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***SALAFI JIHADISM* INFLUENCE IN THE MOVEMENT OF RADICAL RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM: THREAT TO THE SOUND AQIDAH OF CYBER USERS**

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Abstract

This research examines the radical religious extremism (RRE) movement's *Salafi Jihadism* and how it is contaminating Muslims' *aqidah*, particularly among internet users. This essay examines the idea of *Salafi Jihadism*, which goes against the notion of *Ahl Sunnah wal Jamaah*, which is considered to be the core religious conviction of Muslims worldwide, particularly in Malaysia. Given that cyber users are particularly vulnerable to exposure to and influence from *Salafi Jihadism*, this study aims to comprehend the implications of this ideology in light of the contemporary RRE movement, which takes advantage of the development of the internet. This qualitative study acquired resources especially regarding the narrative of RRE movement which relates to the idea of *Salafi Jihadism* from printed and online materials, both from primary and secondary sources. This study found that the cyber net users are vulnerable to the RRE ideologies hence it is required to have self-resilience towards any RRE ideologies since this borderless world of the internet is uncontrollable hence posits threat to its users, especially in the *weltanschauung* of Muslims that adhere to *Ahl Sunnah wal Jamaah*.

Keywords: *Ahl Sunnah wal Jamaah*, Radical Religious Extremism *Salafi Jihadism*

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INTRODUCTION

Particularly since the events of September 11, 2001 in Washington, D.C., the terms radicalism, extremism, Islamophobia, and terrorism have gained popularity. Moreover, the development of the internet has made it almost easy for any news to be immediately shared worldwide, regardless of its veracity. Hence, the trend of cyberterrorism has also become another additional issue that is threatening, not only towards cyber users among laymen but also can cause a great destruction of domino effect to society and the national political landscape as well (Chen et al., 2018). The dissemination of RRE ideologies has apparently become easier, even the modus operandi of recruitment is said to be effortlessly done by them, especially as executed by Daesh (Muhammad Rashidi Wahab, Wan Fariza Alyati Wan Zakaria & Rusoff, 2022).

Abu Bakar al-Baghdadi's worldview is being promoted by Daesh, who is dedicated to exploiting cyberspace to win over people worldwide. Individuals from other nations who are drawn to this movement are labelled as foreign fighters; they may choose to travel to Syria or remain in their home country to carry out any tactics that may be used to further this movement. By recruiting, empowering its jihadists, instilling fear in its enemies, obtaining financial support, and persuading everyone of the merits of their proposal to establish the Islamic State, or Dawlah Islamiyyah, Daesh seeks international support in order to maintain its hold on power (NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, 2016).

The strategic communications of Daesh in using cyber net are very alarming since its ideology is seemingly reaching across all the nations, including Nusantara archipelago. Malaysia is not excluded from being threatened, even though it is separated by thousand kilometres from its base in Syria. Many reports have shown that the influence of Daesh is strongly imbedded by a series of attacks, monetary transactions to support this movement and the presence of Malaysian jihadists in Syria.

Prior to this threat, Malaysia was impacted by RRE movements such as *Kumpulan Jundullah*, *Jemaah Islamiyyah*, *Tentera Sabilullah*, *al-Arqam*, and *al-Maunah*. These were some of the organisations that put the security and the true meaning of Islam in jeopardy by fusing their military power with their corrupt teaching philosophies. All of these groups were founded between 1967 and 2015, long before Daesh's substantial influence in this region became noticeable (Gorawantschy et al., 2016)

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In summary, the three generations of Muslims known as the *sahabah* (the prophet Muhammad's companions), the *taabi'un* (their followers), and the *tabi' taabi'un* (generations that followed the *taabi'un*) are collectively referred to as the *salaf* or *salaf al-salih*, a previous group that is venerated by the Prophet Muhammad. These generations are thought to have lived during the time when Islam was still most closely and perfectly modelled after the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). They were mentioned by Prophet Muhammad as narrated in Sahih al-Bukhari, hadith number 3651:

حَدَّثَنَا مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ كَثِيرٍ، أَخْبَرَنَا سُفْيَانُ، عَنْ مَنْصُورٍ، عَنْ إِبْرَاهِيمَ، عَنْ عَيْبَةَ، عَنْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ .
 رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ . أَنَّ النَّبِيَّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ: "حَيْرُ النَّاسِ قَرْنِي، ثُمَّ الَّذِينَ يَلَوْهُمْ، ثُمَّ

الَّذِينَ يَلُوهُمْ، ثُمَّ يَجِيءُ قَوْمٌ تَسْبِقُ شَهَادَةُ أَحَدِهِمْ بيمينه وَيَمِينُهُ شَهَادَتُهُ". قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ وَكَانُوا
يَضْرِبُونَنَا عَلَى الشَّهَادَةِ وَالْعَهْدِ وَنَحْنُ صِبَاغًا.

The Prophet (ﷺ) said: "The best people are those living in my generation, and then those who will follow them, and then those who will follow the latter. Then there will come some people who will bear witness before taking oaths, and take oaths before bearing witness." (Ibrahim, a sub-narrator said: "They used to beat us for witnesses and covenants when we were still children."

Jihad is derived from the Arabic word *jaahada* (جاهد) which means to strive enthusiastically towards achieving certain aims. In Islamic connotation, it brings the idea of striving towards betterment in life by negating all the negativity, and harmful deeds, evil actions, and thoughts. The connotation of *jihad* encompasses three categories which are 1) *jihad* against visible foes, 2) *jihad* against satan or devil whispers, 3) *jihad* against *nafs* or bad soul (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (JAKIM), 2016). The phrase is used numerous times throughout the Qur'an, which encourages people to live righteously.

However, it is explicitly stated in the Quran that *jihad* should be carried out in a right and genuine manner:

﴿وَجَاهِدُوا فِي اللَّهِ حَقَّ جِهَادِهِ هُوَ اجْتَبَاكُمْ وَمَا جَعَلَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ مِنْ
حَرَجٍ مِّلَّةَ أَبِيكُمْ إِبْرَاهِيمَ هُوَ سَمَّاكُمُ الْمُسْلِمِينَ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَفِي هَذَا لِيَكُونَ
الرَّسُولُ شَهِيدًا عَلَيْكُمْ وَتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ فَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا
الزَّكَاةَ وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِاللَّهِ هُوَ مَوْلَاكُمْ فَنِعْمَ الْمَوْلَى وَنِعْمَ النَّصِيرُ﴾

Strive for the cause of Allah in the way He deserves, for He has chosen you, and laid upon you no hardship in the religion—the way of your forefather Abraham. It is Allah, who named you al Muslimin (the ones who submit) in (the earlier scriptures and in this Quran), so that the Messenger may be a witness over you, and that you may be witnesses over humanity. So establish prayer, pay alms-tax, and hold fast to Allah. Only He is your Guardian. What an excellent Guardian, and what an excellent Helper!

(al-Hajj: 78)

The Salaf and the Salafi Movement

Both *salaf* and *jihad* are expected to be devoid of any false notions. But it seems that the modern Salafi group is distorting the character of our *salaf* Muslim forefathers. The stated goal of this group is to restore Islam to its purest form as depicted by *Salafis*, although their methods and fundamental beliefs are not in line with this. Though they go under the cover of Islam, or to

establish *Dawlah Islamiyyah*, the ideologues of each RRE organisation undoubtedly have distinct goals and political agendas.

It is important to remember that Islam is intended to be independent of all ideologies, thus concepts like Muhammadism and Islamism should not gain traction. Simply put, ideology consists of man-made manifestos that require a large number of followers to execute those particular visions. Besides, those ideologues have no intention to make people really understand their ideas but direly request the followers to obey and move towards achieving their goal culture, in whatever circumstances (Ingersoll et al., 2001). On the contrary, the genuine teaching of Islam motivates human beings to use their intellect and strive for their own good self-development (Quran, al-Saba': 46).

For instance, jihadists were losing their "soul and aim" following their successful defeat of the Soviet Union's forces and allies in Afghanistan in 1989. Because they failed to see that this victory should be the beginning of their journey to a happy life and a new civilization, the jihadists later began to take more significant steps. They ultimately made the decision to create *Qa'ida al-Jihad*, or the Base of *Jihad*, now known as al-Qaeda, as they could no longer fight and were considered "unemployed." As demonstrated by the September 11, 2001 bombing incident, al-Qaeda seemed to be adamantly opposed to the United States of America even though it had previously received funds and aid from Central Intelligence Agencies (CIA) (Mohd Hizam Hanafiah & Zamihan Mat Zin, 2017).

In essence, the desire to liberate Muslim communities from outside authority and influence is what gave rise to the revival of the Salafist philosophy. As a result, the Salafis are split up: The majority of them think that Salafism—which forgoes political involvement in favour of spreading true knowledge and teachings is the best means of purifying Muslims. In the meantime, another group decides to take a prominent role in the establishment of the Islamic state by influencing political events and putting Syed Qutb's *hakimiyyah* philosophy into practice (Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, 2016; Shapoo, 2017).

Salafi jihadists consider Syed Qutb to be their "godfather" due to his fervent support of global *jihad* (arm conflict), which they believe is the most honourable and suitable means of releasing Muslims from the embrace of modern and postmodernist culture (Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, 2016; Teplesky, 2016). In general, few prominent figures such as Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, Osama bin Laden, Syeikh Dr. Abdullah Azzam, Ayman al Zawahiri, Abu Ayyub al-Masri, Abu Omar al Baghdadi and the establishment of various RRE groups such as al-Qaeda and its diaspora, which scatters under different names such as *Jund al-Islam*, *Jama'at al-Tawhid wal Jihad*, al-Qaeda of Iraq, Islamic State of Iraq and et cetera (due to different localities and aims); all of them are observed to hold the similar ideological structure that globalise *Salafi Jihadism* (Institute for Youth Research Malaysia (IYRES), 2017; Mohd Hizam Hanafiah & Zamihan Mat Zin, 2017). The Pan-Islamist movement of 1960–1978 of the Iranian Revolution and the Mecca Grand Mosque seizing incident both served as catalysts for the rise of *Salafi Jihadism* within the Muslim world before issues pertaining to the Soviet–Afghan War appeared (Teplesky, 2016).

Meanwhile, the Egyptian Islamist movement in the 1950s led by Rashid Rida was regarded as among the earliest founders of contemporary *Salafi Jihadism* before the loudness of Syed Qutb in motivating Muslims around the globe to perform jihad in the brand of *Salafi Jihadism* (Dalmeri & Ratono, 2016). Qutb strongly embraced the idea of Tawhid 3, expounded

by Ibn Taimiyyah. The extreme and rigid understanding of these three dimensions of tawhid i.e. Tawhid *Uluhiyyah*, *Tawhid Rububiyyah* and *Tawhid Asma wa Siffah* has led the followers towards the idea of *takfiri*, which entails further implications (Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, 2016).

The Doctrinal Foundation and its Implication

The ideology structure of these related RRE movements put Tawhid 3 as their foundational stance on *Aqidah*. At a glance, the understanding of Tawhid *Uluhiyyah*, *Tawhid Rububiyyah* and *Tawhid Asma wa Siffah* has no correlation to the connotation of extremism, radicalism or terrorism (Hanafiah, 2017). However, the amalgamation of these three elements drives its followers towards a catastrophic pitfall in society. It causes the believers of Tawhid 3 to easily judge and label other Muslims as *bid'ah*, even excommunicating other Muslims (*takfiri*).

Tawhid al-Rububiyyah explains that Allah is the only God of all of the creatures and hold the lordship; however, it brings the extreme implication that they believe that those Muslims who are not practicing obligatory 'ibadah such as prayer, fasting are infidels.

Meanwhile, *Tawhid al-Uluhiyyah* means only Allah has the right to be worshipped; hence, no *taghut*, kafir and others should be accepted (Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, 2016; Muhammad Rashidi Wahab, Wan Fariza Alyati Wan Zakaria & Rusoff, 2022). This dimension of tawhid leads its extreme followers to reject all man-made political systems, such as democracy and collaboration with Western powers. This dimension also allows them to kill Christians, Yazidis, even Shi'ites. This false idea also entails the concept of *al-wala' wal bara'* that differentiates the holiness of Muslims over Kuffar.

For the Daesh, this stance is clearly mentioned in its magazine Rumiyyah, as follows:

“Murtad Brotherhood” group and its parties, factions, and sister organizations, which have denied tawhid, the *Shari'ah*, *wala* and *bara*, and *jihad*, and have resisted adhering to these tenets, mocked them, waged war against them, and supported the Crusaders and the *tawaghit* in waging war against them. Rather, it is obligatory on the Muslim to manifest his disbelief in all of these apostates as much as he is able to, with his pen and tongue, and his sword and spear, thereby following the two *khalils* of Allah (Muhammad and Ibrahim), may the best of blessings and peace be upon them both, and it is Allah's help that is sought, reliance is upon Him, and there is no power or might except by Allah (Rumiyyah Issue 1, 2016: 6).

The third concept of *Tawhid Asma wa Siffah* literally means that Allah possesses all the beautiful names and attributes that nothing resembles Him. However, the implication of this concept brought its followers (in the case of Daesh) to destroy all the symbols, such as tombs and historical sites, that can lead to idol worshipping, as promoted by the Daesh movement. Besides, this is also the reason for them claiming Shiite as kuffar (Institute for Youth Research Malaysia (IYRES), 2017).

Briefly, by the wrong idea of tawhid among *Salafi jihadists* entails further concepts and consequences such as the solid separation between Muslims and non-Muslims, *takfiri*, *al wala-*

wal bara', branding others as *bid'ah* and shirk, promoting *hijrah* and *bay'ah*, false interpretation of *jihad*, manipulation of Quran verses and hadith and whatever means that can channel them towards the goal of establishing the wrong idea of Islamic State or Dawlah Islamiyyah.

DISCUSSIONS: STRENGTHENING MUSLIM RESILIENCE THROUGH THE RIGHT UNDERSTANDING OF ISLAM

Daulah Islamiyyah is just the ideal existence that the RRE doctrines promise. They promote goals of bringing back the heyday of Islam and create a society of justice and peace. However, the type of salafi they brought with them is very different from what the earlier generations of Muslims practiced, and it has even damaged the reputation of Islam worldwide. If certain Muslims are also among the main drivers of this chaotic scenario, then Muslims cannot claim that Islamophobia is just Western propaganda.

According to Imam al Tohawi, one of the prominent *Salaf* scholars in his book *al-Aqidah al-Tohawiyyah* (Abi Ja'far al-Tohawiyyah al-Hanafi, 1995), he said:

وتتبع السنة والجماعة، وتجتنب الشُّذُوذ والخلاف والفرقة.

We follow the teachings of sunnah and jama'ah, and depart ourselves from irregularities, contradictions and disunity.

As a result, Muslims have a duty to consistently adhere to the *Ahl Sunnah wal Jamaah*, the path that the Prophet Muhammad and His predecessors left behind. The teachings of *Ahl Sunnah wal Jamaah* include *akhlaq*, *shariah*, and *aqidah* that were transmitted from our Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and His companions. These teachings were methodically organised through the work of two eminent scholars, Imam Abu Mansor al-Maturidi (333H) and Syeikh Abu Hasan al-Asyaari (260-324H) (Abdul Hamid @ Yusoff Yunus, 2010). Particularly in Malaysia, *Ahl Sunnah wal Jamaah* is officiated as a primary belief for Muslims that governs all aspects of life.

By imbedding a right and sound understanding of *aqidah*, Muslims are supposedly able to screen out the false *weltanschauung* of Islam, whether it comes from verbal or written sources, especially on what can be easily found in the cyber net medium.

The laymen most likely saw that Tawhid 3 did not contain any anomalies, but they are able to directly refute the concept's extreme consequences. For example, even with sound intelligence, it is completely prohibited to be motivated to kill anyone, especially non-Muslims. In referring to the history where Prophet Muhammad served as the leader of Madinah, Muslims co-existed and lived together with Christians, Jews and Pagans. No temple or shrine was destroyed (even in wars), since this is not the right way to treat others.

In contrast to the propaganda spread by the Daesh movement, they destroyed places where non-Muslims worshipped and any location they deemed to be a place of shirk, even if they belonged to Muslims they despised as Kuffar. Despite the fact that their acts result in the deaths of numerous innocent people, they feel proud of them:

Two weeks ago, on the Friday marking the 9th day of the blessed month of Ramadan, the Crusaders and the Rafidah were struck by a wave of attacks in three different regions, one of them in the crusader city of Lyon. The day of the attacks would come to be known as "Bloody Friday," a day that brought more healing to the hearts of the Muslims and the *mujahidin*, and filled the hearts of their enemies with terror and rage (Dabiq Issue 10, 2015: 3).

A plethora of evidence on these fraudulent acts is publicly revealed in the magazines of Dabiq, a series of publications by Daesh. By referring to others as kuffar and shirk, they rationalised their actions and said that it is permissible to murder them. Thus, their influence will increase along with other people's anxieties as a result of making their acts public. Therefore, the idea of an Islamic state is only a utopian ideal because, for good reason, this circumstance is not establishing any peace like had been instilled during the days of the Prophet Muhammad.

In this context, appeals for jihad are perceived as an instrument to randomly attack others in order to gain control and power rather than as a means of defence. As part of *Tawhid Hakimiyyah*, for instance, fighting against non-Muslims is, according to the Daesh concept, an obligatory deed for all Muslims (Institute for Youth Research Malaysia (IYRES), 2017). Consequently, it is the responsibility of Muslims to comprehend the true meaning of *jihad*; otherwise, RRE groups, particularly the current Daesh organisation, will be able to easily utilise our ignorance.

CONCLUSION

Despite the existence of RRE movements in the present day, particularly Daesh, they are seemingly in an idle state; their core ideology will never fade. As how the earliest form of RRE movement namely Khawarij ceased to be, yet it is still reviving today. They may appear unexpectedly or rebrand under a new name, but the same ideology will drive these movements towards achieving their aims and goal cultures through different modus operandi and tactics.

Given how powerfully the development of the internet can link everything, it is nearly hard to maintain a space between the wrong beliefs. Thus, by fortifying their Islamic knowledge and practices, Muslims who follow *Ahl Sunnah wal Jamaah* should become resistant to these RRE ideas; as a result, the harmful impact won't affect their mind and soul.

By quantitatively assessing the correlation statistic between internet users and their general comprehension of RRE influences, this research can be expanded upon. The government may profit from the findings of these research in reducing and managing the effect of RRE movements while also benefiting all Muslims.

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