The Use of Social Media and the Involvement of Pota Detainees in the Isis Movement in Malaysia

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Abstract— **The ideology of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) movement, which promotes the call of jihad to build up "Daulah Islamiyyah", is believed to cause an increasing number of people from all over the world to follow the struggle of the ISIS movement. Meanwhile, the advancement of Internet technology has increased the use of social media, which benefits the radical movement of ISIS by spreading propaganda and recruiting new members more easily. Thus, this study will examine the use of social media by the ISIS movement and the involvement of POTA detainees (Prevention of Terrorism Act 2015) in the ISIS movement. This study used qualitative methods through content analysis and interviews involving four POTA detainees at Simpang Renggam Prison, Johor Bharu, Malaysia. The interview data collected, which covers identified themes, is analysed using Atlas ti software. The study shows the ISIS movement uses social media to spread the ideology of the movement and most POTA detainees convicted are due to channelling funds to the ISIS movement. The study therefore increases the knowledge of Malaysian society on the negative influence and threat of the ISIS movement on the country's harmony and sovereignty. The findings are expected to be of important assistance and reference by policymakers and the Royal Malaysian Police (RMP) in encountering the most contagious militant movement in Malaysia.**

Keywords— **Extremism, ISIS Movement, POTA, Social Media**

I. INTRODUCTION

The world nowadays faces a serious threat from extremism and radicalism due to several factors, including misunderstanding the teachings of Islam and being fanatic about certain ideologies (Fadzli & Naimah, 2017). The emergence of various Islamic movements gave new life to the Muslim community after the fall of the Ottoman Empire in 1924. This movement sought to restore the caliphate system in the Middle East. However, most Islamic movements such as *Al-Qaeda, Jemaah Islamiah (JI), and Hizb ut-Tahrir* are

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considered radical because they carry an extreme element when these movements allow violence contrary to Islamic teachings. The most rugged, aggressive, and radical movement to date is a group known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). ISIS is also known as the Islamic State (IS) or the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). The name of this group in Arabic is *Al-Dawla Al Islamiya fi al-Iraq wa al-Syam,* which is the first three words translated to the Islamic State of Iraq, while "*alSyam*" refers to Syria and the wider surrounding area (Dearden, 2014). Meanwhile, according to Nursalihah Ahmad Raston, Yohan Kurniawan, Noor Raihani Zainol, and Nurul Hasliana Hamsani (2016), the radical ISIS movement is a string of Salafi Jihadi movements in Iraq which originally consisted of three different jihad organizations, one of which was *Ansar al-Islam*. It consists of a group of Iraqi Salafi Jihadis who form their own *'Islamic rule' area* and practise radical Islamic life. Whereas, according to Weiss and Hassan (2015), the ISIS movement was initially just a separatist group in northern Iraq with ties to al-Qaeda that existed as a result of the response and opposition to American policy in West Asia.

Most countries consider the ISIS movement to be a terrorist organisation because it practises violence and atrocities, including beheading, burning people alive, crucifixion, and displaying murderous corpses around the world through online mediums. This is evidenced by the tragic videos of the beheadings of James Foley, an American independent journalist, on August 19, 2014; Time magazine journalist Stevan Sotloff on September 2, 2014; and Allan Henning on October 3, 2014. The news has gone viral on the Internet, showing the atrocities committed by the movement. ISIS is ruthless (Henley, 2014). The ISIS movement uses a social media platform approach to spread ideology and recruit members to join their struggle. Among the social media platforms used to accomplish the group's mission include Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter (Ahmad Munawar Ismail, Wan Kamal Mujani, & Ahmad Aiman Zuhaily AM, 2018; Ahmad Sauffiyan Abu Hassan, 2016; Awan, 2017; Jessica Stern & Berger, 2015; Klausen, 2015; Muhd Imran Abd Razak, Rahimin Affandi Abdul Rahim, et al., 2018; Sit.al., 2018).

The ISIS movement's strategy of spreading ideology and propaganda through social media networks has been well received by a large handful of Muslims who are demanding drastic changes in politics and society. Although the movement uses force in achieving the group's goals, the movement is still

an attraction for some young people to join the struggle of the movement. Many followers are willing to migrate from their country of origin to join the "*Holy War",* or jihad, that is supposedly trying to restore the caliphate system. This is evidenced by the number of people converging on Syria. According to the Soufan Group, it is estimated that 27,000–30,000 people have travelled to Syria since the conflict started (The Soufan Group, accessed November 20, 2016). Six thousand of them came from Europe, including one thousand more from Southeast Asia. We have never seen such an impact in which a conflict can attract thousands of people within a short period of time. During the Afghanistan War, there were 5,000–20,000 foreign fighters in Afghanistan between 1978 and 1992, meaning within a 14-year period (D. Malet, 2010). But in the Syrian case, there are approximately 25,000-30,000 foreign fighters who came into Syria within a three-to-four-year period.

In Malaysia, police records show that from 2013 to 2018, a total of 102 Malaysians had gone to Syria to join ISIS, and of that number, a total of 37 were killed (BeritaBenar, October 25, 2018). The impact of terrorism also affects the country through threats in physical form. For example, a bomb attack at the Movida nightclub in Puchong, Selangor on June 28, 2016 by two individuals claiming to support ISIS resulted in eight civilians being injured (Astro Awani, 29 March 2017). The involvement of the Muslim community, especially the young, in the ISIS movement has raised concerns about national security and sovereignty. Thus, the government has taken the initiative by introducing various acts, including the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2015 or *Prevention of Terrorism Act* 2015 (POTA), which provides for the prevention of the commission or support of acts of terrorism involving terrorist organisations listed in foreign countries. Accordingly, this study aims to examine the use of social media applications and the involvement of POTA detainees in the ISIS movement.

II. USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA APPLICATION

Modern society is highly dependent on social media applications for obtaining information, communicating, marketing and so on. According to Nations (2017), social media as a web-based communication tool allows people to interact with each other by sharing information. Next, Mohammad Rezal (2016) stated that social media is an application that uses Web 2.0 technology and provides opportunities for users to produce materials in various forms, such as text, audio, and video, that can be shared with other users. The development of Internet technology has both increased the amount of social media usage and increased the number of smartphones to actively move social media applications. Malaysia records 28 million social media users, or 86 percent of the country's population. Datuk Seri Mohammad Mentek, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Communications and Multimedia (KKMM), said the statistics also showed that Malaysians are among the most active in using social media and the number of users increased by two million, or seven percent, within a year from 2020 (Sinar

Harian, 09 November 2021).

The use of popular social media applications is popular among young people because this medium offers a variety of functions at a low cost. Although the use of social media is seen to facilitate the sharing of information and communication among users, this medium can also be exploited and misused for the benefit of certain individuals and organizations, including terrorist groups and their networks. The need for social media in the life of modern society has been exploited by terrorist organisations or radical movements, including the ISIS movement, using this platform to promote ideology and recruit members from all over the world. This phenomenon is of concern to the country because this online medium is difficult to break because the strategy of this movement uses high technology and appoints professionals to spread propaganda online.

Past studies have shown social media via the Internet network has been used by extremists to recruit members, educate, communicate, and fundraise (Cloud, 2017; Jessica Stern & Berger, 2015). In addition, social media is also used by the ISIS movement to pose a threat to the enemy and those who oppose its struggle (Ahmad Sauffiyan Abu Hassan, 2016), as well as use social media facilities as an effective medium for disseminating propaganda (Muhd Imran Abd Razak, Rahimin Affandi Abdul Rahim, et al., 2018). Therefore, it is not uncommon for many extremist movements to start leveraging the use of the Internet for their group activities. In the string, there are various websites and social media involved in this movement, which aims to attract thousands of visitors online. The use of social media by radical movements as a platform is not a new phenomenon. After the 9/11 tragedy in 2001, radical movements began using social media and websites to promote their propaganda. Among the social media platforms used by the ISIS movement as a strategy to succeed in the group's mission are Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter (Ahmad Munawar Ismail, Wan Kamal Mujani, & Ahmad Aiman Zuhaily AM, 2018; Ahmad Sauffiyan Abu Hassan, 2016; Awan, 2017; Jessica Stern & Berger, 2015; Klausen, 2015; Muhd Imran Abd Razak, Rahimin Affandi Abdul Rahim, et al., 2018). The use of social media applications has become a weapon for the ISIS movement to launch a successful propaganda war, attracting online users to join in their struggle.

III. THE INVOLVEMENT OF POTA DETAINEES IN THE ISIS MOVEMENT

Most of the members of the movement who fight for the ISIS movement are influential people with information and information through social media. According to Chan (2015), the more open, interactive, and global nature of the Internet causes people to be more interested in the use of the site. The results of the Royal Malaysian Police (RMP) investigation report stated that the youths are the main target group of ISIS, who are most easily influenced by ISIS propaganda (Dewan

Rakyat Malaysia 2014). Therefore, this group should not be the main target of the ISIS movement to recruit new members through online media. The involvement of youths in this movement is now becoming increasingly worrying because many youths in Malaysia join radical Islamic groups without knowing clearly and for sure the truth of the struggle of this group. The young souls and immaturity of the youth in decision-making make them easily involved in this movement.

According to El-Muhammady (2016), ISIS supporters manifest the contribution of jihad through various forms. First, the contribution to ideological support that occurs through knowledge dissemination sessions, discussions, and debates Second, through financial support, such as providing funds or raising funds for the convenience of supporters of Syria. Third, through struggle supporters (symphatizers) who fought through social media, such as pressing the like or retweet button and sharing ISIS-related information, and finally, through direct involvement who went to fight as foreign terrorist fighters (FTF), suicide bombers, wife fighters, and other contributions on the battlefield. These groups think that the path of their struggle for jihad in Syria can atone for the sins they have committed before (Siti Naqiayah Mansor et al., 2018).

Some evidence shows the extreme involvement of the Malaysian community in the struggle against ISIS, namely Ahmad Tarmimi Maliki, who is 26 years old and acted as the first suicide bomber. He drove a military vehicle carrying explosives to the headquarters of the Anbar Iraqi Special Forces and killed 25 Iraqi soldiers, including himself. Next, 27-year-old Ahmad Affendi Abdull Manaff from Tumpat, Kelantan, was identified as the second bomber from Malaysia. He is believed to have driven a truck loaded with bombs to an army camp in Homs, Syria, that killed 50 soldiers for Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad. According to police, he had gone to Syria on April 23rd, 2014 and carried out an attack on November 8 or 9th, 2014 (Straits Times, 2014b). Women are also not spared from being influenced by the ISIS movement's propaganda when three Malaysian women in their 20s are willing to go to the Middle East to offer sex services or jihad al-nikah to ISIS fighters in order to boost morale. The willingness of some groups who are influenced by the struggle of the ISIS movement is due to the influence of social media, which serves to poison the minds of those who are easily influenced by the ideology of the ISIS group. Among the targets and victims were POTA detainees at Simpang Renggam Prison, where most detainees were influenced by the ISIS movement through the use of social media applications such as Telegram, Facebook, and YouTube. The use of social media applications caused them to be further influenced to engage with the struggle of the ISIS movement.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A descriptive case study was chosen for this study in view of its specific and focused method of examining the use of social media applications and the involvement of POTA detainees with the ISIS movement. Based on this method, the problems and issues of a phenomenon through the selected sample are studied in depth. In terms of data collection methods, semi-structured and face-to-face interviews were conducted where the informants were identified in advance with the questions posed designed based on expert reference and verification. Semi-structured interviews were chosen to give informants the freedom to express their views without being specifically bound by interview rules. Thus, this study covers aspects of instrument development, data collection and analysis, as well as analysis of research findings. Interview informants A total of four people were interviewed in depth, with their further details as follows:

1) The first detainee is 39 years old and lives in Penang,
2) The second detainee, aged 36, is from Penang.
3) The third detainee, aged 24, is from Kedah.
4) Kedah is the home state of the fourth detainee, who is 47 years old.

Semi-Structured Interview

The questions posed to achieve the objectives of the study are:

1. Identify the use of social media in communication activities in the ISIS movement.
2. To what extent is the involvement of POTA detainees in the ISIS movement?

Interview Findings

The use of social media in communication activities in the ISIS movement.

The first detainee stated, "*I met a friend who followed the radical movement and was once*" invited "*into the Telegram group, the Black Crow group used by the ISIS group to spread information and ideological info on their group*."

The second detainee stated, "*I know the ISIS movement through Facebook. Originally, I only saw the war crisis going on in Syria and the Basad army killing people there. There is a sense of sympathy. In addition, I looked at Facebook through the page (SyriaCare, Green Project) to find out the news. In 2015, Wandy put me in a wassap group and asked for an infaq as well as an account name*."

The third detainee stated, "*I found out about the ISIS movement through the Syria Care Facebook page. For me, Syria Care supports the ISIS movement. I will continue to follow the page. They applied for financial contributions to carry out humanitarian missions. There are many arguments in the comments section of the page. There were fights because of differences of opinion. I once met Wandy in Penang. He is my contact. He talked about the situation in Syria and the conflicts in the country, as well as the influence of Bashar Assad. He narrated the ISIS movement in depth, like*

the Black Flag that he supported. He put me in the Black Crow WhatsApp group to get and find out current info."

The fourth detainee stated, "*I have a Usrah WeChat group. I also browsed the website of Hizb ut-Tahrir. Apart from that, I also visit blogs which consist of Indonesian, English, and Malay content. Muhammad Wandy also added me to the Black Crow group in 2016 (3 months). One of the mediums used was the Black Crow telegram, handled by Muhammad Wandy. I used a telegram account named ibnulirama and Ana Hamba Allah to support ISIS. Apart from that, Telegram Amanah (PHB) vs PAS was also handled by Muhammad Wandy. The social media platforms used are Wechat and Telegram.*"

To what extent is the involvement of POTA detainees in the ISIS movement?

The first informant stated:

"*It started in Egypt when my acquaintance (a student in the field of Usuluddin) was the best student and came from Selangor, who was associated with the extremist movement. In addition, my involvement is to transfer money through donations to individual accounts associated with extremist movements. The charge is to wage war on the YDP Agung.* "

The second informant said:

"*Involvement on the basis of the sympathy of Muslims in Syria.*" Support for the ISIS movement is through donations of money without a check motion. I never thought of going to war in Syria. I also transferred RM150 and sent RM1000 to Syria Care. "

The third informant stated:

"*I was convicted of supporting ISIS terrorism.*" My support for ISIS is because I support Basar Assad's opposition to the Syrian community. I support ISIS because ISIS is the platform of Muslims to oppose the violence of Bashar Assad. In addition, ISIS uses many verses from the Quran and hadith. I confess I lack religious knowledge and support it blindly. I once met Muhammad Wandy to find out clearly about the ideology of ISIS. For information, I have bought tickets to contribute towards the energy costs of the humanitarian mission in 2016 under the NGO-Wandy. But not because of security factors.

The fourth informant stated:

"*In the beginning, the desire to know the development of Syria—the situation and what is happening in Syria Back then, the internet network was slow. Look for initiatives through books and blogs but don't find them. Next, I got acquainted with Wandy through someone who was an ISIS fighter in Syria. On June 3, 2016, I transferred money to an account belonging to Bukhari bin Che Noor. The mistake I made was not reporting it to the authorities. I was asked to put in money for humanitarian purposes, and I agreed. "Inside Syria Care, there is manipulation by closing and building new pages.*"

V. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEW FINDINGS

The results of the interviews with the four informants found that all the detainees used social media to obtain information about the movement, ISIS, and communicate with other members of the movement. After the detainees show interest in joining the movement's struggle against ISIS, they will be put into a Telegram group called the "Black Crow Group" by an individual known as Muhammad Wandy. Apart from "Kumpulan Gagak Hitam", Telegram Amanah (PHB) vs PAS is also run by Muhammad Wandy. The content of the messages disseminated via Telegram included current info and developments in Syria and Iraq, the importance of "*qital jihad*," which has been manipulated by members of the ISIS movement. Most detainees use the Facebook medium to obtain information and news on the Syrian war crisis and the ISIS movement. After these detainees get acquainted with members of the movement, they will be included in the Telegram group. Among the advantages of using Telegram is that it offers a "secret chat" function that uses end-to-end encryption that is highly favoured by the ISIS movement (Hill, 2016; Smith & Chan, 2017. These secret conversations are very secure and difficult to detect by the authorities. In addition to Telegram, which is used for the purpose of communication and dissemination of information by members of the ISIS movement, the use of Facebook, Wechat, Websites, and blogs are also used to obtain information about the movement. This situation was evident when the second and third detainees stated that they recognised the ISIS movement through Facebook through the Syria Care and Green Project pages. He wanted to know about the war crisis that took place in Syria and eventually led to support for the ISIS movement. Meanwhile, the fourth detainee used Wechat, a website and a blog to find information on developments in Syria. The use of social media applications has proven to influence the involvement of POTA detainees in the ISIS movement.

In addition, the high-quality videos released by the ISIS movement managed to attract the public to sympathise with the plight of the Muslim community in Syria. The proof is that the ISIS movement is capable of influencing the minds of the younger generation and vulnerable people who watch YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter (Cloud, 2017). The strategy used by the ISIS movement has succeeded in attracting a handful of communities, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, to channel funds to contribute energy to the movement's struggle. This is evidenced by the findings obtained when a total of three detainees acted directly to channel funds to individuals or organisations believed to be agents of the ISIS movement. Meanwhile, a detainee had planned to travel to Syria under Muhammad Wandy to donate energy but was unsuccessful due to security factors at the time. This situation shows the influence of social media in the involvement of the ISIS movement in the ISIS movement.

VI. CONCLUSION

The strategy of using social media by the ISIS movement has succeeded in expanding its influence to all corners of the world. This platform has become the most effective tool to present a global threat to the international community online. The movement has done propaganda with its narrative to restore the caliphate system and stated that the action is to eradicate political power that is contrary to the teachings of Islam. Consumption through high-quality video technology has attracted many Internet users to sympathise and, in turn, engage with the ISIS movement. In addition to the influence of social media, effective recruiters managed to convince others to join the ISIS movement. In this situation, Muhammady Wandy managed to recruit many members, especially young people, to join the ISIS movement. Muhammad Wandy's ability was proven when many Malaysians joined the ISIS movement after meeting face-to-face or online through Wandy. The main goal of the ISIS movement is to gain support not only through the contribution of energy as a fighter, but also through financial support. Although the threat of the ISIS movement is still under control, cooperation from all government agencies and civil society organizations, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, is essential to combat the terrorist threat and at the same time avoid all negative implications that could disrupt national security.

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