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Research Note

The Threat of Terrorism in the Malang Region, Indonesia

Gonda Yumitro*

Elfatih Abdullahi Abdelsalam**

Ishtiaq Hossain***

Syaza Farhana Mohamad Shukri****

Introduction

Since the terrorist bombings in the Kuta district of Bali in 2002, which killed 88 Australians, 38 Indonesians, 23 Britons and people of more than 20 other nationalities, terrorism has emerged as a major issue in Indonesia. On October 1st, 2005, suicide bombings occurred in two locations in Bali causing dozens of death (32 victims) (Brookes et al., 2014). Two years before, on August 5th, 2003, a suicide bomber detonated a car bomb in JW Marriot hotel lobby in Jakarta causing tens of death (14 victims) and hundreds (150) were injured (Wernick & Von

*PhD student, Department of Political Science, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), and Associate Professor, Department of International Relations, University of Muhammadiyah Malang, Indonesia. Emails: yumitro@gmail.com and gonda@umm.ac.id

**Professor, Department of Political Science, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). Email: elfatih@iium.edu.my

***Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). Email: ihossain@iium.edu.my

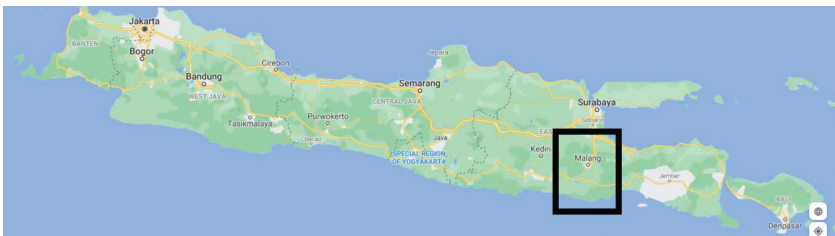
****Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). Email: syazashukri@iium.edu.my

Glinow, 2012). Further, on July 17th, 2009, the two suicide bombers detonated bombs in the two hotels of Marriott and Ritz Carlton, causing the death of nine victims, and dozens (42) were injured (Oak, 2010).

This research explores the threat of terrorism emanating from Malang, a place repeatedly used to recruit and plan terrorist actions. In general, the Malang region consists of three municipalities, which include Malang City, Batu City, and Malang Regency, with a population amounting to 4 million people (861,414 in Malang City; 203,997 in Batu City; and 2,576,596 in Malang Regency) in an area of 3,882.44 km² (BPS, 2018). This number, however, does not include other socio-demographic segmentation, such as the scholars studying at 86 universities and the number of tourists annually visiting the Malang region, amounting to more than 5 million visitors (Syafii, 2018).

In terms of geographical features, the Malang region is surrounded by several mountains, such as Semeru, Arjuno, Welirang, Anjasmoro, Panderman, and Kawi; contributing to its cold weather, with average temperatures ranging from 22.4 C to 24 C, comforting the tourists to find “home-away from-home”. In the southern part, the geographical features are subjugated by lines of coastal area facing the Indian ocean. In terms of accessibility, Malang region is connected by adequate public transportations such as airlines, buses and trains with toll roads facilitating mobility. The strategic location of the region of Malang is illustrated in the following map (Fig.1).

Figure 1. Map of Malang Region



(Source: <https://www.google.com/maps/@-7.2226547,110.4521183,7.46z>)

With this strategic geographic and accessibility, several terrorist attacks, such as the Thamrin bombing in February 2016, were plotted in this region (Yuswantoro, 2016). The evidence was gathered from interviews

from the arrested terrorists in Karangploso, asserting that the Thamrin bombing plan was arranged in a rent house in Batu (Purmono, 2016).

Even though some of the terrorists were arrested in Malang, the police believe the group networks are still active, given Malang's historical background linked to terrorism. It should be mentioned here that the top leader of *Jamaah Islamiyah* (JI) and the man behind the 2002 Bali bombing, Dr. Azhari, were killed by the Indonesian Police in Batu city in 2005. Moreover, Hendrawan, one of JI members, was also arrested in Batu city four years later in 2009. In addition, in March 2015, six ISIS members were arrested in Malang (Rijal, 2016).

Salim Mubarak Attamimi Al Indonesy, or famously known as Abu Jandal, was also from Malang, one of the top ISIS figures before he was killed. His infamous video provoking people to join *Jihad* in Iraq and Syria and to oppose the Indonesian government was easily found on the Internet (Nuraniyah, 2015). Based on particular news (through Al Mustaqbal magazines), his family resides in Malang, and some cadres who are thought to be actively spreading radical notions (Arianti, 2017).

Some of these evidence depict serious issues of terrorism in the Malang region, exacerbating the mistaken perspective towards East Java as one of the terrorists' webs, forcing the governor to announce rule No. 51 in 2014 stipulating the prohibition of ISIS in this province. Despite the government's alert of Malang as one of the "red zones" of terrorism (Faizal, 2014), this paper aims to elaborate on the threat of terrorism in the Malang region with its supporting factors. Moreover, this study is expected to contribute to the terrorism studies in Indonesia by considering the interconnection between the local and international issues in this globalization era.

Methodology

This research utilized a qualitative method by analyzing various data collected from one year of research. The data collection was undertaken with open-ended questions to obtain complete and in-depth data.

The data was obtained from both primary and secondary resources. The researchers interviewed some scholars, religious figures from various backgrounds such as Salafism and Ikhwanul Muslimin, the head of *Pesantren* (Islamic Boarding Schools), some of the Middle Eastern universities' alumni, and the government officers to obtain primary data.

The informants of this research included the people closely connected to the issue of terrorism and radicalism. Meanwhile, the literature review and observation technique were also applied to strengthen data analysis.

Upon obtaining the required data, the researchers conducted data analysis steps, including reduction, display, and verification. During these processes, the researchers interpreted the article's writing results utilizing Nvivo plus 12 by making coding and case data, further performing a crosstab analysis. The data generated from the Nvivo 12 analysis were analyzed to investigate the threat of terrorism in the Malang region.

Results and Discussion

The results of this study are structured, explained, and discussed in the following parts.

The Existence of Radical Movements in Malang

A previous relevant study (Oam, 2013) reported that Dr. Azhari, who was killed in a raid in 2005, was the first contact in the Malang area (Batu city) of the global terrorist network *Jema'ah Islamiyah* (JI). This finding further highlights the direct link of the Malang region with the terrorists. History records that Malang had experienced acts of terrorism long before ISIS even existed. *Jema'ah Islamiyah* maintains an affiliation with Osama bin Laden of Al Qaeda, in which JI focused on radicalizing Muslims in Southeast Asia. This finding is in accordance with a previous study (Vaughn et al., 2005), affirming that Indonesia was the first target of radicalization.

In addition, the Malang region also has contact with another global terrorist network, which is the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). In Malang, the existence of ISIS had been detected since early 2014, when police intelligence discovered ISIS flags in two Islamic boarding schools in Merjosari, Malang (Rijal, 2016). Moreover, in July 2015, there was a poster of Ansharul Khilafah on social media, along with several universities suspected to have a connection to ISIS supporters' activities (Rijal, 2017).

One year later, in 2016, the Indonesian police special forces (Densus 88) arrested four suspected terrorists in the Karangploso area (Malang district). They were under suspicion of had taken part in the

M. H. Thamrin terrorist attacks in Jakarta. In the raid, the police seized Molotov bombs, jihad-related books, masks, and other inspected stuff (Aminudin, 2016). One of the arrestees was M. Romly, the person involved in the Ansharul Khilafah declaration of 2014 (Sasongko, 2015).

Two years earlier, in 2014, within a similar district, a bomb exploded in Karangploso (in ATM). Upon responding to the unexpected event, East Java Provincial Police pointed out that it was a terrorist attack due to the absence of stolen-money, and the perpetrators of this act allegedly had connections to radical groups (Rachman, 2014). In 2016, three persons in the Malang region, suspected as Abu Jandal's cadres, were also captured by the police. Two of those arrestees (Abdul Hakim Munabari and Junaedi) went to Syria to join ISIS before returning home to Malang (Suriyanto, 2015). In Malang, they started to recruit more cadres and influenced more people to support ISIS. According to the police report, their role was to facilitate Indonesians to join ISIS in Syria. The other one, Helmi Aalamudi, had facilitated 18 Indonesians to obtain military training in Syria through a pilgrimage scheme (Sasongko, 2015).

The threat of ISIS in Malang did not end in 2017 with the arrest of two terrorists in 2017. On June 24th, a man named Syahrul Munif was arrested for his involvement in ISIS. His document of arrest revealed that he went to Syria through Turkey in 2013 and joined the Abu Jandal group. Following Abu Jandal's death, Munif served as the successor and later as the right hand of the ISIS Indonesia leader (Aman Abdurrahman). Six months after, a suspected terrorist was once more captured in Kasin district, Malang. A man named Kiki Rizky was believed to become Abu Jandal's network and reported to have flown to Syria with Abdul Hakim in 2013 (Hartik, 2017).

The existence of radical movements in the Malang area is not merely facilitated by the safe shelter for radicals to hide, but is rooted in the society. People's involvement in JI and ISIS in Malang is the tip of the iceberg, indicating that the ISIS ideology has influenced many people of the region. For those influenced people, the understanding and progressiveness of ISIS towards phenomenon in various Islamic settings worldwide should be supported. From their perspective, ISIS is considered as one of the symbols against the domination and exploitation by the West of the Muslim world (Klausen, 2015).

In addition to the terrorism discourse in the Malang region, Ahmad & Ula (2012) added that there was a suspected terrorist, “AA” who was being radicalized in Malang when he took an undergraduate degree (Ahmad & Ula, 2014). Further, it was reported that AA’s family was suspicious about AA’s unusual behaviour since studying in Malang. AA was considered an active and open minded person while he was living together with his family. However, after one year of studying in Malang, on the one side, he looked more Islamic in terms of physical outlooks marked by a beard, often wearing Islamic clothes, and spending much time in the mosques; however, he was more secluded/introvert, rarely communicating with others.

Therefore, his family started to find the information behind his new characteristic through his friends. It was found that he joined the group, studying Islam in a particular place, and avoiding public communication. During this ideologization, AA, who had a strong spirit to live with Islamic values and system, lacked an understanding of the proper Islamic way of life. Therefore, he strictly limited his communication with the others, desiring to alter the so-called un-Islamic condition to be more Islamic.

Realizing this dangerous condition, his family decided to move AA to Pekalongan, a city in Central Java, to break the connection with a radical organization in Malang by rebuilding intense communication within the family (Ahmad & Ula, 2014). Moreover, efforts also included providing a moderate Islamic environment for AA. Under the guidance of a moderate Islamic scholar, AA gradually started to realize his mistake and the dangers of his mistaken.

The AA case indicates that the radicalization process in Malang increased in a systematic way. However, the local government of Malang considered only JI and ISIS as the real threats, whereas other transnational organizations such as *Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia* (HTI), *Laskar Jihad*, *Ikhwanul Muslimin* (Muslim Brotherhood), dan *Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia* (MMI) as mere religious organizations. It is assumed that the government failed to navigate the underlying aspects of these organizations. In the broad discussion, such Islamic organizations practice similar primary purpose of the strict application for Islamic law in Indonesia, a country with a majority Muslim population but supporting secular democracy (Hefner, 2008).

The push for purification of practice of Islam in Indonesia came from the Indonesian scholars pursuing their studies in Middle Eastern countries. They considered most of Indonesia's religious practices had been contaminated; therefore, they attempted to purify such contamination by penetrating the Islamic law and the purification doctrine. However, most moderate Muslim societies in Indonesia are against their notion and argue that it threatens the country's primary ideology, Pancasila (Hidayat & AF, 2006).

The aforementioned radical views have roots in the Malang region, and advanced by Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia. First introduced by Syaroni, these views can be traced back to 1993. In the first years of its appearance, HTI spread its ideology in two renowned universities in Malang, which were Universitas Brawijaya and IKIP Malang. Such proliferation was further increased after the reform (1998), including in Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang, Universitas Islam Malang, Universitas Kanjuruhan, and Politeknik Negeri Malang (Arifan, 2011).

Besides HTI, *Ikhwanul Muslimin* also presented its history in Malang which started from a student activist of *Tarbiyah*. In March 1988, an event called the 10th *Forum Silaturahmi Lembaga Dakwah Kampus* (Da'wah Institute Forum) at Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang, led to the establishment of Kesatuan Aksi Mahasiswa Muslim Indonesia (KAMMI/ Indonesian Muslim Students United Action). This student organization was connected to Partai Keadilan (PK/Justice Party); since KAMMI, Fahri Hamzah, was also a member of PK (Machmudi, 2008). Both HTI and PK have a similar goal: reshuffling Indonesia's basic ideology into a strict Islamic law based their strict interpretation of Islam.

Factors Contributing to Terrorism in Malang

The aforementioned discussions demonstrate that the Malang region is prone to serious issues of terrorism due to several potential factors, such as the presence of radical groups in Malang and supporting factors such as economics and geography. The explanation is further mapped as follows:

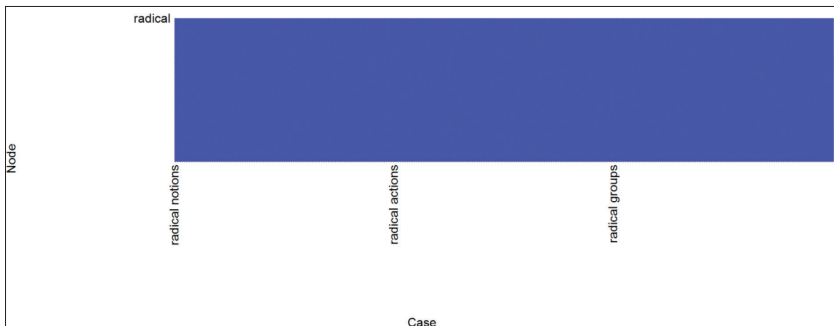
First, in relation to the existence of radical groups in the Malang region, the discourse on terrorism is pivotal due to its connection with the national and transnational connections. This signifies that terrorism

in Malang does not stand alone but has a close relationship with national (Indonesia) and transnational terrorist networks. Moreover, as a country with some active Al-Qaeda and ISIS-related links, Indonesia has been suspected as the sources and strategic area for radicalism and often called as the second front of terrorism (Honna, 2012). It was estimated that around 2000 Indonesian citizens had joined ISIS. These Indonesian citizens are mainly composed of the youths closely connected to Indonesia's existing terrorist cells (Aras & Ekim, 2015).

Therefore, the threat of ISIS as a terrorist group was perilous, supported by the proliferation of transnational Islamic organizations in some universities in Malang since terrorists tend to recruit young Muslims as future cadres (Afrianty, 2012). Therefore, scholars in those universities with limited understanding of Islam tend to fall for the terrorist trap. Furthermore, some prominent figures of ISIS residing in Malang have actively promoted Islam's radical notions, such as Hilmi, one of Aman Abdurrahman's followers (Taufiqurrohman, 2015).

This radical thought serves as a latent threat requiring surveillance as it will potentially develop into actions. If the action occurs in one place, it may also invite several radical groups to be connected. The results were analyzed with Nvivo as follows (Fig. 2).

Figure 2. The Steps of Radical Groups Emergence



Source: Crosstab analysis of NVivo 12 plus

Secondly, economic factors contributed to terrorism in Malang, depicting an enormous economic gap between the rich and poor people due to the unjust policy (Choi & Luo, 2013). Disadvantaged communities from low-income families tend to be effortlessly provoked to join these

terrorist groups. The example includes the recruitment for Syria to join ISIS, guaranteed to obtain a specific amount of money, a car, and some other facilities (Speckhard & Yayla, 2015). They also were promised that they would find the proper Islamic life under the umbrella of ISIS. It was evident that some of the Malang people who went to Syria were due to this economic reason.

Thirdly, in terms of geography, Malang's existence as an education city and tourism destination profoundly influence the close relations to various people across Indonesia. Because of its strategic position, the opportunity to recruit and proliferate the cadres in more places would be more affordable. Residing in Malang as an education city, the students become more potential cadres, especially those without an adequate and proper understanding of Islam despite the strong motivation for Islam.¹ Furthermore, the background of students as an agent of change along with their potential to work in various places in Indonesia encourages more terrorist groups' interests to approach them as members.

Meanwhile, Malang's status as a tourism city resulted in limited government control to check the migration of people coming or leaving the city. This opportunity was utilized by terrorist groups to coordinate intensively, organizing the plan for the action inside a rented house with little or even no surveillance since they were assumed to be frequent tourists. Moreover, the condition was exacerbated due to intense communication with the alumni of ISIS residing in the Malang region.

The National Bureau of Terrorist Anticipation (BNPT) has declared that more than 900 Indonesians have migrated to Syria, and 75 of them have already returned; such condition becomes a significant threat as some of them currently reside in Malang (Christiyaningsih, 2017). Another essential point was those returnees from Syria, already established cluster with the burgeoned links to various places in Indonesia, interconnected to each other in sharing the ideology within the society.

¹ For instance, in 2011, nine freshman students of Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang, were suspected of being brainwashed by a radical group in Indonesia namely Negara Islam Indonesia (NII).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the terrorist movement in the Malang region is connected to national (Indonesia) and international terrorist networks. This alleged notion has lasted with the availability of the Malang region as an appropriate area for cadre and consolidation before launching the terrorist attacks. Accordingly, the threat of terrorism in the Malang region is deemed latent and active due to the ongoing activities, forcing the government to mark this area as one of the «red zones» in terms of the threat of terrorism.

The researchers have concluded that the threat of terrorism is influenced by at least three factors: the existing network of active radical movements, the economic problems provoking community to join radical movements, and the geographical position as a destination city for education and tourism. These three factors are believed to accommodate radical movements and terrorism in executing their movements. The fact that Malang is home to a heterogeneous society across Indonesia remains inescapable for decades.

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