



# The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and the Spread of Women's Terrorism in Indonesia

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**Abstract** — The spread of terrorism is often associated with radical network groups, such as Al Qaeda and The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Unlike other radical groups in various countries, ISIS is known as a group that uses women and children as perpetrators of terrorism. In Indonesia, acts of terrorism committed by women are also linked to ISIS. This paper will analyze how the spread of terrorist acts carried out by ISIS, the role of women in ISIS terrorism acts, and the pattern of terrorist acts of women ISIS sympathizers in Indonesia. This study uses a qualitative approach. Data is collected from searching for information on the internet and library sources from mass media, books, and scientific journals. The data are analyzed in a qualitative descriptive manner. The results show that the influence of ISIS has spread to various countries. There is a shift in women's role from sympathizers to perpetrators of acts of terrorism. In Indonesia, acts of women's terrorism are not concentrated in certain areas but spread in various cities. The movement pattern has shifted from joint or group action to action alone.

**Keywords** — ISIS, terrorism, women, Indonesia

## I. INTRODUCTION

Acts of terrorism are often identified with men, masculinity, courage, and violence. Most terrorism perpetrators in various countries are men [1]. Radical network groups, such as Al Qaeda and The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), are also men-dominated.

However, the phenomenon in Indonesia shows that women are also involved in terrorism. In mid-2000, the wife of terrorist Noordin Moh. Top became involved in terrorism by hiding her husband from police pursuit [2]. The number of women's acts of terrorism has increased after the declaration of the establishment of ISIS in 2013. In December 2016, two women were involved in a terror plot, namely T.S., who allegedly carried out the bombing in Bekasi, and Dian Yulia Novi, who was successfully arrested before carrying out a self-blowing action near the Jakarta Presidential Palace complex [3][4].

Meanwhile, in 2018, a mother and her two daughters blew themselves up in front of a church in Surabaya [5]. Another action occurred in Makassar in 2021 when a four-month-pregnant woman blew herself up with her husband [6]. In the same year, a woman named Zakiah Aini was shot by police for committing an act of terror at the Indonesian police headquarters [7]. Meanwhile, in 2022 Siti Elina was arrested by the police for breaking into the state palace and brandishing a gun [8].

In 2018 there were 13 women involved in acts of terror. Meanwhile, in 2019, this number has increased to 15 women. Other data was revealed by the Legal and Human Rights Researcher from the Institute for Economic and Social Research, Education and Information (LP3ES). They noted that 39 female prisoners and convicts were involved in terrorism from 2000 to 2020. Data from the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT) shows that there are 18 young women committing acts of terrorism. Their role has transformed from a supporting role to an actor [9].

Acts of terrorism in Indonesia are related to the Jamaah Ansharud Daulah (JAD) organization affiliated with the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) [10]. ISIS is a terrorist organization led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. The organization is an al Qaeda branch in Iraq that was established in response to the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq. ISIS's goal is to establish a worldwide caliphate and fight governments that are not in line with ISIS ideology. To realize its goals, ISIS uses violence and terrorism. This paper will analyze how ISIS spreads its ideology in Indonesia, influences women to commit terrorism, and the role and pattern of women's terrorist movements in Indonesia.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of women and terrorism is dominated by research on why women are involved in terrorism. The motivations of women to commit acts of terrorism vary. Subjective "rational choices" motivate some women to engage in terrorist activism [11]. Some think that by doing terrorism, they will be martyred. In addition, there is a growing thought among women involved in acts of terrorism that a target government deserves to be countered with acts of terrorism [12]. The increasing involvement of women in terrorism in Southeast Asia following the husband's jihad to fight through regional regimes.

Meanwhile, there are a large number of Islamic terrorist organizations involving active women throughout the Southeast Asian region, from Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore to the Philippines [13]. The motivation for jihad is the background of women's involvement in terrorism. Women will be recognized for their existence if they show courage in jihad at the cost of their bodies. The courage to become a 'martyr of Allah's religion' shows the level of piety of a woman [14].

Another study looked at economic factors as driving women to commit terrorism. Economic limitations and lack of attention from people around after the husband is caught or dies after committing acts of terrorism cause the wife to commit the same act [15][16]. For example, The Taliban exposed the disparity between the poor landless class and the rich landed class to convince the women of the lower class to collude with them with the promise of ameliorating their condition (Naseer et al., 2021).

The next factor is the social factor, an invitation from close friends or relatives. Affecting the closest people and creating social identity because of solidarity with fellow Muslims raises feelings of revenge for what fellow Muslims experience abroad, such as in Syria and Palestine [16].

According to Sukabdi (2021) [17], the motivations and ideologies of female terrorists are at high risk. However, the role of women in terrorism varies significantly according to the prevailing culture [18]. In many societies, women are considered victims of terrorism, not perpetrators. The salient identity of women is still not considered the main character in terrorism, so women are often considered victims. The involvement of women is marked by the roles they carry that affect their social behavior according to the role they play as terrorists [19].

Unlike previous studies that discussed the motives for women's involvement in terrorism, this paper will analyze the influence of ISIS on women's involvement in acts of terrorism. The author will discuss the case of Indonesia by identifying how ISIS ideology encourages the involvement of Indonesian women and how the forms and patterns of Indonesian women's involvement in terrorism.

### III. METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach. The author collected data from online mass media reports, namely Kompas.com, Tempo.co, BBC News Indonesia, and CNN Indonesia. The selection of online mass media is based on the consideration that the four mass media are widespread in Indonesia and widely accessed by readers. The authors also collected data from various scientific journal literature and social media.

The author then analyzes the data that has been collected. The data is organized into relevant categories and then given interpretation. The result is a qualitative descriptive analysis of the phenomenon of the existence of ISIS, its spread, and its influence on Indonesian women.

### IV. THE SPREAD OF ISIS IDEOLOGY

ISIS is an organization founded in Iraq in 2013. Many say the organization was born out of al-Qaida's branch in Iraq. The group has become the main jihadist fighting Syrian government forces and building military power in Iraq. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi headed the organization. In 2013 ISIS took control of the Syrian city of Raqqa, followed by June 2014, ISIS took Mosul. ISIS claims to have fighters from Britain, France, Germany, and other European countries, such as the

U.S., the Arab world and Caucasus countries, and even Indonesia [20].

ISIS utilizes social media as a tool for its radicalization as it helps to spread and recruit new members worldwide. BNPT reported that ISIS' primary strategy is cyberspace. Even ISIS allocates almost 50% of its finances to media interests. ISIS has organized and systematically radicalized through propaganda by producing informational materials in the form of videos, photos, and writings published professionally through ISIS' official media, including the Al-Hayat Media Center, which was established in mid-2014, and broadcast in German, English, French, and Russian. Propaganda carried out by ISIS relies not only on radical groups but also on social media, such as websites, Facebook and Twitter. The ease of propaganda and internalization of ISIS ideology is supported by the spread of personal and global communication through the Internet, which facilitates broadcasting images of cruelty as a choice. Recruiters even use propaganda films released theatrically. ISIS's films use Hollywood-style production tricks and special effects to portray ISIS terrorists as heroes and portray ISIS's struggle in real life. Although ISIS propaganda videos are often banned from social media sites such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter because of their violent content, which includes beheading, ISIS often uploads videos to sites such as Liveleaks, Pastebin, and Internet Archives, where users can upload information anonymously. The videos are then shared through social media networks by ISIS supporters so that even if removed from major social media sites, they are still accessible to stakeholders [21].

The jihad narrative by ISIS attracted male and female hardline Islamic activists from various parts of the world to support their struggles and are willing to immigrate to Iraq and Syria. ISIS ideology has spread to other countries through massive propaganda using information and communication technology media, including in Southeast Asia and Indonesia.

Propaganda focusing on finance is a powerful way to attract warriors who may not believe in ideological or theological messages. Of course, this gives a better life expectancy, especially for candidates from countries full of uncertainty or financial prosperity. ISIS's maximum support for the daily needs of the Mujahideen family is also widely exposed on the Internet, such as free health care, electricity, etc., for the people in ISIS country. Not only that, the lucrative offer made by women for fighters is also a commodity that is very attractive for those who seek sexual satisfaction, similar to Mut'ah Marriage (contract marriage) of the Shia religion. The Internet also exposes "success" in executing prisoners and reporting the amount of financial wealth, so it is not surprising that ISIS can recruit tens of thousands of people every year worldwide. The impact of the caliphate state declaration and so many benefits and conveniences promised by the ISIS group finally convinced many people to come to Syria to join ISIS. These people were later called foreign terrorist fighters or foreign fighters. Indeed, this is the primary goal of ISIS propaganda through social media [21].

"The most important financial source of ISIS is the Gulf states and Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates," especially from the rich people in the country. According to Meyer, the motivation for the initial assistance they provide is to support ISIS in facing the regime of

President Bashar al-Assad in Syria. This support is encouraged by "hatred" sectarian: three-quarters of the Syrian population is Sunni Muslim, but most of the ruling elite is the Alawite minority, which is often called part of the Shia Muslims [22].

## V. THE ROLE OF WOMEN

When ISIS experienced its heyday from 2014 to 2016, the organization had the same views on the role of women as other jihadist groups. Women are not obligated to fight but can and must do so if in a desperate condition [23]. However, since 2016, ISIS began to be pushed by the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces until finally falling in 2019 when Mosul and Raqqa were controlled by the Allies [24]. This reality influenced ISIS's view of the role of women and led to the declaration that the time had come for women to take up arms. The narrative used is to campaign for "Ummu Amarah Nasibah Baru" in the modern era. Ummu Amarah was a female companion of the Prophet Muhammad who died in the battle of Uhud. A similar campaign resurfaced in October 2017 with an Arabic-language editorial in Naba magazine entitled "The obligation of women to engage in jihad against the enemy." The involvement of women in terror movements is like to emphasize that they (women) have an essential role in extremism movements and acts of terrorism [25].

Recruitment or action involving women in ISIS-affiliated terrorism groups in Indonesia imitates international ISIS strategies and tactics involving women in combatant roles, including in artillery troops and suicide bombers. This strategy was taken considering that the number of male ISIS combatants in Iraq and Syria continues to decrease due to severe injuries and deaths in the war. In addition, using women as suicide bombers or artillery troops effectively deceives opposing armies. Almost the same phenomenon also occurs in Indonesia. Various arrests of members of terrorist groups have made these cells short of cadres and combatants, thus demanding new tactics and strategies. As a result of being pressed and deemed quite effective, the choice to make women a martyr became natural for this group [26].

The process of women as ISIS combatants is determined by the ability and influence of brainwashing. If brainwashing instills extremist ideas successfully, then it is very likely that a woman will become a terror combatant, as happened to Ika Puspitasari, the bomber in Bali in 2016, and Dian Yulia Novi, the bomber at the State Palace in the same year. Two years later, in Surabaya, a mother took her two daughters to carry out a suicide bombing at a Surabaya church. These women pledged allegiance to ISIS [27].

Social media plays a vital role in increasing women's involvement in acts of terrorism. They are influenced by terrorism propaganda spread by radical groups on social media [9]. The closest people, such as parents, spouses, and friends, primarily recruit the women involved. Some are involved because of their desires or recruited by radical or terrorist groups [12].

ISIS shifted its conception of masculinity to femininity. In the process of indoctrination developed, the discourse that women also must perform jihad in emergency conditions. In

addition, some women have trauma to their households, so they choose to commit acts of terrorism, even though they know it is wrong. The patriarchal culture of violence and ISIS networks have changed women's conception of acts of terrorism, and women also have the opportunity to wage jihad. ISIS uses the strong desire of women to wage jihad to recruit women as terrorists [12][28].

ISIS's views on the role of women in the movement are contained in the document 'Women of the Islamic State,' which is the manifesto of the Al-Khansaa Brigade (ISIS women police). According to the manifesto, involving women in warfare is allowed in case of emergency [29]. When in 2017, ISIS positions in Mosul (Iraq) and Raqqa (Syria) were pushed by allies, ISIS finally allowed women to fight. In addition, the involvement of women in terrorism is considered more effective because officers tend to be more suspicious of men than women.

In the case of Indonesia, the disclosure or murder of perpetrators of terrorism – especially the husband makes the wife take revenge by participating in terrorism. The rise of arrests has left the ISIS network short of human resources, so women are involved. Meanwhile, millennial women involved in acts of terror are influenced by the desire to defend religion. They see an unjust system of government that must be resisted. They were provoked by online media, especially Telegram. In addition, some try to brainwash or distort information through direct studies or social media. Terrorism analyst and former head of Jemaah Islamiyah, Nasir Abbas, said takfiri, or disbelief is a driving factor for women's involvement in the vortex of terrorism. According to Nasir, terrorist groups uphold that jihad is a fardhu ain or obligation that must be carried out [27].

## VI. THE PATTERN OF WOMEN'S TERRORISM

There are two patterns of women's acts of terrorism. First is joint action. This pattern involves friends or family. An example of a pattern of joint action is the act of terrorism committed by 18-year-old Dita Siska Milenia and 22-year-old Siska Nur Azizah. They carried scissors to attack the police on May 12, 2018. They want to help terrorism convicts by attacking police. The police finally arrested the two women for allegedly committing acts of terror and stabbing Brimob members in Mako Brimob Kelapa Dua Depok, West Java [30].

The bombing at the Makassar cathedral was also carried out through joint action. The perpetrators were married couple Yogi Sahafitri Fortuna (Dewi), who was 20 years old, and her husband. Bomb blasts killed both. Dewi and her husband are ISIS-affiliated Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD) members.

Another case was the bomb explosion in Surabaya on May 13, 2018. Bombs exploded in three churches, namely Santa Maria Ngagel Catholic Church Surabaya, Indonesian Christian Church Jalan Diponegoro Surabaya, and Central Pentecostal Church Jalan Arjuna Surabaya. The bombing of Indonesian Christian Street Diponegoro Street Surabaya was carried out by Puji Kuswati (43), who invited her two daughters named, Famela (9) and Fadhila (12). They died from bombs. Meanwhile, the bombing of the Pentecostal

church was carried out by Dita Oeprianto, husband of Puji Kuswati, who rammed a bomb-laden car into the church. One day later, on May 14, 2018, a bomb exploded at the Surabaya Police Headquarters. The perpetrators were Tri Murtiono (50), his wife Tri Ernawati (43), and their three children. On the same day, bombs exploded in Wonocolo flats, Sidoarjo, East Java. This incident involved a husband and wife residents of flats with their four children [31].

The perpetrators of terror in Surabaya and those arrested in Sidoarjo have links to JAD (Jamaah Ansarut Daulah). JAD is a significant supporter of ISIS in Indonesia. ISIS also claimed to be the instigator of suicide bombings at three churches in Surabaya. The website Amaq News Regency, an ISIS news agency, reported that ISIS was responsible for three suicide bombings at churches in Surabaya. Amaq posted the statement in Arabic on the Telegram app. It was later translated and published on the website of the antiterrorist intelligence community, Siteintelgroup.com [31].

The second pattern is individual action or known as (lone wolf). Unlike male terrorists, female terrorists in Indonesia tend to take on their moving patterns. Lone wolves are terrorists who move alone, without networks, without help from any group and are outside the structure or command of formal terrorist networks. This type of terrorist is more challenging to identify, and its modus operandi is more difficult to understand because there is no organizational command [32].

Individual action patterns can be found in the actions carried out by Siti Elina, Zakiah Aini, and Dian Yulia Novi. Siti Elina is the wife of a member of a radical group who actively communicates with members of Hizbut-Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) and the Islamic State of Indonesia (NII) through Social Media. Police arrested him for carrying a gun and assaulting the State Palace on October 25, 2022. Zakiah Aini was shot dead for attacking the Indonesian National Police Headquarters on April 2, 2021. Meanwhile, Dian Yulia Novi was arrested by police on December 11, 2016, for planning to bomb the State Palace.

## VII. CONCLUSION

The campaigns and narratives developed by ISIS through various social media platforms have encouraged the development of acts of terrorism in Indonesia. These actions are not only carried out by men, but also women. This phenomenon shows that acts of terrorism are no longer synonymous with the harsh and masculine world of men.

There are a variety of motives that drive women to engage in terrorism. Similarly, there are various forms of terrorism committed by women in Indonesia. This reality requires appropriate anticipation measures and the process of deradicalizing women needs to consider this complexity.

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