**The Process and Types of Radicalization**

**As Observed in Malaysia**

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**Abstract**

Radicalization as we know it, have been the crux of the issues related to violent extremism and terrorism. It has been discussed on many platforms and measures are being taken to correct it or find ways to counter it. However, we are looking at radicalization from the marketing stand point and try to figure out what actually affect the attractiveness of Islamic State’s calling that it has becomes a household name among extremist and terrorist alike. The success of Islamic State to attract thousands of foreign fighters to its region does not depend solely on religious factor. It is the well-crafted marketing strategies used by its marketing team that bring about a success level as good as Apple strategies in the smartphone market share. As smartphone users waited anxiously for Apple to reveal the latest I-Phone in the market because they are going to join the crowd to be among the first to own it, Islamic State managed to create the same excitement among the jihadist to wait anxiously of what in store for them in the future. The quietness in Islamic State market is not a sign of sluggishness but it could be some soul searching among the talented designers to come out with the next surprise for its consumers a.k.a the jihadists.

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**Introduction**

Islamic State (IS) or DAESH has proven that a caliphate is here to stay. It does not matter whether it is a physical caliphate or a virtual caliphate. What is important is its resiliency to withstand the fall of physical caliphate and endure the setbacks through a well-planned strategic intent to expand its tentacles globally. This terrorist organization is looking forward for distant victory in places that are conducive for their struggle. This group is also very successful in creating thousands of invisible army or soldiers of the caliphate. With simple marketing strategy in spreading its propaganda, the Islamic State is building an empire without being present physically but deep-rooted ideologically. Their successes depend a lot on the exploitation of information and communication technology. Their influence is as resilience as the technology that support its communication with the masses. The entire world is hooked up with this technology and so does Islamic State in its pursuit to form a caliphate. Just like wild fires, Islamic State propaganda spread to all nooks and crannies of the world. By using virtual caliphate to achieve the desired result, no military intervention can change the course of this virtual battle.

**Radicalization**

Special Branch Counter Terrorism Division of Royal Malaysia Police define radicalization as a process where one’s belief system is transform into another set of belief system. The transformation take place gradually over a period of time after being exposed substantially of the said ideal until it becomes a person’s belief system. Radicalization also revolves around one’s ability to process and translate the ideal, thus affecting the threshold level of exposure, the time frame of exposure and the result of the belief system. People can be radicalized in many areas of life especially in negative form such as accepting violent extremism as part of their belief system and way of life. Violent extremism as a result of radicalization is observed among hard core criminals, terrorist militants and even cult members. From our experiences as law enforcers and counter terrorism practitioners1, radicalization is a process that bring about different changes to different individuals. It depends on tolerance and absorption level of the input one is exposed to. We realized that there are cases where individuals from the same group that have being exposed to the same materials or inputs over the same period of time bring about different result such as the level of readiness in accepting jihad. For example, between two persons who had been friends and exposed to the same level of exposure can have different level of readiness. One is ready to move to the so called *Daulah* propagated by the Islamic State and the other one is only willing to assist like providing financial support or assisting through other means like collecting donations, selling goods to raise fund, propagating the ideology through on-line chats and contributing according to their ability. We always wonder why same exposure bring about different outcome. It is not the exposure that created different result but the tolerance level of individual to accept changes in their belief system. There is no specific profile of radical individual. It is actually one personal choice to be radical or not. Lowly educated and highly educated individual can both be radicalized because their own personal choice. Though cognitively they are different but emotionally they share the same feeling. The tolerance level to accept changes by means of constant exposure to radical material differ from one individual to another on the degree of willingness to perform jihad**.**

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1 From 2013 to January 2018, Special Branch Counter Terrorism Division, Royal Malaysia Police has arrested 382 pro-Islamic State individuals for terrorism offences. Out of that figure, 287 are Malaysians.

**Precursors to Radicalization**

There are many precursors to radicalization. These are the common precursors among Malaysians arrested for terrorism offences: -

1. Intermediaries – Person with violent extremism towards terrorism who are charismatic and is able to influence those who interact with him;

b) Social Network – Peers and support system that are inclined towards violent extremism;

c) The Internet – The World Wide Web is open to everyone who seek its content and has abundance of free flow derogatory contents publish openly or through the dark web;

1. Environment – Negative reinforcement of the environment in which one lives can have an impact on one’s belief system. Disenfranchise environment often time bring about a radicalized mind;
2. Ideology – When negative ideology meets suffering and searching mind, it will connect easily;
3. Personal Motivation – Personal motivation can also contribute in giving birth to radicalized mind;
4. Parenting / Upbringing – Poor parenting and upbringing can also be the reason for a radicalized mind; and
5. Prison – Prison is one of the perfect joint for potential radicalization to take place2. It is a perfect convergence of all kinds of extremity that are waiting to be harvested by both criminals and militants alike

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ 2 Out of 128 Malaysian militants, which have been sentenced to prison, at least 5 that

have been released returned to their jihadi struggle with no sign of remorse.

**Approaches of Radicalization in Malaysia**

Based on Malaysia experience, arrested individuals are radicalized through three basic approaches as follow: -

1. **Free for All Lottery System**

This approach is normally done through Islamic State media outlets by dumping into the internet variety of messages, narratives and materials to increase availability and enhance accessibility via social media network, mobile phone application and secret channel, published newspaper, online magazines and audio video programs. Besides this, Islamic State has numerous media production centers to ensure strategic dumping of materials to coincide with certain occasion or as aftermath commentary of a pro-IS incident. Often time there will be responses from the mass public and eventually a lottery winner will emerge one after another to be targeted by Islamic State for radicalization. There will be general radicalization and also targeted radicalization. General radicalization involved being exposed to the pro-Islamic State materials over and over again and targeted radicalization where an individual is already getting in touch with specific admin through personal messages. Free for all approach is the easiest approach and the effort put in during the preparation time is the only hard work involved. No effort is needed post-publication but to reap all the lottery winner wittingly or unwittingly. This approach comes with comprehensive strategies to achieve the ultimate goal of having an expandable caliphate in Syria and Iraq and also provincial caliphate elsewhere in the world. The carefully crafted strategies put Islamic State in an advantageous position compared to its rival AI-Qaeda. From the perspective of pro-IS militants arrested in Malaysia, it can be defined that Islamic State utilized competitive positioning and branding strategies. Free for all lottery system is the best approach in creating lone wolf and suitable to form a mindshare radicalized group.

1. **Competitive positioning**

Islamic State successfully put in position its status as “the one and only Caliphate” in the entire world leaving behind its rival, Al-Qaeda by projecting its capability to form a caliphate in historically mentioned location in the Al-Quran and Hadith of Al-Sham or the Levant (present day Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Cyprus the Turkish Hatay Province). When Abu Bakar Al-Baghdadi declared the formation of the Islamic State, its so-called soldiers of the caliphate have conquered and took control on vast area of land in both Syria and Iraq. The core leadership of Islamic State is not only bragging about the caliphate, but presented it to the world. How in the world, are you going to stop aspiring mujahidin (those who wanted to participate in the holy war) and muhajirin (those who wanted to move and live in a true and puritanical Islamic nation). This calling comes as a dream comes true for Muslims from all over the world including those from Malaysia. According to 2015 Soufan Group Report by region in Wikipedia that the majority of Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs) are from Middle East, the Maghreb, Western Europe, former Soviet Republic, Southeast Asia, the Balkans, and North America in descending order of their numbers. Since the FTFs count also include those who are in Syria and Iraq as muhajirin, therefore, we have women and children in the statistics. At present, our record shows we still have 53 Malaysian in Syria comprised 24 male adults, 12 female adults and 17 children (9 boys and 8 girls). Their whereabouts are unknown and those children are brought in by parents as a result of Islamic nation’s utopia projected by Islamic State’s propaganda. The Islamic State manage to carve out a position that have been waiting for by many militant prospects the world over; the true Islamic nation with Islamic lifestyle. It offered to the world, that “special something” even the many Arab nations could not provide. It relates the formation of its nation with the end of time and manipulate circumstantial advantages to its benefit. With proper strategic positioning, the Islamic State came out with the winning factor in the mindshare market leaving all other competitors and unite the mujahidin and muhajirin under one black banner by misusing the seal of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The convincing drama put up by Islamic State media outlets successfully conned people to its operating theatre.

1. **Branding**

Branding is crucial in the recruitment of militants in a huge mindshare market. Islamic State proves to be successful in this campaign due to its choice of branding strategies. Firstly, the name Islamic State itself is so catchy and reflects what it is without much explanations. The name is self-explanatory, publicly understood, easy to remember and represent what the prospective militants are longing and yearning for. Secondly, the logo used is the seal of Prophet Muhamad (pbuh) which is no doubt bring Islamic State’s prestige up so high as if to confirm an alliance with the noble Prophet (pbuh). Thirdly, the choice of black as the official color give Islamic State the easiest way to be recognized as it relates to the end of time hadith of a black banner from Khorasan and banking on its popularity among the mujahidin. Soldiers of the caliphate are always seen clad in black uniform, to give the sense of uniformity and its authenticity. Fourthly, the chosen location in Al-Sham match the hadith of end of time about Imam Mahdi where there will be a battle against evil force. The Islamic State also capitalize on this fact to attract thousands of mujahidin to its nation. Finally, by using the symbol of *tawhid* of raising one’s index finger upward, Islamic State creates its own unique specialty that is shared throughout the world. All these five elements give Islamic State a good branding strategy in its fight to gain the mindshare market in the entire world. In other words, its branding strategy help creates perception that Islamic State is the ultimate answer to achieve jihad

1. **Tools to Achieve Desired Result**

Next will be tools used to achieve the desired results. Islamic State is very good in crafting messages and narratives that convey in detail what it is all about. Besides being good in its literature, the Islamic State is capable of producing high quality online magazines, report with statistics, stunning graphics and the array of exploitations of desktop publishing. The Islamic State media outlet also enriched its messaging using video presentation and of a complete studio quality. Some of the success stories used to influence the masses are Dabiq, Rumiyah, Al-Hayat Media Center, Amaq News Agency and etc. Islamic State also can cater and translate its propaganda into multiple languages.

1. **Multiple Platform Interpersonal Communication**

Another approach that is consider effective is the multiple platform interpersonal communication. This approach is using multiple platform, meaning multiple channel of communication, for example the first platform originating from posting in Facebook and later through comment section where conversation is still open to public viewing. When the conversation needs a little privacy it goes through the Facebook messenger and later after the initial ice breaking session, it could develop into interpersonal communication using mobile phone applications such as WhatsApp, Telegram, Viber and other applications of their choices. This approach is very effective to gather those who are like minded and once they get acquainted to each other, the grouping will develop into smaller exclusive cell for members only and chatters are on clandestine mode. Through their vision and creativity to be part of the caliphate, some groups can transform from a chatter cell to lethal cell in later stage. Here is where we get a pack of wolves’ gang up together to achieve operational mission.

1. **Face to Face Communication**

The third approach is not really famous among Islamic States prospects but there are non-violent extremist groups that are still using this conventional way where they conduct social or religious gathering in small group to promote teachings of their ideologies. This approach is legal in Malaysia if the gathering is done in a private place and preaching among members does not violates existing law. Face to face communication means, the activities are confined to members only. However, this approach though seems like dormant and passive, can be lethal once it reach the threshold level needed to move the nation. Islamic State’s prospects are younger generation and are mostly millennials. They are more comfortable with their online presence than their physical presence. Face to face communication are still popular among older generation and are still effective when it comes to instilling ideology. In late 70s through 80s and early 90s, group like Jemaah Islamiah and Darul Islam used this method as a medium to propagate its ideology and it was very effective then judging from the support both organizations received from their members. Members are very loyal and religiously motivated in a sense that they are also practicing Islam diligently.

**Cases of Lone Wolf**

From 2013 up to January 2018, there are nine cases of lone wolf in Malaysia. Generally, all of them got radicalized through the internet by surfing the pro-IS materials, Facebook and also YouTube. Facebook is the most popular platform to lure prospect. Sometimes, YouTube served as appetizer and from the comments the recruiter can later lured prospect to have private chat guided with the relevant link. All offenders have different time frame of exposure. On average the time frame of getting exposed is no longer than six months. However, the danger they posed to the public is consider alarming. Basically, they started off letting their emotion control their mind. War zone posting in Facebook of the cruelty faced by innocent peoples in Syria and the “light” propaganda that follows the graphic presentation and video presentation stir the prospect’s emotion. They developed the feeling of sympathy and eventually after some mindshare coaching they developed vengeance and hatred towards those who they thought is the root cause of this suffering. To revenge the suffering, they came out with all kinds of idea to attack those who they thought are accountable or deserved to be punished for not doing the right thing to protect other Muslims from the enemy of Islam (mostly targeting Muslims) while non-Muslims is considered *kuffar* and deserved to be punished. Overall, they themselves are not the pious and religious type of personality and yet they group themselves as sympathizers of Islam. Age range for all cases are below 40 years old (refer to in Malaysia as youth adult) with the youngest being 16 years old at the time of arrest and the oldest is 38 years old. The youngest of all came out with the idea to prove the existence of Islamic State in Malaysia after being coached by “someone” in Syria. He brought with him a knife and a black painted toy pistol to a supermarket in Sg. Petani, Kedah and randomly chosen a Chinese salesgirl to demand recognition by putting the knife at the salesgirl’s throat. He told the salesgirl to call the police. When the police arrived and upon questioning him, he informed the police that his act of threat is to inform Malaysian public that Islamic State exists in Malaysia. He was arrested, prosecuted and sentenced accordingly as juvenile. There is also another case where the actor acted upon the instruction of a Malaysian recruiter in Syria, Mohamed Wandy Bin Mohamed Jedi to execute physical attack with Improvised Explosive Device (IED) on tourist spot in Bukit Bintang, Federal Police Headquarters in Bukit Aman and a local brewery, Carlsberg in Petaling Jaya. Another self-radicalized individual planned to have a stabbing spree attack at a commuter station. Based on information and intelligence, we managed to detect them at various stages of an attack cycle. The youngest one was arrested while performing the attack, the rest were arrested at various planning stage; basic idea, thinking and contemplating stage, pre-operational, and also at procurement stage.

**Case Studies on Black Crow Group**

Members of the Black Crow group are the one who tarnished our record by awarding us with the first Islamic State attack in Malaysia. It was the Movida Pub attack on the early morning of 28 June 2016. Eight peoples were injured and we are lucky there was no casualty. The mastermind behind this attack is none other than our infamous Malaysian bred terrorist Mohamed Wandy Mohamed Jedi. He was already on our watch list since 2014, however, on 26 January 2015 he managed to slip through at Padang Besar check point eluding police detection by taking a train from Padang Besar to Syria via Bangkok, Moscow and Istanbul. Since we were monitoring his online activities, we realized he was already in Istanbul through his Facebook posting. Though he was thousands of miles away from Malaysia, we kept our eyes on him because he has a penchant in writing and was quite good in giving commentary and crafting narratives about life in Syria and the war zone news. For over a year we monitored his Facebook postings and at times participated in the comment section with other viewers of his Facebook. From our monitoring over a period of time, we realized Wandy would be busy posting on his Facebook almost at the same time (local time in Syria) and at the same location believed to be a cybercafé to utilize the online connectivity. Every day, there would be an update of war zone news and how soldiers of the caliphate were doing at the moment. Every posting would be accompanied by Quranic verses and hadith about jihad, martyrdom and *infaq* or charitable donation for the cause of Allah. He was famously known as Abu Hamzah Al-Fateh in his Facebook. Though not highly educated and only finished his high school education, he had a lot of followers and Facebook friends due to the interesting presentation of his daily postings. It is like an update with running commentary and it is in our national language. Besides having the update of Syria, he also included an analysis of our division’s operations and executive actions taken against pro-IS militants in Malaysia with all the negative and derogatory comments you can think about. The updates and his Facebook daily presentation is solidly based on positioning and branding strategies. He positioned himself as the conduit for war zone news and real time updates in Malay language direct from Raqqa, Syria for Malaysian viewers. Furthermore, the branding strategies really matched the personality he tried to project and the curiosity on the viewers’ side. Those who were interested to know more, would be invited to message him personally. Gradually, Wandy managed to garner sizeable number of followers. Behind the scene he quietly formed a WhatsApp group with the name Black Crow sometimes in March 2016. Chatters in the Black Crow group would be more focused on jihad, martyrdom and *infaq*. Wandy was so good on the propagation of *infaq*, he managed to amass more than RM 110,000 within a year he was in Syria. From our assessment, that money is used for his own survival as life was actually hard in the war zone despite writing about the Islamic nation’s utopia. He was married with a wife and two kids, both born in Raqqa. With his job as traffic police, considered as menial tasking, the salary of about USD 250 per month was not enough. Getting money across border from Turkey to Syria was also difficult so Wandy would rather pay his courier agent half of what he got from Malaysia as long as fund kept flowing to his end. From time to time he would sponsor one or two persons who had the intention to migrate to Syria, maybe to justify the *infaq* collection at Malaysian side among his group members. He also had to prove that jihad activities were required from all and planning his attack by recruiting only the trusted among group members. Surprisingly on 17 June 2016, he made a personal vetting and pick a few trusted members from Black Crow and bind them together in a different chat application, Telegram with a new name Amanah (phb) vs Pas. This was done hastily and he abolished and deleted all chats in the Black Crow group. We managed to follow the group through a third party and anxiously awaited he next planning. During this gap of direct contact in the group, Wandy made a few “cut out” instructions on the procurement of tools of attack. However, this time around conversation among group members were short and simple using code words not known by the third party. By this time, Wandy had chosen two inexperience operatives for the Movida Pub attack without our knowledge. On our part, we did not strike yet at that time, because we were still waiting for the material evidence to be in their possession. Nonetheless, our lucky star did not shine on time and the attack was successful. Despite the setback, we managed to arrest both attackers within the first 72 hours after the incident because we have prior knowledge and have been following Wandy since he left Malaysia for Syria. We follow him even when his Facebook account have been blocked many times. Every time he surfaced again on Facebook, we would follow him. This gave us the advantages of having the upper hand in the ensuing investigation of the case. The prime suspect was sentenced to 25 years imprisonment.

**Conclusion**

What is interesting in the radicalization episode of the Black Crow group, Wandy himself vetted the members, whom he himself had initially added to the group and later identified a few, whom he trusted more than the rest to form another group for operational purpose. Wandy’s action alone on this matter proved that the same group members who have been exposed to Wandy for the same period of time have different level of acceptance to radicalization. Wandy could sense this through the private conversation he had with individual in his group. Therefore, for operational purpose he handpicked the most radicalized and left the less radicalized out of the operational picture. However, we have enough evidences to pick up the rest for indictment. 35 members of Black Crow have been charged and sentenced by the court under various sections of Chapter VIA of our Penal Code for security offences, two was charged under Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), one was charged under Prevention of Crime Act (POCA) and one has been released due to lack of evidence. Three out of 35 charged under security offences involved in providing financial support and assistance to Wandy but were not brave enough to perform physical attack. What made Wandy attractive to those acquainted with him is the marketing strategies used by Wandy. He understand these marketing principles and made a good sales of his narratives to those who are interested and willing to pay a premium price to him. They have been sentenced for various duration in jail and Wandy being a stellar performer in terms of recruitment drive through his narrative was paid well when he was killed in a drone attack on 29 April 2017.