

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE MOVEMENT OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN FIGHTERS TO  
ISIS: A COMPARISON OF INDONESIA AND MALAYSIA

A Thesis

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to understand why Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim country with roughly 200 million followers, has sent relatively fewer fighters abroad to join the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria ("ISIS", also known as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant or Daesh), or other violent groups in Iraq and Syria, when compared to Malaysia, a Southeast Asian regional peer with around 20 million Muslims. A precise assessment of the number of Southeast Asians fighting in Iraq and Syria is hard to make, but according to the Soufan Group's December 2015 report "Foreign Fighters," Indonesia has sent roughly 500 fighters to the Middle East, while Malaysia, with 1/10th as many Muslims, has sent around 100. That is roughly 2.5 Indonesian fighters per million and 5 Malaysian fighters per million (twice as many proportionally). The three plausible explanations addressed in this thesis are: (1) externalities of a strong state, (2) the influence of Arabization and (3) the availability of financial and language resources. The paper is focused on making judgments on patterns of behavior that the reader may find useful when looking at the issue of terrorism in Southeast Asia, as these explanations are meant to provide a foundation for understanding factors that *likely* influence Islamist violence in the aggregate.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jonathan Weintraub was born November 25, 1988 in New York City. He graduated with a BA *summa cum laude* from Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey–New Brunswick in 2011. Subsequently he studied Indonesian language and culture at the University of Wisconsin – Madison’s Southeast Asian Studies Summer Institute, followed by Universitas Gadjah Mada in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. He then won a U.S. Department of State Fulbright Fellowship in Malaysia in 2014. As a Fulbright Fellow, he served as a teacher and cultural ambassador for the U.S. in Asia. He speaks Indonesian and Malay.

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## LIST OF ARABIC, INDONESIAN, AND MALAY TERMS<sup>1</sup>

<i>Ahmadiyya</i>	Minority Muslim sect
<i>Bid'ah</i>	Innovation in religious matters
DDII	<i>Dewan Da'wah Islamiyah Indonesia</i> . Indonesian Society for the Propagation of Islam
<i>Fatwa</i>	Advisory opinion issued by a recognized authority on law and tradition in answer to a specific question
FPI	<i>Front Pembela Islam</i> . Islamic Defenders Front, hardline Indonesian Islamist group
<i>Hadith</i>	Collection of sayings of the Prophet Muhammad that constitute the major source of guidance for Muslims apart from the Quran
ICMI	<i>Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia</i> . Association of Indonesian Islamic Intellectuals, Suharto era institution
<i>Jihad</i>	A war or struggle against unbelievers or an internal struggle against sin
<i>Kafir</i>	Infidel or unbeliever
<i>Katibah Nusantara</i>	Malay-Indonesian speaking chapter of ISIS
LIPIA	<i>Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Islam dan Arab</i> . Institute of Islamic and Arabic Studies
<i>Madrassa</i>	Islamic religious school
<i>Muhammadiyah</i>	Followers of Muhammad, modernist Muslim-based socioreligious organization in Indonesia
MUI	<i>Majelis Ulama Indonesia</i> . Indonesian Ulama Council, newly influential quasi-state religious organization post-1998
NU	<i>Nahdlatul Ulama</i> . Renaissance of Islamic Scholars, traditionalist Muslim socioreligious organization in Indonesia
<i>Pancasila</i>	Five Principles, governing ideology of Indonesia
PAS	<i>Parti Islam Se-Malaysia</i> . Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party, opposition political party of Malaysia
PPP	<i>Partai Persatuan Pembangunan</i> . United Development Party, Indonesian Islamist political party that came into being under Suharto
<i>Reformasi</i>	Democratic/civil society movement in Indonesia and Malaysia c. 1998
<i>Shari'a</i>	Islamic law based on the Quran and the <i>hadith</i>
<i>Takfeer</i>	The act of declaring someone an infidel
UMNO	United Malays' National Organization, the dominant Malay party of Malaysia's governing coalition

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<sup>1</sup> Definitions for *Ahmadiyya*, *bid'ah*, DDII, *fatwa*, *hadith*, *jihad*, *kafir*, *madrassa*, *Muhammadiyah*, NU, PAS, PPP, *reformasi*, *shari'a*, *takfeer*, UMNO sourced from Peterson in *The Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*, 2016, by order of appearance, pp. 30, 107, 644, 371, 431, 583, 533, 671, 765, 499, 963, 644, 582, 618, 895, 644. FPI definition sourced from Woodward et al., 2014, p. 154. ICMI definition sourced from Liddle, 1996, p. 613. *Katibah Nusantara* definition sourced from Liow, 2016b, para. 4. LIPIA definition sourced from Scott, 2016, para. 4. MUI definition sourced from Lindsey, 2012, p. 253. *Pancasila* definition sourced from Formichi, 2012, pp. 79-80.

## **Introduction**

This thesis seeks to understand why Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim country with roughly 200 million followers, has sent relatively fewer fighters abroad to join the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria ("ISIS", also known as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant or Daesh), or other violent groups in Iraq and Syria, when compared to Malaysia, a Southeast Asian regional peer with around 20 million Muslims. A precise assessment of the number of Southeast Asians fighting in Iraq and Syria is hard to make, but according to the Soufan Group's December 2015 report "Foreign Fighters," Indonesia has sent roughly 500 fighters to the Middle East, while Malaysia, with 1/10th as many Muslims, has sent around 100 (pp. 8-9). That is roughly 2.5 Indonesian fighters per million and 5 Malaysian fighters per million (twice as many proportionally). The Australian National University scholar Greg Fealy estimated that an even greater percentage of Malaysians have gone to fight for ISIS: for every million people in Indonesia, 1.4 have left to join ISIS and for every million people in Malaysia, 8.5 have left to join ISIS (Fealy, 2016, p. 9). To put the disparity in context: if Indonesia sent proportionally as many fighters abroad as Malaysia, there would be between 1,000 and 2,000 Indonesians fighting in Iraq and Syria.

While it is understood that jihadism in both Indonesia and Malaysia generally lacks appeal among the majority of the populace (for example, 74% of Malaysian Muslims and 92% of Indonesian Muslims believe suicide bombing in the name of Islam is rarely or never justified) (*Pew Research Center*, April 30, 2013, p. 29), the relatively low level of concern about rising Islamist violence and relatively favorable view of ISIS among Malaysian and Indonesian Muslims indicates a problematic trend of the institutionalization of extremist interpretations of Islam within the mainstream Islamic discourses in both countries (Hamid, 2016, para. 8). Survey

data from the *Pew Research Center* solidifies the fact that Malaysia has generally tilted more toward jihadism than Indonesia. For example, in 2015, 11% of Malaysian Muslims expressed a favorable view of ISIS, while only 4% of Indonesian Muslims expressed such a view (Poushter, 2015b). While socio-economically and politically different, Indonesia and Malaysia are relatively similar countries in that they share a mutually intelligible language, contiguous borders and a shared geographic outlook within Southeast Asia. Additionally, both countries are religiously and ethnically diverse. So what factors have led to such a disparity between these two Southeast Asian neighbors?

Before beginning this investigation, I will preface it by acknowledging that there is no simple answer to why jihadism exists; the issues here are nuanced and multi-causal. It is extremely difficult to know what motivates an individual in pursuing violence. Additionally, there are limitations to the kind of evidence that can be used to support claims about said motivations given that direct access to ISIS fighters is not feasible. Hence, this thesis builds on newspaper articles and scholarly publications to construct reasoned arguments, although these sources might at times be limited in scope, only offering hints of connections.

After a brief introduction to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, discussing its ideology and rise, and examining the role of Wahhabi ideology in global jihadism, I move on to explain how Southeast Asia fits into the equation and why this is an important issue. Then, I analyze the way Islam is employed as a political instrument in both Indonesia and Malaysia and comment on how these trends may set the stage for extremist ideations. Finally, I present a series of plausible explanations for why the disparity in exported fighters between Indonesia and Malaysia exists. The three primary explanations I discuss are: (1) externalities of a strong state, (2) the influence of Arabization and (3) the availability of financial and language resources. The paper is thus not

focused on individual decisions, but rather on making reasonable judgments on patterns of behavior that the reader may find useful in looking at the issue of terrorism in Southeast Asia, as these explanations are meant to provide a foundation for understanding factors that are *likely* to influence Islamist violence in the aggregate.

Externalities, a term borrowed from economics, are consequences of an activity that affect an unrelated third party. A micro-level example of a negative externality would be a factory that pollutes a river and the effect of that pollution being experienced downstream, not in the vicinity of the factory itself. I will compare the political discourse and security apparatus in both Indonesia and Malaysia to better explain the way both states potentially create externalities that affect their neighbors. The issue of Arabization in Indonesia and Malaysia will help clarify both ideological and physical connections to a Wahhabist worldview. A discussion of resource availability (e.g., financial, human capital) in Indonesia vs. Malaysia may also bring us closer to an understanding of the current state of violent extremism in Southeast Asia.

Throughout this paper I will use the terminology “Islamist violence,” “militant Islam” and “violent extremism” interchangeably. In all instances, unless stated otherwise, I am referring to jihadists or jihadis, whether they have acted on their desires or simply maintain them, following Habeck’s analysis of jihadism. *Jihadists* have very specific ideas about how to revive Islam, how to return Muslims to political power and how to deal with their enemies; ultimately, jihadists are committed “to the violent overthrow of the existing international system and its replacement by an all encompassing Islamic state” (Habeck, 2006, p. 4). Jihadists justify their violent means through their interpretation of *jihad*, which can mean an internal struggle against sin or an external war against infidels under the direction of a Caliph (Peters, 2005, pp. 1-3). Jihadis cling to the latter definition of *jihad*, which is the “lesser *jihad*” or *jihad* of the sword (the

“greater *jihads*” are *jihad* of the pen and of the tongue, meaning proselytizing through writing and speech) (Peters, 2005, p. 1). In recent years, groups like ISIS have used the concept of *takfeer* (the act of declaring someone an infidel) to expand the scope of *jihad* to encompass co-religionists who condemn ISIS’ actions and approach (Bunzel, 2015, p. 11).

It is important to clarify the difference between Islamism and militant Islamism. Islamism is the call for reforming Islam through a revival of the religion through a return of Islam to political power (Habeck, 2006, p.4). Islamism, like Islam, is not monolithic; it encompasses a large body of groups that maintain different goals, beliefs and methodologies for achieving their vision (Habeck, 2006, p.4). Militant Islamists that seek to use violence to achieve their goals (e.g., al-Qaeda) would be categorized as jihadists or jihadis, while Islamists that are committed to working within the existing international system would generally not be categorized as jihadists (e.g., Turkey’s Justice and Development Party)<sup>2</sup>. The Brookings scholar Shadi Hamid explains, “Islamists aren’t just acting for this world, but also for the next. Muslim Brotherhood and Brotherhood-inspired organizations aim to strengthen the religious character of individuals through a multi-tiered membership system and an educational process with a structured curriculum” (2015, para. 4). In this respect, jihadis may often share some of the same goals as Islamists. The difference is the means that each respective group is willing to employ in order to achieve those goals.

### **1. The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Saudi Wahhabism and Southeast Asia**

ISIS is a jihadi-*Salafi* group. This means that they prefer armed struggle (*jihad*) as the way to achieve their version of Islam, in addition to a strict literalist interpretation of the Quran and the

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<sup>2</sup> There are exceptions to the distinction between Islamist groups and militant Islamist groups. For example, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt calls for peaceful measures, but it is still being considered for designation as a foreign terrorist organization by the U.S. government (Wittes & McCants, January 30, 2017, para. 12-14).

*Hadith* (the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad) (Haykel, 2015, para. 4). Not all jihadis are *Salafis* and not all *Salafis* preach armed violence, only the jihadi-*Salafis* do (Haykel, 2015, para. 4). *Salafism*, which refers to Muslims who follow the example of the Salaf, the “pious predecessors”, actually grew out of a reform movement in the late 19th and early 20th centuries that became progressively more conservative over time (Esposito, 2003, p. 275). The *Salafis* seek to re-Islamize daily life by returning to the teachings and texts of the “pious predecessors,” or the first three generations of Muslims after Muhammad (Esposito, 2003, p. 275). Jihadi-*Salafi* groups draw inspiration from Wahhabi ideology - especially the more expansive Wahhabi application of *takfeer* that undergirds the exclusivist practices and violence that ISIS engages in (Bunzel, 2015, pp. 9-11). The main distinction between Wahhabis and *Salafis* is that Wahhabis follow the Hanbali legal school, while the *Salafis* reject *taqlid* (Haykel, 2009, pp. 42-45), or the following of a legal authority or school (Stewart, 2013, p. 244). Under the Wahhabi application of *takfeer*, *Shi'ites* and other minority Muslim sects are uncompromisingly rejected as true Muslims.

Wahhabism is a school of law (Ar. *madhhab*) that advances a puritanical interpretation of the scriptures. It also exists as the state ideology of Saudi Arabia. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Abd al-Wahhab wanted to reverse what he perceived as the moral decline of Arab society by denouncing many popular Islamic beliefs and practices as idolatrous (Blanchard, 2008, p. 2). Some of these practices included the veneration of graves, the celebration of Muhammad’s birthday, and generally the incorporation of local culture into Islam. He called for a return to the pure fundamentals of Islam as embodied in the Quran and the life of Muhammad and his closest friends and family (Ar. *sahaba*) (Blanchard, 2008, p. 2). Abd al-Wahhab’s ideology is rooted in the purification of Islamic practices - he despised what he saw as the excessive lifestyles of the

Ottoman and Egyptian elites of his day (e.g., smoking hashish and tobacco) (Crooke, 2014, para. 9). He was also angered by the fact that local Bedouin Muslims incorporated local superstitions (e.g., revering divine places and graves) into their practice of Islam (Crooke, 2014, para.10). He declared these activities as innovations (Ar. *bid'ah*) that were forbidden by Allah (Choksy and Choksy, 2015, p. 25). Incorporating the teachings of the 13<sup>th</sup> century Islamic scholar ibn Taymiyyah, Abd al-Wahhab declared war on other interpretations of Islam and stated that “any doubt or hesitation” about acknowledging Wahhabism as the one true interpretation of Islam should “deprive a man of immunity of his property and his life” (Crooke, 2014, para. 12).

Abd al-Wahhab and his followers saw the world in absolute terms: either you follow our interpretation or you are an infidel (Ar. *kafir*). John Esposito noted, “They regarded all Muslims who did not agree with them as unbelievers to be subdued (that is, fought and killed) in the name of Islam” (2011, p. 54). This policy of *takfeer* allowed Abd al-Wahhab and his followers to declare war on any fellow Muslim that deviated from the Wahhabi worldview. This led to violence against those that were deemed to fall outside the Wahhabi group and the implantation of a highly intolerant and exclusivist worldview. ISIS espouses a similar view in regard to *takfeer*, labeling vast numbers of Muslims as “apostates”, thus justifying their murder (Wood, 2015, para. 18). ISIS even declares fellow jihadis apostates. Carmon, Yehoshua and Leone note, “*Dabiq* [ISIS’ English language magazine], often stresses the internal ideological struggle and the illegitimacy of the rival organizations, including by mocking their leaders, whose behavior, the IS believes, deviates from the true Islamic model. This contempt extends even to al-Qaeda leader Ayman Al-Zawahiri and to Jabhat Al-Nusra leader Abu-Muhammad Al-Joulani” (2014, para. 10).

Abd al-Wahhab also demanded conformity and complete allegiance to a Caliph (a Muslim political, military, spiritual and religious leader) (Crooke, 2014, para. 15). One of the main goals of Wahhabism is to restore “a fantasized caliphate centered on a desert, a sacred book, and two holy sites, Mecca and Medina” (Daoud, 2015, para. 2). This is the ideology that Saudi Arabia is based on. These ideas also represent the same worldview and interpretation of Islam that ISIS currently employs. ISIS has prioritized the establishment of the Caliphate as its immediate short-term goal (Carmon et al., 2014, para. 3). The second issue of *Dabiq* explains the order of building the Caliphate: first conquer the Arabian Peninsula, then Persia, then Rome and then fight the *Dajjal* (false prophets) (Carmon et al., 2014, para. 3).

From Jihadi-*Salafi* terrorist groups in the Middle East to Muslim dress in Southeast Asia, Saudi Wahhabi Islam has exerted a powerful influence on Islamic discourse in the late 20th and early 21st century. The ascent of Wahhabism can be traced to the creation of the Saudi state. Muhammad ibn Saud, head of the al-Saud tribal family, made a deal with Abd al-Wahhab in the 18th century: the al-Saud family agreed to endorse al-Wahhab’s puritanical interpretation of Islam for political and military support from al-Wahhab and his followers (Curtis, 2010, p. 571). Wahhabism thus became the state ideology of Saudi Arabia, as it exists today. As Wahhabi clerics were integrated into the burgeoning Saudi kingdom’s religious and political establishment, Wahhabi ideas became the basis of rules and laws that govern social affairs as well as judicial and educational policies (Blanchard, 2008, pp. 2-3).

After the oil boom of the 1970s, Saudi Arabia became immensely wealthy. This allowed them to export their brand of Wahhabi Islam in an effort to create doctrinal uniformity among Muslims worldwide (Kepel, 2002, pp. 71-2). The exporting of Wahhabism was further hastened by the Saudi desire to contain Iran, Saudi Arabia’s main political adversary (Kepel, 2002, p. 73).

The Saudis exported their ultra conservative version of Islam through the offering of development aid, the building of mosques, libraries and other institutions, the distribution of Saudi religious tracts and the funding of commissioned imams and religious scholars (Esposito, 2011, p. 51). Financial support for Wahhabi institutions has been provided to Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Central Asian Republics, China, Africa, Southeast Asia, the United States and Europe (Esposito, 2011, p. 51). In Indonesia, the Saudis have built more than 150 Wahhabi-oriented mosques and supplied more than 100 boarding schools with teachers (Hefner, 2009, p. 86). They also have allocated thousands of scholarships for graduate study in Saudi Arabia that many Indonesians have taken advantage of (e.g., Habib Rizieq, the founder of the FPI or Islamic Defenders Front) (Hefner, 2009, pp. 86-88). In a more direct fashion, Saudi citizens have provided financial support for violent jihadi groups like ISIS. For example, Saudi Arabia arrested 18 individuals for providing shelter and funding to ISIS fighters in February 2017 (Al Jazeera, Feb. 16, 2017). In the past few decades, the Saudi regime has spent around \$100 billion exporting Wahhabism, primarily to poverty-stricken Muslim countries (Norton, 2016, para. 25).

According to scholars like Madawi Al-Rasheed, Wahhabism licenses intolerance through the Saudi domestic education system and the exporting of that system throughout the Muslim world. Al-Rasheed notes, “Most terrorists do not embrace a sophisticated approach to rejecting other Muslims by dint of pursuing a doctorate in Islamic studies but are simply absorbers of hate speech, most of it emanating from preachers on the payroll of the Saudi regime as teachers and educators, or readers of ancient and new Wahhabi fatwas, published in fancy bound leather volumes” (2015, para. 9). Additionally, the teachings within Saudi domestic schools foster an intolerance of other cultures and religions (Blanchard, 2008, pp. 3-4). A Freedom House report analyzing twelve Ministry of Education public school textbooks concluded that these textbooks

teach students to condemn and denigrate the majority of Sunni Muslims that don't follow Wahhabism and to hate Christians, Jews, polytheists and others (2006, pp. 12-13). The report also found that the Saudi education system taught that Jews and Christians are “enemies of the [Muslim] believers and that students should not greet or befriend non-believers and fighting between Muslims and Jews will continue until judgment day” (2006, p. 13). Another Freedom House report, published in 2015, noted that “despite changes to textbooks in recent years, intolerance in the classroom remains an important problem, as some teachers continue to espouse discriminatory views of non-Muslims and Muslim minority sects” (para. 14).

The Saudi funding of mosques, *madrasas* (Islamic boarding schools) and charities has raised concern that Wahhabi Islam is used by militants to suit their political goals - this is especially worrisome given the fact that some Saudi-based charities have been accused of funding violent extremist groups (Blanchard, 2008, p. 4). Choksy and Choksy note that the Saudis have been “the most persistent source of support for global *jihad* by spreading Wahhabism abroad to radicalize foreign Muslims and then giving financial support to their violent struggles” (2015, p. 26). Private donations from Arab Gulf citizens, of which the Saudis are the most generous, to groups in Syria, including ISIS and other groups, have exceeded hundreds of millions of dollars in recent years (Boghardt, 2014, para. 8). In fact, ISIS directly targets Saudi Arabia for fundraising efforts (Boghardt, 2014, para. 7). Choksy and Choksy further explain, “Funds for equipment and fighters come from private donors and charitable endowments. Lax banking regulations, traditional money-transfer networks, and influential sympathizers on the Arabian Peninsula have been vital to subsidizing Sunni militants in the ongoing conflicts of Iraq and Syria” (2015, p. 30). Former Florida senator Bob Graham, lead author of the 9/11 congressional commission, said, “Saudi Arabia has not stopped its interest in

spreading extreme Wahhabism. ISIS...is a product of Saudi ideals, Saudi money and Saudi organizational support, although now they are making a pretense of being very anti-ISIS” (Butt 2015, para. 8).

To clarify, ISIS and groups like it are not simply an outgrowth or an extension of the Saudi regime. The Saudi government, one of the main counter-terrorism partners for the U.S. in the Middle East, actively combat ISIS and view it as a major security threat (Byman, 2016, p. 4). However, although the political relationship that the Saudi state maintains with ISIS is highly adversarial, its promulgation of Wahhabism licenses behavior and worldviews that are in line with radical groups like ISIS. The Saudi regime disdains jihadist violence in general because they view the phenomenon as a de-stabilizer and a threat to their rule (Shane, 2016, para. 9), yet, of course, the Saudi approach is not monolithic: while private Saudi citizens have financially supported ISIS, the regime has also cracked down on citizens attempting to join the group (Byman, 2016, p. 1). The regime is also very much driven by its rivalry with Iran and depends on the clerical establishment (that is committed to reactionary policies) for legitimacy (Shane, 2016, para. 9). The competing interests of opposing Iran, spreading Wahhabism and combating jihadism have made the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia a land of contradictions. On the other side of the coin, ISIS and other violent Islamist groups like al-Qaeda oppose the Saudi regime, which they view as an apostate regime that has corrupted Islam in order to preserve its power (Hubbard, 2016, para.7). This view was also shared by Osama bin Laden, who understood the Saudi family to be an “agent” of the United States (DeLong-Bas, 2004, p. 272).

The Saudi-Wahhabi connection has reached Southeast Asia, home to around 250 million Muslims (around 20% of the world’s population of around 1.6 billion) (Yusuf, 2012, para. 4). Dennis Ignatius, a former Malaysian diplomat, noted that Riyadh built up a significant cadre of

Wahhabi-trained academics, preachers and teachers across the region. They act as “lobby groups agitating for greater Islamization, demanding the imposition of *shari’a* (Islamic law based on the Quran and the *hadith*), pushing for stricter controls of other faiths, and working behind the scenes to influence official policy and shape public opinion” (Ignatius, 2015, para. 20).

Regarding Wahhabi influence in Indonesia, the scholar Fred R. von der Mehden explains, “The most well known organizations that serve as primary conduits of Saudi funding in Indonesia are the *Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia* (the Indonesian Society for the Propagation of Islam, or DDII) and *Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Islam dan Arab* (the Institute of Islamic and Arabic Studies, or LIPIA)” (2014, para. 9). The curriculum at LIPA, which emphasizes Arabic language and the study of Islam, rejects pluralism and democracy (Scott, 2016, para. 4). An expansion of LIPIA by the Saudi government is planned, increasing the number of graduate students from 3,500 to 10,000 per year (Scott, 2016, para. 2).

These forces coalesce to influence Islamic discourse and potentially encourage would-be jihadists to act out, either in their home countries or abroad. In fact, nine of the Bali bombers graduated from al-Mukmin Islamic boarding school in Solo on the island of Java (Campbell, 2017, para. 26). Al-Mukmin, dubbed the “Ivy League” for Indonesian jihadists by the International Crisis Group, teaches a Wahhabi-inspired curriculum that prizes violent *jihad* (Liow and Leifer, 2014, p. 95). More broadly, the Saudi-funded institutions and schools quietly push Islamic discourse in Southeast Asia (and the rest of the Muslim world) toward a more rigid, exclusivist interpretation of Islam.

In January 2016, ISIS launched its first successful terrorist attack in Jakarta, Indonesia. Four civilians were killed and 20 were wounded (Liow, 2016a, para. 1). The attack was most likely masterminded by an Indonesian computer technician turned jihadi, Bahrun Naim,

operating out of ISIS-held territory in the Middle East (Liow, 2016a, para. 4). Despite the fact that the attack was a poorly planned amateur operation and that the central ISIS leadership may not have been involved, the event still demonstrates the reach that ISIS have in Southeast Asia. This influence is bolstered by the existence of a Malay-speaking chapter of ISIS, the *Katibah Nusantara*, comprised mostly of Indonesians and Malaysians (Hamid, 2016, para. 2-3). The *Katibah Nusantara* has been expanding its recruitment efforts in Southeast Asia through videos and leaflets published in Malay, according to a study by the Nanyang Technological University's S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (*The Straits Times*, January 17, 2016, para. 13-15).

Referring to the impact of Saudi-exported ideology, Universiti Sains Malaysia Professor Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid explains that “four decades of *Salafization* have altered the face of Islam in Southeast Asia...there exists general acceptance of Wahhabi-inclined authors such as Sayyid Qutb, the Pakistani Abul A'la Maududi (1903-1979)...Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab himself, and a host of Saudi-affiliated scholars such as Abd al-Aziz ibn Baz (1910-99), Nasiruddin al-Albani, Muhammad ibn Salih al-Uthaymeen (1925-2001) and Saleh al-Fawzan (1933- ). Their writings are increasingly defining mainstream Islam in Southeast Asia...” (2016, para. 16). The connection between Wahhabism and jihadi-*Salafi* groups worldwide is the strongest it has ever been, given the extensive amount of time and money that the Saudis have dedicated to promoting their worldview. This is true despite efforts by countries like Indonesia to combat Wahhabism by promoting progressive Islamic movements like the *Islam Nusantara* campaign, which stresses a spiritual reading of Islam that endorses non-violence, inclusiveness and acceptance of other religions (Cochrane, 2015, para. 12).

The products of Wahhabization, some of which reasonably include jihadists willing and able to fight for ISIS and other groups in the Middle East, are especially relevant in Southeast

Asia given ISIS' increasingly precarious future. Professor Brahma Chellaney, from India's Center for Policy Research, warns, "No matter how many bombs the US and its allies drop, the Saudi-financed *madrasas* will continue to indoctrinate tomorrow's jihadists" (2015, para. 17). ISIS has deepened ties among Southeast Asian jihadis fighting in the Middle East and these fighters will likely return home to their respective countries when the group is defeated (Jones, 2016b, p. 1). These militants can serve as ambassadors in Southeast Asia for ISIS' Wahhabi-inspired ideology and will further encourage the development of Saudi Wahhabi institutions and *madrasas*. The international network of Saudi Wahhabism is an important underlying factor that shapes the trajectory and nature of Islamist terrorism in Southeast Asia and elsewhere. The way in which Indonesia and Malaysia have been shaped by Saudi Wahhabi influence and indoctrination is dependent upon a number of factors, including each country's domestic political environment and Islam's role in political discourse.

## **2. Political Islam in Indonesia & Malaysia**

In this section, I offer a brief survey of how Islam has been used as a political device in both Indonesia and Malaysia from the late colonial era until today. Thus, I first discuss the way in which political Islam was used in Indonesia under Sukarno and Suharto, and its treatment in the post-New Order era. And then I shift to Malaysia, from independence through the Mahathir Mohamad regime and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The purpose of this section is to demonstrate that Indonesia, through its own political dynamics, sidelined political Islam in favor of a pluralistic impulse, while Malaysia harnessed political Islam as a divisive tool to maintain political hegemony, thus creating a less pluralistic political environment.

Political Islam is here understood to mean the utilization of Islam and Islamic symbolism by governments and state leaders to pursue political objectives. It is important to look at how

Islam is employed politically to differentiate between radical Islamists, moderate Islamists, secular Muslims and everyone else that falls in between. This is useful in understanding how Muslims in Malaysia and Indonesia see Islam and the world, and how those worldviews are shaped by political institutions and rhetoric. More generally, the nature of political discourse conditions individuals to respond in different ways. For example, violent and negative political rhetoric has been shown to promote support for violent and negative behavior (Kalmoe, 2010, pp. 22-4).

The domestic political context is helpful in analyzing how Islam is received and understood by individual Malaysians and Indonesians. Historically, Indonesia, under the Suharto regime, repressed or co-opted Islam, while Malaysia accommodated and directed Islam under the Mahathir regime. In both cases, governments in the 20<sup>th</sup> century constructed, or limited, Islamic institutions with consequences for religio-political discourse in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In recent years, Malaysian political parties and leaders have used Islam as a tool to exclude others and stoke animosity as these groups attempt to “out-Islam” each other (Liow, 2015a, para. 9). In Indonesia, since the fall of the Suharto regime in 1998 and the blooming of a democratic system, conservative Islamist groups have repeatedly lost out during national elections, remaining at the peripheries of political power, despite winning almost 30% of the legislative vote in 2014 (up from 24% in 2009) (Otto and Schonhardt, 2014, para. 8). Meanwhile, exclusivist political discourse and intolerance of minorities in Indonesia has increased, as documented by *Human Rights Watch* and the former U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay (*Human Rights Watch*, Feb. 28, 2013, pp. 1-5; *U.N. News Centre*, Nov. 13, 2012, para. 1, 8).

## 2.1 Indonesia

At the time when Indonesia was granted independence from Japan in 1945, Sukarno (Indonesia's first president) and other Indonesian leaders debated whether Islam and *shari'a* should be inscribed in the constitution. A *shari'a* clause was added to one of the earlier drafts of the constitution (the so-called Jakarta Charter), together with a stipulation that the President must be a Muslim (Azra, 2006, pp. 21-2). As secular nationalists and Christian leaders objected (Azra, 2006, pp. 21-2), Sukarno had these provisions removed from the body and preamble of the Indonesian constitution (Sukma, 2003, p. 19). Sukarno instituted his own philosophy of *Pancasila*, or the five principles, which stated (1) a belief in a supreme god (this becoming the most important of the principles); (2) humanism; (3) nationalism; (4) deliberation among representatives and (5) social welfare (Formichi, 2012, pp. 79-80). Sukarno, on the one hand, placed the belief in a supreme god at the forefront as a way to appease conservative Islamist groups that demanded Indonesia become an Islamic state (Liow and Leifer, 2014, pp. 210-11). And on the other hand he placated them by specifying that the constitution was "temporary, quick and only applicable to the revolution" (Formichi, 2012, p. 82). *Pancasila* was also a useful device for implanting religious pluralism and tolerance in the culturally diverse archipelago of Indonesia (Liow and Leifer, 2014, pp. 210-11). By opting for *Pancasila*, Sukarno ensured that Indonesia would not be an Islamic state, but a diverse, multi-religious state based on monotheistic traditions.

Suharto came to power in Indonesia after the 1965 alleged Communist coup and the mass killings of suspected communists and political dissidents that accompanied it, on which occasion some religious and ethnic minorities (e.g., liberal "nominal" Muslims and ethnic Chinese) were also targeted (Lamoureux, 2003, pp. 64-5). Suharto was a dictator that is famous today for human rights abuses, crony-capitalism (a system where economic success depends on close

relationships between businesses and government) and corruption. Suharto aimed to turn Indonesia into a vibrant, united and economically advanced nation, turning away from Soviet influence and towards the United States of America. He maintained a tight grip on the state by formalizing *Pancasila* through the implementation of new policies, and used it to repress forms of dissent. This was the case with the implementation of the *asas tunggal* policy, which forced all political parties to adopt *Pancasila* as their ideological basis, mostly affecting Islamic groups; those that rebelled against *Pancasila* were threatened with the charge of treason (Liow and Leifer, 2014, p. 211). Criminalizing divergent ideological or religious groups kept potential adversaries from mobilizing nationally against Suharto. In 1973, Suharto banned all political parties based on religion to promote stability and squash potential challengers in the form of Islamist parties (Marty, 1994, p. 723). The four Islamist parties that held seats in parliament were amalgamated into one party, the *Partai Persatuan Pembangunan* (the PPP or United Development Party) (Marty, 1994, p. 723). At the same time, the Suharto government advocated for individual religious piety as a bulwark against the spread of communism (Formichi, 2015, p. 116). In addition, Suharto's regime, through Ali Moertopo, quietly supported the Islamist group Darul Islam (which eventually splintered off and became the jihadi group *Jemaah Islamiyah*), to combat communism (Temby, 2010, p. 6).

The effect of Islam-weakening policies resulted in the bolstering of the power of secular - and especially military - elites by minimizing the reach of religious parties. These policies kept the elites focused on economic development and Western-derived notions of modernization. In response to the Western-inspired secular elites, Islamic organizations (such as the modernist *Muhammadiyah* and traditionalist *Nahdlatul Ulama*) began to focus their energies and resources into cultural, social and intellectual activism in civil society that led to the development of

political theologies and intellectual debates to promote pluralistic and democratic values rooted in Islamic principles (Hamayotsu, 2015, p. 5). In this way, Suharto pushed Indonesian society toward pluralism by empowering secular elites and forcing Islamic organizations to align their outlook more closely with the secular establishment.

In the latter years of his rule Suharto cultivated Islamic organizations as the populace increasingly identified with more observant Islam (McRae, 2013, pp. 28-29). This new outlook was exemplified by the reforming of *shari'a* courts and the government-backed formation of the ICMI (*Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia* or Indonesian Association of Muslim Intellectuals) in 1991 under the leadership of Indonesian technology minister B.J. Habibie (McRae, 2013, p. 29). This was an attempt by Suharto to co-opt Islamic organizations and elites in order to ensure the political survival of his crony capitalist regime (Liddle, 1996, p. 625). It was also a response to societal transformations that included a shift toward Islamic conservatism (Liddle, 1996, p. 618). State patronage and resources for Muslim communities were redistributed, but the secular nature of the state apparatus (and Islam's subordinate position within that apparatus) remained the same (Hamayotsu, 2015, pp. 5-6). A pluralist tradition connected to a secular-oriented governing system were cemented for the foreseeable future.

The fall of Suharto and the implementation of free elections in Indonesia presented an opening for Islamist parties to achieve power through the democratic process. A central goal of Islamists in the post-Suharto period, known as the *reformasi* period, was to amend the constitution and upgrade the official status of Islam (Platzdasch, 2009, p. 217). These hopes were crushed in constitutional debates due to the fact that a large percentage of Muslims, including the newly established political parties that had ties to *Nahdlatul Ulama* and *Muhammadiyah*, reiterated their commitment to the *Pancasila* as the bedrock of the Indonesian state (Hamayotsu,

2015, p. 6). After Suharto's three-decade autocratic rule, these groups had come to accept and appreciate the concepts of national unity and religious pluralism embedded in the *Pancasila* (Hamayotsu, 2015, p. 6). *Pancasila* became fixed in the national consciousness of Indonesia - promoting a pluralistic outlook that has persisted through time. Samsul Maarif, a scholar at the Center for Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies of Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta, on the Indonesian island of Java, explains, "Even though we are mostly Muslim, the way we practice Islam has very local characteristics. We in Indonesia like to live together in diversity; we are different, and this has created a challenge here for Islamist movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood" (Trofimov, 2016, para. 14). This sentiment has also been embraced by Indonesia's current President, Joko Widodo, through the discourse of *Islam Nusantara* (Affan, 2015, para. 9). It is important to note that the *Islam Nusantara* doctrine is the product of hundreds of years of Indonesian religious acculturation and acceptance of diversity. Promotion of *Islam Nusantara* abroad plays well with Western diplomats and observers who use it to suit their political agendas, though the domestic implementation of *Islam Nusantara* in recent years is increasingly inconsistent with that history of pluralism and acceptance (Hoesterey, 2017, para. 8) as democratic successes and the rejection of Islamist parties in Indonesia through elections have not lessened persecution against minority groups.

Religious minorities such as the *Ahmadiyya* (an Islamic religious movement that is regarded as heretical by many orthodox Muslims), *Shi'a* Muslims and Christians have recently been the victims of violence and abuses. Findings published in February 2016 by the Wahid Institute, an Indonesian advocacy group, reported 190 violations against freedom of religion and faith in 2015, a 23% increase from 2014 (Hiebert, para. 2). In January 2016, the top elected official on Bangka Island off of Sumatra, said he would expel the *Ahmadiyya* community; and

district officials in Subang, West Java, issued a notice banning *Ahmadiyya* activities (Hiebert, 2016, para. 3). ISIS-inspired church bombings or attempted bombings have occurred with alarming frequency (e.g., Borneo in November 2016, Medan in August 2016) (*Reuters*, Nov. 13, 2016, para 1; Arshad, 2016, para. 1). The 2016 blasphemy trial of Jakarta's first Christian governor, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (known as Ahok), was a victory for hardline Islamist groups that seek to hijack Indonesia's pluralistic outlook and push the country closer to Islamism. Ahok, who is also of Chinese descent, was accused of insulting Islam in a campaign speech, though moderate Muslim leaders and scholars, in addition to outside observers, have viewed the trial as an episode of religiously motivated persecution (Kwok, 2016a, para. 4). Hardline Islamist groups, like the Islamic Defenders Front (Ind. *Front Pembela Islam* or FPI), have helped propagate religious intolerance in recent years and have weakened Indonesia's democratic progress.

It is not only hardline religious groups, but also state institutions and elites that advocate discriminatory actions and measures to instill intolerant attitudes among religious communities (Hamayotsu, 2015, p. 7). Phelim Kline, the deputy director of the Asia division for *Human Rights Watch* notes,

Indonesia's mainstream Muslim mass organizations, *Nahdlatul Ulama* and *Muhammadiyah*, have failed to adequately respond to these incidents. Neither organization has publicly opposed the 2005 *fatwa* by Indonesia's semiofficial Ulama Council (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia*, or MUI), which ruled that the *Ahmadiyya* community deviated from Quranic teachings (2014, para. 10).

These episodes of intolerance are incongruent with the Indonesian national outlook of inclusivity and pluralism that the *Pancasila* doctrine was meant to promote.

Sidney Jones, the director of the Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict in Jakarta, credits Saudi Arabia with contributing to a more conservative environment in Indonesia (Shane, 2016, para. 61-2). The Saudis have sent funds for mosque construction, books and teachers for decades, according to Jones, and the effect of this influence has created a more intolerant atmosphere (Shane, 2016, para. 61-2). President Barack Obama, who attended primary school in Indonesia, also commented on the shift from a more tolerant and relaxed interpretation of Islam to a more rigid and fundamentalist interpretation (Goldberg, 2016, para. 53). Jones believes that money from private Saudi foundations supports campaigns against religious minorities, like the *Ahmadiyya*, that are considered to be heretical according to Wahhabism (Shane, 2016, para. 61-2). Jones notes that some well-known Indonesian religious vigilantes were educated in Saudi Arabia (Shane, 2016, para. 61-2). It makes sense that many Indonesian jihadis fighting for ISIS were influenced by external ideological forces, like Wahhabism, rather than the Islam of the archipelago or *Islam Nusantara*. For example, Riza Fardi, an Indonesian jihadi that died near Damascus in November 2013, attended al-Mukmin boarding school (Brandon, 2014, para. 3). Another Indonesian jihadi, Wildan Mukhollad bin Lasmin, attended al-Islam school, a hardline Islamic school that promotes *jihad*, as well as an Islamic school in Egypt (Brandon, 2014, para. 4).

Indonesia's political discourse has still retained a pluralistic outlook and a strong conception of national unity stemming from its historical embrace of *Pancasila* and a rejection of state Islam; this is still true despite a shift to a more conservative political atmosphere and worrisome incidents of minority persecution. For example, even though Ahok's trial is worrisome, the fact that he, as a Christian, was elected vice-governor of the capital city in the world's largest Muslim majority country is representative of Indonesia's pluralistic foundation.

The nature of this kind of pluralistic political discourse is at odds with pro-ISIS sentiment that highlights difference and draws sharp lines between the correct iteration of Islam and unbelievers.

## *2.2 Malaysia*

In contrast to the Indonesian desire to build a united, singular “Indonesian” identity, Malaysia’s national experience has been largely shaped by the desire of the Malay Muslim majority to maintain political hegemony. This marked difference is evident in the very nature of communication in the two countries (language), as much as in their respective political structures. In 1928 Indonesians from all over the archipelago declared in the “Youth Pledge” that they would be united through the trading language of Malay (here for the first time called Indonesian) (Kahin, 2015, p. 511). They strategically chose Malay as opposed to Javanese (the language of the dominant political and ethnic group that made up around 50% of the population of the archipelago at the time) so as not to alienate the many other ethnic groups and islands. In the case of Malaya/Malaysia, Malay became the official language in the 1957 Constitution along with English, until English was eliminated in 1967, making Malay the sole official language (Jenkins, 2008, p. 68). Hence, the language of the dominant Malay majority became the official language without taking into consideration the multi-ethnic makeup of Malaysia (which included large Chinese and Indian populations).

Alongside language related issues, the difference between Indonesia and Malaysia emerges quite clearly in the role of Islam and also in their respective political institutions. The role of Islam in the constitution was a key issue for Malaya/Malaysia at the time of independence from Britain, just as it was in Indonesia. Islam was made the official religion of Malaya at

independence, along with a guarantee of religious freedom for others as long as they didn't proselytize to Muslims (McCloud et al., 2013, p. 243). At the same time, ethnic Malays were defined as Muslims in Article 160 of the constitution, a legacy of British colonial laws (Müller, 2014, p. 10). This was done in part because Islam and indigenous Malay rulers and Sultans had already been recognized by the British as part of the colonial structure (Hamayotsu, 2015, pp. 8-9). It was also part of a concession given to UMNO (United Malays National Organization - the dominant Malay party of Malaysia's governing coalition) by its partners in the Alliance coalition (the Malaysian Chinese Association Malaysian Indian Congress) as recognition of the higher status of the majority Malay population (Puyok, 2015, p. 63). That being said, the Alliance coalition did not intend to turn Malaya/Malaysia into an Islamic state, nor to deny minority groups their religious rights; after all, many of the Malay elites were Western-educated and maintained a secular-oriented vision of modern statehood (similar to the Indonesian outlook) (Puyok, 2015, pp. 63-6; Hamayotsu, 2015, p. 8). In fact, the scholar Joseph M. Fernando asserts that Islam was made the official religion of Malaya primarily for ceremonial purposes so that official public occasions could be conducted in an Islamic fashion (2006, p. 250). It is important to also recognize that the prominence of Islam was bolstered by the legacy of British colonialism: the Malay rulers and traditional elite were stripped of real power to influence their states and instead turned to religion and custom to exert control (Roff, 1994, p. 72). Regardless of intent, the elevated status of the religion and ethnicity of the Malay majority was institutionalized through the constitution during the birth of the nation. As other communities received citizenship, economic and cultural freedom and other basic rights, they were also simultaneously reduced to minority status and stripped of any political relevance (Hamayotsu, 2015, p. 8).

The nature of the British handoff of Malaysia to the Malays combined with political opportunism by the major Malay political parties led to a less pluralistic political system with high levels of ethnic animosity. The constitutional and political party arrangements that the British put in place heavily favored the Malays. This created a hierarchal system where the Chinese and Indian minorities lost out on opportunities to contribute governing Malaysia. Malay monarchies and ruling elites were immediately privileged with leading the country through the constitution. The British oversaw the formation of ethnic based parties for political expediency, but, in the long-term, the ethnic-based system led to deeper divides between the groups. The dominant Malay political parties, UMNO and PAS (the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party), took advantage of the fact that Islam was the state religion to realize their agendas and heighten inter-religious/ethnic discord (Puyok, 2015, p. 64). UMNO has governed Malaysia since its inception by conceptualizing itself as the safeguard of Malay interests and by leveraging the special position that the Malay race maintains (Müller, 2014, p. 12). UMNO's position heightens inter-ethnic conflict by focusing on the higher status of Malays in relation to Chinese and Indian minorities. In 1969, riots broke out between Malay and Chinese communities due to economic disparities and frustration surrounding the elevated status granted to Malays (Hamayotsu, 2015, p. 9). As Malay parties tightened their grip on power, the constitutionally designated Malay religion of Islam embedded itself further in the political system and pluralistic attitudes were weakened as inter-ethnic differences were amplified.

By the time Mahathir Mohamad, as Malaysia's fourth prime minister, took office in 1981, the political discourse had already begun to focus on using Islam as a means of legitimization. Mahathir's UMNO party focused on strengthening Islamic institutions as a response to criticism from PAS that UMNO was lacking the necessary religious credentials to

adequately provide for and protect Muslims (Puyok, 2015, p. 64). Mahathir strengthened religious institutions such as the Federal Religious Council, the Office of Islamic Affairs and the Islamic Missionary Foundation (Puyok, 2015, p. 64). He also expanded Islamic banking, bolstered *shari'a* laws and promoted Islamic thought and values while simultaneously emphasizing economic development. Mahathir also recruited Anwar Ibrahim, the leader of the Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement (Ma. *Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia* or ABIM), to join UMNO (Hamayotsu, 2015, p. 9). Mahathir further strengthened the institutionalization of Islam by inserting Clause (1A) into Article 121 of the Federal Constitution, ensuring that “all matters pertaining to Islam should be handled by the *Syariah* Court” (Walters, 2007, p. 77). This effectively created a two-tiered legal system, further separating the Malays from other religious groups. UMNO’s commitment to Islamic institutions during this period was part of the “*dakwah* [loosely translated to mean proselytization] movement...to harness the legitimizing power of Islamic symbols and discourse” (Moustafa, 2013, pp. 777-8).

Part of the Mahathir pro-Islam campaign involved also cracking down on other religious groups. He banned the Indonesian language Bible in 1981 by using the Internal Security Act to argue that the open sale and distribution of the Bible could create public disorder (Puyok, 2015, p. 64). In 1987, Mahathir initiated *Operasi Lalang* in order to squash internal opposition within UMNO (Puyok, 2015, p. 64). *Operasi Lalang* led to the detainment of individuals that were considered a potential threat to national security - including individuals that proselytized to Muslims (Puyok, 2015, p. 64). In the case of *Operasi Lalang*, Islam was used as a political tool to protect ethnic Malays: insulting Islam actually meant insulting Malay special privileges (T. Pepinsky, personal communication, February 14, 2017). In 1991, the government reiterated its position that non-Muslims could not use the word *Allah* (Arabic for god) as well as other Arabic

words that were now reserved by the government for exclusive use by Muslims (Puyok, 2015, pp. 64-5). This decision frustrated many Bahasa Malaysia-speaking Christians, particularly in Sabah and Sarawak (Eastern Malaysia), as they translate the English word “god” to “Allah” (Puyok, 2015, pp. 64-5).

The pro-Islam maneuvers were a successful attempt by Mahathir and UMNO to eliminate Islamist opposition (in the form of PAS) by “out-Malay-ing” them. UMNO wanted to demonstrate Islamic resolve in order to solidify and expand their Malay electoral base. Mahathir, while stoking ethnic discord through Islamization policies, simultaneously endorsed official state programs that promoted multiculturalism, peaceful ethnic dialogue and moderate religiosity (Hamayotsu, 2002, p. 357). These programs were meant to dampen the alienating effects of pro-Malay, pro-Islam policies among minority groups. Moreover, these programs reinforced the ostensibly moderate nature of Islam in Malaysia.

After 2003, when Mahathir resigned, his successors Abdullah Badawi and Najib Razak had to contend with conservative elements and discriminatory attitudes that were a part of Mahathir’s Islamization legacy. Islamization was amplified by Mahathir’s policies, though Islamization in Malaysia predates Mahathir. Malaysian Islamization can be traced to the 19<sup>th</sup> century when Malay religious and cultural identity was first formed with help from British institutionalization (Roff, 1998, pp. 212-13). Also noteworthy is the previously mentioned *dakwah* movement, which was a period of intensified Islamization that emerged in 1969 in the wake of the Kuala Lumpur race riot between Chinese and Malay citizens (Baharuddin, 1997, pp. 211-13). The Islamic institutions and religious officials that Mahathir’s regime cultivated eventually grew to become exceedingly influential. Some took advantage of the powerful state apparatus that UMNO helped establish to promote rigid, potentially Wahhabi inspired,

interpretations of Islam (Hamayotsu, 2015, p. 10). In response to growing Islamic conservatism among religious elites, political elites have had to compensate to increase their Islamic credentials.

Attempting to “out-Malay” the competition is a feature of Malaysian politics that has persisted through time and is a major component of contemporary political discourse. UMNO, which was created to defend the supremacy of the Malay-Muslim majority, has been aggressively pushing the narrative that this supremacy is coming under siege from non-Malay and non-Muslim enemies and that Malay-Muslimness must therefore be defended rigorously (Liow, 2015a, para. 8). UMNO’s main political challengers are also Malay-Muslims that leverage religious credentials as a source of political legitimacy (Liow, 2015a, para. 8). This creates a rising of the stakes and a ratcheting up of exclusionary discourse as a means of asserting political dominance. In this way Islamism has been amplified and pushed toward rigid conservatism. Islam’s so called “defenders” push for an exclusivist interpretation of the religion that works against pluralism and compromise. The end result of discourse of this nature is the marginalization of non-Muslim Malaysians as Islamist parties attempt to “out-Malay” and “out-Islam” each other (Liow, 2015a, para. 9). This is particularly worrisome given the precarious political position of UMNO and the ruling *Barisan Nasional* (“BN”) coalition, which in 2013 had its worst electoral performance since Malaysian independence in 1957 (Hunt, 2013, para. 3). UMNO is using its religious credentials to stay in power, just as Suharto’s regime clung to Islam in its dying days. Concurrently, the Malaysian state has become quite powerful and has used its power to strictly regulate Islam and restrict deviations from the official state sanctioned Islam, which has become increasingly exclusivist (Liow, 2015a, para. 9).

This divisive rhetoric is reinforced by elements of the political system in Malaysia, which Freedom House categorized as “partially free” with a freedom score of 44/100 (2017).

Antagonistic religious discourse in the public sphere takes place within a democratic system that holds unfair elections that are characterized by rampant gerrymandering, silencing of the media and flawed voter lists (Sreenevasan, 2015, para. 2). UMNO, which has run the country for almost 60 years, is plagued by corruption at the very highest level of government (e.g., the 1MDB embezzlement scandal that has implicated the current Prime Minister, Najib Razak) and routinely curbs freedom of expression among its citizens, especially voices of political dissent. For example, *Human Rights Watch* has called for the release of the BN opposition leader and former deputy prime minister, Anwar Ibrahim, who was jailed on politically motivated charges in 2015 (*Human Rights Watch*, Feb. 8, 2016). These factors have contributed to a weakening of the rule of law and the democratic spirit of Malaysia.

In Malaysia, political leaders often use religion not as a tool to bind people together, but to divide citizens and magnify racial and ethnic differences. Malay-Muslim leaders have quietly allowed extreme right-wing ethno-nationalists and religious groups to propagate hateful discriminatory messages against religious minorities such as Christians and Hindus (Liow, 2015a, para. 11). In some cases, these Malay-Muslims leaders have proactively stoked ethnic animosity by referring to fellow (non-Malay) Malaysians as “enemies of Islam” (Liow, 2015a, para. 6). Feeding off of the divisive political discourse, pro-Malay nationalist movements such as *Perkasa* and ISMA (*Ikatan Muslimin Malaysia* or Malaysian Islamic Solidarity) have become antagonistic and xenophobic against the non-Muslim/non-Malay communities through discriminatory assertions about the special rights of Malay-Muslims (Hamayotsu, 2015, p. 9).

### *2.3 Comparative Reflections*

It is my contention that these domestic political conditions have created fertile ground for views that are sympathetic, and even supportive, of ISIS and other Wahhabi-inspired violent extremist groups. The way that Malaysia understands and articulates Islam politically is increasingly in dialogue with the articulation of Islam that Wahhabi-inspired groups like ISIS espouse. This is evidenced by the fact that 39% of Malaysian Muslims believed that violence could be justified against enemies of Islam, for example (2013 *Pew Global Attitudes Survey* found in Liow, 2015a, para. 6, in Indonesia, the number was 18%). These attitudes seem to be connected to political rhetoric that explicitly points the finger at domestic “enemies of Islam” - not “enemies of Islam” as a far-away or abstract concept, but rather enemies living in Malaysia in the form of religious and ethnic minorities. Exclusivist and antagonistic political discourse and the “othering” of minority groups create conditions that are favorable to the spread of extremist ideations and sympathies. Moreover, there isn’t any room for serious examinations of ISIS and Wahhabi-inspired extremist ideology given that exclusivist political discourse in Malaysia has been consistently edging closer and closer to fundamentalism.

Political expressions of Islam have played a significant role in shaping notions of pluralism and peaceful dialogue in both Indonesia and Malaysia. In Indonesia, expressions of political Islam have been historically repressed and then rejected democratically, while in Malaysia, Islam has been used as a state-sanctioned tool to shore up religious credentials that has resulted in an increasingly exclusivist political discourse. Indonesia, under Sukarno and then Suharto, has primarily been concerned with building a single united nation. This is due partially to the geography of the 17,000 island-strong archipelago, and partially to the incredible diversity of the islands (there are over 300 ethnic groups in Indonesia). These concerns were historically

prioritized over individual ethnic and religious identities. Kikue Hamayotsu explains, “The aspiration of pluralistic nation-building seems to have been deeply embedded in state and societal organizations, despite occasional tragic mass killings among communities and ideologies” (2015, p. 12). In contrast, Malaysia has been concerned with asserting the political hegemony of the Malay-Muslim majority. This has been achieved through the privileging of Islam in the legal system (e.g., the special privileges afforded to ethnic Malays such as the 1971 New Economic Policy that gave ethnic Malays preference in university admissions and civil service jobs) (Jomo, 2011, p. 1). The extension of this political hegemony is the way in which Malay-Muslim politicians have been shoring up their Islamic credentials and consequently intensifying differences between Muslims and non-Muslims. Malaysia has been only secondarily concerned with promoting religious pluralism and mutual understanding between ethnic groups.

In sum, the political structures and social environment (to encompass public Islamic discourse) in Malaysia likely fosters citizen sentiment that is more sympathetic toward ISIS and a Wahhabi worldview when compared to the political structures and social environment of Indonesia. This assessment is supported by the previously mentioned Pew statistics, as well as the historical racial hegemony of the Malay Muslim majority and the discriminatory policies that extended from that hegemony. Given these factors, Indonesia’s political environment may be more pluralistic than Malaysia’s. This is true despite the fact that Indonesia’s history is marked by multiple episodes of ethnic or ideological violence (e.g., the 1965-66 mass killings, numerous church attacks and bombings and persecution of religious minorities like the *Ahmadiyya* and other groups). Furthermore, evidence of expanded conservative Islamic tendencies in recent years (e.g., the 2006 anti-pornography bill that has been described as “*shari’a* in-disguise” and the quiet support of other piecemeal *shari’a* by-laws across Indonesia) has not structurally

altered the Indonesian state system that is historically rooted in a pluralistic, unifying discourse (Mujani and Liddle, 2009, p. 584; Liow, 2015b, p. 7). Given Malaysia's foundation of Malay-Muslim ethnocentrism, Islam is often used as a negative political tool - highlighting differences between religious groups and dividing the country into ethnic bubbles. Political Islam in Indonesia has been historically repressed, and eventually rejected by the democratic process. This is a result of a pluralistic outlook rooted in a desire by the country's founding fathers to unify the vast and diverse archipelago in order to build a coherent, modern nation, and today's population desire to retain it as such.

### **3. Externalities of a Strong State**

Political discourse alone can't adequately explain why Malaysia has sent proportionally more fighters to join ISIS than Indonesia. The fact that the Malaysian political discourse appears to nourish intolerance among its Malay-Muslim majority is important only as one component within a complex sociopolitical and economic nexus that leads to violent Islamism. Part of this nexus is the way in which countries develop and how their security systems operate. Countries that are more economically developed tend to have more advanced security systems and are better able to defend potential targets against terror attacks (Berman and Laitin, 2008, p. 1948). Security systems or security apparati should be understood to mean border control and internal security forces that include police and intelligence agencies. But in addition, strong states often have competent security forces and a rule of law that is applied reliably.

In building up the economy and security apparati, strong states also create externalities. Externalities are unintended consequences of activities that are experienced by unrelated third parties (Investopedia, 2015). Externalities can be either positive or negative. An example of a negative externality would be playing loud music at night that prevents your neighbor from

sleeping. The neighbor, not you, pays the price of missing out on a good night's sleep on account of your behavior. An example of a positive externality would be the construction of an airport that benefits local businesses because of increased accessibility to the area. For the purpose of my argument, I analyze the negative externalities of strong states. This section thus presents the argument that Malaysia's more advanced security apparatus, when combined with a divisive political discourse that can be sympathetic to militant Islamism, has created the negative externality of exporting fighters abroad to commit violent acts in less stable countries. Other countries, like Syria and Iraq, suffer by receiving Malaysian jihadis as a result of Malaysia's position as a strong state. In contrast, Indonesia has a weaker security apparatus and a more pluralistic political discourse overall, which in combination encourage militant Islamists in Indonesia to stay local rather than go abroad to commit acts of violence.

Saudi Arabia is a great example of a strong state creating negative externalities for its neighbors and beyond. Saudis are often radicalized internally through the country's education and religious system and then proceed to go abroad to engage in terrorist acts. Wahhabi teachings apply *takfeer* (the act of declaring someone an infidel) to Muslim minority sects and non-Muslims alike. The end result is a worldview shaped by exclusivism that encourages political violence (Taleb, 2015, para. 2). Saudi Arabia began to develop a strong, modern security apparatus in the 1980s after the oil boom of the 1970s that generated immense wealth for the kingdom. This is relevant due to the way Saudis, as in the case of Osama bin Laden, and other militant Islamists from around the world flocked to Afghanistan to perform *jihad* during the Soviet-Afghan war, which lasted from 1979 to 1989. Even though Saudi Arabia was in the early stages of constructing an advanced security apparatus, the state already demonstrated its capability to suppress internal violence and terror acts and capitalize on alliances with Western

powers. For example, Saudi commandos, with support from the French *Groupe d'intervention de la Gendarmerie nationale* (“National Gendarmerie Intervention Group”), commonly abbreviated GIGN, forced the surrender of extremist insurgents that took over the Masjid al-Haram in Mecca in 1979 (Chalk, 2011, p. 259). The Saudis tried and executed the leader of the insurgent group, Juhayman al-Otaybi, and his 400 to 500 followers (Chalk, 2011, p. 259). The competence and decisiveness that the Saudi state demonstrated in its ability to take down violent extremists with the support of foreign troops sent a firm message of discouragement to would-be Saudi jihadis.

It is my contention that one of the reasons Bin Laden and many other Saudis saw Afghanistan as an attractive destination for performing *jihad* was the fact that a political vacuum existed in the country. Saudi militants could engage in *jihad* without fear of reprisal from the Afghan government - a fear that was justified within Saudi Arabia, where the security apparatus was relatively tight and thus discouraged internal violence. Bin Laden and his followers had just seen Saudi commandos takedown and subsequently execute insurgents at the largest mosque in the world, Masjid al-Haram.

Al-Qaeda, which translates to “the data-base” (another potential meaning of the phrase in Arabic is “the rule”), was originally formed by Osama bin Laden and Abdullah Azzam, a Palestinian who heavily influenced bin Laden (Kepel et al., 2008, p. 1-5; Bergen, 2006, pp. 74-5). Al-Qaeda originally started as the *Maktab al-Khidamat*, or Afghan Services Bureau, which was formed by Osama Bin Laden, Abdullah Azzam and Ayman al-Zawahiri in 1984 to raise funds and draw foreign fighters to Afghanistan (Kepel et al., 2008, pp. 93-95). Foreign fighters were drawn to that country because it lacked stability and had a weak or non-existent internal security apparatus during the war with the Soviets. Countries like Saudi Arabia and Egypt maintained strong state status in the Middle East - this spurred the exportation of jihadis. Egypt,

under Mubarak, built a massive multi-layered security apparatus (consisting of police and the army as internal tools) that repressed strikes, mass protests and Islamist militant groups in order to maintain stability and silence dissent (Metz, 1990, p. 278). Given the existence of strong security apparatus in both Egypt and Saudi Arabia, and the complete lack of security and stability in the warzone of Afghanistan during the 1980s, it makes sense that as many as 35,000 foreign jihadis (predominantly Pakistanis, Egyptians, Saudis and others) flocked to Afghanistan to fight the Soviets (Williams, 2011, p. 219).

During the 1992 Bosnian War, Saudi Arabia once again exported jihadis to fight and die, rather than commit violence locally. The Bosnian War was a three-way conflict between Bosnian Muslims, Croats, and Serbs, with much of the violence directed at civilians as all three sides aimed to produce homogenous zones composed of their ethnic kin (Boyle, 2014, p. 99). Saudi Arabia and other Arab nations built and sustained networks for sending foreign jihadis to Bosnia to fight the Croats and the Serbians (Healy, 2016, para. 6-7), as hundreds of Saudi veterans of the Afghan war moved to Bosnia to pursue *jihad* again (Hedges, 1992, para. 2). Many Saudi men who volunteered to provide relief work during the war ended up becoming jihadist soldiers as well (Hedges, 1992, para. 16-17). It is likely that many Saudis chose to fight in Afghanistan and then Bosnia because violent *jihad* was unattractive inside Saudi Arabia given the state's strong security apparatus.

The Saudis report extremely high levels of spending on security - a 2004 report by the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) acknowledged that Saudi security expenditures peaked during the 1990-91 Gulf War. The Saudis maintain one of the most powerful militaries in the region and have relied on Western allies to consult and modernize internal security apparatus since the 1980s (Cordesman and Obaid, 2004, pp. 2-4).

In stark contrast, war zones like Afghanistan and Bosnia lacked any real security apparatus, making the environment ideal for jihadism. Interestingly, Bin Laden and other jihadis were angry at the Saudi state for not providing enough support to Muslims suffering in Bosnia and elsewhere around the world. Furthermore, they began to view the Saudi government as an *infidel* government because they allowed Western forces onto Muslim lands during the first Iraq War and also rejected Bin Laden and al-Qaeda's offer of assistance (Hashim, 2001, pp. 22-3). Even with those incentives, Saudi jihadis overwhelmingly went abroad to pursue *jihad* rather than target the Saudi regime at home. This reveals the contradictory nature of the modern Saudi state: quietly licensing violence through Wahhabi ideology on the one hand, while simultaneously wielding a tight and far-reaching security apparatus that discourages violence on the other.

In the Syrian civil war that has raged on since 2011 and has killed almost 500,000 Syrians, states with strong and stable governments like Saudi Arabia and Jordan continue to heavily supply jihadis for the war (*Al Jazeera*, Dec. 14, 2016). A 2015 report by the Soufan Group acknowledges that Saudis and Jordanians continue to outnumber other nations in exported jihadis with more than 4,500 fighters between the two countries. Jordan, like Saudi Arabia, has extensive military ties with the U.S., the U.K and France, countries that have helped to bolster its internal security, as demonstrated by the fact that Jordan was able to maintain stability and security throughout the Arab Spring movement in 2011 (Ryan, 2015, para. 10, 34). The Jordanians also recently instituted stronger counter-terrorism laws and tighter border-control policies that target jihadis (Ryan, 2015, para. 21-2). Similar to the Saudis, the Jordanians have solidified internal security to such an extent that would-be jihadis have been discouraged from

acting-out inside the country's borders. The externality of the strong Jordanian and Saudi states is the movement of jihadis from Jordan and Saudi Arabia to the war in Syria.

While keeping in mind that Malaysia is a multi-party democratic-oriented system, whereas Saudi Arabia is a monarchy, there are some comparisons that can be made between Malaysian political discourse and Saudi political discourse. The Saudi regime suppresses diversity of thought and promotes exclusivism, while simultaneously policing any iteration of Islam that differs from the official state-sanctioned version. Madawi al-Rasheed explains the situation in Saudi Arabia: "The Saudi regime is responsible for eliminating all spaces where the youth can debate, challenge, and offer diverse and alternative interpretations that differ from the dominant sectarian state religious tradition" (2015, para. 10). Troubling instances of exclusivism also exist in Malaysia. Suppression of debate and the denial of alternative interpretations of Islam are not policies unique to Saudi Arabia, as Malaysia has also silenced journalists and cracked down on variations within Islam, though on a lesser scale. Joseph Chinyong Liow describes contemporary political Islam in Malaysia:

But the politics merely expresses the perpetuation of an exclusivist brand of Islam that is divorced from the religion's historically enlightened traditions, and which has no intention to encourage pluralism or compromise...Related to this is the fact that this politicization of Islam is taking place against a backdrop of a state which has taken upon itself to police Islam and curtail any expression of faith that departs from the mainstream Shafi'i tradition (2016b, para. 20-21).

The descriptions of Saudi Arabia and then Malaysia are comparable in that both promote Islamic exclusivism and divisiveness. In both countries the political rhetoric permits othering of non-normative Islam. In Saudi Arabia, the othering is more explicit than in Malaysia, though there

exists a distinct resemblance between Malay political rhetoric and Saudi Wahhabist rhetoric. These underlying currents of religious conservatism and intolerance are supported by powerful state security apparatus that effectively deter acts of political violence.

Malaysia's internal security apparatus is historically rooted in the implementation of strong laws by the state. Malaysia has swiftly applied the Internal Security Act ("ISA") to arrest and deter potential terrorists (Humphreys, 2009, p. 103). The ISA was put in place during the Emergency period (1948-1960) when British-backed Malayan forces fought Communist insurgents and was never repealed, but rather utilized by Malaysia's authoritarian government whenever stability and/or national security were threatened (Humphreys, 2009, p. 103). The ISA allows for detention of up to two years for individuals that are determined to be national security threats (Humphreys, 2009, p. 103). The ISA and similar laws were also used by the Malaysian regime to silence political opponents (including crackdowns against Islamic groups that are considered deviant). The ISA was replaced in 2012 by the Security Offences (Special Measures) Act, which allows security forces to detain anyone for up to 28 days without judicial review and for 48 hours before being granted access to an attorney (Dhanapal and Sabaruddin, 2015, p. 4). While these kinds of coercive laws have been misused by the ruling *Barisan Nasional* regime to target political opponents, they have also strengthened the authority and reach of security forces in combating and deterring Malaysian jihadis since the 1970s.

Malaysian security forces have launched many operations against violent Islamist groups over the course of the last 50 years. In the 1970s, Malaysian security forces moved against underground Islamist movements like the Krypto group. In 1994, Malaysian security forces targeted the Darul Arqam movement. Security forces were used again to target the underground Al-Maunah movement during an arms heist in June 2000 (Noor, 2012, p. 188)).

Consistent economic development through the late 20th and early 21st centuries, combined with muscular laws like the ISA (and its predecessor, the Security Offences Special Measures Act), ensured the formidable nature of Malaysia's modern security apparatus. Strong economic growth led to the expansion and modernization of security systems. Malaysia's defense expenditure increased from an average of 2.6 billion Malaysian Ringgit (around USD 1 billion) in the 1980s to 6 billion (USD ~2.5 billion) in the 1990s (Singh, 2004, p. 15). Harrison Cheong, senior analyst for global risk analysis at Control Risks, acknowledged, "counter-terrorism laws and capabilities remain fairly robust" (Shaffer, 2016, para. 23). The Malaysian police force is highly trained and combats armed insurrections as well as standard criminal activity (*Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, 2016, p. 11). Malaysia has increased border surveillance and security and has also launched periodic operations to combat illegal immigration (Meng, 2015, p. 398). Overall, Malaysia maintains a strong and modernized security apparatus that is effective in policing and stabilizing the country's internal environment.

In March 2016, Malaysian officials successfully arrested 15 ISIS supporters across six states, including one individual who worked as an aircraft technician (*The Star Online*, May 20, 2016, para. 1), and by May 2016 that number had gone up to 160, including an auxiliary police officer that screened explosives at Kuala Lumpur International Airport (*The Star Online*, May 20, 2016, para. 18-20). The police officer allegedly helped facilitate his brother in law's flight out of the country to join ISIS. These extremists had key access to security vulnerabilities due to their respective positions. It is telling that the auxiliary police officer, who could have easily capitalized on his position to cause terror at KL International Airport or on an airplane, instead only helped a family member to pursue his terrorist intents abroad, likely in a country without a strong security apparatus and rule of law. This incident demonstrates the effectiveness of the

security apparatus in Malaysia and the idea that going abroad as a Malaysian jihadi is perhaps a more attractive route than staying local and having to contend with Malaysian security forces. There were *means* and  *motive* for that jihadi police officer, but Malaysian security forces ensured that there was no  *opportunity* to carry out an attack.

Unlike Malaysia and Saudi Arabia, Indonesia is less likely to create externalities because its political discourse is more pluralistic and because its security apparatus is relatively weak, thus allowing for internal violence. Indonesia was founded as a religious country, but not as an Islamic state. As discussed, equality under the law and pluralism were baked into the constitution and the country's guiding philosophy of *Pancasila* as a result of the country's desire to unify the many people and islands of the archipelago. The vast majority of Indonesians are not aligned with militant Islamism and this is visible in the rejection of hardline Islamist groups in national elections. While recent episodes of intolerance, including the trial of Jakarta's first Christian governor, are worrisome, the political discourse is still fundamentally rooted in pluralism. Indonesian jihadis fighting for ISIS are typically affiliated with militant groups that adhere to a Wahhabi worldview (e.g., East Indonesia Mujahedeen or *Tawhid wal Jihad*), not the pluralistic domestic tradition of Indonesia (Nuraniyah, 2015, para. 5, 12).

Even without its pluralistic foundation, Indonesia is less likely to export jihadists in large numbers because of the nature of its security apparatus and the country's geography. Indonesia's internal security forces have to police 17,000 islands that extend 3,181 miles east to west and 1,094 miles from north to south (Kuoni, 1999, p. 88). On top of this task, internal security forces in Indonesia are often corrupt and inefficient. In recognizing the extent of these security issues in the current geopolitical climate, President Joko Widodo's administration increased spending for the national police force by 42% in 2016 to 63.5 trillion Rupiah (USD 5 billion) due to internal

security risks, border issues and terrorism (Negara, 2016, p. 9). Making security matters more difficult is the fact that Indonesia is a developing country with a GDP per capita of only \$3,346, according to the World Bank (2015).

Historically, security forces under Suharto were brutal in their application of force and were famous for human rights abuses (e.g., the military campaign against the Free Aceh Movement in the early 90s and the crackdown on East Timor) (Malley, 2015, pp. 93-7). They essentially operated in any manner they saw fit using threats, extortion and kidnappings to achieve their ends (Haller, 2006, p. 6). The violence and lack of accountability of the Suharto years informed the security system of the post-New Order era, where disorganization and a lack of oversight of security forces continues. The division of labor between the police and army is also unclear because it was never defined explicitly in law (Jones, 2015, pp. 6-7). This leads to a lack of coordination between the two groups in dealing with potential threats. It is complicated further by the overlap of duties between intelligence organizations, like the National Intelligence Agency, and the police and the army (Jones, 2015, pp. 6-7).

These problems are compounded by the fact that the security foundation is anchored by ambiguously written and sometimes contradictory laws that prevent internal security forces from operating effectively and professionally (Jones, 2015, pp. 6-7). Indonesia has been slow to ratify laws that counter terrorist financing and even slower to implement those laws (Padden, 2016, para. 6). In 2015, Rikwanto, the head of the public information division of the Indonesian National Police, complained that a lack of regulation prevented his unit from arresting ISIS supporters (*Kompas*, May 4, 2016, para. 5). The result of these issues is a security apparatus that either applies laws to target terrorists subjectively or is too hamstrung by bureaucracy and corruption to effectively apprehend those targets.

There are many issues with Indonesian border security given that the archipelago is vast and the security services are still in the process of modernizing. For example, three separate groups of Uighur militant Islamists penetrated Indonesian borders in January 2016 and were later discovered with bomb-making materials by Indonesian police (*South China Morning Post*, Jan. 21, 2016, para. 1,5-8). Furthermore, kidnappings of Indonesians by the Abu Sayyaf Group are common in and around the Celebes and Sulu Sea (Dacanay, 2016, para. 4). In October 2016, a 16-year old West Sumatran man was caught in Central Sulawesi after traveling around 2,300km from his home in an attempt to join the East Indonesia Mujahedeen (*The Star Online*, Oct. 24, 2016, para. 6). This is a result of the geography of thousands of islands and a police and military force that is still in the process of modernizing.

The lack of coordination and ineffectualness of the Indonesian internal security apparatus, combined with a lax approach to anti-forgery enforcement, create an opening for Indonesian jihadists. It is relatively easy for an Indonesian to falsify government documents without raising an eyebrow. In July 2016, an ISIS-affiliated militant blew himself up at a police station in Solo, Central Java (*The Star Online*, Oct. 20, 2016, para. 7). In October 2016, an ISIS supporter stabbed two police officers in Jakarta (*The Star Online*, Oct. 20, 2016, para. 7). In November 2016, a group of Indonesian jihadis used falsified government identification to travel between Syria and Indonesia (Fachrudin, 2016, para. 3). The militants were arrested when they tried to steal a weapon from a police officer during a demonstration, suggesting that the Indonesian jihadis were resource-poor and comfortable acting directly against security forces (Fachrudin, 2016, para. 6). These episodes reinforce the notion that Indonesian jihadis can more easily operate domestically than their Malaysian counterparts. There were no ISIS-inspired or -affiliated attacks directed against security forces in Malaysia in 2016. The weakness of the

security apparatus and the wide-open geography of the Indonesian archipelago invite jihadis to plan and implement attacks on home soil. The result is an avoidance of the negative externality problem that is exemplified by stronger states like Malaysia and Saudi Arabia.

Despite its many weaknesses, the Indonesian security apparatus has had important successes, namely the effective use of Special Detachment 88 or *Detasamen Khusus 88* (*Densus 88*), Indonesia's elite counter-terrorism squad that is supported by the U.S. and Australia (Carnegie et al., 2016, p. 61). *Densus 88* has been effective in aggressively pursuing terrorists. They have killed or captured many leading *Jemaah Islamiyah* operatives (the jihadi group responsible for the 2002 Bali bombings) (Carnegie et al., 2016, p. 61).

Malaysia's strong security apparatus and the atmosphere of religious conservatism and intolerance that UMNO has promoted, has created negative externalities by producing jihadi sympathizers that are discouraged from committing violence in Malaysia and thus travel abroad. Negative externalities are experienced by unstable countries like Syria and Iraq. Malaysia, Saudi Arabia and other countries with strong security apparatus, do not experience the consequences of their production of jihadis and jihadi sympathizers. Conversely, would-be Indonesian jihadis face a weaker security apparatus and more "local" options for committing violence. In the early 2000s, Indonesian jihadis joined the conflict in the Moluccas; today they can join the Sulawesi-based East Indonesia Mujahedeen, or participate in anti-*Shi'a* and anti-*Ahmadiyya* attacks across the country. Indonesians have the opportunity to release tensions locally: it is far easier and cheaper for a jihadi in Poso, Sulawesi to attack a church in that city than it is for him to fly to Syria to join ISIS. The jihadi's pay off is immediate in such a scenario. Facing a tighter security apparatus, Malaysians don't have those kinds of opportunities. Negative externalities, in the form of exported jihadis, are thus less prevalent in Indonesia. This explains why Indonesia has had

more internal terrorist attacks and has exported proportionally fewer terrorists abroad when compared to Malaysia. Looking at 2016, there have been jihadi-inspired attacks or attempted attacks against religious minorities and others in Indonesia during most months of the year (with the exception of March, April, June, July and September) (Bearak, 2016; Cochrane, 2016; *Channel News Asia*, Feb. 15, 2016; Kwok, 2016b; *The Jakarta Post*, May 24, 2016; Rachman, 2016; Topsfield, 2016). Malaysia has had only one jihadi related attack within the country (a grenade attack outside of Kuala Lumpur in June) in 2016, among other arrests of jihadi sympathizers that have foiled potential attacks in August and December (*The Malay Mail Online*, Dec. 20, 2016; Iyengar, 2016; Lourdes, 2016).

#### **4. Arabization**

The concept of Arabization is the third factor I analyze to explain why proportionally more Malaysians than Indonesians have traveled to the Middle East to join jihadi groups. For the purpose of this thesis, “Arabization” is the influence of Arabic language and cultural values (which includes Wahhabi Islam, given its wide-spread influence in much of the Arab-speaking world) to regions outside of the Middle East. As noted previously, globalization has increased the influence of Middle Eastern Islam in Southeast Asia; it has both drawn Southeast Asians to the Middle East and brought Middle Eastern culture to Southeast Asia.

I thus analyze Arabization through two vehicles: language and culture. To address the question of Arabization in Malaysia and Indonesia, I first discuss how Arabic language and culture can influence one’s worldview in general. I then look at specific examples of Arabization in these two countries through observations about the prevalence of Arabic in Malay and Indonesian languages, and by analyzing the frequency of *haji* pilgrimage. Arabization matters because, as noted previously, there is a link between Middle Eastern ideologies like Saudi

Wahhabism on the one hand, and terrorism on the other. Saudi Wahhabism draws a very sharp line between “true Muslims” and everyone else via an expansive understanding of *takfeer* – Wahhabism thus provides ideological fodder for jihadis (Shane, 2016, para. 7). These ideologies and their spawn are centered in Saudi Arabia and the Middle East more broadly. For example, commentators on terrorism in Southeast Asia have noted the connection between studying in the Middle East and defecting to join groups like ISIS. Abdul Ghaffar Rozin, the head of all NU Islamic boarding schools in Central Java, noted in *Kompas* that “not a small number” of Indonesian citizens joined ISIS after enrolling in religious schools in the Middle East and, to a lesser extent, Europe (*Kompas*, May 4, 2016, para. 4). Abdul’s comments reflect the notion that proximity to the source matters; Arabization can serve as a vehicle for Saudi Wahhabism.

Arabic is inextricably tied to Islam. As Benedict Anderson noted, “In the Islamic tradition, up until quite recently, the Quran was literally untranslatable (and therefore untranslated), because Allah’s truth was accessible only through the unsubstitutable true signs of written Arabic” (2006, p. 14). Anderson concludes that Arabic is a “truth-language” due to its highly sacred charge which works to increase its coercive power over the user (2006, p. 14). To fully understand truth within Islam, one must know Arabic. All languages shape how individuals see and interact with the world, but as James Coffman explains, Arabic is filtered through the historical experience of Islam<sup>3</sup>:

“Why is it so hard for a teenager to tell his girlfriend ‘I love you’ in Arabic?” asks Mohamed Talbi, a linguist. In French, it's so easy.” To which his colleague Amina Zaoui replies, “The Arabic language has a memory that atrophies it: it has gone through the funnel of Islamic thought . . . Arabic is a prisoner of Islam . . . sacred, it remains the language of modesty.” The particular structure of the Arabic language and its allusions

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<sup>3</sup> Arabic is also the language of many Christians.

mean that a child who studies and thinks in Arabic will develop distinct historical and cultural references, cognitive approaches, attitudes, and styles of reasoning. (1995, p. 55)

The language chosen by Allah is Arabic and Arabic provides an Islamic lens through which one sees the world. Arabic loanwords exist in both Malaysia and Indonesia, and indeed they tend to refer to Islamic concepts, although not exclusively (in Indonesian, for example, *koran* has taken the broader meaning of “newspaper,” and *sura* that of “letter”). The effect of these loanwords on their users may be a stronger identification with Arab civilization and an appreciation for the sacred historical meaning of the text. The impact of Islam’s influence may be evident within the languages of Indonesia and Malaysia.

Due to the fact that the first Muslims were Arabs, Arab culture, families, names and identities are deeply connected to Islam. Furthermore, the sacred places within Islam are linked to Arabia: the birthplace of the prophet Muhammad, the location of the *Ka’ba* (the most important shrine in Islam which constitutes the direction to which Muslims must orient themselves in prayer (Ar. *qibla*) and the destination of the *hajj* (Faruqi, 2004, p. 1259). It makes sense that all things Arab are revered by Muslims in Southeast Asia, given the centrality of Arab culture and its relationship with Islam. Dr. Tarek Ladjal, a lecturer in history and Islamic civilization at the University of Malaya, noted, “Arabs [in general] were perceived in a sacred way, especially [since] many of them were from honorable and educated families” (Aljamal, 2015, para. 3). This veneration continues today, as evidenced by the high number of Arabic language enrollments at Malaysian universities (Aljamal, 2015, para. 3). Direct linkages between Southeast Asia and Arabia are longstanding given the history of trade with the Arab world. This is the primary hypothesis for how Islam arrived in Southeast Asia as the religion is inextricably tied to the trading system of the Indian Ocean (Johns, 1995, p. 173). In fact, Aceh, which is

oriented toward the Middle East at the tip of the island of Sumatra, was given the nickname Mecca's veranda (Ma. *Serambi Mekkah*) by Arab traders (Reid, 2005, p. 14).

Looking at Indonesian and Malay comparatively is one way to assess the influence of Arabic within the two languages. Indonesian (*Bahasa Indonesia*) is the national language of Indonesia and is a derivative of Malay, which was originally used as a trading language throughout maritime Southeast Asia. In modern times, Malaysians speak Malay or *Bahasa Melayu* - a politically distinct language from Indonesian. *Bahasa Indonesia* and *Bahasa Melayu* are linguistically similar given their mutual intelligibility and are thus often grouped together as Malay-Indonesian. The relationship between Malay and Indonesian is arguably more differentiated than the relationship between British English and American English. A Malaysian and an Indonesian can communicate, but not as seamlessly as a British person and an American. Given these similarities, slight differences in the influence of Arabic should be quite meaningful in demonstrating the strength of Arabization in each respective country.

The argument that Malaysia is more Arabized than Indonesia is supported by the prevalence of Arabic in modern Malay. Within everyday language there are many examples of Malay opting for an Arabic loanword over an indigenous word or a loanword from elsewhere. For example, in Malaysia the word for Sunday is *Ahad*. This is a loanword from classical Arabic (*yawm al-'ahad*) (van Dam, 2010, p. 223). While in Indonesia, Sunday is *Minggu*. This is derived from the Portuguese word *Domingo*. Another example would be the word for Monday. In Malay, Monday is *Isnin*. The Arabic word for Monday is *yawm al-'ithnayn* (van Dam, 2010, p. 223). The connection to Arabic is quite clear in the spelling of the two words. The Indonesian word for Monday is *Senin* - which is actually an alternate transformation of the Malay variant. The Indonesian connection to Arabic in this instance is more tenuous than the Malay connection

as Malay opted for a closer spelling to Arabic. Another example would be the word for date (as in the day of the month or year). In Malay, the word for date is *tarikh*, a direct loanword from the Arabic word *ta'rikh* which means chronology, date or history (Wehr, 1961, p. 12). The Indonesian word for date is the indigenous word *tanggal*. The Malay word *khidmat* - which is used frequently in Malaysian government campaigns - means to serve or service (the way the police serve the people). This is a direct borrow from the Arabic word *khidma* which also means service (Ware, 2014, p. 259). *Khidmat* exists in Indonesian and is used, but to a lesser extent. The primary Indonesian term for service that is used in a comparable nature to the Malay term *khidmat* is *melayani* - a Sanskrit derived word (Jones, 2008, p. 305).

The varying influence of Arabic in each language is visible as soon as one enters Indonesia or Malaysia from the airports. The speed limit signs that dot Malaysian highways say *had laju* or literally “limit speed” (translated to mean speed limit in English). Malay uses the word *had* (limit, as in speed limit). This is a direct borrowing from the Arabic word *hadd* (limit, as far as) (Wehr, 1961, p. 159). In Indonesian, speed limit is *batas kecepatan*. Indonesians use the word *batas* for limit (an Austronesian word most likely borrowed from Filipino *tagalog*) (Potet, 2015, p. 61). The term for limited liability corporation in Malay is *sendirian berhad*, typically abbreviated as *Sdn. Bhd.* (as in Berkshire Hathaway Sdn. Bhd.). *Sendirian* means private in this instance and *berhad* means limited. The term *berhad* is another Arabic derivation from *hadd* (limit) (Wehr, 1961, p. 159). Indonesian companies are organized under the term *PT*. or *Perseroan Terbatas* (as in PT. Pfizer Indonesia). This term means Limited Liability Company. As noted previously, *terbatas* is a conjugation of *batas* (an Austronesian word). *Perseroan* is also an indigenous term (Stevens and Schmidgall, 2010, p. 743). Further evidence of a predilection for Arabic within Malay is the word *jenayah* (crime). This is another direct borrow

from the Arabic word *jināya* (Wehr, 1961, p. 141). Indonesians use the non-Arabic derived word *jahat* for crime. These examples are far from exhaustive, but they are rather meant to be a sample collection of widely used colloquial words.

The use of the patronyms *bin* and *binti* in Malay and their absence in Indonesian also points to a more Arabized Malaysia when compared to Indonesia. *Bin* means “son of” (e.g., Ramlan *bin* Ibrahim) and *binti* means “daughter of”. These words are derived from the Arabic word *ibn* (son of). Malaysian names contain *bin* and *binti* on a large scale, while Indonesian names do not. Malaysians use patronymics to signify their Malayness and also their connection to Islam through an Arabic link (children’s names are typically Arabic) (Adams and Gillogly, 2011, p. 286). In contrast, it is somewhat uncommon for Indonesian Muslims to have Arabic names; signifying a Muslim identity in Indonesia is less of a political statement. If we look at the current Malaysian cabinet under Prime Minister Najib Razak there are 34 Ministers. The Indonesian cabinet under President Joko Widodo also has 34 Ministers. None of the Indonesian Ministers have *bin* or *binti* names, while 22 of the 34 Malaysian Ministers have either *bin* or *binti* in their names (*Detik News*, Oct. 26, 2014; Office of the Prime Minister, Putrajaya, Malaysia, Aug. 17, 2016). However, it ought to be noted that *bin* and *binti* don’t necessarily signify Islam in Malaysia (Puyok, 2015, p. 66). For instance, Christian Malays living in Sahaba (Eastern Malaysia) sometimes use the *bin* or *binti* patronyms (Puyok, 2015, p. 66).

Arabization through cultural connections to the Middle East can also be assessed via the frequency of *hajj* journeys over time. The *hajj* pilgrimage is one of the five pillars of Islam that requires all Muslims to journey to Mecca at least once in their lifetime (if able). The *hajj* is more than just a symbolic connection to Arab culture; it is a physical connection to that region that imbues the pilgrim with a lasting imprint of the Arabian Gulf Islam. Southeast Asian pilgrims on

the *hajj* are influenced by the sights and sounds of Arabia, and bring back those Islamic influences to Southeast Asia, some of which encompass Wahhabism. This is true since at least the 1800s when Indonesian Muslim clerics, inspired by Wahhabi teachings while on *hajj*, initiated the often-violent Padri movement in Sumatra, in an attempt to bring local religious practices into accord with traditional Islamic law (Ricklefs, 2008, pp. 172-4).

Arabization and Wahhabism are linked via institutions and organizations in Southeast Asia. For example, the FPI in Indonesia is modeled on the Saudi religious police and perform a similar role as moral guardians (Campbell, 2017, para. 17). The leader of the FPI, Rizieq Shihab, attended LIPIA (the Saudi Islamic and Arabic College of Indonesia) in Jakarta before receiving a Saudi state scholarship to continue his studies in Riyadh (Campbell, 2017, para. 20).

Additionally, nine of the Bali bombers, five of the 2003 Marriot bombers and one bomber in the 2009 Ritz Carlton attack in Jakarta, all graduated from al-Mukmin Islamic boarding school in Solo, where Arabic and Wahhabi tenets dominate the curriculum (Campbell, 2017, para. 24). Hambali, the mastermind of the Bali and the Marriot bombings in 2003 taught at al-Mukmin and allegedly fought in the Middle East with Osama bin Laden in the late '80s (Chew, 2016, para. 12). These connections demonstrate the way in which Arabization, including *hajj* journeys, likely encapsulates Saudi ideology.

Looking at the roughly 125-year period between 1885 and 2010, Malaysians have consistently made the pilgrimage to Mecca in proportionally larger numbers than Indonesians. Table 1 demonstrates the populations of Malaysia and Indonesia over time, the number of pilgrims to Mecca from each country and the number of pilgrims per 1,000 people between 1885 and 2010. This statistic is the most useful as it neutralizes the major population difference, as the population in Indonesia in 1885 (the Dutch East Indies at the time) was estimated at 34 million,

versus Malaysia (British Malaya in 1885) that was estimated at 3 million. It is important to note that British Malaya incorporated Singapore (thus increasing its stated population) and the data is based on entire populations, not just Muslim populations; nevertheless, it is still useful in analyzing the *hajj* broadly as a metric of Arabization over time. In Malaysia in 1885 there were 1.22 pilgrims estimated per 1,000 people. On the same year, in Indonesia that number was estimated at 0.14 per 1,000. That is proportionally almost eight times more Malaysians than Indonesians embarking on the pilgrimage to Mecca.

The increased *hajj* frequency for Malaysians continues throughout time. In 1928 there were 0.59 Indonesian pilgrims per 1,000 people, while in Malaysia there were 2.63 pilgrims per 1,000 people. This is a 4:1 ratio of Malaysian pilgrims to Indonesian pilgrims. In 1960 more than 3 Malaysians made the pilgrimage for every 1 Indonesian per 1,000 people. In 1980 the ratio of Malaysians to Indonesians was more than 2:1. In the post-New Order era, Malaysians continued to make the pilgrimage at proportionally higher rates. Since 2000, roughly 0.85 per 1,000 Indonesians have made the pilgrimage, while that number for Malaysia is about 1.07 per 1,000. Interactions with Arabia through the *hajj* matter because *hajjis* and students studying in the Middle East can bring back fundamentalist strains of Islamic thought, like Wahhabism, to Southeast Asia (Larsen, 2005, pp. 5-6).

**Table 1: Indonesian and Malay Populations and Pilgrims to Mecca: 1885 - 2010**

Year	Indonesian Population (millions)	Malaysian Population (millions)	Indonesian Pilgrims to Mecca	Malaysian Pilgrims to Mecca	Indonesian Pilgrims to Mecca per 1,000 people	Malay Pilgrims to Mecca per 1,000 people
1885	34	3	4,760	3,685	0.14	1.22
1900	42.7	3.25	5,068	6,861	0.12	1.6

<b>1914</b>	49.2	3.49	28,427	8,344	0.57	2.39
<b>1928</b>	58.9	3.75	35,000	9,875	0.59	2.63
<b>1960</b>	92.7	8.1	15,039	5,115	0.16	0.63
<b>1972</b>	125.6	11	22,753	10,650	0.18	0.97
<b>1980</b>	150.9	13.7	74,741	14,846	0.5	1.08
<b>1981</b>	151.3	14.1	69,002	22,704	0.46	1.61
<b>1982</b>	154.7	14.5	57,478	25,277	0.37	1.74
<b>1983</b>	158.1	14.9	54,904	25,013	0.35	1.68
<b>1984</b>	161.6	15.3	40,928	24,749	0.25	1.62
<b>1990</b>	179.4	17.8	50,000	30,000	0.28	1.69
<b>1995</b>	193.3	20.2	195,000	25,000	1.00	1.24
<b>2000</b>	206.3	21.8	174,000	25,000	0.84	1.15
<b>2005</b>	218.9	23.7	187,000	25,000	0.85	1.05
<b>2010</b>	231.3	25.4	196,000	26,000	0.85	1.02

Sources: Population statistics adapted from Dutch researcher Jan Lahmayer's Populstat website entries on "Indonesia" and "Malaysia" (<http://www.populstat.info>); *The World Bank*; Marshall Cavendish, *World and Its People: Eastern and Southern Asia* (New York: 2007), pp. 1184-5; Universitas Indonesia's *The Population of Indonesia* (Paris: 1974), pp. 5-7. Pilgrim statistics adapted from the Indonesian Ministry of Religion Direktorat Jenderal Penyelenggaraan Haji dan Umrah (2014); Eric Tagliacozzo's *The Longest Journey: Southeast Asians and the Pilgrimage to Mecca* (2013), p. 295; Hellwig and Tagliacozzo's *The Indonesia reader: history, culture, politics* (2009), p. 191; Long's *The Hajj today: a survey of the contemporary Makkah pilgrimage* (1979), p. 130; McDonnell's PhD dissertation entitled "The conduct of Hajj from Malaysia and its socio-economic impact on Malay society: A descriptive and analytical study, 1860-1981" (1986), p. 626; Robert Bianchi's *Guests of God: Pilgrimage and Politics in the Islamic World* (2004), p. 116.

*Note:* In the late 1980s, Saudi Arabia instituted a quota system, prescribing the number of pilgrims each country was allowed to send on the *hajj* (Tagliacozzo and Toorawa, 2016, p. 139). The system guidelines suggest allocating 1,000 pilgrims per 1 million Muslims in each country and this provision is generally reflected in the numbers from 1990 onward, with the noted exception of Malaysia's quota being sized on its entire population (Bianchi, 2004, p. 116). The numbers of pilgrims for 1990 onwards are rounded. The italicized numbers are estimates.

It can be argued that the difference in pilgrims between Malaysia and Indonesia is a result of varied economic means. Malaysia is a far richer country than Indonesia and, therefore, Malaysians have the means to make the long journey to Mecca, while Indonesians may not. That argument may have historical validity, though it is irrelevant in recent times given the fact that Saudi Arabia established a pilgrim quota system in the late 1980s. In both countries, quotas are always filled; in fact, *hajj* wait lists can extend past 10 years (Onishi, 2010, para. 2; Heng, 2014, para. 1). In recent years, both Indonesia and Malaysia have lobbied Saudi Arabia for a higher quota (Halim and Parlina, 2016, para. 1; Firdaws, 2016, para. 1). The data for 1990 onward is influenced by the quota system (based on the guidelines of 1,000 pilgrims per 1 million Muslim citizens, a provision that has largely been mirrored in the statistics), though it is important to note that Saudi Arabia allowed Malaysia and Singapore to size their *hajj* quotas based on their entire populations, not just Muslim citizens (Bianchi, 2004, p. 116). Even with its larger quota, Malaysia sent at least 10,000 unregistered, illegal pilgrims to Mecca yearly as of 2004 (Bianchi, 2004, p. 117), though Saudi Arabia has cracked down on illegal pilgrims as of 2015 (*Al Arabiya English*, Nov. 10, 2015, para. 1).

The *hajj* statistics and Arabic influence within Malay language point to a more pronounced Arabization effect in Malaysia when compared to Indonesia. Recently, Malaysian social critics have pointed out the expansion of Arabization and its consequences. Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir, the eldest daughter of the former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, criticized the Arabization process for creating a cultural shift toward more conservative forms of Islam and dress. She noted that women have shifted from wearing traditional clothing (Ma. *baju melayu*) during Eid al-Fitr (known in Malaysia as *Hari Raya*) to wearing Arab kaftan style dress (Su-Lyn, 2015, para. 2-3). This assessment highlights a larger

trend toward identifying with Arab language and culture in Malaysia and placing a higher value on Arab cultural artifacts over indigenous cultural artifacts.

These developments surrounding Arabization in Malaysia, where the influence of Arab culture (e.g., language, dress, etc.) is much more visible when compared to Indonesia, contribute to the interpretative framework laid out here to understand why proportionally more Malaysians than Indonesians have joined jihadi groups in Syria and Iraq. Online propaganda by groups like ISIS may have resonated more deeply with Malaysians because Arabization in Malaysia has already familiarized Malaysian people with Wahhabi tenets exported from Saudi Arabia.

## **5. Resources**

Resources are an important factor in determining ability to engage in international terrorism. My contention is that financial and language resources, or lack thereof, have affected the flow of Southeast Asian fighters from Indonesia and Malaysia to jihadi groups in the Middle East. In this section I first look at how financial resources have played a role in facilitating international terrorism by comparing Malaysian and Indonesian GDP. Following that, I discuss how Malaysia's more advanced language resources and more developed human capital have enabled would-be jihadis to more easily join and acclimate to international terrorist groups.

In approaching the subject of resources, we shall assume that the desire to join violent extremist groups is equal in both Indonesia and Malaysia in order to evaluate the effects of different resource capabilities fairly. Indonesia is less wealthy than Malaysia with a per capita GDP of \$3,346 as of 2015 (*The World Bank*, 2015). Malaysia's GDP per capita is almost three times higher than Indonesia at \$9,768 (*The World Bank*, 2015). Therefore, it is more likely that the average Malaysian has more possibilities to travel to the Middle East when compared to the average Indonesian. Indonesians are hamstrung because they are poor, while Malaysians, with a

more developed economy, stronger currency and higher income, are empowered to move about the world more freely. Most Indonesians that joined ISIS had to sell all of their possessions in order to fund their travel (Asril, 2015, para. 12).

Secondly, the average Malaysian has more disposable income and can fund terrorism more easily. Researchers at Erasmus University in Rotterdam found that wealthier countries are more likely to send recruits to fight for ISIS than poorer countries (Meotti, 2016, para. 4). For example, a 34-year old Malaysian man was charged with financially supporting an Islamic State militant in July 2016 (*The Star Online*, Jul. 26, 2016, para. 1). Fewer Indonesians have disposable income at such a young age and therefore are less able to fund such activities. Often not in a position to self-finance, Indonesians are typically provided funding and guidance from Indonesian ISIS operatives, such as BahrumSyah, Abu Jandal and Bahrun Naim, who are based in ISIS territory and already affiliated with established Indonesian jihadi groups (*Asia One*, Feb. 6, 2016, para. 5). Bahrun Naim, believed to be the leader of the *Katibah Nusantara*, funneled cash to Indonesian militants to fund the January 2016 attacks in Jakarta, the first ISIS attack in that country (*The Star Online*, Jan. 16, 2016, para. 5-6).

Specific cases of Indonesians fighting for ISIS illustrate the importance of resources. Many Indonesian fighters currently in Syria hail from cities on the island of Java (Jones, 2016a, p.3), which is Indonesia's richest island, accounting for more than half of the country's GDP (BPS Statistics Indonesia, 2013). This fact illustrates that resources are relevant on both a national and a sub-national level. Additionally, Indonesians that joined ISIS as freelancers (unaffiliated with established Indonesian or international jihadi groups) were typically students studying in the Middle East (Nuraniyah, para. 12, 2015). This suggests that individuals with more resources to travel abroad have more opportunities to join jihadi groups. Furthermore, as

noted in the previous section, proximity to the source and exposure to Middle Eastern Islam are relevant factors in determining who ends up joining ISIS and who does not.

Language resources are also important in connecting individuals to the outside world. In the context of the Middle East and the language of terror groups in Iraq and Syria, Arabic is the most important language. Individuals who speak English and/or Arabic can more easily travel abroad and communicate with individuals and groups in the Middle East. For example, Indonesia's *Kompas* noted that many Indonesian militants fighting with ISIS had a hard time integrating because of their limited Arabic and English skills (Sep. 26, 2014, para. 5). Similarly, in 2009, five American men who tried to join a jihadi training camp in Pakistan were rebuffed because of their lack of language skills<sup>4</sup> (Cragin, 2009, pp. 1-2). These cases demonstrate how language skills can be a deciding factor in whether or not an individual can successfully join an overseas militant group. In absolute terms, then, Malaysians have more "resources." The EF English First World Proficiency Index, which ranks countries according to their English language proficiency, puts Malaysia at number 12, while Indonesia is ranked 32 (2016, p. 6). ISIS and al-Qaeda primarily produce their foreign recruitment material in English (e.g., al-Qaeda's *Inspire* magazine and ISIS' *Dabiq*), not Indonesian-Malay nor Arabic. Malaysians thus have more access to jihadist literature than Indonesians.

The recent uptick in Arabic language students in Malaysia at prominent Malay universities, such as University of Malaya, highlights the notion that Malaysians may also have stronger Arabic language skills when compared to Indonesians (Aljamal, 2015, para. 1). Language education is tied to more study abroad opportunities, including to the Middle East. Indonesians may either not know about opportunities to go abroad, either for study or work, or may be concerned that they don't have the requisite language skills to do so. This is supported by

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<sup>4</sup> The source does not identify which language skills the individuals were lacking.

the case of Mohamad Hidayat Azman, a Malaysian college student studying in Egypt in 2014 who was charged with supporting a terror cell linked to al-Qaeda (*The Star Online*, Jan. 1, 2016, para. 1-3). Azman's proximity to the war in Syria may have impacted his decision. It's possible that the Arabic speaking environment in Egypt allowed him more opportunities for exposure to extremist propaganda and recruiters.

In explaining the radicalization process, the scholar Kim Cragin puts forth three phases that a potential recruit experiences. The first phase is "availability", where environmental factors can make certain individuals susceptible to terrorist recruitment (2009, pp. 3-4). Social networks, peer influence and frustration with foreign or local government policies are some of these factors. While both Malaysians and Indonesians may interact with these initial factors in a domestic setting, Malaysians may have more opportunities for "availability" exposure in an international setting or a multi-lingual setting. Indonesians are resource-poor and, therefore, have fewer opportunities for international exposure or multi-lingual access to peer groups that may encourage radicalization (e.g., a study abroad semester at a university in the Arabophone world).

Tied into language skills is human capital: the relationships and connections to the outside world that facilitate international exposure and travel. The *World Economic Forum's* 2016 Human Capital rankings take a life-course approach to human capital by evaluating the levels of education, skills and employment available to people in five distinct age groups (2016, pp. 4-5). According to the Human Capital report for 2016, Malaysia is ranked 42<sup>nd</sup>, while Indonesia 72<sup>nd</sup>, thus showing that Malaysians have quantifiably more connections and opportunities via relationships that could facilitate international travel to fight for terrorist groups when compared to Indonesians.

Language resources (both Arabic and English), financial resources, and human capital are significantly greater in Malaysia when compared to Indonesia. All other things being equal, these three resources combine to give Malaysians a distinct advantage over Indonesians in traveling to the Middle East to fight for violent Islamist groups.

## **Conclusion and Outlook**

Saudi Wahhabi ideology looms large on contemporary Islamic discourse. Its influence is both direct (through Saudi educated preachers and religious schools) and indirect (by leveraging its position as the center of foundational Islamic symbols to subtly push Islamic thought toward ultra-conservatism). Saudi Arabia has exported its rigid fundamentalist understanding of Islam throughout the Muslim world. In doing so, the Saudis have normalized and promoted the actions of groups like ISIS. Wahhabism is further amplified by the fact that Arab culture, with Saudi Arabia - the home of the Prophet's birthplace and the *Ka'ba* (the most sacred site in Islam) - as the exemplar, is highly revered within the Muslim world. Even without explicit preaching of Wahhabi tenets, Muslims in Southeast Asia and elsewhere see Arabs and Arab culture as the most authentic representation of Islam. This perception validates Saudi ideology and encourages its propagation in places as far away from Saudi Arabia as Indonesia and Malaysia.

In noting the strong influence that Saudi Wahhabism has had on mainstream Islamic discourse, I have attempted to explain why Malaysia exports more jihadis and is more sympathetic to militant Islamist groups like ISIS when compared to Indonesia. The fact that Malaysia has sent proportionally five or six times as many fighters abroad as Indonesia is significant because Malaysia, given its relative wealth in Southeast Asia, is an important source of funding and personnel for extremist activity in Mindanao, Eastern Malaysia and elsewhere

(Jones, 2016b, pp. 8-10). It is also relevant because of Malaysia's position as a major hub for global Islamic finance.

To explain the fact that Malaysia has sent proportionally more fighters abroad than Indonesia I have presented three main components: the internal political and security environment, the spread and influence of Arab culture and the role of socioeconomic resources. My explanations, while reasoned, are only supported by evidence available to me through open source research. In an ideal world, I would conduct interviews with Indonesian and Malay jihadis who fought for or are currently fighting for ISIS, as well as their siblings (in order to avoid selection bias). I would provide a survey that asks respondents to rank the varying means, motives and opportunities that influenced their decision to join jihadist groups in the Middle East. I would thus be able to quantify exactly how the three factors impact behavior.

A state's security apparatus and the nature of its political discourse create externalities. Malaysia has benefited from economic growth and development to become a state with strong and competent security forces and tight controls over its citizens. Given the Malaysian ruling regime's endorsement of exclusivist political discourse and the climate of increasing religious conservatism and intolerance against non-Muslims, the Malaysian state security apparatus has created a negative externality. The negative externality is the production of Malaysian citizens that are sympathetic to jihadi groups and are more willing to go abroad to commit acts of violence. The tight security apparatus in Malaysia discourages violence on Malaysian soil; therefore unstable countries, like Iraq and Syria, experience the effects of the intolerant aspects of Malaysia's political culture that create fertile conditions for jihadi ideology to gain traction. Indonesian political discourse, while increasingly intolerant in recent years, is overall more pluralistic than Malaysia's, given the country's *Pancasila* foundation and its historical desire to

unite the disparate islands and cultures of the archipelago. Indonesia's weaker internal security apparatus and its expansive geography encourage jihadis to stay local rather than go abroad.

Arabization, which can encompass Wahhabism, seems to be more pronounced in Malaysia than in Indonesia. This may link Malaysia to the Middle East and Saudi Arabia more intensely than in Indonesia. Malaysians have the financial and language resources to fulfill their desire to fight abroad; Indonesians are poorer and lack the necessary English or Arabic skills to pursue international *jihad*.

These issues and disparities between Indonesia and Malaysia are worth examining for a number of reasons. Understanding the motivations and conditions that create jihadis in Southeast Asia is helpful in and of itself given the fact that Southeast Asia is home to around 250 million Muslims, which is close to 20% of the world's total estimated Muslim population of 1.6 billion (Yusuf, 2012, para. 4). If Malaysia is sending proportionally 5 or 6 times as many fighters to the Middle East as Indonesia, that represents a shift away from the moderate image that Malaysia attempts to portray on the world stage (Liow, 2016b, para. 21). Even though Malaysia is a small country with only 20 million Muslims, this is still worrisome because countries don't need large populations to effectively engage in terrorism. Another issue is finance: Malaysia could play a larger role in facilitating and funding militant Islamist groups in the future if religious conservatism and jihadi sympathies continue. Locally, Malaysia is a source for funding and personnel for violent extremist groups like Abu Sayyaf, which itself has been endorsed by ISIS (Jones, 2016b, pp. 8-10). Together these reasons highlight the fact that the future of militant Islamism in Malaysia may be more of a threat than in Indonesia.

There are a number of steps that can be taken to combat violent extremism in Southeast Asia and around the world. States need strong security apparatus and stable governments free of

corruption. These elements will create a hostile environment for violent Islamist extremism by eliminating political voids that terrorists take advantage of (e.g., Syria, the Southern Philippines, Afghanistan in the 1980s etc.) For stable countries like Malaysia and Indonesia, divisive and intolerant political discourse and the politicization of Islam have likely contributed to increased sympathies for violent Islamist groups. Islam should not be used as a tool to enhance differences, but rather as a unifying and peaceful mechanism to promote understanding. In order for that to happen, the Saudi Wahhabist narrative needs to be countered. Alternative visions of Islam should be funded aggressively and promoted within the Muslim world. Undoing over thirty years of Saudi petro-fueled Islamic discourse is not a task achieved overnight. Funding Indonesia's largest Muslim organization, *Nahdlatul Ulama*, whose mission is to combat Wahhabi ideology at home and abroad, would be a step in this direction (van Doorn-Harder, 2004, p. 499; Weintraub, 2016, p. 4). *Nahdlatul Ulama* has had success in countering ISIS' internet propaganda by using their own so called "cyber warriors" to promote moderate Islam on Twitter, WhatsApp, Line, Facebook and other digital media (*The Star Online*, May 8, 2016, para. 1). The implementation of soft diplomacy programs funded first by Muslim countries and later by the West (either directly or indirectly) is another potential remedy (Weintraub, 2016, p. 5). The U.S. practices soft diplomacy through international exchange programs like the Peace Corps and the Fulbright program. These kinds of programs could be applied to Muslim communities to soften hardened cores of Wahhabism throughout the Muslim world. A Muslim Peace Corps that mixes Muslims from various parts of the world could slowly erode Wahhabi ideology and promote mutual understanding across the *ummah*, the global community of Muslims (Weintraub, 2016, p. 5).

As for Southeast Asia, unity and inclusivity will be central to combating terrorism. The recent trends of exclusivist discourse and politicization of Islam need to be combated. Leaders in

Malaysia should reverse laws that are inherently unfair and explicitly reject ISIS' ideology and political rhetoric that is in dialogue with ISIS. Indonesians should dismiss the calls of groups like the FPI to further Islamize and persecute Christians and minority sects like the *Ahmadiyya*. Both countries can do a better job at fighting corruption and tightening internal security apparatus. Indonesia should also reassess its prison system, which currently provides networking and a megaphone for jihadis (Liow, 2016b, para 18). External unity will be of great significance as ISIS fighters return home to Southeast Asia from the Middle East as the Caliphate is weakened. ASEAN has become an effective multilateral body in the 21st century. The West benefits from a strong ASEAN, especially given the huge uncertainty of a nascent Trump administration and a rising China. The conflict potential that exists in the South China Sea is acute. Maritime cooperation between Southeast Asian governments will be critical given the way that violent extremist groups exploit the lawlessness of the Sulu and Celebes Sea and the waters surrounding Borneo (where Abu Sayyaf and other groups operate). If Malaysia and Indonesia - and ASEAN countries as a whole - collaborate and share intelligence, shore up their internal security systems, and promote inclusivity, mutual understanding, and respect within political discourse, then the threat of Islamist terrorism can be minimized and ultimately defeated.

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