

**CONTESTATION OF JIHAD AND
SOCIAL MEDIA NARRATIVE:
A CASE STUDY OF ISIS**

UMI NUR ZAHIDAH BINTI MOHD KASLAN

UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA

2021

**CONTESTATION OF JIHAD AND
SOCIAL MEDIA NARRATIVE:
A CASE STUDY OF ISIS**

by

UMI NUR ZAHIDAH BINTI MOHD KASLAN

**Thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Social Science**

April 2021

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious and the Most Merciful. All praise and glory are to Him alone for the wisdom, knowledge, time and support system He gave me to watch this dream to turn into a reality. Peace and blessings to beloved Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h), his family and his companion.

I wish to extend a sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Benny Teh Cheng Guan for having the will to help and guide me as well as pouring remarkable dedication and patience with me throughout the journey of a full semester in the effort to complete this thesis. His full commitment to guide and educate taught me more than I expected to have and more than I ever deserved. I also want to extend this appreciation to my fellow friends who without their support would not bring me to wherever I stand today.

Last but certainly not least, I wish to deliver my gratitude and love for my precious family members especially to my beautiful parents, Mrs Sukinam Suramin and Mr Mohd Kaslan bin Sulaiman Darjo and to my beautiful siblings, Mohd Zahiruddin Zami' bin Mohd Kaslan and Haninatusyahidah binti Mohd Kaslan for giving me the drive, passion, strength and aspiration as well as endless prayers for me throughout my postgraduate years here in USM. Without them, I would not be standing where I am standing today. I also want to express my appreciation to everyone who had been involved in the writing either directly or indirectly in the process of making sure that this writing will be compiled and finished.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iii
LIST OF TABLES	vi
LIST OF FIGURES	vii
LIST OF APPENDICES	viii
LIST OF ACRONYMS	ix
ABSTRAK.....	x
ABSTRACT	xii
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Background	1
1.2 Research Problem	9
1.3 Research Questions	11
1.4 Research Objectives	11
1.5 Research Scope.....	11
1.6 Conceptual Understanding	12
1.7 Methods and Data Collection	17
1.8 Research Significance	18
1.9 Thesis Structure	19
1.10 Conclusion.....	21
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW	23

2.1	Introduction	23
2.2	Theoretical Framework	49
2.2.1	Different School of Thought in Constructivism	51
2.3	Terrorism	62
2.4	Jihad.....	70
2.5	New Extremism	73
2.6	Conclusion.....	77
CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY		79
3.1	Introduction	79
3.2	Research Design	80
3.3	Sampling Design.....	81
3.3.1	Population	81
3.3.2	Rationale	82
3.3.3	Criteria of Sample	83
3.4	Research Location	84
3.5	Research Approach.....	84
3.6	Data Collection Method and Tools.....	84
3.6.1	Analysis of Documents	84
3.6.2	Interviews.....	85
3.6.3	Focus Group Discussion	87
3.6.4	Questionnaire	88
3.7	Data Analysis.....	90
3.8	Research Ethics	92

3.9	Conclusion.....	93
CHAPTER 4 CONTESTATION OF JIHAD.....		95
4.1	Introduction	95
4.2	Understanding Jihad: Classical and Contemporary Views	95
4.3	Interpretation and Relevancy: Differences between Jihad and Qital	103
4.4	Conclusion.....	121
CHAPTER 5 SOCIAL MEDIA NARRATIVE: A DEEPER LOOK INTO MEDIUM OF INFLUENCES AND ITS CONSEQUENCES		122
5.1	Introduction	122
5.2	Social Media Platform and Role of Returnees.....	122
5.3	Development of Influence in Social Media Platform	129
5.4	ISIS and the Social Media Influence: A Frequency Analysis	141
5.4.1	Demographic Background	142
5.4.2	Exposure to Social Media.....	148
5.4.3	Influence and Perception	158
5.4.4	Ideology and Propaganda.....	163
5.5	Impacts and Consequences: What was Left Behind?.....	173
5.6	Conclusion.....	180
CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSIONS		182
REFERENCES		188
APPENDICES		

LIST OF TABLE

	Page
Table 1 Phases of conducting research	91
Table 2 Percentage on age	142
Table 3 Percentage on gender	143
Table 4 Percentage on race and ethnicity	144
Table 5 Percentage on marital status	145
Table 6 Percentage on highest academic qualification	146
Table 7 Percentage on religion or faith	147
Table 8 Exposure to Social Media	148
Table 9 Influence and Perception	158
Table 10 Ideology and Propaganda	163

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1 Theoretical Framework	50
Figure 2 Pie chart on the distribution of age among respondents	142
Figure 3 Pie chart on the distribution of gender among respondents	143
Figure 4 Pie chart on the distribution of race/ethnicity among respondents	144
Figure 5 Pie chart on the distribution of marital status among respondents	146
Figure 6 Pie chart on the distribution of academic qualification among respondents	147
Figure 7 Pie chart on the distribution of religion/faith among respondents	148

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A	Questionnaire
Appendix B	Letter of Assurance to Respondents
Appendix C	List of Questions
Appendix D	List of Respondents

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AQI	Al Qaeda in Iraq
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
GWOT	Global War on Terror
IJT	Jamaat al-Tawhid wal-Jihad
ISI	Islamic State of Iraq
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
MCMM	Ministry of Communications and Multimedia Malaysia
MCMC	Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
WWW	World Wide Web

**PERSOALAN JIHAD DAN NARATIF MEDIA SOSIAL:
SEBUAH KAJIAN KES TERHADAP ISIS**

ABSTRAK

Jihad telah lama menjadi titik perbincangan berkenaan dengan keabsahan atas tindakan-tindakan yang dilakukan oleh kumpulan radikal berasaskan agama yang menjustifikasikan tindakan mereka menggunakan ayat-ayat Al-Quran dan ucapan-ucapan Nabi Muhammad yang diambil luar daripada konteks dengan menyamakan peperangan pada masa lampau dengan peperangan dunia moden dalam usaha untuk mewujudkan dan membangunkan sebuah kerajaan berasaskan syariah berdasarkan kepada idea yang jauh menyimpang. Perkembangan jihad juga seringkali dikaitkan dengan konsep qital yang mempunyai nilai perang yang lebih kuat malah lebih daripada jihad itu sendiri yang sentiasa dilabelkan sebagai perang suci. Dalam membincangkan perkembangan kumpulan-kumpulan radikal dan justifikasi di sebalik tindakan yang diambil oleh mereka, jihad digunakan secara lebih meluas berbanding qital. Maka, kajian ini dilakukan bertujuan untuk mencari tahu perbezaan antara kedua-dua terma tersebut dalam usaha untuk meleraikan konsep konsep yang sentiasa menjadi persoalan besar yang selalu disalahgunakan untuk mengeneralisasikan tindakan sebuah pihak yang akhirnya menyumbang kepada peningkatan sentiment xenofobia terhadap Islam dan pengikutnya. Pada masa yang sama, perkembangan kumpulan radikal seperti ISIS juga tidak pernah lari dari perhatian platform media social yang digunakan sebagai medium untuk memperluas pengaruh mereka dan mempromosikan perjuangan mereka bukan sahaja untuk meraih sokongan daripada pengguna media sosial tetapi juga untuk

merekrut ahli baru untuk kumpulan dan sel mereka. Maka, kajian ini turut menjelaskan bagaimana ISIS menggunakan media sosial seperti Twitter dan Facebook sebagai medium dan platform penyampaian utama dalam menyebar luaskan propaganda dan menjalankan proses merekrut ahli baru secara atas talian serta ancaman yang mereka bawa kepada komuniti global. Bagi menganalisa persoalan-persoalan ini, sebuah kerangka teoretikal dijadikan sebagai asas yang bertindak sebagai pengemudi kepada perbincangan dalam kajian ini. Pengumpulan data pula diadakan dengan menggabungkan kajian kualitatif dan kuantitatif yang dijalankan dalam beberapa bentuk seperti temu ramah, temu ramah secara rawak, perbincangan kumpulan fokus dan penyebaran borang soal selidik untuk mengumpulkan pendapat serta pandangan. Dapatan kajian ini dianalisa menggunakan teknik analisa tematik serta perisian data kuantitatif untuk mengumpulkan maklumat. Antara dapatan kajian ini termasuklah penjelasan berkenaan salah tafsir dan salah guna maksud kontekstual jihad yang sering kali disaling kaitkan dengan qital serta penggunaan platform media sosial untuk meraih sokongan dan mengembangkan pengaruh dalam ruang rangkaian maya.

CONTESTATION OF JIHAD AND SOCIAL MEDIA: A CASE STUDY OF ISIS

ABSTRACT

Jihad has long been the center of discussion regarding the validity of actions done by religion-based radical groups that justify their act using out-of-context verses of Al-Quran and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad by equating the olden times war with modern day war in order to create and develop a heavily-mislead idea of syariah-based government. The development of jihad has also been intertwined with the concept of qital which possess stronger values of war even more than jihad itself that has been labeled as the holy war. In discussing the development of radical groups and the justification behind their act as well as the justification used by the radical groups themselves, jihad has been prominently used to categorize the act rather than qital. Thus, this study set to look for the differences between the two terms in order to unravel the hugely contested concept of jihad that often misused to generalize the action of one party which ultimately contributes to the growing xenophobic sentiment towards Islam and its followers. At the same time, the development of radical groups such as ISIS has never been shy from social media platforms which used as a platform to widen their influence and advertises their fight not only to gather support from the mass users of social media but also to recruits new members in joining the group and its cells. Thus, this study also explains on how the ISIS use the social media such as Twitter and Facebook as its main medium and platform in disseminating propaganda and conducting online recruiting of new members as well as the growing threat they

posed on the global community. To analyze these questions, a theoretical framework was laid as the foundation to act as the guide for the discussion performed in this study. The data collection was done by combining qualitative and quantitative methods which were carried out in several forms such as interviews, random interviews, focus group discussion and spread of questionnaire to gather opinions and views. The results of this study were analyzed using thematic analysis technique as well as quantitative data software to gather information. Among the results of this study include the explanation regarding the misinterpretation and misuse of the contextual meaning of jihad that often intertwined with *qital* as well as the use of social media platform in order to gain support and develop influence in the virtual network space.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Background

Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) or also known as IS has recently been reported on calling resistance towards the ‘infidels’ which was assumed as calls towards North Korean threats to both Japan and the United States of America (US) (Aljazeera, 2017). The emergence of ISIS has been feared by the global community since its establishment in 2014 by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in both Iraq and Syria. ISIS has since been conducting terror attacks on Iraqis and Syrians and claimed both states as its base to create and to glorify the caliphate system which was practiced by almost all Islamic government back in 15th century – the Umayyad, Abbasid and until the Ottoman empire. Such emergence of such terrorist group was taking the world by storm due to its barbaric execution – man slaughtering, gunshot at point blank – done towards Western reporters and other hostages which they claimed as being ‘infidels’. Assuming themselves as the ‘successor’ of past caliphate, they see themselves as having the right to execute the ‘infidels’ by whatever means they think is ‘appropriate’ and within the accordance with past executions to prisoners in the caliphate era and what was mentioned in the Muslim scripture, the HolyQuran.¹

¹ Hosken, A. *Empire Inside the Islamic State*, Great Britain: Oneworld Publication. 2014, p. 15; Bennis, P. *Understanding ISIS and the New Global War on Terror*. Northhampton, MA: Olive Branch Press. 2015. <https://www.kropfpolisci.com/isi.bennis.pdf>

The progression of new extremism has been deemed as one of the major threat in today's world by the global community. Why I call it as a new extremism? It is because of the medium ISIS used in executing attacks and spreading propaganda which took a whole new turn with the mass introduction of social media as one of the most pivotal media in this 4.0 revolution era.² Before, the states, majorly face issues and threat by the state actors but now, states have to deal and face new challenges posed by the non-state actors which include terrorist organization which simply quoted out-of-context understanding of the Holy Quran as a religious scripture especially in the subject of *jihad* and the threat of new extremism in the shape of rising new terrorist group such as the ISIS group which will be the major case study in this research. The rise of such groups can be caused and catalyzed by many factors and this encompass several theme including the misleading interpretation and connotation of *jihad* as “arm struggle”, action taken by the members of the terror cells that is contradictory with the texts they referred to i.e. the Qur'an – in misleading manner that arguably only suit the political purpose of their movement. The policy head by the hegemonic power is the global war on terror which still maintain its ‘virtue’ and aim up until this point which is to have a global consensus on fighting terrorism and terrorist groups which strengthen the idea of extremism, misconception of jihadi spirit and fortify the restoring of caliphate government especially in the Middle East.³

² Greene, K. J. 2015. Trends in Terrorist Media and Propaganda. *International Studies Capstone Research Papers*. 4(24): 2-3. Retrieved from http://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/international_studies_capstones

³ Hall, B. *Inside ISIS: The Brutal Rise of A Terrorist Army*. New York: Hechette Book Group. 2015, p. 7

Most of the literature were and are focusing on this issue – the breed of new extremism, ISIS – is mainly emphasizing on the inner cause of the creation of such militant groups such as ideological factor and intra-conflict in the states as well as the instability in the region but only a few give emphasis on the deeper cause that might be the fundamental source of such emergence because after all, the idea of creating a caliphate government and to glorify such system which have its basis on Islam is also a way of ‘nullifying’ the government system that we have now including the democracy-based government, socialist/communist government and monarchy-based government. The focal point of this research is to identify the comprehension of the militant organization in its interpretation of *jihad* and how out-of-context understanding of analyzing the real meaning behind the genuine *sabda* (sayings of the Prophet) or *hadith* (texts explaining the actions done by the Prophet) by Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) can generate a political movement that is contrary to the original meaning delivered by the Prophet himself could threaten thousands of lives worldwide.

Alongside that, this research will also look at the narrative brought by ISIS to the virtual world in answering the fundamental question of how exactly the proposed doctrine of ISIS “seeps” through the society via social media and the inter-relation between the two points of research will be discussed to exhibit the ideologies and the misunderstanding it cause to the international community. The factor of ISIS growing influence might be mentioned as one of the causes but the writings which focus on the mentioned elements – misinterpretation, contradictory actions, and narrative in social media – as the catalysts for such movement and mobility of extremist groups are only within a few writings. This can also be applied in reviewing the literature made on

several issues concerning ISIS and the Islamophobia sense it creates in several Southeast Asian (SEA) countries which encompass the issue of Malaysia as “terror-transit”, emergency in Marawi, Philippines and persecution of the Rohingyas community in Myanmar. These issues have not been discussed elaborately in many writings probably due to the time frame of the incidents that occur only a year or two ago and further research should be done to explain the situations faced by our community on this side of the world as well as preparing us for better conflict management involving ISIS in the future.

ISIS is a terror association centered in Syria and Iraq that situated in the Middle Eastern part of the Asia continent.⁴ According to the proposal presented by the ex-Prime Minister in the Parliament that put its focus on the effort of combating the threat posed by the ISIS group in 2014, it was stated that the ISIS was a militant group which grew and established through the biggest terrorist link the world, the Al-Qaeda, centered in Afghanistan which was claimed as the core hub of militant group in Asia.⁵ The ideology of ISIS was started as Jamaat al-Tawhid wal-Jihad (IJT) as the brainchild of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in 1999. The members of this group took their oath of loyalty to Osama bin Lden in 2004 and change the group’s name to Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI).⁶ Abu Ayyub al-Masri which taken the lead seat after Abu Musab change the

⁴ Ibid, p. 3

⁵ Pembentangan Kertas Putih, Kertas Perintah, *Ke Arah Menangani Ancaman Kumpulan Islamic State*, Bahagian 1, 2014, Kuala Lumpur: Parlimen Malaysia, p. 5

⁶ Ibid

name of the group to Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) and choose Abu Omar al-Baghdadi to be the leader of the group.⁷

ISIS which was headed by the al-Baghdadi announced the modification of the name ISI to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) which aimed to inaugurate and instituted an Islamic caliphate-based state which includes a number of Middle Eastern countries such as Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Israel, Cyprus, Hatay in the southern Turkey and Sinai Peninsula in Egypt.⁸ Ayman al-Zawahiri (current leader of Al-Qaeda) declared that ISIL was no longer a part of Al-Qaeda due to the immense gesture of al-Baghdadi that forced upon all the groups under the auspice of Al-Qaeda to vow their allegiance to al-Baghdadi and the members of ISIL which in other words, called for the rejection of al-Zawahiri leadership.⁹ ISIL had managed to annihilate and take control of a number of cities in Iraq and Syria and this had allowed al-Baghdadi to proclaim the formation of IS on the June 29th, 2014 and this had caused the ever-growing of this terrorist network along with the sentiments of deep fear towards them till this very day.¹⁰

One of the principles of the ideology is to form the Daulah Islamiah¹¹ (Islamic State) which adheres to the principles, proposition and laws of sharia as had been done

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid, p. 6

⁹ Hosken, A., *Empire Inside the Islamic State*, Great Britain: Oneworld Publication, p. 3

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 3

¹¹ Pembentangan Kertas Putih, Kertas Perintah, *Ke Arah Menangani Ancaman Kumpulan Islamic State*, Bahagian 1, 2014, Kuala Lumpur: Parlimen Malaysia, p. 7

by the Prophet Muhammad during his reign in Medina and re-applied the laws of God on Earth especially in the *siyasah* or governance of the state. ISIS claims that modern Islamic countries are now more likely to practice secular administration systems than syariah systems are among the indicators that contribute to the expansion of this group.¹² In addition, their movements expanded through war and denied the Islamic government that did not enforce syariah law. Another indicator that may be the cause of the establishment of this militant group is the desire to defend the Muslim community or the *ummah* from the disbelievers and the apostates.

The Islamophobia phenomenon emerged that led the Muslim community to be viewed as a subordinate society and deserved to be challenged to further strengthen this group's struggle to defend their religion from the reproach and slander of other religions, especially several Western countries that practice the policy of marginalizing Muslim societies in their country.¹³ This group is more likely to be on the face-to-face opposition or confrontation and a coalition of wars led by its main enemy, the United States.¹⁴ They see these face-to-face conflicts as a sign of an end-of-the-time conflict between the Muslim community and their enemies including the Christians and Jews as

¹² Bennis, P. Understanding ISIS and the New Global War on Terror. Northhampton, MA: Olive Branch Press. 2015. <https://www.kropfpolisci.com/isis.bennis.pdf>

¹³ Hassan Yussuff. *Islamophobia Exists in Canada – We Must Recognize It*. The Globe and Mail. 2018

¹⁴ Hall, B., *Inside ISIS: The Brutal Rise of A Terrorist Army*, New York: Hechette Book Group, 2015, p. 4

ever described in apocalyptic prophecies or end-of-life events ever pronounced by Prophet Muhammad (pbuh).¹⁵

The Islamic State of Iraq militant group (ISIS) or the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria is a radical militant group that uses the Islamic name for *jihad*, and has now dominated much of eastern Syria, north and west of Iraq. The group uses violent tactics including massacres, kidnapping, abducting heads of media outsiders, resulting in US military intervention that attacked the group's fortress in Iraq.¹⁶ The goal of ISIS is to create a system of cohesiveness governing the armed struggle of a country ruled by only one leader who must be obeyed by all the people under his rule. In addition, they also want to call on Muslims to move to Syria and Iraq to make Daulah Islamiyah successful.¹⁷ At the same time, the group also wants to develop ISIS ideology throughout the world and ultimately, supporting the armed struggle of the suppressed Muslim minority worldwide.¹⁸

This ideology received the support of Islamic militants from all over the world and demanded all its members to swear allegiance to their leader Ibrahim Awad

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Pembentangan Kertas Putih, Kertas Perintah, *Ke Arah Menangani Ancaman Kumpulan Islamic State*, Bahagian 1, 2014, Kuala Lumpur: Parlimen Malaysia; Bennis, P. Understanding ISIS and the New Global War on Terror. Northampton, MA: Olive Branch Press. 2015. <https://www.kropfpolisci.com/isis.bennis.pdf>

¹⁷ Daulah Islamiyah is the name for the Islamic state that the militants intend to create

¹⁸ Bennis, P. Understanding ISIS and the New Global War on Terror. Northampton, MA: Olive Branch Press. 2015. <https://www.kropfpolisci.com/isis.bennis.pdf>

Ibrahim Ali al-Badri al-Samarrai, or better known as Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.¹⁹ Initially, this ISIS ideology was only growing in Middle Eastern countries such as two major countries that focused on the spread of this ideology namely Syria and Iraq. There is an opinion that this ideology is based on both countries because they want to conquer the major economic sources of oil or petroleum.²⁰ There is also an opinion suggesting that the establishment or dissemination of the ISIS ideology is merely an immature thought disguised as obligation as a Muslim to spread the religion of the world's second largest.²¹ However, it is clear that the influence of this understanding is increasing from time to time from one nation to another nation across the border and continent and contributing to the fears of the world community against the threat of violence that is able to undermine world security. Despite the expansion of the influence, the ideology has received a widespread and negative coverage due to the influence of the media that has always been exposed to terrorism stories involving ISIS militant.²²

In the context of International Relations (IR) discourse, these type of groups are seen as one of the results of the rapidity of the globalized world we currently residing in (Baylis *et al*, 2008: 373). This can be further understood when we touch on the development of the technology infrastructure which had flourished the ability of these

¹⁹Sinar Harian. "Apa Itu Kumpulan IS". October 5th 2015. Retrieved from <http://www.sinarharian.com.my/nasional/apa-itu-kumpulan-is-1.326714>.

²⁰Hall, B., *Inside ISIS: The Brutal Rise of A Terrorist Army*, New York: Hechette Book Group, 2015; Hosken, A., *Empire Inside the Islamic State*, Great Britain: Oneworld Publication

²¹ Chassman, A. Islamic State, Identity and the Global Jihadist Movement: How is Islamic State Successful at Recruiting "Ordinary" People? *Journal for Deradicalization*. (9): 241. 2016. <http://journals.sfu.ca/jd/index.php/jd/article/view/77.pdf>

²² Ibid.

militant groups to form and establish terrorist cells in the target areas, sharing information among the groups and create fear to the non-combatants (Baylis et al, 2008: 372). Therefore, to understand the genuine perspective of the IS group in today's context, it is vital for us to examine the Islamic viewpoint in the context of the terror acts administered by this particular group of IS to further understand the heinous and terrifying acts done by the group and hopefully to find a solution to the problem.

1.2 Research Problem

Seeing such rise of extremist groups, we would ponder upon its cause and the impacts towards today's global community. I argue that one of the fundamental causes behind the arisen power of such extremist group is the misinterpretation of hadith regarding the "golden" word of *jihad* which might be understood by the organization as *qital* – another word used to portray struggle which act as a catalyst towards the further spread of terrorism which gave birth to terror groups such as ISIS which deemed as one of the most barbaric extremist in man's history (Aljazeera, 2015). This rise is also contributed by the narrative it proposed to the virtual world (ie. social media, Internet, public network and mass communication in general). In understanding the emergence of ISIS and the ideologies it present, the researcher believes that the inter-relation of the misinterpretation and the massive use and exposure of the growing social networking site has helped ISIS in creating its own platform in the middle of the international community as well as perpetuate, so to speak, the misconception of jihad itself which is often blamed for the main cause of the expanding "Islamic extremism" especially in the much rave situation in the Middle East region as well as some parts of the Southeast Asian (SEA) countries.

The researcher argue that these factors are the factors that catalyzed the emergence of ISIS as the new extremism and the notion of new extremism is linked to the use of social network and social media the terror group use in order to broaden and deepen their influence and multiply their members, supporters and sympathizers. In this paper, the writer will explain to you the background of ISIS, the ‘near and far enemy’ of ISIS which the former directs to the Bashar regime and the Arab state which is in alliance or having good relationship with their ‘far enemy’ which is the Western countries, mainly the United States. The researcher will also explain proficiently to you the difference of contextual meaning of *jihad* which forms the base for the ISIS ‘fights’ in the Middle Eastern states that has been ‘successful’ enough in creating chaotic condition in Syria which is worsen with endless attacks by the Bashar Assad regime in that particular state.

Hence, this research will unveil as a study to discern the misinterpretation of the meaning of *jihad* as mentioned earlier that form the basis of the new extremist organization that left the world dumbstruck by their notorious and unforeseen act of violence and irresponsibly base the acts on the Prophet’s *hadith* and teaching of Islam. Apart from that, this study is also conducted to examine the implications of ISIS on terrorism which breeds another new dimension of terrorism which is ‘new extremism’ that are using social media as the most critical medium in executing their orders and policy as well as affecting the widespread of ideology that they brought.

1.3 Research Questions

In conducting the research, I have come up with several key questions based on the research problem to act as guidance for the researcher. The research questions are as follows:

- a) How is the concept of jihad featured in the formation and development of ISIS and used as a tool to promote violence?
- b) How does ISIS use religious scriptures to shape their ideologies of violence?
- c) How does society reacts to ISIS's use of social media to spread their jihadist ideology and gain the support of the masses for their Islamic wars?

1.4 Research Objectives

To ensure that the research achieves its anticipated goals, a few objectives had been outlined in the beginning of the research. The objectives are as follows:

- a) To identify the misinterpretation of the contextual meaning of *jihad* and how it allows the creation and development of ISIS as a new manifestation of extremism.
- b) To explain the important role of the religious scripture in the creation of the ISIS's jihadism and their notion of Islamic violence.
- c) To understand society's reaction to ISIS's use of social media networks in spreading their jihadist ideology and obtaining public support for their Islamic wars.

1.5 Research Scope

The scope of this study covers a number of elements namely the misconception of jihad and the notion it has on defining an out-of-context messages to either justify or permit

the ideology brought by ISIS to gain supporters and sympathizers –physically, economically and politically. This study will also examine the status quo of *jihadi* spirit and how it relates to the rise of new extremism in today’s world. This is due to the study requirement which requires the study to be conducted by involving the elements together in understanding the cause of new extremism which I argue rooted from the misinterpretation of actual meaning of *jihad* which might be misunderstood as *qital*, another word used to define struggle. At the same time, the study will also explain the impact generated by the movement of ISIS in the virtual space through social media and how it shaped the viewpoint of the international community towards the new physical threat which whether we like it or not, has been successful in maintaining the sentiment of Islamophobia and further attacks of violence to counter the sentiment. We have to admit that all of these elements have revolved around to create a vicious cycle and manifested through several unfortunate incidents including emergency in Marawi, Philippines, persecution of the Rohingyas in Myanmar, Malaysia’s challenges as “terror-transit”.

1.6 Conceptual Understanding

In this paper, three concepts will be used as a guide and basis for the arguments that will come follow in this entire paper. The three concepts are jihad, terrorism and new extremism which will be explained in greater detail in the second chapter of this thesis. These concepts are implemented due to the fact that they are the most consequential that have been surrounding and portraying the hostile environment that the new extremism, to be exact, ISIS has brought to the table and to the political scenario in the global community.

Contrary to the general belief that jihad is a violent act against Islamic enemies such as infidels and hypocrites, jihad actually has a different meaning than those views. Jihad which is violent and requires military power and weaponry has its own distinctive category in Islam (Fatoohi: 25). Based on the Al-Quran, the true concept of jihad refers to the act of giving the best effort, in the form of a struggle or self-defense performed solely for Allah (Mustafa Abdullah, 2005: 42). This effort can be regarded as an effort to oppose the actions of armed oppression and at the same time can be regarded as an attempt to oppose Satan's incitement and unfairness in one's self.

In Islam, the act of providing financial aid and necessities is also considered as a jihad action because it involves the struggle against selfishness and ungratefulness. In essence, jihad can be divided into two *jihad-i-akbar* (great jihad) and *jihad-i-asghar* (small jihad)²³ which each meant the jihad against the lusts and armed jihad. The difference between these two jihads is *jihad-i-akbar* is the jihad that must be done during which one is alive and permanently while the *jihad-i-asghar* will cease when there is no situation in need of military strength and is immortal (Mir ZohairHusin, 2003: 4). So, based on the above discussion, *jihad* can be understood as a struggle but not within the spectacle of war and hostility especially as depicted during the era of prophethood of Muhammad (p.b.u.h). The Prophet was commanded to continue his jihad without continuing to fight continuously but with debate and persuasion to those who still refused to accept the religion of Allah. The jihad brought by the Prophet is very good in terms of its way, its approach and its features. Nevertheless, a profound

²³ Mir Zohair Husain, *Global Islamic Politics*, (2nd Edition), United States of America: Wesley Educational Publishers Inc., 2003, p. 3

study of the true jihad needs to be done in greater detail so that those who want to fight in the path of Allah are not deflected from the right way. In essence, the author believes that the method used by this religion is very practical in which the movement of jihad treats everyone as it should. The movement of Islam must produce a parallel source to deal with the jahiliyyah system of life during that era and we should also employ relevant method that goes with our era so it would not harm any human being regardless of their background.

On the other hand, terrorism is the use of illegitimate violence by sub-state groups to inspire fear by attacking civilians and/or symbolic targets. The aim is to draw widespread attention to a grievance, affect political change as well as to provoke severe response²⁴ to mention a few others. However, disagreement occur as to what constitutes the act of terrorism; determining when the use of violence is legitimate which is based on contextual morality of the act as opposed to its effect is one of the source for the disagreement. Historically, the use of violence was used during the French Revolution which was perpetrated by the state and this act later known as ‘terrorism’.²⁵ As the world seek for the better definition of terrorism that changes within the contextual setting of society and their behaviour as well as through the intensity of security-seeking, terrorism is now known as the use of violence by small groups to achieve

²⁴Baylis, J., Smith, S. & Owens, P. The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press. 2008.

²⁵Ibid

political changes and it differs according to the political legitimacy.²⁶ Cronin (2002: 39) summarize types of terrorist groups and categorized them by their source of motivation; 1) left-wing terrorists; 2) right-wing terrorists; 3) ethno-nationalist or separatists and 4) religious terrorists which currently becoming more significant and in a paradox, using the peace call of religion to initiate violence and influence the act of iniquity in the name of the religion.²⁷

Terrorism has long been a single factor for security-seeking and security-intensifying in a way that it appears as a threat and in the era globalization that we lived in now, this threat is no longer characterized by single domestic threat or even a regional threat. As a result of the so-called globalization which assisted by its very features of decentered process at an unprecedented speed; information and threat, as well as the influence and interdependency that it brought forward beyond the physical border of a state, terrorism has now unceasingly becoming a global threat to global order that hinder the global society of the establishment and perpetuation of peace and freedom.²⁸ And this brought us to the debate of the relationship between national security and international security. In order to understand the notion and contextual meaning of terrorism, we must first grasp the notion of security and in this writing, the writer will briefly explain and debate the correlation between two most affected entity

²⁶Pandalai, S. *Al Qaeda: Beyond Osama bin Laden*. New Delhi: Institute for Defense Studies & Analyses (IDSA), http://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/13181/IB_alQaeda_beyond_osama-bin_Laden.2011

²⁷ Mueller, J. (ed). *Terrorism Since 9/11: The American Cases*. Ohio: Mershon Center of Ohio State University, <http://politicalscience.osu.edu/faculty/jmueller/since.pdf>. 2017

²⁸Silke, A. *Research on Terrorism: A Review of the Impact of 9/11 and the Global War on Terrorism*, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/227253950>. 2008

as a result of the growing and expanding threat to both the security of individual along with the global order.

Terrorist and radical groups have been prominent users of traditional media as well as the Internet to spread information, propaganda and recruiting potential members and “fighters” for their organizations. Indeed, no terrorist organizations have come close to the social media as smooth and as extravagant as the ISIS and this is what differs the ISIS from old terror groups such as al Qaeda which only used traditional media such as radio broadcasting and magazine as their main tool in disseminating propaganda and attacks. ISIS on the other hand used social media benefitting from the evermore evolving Internet and its affectivity to not only ease them to campaign their propaganda and aides them with recruiting process to multiply their numbers and strength but to also “keep everyone updated” with every operation they involved in, every captives they managed to capture and worst, broadcasting every beheading, slaughtering, shooting actions towards the captives who they deemed as the apostles for having the guts to stand against their ideology and barbaric acts.²⁹

ISIS utilize an array of platforms which are well-known to the global society such as Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr, You Tube, Ask.fm and most pivotal is the Twitter to spread its message. It was recorded that from January 2014 to June 2015, a whopping 1.9 million tweets were generated by approximately 25,000 ISIS members which some of them calling for the Muslims to join their fight and some were literally

²⁹Badawy, A. & Ferrara, E. *The Rise of Jihadist Propaganda on Social Networks*. University of Southern California: Information Sciences Institute, <https://arxiv.org>pdf>. 2016

mentioning names of those they regard as apostles and threaten those who do not go along with their beliefs and spirit to be killed by their members around the world.³⁰ This is possible as the ISIS have come up with a strategy of the so-called “online battalion” or “the mujtahidun” which consists of 500-2000 active online members to be the frontrunner on Twitter racing for trending messages to increase ISIS exposure to the public and expand their outreach. This strategy has been very worrisome as they will not only attract those who are already within their reach but also to the sympathizers who we worry to be among university students who have every chances to spread the messages even further to their peer especially to those who have a very strong religious and jihadi spirit presence. These groups of younglings who came by the social media to look for contents can be easily influenced by the propaganda and the messages which they claimed were written in the name of the God, the Prophet and the religion.³¹

1.7 Methods and Data Collection

Due to the nature of the research which is a qualitative research, the method involved in collecting the data needed to complete the study mainly focuses on the literature review. Qualitative data is divided into several sections in the form of interviews, observations, and analysis of documents. In this study, the document analysis method has been chosen as one of the aspects to gather information. Research methods involve

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Ibid

materials such as books, journals, articles, online journals, conference paper and Internet through sources that are well founded and definitive to be used as references. Besides, the researcher also uses newspaper as one of the methods in increasing knowledge in the development of the subject matter which includes ISIS and its narratives in social media platform, among others. Critical analysis is done on the materials mentioned above to achieve the objective of the paper and to ensure the completion of the study can be fulfilled. At the same time, the research will also be conducted following quantitative manner in which the researcher will spread effective questionnaire to respondents in order to collect data mainly for answering the third research question and objective which calls for the community's involvement in understanding the level of exposure received involving ISIS propaganda utilizing social media in assuming almost every respondent is active users of at least one social media platform as well as to see the level of acceptance of the ISIS ideology in Malaysian community to draw out the respondents' reaction towards the terror organization and its presence. The data will then compile and analyzed through the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) system as the main statistical data analysis application which then will be interpreted to achieve results of the research. The span of the anticipated study will take approximately one to two years to complete with active consultation with the supervisor.

1.8 Research Significance

In every writing, there is always a cause and effect; questions and answers; interests and the spread of knowledge. Based on this belief, the writer believes that the paper could help us in understanding the cause of new extremism – referring to ISIS – which

the writer believes stemmed from the misconception of jihad which acts as a motivation for the terror organization to glorify the order of Islam used in the *Khalifah Empire*. Not only that, this paper will give us a more apprehended understanding on the spirit of *jihad* which always faces misconception as well as misunderstanding which sometimes lead the orientalist writer to punish the Muslims as extremists based on what they believe as *jihad*. Plus, in order for us to understand the root of new extremism involving ISIS in social media, this paper offer a view on the role played by the narrative created and brought by the said terror organization to expand the ideology it brings by exploiting the mass media. At the same time, the paper will provide the audience an insight to the effect caused by the extremist movement towards several countries in Southeast Asia region by highlighting several key issues concerning the threat of the radical and misled terror cells in Malaysia and Philippines for example. Not only will this help us to grasp the idea of ISIS which rooted from misunderstood certain religious practice and concepts and the aftermath it could produce, this research will also help the state government to change the policy it has on security and terrorism and see how the policy helped in ending or at least act as a buffer in the spread of extremism and conflict it may produce mainly in the Southeast Asia region. In creating a sustainable community, we will not be able to sustain long enough if we cannot and do not provide the community with the basic understanding of extremism that is threatening our everyday lives with fear that extremism has been putting on us.

1.9 Thesis Structure

This paper begins with Chapter 1 which aim to explain the concept of the study along with the understanding of the four keywords in this study namely the genuine meaning

of *jihad*, the question on the intent and basis of the emergence – jihad or terror – and the rise of new extremism and the aftermath of the rise basically become the subject matters in this research paper.

Chapter 2 will explain more about the concepts applied in the study of the researchers in a clearer and deeper way. The researcher will explain to you more about the conceptual definition of *jihad*, *qital* and new extremism in the effort to make it easier for the readers to understand the issue in a better way. In this chapter, not only will the researcher give clarification on the terms that serves as the nucleus in understanding the research but the researcher will also try to affiliate the concept with the new ideologies brought by ISIS as the evidence and manifestation of new extremism.

Chapter 3 through 4 will focus on elaborating and explaining the different *jihad* terms and its meaning, the incidents of terror involving ISIS and its motivation and the spread of the *jihadi* spirit. The explanations will look into the contextual meaning of jihad and qital and how these words and its meaning are used interchangeably in justifying the actions taken by ISIS. It will then be continued by examining the impact of the publicizing and escalation of such threats which the organization, purposefully, uses the Quranic verses and the *hadith* to signifies and albeit to mount support from the Islamic societies to further advocate the movement of violence.

Chapter 5 examines the inter-relation of jihad and terrorism and how does it spread to the social network platform where the vast recruit of new members of jihadists are done. We will look at how the misrepresentation of ISIS in the name of

jihad and Islam created the narrative of “fights for religion” which can be considered as the “theme” of the organization in selling extremism, jihadism and terrorism in social media to attract or more accurate to recruit the future jihadists of ISIS.

Chapter 6 as the final chapter will conclude the paper by seeing how the causes have been ‘effective’ enough in being the fundamental cause of the creation of millennia extremist groups which enhanced the notion of new extremism and how the extremism shape the global security scenario in the form of threats towards the global order which is affecting the countries all around the globe with the same notion that the groups must perish in order to regain peace and freedom all over again.

1.10 Conclusion

The deepening of Islamophobia sentiment has been worsening with the Trump’s policies of banning 7 Muslim countries and his policies which are questionable for the Muslims around the world. This manifestation of policies made by United States reflected the overall situation we have globally in which the act taken by ISIS was equated with every single Muslims worldwide which makes the Muslims vulnerable as well as to the non-Muslims who are influenced greatly by the fear they have with the development of ISIS, the Muslims are seen as hostile and projected dangerous nuance which is a shame and very unfortunate for the global community as ISIS only represents not more than 2% of the Muslims but the impact produced by the intensification of Islamophobia sentiment has been affecting the rest of the Muslims around the world which are also refusing the ideology and the method applied by this terror organization. Hence, efforts need to be taken to curb the threats that could

critically leave the community severely damaged and influenced. The vigorous and robust expose of ISIS and the support for this organization must immediately be recalculated and stronger policies must therefore be imposed in strategic manner to ensure that the expansion of influence could not proceed through the masses of society to protect the interests – security, safety, peace, freedom – of the society itself and the state. To ensure the peaceful livelihood of every human being in the world is the responsibility that we have to carry out every day just as Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) put it when asked about the actions that are most excellent, he said, “To gladden the heart of human beings, to feed the hungry, to help the afflicted, to lighten the sorrow of the sorrowful, and to remove the sufferings of the injured” (Bukhari).

In a nutshell, the study will not only give us the basic understanding of the two key elements in understanding the cause of new extremism which is the misconception of jihad and the development of virtual world through the expanding of social media but will also dig deep down towards the linkage of both elements and how both elements will complement each other without jeopardizing one or the other. This is pivotal to be understood especially by the policy makers out there to scrutinize the elements together; not only to create a more consolidate understanding of the occurrence but also to understand the cause of new extremism and the threats it bring together to today’s world which I argue stemmed from the occurrences aforementioned.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In conducting the research, the writer depends on some fundamental materials which encompass all the principal elements in the research and this includes the discussion concerning the true meaning of *jihad*, *qital* and war in Islam. Along with that, this research will also look for the arguments used by the ISIS organization itself in justifying the ideologies it carries and how the real meaning of *jihad* intercept with the misconception that is built upon the idea of violence and ferocity ignited by the founder of the organization. Does the misconception, in any possible way, reflect the genuine meaning of jihad as mentioned by the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in the hadiths? And how does this misconception ultimately generates a greater misunderstanding of Islam by the orientalist and Western society societies?

It is understood that the misperception of *jihad* as being the reason of Islamic terrorism that legitimizes the killings of non-believers, infidels, apostles had occurred since the eleventh and twelfth centuries during the hype of Crusades era. This is evident in several occurrences including in the medieval era where the Muslim resistant were labeled as jihadist against the European Christians. *Jihad* was also used as “the voice of reason” during the colonial period to show protest towards the colonial pressure, presence and establishment in many Muslim majority countries at that time. The presence of jihad as holy war was also evident during the Second World War when

the emergence of political and armed resistant movement to defend the Palestinian people over the disputed land of what now has become a huge part of Israeli illegal settlement occurred as well as the Afghan resistant groups against the Russian occupation in Afghanistan during the 1980s.³²

The evil connotation of jihad, however, was deeply scrutinized after the 9/11 attack in New York which has been resonating since the unfortunate morning until today. Moniruzzaman (2008) however argued that the “evil connotation” of jihad does not necessarily represent the actual meaning of jihad itself. Rather, jihad is now used as “dogmatic foundation of Islamic fundamentalists”. The exaggeration of jihad that is being used to represent the holy war has successfully deviate the contextual meaning of jihad from its philosophical meaning and universal human principle that attend to a greater idea of compassion and struggle of oneself to be a better being in the name of God. Jihad which we have come to know now is a noun derived from the word *jabdu* or *jabda* and it is a direct transliteration from Arabic which literally means “to strive” or “labor”. The meaning of “striving” and “laboring” on the other hand has since become controversial as it does not only mean striving to commit oneself to the world and decree of God but it is also associated with committing oneself to propagation of Islam and involved in warfare as evidently shown in Sunnah (prophetic tradition) as well as in hadith (Prophet’s sayings) and ayat (verses from Quran).

Due to the nature of Quranic verses and hadiths that needs a long and elaborate explanation to “code” the meaning behind the verses and what the prophet was trying

³² M. Moniruzzaman. Jihad and Terrorism: An Alternative Explanation. *Journal of Religion and Society*. **10**(1): 2