

# Questioning Action, Ideology, and Politics of ISIS Extremism Group in North Sinai, Egypt: A Study with Post-foundationalism Approach

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**Abstract:** This writing explained ideology and politics action by ISIS extremism group in North Sinai, Egypt in November 2017 as a study with post foundationalism. Most studies and researches so far developing regarding this group action and ideology have been merely dominated by the thought based on descriptive review. This writing also describes that it needs some reconsideration for action, ideology, and politics they were applying in their past terror action. The method and approach used in describing this case was qualitative research method using literature review and Post-Foundational thinking framework by Jean Luc Nancy and Saul Newman. The result showed that in understanding this group emergence should be particular by not fixing either the study result or thought from certain experts on ISIS group, as such way thinking would finally present inexactitude and incoherence in mapping the ISIS group's political ideology, goal, or dynamics. Furthermore, in either understanding or reading ISIS group, though it could not be denied if it would be needed a foundation rooting from either ISIS group formation history or previous studies trying to probe this group ideology; however it would be better not to make all of them as the sturdy basis or foundation and immune from improvements. Finally, the terror performed in this North Sinai was led by two things: the government understanding about this group tended more to apply point of view as what Nancy called as politics, in that its understanding was overly organizational.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

On the last 24 November 2017, there recurred a bloody tragedy in Egypt. This time, extremist group attacked in North Sinai region, and ironically, the attack took place in a mosque, Al-Raudha, as the North Sinai people would perform Friday prayer. Dozens of terrorists besieged the mosque, when the sermon was being delivered, they showered the pilgrims with bullets so that 305 people were died, included 27 children and hundreds other were injured (Misrawi, 2017). Other sources stated that the attack began with bomb explosion and by several terrorists. Egypt Public Prosecutor informed that 305 people were killed, included 27 children; 128 people were injured. It seems that there were between 25 and 30 attackers; they raised a flag identified as Daesh (NIIS), although the terrorist group hadn't so far claimed that it was their action (Abu Haniyah, 2017).

As for the assumption arising after the attack was that The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria was the actor. It appeared without any reason, considering this group for several recent years has been quite

actively committed terror in North Sinai. According to The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, within the last one year there have been 130 attacks launched by Daesh in North Sinai region. Between 2013 and 2017, there were 100 soldiers died and around 200 more died in 2017 (Misrawi, 2017). Furthermore, it was not a public secret anymore if Daesh group considered the people in North Sinai region who had Islamic Sufism as their enemy since according to that group they were apostate and infidel.

In referring to the explanation and fact mentioned above, terrorism action in North Sinai (Egypt) was not a new one. The form of attack conducted in an Islamic worship place, a mosque, moreover as the Friday prayer executing was indeed the first, and it had clearly never been expected before by the people over there. One of Muslim scholars in Bir Al-Abed said to New York Times (in Ericson, 2017) that the attack was really surprising the Egyptian as it was not commonly occurred in Egypt. "I don't believe they attacked a mosque," said that scholar.

So far, indeed not all extremist groups attack Islamic worship place. Therefore, it was equity if North Sinai community didn't expect and very shock of it. For example, Al-Qaeda group known as one of extremist groups previously active in conducting attack in Egypt region had never attacked Islamic worship place. Furthermore, this group's attack target was not civilian, but government officers, security guard and other military target (Bar'el, 2017).

Extremism itself could be called as a theology, signed by disbelieving toward other party (al-takfir) and accompanied by murder. This theology keeps growing and spreading without conducting serious deconstruction. Consequently, someone or a group could easily disbelieve anybody who has different opinion, either in one religion or not (Misrawi, 2017). In another article titled 'Moderate Islam' Misrawi (2017) said that global extremism theology groups kept growing, such as Jamaah Islamiyah, Al Qaeda, and NIIS. As for some extremist groups, based on the information obtained from some sources, only NIIS that in several recent years quite active in launching attack in North Sinai region, including the one in Al-Raudah mosque during Friday prayer (14 November 2017). The reason why NIIS has been actively enough to attack North Sinai region, though it was taken place in the mosque, as previously mentioned that the people in North Sinai, the sufism community with their belief, was considered by NIIS as the apostate and infidel; hence their worship place could be claimed as a legitimate place for them to attack. In an interview with magazine on last January, one of NIIS chief commanders in Sinai underlined his hatred on 'tasawuf' (the faith embraced by sufism group). He labeled Rawda, a district where the attack occurred on Friday, as one of three regions dominated by Sufis that were wanted to be "eradicated" by his group (Erickson, 2017).

After some attack actions performed by NIIS Extremism Group in Egypt, especially in North Sinai as described above and started also from either the government complexity or Egypt nation to tame this extremist group; therefore, writers were interested to further review this community. This writing would try to review on how extremism theology (community) emergence especially NIIS and try to search the goal of the group present and how the group's political dynamics and ideology so that their attack object leading to the fellow Muslims, even in their worship places. The review in this writing would apply Post-Foundational

school of thought from Jean Luc Nancy and Saul Newman.

## 2 METHOD

The method used in this study was qualitative by collecting data and writing in the form of analytic and descriptive. Data was obtained and collected by literature reviews that were from some mass media, books and previous documents. This method can assist the researchers in describing and analyzing action, measure, and political ideology conducted by ISIS extremist group in North Sinai, Egypt

## 3 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 The Emergence of ISIS Extremist Group

Understanding the ISIS emergence history, the first to trace was the history and the name of ISIS itself. In Arabic language, ISIS or Islamic State of Iraq and Syria is the translation of Ad-Daulah al-Islamiyah fi al-Iraqwa asy-Syam organization. Associated Press and United States called it as Islamic State in Iraq and The Levant (ISIL). This organization is related to Salafiyah Jihadiyah movement compiling some different elements to fight in Iraq and Syria. In a battlefield, they were separated into many groups. Therefore, itrose an organization name stating a term as Ad-Daulah Al-Islamiyah (Islamic State). This name was also an interesting magnet for many soldiers from many places in the battlefield to declare their loyalty under the big umbrella. In 2006, Zarqawi declared his loyalty to former al-Qaeda leader, Osama bin Laden and asked this organization to be a part of al-Qaeda. It was then, in the similar year, created Mujahidin's Board of Syuro under Abdullah Rashed al-Baghdadi leadership. However, Az-Zarqawi was finally death in the US attack in the middle of 2006 and Daulah Islamiyah leadership switched to Abu Hamza al-Mohajir. It was only four years separated, precisely on 19 April 2010; United States army was succeeded to murder Abu Hamzaal-Mohajir. Finally, Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi was elected as Daulah Iraq Islamiyah leadership substitute (Waid, 2014).

On 29 June 2014, this organization claim itself as the world caliphate. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was known by his supporters as Amirul Mu'minin, Khalifah Ibrahim was appointed as caliph, and this

group replaced its name into ad-Dawlah al-Islāmiyah “Islamic State”. As a “caliphate”, NIIS claimed control on religion, politics, and military of Muslims all over the world. Caliphate concept and “Islamic State” name was rejected by government official and Islamic figures all over the world (wikipedia). Quantitatively, the number of ISIS soldiers in Syria was between 6000 and 7000 persons. While in Iraq, they were between 5000 and 6000 persons. It signed that ISIS existence was truly dangerous since everytime they do their fight by always taking up the arms in the battlefields (Waid, 2014).

### 3.2 A Glance on Post-foundationalism School of Thought

Before further stepping forward to the discussion on how to critically understand ISIS extremism group by applying Post-Foundationalism school of thought, it seems necessary to briefly touch first on how actually the Post-Foundationalism school of thought is. This school of thought presented as a critique to the previous school of thought considered as fixing and universalizing a thinking concept, including a political thinking and thus the result would be considered as a foundation. This school of thought was known as foundationalism school. Merchant (2007) stated that a solid and closed foundation was a characteristic of political thinking map in a modern era. This concept was known as foundationism, in which a foundation or principle in a political thought could not be rejected anymore or immune against revision. Sketchily, this type of Foundationalist school of thought integrated various thinkings, and then they were concluded into one (related to politic, for example) and it was the formulated one universalized goal. The formulation results would be indeed a foundation. In relation to politic, foundationalism made politic as only an arena to equalize a goal to be achieved together (Elyana, 2012).

This Foundationalist school of thought was then criticized by many thinkers joined in Post-Foundationalist school of thought. According to Post-Foundationalist thinkers, the foundation created by Foundationalist thinkers could not be a sturdy basic to see subject (individu/society group) since the subject is dynamic, having instability element; hence, in certain conditions it can keep changing. Post-Foundationalism school considered a foundation should be indwell; however, it should not be in final as first, overly large social arena to be totalized and second, from the beginning, the real

foundation had actually lost the ability to be total as it had conducted both inclusion and exclusion (Elyana, 2012). In other word, Post-Foundationalism school of thought did not totally refuse; however it requested what was called as foundation and what should be removed by foundation to make it stayed firm. In this school of thought, the foundation remained exposed to instability concept (Elyana, 2012).

The other most important thing from this Post-Foundationalist school of thought was that its adherents differentiated between politic (*la politique*) and political (*le politique*). Politics is a conventional politic concept practically struggling in power strategy and conflictual battle as well as trying to look for essence. While political was a metaphor of adjective adhering to collective identity as long as antagonistly grouping with others (Elyana, 2012). However, in addition every role figure had his/her own thinking regarding the difference of politic and political. As for one of post-foundationalism figures having concern and sharp discussion about Politic and Political (in his political difference) was Jean Luc Nancy. It's also Nancy's thought that would be major reference for the writers in reviewing the problem rising in this paper.

### 3.3 How to Understand ISIS Extremist Group using Post-foundationalism Approach

In referring to Post-Foundationalism thought as discussed above, thus in understanding on how the present or founding of the extremism groups, it could not be directly generalized. In other word, it should not comprehend every extremism groups based on the same social religion, politic, economy, and culture condition. As to discern by such generalization, it means implicitly that it has already constructed a foundation and finally this can be fixed. Such comprehension is the foundationalism one. The question will be then, how can one discern the extremism groups, particularly ISIS using post-foundationalism approach?

First, understanding its coming up should be particular and without fixing either the review result or certain expert thoughts regarding ISIS group. Every extremism presence was not right if it was universalized in any concept, including things becoming the causal of their emergence and the groups's volition (the important thing one should comprehend as applying post-foundationalist perspective). For example between Al-Qaeda and ISIS, once we want to find something more precise

on why this group coming up; thus, it should be specifically comprehended. Therefore, it would result in some specific foundation as we talk about every extremism group.

There were actually some opinions as talking about extremist group, specifically ISIS. However, if they were further seen, it could be questioned their accuracy in formulating it. For example, the opinion from Chandler and Gunaratna that after Nine eleven (911) there has been a global terrorisms landscape development. According to them, there have been three important developments within political dynamic and global security post 911. First, ISIS has been regarded as Al-Qaeda transformation. Second, Iraq has been a "Land Of Jihad". Third, Moslem population support in many countries over hatred narration against United States and Western domination over Islamic population (Rijal Khairur, 2015: 47). If these statements were seen with Post-Foundationalism approach, and then mated with the recent reality; thus, it's important to call in doubt about its accuracy and relevance.

The first statement above needs to be reconsidered, as if it's seen from their last action, it showed that the action confirmed if this group has been difficult to be said as the transformation of Al-Qaeda. It is totally different. Al-Qaeda has never even attacked civilian, even less a mosque. However, ISIS group brutally slaughtered Sufism Moslems during Friday prayer in Al-Raudha mosque.

So as the assumption stated that global extremism groups' emergence, including ISIS have been a Moslem population support in many countries, since Islamic people are overly dominated by United States and other Western countries having islamphobia tendency. Because, what recently happened has been contradicted with the assumption. How can be many Islamic countries support action blindly struck other Moslem groups. More precisely, either opinions or thinking results as described above needs to be rechecked before making them as a foundation in understanding extremism groups, especially ISIS.

Second, although there has been a foundation previously considered as very accurate in comprehending the extremist group's emergence and goal; however, in the different era, for example in recent context, the foundation can not be the fix and firm foundation for us to understand. It should be noted in post-foundationalism perspective that subject, in this case extremist group should be considered as thick in instability, dynamic, and continuously changing, since the people inside it

should pass through interaction processes, either directly interact with other parties (primary) or through certain holy books as facilitator (secondary). In other word, the understanding on that thing remained conducting by critical and holistic approach without putting aside the available foundation.

### **3.4 Mistake in Understanding ISIS as an Active Group on Terror in Egypt: A Critique with Frame of Jean-Luc Nancy Thought**

Jean Luc Nancy is one of well known Post-Foundationalism figures with his thought about The Retreat of the Political and population as Community and Society. Nancy in Merchant (2007) saw the recent politic as if shedding. Everything became political and thus the political itself according to him became unavailable. Political had been integrated into the terminology of socio-politic, economy-politic and so on. As political had been integrated with other terminology, the political itself was actually missing its essence. It was this that later to be called by Nancy as either Imanentism or new totalitarianism. Starting from this, then according to Nancy it was needed some re-researching into the essence of political itself, and thus it would deliver the thought about politic and political.

Sketchily, Nancy stated that political was a place in which what was available in the togetherness (being in common) was open to define, while politic was a power game around government representation conflict (Merchant, 2007). In order to be cleare, the writers needed to quote Paul Ricouer's opinion, since Nancy's thought about the two terms lead and coincided with Paul Ricouer's opinion. According to Paul (in Elyana, 2012), political domain was on specific rationality and thus was around review about theory. Specific rationality was philosophy discourse in which politic was deeply studied without merely discussing strategy to gain power. While politic domain was autonomous power or what we knew as practical politic domain, that was then translated by Nancy that political was not merely around technical problems, however it discussed more on human relations living in society.

Nancy's thought has delivered and encouraged the writers to comprehend reality related to the reasons why terror actions from this extremist group can keep continuously take place and why government, especially Egypt government to date hasn't been able to further understand this group, thus they can not stop the attack often taking place

in their country territory. There were two possibilities: first, government understanding to this organization was more on the point of view that was called by Nancy as politic, in that the understanding was overly organizational, considering that group as government enemy trying to have practical politic. In one side, understanding in such way was not a mistake. However, in another side, it seems necessary to look at this group from political point of view, in which the study was so philosophically deep using theories in order to understand the unity of society modus into the group members, how inter-members interaction patterns and how the social process taking place inside it. In this case, it would be certainly needed the role of intellectuals.

The second possibility would be the frequently studies performed about this group from the political point of view and/or dimension, such as in academic world. For example this could be seen from the studies in terms of this problem that could be easily found, moreover in the internet era as this time. However, according to the writers the problems were that these studies were lack of attention or they were made as a basic/material by government to assist them in comprehending and looking for formula to anticipate terror from ISIS group.

Nancy's thought regarding politic and political differences was used to discuss the difference between what he called as society and community. According to him, political is a domain in which community plays its role. "The political is the place where community as such is brought into play (Nancy in Eryana, 2012: 4). It could be further understood that community according to Nancy was a different concept from Communism so called as society that was considered as engineering product over society to create integration unity into one single identity (Eryana, 2012: 8). Community was the rejection form from society as the engineering product to create similarity.

Nancy's thinking regarding society and community was very interesting to be used to see the ISIS group ideology and political dynamic or changing. In the beginning of its present, this group was truly as a container such as described by Nancy that was as a refusal form against a contrived society concept. In this case, the meaning tended to be the state and its system. In the middle of a state system dominated by secular tenet, making the people in states with Islam majority and tend to be fundamentalist made a certain reaction as a rejection and even a resistance against the system making them as society as stated by Nancy.

ISIS itself was founded on 9 April 2013 under Abu Bakar al-Baghdadi (AbuBakrAlBaghdadi was ISIS group leader who was already appointed as Iraq and Syria Islamic State. He came from al-BuBadri tribe inhabiting Samarra and Diyala, Baghdad, Iraq. AbuBakrAlBaghdadi claimed that he was the descent of Prophet Muhammad SAW; therefore, he felt entitled and appropriate to be caliph or Moslem leader all over the world. Through ISIS he led, he wanted to be the only Moslem leader all over the world. Source: Scientific Article from Abdul Waid (ISIS: Islam Struggle and Political System Setback)

leadership as a group or community trying to be a place for Moslems to gather in Iraq and Syria with one of predominant ideologies, Islamic brotherhood, rejecting secular state system hegemony. As it progresses, their activities didn't actually reflect their consistent rejection against the system making them as a unity or trying to agitate them. This community even then came up as a new system forming wanting to take part in making the community as one similarity known as Khalifah Islamiyah that they massively declared. It could be minimally occurred in certain territory scope covering Libya, Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Lebanon and several other countries in Middle East (Waid, 2014). In terms of community, this tried to turn every individual into society, but not presenting community concept in the middle of individual diversity such as the dreaming of Jean Luc Nancy.

This case was basically similar to the dynamic taken place among groups having communism ideology foundation, that was initially considered as an ideal government method in which a society could live together side by side without solicitudes since every citizen had similar rights and obligation. However, the one that subsequently developed was communism comprehended as a way to equalize perception in terms of ideal society concept. Finally, the real communism comprehension was a way of living together turning into an understanding in creating equality in the society (Merchant, 2007; Elyana, 2012).

The group face having communism foundation was directly proportional with the one of recent ISIS extremist group. They didn't glorify any longer on how to live together, though there was difference. However, they imposed differences in order to be similar as they expected. The extreme thing was that they glorified and legitimated assault, murder and demolition to other communities, although they have a very similarity with them, for example religion. Such community was not the one dreamed

and expected by Nancy, since the community dreamed by Nancy was the one in which singular being could expose each of their identity and thus it created alterity comprehension (Merchant, 2007).

### 3.5 Critically Probing the Attack Object of ISIS Group

Starting from the attack at Al-Raudha mosque in North Sinai in which it killed 305 people; hence, it could be said that from the time being they way civilian and government in understanding NIIS group have remained confined with prevalent one or based on the previous experiences. They were not aware of dynamization and thus its instability became the subject. This could be seen as the citizens and government of Egypt didn't have presupposition altogether if this group would attack the worship place.

It was one of examples resulted from understanding based on fixed foundation. The foundation was the previous experiences and they considered that the most brutal actions by extremist group including ISIS would not be audacious to attack Allah's house, moreover other extremist groups such as Al-Qaeda has never, throughout history, attack a mosque. However, the fact is that this understanding has been proved as could not be always used to discern ISIS extremist group, since they could use any object to be attacked when they have already passed through some certain processes with result of legitimate to do according to their point of view.

Subject, in this case was ISIS group (either the chief or its members) everytime passing interaction process with other individual/group or with holy books and everything related to their faith; hence, it was through the social interaction process, making subject instability condition emerge. At last, by the existence of such dynamics, it had implication of allowing the predictable ones into impossible. The example was the attack to Al-Raudha mosque in North Sinai on the last 14 November 2017. It was the dynamic or process that according to the writers as to be the explicitly important message to be passed on by Post-Foundationalism school of thought followers.

The incident was indeed the prove of the post-foundationalism comprehension importance to figure out everything related to the subjects (individual, group or population), always asking and being critical to certain political group would be very principal according to post-foundationalism school of thought. The writers envisaged whether the

government there tried to be more specifically and deeply understand this group, as one of Nancy's suggestion that was being more critical and frequently performing continuous review related to their modes in merging within the community, so that it would be more precisely predicted on their goals and attack targets, in which it would not be as practical and easy as generally understood. The government could ask scientists such as philosophers and political science experts to review this group using more critical approaches, the writers thought that it would provide enlightenment related to the extremist group's political ideology or strategy.

## 4 CONCLUSION

Since 2013, ISIS extremist group has been extremely intense to attack Egypt, particularly North Sinai region. However in the end of 2017, there has been a changing in the pattern and target attack executed by this group. For the first time, they attacked a mosque directly targeting Moslems who were performing Friday prayer. It was the one that was then drawing attention many parties and public. The horrendous event in the end of 2017 at once showed incoherence among parties in comprehensively understanding ISIS group. Many parties including Egypt government were not successful even not ready at all toward such patterning attack. In addition, in fact until now the condition in Egypt hasn't showed successful signs in overcoming various terror actions frequently occurred there that sacrificed many victims, included civilian. The fact is that the recent condition in Egypt itself hasn't shown any improvement in dampen various terrors often occurred there that ravaged many victims, including civilians.

Reviews on ISIS group have often been performed; however, the reviews trying to critically read the ideology, interest, or action have seldom been found out. This writing, therefore, accommodated review on ISIS group particularly the terror action they conducted in Egypt. This review applied Post-Foundationalism having thinking characteristic and tradition tending to be more critical in understanding various problems. The result showed two important things needed to be emphasized when understanding ISIS group using Post-Foundationalism approach, they were: first in understanding its emergence, it should be particular and not to fixing with the review result or thought

from certain expert toward ISIS group, since such perspective finally showed inaccuracy and incoherence in mapping ideology, goal or political dynamic of this group. Second, in either understanding or comprehending this group, though it could not be denied involving a foundation as having source from either ISIS group establishment history or previous reviews trying to probe its ideology; however, it should never make all of them as a sturdy and immune basic or foundation for improvements. As ISIS group was positioned as subject of terrors in Egypt; hence, it's important to understand that in post-foundationalism view subject is the item full of instability, dynamic since they are as a subject that certainly passed through either process or interaction, both primary and secondary.

Moreover, if started from the thought of Jean Luc Nancy in studying on how terror actions from ISIS group in Egypt could continuously take place, it could also be a result of two things. First, the government understanding on this group tended to use the point of view as what was called by Nancy as politics, in which its understanding was overly conventional, considering this group as only the government opposition trying to do practical politics. Second, in spite of frequently performing studies on ISIS group by prioritizing more political point of view; however, they obtained less attention or they could not be used as consideration by government to assist them in understanding and looking for formula to anticipate ISIS group terror actions.

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