Should Malaysia Take Back Daesh Returnees?

The ongoing assault on **Daesh's** last bastion in **Baghouz** by **Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)** has displaced thousands of people, especially Daesh foreign fighters. These fighters might seek avenues to return to their countries of origin. **Malaysia** should decide whether taking back its nationals is in her national interest or not.
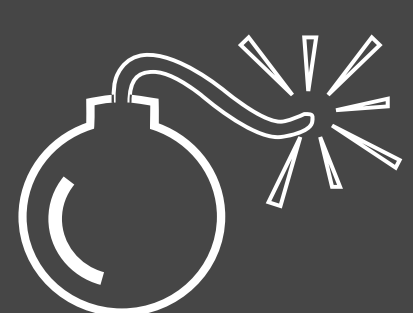
Involvement of Malaysians in Daesh

Syria

Iraq

102 Malaysians have migrated to Daesh territory in Syria and Iraq

40 Malaysians have been killed

51 Malaysians remain in the region, including 17 children

13 reportedly wish to return to Malaysia

11 have returned to Malaysia

457 suspected militants have been arrested in Malaysia since 2013

24 terrorist plots have been thwarted

One successful attack was executed in Puchong

Malaysia

Source: *BenarNews, New Straits Times*

What happens to Baghouz refugees?

Al-Hol Camp — Refugees of the assault have flocked into al-Hol camp in eastern Syria, an overcrowded camp with over 62,000 people

Women and Children — Over 90 percent of new arrivals are women and children. At least 100 people, mostly children, have died en route or upon arrival

Resource and Disease — There is not enough food, medicine and tents for everyone. The risk of infectious disease is also high

Conflict — Infighting is reportedly common between displaced Syrians/Iraqis and foreign nationals. The latter reportedly remain loyal to Daesh

Source: *The Star*

The refugees' arrival at camps like **al-Hol** does not necessarily signify a renouncement of **Daesh's** radical ideology. In fact, their loyalty to the false caliphate might persist even after **Baghouz** is captured by the **SDF**.

President Trump had earlier called for European countries to take back and put to trial over 800 **Daesh** foreign fighters captured in **Syria**. This call was met with a lukewarm response.

Opinions vary

"We are trying to bring them home. But, you know, the situation is difficult as it involves many parties from different countries"

DATUK AYOB KHAN MYDIN PITCHAY
HEAD OF COUNTER-TERRORISM DIVISION, RMP

"For the future, I wish to return to Italy to my family and friends, to get out of this dream"

MOUNSEF AL-MKHAYAR, A RETURNEE HOPEFUL

"I don't care about the possibility that she would be detained. I just want her home and to see my grandsons"

FATHER OF A MALAYSIAN WHO FLED TO AL-HOL CAMP

"I am willing to go back to the UK, settle down again and rehabilitate"

SHAMIMA BEGUM, A RETURNEE HOPEFUL

Source: *BenarNews, The Epoch Times, BBC News*

Should we take them back?

✓ YES

- Domestic extremists would be discouraged from staging a retaliation against the country

- The returnees' families would be less likely to develop a sense of resentment towards the state

- Daesh's claims for legitimacy would be dampened

- The constitutional rights of these Malaysian nationals must be met

- Returnees could become possible sources of intelligence for Malaysia's security agencies

✗ NO

- Returnees could become additional security risks to Malaysia's security landscape

- Constant monitoring and deradicalisation programmes for returnees drain state resources

- By moving to Syria and Iraq, returnees had forsaken their national allegiance

- The society needs to be properly informed and educated on ways to interact with returnees, which requires an immense work
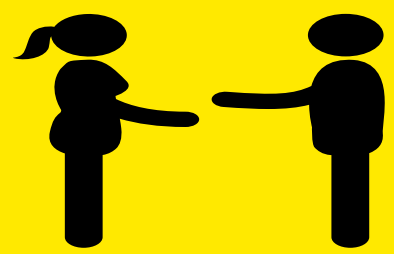
What is Malaysia's policy on returnees?

Multi-party cooperation to bring returnees home

Detainment of certain individuals

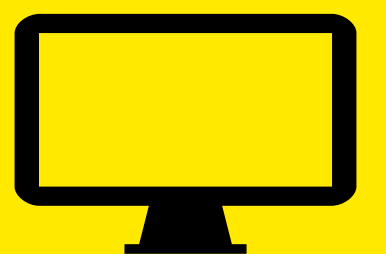Individuals found to be involved in Daesh activities are put to trial

Screening process that involves an evaluation of ideology, reason for joining Daesh and degree of involvement in Daesh's activities

Enrolment into a one-month rehabilitation programme by the government

Reintegration and constant monitoring

Source: *New Straits Times*

Lingering questions

Is our deradicalisation module able to address female and children militants?

Are we equipped to take in returnees from other countries too?

Is the public ready to accept the reintegration of returnees into the society?

Prepared by:
Muhammad Sinatra
Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia
14 March 2019

For inquiries, please contact: sinatra@isis.org.my - Pictures obtained from Google Image