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ISLAMIST VIOLENCE IN MALAYSIA: REFLECTIONS FROM THE PRE-GWOT ERA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE MEMALI AND AL-MAU'NAH CASES

Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid

ABSTRACT

Before the advent of the Global War on Terror (GWOT), Islamist violence in Malaysia was very much the exception rather than the rule. This article chronicles two cases of actual violence that pitted Islamists and the Malaysian state, in spite of the latter harbouring its own vision of a modern Islamic polity to the extent of proclaiming itself an Islamic state. Based on the accounts presented, this article posits the existence of an ideological thread that runs through paroxysms of Islamist violence in Malaysia, notwithstanding claims of the presence of various social, political and psychological factors that purportedly influence militants into translating their violent extremist dispositions into real instances of terrorism. This ideology is one of hate of established authorities seen to have betrayed Islam despite the Muslim-led government's claims to the contrary. This line of thinking goads its subscribers to behave aggressively towards the 'enemy,' of which are both non-Muslims and Muslims who have allegedly renounced their faith. Its reasoning is specifically 'Islamist,' referring to a politically arbitrary interpretation of Islam, rather than 'Islamic' as per the religion of Islam as interrogated through its multi-faceted dimensions. The violent extremist narrative, it is argued, has remained consistent from the Memali through to the Al-Ma'unah outbursts of violence, right up to terror-related happenings by Al-Qaeda and Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) supporters if not by outright members themselves, irrespective of the particular schools of thought adhered to by the perpetrators of terrorism.

Keywords: Islamist violence, jihad, Malaysia, Memali, Al-Ma'unah, Amanat Haji Hadi, PAS

1. INTRODUCTION

Prior to the Global War on Terror (GWOT) era, as sparked off by the suicidal terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre (WTC) in New York and the Pentagon in the United States of America (USA) on 11th September 2001 (hereafter '9-11'), extremist violence in Malaysia has been relatively rare. The only nationwide armed rebellion that the Malaysian state had had to contend with was instigated by the Communist Party of Malaya, from 1948 until 1989. Apart from the communists, the machinations

of other militant groups were far from reflecting systematic attempts at organised insurrections bearing any realistic hope of success (Ruhanas 2011). They were no match for Malaysia's originally British-trained Special Branch unit within the Royal Malaysian Police (RMP), well-known for efficient infiltration methods to neutralise not only militants but also criminal gangs and religious deviants.

9-11, the USA-declared GWOT and its subsequent incursions into Muslim lands in Afghanistan and Iraq dramatically changed the scenario. Traditional or old terrorism, typically comprising armed secessionists fighting for specific causes within limited geographical-cum-ideological boundaries, gave way to post-modern or new terrorism, which is distinguished by its transnational perpetrators' ability to exploit sophisticated advances in information and communications technology (ICT) and economic globalisation to their own advantage, while simultaneously adopting fairly pre-modern orientations such as amorphous millenarianism and heartless brutality as carried out by the Al-Qaeda and Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) international terrorist networks (Tan 2003: 86-88). The emergence of new terrorism in Southeast Asia, as manifested for instance in large-scale *jihadi* bombings in Indonesia, was a wake-up call for Southeast Asian governments, many of which were complacent all this while. Their false sense of security was generated by consecutively high rates of economic growth, a stout policy of non-interference in the affairs of fellow Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) members' affairs, and pre-mature over-confidence in the capacity of Asian values to inculcate a shared vision of regional harmony (Martin Jones and Lawrence Smith 2003: 143-147).

In August 2001, Malaysians were awakened by the discovery of revolutionary cells run by the *Mujahidin* Group of Malaysia (KMM: *Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia*, or *Kumpulan Militan Malaysia* as sensationalised by the media), followed by a crackdown on Malaysian cells of the *Jamaah Islamiah* (JI). Both KMM and JI, in turn, allegedly operated links with Al-Qaeda via the 'Afghan connection' of former fighters who battled against Soviet Union troops during its occupation of Afghanistan (Ramakrishna 2005: 354-359, Sariburaja 2013: 43). The government's sense of urgency was heightened by revelations that the USA maintained a close interest on the terrorist threat emanating from Southeast Asia (Economist 2002), even including Malaysian groups in its list of undesirable terrorists (Bernama 2003). By 2014, when

ISIS temporarily eclipsed Al-Qaeda as the most dangerous and powerful Islamist terrorist group as gauged from its extensive territorial control, news of Malay-Muslim youngsters fighting for the ISIS caliphate in Syria to the extent of becoming suicide bombers, began trickling in. Through social media accounts, some of their exploits were aired in real time (cf. *Syriana Analysis* 2018).

Strongly believing in multilateral cooperation in GWOT, Malaysia has since 2003 hosted the Southeast Asian Regional Centre for Counter-Terrorism (SEARCCT), which actively organises seminars and workshops on countering violent extremism (CVE). Malaysia has initiated anti-terrorist measures which focus on identifying and addressing the deep-seated causes of terrorism, rather than relying on military strikes against suspected terrorists and countries accused of harbouring terrorism (Humphreys 2010). Malaysia's close collaborators in CVE have included developed countries such as the USA, UK and Australia (Kementerian Dalam Negeri 2016). While remote, there always exists the risk that the West might interfere in the domestic affairs of small countries like Malaysia should its anti-terrorist defence mechanisms prove ineffectual. In 2019, for instance, half-way into his second stint as Prime Minister since May 2018, Dr Mahathir Mohamad hinted at foreign interference in Malaysian banks' decision to close accounts of Iranians in the country (Lee and Ananthakshmi 2019), despite Malaysia maintaining close links with Iran which is accused by the West of funnelling close to a billion dollars of funds every year to its regional proxies such as the Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Houthi rebels in Yemen. A report released by the USA State Department in the wake of the October 2019 killing of ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi confirms that to the USA, Iran remains the top state sponsor of terrorism (Reuters 2019).

This article chronicles two violent uprisings attempted by Islamists of the pre-GWOT era, viz. the Memali incident of November 1985 and the Al-Ma'unah affair of July 2000. Doctrinal ramifications of both plots, it will be argued, have survived their tangible defeats by the security forces. Both the Memali and Al-Ma'unah rebels were identified by the Home Ministry as having been among thirteen groups that had planned an unconstitutional and radical takeover of the country (Mohd Mizan 2017a).

2. THE *KAFIR-MENKAFIR* DOCTRINE AND THE MEMALI INCIDENT (NOVEMBER 1985)

Kafir-mengkafir refers to the trading of accusations of one another's infidelity between different groups of Malay-Muslims, each holding adamantly to its own conception of the Islamic faith. In Malaysian politics, the conflicting parties involved were the Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS: *Parti Islam SeMalaysia*) and the United Malays' National Organisation (UMNO). The issue had its beginnings in PAS's animosity towards UMNO's cooperation with the overwhelmingly non-Muslim Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), in the governing *Perikatan* (Alliance) coalition (1952-73). By forming a multi-religious administration, UMNO was alleged to have been committing the forbidden act of appointing non-Muslim leaders to rule over Muslims. Such a stance had arisen as early as November 1963, when three Kelantan PAS preachers, viz. Haji Omar Daud, Haji Daud Othman and Haji Mohd Nor Abdullah were detained without trial under the Internal Security Act (ISA), followed by nine more individuals including three PAS state assemblymen in February 1964 (Mustafa 2013: 62-64). *Kafir-mengkafir* was however temporarily suspended during PAS's brief stint in the ruling *Barisan Nasional* (BN: National Front) coalition (1973-77) (Kamarulnizam 1999: 268).

Kafir-mengkafir resurfaced in line with the exertion of influence of the Middle Eastern-influenced Young Turks in PAS, culminating in 1982 with the deposition of Mohamad Asri Muda from PAS's presidency. PAS's *takfiri* disposition re-appeared in November 1979, when Mustapha Abu Bakar, Deputy Chairman of PAS's Commissioner Committee of Kelantan (1979-81), labeled UMNO members as apostates during a lecture in Ulu Besut, Terengganu. As such, UMNO members were allegedly unfit to lead congregational prayers, unqualified to slaughter livestock for consumption and incapable of solemnising marriages. The religious acts, if continued to be led by UMNO members, were pronounced to be null and void. For example, a marriage formalised by an UMNO *imam* (head of congregation) was deemed to be illegal, such that any offspring produced from the union was deemed illegitimate. Mustapha was eventually convicted in the *syariah* court for delivering a religious lecture and issuing a *fatwa* (religious edict) without *tauliah* (formal letter of authority) (Kamarul zaman 2004: 381-382).

Unperturbed by the court ruling, in September 1980, PAS's *Ulama* Council published a book, *Islam dan Politik: Hasil Kajian Ilmiah Ulama PAS* (Islam and Politics: Results of Scholarly Research by PAS's *Ulama*), which declared as apostates Muslims who condoned the separation of religion from politics and those who rejected God's laws in preference for man-made laws (Kamarul zaman 2004: 383). *Kafir-mengkafir* was crystallised as a national issue by the controversial speech delivered in April 1981 by Haji Abdul Hadi Awang, then PAS State Commissioner for Terengganu and PAS President since September 2003, in Banggol Peradong, Terengganu. This speech, infamously called *Amanat Haji Hadi*, outlined three major principles which governed PAS's fight against UMNO. First, PAS opposed UMNO and BN not because their names were as such, but because they had retained the colonial or infidel constitution that they inherited. Second, since the struggle, speeches and financial contribution of PAS members were all *jihad* (holy war), their deaths in the course of fighting UMNO members were as honourable martyrs. Third, one need not officially convert to other religions to become a *kafir*, instead, one could be thrown into infidelity by simply separating between religion and politics (Kamarul zaman 2004: 385).

The impact of *Amanat Haji Hadi* was to polarise Malay society into PAS and UMNO camps. The situation was particularly acute in the rural Malay heartlands of Terengganu and Kelantan. Families broke up, marriages were dissolved, religious feasts were boycotted, annual *zakat* (almsgiving) were paid not through official channels, and rival congregations simultaneously offered the same prayers in mosques (Mingguan Malaysia 1999, Kamarulnizam 2003: 193-194). Burgeoning audiences at PAS-organised lectures prompted the government to increase security measures against it. Following detentions under the ISA of three PAS Youth leaders, viz. Abu Bakar Chik, Bunyamin Yaakob and Muhammad Sabu, and amidst rumours that PAS members were preparing themselves for a military *jihad*, a ban was imposed in August 1984 on PAS gatherings in its four stronghold states (FEER 1984a). In his 1984 National Day address, Dr. Mahathir harped upon the theme of groups aiming to forcibly establish a "government by mullahs" and on another occasion, claimed to have seen evidence of PAS's plans of setting up 'suicide squads' for whom "*the shedding of UMNO blood [wa]s halal*" (FEER 1984b). A live television debate, scheduled for 11th November 1984, would have pitted three

UMNO leaders against three PAS stalwarts on the *kafir-mengkafir* issue, but was eventually cancelled by the intervention of the *Yang diPertuan Agong* (king) (FEER 1984c). Following this, the government issued a White Paper entitled *The Threat to Muslim Unity and National Security*, which implicated PAS members in the subversive activities of extremist Islamist groups, and created the spectre of the communists manipulating PAS-inspired rifts to achieve their anti-democratic aims (Kamarulnizam 2003: 195-196, Gunn 1986: 40).

In 1985, two bloody incidents astounded PAS members and the public alike into realising how far the government was prepared to resort to physical repression. Firstly, a PAS supporter was killed when UMNO-paid thugs attacked a PAS pre-by-election gathering in Lubok Merbau, Kedah. PAS's legal advisor, Suhaimi Said, who wrote a pamphlet disclosing the event was consequently held under the ISA and expelled to district confinement (Jomo and Ahmad Shabery 1988: 862, Kamarulnizam 2003: 194). On 19th November, in the rural village of Memali near Baling, Kedah, police stormed upon a community of inadequately armed PAS villagers resisting the arrest of their leader, Ibrahim Mahmood aka Ibrahim Libya, who was accused of abusing Islam and inciting rebellion against the state. In the ensuing showdown, four policemen and fourteen villagers including Ibrahim lost their lives. Notwithstanding the heavy casualties on his side and their manifest ill-preparedness for armed combat, Ibrahim's followers were alleged to have started hostilities by threatening and behaving aggressively towards the police (Kamarulnizam 2003: 196-198, Government of Malaysia 1986: 11, 21). The official version of events traced the police operations, including previously abortive ones, to provocative preparations made by Ibrahim Libya to topple the government by force, via the setting up of a clandestine Islamic Revolutionary Movement that drew inspiration from similar movements in the Middle East (Government of Malaysia 1986: 12).

The polemic surrounding events of the 'Memali tragedy' has never really ended. The official explanation of the 'Memali tragedy' directly linked the violence with *Amanat Haji Hadi's* advocacy of militant *jihad* (holy war) against UMNO members (Government of Malaysia 1986: 5-6, appendix "B"; JAKIM 2002: 7, 24-30). Physical confrontation against the state was said to be passionately pursued by the PAS

members, who earnestly believed they were fighting an infidel government. Although the resort towards violence may have been Ibrahim Libya's personal instruction under intense pressure rather than an execution of party policy, its connection to *kafir-mengkafir* was arguably more than accidental. The recorded confession of Muhamad Yusof Husin, a PAS activist detained following the Memali violence, has been the government's favourite evidence (Government of Malaysia 1986: 3, 5-6, 13-15, 17, 19). PAS, on the other hand, has been consistently commemorating the day of the Memali tragedy as 'Martyrdom Day'. It has openly declared disagreement with the official *fatwa* that Ibrahim Libya and his companions who perished in Memali were treacherous rebels (*bughah*) rather than martyrs, claiming that Muhamad Yusof Husin's confession following the tragedy was extracted under torture (PAS 2002: viii, 18, 41-45).

Since the Memali tragedy, PAS has never really retracted from its position of defending the contents and implications of *Amanat Haji Hadi*. This intransigence has been ascribed to the heavy influence among PAS leaders of Middle Eastern Islamist trends, which, under incessant state repression, have developed strong *takfiri* tendencies which excommunicate fellow Muslims who are willing to compromise with unIslamic rulership (Ayubi 1991: 125-126, Astora 1999). Despite embracing such extreme positions, PAS registered massive gains in the November 1999 general elections by capitalising on the *Reformasi* euphoria engulfing the Malays, still disgruntled at the government's humiliating treatment of Anwar Ibrahim, whom Dr. Mahathir sacked as Deputy Prime Minister and Deputy President of UMNO in September 1998. For the first time, PAS led the opposition bloc in Parliament. At the state level, PAS retained Kelantan, captured Terengganu, and made significant inroads into Kedah, Perlis, Pahang, Perak and Selangor.

Faced with PAS's resurgent influence among upwardly mobile young Malays (Suh and Oorjitham 2000), UMNO's legitimacy as the prime representative of the Malays was called into question. PAS was put on the defensive for failing to disavow *Amanat Haji Hadi*, which bore blame for creating fissures within the Malay community with its *kafir-mengkafir* implications. While PAS claimed that there was never any clear-cut promulgation of *Amanat Haji Hadi's* deviation from Islamic teachings, the state Islamic officialdom insisted otherwise (Utusan Malaysia 2000d, Wan Zahidi 2003: 36-

54). In response, PAS tried instead to divorce *Amanat Haji Hadi* from *kafir-mengkafir* in its essence. For instance, PAS's *Mursyid al-'Am* (General Guide)-cum-Chief Minister of Kelantan, Nik Aziz Nik Mat, insisted that the PAS leadership had never adopted as policy the practice of *kafir-mengkafir*, which was instead popularised by extremist camps within the party (Utusan Malaysia 1999). Haji Hadi Awang, in 1999 as PAS Deputy President and Chief Minister of Terengganu, pleaded that *Amanat Haji Hadi* not be cited in parts and interpreted taken out of context. He claimed that *Amanat Haji Hadi* read as a whole had merely outlined the boundaries separating between faith and unbelief, without pin-pointing any group or individual deemed to have gone out of the fold of Islam (Abdul Hadi 2000). Haji Hadi further claimed that his speech was manipulated by PAS's machinery who, despite once ardently presenting *Amanat Haji Hadi* as lucid evidence of UMNO's infidelity, had now themselves joined UMNO (Utusan Malaysia 2001a, Abdul Hadi 2018). Fadzil Noor, PAS President from 1989 until his death in 2002, dismissed the *Amanat Haji Hadi* brouhaha played up by UMNO as at best a non-issue (Utusan Malaysia 2001c).

The bottom line appeared to be that to PAS, *Amanat Haji Hadi* was somehow Islamically justifiable and absolvable of allegations of bringing about Malay disunity. Public calls upon PAS leaders to repudiate *Amanat Haji Hadi* have thus fallen on deaf ears regardless of numerous party leadership changes (Utusan Malaysia 2001b). This gloomy state of affairs has remained even until recent times after the signing of the so-called *Muafakat Nasional* (National Cooperation) charter between UMNO and PAS in September 2019, that apparently ended decades of bitter intra-Malay feuding (M Hifzuddin, Siti Nur Mas and Noorazura 2019). A *muzakarah* (discussion) session to resolve the UMNO-PAS dispute pertaining to *Amanat Haji Hadi* and revolving issues of Malay unity, has yet to materialise despite both parties assuming the role of opposition parties since May 2018 against the new *Pakatan Harapan* (PH: Pact of Hope) federal government.

3. THE AL-MA'UNAH REBELLION (JULY 2000)

The Al-Ma'unah affair started dramatically with an arms heist by members of a hitherto obscure Al-Ma'unah movement on an army post and camp in the rustic district of Grik, Perak, during the wee hours of 2nd July 2000. The whole nation was

initially stunned by the efficiency and magnitude of the operation, which exposed serious loopholes in security procedures at army bases. Dangerous weapons in huge quantities were transported via three four-wheel drive vehicles to the jungles of Bukit Jenalik near the small town of Sauk. There, the rebels allegedly engaged in military training as preparations for an uprising to install an Islamic government by force of arms. During negotiations with the security forces, among the demands of Al-Ma'unah leader Mohd. Amin Mohd. Razali were the resignation of the Prime Minister, his replacement with an Islamic scholar, the overthrow of the presently tyrannical government and the implementation of Islamic law (Zabidi 2003: 257-258, 286-287).

By the time Al-Ma'unah eventually surrendered on the evening of 6th July, one rebel and two members of the security forces who had been held hostage within the rebels' jungle sanctuary, had lost their lives (Utusan Malaysia 2000a). Significantly, the two murder victims, Trooper Mathew and Corporal Sagadevan, were non-Muslims. Outside the jungles, Al-Ma'unah members also launched attacks, albeit in vain, to damage what they perceived as abominable non-Muslim symbols such as the Hindu temple in Batu Caves, and multinational breweries around industrial estates in Selangor (Zabidi 2003: 236, 239, 245, 250). The attacks were supposedly meant to create chaos and ignite a rebellious climate around areas near Kuala Lumpur (Utusan Malaysia 2000c). Consequently, Al-Ma'unah members around the country were rounded up and interrogated; some were eventually detained under the ISA, as had their comrades who had based themselves in Bukit Jenalik. These nineteen insurgents were later tried in the high court and found guilty under section 121 of the Penal Code of waging war against the *Yang diPertuan Agong* – the first ever usage of this law. The three main Al-Ma'unah leaders, viz. Mohd. Amin Mohd. Razali, Zahit Muslim and Jamaludin Darus, received the death penalty, while their sixteen accomplices were sentenced to life imprisonment (Anwar 2001). Later, Jemari Jusoh, one of the sixteen initially handed the life sentence, was meted out the death penalty for actively taking part in the slaying of Trooper Mathew (Utusan Malaysia 2003).

According to an account of the Al-Ma'unah saga written by Zabidi Mohamed (2003), the defence counsel for two leading Al-Ma'unah insurgents Zahit Muslim and

Jamaludin Darus, many of the Al-Ma'unah rebels were unknowing victims of their leader, Mohd. Amin Mohd. Razali (hereafter 'Amin'). Having hardly any intention of rebelling against the state, they had been at Bukit Jenalik as participants of Al-Ma'unah's regular courses on spirituality. The arms heist and consequent shooting practice in the jungles were thought to be a joint training session fully condoned by the military. By the time they realised that Amin was fighting a real physical war, they had grown too fearful of the severe punishment as threatened by Amin, should they be caught trying to escape. Furthermore, they were unsure as to who among them were or were not Amin loyalists. They also suffered from the delusion that Amin possessed the mystical capacity of foretelling any bad intentions harboured against him, that might be lurking in the minds and hearts of his followers.

The founding of Al-Ma'unah was attributed to Amin's fascination with the Malay martial arts, *silat*, which he combined with occultism and theosophical interpretations of Islam. He claimed to have inherited his *silat* abilities from the Indonesian *guru* of Al-Ma'unah – an Indonesian namesake known to have conducted joint-training with Indonesia's military the *Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia* (ABRI) (Zabidi 2003: 102). Following the eruption of the Al-Ma'unah affair, Amin was disowned by his Indonesian *guru*, Ibnu Abbas, who all along professed loyalty to the Indonesian national precept of *Pancasila* (Zabidi 2003: 135-143). Amin imported the name 'Al-Ma'unah' from Indonesia but refashioned its Malaysian version into a movement he totally controlled. As news spread of Amin's supernatural abilities and willingness to bequeath knowledge of his 'inner energy' via devoted spiritual exercises, his followers increased in number. In April 1999, Al-Ma'unah was legally registered with Amin as President and Zahit Muslim as Deputy President. Its activities were advertised in Malay magazines, in *Harakah* – PAS's official mouthpiece, and via a website. Al-Ma'unah became briefly well-known for its successful practice of traditional healing and free services offered at its clinics. By July 2000, Al-Ma'unah's membership had grown to 1700, comprising of aficionados of *silat* and traditional medicinal techniques from all over the country and Brunei (Utusan Malaysia 2000b).

Notwithstanding Amin's charisma at the young age of 30, it still perplexes readers of Zabidi's account of Al-Ma'unah that Amin's rebellious instincts could have escaped the attention of his followers until their impending apprehension by the authorities. At

certain times during the various Al-Ma'unah spiritual courses, he did not conceal his abhorrence of Malaysian government then for its neglect of Islamic law. Whilst portraying himself as intensely spiritual, his references when lecturing on the obligation of *jihad* were to the crises in Bosnia, Chechnya, Afghanistan and Ambon. He was overheard expressing the intention to send his followers abroad to fight enemies who were tyrannising Muslims (Zabidi 2003: 78, 102). His background as a former military spy notwithstanding, Amin proudly admitted that he was an adolescent student at Ibrahim Libya's *madrashah* (religious school) during the very moment when the police raided Memali in November 1985. Only after the killings at Bukit Jenalik did Amin's followers realise his intent of avenging the 'cruelty' perpetrated by the authorities on the Memali insurgents (Zabidi 2003: 292).

Towards the end of his account, Zabidi reveals his shock at having discovered, through frank conversations with two convicted Al-Ma'unah members in prison, that they had indeed advocated Amin's rebellious plot in early July 2000, without exhibiting any remorse for the violence perpetrated at Bukit Jenalik (Zabidi Mohamed 2003: 307-324). Their personal confessions tally with the official version of events presented by the police and the prosecutors: that all the Al-Ma'unah rebels had purposely and knowingly participated in a military *jihad* designed to overthrow the government by militant force (Utusan Malaysia 2001e). In the wake of the discovery of KMM cells in August 2001, Deputy Interior Minister Zainal Abidin Zin asserted that there existed continuity between the Memali incident in 1985 and the establishment of KMM, and in turn, between KMM and Al-Ma'unah (Utusan Malaysia 2001d). Sharing the same modus operandi with Al-Ma'unah's plots to bomb multi-national breweries and Hindu temples (Zabidi 2003: 234), KMM was accused to have conspired to launch attacks on a police station and non-Muslim religious sites, and to have assassinated Dr. Joe Fernandez, a Kedah BN state legislative assembly member notorious for his evangelising activities among Malay-Muslim youth. KMM's struggle allegedly dovetailed with its larger objectives of maintaining and protecting PAS's Islamic state agenda (Kamarulnizam 2005: 39-42). Prime Minister Dr Mahathir pointed out that most of the Al-Ma'unah rebels had at any one time been PAS members (Ahmad Zaini and Hassan 2000). UMNO Secretary-General Khalil Yaakob further linked the Al-Ma'unah rebellion to a PAS-style militancy which had derived inspiration directly from *Amanat Haji Hadi* (Utusan Malaysia 2000e).

4. LESSONS AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

Not a few researchers have pointed out the centrality of the ideological role of *salafi-jihadism* - product of an unholy marriage between the Saudi Arabian-originated Wahhabism and *jihadist* activism that prioritises physical fighting in defending Islam as exemplified in the heroics of foreign fighters who poured into Afghanistan from 1979 to 1989 to defeat the Soviet invaders (cf. Ramakrishna 2016: 503-505, Mubarak and Ahmad Fauzi 2018, Ahmad 2019). The dominance of *salafi-jihadism* as the ideological driver of terrorism in Malaysia is confirmed by police interrogations of detained terrorists and would-be terrorists whose destructive plots were foiled by E8 – RMP's elite counter-terrorism unit within its Special Branch, with whom the present author has had the privilege of cooperating in identifying evidence and providing expert testimonies (Ahmad 2017: 44-45, Ayob Khan 2019).

However, the author would like to emphasise here that the many Malay-Muslim youths who were beguiled by KMM, JI and ISIS's propaganda were not necessarily Salafists even if they might have been Salafised or at least indoctrinated by murkier and Manichean aspects of the Salafi doctrine. They may have just been wayward youths in search of salvation often after having committed grave sins, or even traditional Sunnis who became enchanted with the fighting aspects of *salafi-jihadism*. Such fascination, cultivated over some time usually via social media, grew parallel with their immature frustration over the Muslim leaders' alleged lack of will and courage to defend their co-religionists who were being victimised by the infidel forces of both Western powers and apostate Muslim states such as the post-Saddam Hussein Shi'ite-dominated government of Iraq. Thus, Lotfi Ariffin, the PAS-linked *madrasah* teacher who perished in Syria in September 2014, who was featured in the "Moderate Rebels" of Idlib' video (Syriana Analysis 2018) and whose *madrasah* was later featured in a *New York Times* documentary (New York Times 2015), had in actual fact neither joined ISIS nor its Al-Qaeda-linked rival *Jabhat al-Nusra* (Nusra Front) (Ahmad 2016: 109). The favourite *jihad* manual of Malaysian jihadists, *Tarbiyah Jihadiyah*, was written by Al-Qaeda's true founder-cum-Osama bin Laden's mentor Abdullah Azzam (1941-1989), who is described by two researchers once involved in the Home Ministry's deradicalisation programmes as a righteous Sunni rather than one influenced by Salafi Wahhabism (Mohd Hizam and Zamihan 2017: 58).

Yet, excerpts from *Tarbiyah Jihadiyah* are alarming enough to the authorities to be used as evidence to prosecute terrorists. For example, Abdullah Azzam (2013: 63-64, 67) is supposed to have taught his followers, as quoted verbatim from the Indonesian language version of *Tarbiyah Jihadiyah*:

Semua fuqaha' mendefinisikan bahwa Al-Jihad adalah memerangi orang-orang kafir dengan senjata sampai mereka taslim (memeluk agama Islam) atau membayar jizyah dengan rasa patuh sedang mereka dalam keadaan hina. Tidak ada lagi tempat untuk menakwilkan makna jihad dalam pengertian lain, seperti berjihad dengan pena, berperang melawan hawa nafsu, berjihad dengan media massa, berjihad dengan lisan, berjihad dengan dakwah, dan lainnya. Apabila kata Al-Jihad disebut dalam Sunnah, kata tersebut mengandung pengertian berperang dengan senjata. Apabila disebut dalam Al-Qur'an, kata tersebut mempunyai arti berperang dengan senjata Ada juga jihad yang mengandung arti jihadun nafs, jihadul hawa, jihadul qalam, namun pengertian tersebut bukan merupakan pengertian syar'i, melainkan menurut pengertian bahasa (lughawy) Ada perbedaan antara makna bahasa dan makna syar'i. Makna syar'i bagi jihad ialah menyembelih, menyembelih dengan pisau. Menggunakan senjata. Inilah makna jihad. (Azzam 2013: 63-64, 67).

Translation: All jurists have defined Al-Jihad as waging war against unbelievers using weaponry until they become Muslims or devotedly and humiliatingly pay *jizya* (tax). There is no room to interpret jihad with any other meaning, such as to conduct jihad with the pen, to fight evil desires, to wage jihad against the mass media, orally, via missionary efforts, etc. When the word 'Al-Jihad' is mentioned in the Sunna, it carries the meaning of carrying out war with weapons. When it is mentioned in the Qur'an, it denotes fighting war with weapons There are jihads which mean other things: jihadun nafs, jihadul hawa, jihadul qalam, but these other meanings are not legally religious, they are merely linguistic meanings (lughawy) There are differences between a linguistic meaning and a legally religious meaning. The legally religious meaning of jihad is to slaughter; to slaughter with a knife. Using a weapon. This is the meaning of jihad.

With Malaysia's Islamic religious eco-system becoming increasingly Salafised though not necessarily wholly Salafist as yet (Ahmad Fauzi 2016), the authorities need to keep close tabs on inflammatory social media discourse which are potentially racially explosive. Although JI and ISIS as organisations may have been put on the defensive, their *salafi-jihadist* narratives and methods may well have penetrated many young Malay-Muslim minds (cf. Mohd Azizuddin 2016, Mohd Mizan 2017b), while their brutal methods might have fired the imagination of even non-Muslim terrorist outfits such as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), just as how USA's resurgent white supremacists have of late tactically imitated Muslim extremists (Pamuk 2019).

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APPLYING RAHMATAN LIL ALAMIN (RLA) IN COMBATTING TERRORISM

Mohd. Mizan Aslam

INTRODUCTION

The concept of *Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin* (Mercy to all creations) was officiated by the Minister at the Prime Minister's Department, Datuk Seri Dr. Mujahid Yusof Rawa in Kuala Lumpur on 25 April 2019. Three working papers based on the concept of *Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin*, Maqasid Syariah and Model Malaysia were approved in the meeting held by the National Council for Malaysian Religious Affairs (Majlis Kebangsaan Bagi Hal Ehwat Ugama Islam Malaysia) on 14 March, led by the Prime Minister, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad. The concept of *Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin* is the fundamental basis and has been publicised as the new core to the Pakatan Harapan (PH) government. This concept has invited debates and widespread discussions within the nation.

The opponent has created a polemic at this time to disturb the smooth implementation of the *Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin* concept. The biggest argument raised is that the concept of *Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin* contains liberal and open traits. Islam during the governing era of Pakatan Harapan (PH) is seen to be threatened by the religious liberalisation introduced. The *Rahmatan Lil A'amin* concept is regarded as a destroyer to the nation's peace and stability even when the concept encourages unity, tolerance and understanding. The introduction of *Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin* is feared to diminish the power of Islam and the Malays as the main pillar of the country. *Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin* is also regarded as astray and shaped from a narrow perspective, without a firm foundation.

It has to be remembered that every government or concerned Minister, including the Prime Minister will have their own agendas and visions. These have been adapted to the needs and current situation which are thought to be the best at that significant point. Tun Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad as the forth Prime Minister 20 years ago brought the policy of The Application of Islamic Values (Penerapan Nilai-Nilai Islam),

Tun Abdullah Badawi introduced the concept of *Islam Hadhari*, Datuk Seri Najib Razak put forward the concept of *Maqasid Syariah* and today, once more Tun Mahathir through the Minister of Religion, Datuk Seri Mujahid Yusof Rawa has brought the concept of *Rahmatan Lil'Alamin* (Aslam, M.M. 2019).

Paradigm Shift

Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin means Islam brings in blessings and the wellbeing to the entire universe. This concept is headed by Islam, and then adapted to the local context. Islam brought by the Prophet Muhammad S.A.W. is regarded as the solution to all the problems of the community during the Age of Ignorance and the whole Arab community (Ashour, O. 2015), without focusing only on the Muslims as the teachings of Muhammad had provided harmony and promised human rights and fairness within the Arab community, across religions and tribes. Life full of vice such as drinking alcohol, prostitution, killing of daughters, fortune telling, black magic, war and various other damages were rampant among the community during the Age of Ignorance. The arrival of Islam changed the Arab community at that time. They began to understand the importance of wellbeing and peacefulness after they accepted the teachings brought by Muhammad S.A.W.

The strengthening and purification of creed had created the existence of better moral behaviour. The understanding of the truth of Islam generated a more tolerant community living in peace and harmony at that time. Prophet Muhammad not only made Islam as a blessing or saviour to the community at that time but Muhammad himself demonstrated commendable and noble morals making him a noble exemplary to all. With the concept of *Rahmatan Lil'Alamin* brought by Muhammad at that time, the community was introduced with a national system that was extremely just in all aspects of living, including political, social and economical aspects.

Rahmatan Lil'Alamin is actually mentioned in Surah Al-Anbiya: 107 which carries the meaning "And We have not sent you (Muhammad), but as a mercy (rahmat) to the worlds." This clearly means that the Islamic teachings brought by Prophet Muhammad provide wellbeing and goodness to all creatures, not limited to only human beings. All creations, whether living or not, including animals, vegetation,

rocks, soil, houses, worldly possessions and everything else on the face of the earth are safe under the teachings of Islam (Tinka Veldhuis & Jorge Staun, 2009).

The concept of *Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin* is essentially was very suitable to be practiced in this country. Taking the same approach of Prophet Muhammad in the Arab lands which were occupied by a community of multi tribes (kabilah) and religions, this situation is the same in this country (Yusuf, Q. 1992). Communities of various ethnicities which is the basic mould of the country are actually under threat from outside dissidents who want to see the country fall. Therefore, through the *Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin* approach, these issues are hoped to be solved. Every individual in this country, regardless of ethnicity, will be guaranteed their human rights and will be given relevant justice.

Aware of the problems and social issues gripping the country today, the *Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin* concept has therefore been introduced as a platform of total solution for all the persisting issues. Malaysia was built by the unity and understanding of various races in this country. Malaysia is known in the world as a very harmonious country and has its own uniqueness. It is almost impossible to change this traditional landscape built with sheer wisdom by the earlier leaders. Racial integration and traditional assimilation which started decades ago are the strengths Malaysia possesses. The people of Malaysia live in peace and harmony, united through the agreement of differences amongst each other, and not in search of dissimilarities that will end in hostility.

It is time to look at the positive sides of a concept put forward and not merely at the negative sides. Citizens in this country should become extraordinary people who know how to value the good and the bad. If approached positively, positive results can be achieved. No one is perfect on this earth as every human being has most definitely made mistakes, either intentionally or not. Therefore, as extraordinary people, they should look for the good in the individual and not just the flaws. If life is aimed at looking for flaws and imperfections, damage and disaster will await. It is best to be human beings with varying paradigms in making assessments and reasoning.

The *Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin* concept should be thought as a hidden agenda to expand Islam and not to weaken the faith. Changes should be made by assessing and looking at the strong sides of *Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin* and not the weaknesses (Aslam, M.M. 2002). A great person will view a problem as an opportunity, and not as an obstacle. *Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin* must also be seen as a method of reaching out to the non-Muslims. All this while, the non-Muslims in Malaysia have been thrust with the negative and damaged version of Islam. Islam is portrayed as a religion that is harsh towards women; a patriarchal religion denying women their rights. Islam is also misconstrued as a religion that places importance on sex through polygamy; in fact, Islam is regarded also as a religion that loves war and death.

These are among the confusions successfully put across by the enemies of Islam, resulting in even the Muslim community being confused and also involved in tarnishing the image of Islam. Islam is rejected not only by non-Muslims but without realising it, also by the Muslims. *Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin* is a part of Islam, and it should be loved and empowered from time to time, but the goodness and advantages of the *Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin* concept is being denied by various parties for personal and political interests and agendas.

As long as hidden agendas are intended by any individual or organisation, the concept of *Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin* will continue to face a continuous polemic. Human beings should think wisely and act honestly, in order to achieve mental sanity and courteousness. When the paradigm is correct, then the action will also be precise and truthful, subsequently either through the concept of *Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin* or whatever concept, Islam will surely be accepted and supported until it is successful. The unity of sane minds and sincere hearts will therefore result in complementing entities.

Handling Extremism

In understanding the threat of extremism in Malaysia, one of the main factors is the feeling of dissatisfaction caused by the deprivation of just rights and space. Non-Malay ethnicities think that they are under threat and are not given fair justice. On the other hand, the Malays feel that their special rights and 'perks' possessed as natives are seemingly lessening. This thickens the feelings of unsatisfactory, hatred

and doubt amongst the community. Clearly, this situation has caused the emergence of extremist movements which are translated in the form of violent attacks on other ethnics. If the concept of *Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin* is well practiced, then all ethnicities including the natives of Sabah and Sarawak and all the natives of this country will feel comfortable, as all their problems will be well solved because it is the demands and essentials of Islam.

Malaysian citizens are reminded to distance from extreme and radical national movements. Extreme ideologies can indoctrinate anyone regardless of religious or ethnic background. The country has recorded a few incidents happening in the country, caused by extreme approaches towards religion and ethnicity such as the *Hartal* tragedy 1967, the 13th May 1969 incident, the Kampung Medan tragedy and the latest is the incident at the Sri Maha Mariamman Temple in Seafeld, Selangor in November 2018. These incidents can happen again and will carry on if without a concept which is balanced and suitable for every religion, ethnicity or country. Therefore, the *Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin* concept is seen as the most suitable field at this time.

In Islam, it is prohibited to remove, what more to abolish, the rights owned by any race or religion. In fact, Islam has promised justice and will protect their rights and interests. History has proven how Islam reprimanded and rejected any action considered unjust towards any party. Apparently, any government or leader that denies this will be attacked like how Saidina Umar warned the governor of Egypt, Amr bin Ash, who had been shown with a straight line signalled with Saidina Umar's sword on a piece of bone, as a result of a complaint by an old Jewish man. Not even a single race should be oppressed, even under the name of expanding Islam such as building a mosque, school or others. They should be given appropriate compensation so that justice can be upheld without compromise.

Extremists exist in any country or group of communities when two things are involved, i.e. religion and ethnicity. Through this concept of *Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin*, both these factors are fully protected, in fact the government and responsible ministry are largely entrusted as they are responsible for the trust given to them and promise made especially through their election manifestos. Therefore, the

government has no excuse to pursue solutions to meet all the promises made without any compromise. The *Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin* concept will ensure that all these will be implemented as best as possible, because the nature of *Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin* is to protect the interest of all related parties.

The PH government has to seriously look into this matter as the group of extremists will create their own manners and ways to ensure that their agendas are achieved. The murder of Dr. Joseph Fernandez in 2001 in Kulim, Kedah is clearly a result of feelings of dissatisfaction with the ruling government. The government then failed to give deserving protection to the Islamic religion. Government policies were perceived as non-Islamic and disorganised. They wanted a government that fully practiced Islam following the version that they had wanted. In fact, they felt that when the government did not actually practice the implementation of Islam, the solution was to take action on their own. As a result, they chose to shoot Dr Joseph Fernandez to death when it appeared that he was threatening Islam and the government failed to take any action against him.

The biggest accusation against Dr Joseph Fernandez was that he had converted many Muslims into Christians, especially factory workers within the area of Kulim. Dr Fernandez who owned a clinic gave specific treatment which ended with him giving suggestions to his patients to convert from Islam to Christianity (Aslam, M.M. 2009 & 2016). Medical counselling sessions became sessions of Christianising many factory workers who had limited religious knowledge. This group of extremists had never reported this matter to the authorities, but conducted spying investigations and operations on their own. Assisted by knowledge regarding such operations from experience in Afghanistan and South Philippines (Aslam, M.M., 2017), the operations were therefore implemented successfully. The group of extremists also had the ability to use firearms at a minimum level but could still give an outstanding impact as had happened in this case.

Apparently, when movements of the Al-Qaeda 'jihad' fighters and ISIS in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria are scrutinised, they all actually started when Islamic governments throughout the world were seen to fail implementing their responsibilities as a nation that protects Islam through the concepts of 'Umran' and

'Asabiyyah' (Azmi, Ahmad Sanusi, 2018). So the alternative is to initiate a group of fighters in the name of Islam in which the motive is to build an Islamic state (*Daulah Islamiyyah*) that will defend Islam and practice the teachings of Muhammad, i.e. *Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin*. Religious extremism occurs when an existing Muslim country is perceived as not bringing blessings (*rahmat*); instead only welcomes wealth, practices secularism and worships capitalism. Islamic countries are considered to have strayed from Islam when rejecting the 'hudud' law, including the government of Arab Saudi. For this group of extremists, they want the 'hudud' law to be implemented in total without taking in various related factors into consideration, including a country's setting, readiness and capability.

Due to this, *Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin* should be an opportunity for the government to carry out the implementation of Islamic law which is just and right. It must be understood that *Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin* does not aim to promote liberal Islam as accused by many parties, but the Islamic law brought by the government through *Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin* appears as the best judiciary system while taking into consideration that Malaysia has its own uniqueness (Chasdi, Richard, J. 2018). However, the biggest challenges of *Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin* are to convince all parties that it is the best concept and Islamic law to be practiced, and also to make it a priority to ensure that the mass public understands the concept. If it fails, then a bigger problem may potentially take place, which is when this story is manipulated and taken seriously by the group of extremists.

Another big issue that will also cause problems in the country concerns the Malay ethnicity. This issue is devastating because the Malay community is the native of this country. The concept of *Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin* is highly required to ascertain the special rights of the Malays. The Islamic and Malay synergy is actually strength and specialty that are non-comparable. As a matter of fact, the concept of *Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin* is expected to give more strength that not only guarantees the rights of the Malays, but also makes them stronger and more intact. This is what is called *Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin*. This situation will more or less make some parties with hidden agendas feel threatened. The concept of *Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin* is very impressive that it is on this basis it is envied and continuously condemned.

Ethnic communities other than the Malays such as Indian, Chinese, Sikh and others, must also understand this concept of *Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin*. It is through this concept, their rights are also guaranteed and fought for. No ethnicity will be threatened, and everything is protected to its best. *Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin* also opposes extremism in any religion and ethnicity (Luqman Hj Abdullah, 2009). Indirectly, *Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin* is also the instrument of *dakwah bil-hal* or indirect preaching. To draw the non-Muslim community to the actual teachings of Islam, they should be exposed to the right version of Islamic teachings, and not the extreme version of Islam brought by some leaders, political parties and certain movements (Clutterbuck, L. 2010).

This extreme and radical ideology can be translated into violent acts which are also called terrorism (Silber, M. & Bhatt, A. 2007). Terrorist acts are not only linked to Islam per se, but the same violence is also carried out by Christians, Hindus and Buddhists, just as how it happens in many countries in this world. The terrorist attack incident at An-Noor Mosque in Hagley Park, and Linwood Mosque in Christchurch, New Zealand were carried out by terrorists with radical understandings who reject immigrants and wished to take vengeance. *Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin* will also promise the rights of immigrants, including '3D' workers as well as professionals who are in the country.

Malaysian citizens are reminded to always be careful so that they do not become easily influenced by all sorts of extreme and radical acts (Gunaratna, R. & Hussin, M.S. 2018 & 2015). This can happen not only overseas but also in this country without sound and good religious knowledge (Khairul Azhar, 2016). All systems in this country should function so that all feelings of dissatisfaction or vengeance can be overcome by the ruling government. People who are civilized will live in moderation and totally reject the extreme and radical acts and actions. Therefore, the solution is for us to appreciate the concept of *Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin* as a vital policy not only to be implemented within the country but also in the whole world, including to be brought to the level of United Nations (UN).

CONCLUSION

The concept of *Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin* has to be implemented intelligently and wisely so that it is not politicised by certain parties. This impressive policy is very suitable at this time and situation and needs to be spread without prejudice. Every party has the responsibility that should be played with wisdom. Failure to make the mass community understand, both Muslim and non-Muslim, is deeply feared. If the strategy is not well implemented, then it has the potential to backfire.

The government is responsible in ensuring that this concept is understood by every layer of the community. In Malaysia, politics is full of vengeance and hatred, and lacks rationale (Kohler, D. 2016) in the minds and actions of some groups. The syllabus for Islamic Studies in schools and higher institutional centres need to include information pertaining *Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin*. Forum sessions, discussions, workshops and other medium of physical communication deemed suitable have to be handled wisely. Failure to understand this can result in massive problems in the days to come.

In the context of extremism, these groups will always look for opportunities to manipulate the issue so that it can be made a topic in the movement invented by them. A suitable pathway has to be prepared for this group in order for the ideology, feelings and agenda they are fighting for, to be channelled to the deserving parties. Their ideology is comparable to flowing water which needs to be flowed into the right direction; otherwise it will choose its own paths which may jeopardise everyone including the government and country. *Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin* will not only lessen the problems of race and religion, but it can also help the country strengthen the economy and attract external investments.

When chaos can be lessened, then the citizen will be able to live in peace and harmony. There will no longer be oppressed entities or denied rights including amongst merchants and consumers. Consequently, the economy will flourish and citizens will be showered with good and equal wealth.

Business conducted will be fair and equitable in nature to all parties (Noor, S. & Hayat, S. 2009). It will ensure that no one will be oppressed or left behind. In fact, investors will also be courageous enough to handle any transaction that can possibly bring harmony to the country.

The Pakatan Harapan government has a good amount of space to strengthen the *Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin* concept by braving every space and opportunity available. This concept has to be empowered to a higher level including internationally. The world must be made to understand the concept of *Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin* and it will be the best weapon to combat propaganda brought in by enemies of Islam, either internally or externally. This is the opportunity for Malaysia to once more stand tall as the Asian tiger and also as a representative for other Muslim countries worldwide. *Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin* is the solution to the problems faced by the nation today.

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STATE PATERNALISM AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE: DESECURITISING THE DIFFERENT FACETS OF PREVENTING AND COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM (P/CVE)

Danial Yusof

ABSTRACT

Over the past 18 years or so, the narrative of P/CVE has evolved considerably from the events of September 11 to the post-ISIS era and contemporary concerns of race and ethnic based or motivated violent extremism. While counter-terrorism retains its security agenda, P/CVE is developing inversely. P/CVE has shifted to the sharing of risks between state and society, and most recently a turn towards developing resilience. This trend of desecuritisation i.e. a holistic approach of mitigation and recovery - emphasises social cohesion, the public health model, and the case management or idiosyncratic approach to P/CVE. This article will discuss the current trend of P/CVE via the different facets of its theory and practice. These facets include the evolving narrative of P/CVE; securitisation and desecuritisation; operationalising the public health model; risk, resilience and the P/CVE factors typology i.e. drivers and enablers at structural and individual levels; the roles of religion and ideology; group dynamics in relation to radicalisation and recruitment; and P/CVE evidence based recommendations and programme management. It will also in the process, address the communities first or resilience context of approaching these facets and the state and society dynamics in balancing the tension between securitisation and desecuritisation.

Keywords: Facets of P/CVE; Resilience; State Paternalism; Desecuritisation

INTRODUCTION

In a publication on the global state of the P/CVE agenda, one of the cited challenges is that of the ambiguity around the terminology in terms of its scope and definition. Despite the lack of policy and terminological clarity, and regardless of the labels that are used – CVE, PVE, P/CVE, or PCVERLT (Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalisation that Lead to Terrorism), there is acceptance that researchers and practitioners are in agreement in relation to the scope of their work. Nevertheless, it also mentions of the possible appropriation and legislation of extremism that instead facilitates state oppression of legitimate dissent, ideology and speech (Rosand et al 2018, pp 23-25). A longterm challenge I put forward in this

article is that despite addressing the facets of P/CVE through the communities first or resilience approach, where there is state and society dynamics in balancing the tensions between securitisation and desecuritisation, P/CVE itself is still ultimately a narrative that is mainly guided by state paternalism for surveillance society.

This article will go over the past 18 years or so of the narrative of P/CVE that has evolved considerably from the events of September 11 till the post-ISIS era and contemporary concerns of race and ethnic based or motivated violent extremism. In this time, P/CVE has shifted to the sharing of risks between state and society, and more recently a turn towards developing resilience. This trend of resilience focuses on desecuritisation i.e. a holistic approach of mitigation and recovery - emphasises social cohesion, the public health model, and the case management or idiosyncratic approach to P/CVE. I will then discuss this current trend of P/CVE via the different facets of its theory and practice. These facets include the evolving narrative of P/CVE; securitisation and desecuritisation; operationalising the public health model; risk, resilience and the P/CVE factors typology i.e. drivers and enablers at structural and individual levels; the roles of religion and ideology; group dynamics in relation to radicalisation and recruitment; and P/CVE evidence-based recommendations and programme management. I will also address the communities first or resilience context of approaching these facets and the state and society dynamics in balancing the tension between securitisation and desecuritisation.

The Evolving Narrative of P/CVE

In a keynote session of the Hedayah, UNDP and Australian government organised ICVE Research Conference 2019, transitions in CVE and CT (Counter Terrorism) since September 11 on risk perception, risk tolerance and policy formation was highlighted. The narrative of P/CVE and CT from "Never Again" to the sharing of risk between state and civil society to harness community and learning to apply policy from others means that P/CVE is at present focusing on resilience development. The necessary evolution of this narrative was in part due to certain drivers i.e. (1) impatience and securitisation as immediate responses to the tragedy shifting in time with the development of the scope of knowledge of P/CVE and the sharing of risks between state and society; (2) Going beyond the costs and counter-productiveness

of securitisation e.g. for the USA, USD1 Trillion in expenditure over the past 18 years; (3) concerns over civil liberties in relation to criticisms over the Guantanamo Bay detention camp and human rights violations of the Abu Ghraib prison; (4) the rise and fall of ISIS and the ideological latency of religious extremism; and now (5) the radicalisation of identity politics i.e. ethnic and racial mobilisation of violent extremism; and even the nexus of religious and racial or ethnic based violent extremism e.g. FRE (Far Right Extremism).

The shift towards resilience looks at P/CVE in the context of a global prevention architecture, focusing on mitigation and recovery. In effect three trends pertaining to risk and resiliency are expected to be facilitated and incorporated: (1) Social Cohesion i.e. community and nationbuilding; (2) A Public Health Model that clearly distinguishes between PVE and CVE in relation to the baseline of PVE's advocacy to community and CVE's intervention of targetted segmentation of those at risk or having certain vulnerabilities; and (3) Case Management approach to CVE because while the drivers and enablers may be identifiable, the trigger for VE or Terrorism is highly idiosyncratic (Khalil, L. 2019).

The recommendations for resilience as an approach to P/CVE is also earlier emphasised by the Prevention Project as a "whole of society approach", bridging both society and the security apparatus, which includes among others: (1) Strengthening and incentivising locally led P/CVE efforts by investing in trust building between communities and security agencies; and working with existing state and society organisations; (2) Enhancing contribution of CSOs (Civil Society Organisations) to P/CVE; (3) Strengthening and incentivising cooperation and collaboration among national and subnational authorities and stakeholders relevant to P/CVE, and capacity building among multidisciplinary stakeholders; and (4) Improving the evidence base for monitoring and evaluating P/CVE efforts (Rosand et al. 2018, pp 41-49). The resilience narrative is pervasive and is the mainstay approach among P/CVE practitioners, researchers and organisations from the UN and EU level down to the international community of nationstates in creating the global P/CVE architecture.

Securitisation and Desecuritisation

As I mentioned earlier, the communities first or resilience context of approaching these facets involve state and society dynamics and requires balancing the tension between securitisation and desecuritisation, the boundaries of which can appear tentative in practice. In Malaysia for example, laws governing terrorism-related offences such as the Penal Code 130 (Terrorism) is sometimes seen as not being able to distinguish between the threat of terror acts from extremist ideology or ideological crime.¹

Practitioners of CVE mitigation or intervention may be walking a tight line between pro-active deradicalisation of individuals at risk as a desecuritisation means to ensure that their subjects are saved from potential arrest and hardship of the legal process and the CT operations need to monitor, investigate and collect evidence into the threat of possible “lonewolf” or “wolf-pack” operations for subsequent arrest. Far from suggesting the irreconcilability of securitisation and desecuritisation aspects of CT and CVE, I am highlighting both a challenge and opportunity for bridging and capacity building on the part of CVE. The trend of resilience in P/CVE will indirectly involve the transfer of security related risks to non-security state and societal practitioners and organisations, requiring further refining of the scope of CT and CVE and bridging between the two. As such, there has to be operational agreement, platform and communication in relation to the continuum of radicalisation model of a given state between CT and CVE i.e. non-violent manifestations and pre-actualisation stages as the domain of CVE, and action oriented radicalisation and actualisation stage as the domain of CT.²

If seen from the earlier mentioned trends of risk and resiliency for P/CVE, the application of a well defined public health model and case management approach

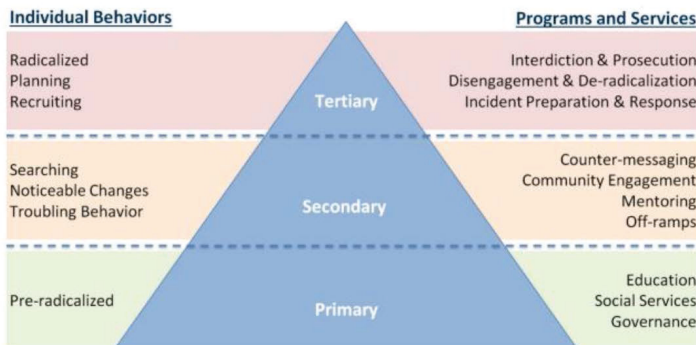
¹ Under details of Penal Code 130, even possession of extremist materials such as books and videos, although non-violent, are offences that are punishable by imprisonment, fine and confiscation of assets.

² The Malaysian radicalization model identifies four modalities of radicalization i.e. cognitive, emotive, faith and action-oriented radicalization. The final quadrant i.e. action-oriented radicalization is the culmination and validation of the three preceding modalities. It also identifies a seven-step radicalization process i.e. pre-radicalization, exposure, internalization, externalization, actualization, post-actualization and deradicalization/rehabilitation (El-Muhammady, A. 2020).

can help to refine the boundary and bridging between CVE and CT. Nevertheless, P/CVE itself is still ultimately a narrative that is mainly guided by state paternalism for surveillance society or the panopticon effect of a disciplinary society that itself has to be mitigated by international and public discourses and assurances on ethics and civil liberties.³

Contextualising the Different Facets of Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE)

(i) The Public Health Model



The Public Health Pyramid (Challgren et al 2016)

As mentioned earlier, the different facets pertaining to risk and resilience in P/CVE are expected to be facilitated by the application of a Public Health Model that distinguishes between PVE and CVE in relation to the baseline of PVE’s advocacy to community and CVE’s intervention of targetted segmentation of those at risk or having certain vulnerabilities.

This will at the primary level enable a baseline of broadbased PVE initiatives that may be incorporated into existing nationbuilding policies and programmes via education and social services organisations for social cohesion. At the secondary level, CVE’s intervention of targeted segmentation of those at risk or having

³ The panopticon effect refers to the architecture of modern prisons where the main watchtower gives the impression of constant observation and monitoring of inmates. As a metaphor, it is often used to identify with the asymmetrical surveillance tendencies of disciplinary societies or the state for corrective purposes of behavior. However, in the digital age, the non-corrective motive of state surveillance of the Internet, for example, is invisible and is primarily used for providing security from terrorism (McMullan, T. 2015)

vulnerabilities is operationalised. This involves those who are already exposed and are beginning to internalise and externalise VE tendencies through noticeable changes in thinking and behaviour. At this level, CVE intervenes through counter-messaging and community engagement, and mentoring and off-ramp engagements with vulnerable individuals. Primary and secondary levels of the public health pyramid reflect P/CVE as a desecuritized and communities first or “whole of society” approach. At tertiary level, individual behaviours that reflect full-fledged radicalisation, planning and intent are addressed by programmes and services that involve disengagement and deradicalisation initiatives and eventually security incident preparation and response including counter-terrorism measures. The tertiary level represents the point at which public initiatives for social order transforms into state concern for security, and the transition from P/CVE to CT. At the same time, it may also refer to initiatives that target individuals that are serving sentences from previous involvement for purposes of deradicalisation, disengagement, and reintegration (Royal United Services Institute 2019, pp 9-12).

(ii) Risk, Resilience and P/CVE Factors Typology

As mentioned earlier, the shift towards resilience looks at P/CVE in the context of a global prevention architecture, focusing on mitigation and recovery. It is meant to develop the capacity for individuals and communities to resist or prevent as well recover from violent extremism. Vulnerability and risk are used interchangeably in relation drivers and enablers associated with being prone to radicalisation; and groups that are identified through needs assessments who can benefit from intervention and case management approach for individual cases. Resilience is further advocated in the international framework of approaches (UN or United Nations and EU or European Union) to P/CVE, with the UN Plan of Action calling for national and regional PVE action plans to address local and regional concerns (Royal United Services Institute 2019, pp. 13, 26-27).

Desecuritising P/CVE requires an understanding of the factors typology that contribute to radicalisation and VE of groups and individuals, recognising the need and capacity to address a broader context encompassing the social, political, economic, cultural, psychological, religion, technological and ideological as possible

drivers and enablers; and that the process is unlikely to be linear and on the contrary idiosyncratic. The EU typology of factors of radicalisation refers to:

- “(1) **Structural motivators:** e.g. repression, corruption, unemployment, inequality, discrimination, a history of hostility between identity groups, and external state interventions in the affairs of other nations
- (2) **Individual incentives:** e.g. a sense of purpose (generated through acting in accordance with perceived ideological tenets), adventure, belonging, acceptance, status, material enticements, fear of repercussions by VE entities, expected rewards in the afterlife
- (3) **Enabling factors:** e.g. presence of radical mentors (including religious leaders, individuals from social networks, etc.), access to radical online communities, social networks with VE associations, access to weaponry or other relevant items, a comparative lack of state influence, absence of familial support
- (4) **Group based dynamics:** e.g. peer pressure, values and norms of groups that contribute and encourage recruitment, radicalisation and support for VE.” (Royal United Services Institute 2019, pg. 30)

Structural motivators are largely the equivalent of push factors and Individual incentives the equivalent of pull factors and both are considered as typical motivators or drivers of VE which are distinguished from enabling factors. Group based dynamics focus on the critical role that group and networks contribute in socialising individuals into the VE worldview by using religion and identity while disseminating ideology and recruitment of those vulnerable or at risk. In post-ISIS P/CVE and CT, ideologies of ethnic or racial mobilised VE and Far Right VE are also addressed e.g. ultranationalism, racial supremacy, Islamophobia, elite theory, and even extreme libertarianism. At the same time, factors of VE are also context dependent to local and regional dynamics, for example, in Southeast Asia, where technology and social media penetration can be a strong enabler for Malaysia and Indonesia; specific VE group dynamics of the region and their allegiance to ISIS; or identity politics in multi-civilisational Malaysia (Royal United Services Institute 2019, pp. 30-45).

(iii) P/CVE Programme Evidence-Based Recommendations and Management

The operationalisation of a public health model has also bought recommendations for improving the evidence base for and monitoring and evaluation of P/CVE efforts. They include: (1) highlighting the link between strengthened or effective governance and successful P/CVE programmes; (2) focusing attention and resources on local

conditions and not just strategic communications and impact of counter narratives; (3) increasing the capacity of the UN and relevant regional bodies to provide training and knowledge exchange for governments to design human rights compliant P/CVE policies and programmes; and (4) emphasising on policy and programme attention at international and regional levels on the nexus of human rights protection and P/CVE, especially in light of state appropriation of counterterrorism, P/CVE and security in breaching civil liberties, committing human rights violations and political subjugation of groups and individuals that only contributes to diminishing societal resilience (Rosand et al 2018, pg. 48).

Furthermore, the programme management cycle of P/CVE is expected to follow the following operations i.e. programming, needs assessment or identification, programme design or formulation, programme implementation, and impact assessment or evaluation and lessons learnt (Royal United Services Institute 2019, pg. 46). In order to fulfil the specific requirements of P/CVE programme management, organisations like Hedayah, for example, was created by the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum (GCTF) as a centre of expertise and experience to help with the development of P/CVE specific instruments for evidence base, monitoring and evaluation of programmes (Zeiger, S. 2016).

CONCLUSION

A longterm challenge I put forward at the introduction of this article is that despite addressing the facets of P/CVE through the communities first or resilience approach, P/CVE itself is still ultimately a narrative that is mainly guided by state paternalism for surveillance society. State and society dynamics in balancing the tensions between securitisation and desecuritisation will still require oversight from international organisations such as the UN. The recommendations pertaining to provision of training and knowledge exchange for governments to design human rights compliant P/CVE policies and programmes; and the emphasis on policy and programme attention on human rights protection and P/CVE are made because of the possibility of abuse. The appropriation of counterterrorism, P/CVE and security for political subjugation of groups and individuals come from well-founded concerns of state oppression. There are in fact examples of the dubious use of counter-

terrorism and P/CVE policy, programmes and nomenclature in the name of quelling “the evils of separatism, religious extremism and terrorism”.

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“POST-DAESH” : TACKLING MISPERCEPTIONS IN MALAYSIA

Muhammad Sinatra

ABSTRACT

The term “post-Daesh” has been gaining a wide popularity in Malaysia’s P/CVE discourse despite the term being a relatively new occurrence and the lack of epistemic work focusing on it. The absence of a concrete definition has created a space for speculations and misperceptions about the term to emerge, which could misinform the public and policy-making process. This article aims to tackle some of these misperceptions as a contribution to a more concrete work in defining the term “post-Daesh”. These claims are: (i) that the term “post-Daesh” indicates the waning of terrorist threats from Daesh, and; (ii) that the defeat of the terrorist powerhouse in its strongholds suggests the growing irrelevance of P/CVE work in Malaysia. It does so by examining trends of Daesh’s threats in Malaysia – such as local supporters’ movements and activities after the caliphate’s defeat – and observing some ostensible connections between terrorist threats in the past and in the present.

Keywords: P/CVE, Post-Daesh, Malaysia, Trends of Terrorism, Misperceptions, Discourse

INTRODUCTION

“ARSA will be the next threat, we should watch out the Rohingyas here in Malaysia.”

Such is one of the few projections that have emerged in this era that is usually dubbed as “post-Daesh”. Another trending projection that we probably have come across in this era is the perception of the decreasing relevance of preventing/countering violent extremism (P/CVE) agenda in Malaysia.

Indeed, these types of claims are emblematic of the uncertainty and perplexity that have characterised the mood in the “post-Daesh” era, Malaysia not excluded. In the past few years, the P/CVE agenda has intensely focused on the dynamics of Daesh and how it presents a shift in Malaysia’s terrorism landscape. The fall of Daesh, thus, leaves a certain void in our perception towards terrorism in the country, forcing some of us to fill the emptiness with strategic projection at best and speculation at worst.

The term “post-Daesh” is problematic, lacking a well-set definition that leaves its parameters vague, resulting in its multiple interpretations and room for debates. For example: (i) does the term denote the fall of Raqqa in September 2017, Daesh’s fall in Baghouz in March 2019, or the death of Abu Bakar al-Baghdadi in October 2019 as a reference point?; (ii) in future P/CVE discourses, should we still maintain the mere mentioning of Daesh or remove it altogether?; (iii) does it impose a uniform implication to terrorism landscape in all countries, or does it carry a specific meaning to different countries?¹ With so many aspects left uncertain, speculation and misperception surrounding the term arise.

This lack of proper definition, however, provides a space for P/CVE observers and analysts to use the term liberally. After all, saying “post-Daesh” in conversations is easy, especially if we are referring to a notion as general as the group’s current debilitated state. Nevertheless, here in Malaysia, caution must be exercised in using the term, as its lack of definition could give birth to unintended policy implications. These include the over-securitisation of certain groups as potential threat (such as Rohingya or Indonesian migrants in Malaysia, demonstrated by the claim above), the missed opportunity to amplify the whole-of-nation effort in P/CVE, or the inability to acknowledge the specific trends of terrorism landscape in Malaysia following Daesh’s defeat² in the Middle East and the Southern Philippines.

Thus, there is a degree of urgency to frame the term properly in the context of Malaysia to avoid creating a misperception in the public and missteps in policy making. Particularly, a concrete understanding of what “post-Daesh” entails could also complement the government’s effort in producing the National Action Plan to Prevent Violent Extremism, which would be instrumental in Malaysia’s fight against extremism in the future.

This article does not intend to undertake the colossal task of defining the term “post-Daesh”. Rather, it aims to offer some parameters with which relevant stakeholders could consult to in formulating a concrete definition of “post-Daesh”. It does so by attempting to tackle some of the misperceptions surrounding the term itself. Although

this involves the narrowing of space for interpretation, this is in no way an exhaustive exercise and must be complemented by other critical works scrutinising the term.

THE CONTINUED PRIMACY OF DAESH IN MALAYSIA

One of the risks that could emanate from the term “post-Daesh” is the misperception that it suggests the complete severance of Daesh’s dynamics from the terrorism landscape. The relatively quiet terrorism trend in Malaysia, especially if compared to other Southeast Asian neighbours³, should not be a ground in assuming that Daesh-related threats are all but diminished. Even in this era of uneasy peacefulness, terrorism discourse in Malaysia continues to be inundated by Daesh-related topics.

A major subject in this era is Malaysian returnees. This topic has been a prominent concern since the caliphate’s defeat and its prevalence is especially notable throughout 2019. As of October 2019, reports showed that 65 Malaysians were still holed up in Syrian camps⁴, 40 of which had expressed desire to return home.⁵

Bukit Aman has clearly expressed its position in accepting Malaysian detainees in Syria back to Malaysia. The principal argument presented is the concern that denying the returnees’ return would only propel them further into extremist paradigm, becoming security threat to foreign nations. There also appears to be a sense of solidarity towards fellow nationals who need the assistance of the security sector, notwithstanding their decision to migrate.⁶

There are, of course, opposing arguments to this stance. For example, it means transferring potential security threat from abroad into Malaysia. The problem is compounded if we consider the one-month compulsory deradicalisation programmes for these returnees, which is deemed too short especially for those who are battle-hardened.⁷ This is not to mention that such programmes and constant monitoring by the police post-release would incur prolonged financial burden on the state. Moreover, we also need to consider the capacity of the society to welcome and re-absorb the returnees in their midst.⁸

As long as this dialectic between the pros-and-cons of allowing returnees back is not decisively resolved, the aspect of Daesh in Malaysia's public space would likely be retained. This demonstration is just an instance why the term "post-Daesh" does not necessarily signal the end of security concerns emanating from the group, at least in Malaysia.

Recent developments in Syria seem to amplify this concern. The advancement of Turkish-backed forces into Kurds-controlled areas has given rise to the anxiety that Daesh detainees would break free from their compounds. There are also worrying reports that these forces had deliberately released these prisoners upon their captures of Kurdish territories.⁹ While there has not been any confirmation on the escaping Malaysian detainees from Kurdish detention camps, such potential would likely complicate the government's agenda in repatriating these individuals, in addition to allowing them to become a security threat to foreign nations, something that Bukit Aman is trying to avoid in the first place.

Despite the above conundrum, Sidney Jones said it right when she asserted that "the biggest threat from ISIS supporters for Southeast Asia is not from the fighters returning from Syria. It's from people who never left who want recognition from ISIS central."¹⁰ Such an assertion brings our attention to the activities of Daesh supporters in Malaysia who have not migrated to the caliphate's territory for various reasons.

Measuring the activities of Daesh supporters could be a progressively difficult task to do. The defeats of Daesh in the Middle East and Southern Philippines may have diminished the linkages between local and Malaysian fighters abroad, which have been tactical target operations by the police. This makes Daesh supporters less predictable in terms of their strategic objectives and mobility, such as migration or fund transfer to the caliphate's territory. Consequently, the police might lose these activities as a point of reference to determine the trend of the supporters, at least in mid- to long-term projection.

In the nearest future, however, some local supporters likely retain their intention to migrate. The arrests made by the police in May 2019 are an indication to this: (i) a Malaysian was picked up in KLIA as he tried to take a flight to the Middle East to join Daesh; (ii) an Indonesian labourer was arrested in Sabah on the suspicions of facilitating Daesh supporters to enter the Philippines and channelling funds to the Maute group.¹¹ These examples are supporting evidence to an argument made by Amalina Abdul Nasir, who wrote that "... territorial defeat has not however whittled their desire to travel to Syria as seen by the ongoing attempts to physically join the terrorist group."¹²

The promotion of extremist ideology is another indicator of Daesh's activity following its defeat. In September 2019 (two years after the fall of Raqqa), it was revealed that a terrorist cell in Malaysia had been actively propagating salafi jihadi ideology and recruiting members through social media before its members were detained. Interestingly, the group, which was said to be planning attacks in Malaysia and Indonesia once it had recruited enough individuals, comprises all-Indonesian-members.¹³ This points out the fact that the crumbling of the caliphate has not deterred some local supporters to continue spreading extremist teachings in Malaysia, regardless of their nationality. Coupled with the continuing interest to migrate, Amalina Abdul Nasir's assertion on the continuing traction of Daesh ideology – notwithstanding territorial losses – appears to be true.¹⁴

As the group continues to suffer damages progressively – the loss of territories, strongholds and the death of Abu Bakar Al-Baghdadi – there might be enough grounds to suspect that the group in Malaysia would move underground. Whether this would be a trend in the near future, or is marginally happening already, is a question to pose at this point. The individuals mentioned in examples above supply some indications that supporters' activities remain visible on such social media as Facebook and Telegram. Additionally, a "wolf pack" apprehended during the month of Ramadhan this year was also reported to have based their communication via WhatsApp.¹⁵ These cases run contrary to the suspicion that supporters would be driven underground.

Of course, more evidence must be gathered to test the viability of this projection and a recent development suggests more nuances to the situation. Reports from October 2019 showed that around two-dozen TikTok accounts were utilised to spread Daesh's propaganda in this lesser-known application.¹⁶ While the particular impact of its venture into TikTok is an interesting subject in itself – especially due to the propensity of younger children to access the application¹⁷ – this signifies that Daesh is getting more creative in the face of limitations after its defeat.

Linked to this is the tenacious behaviour displayed by some terrorist groups in spite of ardent oppositions and limitations. The demise of Abu Bakar Al-Baghdadi, for example, is not projected to leave a significant dent in the activities of Daesh supporters in Southeast Asia.¹⁸ In Malaysia's context, this could mean that the alert level towards Daesh threat would be retained in the short- to mid-term projection at the very least. Datuk Ayob Khan Mydin Pitchay of Royal Malaysia Police's Counter Terrorism Division (E8) has drawn a comparison to the persistent presence of Al-Qaeda, despite the death of Osama bin Laden in 2011.¹⁹ If anything, constant losses could push supporters to the corner and trigger them to launch retaliatory attacks, as has been suggested following the death of Abu Bakar Al-Baghdadi.²⁰

All of the above depictions point towards the fact that Daesh has, in fact, remained in Malaysia's terrorism scene despite what the term "post-Daesh" implies. In the context of Malaysia's P/CVE discourse, it would be uncalled for to remove the element of Daesh from our consideration of terrorism threat in the country, at least for now.

BACK TO "NORMAL"? – PERSISTING TRENDS AND AGENDAS IN MALAYSIA

Another possible misperception is that the "post-Daesh" era heralds a new security landscape whereby the threat of terrorism has significantly diminished and, therefore, the P/CVE agenda is losing its relevance. Some in the P/CVE community in Kuala Lumpur has especially encountered this last sentiment recently, contributing to the less vibrant discourse on P/CVE this year.²¹ Part of this can be attributed to this sense of relief that the extremely violent and sensational terrorist group has been largely defeated in its bastions.

As explained above, the defeat of Daesh does not necessarily spell the end of its terror. It must also be noted, furthermore, that before Daesh captured the attention of the nation, terrorism had been one of the country's top security concerns for a long time, be it religiously inspired or not.²² Terrorist threat is also expected to remain in Malaysia's security scene in the future, as long as extremist ideology continues to be a feature among some quarters of Malaysian society.²³

The question is, are there any linkages between manifestations of terrorist threat in the past and the trajectory of terrorism landscape from this point onward?

A brief examination of terrorist groups in the past shows that the groups always had certain political agendas as motivating factors. Groups such as *Golongan Rohaniah*, *Koperasi Angkatan Revolusi Islam Malaysia* (KARIM), *Kumpulan Jundullah*, the infamous *Kumpulan Persaudaraan Ilmu Dalam Al-Maunah* and the *Jemaah Islamiyah* (JI), for example, advocated the overthrow of Malaysian government to set up their version of an Islamic state. There is an anti-democratic agenda in these groups' creed, as exemplified by their rejection of elections, parliamentary democracy and the constitution.²⁴ Moreover, the perception of Malaysian government's un-Islamic tendencies also seems to be a motivation for these groups. *Kumpulan Revolusi Islam Ibrahim Libya*, which was associated with the Memali incident, was reportedly encouraging Muslims to oppose any government that did not incorporate Islamic teaching and spirit in its affairs.²⁵ Additionally, and more worryingly for Malaysia, there is also an ethnic or pluralism dimension in some groups' belief system. JI and *Tentera Sabilullah* are samples of groups that exhibit antagonism towards non-Muslims and members of minority ethnic groups.²⁶

It is clear that these agendas – the establishment of an Islamic state, the overthrow of un-Islamic governments and the rejection of non-Muslims – resonate strongly with some of Daesh's central tenets. More interestingly, however, is the fact that these agendas had always been a part of Malaysia's terrorism landscape for a long time. If these agendas had been present, disseminated and metastasised for a long time for decades before Daesh came into picture, then would not the defeat of Daesh did little to dampen the vigour of violent extremism in Malaysia?

Fast forward to today, there are signs of these agendas being engendered and expressed again within Malaysia's scene, though not necessarily by terrorist groups. The death of firefighter Muhammad Adib Mohd Kassim, for example, has sparked an uproar among Muslims and opposition parties that criticised the government's handling of the riot at the Seafeld Sri Maha Mariamman Temple.²⁷ This local controversy has become a convenient entry point for local Daesh supporters to justify their activities. A Daesh wolf pack comprising four men²⁸ was detained after the police detected their plan to assassinate four VIPs, attack non-Muslim houses of worship and entertainment centres to avenge death of Muhammad Adib.²⁹ Despite this worrying development (i.e. terrorist groups exploiting local controversies to sustain presence)³⁰, the revenge narrative is a recurring theme in Malaysia's security landscape. Before this, the aforementioned *Tentera Sabilullah* had instigated ethnic violence to avenge Muslims who perished during the Penang *Hartal* of 1967.³¹

Perhaps, the above case is an example of "ingredients" for inter-group tension that Dr Ahmad El-Muhammady said could be exploited for radical groups in Malaysia today.³² Such "ingredients" show the close proximity between domestic politics and terrorism which, yet again, was exemplified by the political agendas of terrorist groups of the past.

Another "ingredient" that seems to strike a similarity with past experience is the perception that the Malaysian government is unsympathetic towards Islamic teachings. The *Pakatan Harapan* government is no stranger towards such accusations. That 50 percent of the government is made up of non-Muslims has been exploited to build a narrative that the government is anti-Muslim.³³ Individuals in high places have also been targeted, as in the case of Attorney General Tommy Thomas who was alleged by his opponent as being anti-Islam.³⁴ The call by some Malay-based quarters to return political powers back to the Malays – including cabinet, bureaucratic and judicial positions – has also emerged and amplified recently.³⁵ Past terrorist groups that espoused such belief – the un-Islamic-ness of the government – could easily turn these narratives into fuel that sustains their operation in the country, if they had the chance. Whether these narratives would

inspire similar movements by existing groups in the future is a task that security forces and P/CVE community must undertake.

Anti-democracy sentiment is also an “ingredient” to consider. The best example for this is perhaps a foiled plan to attack non-Muslim voters at a polling station during the 14th General Election, which was masterminded by a housewife. The selection of the target is significant, as it demonstrates perpetrators’ denouncement of Malaysia’s democratic process and multiculturalism. At the surface, plans and groups such as this engender similar visions and agendas as past terrorist groups.

All these cases above do not just bear a degree of resemblance to Malaysia’s experience with terrorist groups, but they also occurred after the defeat of Daesh. However, this is not to suggest that there is a complete similarity between situations of today and the past – more efforts need to be directed at examining the linkages between the two that goes beyond the mere superficial level. Nevertheless, we need to acknowledge that these linkages could sometimes strike a right note, which makes it a sufficient departure point to question the claim that terrorist threat would dwindle in Malaysia’s “post-Daesh” era.

CONCLUSION

To reiterate, this article attempts to tackle some of the misperceptions surrounding the “post-Daesh” term that arose due to the lack of epistemic work on the term itself. As demonstrated above, in Malaysia, “post-Daesh” does not necessarily spell the end of Daesh’s threat in particular or the diminishing threat of terrorism in general. Worse, with Daesh’s current debilitated state, those who have been exposed to violence extremism ideology might attempt to find further justifications for their activism, find creative ways to spread their wings, or plug in to existing, pre-Daesh formula of terrorism in the country. While the term “post-Daesh” carries the element of time, it does not propagate the end of anything, terrorism least of all.

Perhaps the perceived calm that descended upon Malaysia after Daesh’s defeat is an opportune window for P/CVE community to re-evaluate its performance in the past years. Some disturbing findings show that past P/CVE endeavours might have

not been as effective as we hoped them to be. First, the backlash against the movie *Polis Evo* 2³⁶ (which is said to be grossly misrepresenting Islam)³⁷ shows that some quarters of the society still fail to acknowledge that terrorist groups could spring from any religion, including Islam. Second, the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia's recent engagement with Bumiputera communities in several states³⁸ found that national security ranks very lowly among issues that the Bumiputeras perceive to be affecting them.³⁹ In both instances, it appears that more work needs to be done to elevate the society's awareness on terrorism threat.

At the end of the day, we may be forced to accept the fact that, with it being a traditional security issue, terrorism will remain in Malaysia's security landscape indefinitely, "post-Daesh" or not. No matter how much P/CVE effort is pumped into the equation, terrorism will continue to be a feature as long as its root causes are not addressed. We may, however, take solace from the show of morbid optimism displayed by Claire Underwood of Netflix's *House of Cards* who, when secretly negotiating with a terrorist suspect, asserted that her government cannot destroy a terrorist group completely, but enough to make it irrelevant.⁴⁰

¹ For example, would the term carry the same strategic implications to Malaysia as it does to New Zealand? Both countries have faced challenges from the terrorist groups, but the different trajectory of violent extremism in each of these countries probably means they would be impacted differently.

² For the purpose of this article, the expression "Daesh's defeat" is used to refer to its debilitated state after significant losses in the Middle East and the Southern Philippines.

³ Thailand and the Philippines are listed in the top 20 countries most impacted by terrorism in 2017. Please see Institute for Economics & Peace, 2018. *Global Terrorism Index 2018: Measuring the impact of terrorism*. [Online]

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- ²⁰ *Ibid.*
- ²¹ IMAN Research, 2019. Updates on P/CVE in Malaysia [Interview] (23 October 2019).
- ²² Unlike what the conventional literature of strategic studies dictates, terrorism in Malaysia should instead be considered as a traditional security issue (as opposed to a non-traditional one, which is what terrorism is assigned to), due to the long history the nation has experienced in fighting terrorism.
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THE RISE OF ARMED GROUPS IN CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT

Asrul Daniel bin Ahmed

INTRODUCTION

A cursory look at today's headlines will no doubt leave the impression to the average reader that a great deal of violence and instability being experienced around the world today are the work of "militants" with less than noble intentions. Whether they be warlords, separatists, insurgents, violent extremists, guerrillas, ultranationalists, terrorists, foreign fighters or supposed Jihadists, the image of the armed and lawless groups intent on inflicting harm upon the global public will often be found at the core of our contemporary context of insecurity in the post 9/11 world. Conflating distinct categories of armed groups can be problematic. A Sub-Saharan warlord's coterie, for example, has operational methods, ideological drivers and organisational structures that are quite distinct from religiously-inspired transnational terrorist cell networks. And not all armed groups fall foul of the public's perception and regard - private military firms that have time and again reinforced the armed forces of the state are part of a long tradition of fighting for private gain. However, the distinctions between these groups are becoming increasingly blurred as scholars, governments, and the public, among others, grapple with the new challenges posed by the rising prominence and frequency of armed conflicts that fall outside the traditional interstate framework of international relations.

Armed Groups

Armed groups are often categorised according to features that distinguish one from one another, although it is not uncommon for observers to sometimes conflate between categories and assume that what holds for one particular type of armed group goes the same for another. There is a danger in this manner of thinking - policies that are effective in countering the actions of one particular type of armed group may not only prove ineffective for another type, but may end up being

counterproductive and exacerbating the situation. It must be kept in mind that assigning categories to different types of armed groups is difficult at best, since armed groups, the agile and adaptable creatures that they are, may demonstrate features or adopt strategies that are uncharacteristic of the categories with which they are often associated. Consider, for example, that “terrorists” as an armed group may not resort exclusively, or even primarily, on terrorist acts to further their cause. The late Paul Wilkinson remarked how acts of terrorism were often used within a wider repertoire of armed struggle, and that sustained, standalone campaigns of terrorism are historically rare.¹ It is also perhaps worthwhile to keep in mind that some of the categories, particularly the more derogatory ones such as terrorists, are sometimes arbitrarily assigned to particular groups in order to delegitimise their claims and dilute any support for them.

Nevertheless, it would be useful to have an idea of some of the broad categories of armed groups that are often referred to, if only to understand how their roles, motivations and activities are generally understood within the context of armed conflicts. The categories include, but are not limited to:

1) **Insurgents** are armed groups that are involved in a protracted military (and sometimes political) conflict with the ruling government with the aim of weakening and eroding their hold on power and challenging the legitimacy of their rule, with perhaps an eye towards overthrowing and supplanting them with a different regime. National liberation and separatist movements can also be considered forms of insurgency, where the former seeks to confront and oust an occupying force, whereas the latter seeks to secede territory from one state to join another or to establish a completely new state. A good example of insurgents is the Basque Fatherland and Liberty Party (ETA)².

2) **Warlords** often refer to the head of an “army” of militants that represent, as Paul Rich alludes, militarised sub-national groupings that have emerged within the lawless terrain that has come about as a result of the fragmentation of weakened nation states following the end of the Cold War³. Indeed, when a particular society is bereft of functional and effective political institutions, there may be instances in which militarised interventions would be carried out by warlords into the political chaos of

such ungoverned spaces. The power and authority projected by Warlords are highly militarised, doing away with the very idea of the central authority of the state and regarding warfare not as serving political ends but as a form of politics in and of itself. Notable warlords include Charles Taylor who led the Independent Patriotic Front of Liberia (IPFL), and Joseph Kony of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA)⁴;

3) **Terrorists** are often categorised as such due to their strategy of attacking civilians and their employment of fear-inducing tactics in order to generate fear and compel targeted authorities into particular courses of action. It has been pointed out time and again that this category is a highly contested one, and there has been more than one instance in which the labelling of a particular armed group as terrorists has been perceived as being done with the intention of discrediting them and delegitimising whatever cause they are claiming to champion. What has been apparent is the deliberate targeting of innocent civilians as a tactic that has been used by a number of armed groups, and the crossing of that moral threshold often leads to the derision and denunciation that comes with such a label. Daesh and Al-Qaeda are currently the more well-known of armed groups that employ the tactics of terrorism, and the term has also attributed to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, the Aum Shinrikyo, Al-Shabaab, and Jemaah Islamiyah⁵.

4) **Private Military Firms (PMF)** can be considered as groups that offer their professional military services in exchange for compensation, usually in financial terms. Remarking that PMFs are the corporate evolution of the mercenaries of old, Peter Singer points out that the private military industry came about in the beginning of the 1990s due to three dynamics: the ending of the Cold War, which brought about the downsizing of professional armies which consequently increased global instability as well as demand for alternative security providers; the changing character of warfare, which made professional militaries increasingly dependent on commercial technologies owned by private firms; and the growing trend of privatisation⁶. One of the most well-known PMF is the American company Blackwater, renamed XE Services in 2009⁷.

5) **Foreign Fighters**, while less its own category but rather a sub grouping that cuts across the broad range of categories of armed groups, has become an increasingly

troubling concern with the flood of foreign recruits that has been swelling the ranks of Daesh, in which case their frequent turn to the sensationalist use of extreme violence and savvy new media techniques for strategic and communicative purposes have led to the expansion and growth of **Foreign Terrorist Fighters**⁸. While the phenomenon is not exactly new, the recent media attention has highlighted the perplexing development that individuals, particularly from Western nations, with very little in common with the cause or ideologies at the heart of a conflict in a distant land, are willing to fight and die in a foreign land⁹. While the reality is much more complex, and analysts such as Stephanie Kaplan advocates carefully disaggregating the foreign fighter problem into several distinct problems to help the formulation of more effective strategies and policies, one observation from various quarters is that when foreign fighters enter the equation in any armed conflict the level and incidences of atrocities almost always goes up¹⁰.

The Evolution of Modern Warfare

While war has been a persistently perennial condition of the human existence, its particularities have always been adapted to meet the demands of the changing times, prompting seminal war theorist Carl von Clausewitz to remark that “Each age has its own kind of war.” Indeed, since the beginning of time warfare has more or less revolved around the central theme of beating one's enemy to a pulp with bigger, better or a larger number of sticks, although prior to the 19th century wars in Europe had primarily been rather limited affairs. Taking into account the high cost of training and maintaining professional armies, and the need to maintain a sense of traditional order of Old Europe, feudal lords content themselves with meagre territorial acquisitions and successive political advantages garnered through their comparatively paltry acts of belligerence, and very rarely sought total dominance over or complete eradication of their opponents.

The advent of the Napoleonic Wars changed all that. Armed with military conscription, an innovation that significantly changed the face of modern warfare, Napoleon Bonaparte had at the height of his command raised an unprecedented 3-million strong army willing to lay down their lives not for gold but for the love of country. The rapid mobilisation of staggering number of conscripts presented supply

line problems that somewhat necessitated acts of razing and pillaging in the enemy's territory, making offensive war the norm and conflicts more aggressive and brutal than they otherwise needed to be¹¹.

Ideology and nationalism, besides being instrumental in raising, by the standards of the time, large armies, were also among the major drivers of conflict during this period. The trend, coupled with the engines of industrialisation that churned out relatively steady supply of the technological implements of war at the dawn of the 20th century, moved towards total war that began in the 19th century reached its zenith with the two World Wars. Perhaps those that decry the apparently recent development of brutal targeting of civilians by certain armed groups today might want to consider that hundreds of thousands of non-combatants perished during the bombings of Tokyo and Dresden in World War II, deliberately targeted by Allied bombers in an attempt to terrorise and disrupt the daily routines of the civilian population¹².

The years following the end of World War II not only witnessed a dramatic decline in interstate conflict, but also saw a correspondingly unprecedented rise in the number of intrastate conflict. As the colonial masses struggled for independence from their soon-to-be-former masters, the rising tide of nationalism turned the trend of armed conflicts inwards. Superpowers continue to jockey for influence and either propel or contain the spread of reigning ideologies by indulging in various proxy wars, the threat of total war having been forestalled indefinitely by the radioactive promise of nuclear arsenals. While armed groups were strongly featured during the armed conflicts of the Cold War period, the fall of the iron curtain would witness not only the rise of the number of these groups, but also a greater diversity of categories and methods that came about due to the changing context of the international system.

The Post-Cold War International System

The rise in prominence of armed groups in the 1990s suggested a strong relationship between the proliferation of violent non-state actors and the ending of the Cold War¹³. The dismantling of structures that supported the superpower rivalry between Soviet and American interests had, among a great other number of things,

pulled the proverbial rug from under many an oppressive and dictatorial regime. With the blind eye that used to indulge their rampant corruption, technical incompetence and violent indiscretions no longer deemed politically sustainable by their 'ideological' patrons, many such regimes found their once stable supply of aid suddenly drying up. Regimes that fail to successfully adapt to these new realities might find that whole populations that for decades had gone along with abuse, oppression and policies of self-interest are suddenly at odds with the legitimacy of their rule and their style of governance.

Within these failed or failing states, we find that the overflowing reservoirs of grievances that are no longer held in check by inadequate and underdeveloped machineries of the state give rise to age-old schisms and divisions, a great number of which predicated along ethnic and religious lines. With traditional institutions of the state dysfunctional and no longer able to provide basic necessities such as security and the rule of law, we witness some of these states regress into Hobbesian-esque conditions where violent and brutal forms of self-help can sometimes be the only viable means of survival.

These conditions are further exacerbated by the fact that their inability of these regimes to effectively leverage authority, legitimate or otherwise, throughout their territories have contributed to the permeability and porousness of the borders they share with others which, arguably, has led to increasing levels and frequency of irregular, undocumented and at times illegitimate movements of goods and people. Among its many implications, this situation can provide a most fertile environment for illicit forms of trade, including that of the means and methods of waging war.

All this was happening at a time when the break-neck pace of globalisation was approaching a fever pitch, and the technological innovations that lay at its very heart was set to revolutionise the reach, intensity, and the very manner with which individuals and communities will come to interact, coordinate and relate with one another. But the myriad of possibilities offered by such advances include darker ones as well, and groups and individuals now have enhanced and cost-effective capabilities to exploit the system and inspire others to join and support their causes,

including those of the violent variety as well. Also, as the globalising environment has made it easier than ever to connect buyers to various markets, so has the relative ease by which arms can now be procured by groups and individuals that desire them.

The Proliferation of Armed Groups

There has been a substantial number of armed groups arising to fill the vacuums of power and assume some of the functions that some states have been increasingly unable or unwilling to provide. Carrying with them a range of motivations and capabilities, they were the vanguard of the sea of change gripping the international system. Martin van Creveld, in the *Transformation of War*, remarked that a post-modern mode of warfare, one which was of low-intensity conflicts between states on one side and various non-state organisations on the other, was rapidly overshadowing what has been the modern understanding of warfare which has been traditionally between states¹⁴. This carries the implication that the very notion of sovereignty upon which the international system had been built upon since 1648 was being undermined by this growing trend.

Indeed, the increasing presence and impact of armed groups over the past few decades has led analysts to conclude that they should now collectively be regarded as a Tier-One Security Priority¹⁵. Such a categorisation represents a level of threat that has the capacity to undermine major interests and could possibly carry out attacks with strategic consequences, a level which had previously only been attributed to states¹⁶. As such, attacks by armed groups are increasingly regarded to be acts of warfare, and the armed groups themselves will continue to pose a credible and significant security challenge to states for the foreseeable future.

This departs somewhat from the traditional tendency to regard the challenge posed by armed groups as primarily internal in nature. As the actions of armed groups are often regarded as challenges to the legitimacy of the *de jure* authority governing over a particular state, their actions are often framed within a highly political context¹⁷. As such, conflicts involving armed groups are often considered to be non-international armed conflict and beyond the scope of a significant portion of the body of laws

governing the conduct of armed conflict¹⁸. One could argue that the laws of armed conflict were designed to protect civilians from the ravages of war by offering limited and conditional forms of protection to combatants as incentives for compliance to the legal regime governing armed conflict¹⁹. Take away those incentives and perhaps one can begin to fathom why conflicts involving armed groups in today's world appear to be more savage and brutal than they need be.

Concluding Thoughts

On the whole, our understanding of the implications of how the nature of conflict has evolved often trails the reality of such. Armed groups have been diversifying and proliferating after the end of the Cold War, and are becoming an increasingly potent factor in the security dynamics of the international system. We must carefully take this into our deliberations and offer more realistic and sober approaches in dealing with the increasingly salient issue of armed groups if we are serious about managing the security and moderating the increasing volatility of the international environment.

The unwillingness of a significant number of those in power to translate what little understanding we have into more effective policies is starkly reflected by how inadequate, underdeveloped and ineffective the laws that govern armed conflict are at addressing armed groups. Perhaps it is high time that the usual suspects among the high contracting parties consider stepping out of their comfort zone and getting serious about finding multilateral and institutional solutions that will provide better incentives and a more welcoming environment for armed groups to play by the rules of the game, rather than sink into the debilitating cycle of unilateral approaches that fail to integrate the reality of armed groups into a workable framework for sustainable peace.

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³ Rich, P.B., 1999. The emergence and significance of warlordism in international politics. In *Warlords in International Relations* (pp. 1-16). Palgrave Macmillan, London.

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ Faluyi, O.T., Khan, S. and Akinola, A.O., 2019. Terrorist Organizations and Counter-Terrorism: Case Studies. In *Boko Haram's Terrorism and the Nigerian State* (pp. 133-148). Springer, Cham.

⁶ Singer, P.W., 2002. Corporate warriors: The rise of the privatized military industry and its ramifications for international security. *International security*, 26(3), pp.186-220.

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- ¹⁷ Davis, D.E., 2009. Non-state armed actors, new imagined communities, and shifting patterns of sovereignty and insecurity in the modern world. *Contemporary Security Policy*, 30(2), pp.221-245.
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DEATHS OF DAESH KEY REGIONAL OPERATIVES AND CURRENT TERRORISM THREAT IN INDONESIA, MALAYSIA AND THE PHILIPPINES

Jasmine Jawhar

ABSTRACT

Despite the weakened physical state of Daesh - with the fall of the so-called caliphate in 2019 and the death of Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi - Daesh's global influence is far from over. In Southeast Asia - particularly in Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines - terrorist groups, cells, and supporters of Daesh have adapted and continue to threaten the region's peace and security. Directly impacting Southeast Asia are also the deaths of key regional operatives in Syria. A significant impact on the region from these deaths is that terrorists in the region are operating more independently of external directives, with lone wolf and wolf pack attacks gaining grounds, as with the use of kinships in conducting attacks. A mixture of both online and offline modes of communication are also observed in conducting various terrorism activities. Apart from this is also the continuing trend of building, maintaining and strengthening network across the region and the link between terrorism and criminal groups to ensure the facilitation of terrorist activities across the region.

INTRODUCTION

Daesh's rise in 2014, and consequently the establishment of a so-called caliphate, had a significant impact on Southeast Asia. Terrorist groups already operating in the region such as the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), Jemaah Ansharut Tauhid (JAT), and Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), were quick to pledge allegiance to Daesh's leader, Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi. Individuals with no affiliation to any local terrorist groups or cells, had also shown commitment to Daesh, and some even went as far as joining the group or other rebel factions active in Syria and Iraq.

However, rigorous security operations at the international, regional and national levels have proven to be effective in weakening the threat of Daesh. Among others, this has led to the fall of the "caliphate" itself, followed by the death of Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi. These operations have also led to the failure of the 2017 Marawi siege, as well as the deaths of key Southeast Asian operatives in Syria.

Does this mean we can safely assume that the threat posed by Daesh in the region has diminished? The simple answer to this is of course, no. History has shown us that terrorist groups are fluid in their nature and able to adapt to changes easily. In this case, the weakening of Daesh core - in its physical form at least - should not be viewed as having direct correlation to the weakening of its affiliated groups, particularly in Southeast Asia, where terror groups have been in existence for decades. Nonetheless, Daesh's influence in the region has small shifts, albeit significant, particularly due to the deaths of Daesh's key regional operatives in Syria, as well as local and regional counter operations by authorities.

This article therefore attempts to identify these shifts and continuities by exploring several areas including present source of directives; the state of Southeast Asia as transit point and destination for terrorists; existing modes of communication being utilised, the extent of current regional network; and the nexus between terrorism and organised crime groups. It will firstly begin with an overview of the key regional operatives in Syria and Iraq who managed to extend their influence not only in their own countries but also across the region. However, this article will only focus on three major countries in relation to the threat of terrorism in the region – Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines.

Regional Daesh Operatives with Influence in Southeast Asia

Several key developments took place in recent years with direct and indirect impact on the threat of terrorism in Southeast Asia and beyond. For starters, the end of the so-called Islamic Caliphate in March 2019 marked the fall of Daesh's ultimate achievement in its quest for territorial control and power. It is by far the biggest blow to Daesh's reign, tarnishing the image, albeit misrepresented, of a powerful, undefeatable, "blessed by God" "caliphate". This was followed by the death of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi himself on 26 October 2019. Prior to these major events, however, were the successes of security operations that led to the deaths of key Southeast Asian leaders in Syria and Iraq – who by exploiting social media platforms and online communication apps, had managed to span their influence back to the region.

One such leader of regional stature was Indonesia's Bahrum Naim, killed in a drone strike in Syria in June 2018. He was one of the few who managed to establish network across the region, including Malaysia and the Philippines. Apart from recruiting Indonesians to conduct attacks in the country itself, he was also successful in recruiting at least 26 Malaysians to be part of a group called "Malhama Qubra" and communicated through WhatsApp, Telegram, and Facebook (The New Straits Times 2018). He was responsible for planning both successful attacks in Indonesia and several foiled attacks in Singapore and Malaysia. He also published a manifesto and a step-by-step manual for making detonators on his Telegram channel.

Another key figure was Bahrumsyah, also from Indonesia. Though his death has not been confirmed by the authorities, reports circulated suggested that he was killed in April 2018 (Allard and Mogato 2018). Like Bahrum Naim, he was also successful in creating a regional network in Southeast Asia. This was made easy as he was the leader of Katibah Nusantara in Syria, a Malay-only group comprising individuals from Malaysia and Indonesia (Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict - IPAC 2016). Former Royal Malaysian Police (RMP) Counter-Terrorism Unit's chief, Khan (cited in Today Online 2016), stated that Bahrumsyah had been "...ordering attacks against Malaysian government, security forces and certain Western interests" in the country.

Zooming in on Malaysia, several significant Daesh operatives from the country were also killed, resulting in the decline of recruitment and attack planning in the country. In 2017, Malaysian Muhammad Wanndy Mohamed Jedi was killed in Raqqa, Syria on 29 April 2017. He was the mastermind behind Malaysia's first successful attack on Movidia nightclub in Selangor in June 2016, which injured eight people (The Straits Times 2017a). He was responsible for recruiting many Malaysians via social media platforms and online communication apps (The Star 2017). It was reported that following his death, online recruitment of Malaysians declined to a certain degree (Khan, cited in Zolkepli 2017a). Following the death of Wanndy, several Malaysians in Syria were considered as replacement for the top post, including Mohd Rafi Udin @ Abu Awn al-Malizi and Wan Mohd Aquil Wan Zainal Abidin @ Akel Zainal, among others (Zolkepli 2017b). However, the latter was killed in March 2019 while the former was killed earlier in January 2019.

Physically present in the region however, was Dr. Mahmud Ahmad, a lecturer at a local university in Kuala Lumpur who travelled to southern Philippines in 2014. Killed in 2017, he played a significant role in the Marawi siege in 2017 both as a financier and recruiter. It was reported that he received more than RM500,000 from Daesh sympathisers and supporters (Tam 2017). Report by IPAC (2017) also suggested that Dr. Mahmud received the funding from Daesh in Syria through *Katibah Nusantara*¹. He was also the point of contact for any foreigners who wanted to join the Daesh-linked group in the Philippines (IPAC 2017). To facilitate the movement of these foreigners, Dr. Mahmud envisaged Sabah as the transit point for Daesh militants to travel to southern Philippines (The Straits Times 2017b).

Indeed, the failure to acknowledge the successes of security operations in the region - specifically in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines - would run the risk of overgeneralising the causal relations between the deaths of Daesh's regional leaders and its impact on the region. Nonetheless, these deaths have not only somewhat influenced the recruitment of terrorists in the region, but also the shifts in sources of directives, and to a certain degree, in modes of communication. The next section will look into these shifts and other related observations.

Impact on Southeast Asia – Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines

While there are many others from the region who are currently in Syria/Iraq, staunch supporters of Daesh in the region have been operating more independently of regional operatives in Syria and Iraq since the deaths of these individuals, resulting in more cases of 'lone wolves', 'wolf packs' as well as the involvement of family units in conducting terror-related activities. Members of local terrorist groups are also becoming more prominent in leading terrorist activities at both the local and regional levels.

¹ *Katibah Nusantara* is a Southeast Asia unit within Daesh. Consisted of Malay-speaking individuals, mainly from Malaysia and Indonesia, as well as Singapore and southern Philippines, who were operating in Syria.

Malaysia in particular, has been concerned with the rise of **'lone wolves' and 'wolf packs'** in the country. According to former chief of the Royal Malaysia Police (RMP) counter-terrorism unit, Khan (cited in The Star 2019), 'wolf packs' are regarded as terrorists that "have no network or links with militant cells and moved in small groups of six to seven members". Following that, in May 2019, Malaysia arrested four men belonging to a Daesh 'wolf pack'. They were suspected of planning large-scale attacks on "...high-profile personalities for not championing Islam" and non-Muslim places of worships (Channel News Asia 2019). Lacking external directives from key Daesh regional leaders, it is notable that terrorists, particularly in Malaysia, are acting more autonomously.

This observable detail is also extended to members of a larger terrorist group such as the Daesh affiliated Jemaah Ansharul Daulah (JAD), based in Indonesia. Following investigations into the Surabaya attacks in May 2018, it was revealed that though the attacks were encouraged by JAD East Java leadership, the perpetrators were left to plan the entire series of attacks on their own (IPAC 2018). Subsequent arrests of other JAD members following the attacks also led to claims that JAD had lost its central leadership, where members "were acting as a loose network of autonomous cells, not as part of a centrally directed organisation" (IPAC 2018). This argument was echoed by the National Intelligence Agency of Indonesia in 2019, when its director, Gunawan (cited in The Jakarta Post 2019a), stated that JAD works in cells comprising both lone wolves and small groups.

Not only did the 2018 Surabaya attacks revealed the lack of JAD's central leadership, but more chillingly, the involvement of **family units including women and children** in terror attacks. The series of incidents that took place on 13 and 14 May 2018 in Surabaya involved two separate suicide attacks by a family of six and a family of five respectively. Another linked-incident was a premature bomb explosion in a family home in Sidoarjo, an hour's drive from the city of Surabaya. The three separate incidents involved members of JAD and their family, led by the JAD Surabaya emir, Dita Supriyanto. Dita's family were responsible for the first series of bombings on three churches in Surabaya by delegating the tasks among his family

members.² The following day, on 14 May 2018, Tri Murtono and his family were responsible for the attack on Surabaya's police headquarters. The incident killed four of the perpetrators, including Tri Murtono himself, his wife and two sons, while his youngest daughter and 10 others, including four police officers, were wounded (Ellis-Peterson & Lamb 2018). Not only does these attacks showcased the involvement of women and children in terrorist attacks, but also the independent roles played by members within a larger terrorist group – and in this case, JAD.

The use of children in the attacks were strongly opposed by some JAD members, including its imprisoned leader, Aman Abdurrahman, leading to claims that such attacks may not take place again (IPAC 2018). However in October 2019, Indonesian authorities foiled a planned attack in Bali by a pro-Daesh father and son duo (Wockner 2019). Both of them were linked to JAD members (husband and wife) responsible for the stabbing attack on Indonesia's chief security minister, Wiranto (Wockner 2019). Earlier in January 2019, another team of husband and wife (also members of JAD), along with their children³ travelled to southern Philippines via Sabah in Malaysia, and eventually conducted a suicide attack⁴ on a Catholic cathedral in Jolo (Zolkepli 2019a). The attack resulted in the killings of 23 people and wounding at least 100 others (Gotinga 2019). Daesh claimed responsibility for the attack, while the Indonesian police believed that the couple's journey was financially supported by an individual based in Afghanistan, after learning of the couple's intention (The Jakarta Post 2019b).⁵

The Jolo Church Bombing 2019 indicated two important details. Firstly is that, while many of the attacks in recent years were hatched by local terror cells and groups, there are still instances of plots being planned and/or financed by those outside of the region – such as in the case of 'S', as aforementioned. Secondly, and equally as pressing, is the ability of these terror cells and groups in **building, maintaining and strengthening network across the region**. In an arrest made by the Royal

² Dita Supriyanto's two eldest sons attacked the first church, his wife and two daughters were responsible for the second church bombing while he was responsible for the third and most lethal attack.

³ Number of the couple's children varies in reports.

⁴ The children were not involved in the attack.

⁵ Indonesian police revealed that the financier is known only as 'S' @ Daniel @ Chaniago. No further details regarding 'S' were disclosed. Unclear if he is linked to Daesh and of his nationality.

Malaysian Police (RMP) on 26 May 2019, an Indonesian man, 20, was detained in Sabah, Malaysia for his part in facilitating travels of terrorists to southern Philippines and channelling funds to the Mindanao-based Maute Group, responsible for the Marawi siege in 2017 (Bador, cited in Zolkepli 2019b). Earlier in March 2019, a series of arrests took place in Semporna and Tambunan, in Sabah where 12 Filipinos and one Malaysian were detained. Among the arrested were either members of ASG, Maute Group, the Royal Security Force (RSF), and/or found to be harbouring elements of the Maute group as well as several militants from West Asia who fled to Sabah (RMP 2019).

Such network is also utilised for training purposes, for example, in obtaining skills for bomb-making. This is evident based on the arrests of two Malaysians in the northern state of Kedah, on 14 May 2019. Both of the suspects were believed to have undergone bomb-making training from JAD in Jogjakarta, Indonesia in 2018 (Zolkepli 2019c). It was revealed that they had learnt to make Triacetone Triperoxide chemical for the purpose of making large-scale bombs and car bombs, targeting non-Muslim houses of worship in Malaysia (Zolkepli 2019c). It should be noted however that such network and its purposes were present even before the rise of Daesh.⁶ Nonetheless, this persisting trend proves to be essential in the effectiveness of facilitating movements between Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines, as well as for training purposes.

As noted above, the network is important for several reasons. But one particular aspect of the network to be pointed out is the need and use of facilitators stationed in strategic locations. This, among others, is a possible indication that **Southeast Asia, apart from being a source, is also regarded as a transit point and destination** for foreigners⁷ to either, escape persecution, obtain funding, and/or to conduct other terror-related activities including attacks - the use of the facilitators would be to assist in expediting these activities. This becomes even more pressing as talks of the region being Daesh's next base loom once again, following the group's fall in Syria and Iraq and the death of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (Reuters 2019).

⁶ Such network were already in existence during the days of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and Darul Islam (DI).

⁷ These foreigners could also be those who are part of the region, travelling to another country in the region.

In 2019 alone Malaysia recorded arrests of 72 individuals, of which 46 were foreigners (Zolkepli 2020), particularly from West Asian and African countries (Othman and Povera 2019). However, one of the more significant arrests that year was the aforementioned detention of an Indonesian man in May 2019 in Sabah. He has been facilitating the travels of Indonesian Daesh militants transiting in Sabah, before heading to southern Philippines, since 2018. Follow-up investigations also revealed that he was responsible for the smuggling of the Indonesian family, responsible for the Jolo church bombing in January 2019 (Zolkepli 2019a). Additionally, Dr Mahmud, the Malaysian lecturer who was heavily involved in the 2017 Marawi siege, was said to have identified Sabah as the transit point for Daesh militants from Malaysia, Indonesia, Bangladesh and Myanmar, to travel to southern Philippines. This was done by hiring individuals as recruiters and facilitators. The plan was discovered when Malaysian authorities arrested four individuals, three foreigners and one Malaysian in January 2017 (The Straits Times 2017b).⁸ These arrests showcased the continued⁹ roles of Malaysia as a transit point and southern Philippines as the destination for terror-related activities. Acknowledging this, Malaysian authorities argued that it is due to the country's visa waiver programme that resulted in Malaysia being their first choice of country to travel to (Khan, cited in Othman & Povera 2019).

The role of these facilitators also points to the **nexus between terrorism and criminal activities**. Indeed, talks of links between terrorism and organised crime groups have been taking place for some time now. A clear link can be established when looking at the illegal activities taking place on the Sulu-Celebes seas, with elements of ASG working with criminal groups such as smugglers and kidnapping-for-ransom (KFR) groups, among others. One example is the Ajang-Ajang, a criminal group working with Hajan Sawadjaan, one of ASG's notorious leaders. According to IPAC (2019), "the group [Ajang-Ajang] has no known ideological commitment to ISIS

⁸ The first arrest was a 31-year-old Filipino man in Sabah, tasked by Dr. Mahmud to recruit and facilitate the movement of local and foreign recruits from Malaysia, Indonesia, Bangladesh and Myanmar (Rohingyas). The arrest was made along with a second suspect who was a 27-year-old Malaysian woman, planning to marry the Filipino man and follow him back to southern Philippines. Two Bangladeshi men, believed to have been recruited by the Filipino man, were later arrested in Kuala Lumpur. They were also reported to have had links with Daesh groups in Bangladesh.

⁹ Sabah, Malaysia has long been regarded as a transit point for terrorists travelling to southern Philippines. This was the case even during the days of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and Darul Islam in the 1990s and 2000s.

[Daesh] but was responsible for a series of criminal activities and ambushes of military personnel, stretching from Tawi -Tawi to Zamboanga” in southern Philippines. The group is also involved in “non-combat operations such as smuggling, scouting, kidnapping, and piracy” (S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies – RSIS 2020).

In addition, smuggling routes for the purpose of trafficking humans and transfer of illicit materials have also been conveniently utilised by terrorist elements for cross-border movements. This is highlighted by the joint operations between Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines (BIMP) led by INTERPOL between 24 February and 20 March 2020. The operations, dubbed the ‘Maharlika III’, were set along known terrorist transit points in the Sulu-Celebes seas. The raids saw the arrests of 180 individuals including a member of the ASG (INTERPOL 2020). According to INTERPOL (2020), the operation managed to rescue 82 victims of human trafficking and confiscated “firearms, illegally assembled explosives made of ammonium nitrate and other illicit goods and substances worth more than one million euros...”. These showcased that terrorists are also using criminal groups and smuggling routes to facilitate their illegal cross-border activities, particularly between southern Philippines, eastern Sabah and northern Sulawesi.

The deaths of key regional operatives from the region, coupled with rigorous security operations against terrorist elements online, have seen terrorists utilising a combination of both online and face-to-face forms of propaganda dissemination, recruitment, and radicalisation of individuals, among others. Previously, the likes of Wannady and Bahrum Naim were very active in recruiting Southeast Asians to join their group through online means. As of recently, instances of physical communication were resurfacing. In Indonesia, groups affiliated to Daesh such as Jemaah Anshar Khilafah (JAK), have been conducting weekly gatherings to recruit members (RSIS 2020), while foreign terrorist elements planned to establish schools in Malaysia to spread extremist ideology (Channel News Asia 2018). However, terror cells and groups are still utilising social media platforms and online communication apps for terror-related activities. It was reported that Telegram is still being used widely to recruit Indonesian militants (Nathalia 2019), while a terror cell detained in Malaysia in 2019 were using social media platforms to disseminate Daesh

propaganda for the purpose of recruitment (Rodzi 2019). The combination of both forms of communication – online and offline – adds up since operations are done at the local level rather than across the continent. However, the online platform is still important in spreading propaganda, thus recruit, as well as to maintain network across the region.

CONCLUSION

It may be too soon to observe significant shifts in Southeast Asia resulting from the fall of Daesh's physical presence and/or the death of Abu Bakr al-Bahgdadi. One might argue that in a sense, much of these shifts are actually going back to the way terrorist groups in the past, such as JI, used to operate. But the gradual weakening of the group's direct influence on Southeast Asia can be somewhat attributed to the deaths of key regional individuals operating, particularly in Syria, and the successful counter operations executed at the regional and local levels.

The deaths of key regional operatives such as Bahrum Shah, Bahrum Naim, Muhammad Wanndy Mohamed Jedi, and Dr. Mahmud, among others, have led to terrorists in the region to operate more independently of external directives.¹⁰ The threat from lone wolves and wolf packs have also been raised by several countries in the region, which makes identifying and locating these individuals even harder for the authorities. Instances of utilising family members including children have also taken place but the possibility of this trend continuing seems bleak with many, including leaders of terrorist groups, deeming the action immoral. However, what may persist are attacks being conducted by individuals with kinship such as husband and wife. Local terrorist groups in the region such as JAD, JAK, ASG and its affiliated groups are also still active, albeit some, including cells, operating more independently of the central leadership.

Once heavily relied on the Internet, social media platforms and online communication applications, local terrorist groups are still utilising face-to-face communication to spread propaganda, radicalise and recruit. Despite these

¹⁰ Individuals who are not located in the region or in the country of operation.

developments, online platforms are still exploited for the very same reason, leading a mix mode form of communication.

While there may be slight shifts in sources of directive, perpetrators and modes of communication, some continuity can be seen in relation to terrorist groups and cells' ability in building, maintaining, and strengthening network across the region. This has been the case for many decades, as far back as the active days of JI and DI. Additionally, the region will continue being a transit and destination points from many parts of the world, due to issues ranging from immigration policies to border control. Adding to the challenge in addressing border control issues is the existing link between organised crime groups and terrorists, utilising illegal routes for the purpose of illicit cross-border movements.

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PERSPECTIVES OF FEMALE TERROR OFFENDERS

Siti Fatimah Nurain Mohamad

ABSTRACT

For a separate project, SEARCCT along with its partners from the Malaysian Prison Department and Fat Bidin Media, visited a correctional facility to gather viewpoints of several Malaysian women who had been convicted for their involvement in terrorism. The way this piece is written goes according to person, under two identified overarching themes, followed by an analysis at the end. Arguments are derived mainly from interviews with the three women, as well as other readings and events.

A brief introduction of the interviewees, is as follows:

1. Maznah, a housewife who had a plot against voters during the Malaysian General Election of 2018.
2. Umi, a former university student who wanted to travel to Syria to join Daesh, but was stopped in Turkey.
3. Aisyah supported Daesh through online channels.

Keywords: prison; women; women and terrorism; women in terrorism; female offenders; Malaysian women; terrorism in Malaysia; ISIS; Daesh.

What exactly does it take to move a person, physically, mentally and emotionally? Collective experiences shape who we are and our identities, whether we face them as individuals or perceived communities (Anderson, 1983). No single act, person or event can ever be understood in isolation.

This is an attempt to put stories into perspective.

Setting the scene

Prison.

Correctional facility.

Even the terminology is intimidating. What more the perimeter fencing, cement walls and iron bars. But beyond layers of security, this particular correctional facility felt much like a school, from the colours to the corridors, to even the tiny water features

with fish and *kura-kura*. Of course, that sense of nostalgia and familiarity only applied to where the prison officers welcomed us.

Past more gates and small doors, the women with whom we had wanted to speak were waiting. The ones who, in the short time we had, provided answers to questions I was not quite sure how to ask. I am still unsure, to be honest.

The interviews began in a very well-ventilated classroom. No actually, it was freezing! Desks and chairs were neatly arranged. We made ourselves comfortable and attempted to get to know each other a little through small talk. Apart from one person we had arranged to meet, the interviewees were rather edgy, which was to be expected. After all, interviews only make people nervous.

But the interviews did not end there. Our friends from the Malaysian Prison Department were kind enough to allow us to enter the dorms, as well. We talked in the interviewees' cells; we listened as they showed us small plots of *daun pandan*, *bunga kantan* and a mulberry tree they had planted; we had conversations on a makeshift netball court they use to hang laundry. Truth be told, I kept having to remind myself why we were there.

Events that inspire: Becoming better Muslims

1. "*Semangat naik balik.*"

Maznah talked about her days growing up. Her father often spoke of the Middle East in the days of Saddam Hussein, and because of that she took interest in the Muslim world, as she called it. She followed the Israeli-Palestinian conflict closely, too. I suppose one could tell she was politically-inclined just by talking to her. Naturally, the conflict in Syria caught her attention, as well.

In her younger days, Maznah befriended people from all walks of life. She told us a story of her friend, a former pimp who now dons the *hijab*. She wanted to know what it was that could make a person so. What was it about religion that could make a person change to such an extent? Well insofar as appearances depict, I suppose.

Maznah did not mention she was particularly irreligious, so we were curious to know what she thought she lacked at that point, in terms of spirituality that is. Which part of

her or her life did she think had to change? She felt she treated her husband and children, I quote, too “loose”-ly.

In 2014, she came across a video entitled *Kebangkitan Rakyat Syria Mahukan Khilafah Naik* (The People of Syria Want the Rise of the Khilafah). This particular video sparked her interest and got her spirits high. She wanted to do her part.

Although those events have no obvious link to each other, what I can gather is that, they left an impression on Maznah. They made her think of how she could become a better Muslim, on both the micro and macro level. She saw herself as an individual as well as situated herself within the larger community of faith she belonged to. As far as that goes, it cannot be said that Maznah was different from anyone else wanting to change or create change.

2. “*Nampak pada kebenaran.*”

Now, Umi’s experience was not quite different from Maznah’s. She wanted to change as well.

Umi felt distant from religion before. She thought of herself as ordinary (*biasa*) or had not given religion much thought. Around the time she enrolled into university, a friend sparked her to think, “What can we bring to our graves when we die?” This triggered her interest to get to know more about religion.

She had already known about the conflict in Syria and Iraq for quite some time, before eventually seeing her “truth” in Daesh, in 2014. Only then, did her desire to die a *shaheed* only come about.

“*Orang yang berjihad tak bersembunyi,*” she said. She wanted to go to Syria to learn more about Islam, and she wanted to do it without hiding. Despite the conflict, she said there were still peaceful places in Syria, where she would have gone to gain religious knowledge.

At this point, I found myself slightly confused. Did Umi want to go to Syria to die, to study or die studying? But that’s not what we came to prison to do. We were not there for an interrogation.

3. “Ada umat Islam yang berani melawan kafir secara terang-terang.”

The Charlie Hebdo shootings in Paris of 2015 drew out Aisyah’s curiosity about Daesh. I have to admit, Aisyah was the most vocal of the lot. I found her opinions more provoking or rather more challenging to digest, compared to others.

Aisyah wanted to know the reasons behind the shooters’ actions. She thought it was brave of this group of Muslims to be fighting “non-believers” in the open. “How could they be so brave?” she wondered.

She felt it seemed as though what they did was right.

Aisyah never felt the need to make *hijra* to Syria, though. She said that women need not go to war to carry out *jihad*.

Social Media: Looking for Answers in the Wrong Places

1. In search for meaning behind her friend’s transformation, Maznah turned to social media. Social media led Maznah to a lot of debates and interesting discussions on religion. There too, she found extremist content. On top of that, most of her Facebook friends were Daesh-linked.

Through Facebook, Maznah was able to speak to Malaysian “*mujahideen*” in Syria. According to her virtual friends, life there was “pure” (*bersih*) like the time of the Prophet, no discos or alcohol, she added. People were not just going there to fight. There were also those who made *hijra* to become electricians or build roads. Therefore, the concept of *hijra* to Syria intrigued her. Life in Malaysia was simply just too much or in her words, *melampau*. However, limited resources and a sick husband prevented her from going. She would have sent her children but she did not want to force them into anything.

2. Umi, too, was by no means a stranger to Facebook. That’s where she gained her platform, as well. Umi found out about Daesh through a page that promoted *jihad* (well, a limited interpretation of what the concept entails) and the terrorist group’s battle. She was attracted to writings on the page and in particular, the Prophetic sayings (*hadith*) Daesh touched on.

Umi said that she was never exposed to the knowledge she gained from the page in school or through formal education. On the page, sources of information were people who had gone to fight the battle themselves (thereby implying, being credible sources as they actually walked the talk), or were *ustaz* from other Southeast Asian countries.

For Umi, she was shown this page by Allah at the time she really wanted to die a *shaheed*. She said it was a sign.

3. Aisyah's experience of social media was a little different compared to the others. She looked for extremist content on GooglePlus. Who would have thought? She got acquainted with some Southeast Asian Daesh supporters on that platform. She preferred this mode of communication as material there did not get taken down as quickly as it did on Facebook. Despite her explanation, this came as a surprise to me, given the trend of social media use in Malaysia. Facebook had been the top choice for social media users in the country for at least the past nine years, while GooglePlus had not even been on the radar (GlobalStats, 2020). One could not imagine turning to GooglePlus for information you can expect to find on any other social media outlet.

Reflection

These interviews made me change what I first set out to do, and what I thought I would achieve from this study. Well this part of it, at least. I had it all in my head already, a structure of hows and whys the women did what they did.

The three women did not even belong to or hold any official membership in a terrorist organisation. They did not have job titles, only affiliation. That being said, though, the nature of terrorist threat and extremism we face today is a lot more fluid compared to before. One need not be sworn in to a group to actually be a part of what it does. What Daesh or the Islamic State managed to create is similar to a movement (Cook and Vale, 2018). A shared vision is enough, for followers intending to cause damage and "make a difference" in their own ways. They are inspired by terrorist groups and acts of terror, and events in their lives serve to play into narratives they are being fed with or encounter. That is something important to consider, regardless of gender, in

understanding reasons people are attracted to the terrorist cause. We must never stop working towards addressing the driving factors behind radicalisation, which global efforts in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE) cannot emphasise enough.

The abovementioned brings attention to debates that have been made before, on perceived shared grievances being used to justify violence (Change Institute for the European Commission, 2008), and the argument in this piece is based on only a tiny sample. Perhaps we should expand the scope of gender-related PCVE research and thought, to avoid discounting non gender-specific motives of female extremists and terror offenders. It may help not to be too fixated on the fact that female extremists and terror offenders are indeed, women.

Something to treat with caution in the study of gender within the wider topic of terrorism is, the extent to which gender actually influences thought and action. It is safe to say that a more common set of terrorist motives were uncovered through the interviews with the three women in this study. As far as they were concerned, neither gender provided a particular reason behind their call to action, nor did gender determine it. But in different ways, gender did influence the type of involvement they made. Maznah could not go to Syria because she was a wife to a sick husband, while Aisyah did not think women had to make *hijra* to perform *jihad*. Umi, on the other hand, almost made it there. Their disposition as women, in one way or another, informed their actions but not their motives. There is a significant distinction that should be made. Ideological motivations are just as strong in women as they are in men (Bloom and Winter 2015). Both men and women can have political grievances and/or have personal reasons in supporting the terrorist cause. Meaning to say that, the element of gender should not serve to impede understanding of the pathways to radicalisation of terrorists and extremists (Ramakhrisna, 2009). Misguided religious knowledge – which informed the pattern of radicalisation for Maznah, Umi and Aisyah – is not unique.

That being said, there needs to be a degree of gender equality for us to have a more impartial perspective of the issue at hand. There is danger of falling into an argument in favour of women being bound to biology (Ortner, 1974). Ortner's theory provides an explanation as to why it may be so. Perhaps the fact that women perform natural

functions such as childbirth and menstruation, makes them closer to nature. Contrastingly, men do not possess such a relationship with nature and perform more cultural duties (work outside the home) without hindrance. Thus, it suggests why there may be difficulty thinking of women beyond the lens of their own gender. It is high time for a departure from this mode of thought, as it has the power to limit our response. We need to look past such association if we are to take female terror offenders' grievances seriously, which includes acknowledging women's agency to make personal decisions outside of their gender classification. At the same time, this is not to undermine the power of masculine or feminine narratives and roles in terrorist organisations. Distinctive differences, when present, should be catered for in forming suitable preventive and counter measures.

On that note, location matters. The roles of female Daesh affiliates physically in Syria and Iraq are different compared to elsewhere (Cook and Vale, 2018). Female Daesh affiliates on the ground as well as abroad may carry out recruitment, dissemination of propaganda, facilitating of travel and/or fundraising. However, there are specific roles unique to women on the ground, as they are physically part of Daesh's aim to create a state. For example, being wives to so-called warriors, mothers to "cubs of the Caliphate" and hold weapon-bearing positions in the al-Hisbah Committee or al-Muhajirin directorate (Almohammad and Speckhard, 2017).

Southeast Asia, on the other hand, may have seen more behind-the-scenes functions being carried out by women heeding to the terrorist group's call. The majority of evidence in this region points to female terrorist activity being away from the line of battle (Arianti and Yasin, 2016). In Malaysia, a female immigration officer secretly accepted payment to assist and secure safe passage for Daesh militants to another Southeast Asian country (Straits Times, 2017). Singapore detained its first female citizen for radicalisation, who hoped to find a husband in Syria and believed that being a militant's wife had significant rewards (Channel News Asia, 2017). In October 2018, a Malaysian woman was arrested for having had channelled funds to Mohammad Wanndy bin Mohamed Jedi, the now-deceased notorious Malaysian Daesh member based in Syria, from 2014 – 2017 (Teoh, 2018). Although the Surabaya bombings (BBC News, 2018) did happen, leaving people in disbelief – to think that a woman, a mother, could bring herself and her own children to their

deaths – it certainly was not a common occurrence in terms of female terror involvement in the region.

This raises us to think of women in terrorism as having an added dimension, due to their ability to have an expansion of possible roles. In terrorist groups, terror incidents or terror plots, women have the power to be what men can be and more. While there is evidence to suggest that women in terrorism overwhelmingly play parts behind the scenes, it is also important to keep in mind that having supporting roles is not the same as being passive (Arianti and Yasin, 2016). Therefore, it is to be emphasised that, ideological motivations to conduct terrorism carry the same weight, regardless of the involvement of individuals behind the scenes or at the frontlines.

This piece of writing may not be academic in nature, nor is it meant to be. It is merely a reflection on a collection of perspectives of individuals, who remind us of the “mundaneness” behind the involvement of peoples in terrorism and violent extremism, which I stress, may not be the case for all. Nonetheless, such ordinary motives, reasons, as well as push and pull factors, are what make PCVE complex, and demand for it to be unique.

The interviews are featured in a series called “Projek 3R: Radikalisasi, Rehabilitasi dan Reintegrasi” by SEARCCT, in collaboration with the Malaysian Prison Department and Fat Bidin Media. The full videos can be found on MyAman’s Instagram (IGTV), Facebook and YouTube channel.

Names of interviewees stated are purely fictional.

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