
The Problems of Terrorism in Southeast Asia

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Abstract: *The September 11th attack had opened the eyes of countries in the international system regarding the threats from terrorists which is seen as capable of threatening the security of country. Many countries started talking about the development of international terrorists which are able to threaten a particular country at anytime. The success of international terrorists attacked against the most power country like United States has influenced the emergence of various terrorist activities all over the world including in the Southeast Asia. This region has got the world's attention when terrorism movements were developing like the 'Jemaah Islamiah Front' (Indonesia), Abu Sayyaf Group and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (Philippines), Pattani Liberation Front (Thailand) and Malaysian Militant Group (Malaysia) which potentially threatened the security of the Southeast Asia region. These terrorist groups have changed from making limited or small attacks in the country to making serious threats and becoming bigger movements. Many predictions have been made as to clarify how these terrorist attacks have changed into active threats. This situation has been connected to the role played by international terrorist who secretly entered the countries in the Southeast Asia to help the local terrorist. Therefore, this paper will explain the influence of international terrorist in the terrorism activities in this region. Besides that, it will also explain the background of these terrorist movements in the region and how these terrorist are able to enter a particular country and help the local terrorist movement to be more active in the region.*

Keywords: *Terrorism, Security Threat, Regional Development*

1.0. Introduction

The fall of the Soviet Union has halted the power competition between superpowers, United States (U.S) and Soviet Union (SU). The collapse of SU has also changed the security concept of a country. This is because during the Cold War

(1945-1991), the world concentrated more on problems related with traditional security threats as a threat to the security of one country. However, after the end of Cold War, the world had witnessed changes in the national security concept, where security issues not only involves traditional security threats or usually called "high politics" but also unconventional threats or "low politics" such as economic problem, internal rebellion, militant threat, pollution, disease, drug, conflict, terrorist threat and others (Yazid, 2000:26-36). The problems are identified also as elements that are able to threaten the security of a country.

"The new millennium and strong current of globalization features larger influence and role of non-state countries in international relation. In the 1980's and 1990's, the noticeable elements of non-state were the expansion and role of multinational companies in designing the economy, politics and social environments, now we witness the rise of government organizations and international terrorist activities (Ishak,2001b:21)".

The term terrorism and terrorist have similar meaning and motive that are related. The definition of terrorist is an individual or a group which are involves in terrorist activities whether directly or indirectly (mastermind). On the other hand, terrorism is defined as an act done by a person or a group by force without the consent of the adversary and employs the usage of firearm etc (Balakrishnan, 2002:5). The violence that occurs at present time is a phenomenon which is executed by an individual or a particular group to achieve a certain objective. The elements of terrorism are sometimes mixed with crime across borders. Terrorism has the objective to spawn unrest or change a status quo inside one country and to create a country based on the model believed to be right by the particular group. In this era of globalization, we are often exposed to various case related to violence. As such, the issue of terrorism issue is a global issue that should be given serious attention by various parties.

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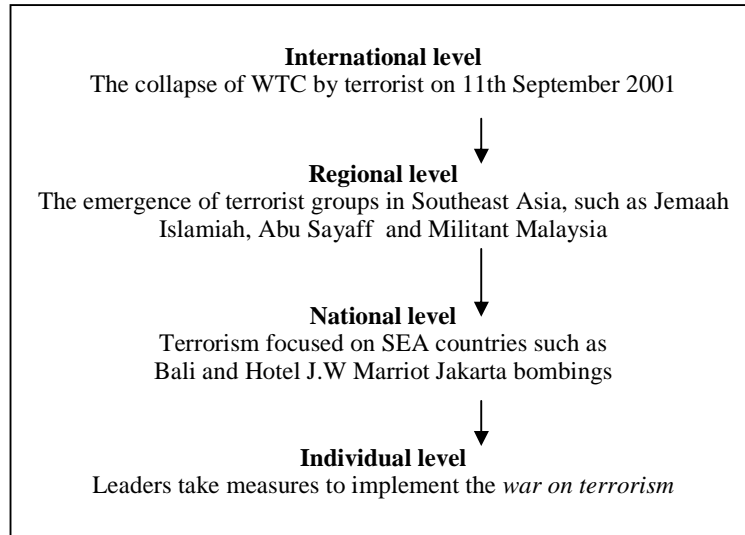
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2.0 The Growth of Terrorist Groups in Southeast Asia

The September 11 attack in 2001 has given a significant impact to the world's status quo where this particular terrorist attack had successfully brought a perception that threats can occur at anytime and trigger an unrest atmosphere, especially now when the global community is often presented and shocked with news relating to international terrorism. The consequence of this event had made the US arrange strategies to fight against international terrorism by organizing campaigns and offering assistance to other countries to fight against terror. The moves that U.S have taken was to send their army troops to Afghanistan in 2002 and Iraq in 2003, which they called the war against terror, because it was presumed that both countries were linked to terrorist group and also to the September 11 attack. However, behind the moves taken by U.S, it had caused an increase of anti U.S sentiment and has directly amplified attacks done by international terrorist group.

This implementation of actions against terrorism has also enhanced increasingly complex attacks that are difficult to solve. This international terrorism has directly spread to Southeast Asia, also known as SEA (*Massa, 29 September-5 October 2001:43*). The emergence of terrorist groups and violence in SEA has positioned this region as a region facing terrorist activity (*Man,1990:15; Islam,1998:441 456; May,1992:396-414*). This is because there have been a number of kidnapping and murder cases which was done by terrorist (*Turner,1995:18; Gunaratna, 2002:174*). Daniel Pearl's abduction case, Martin Burham's kidnapping and his wife Gracia in Southern Philippines and other kidnapping cases are a threat to SEA's security and international travelers visiting the Southeast Asian region (*Gunaratna, 2002:174 175*).

Diagram 1. Terrorist influence development from international level to individual level



The Southeast Asian region is a region that is prone to international issues. This is because, since the Cold War (1945-1991), SEA has been subjected to international development which witnessed the competition of international power that has spread to SEA (please refer diagram 1) (Razak et.al,2006:79-84). And also the issue of terrorism that has increase since September 11, 2001 in the United States, which resulted in the emergence of terrorist groups such as Jemaah Islamiah (JI), Kumpulan Abu Sayaf (KAS), Kumpulan Militan Malaysia (KMM) among others. In this region they mainly exist in the Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand. Malaysia is also often linked to these terrorist activities. Therefore, it has openly positioned this region as a major focus to counter the issue of terrorism (Balakrishnan, 2002:5) .

In fact, a more serious matter is that some external party believe that terrorism are related to certain countries. For example, Malaysia has been labeled a country protecting terrorist and possesses many international terrorist network (Gunaratna, 2002:179). And what is more ironic is the impact of the September 11 attack has made on the Muslim community, labelled as terrorist by the Western world thus should be constantly monitored. In fact the world

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community has started to indict that Muslims as the cause of the eruption of international terrorism. Moreover, according to Sulaiman (2002:66) :-

“The jihad doctrine in Islam is often associated, by the Westerners, as terrorism specifically ”

The emergence and terrorist activity in SEA has attracted U.S attention, where U.S has organized campaigns and provided assistance to SEA countries to fight against this aggression. For example, the Philippines have received military aid from U.S in terms of skills and military power to eradicate terrorist group such as the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and KAS which is suspected to have links with the international terrorist group called Al-Qaeeda (Niksich, 2002:4). These terrorist activities was further increased through the eruption of a few series of bombings in locations which have relationship and interests with the U.S in Southeast Asia. In year 2002, Southeast Asia was shocked by series of bombings at J.W Marriot Hotel in Bali, Indonesia, killing mainly western tourists. This event was linked to Islamic group.

3.0 An Analysis on the Definition of Terrorist

What is terrorist and terrorism? According to *Kamus Dewan*, terrorist is defined as a criminal, disturber and traitor (Iskandar, 1984:311). While Revell (1987) described terrorist by various names such as urban guerrillas, warriors or freedom fighters. Also, he suggested that terrorism as a main problem for researcher and law enforcement agents to eliminate and eradicate their activity. Oxford English Dictionary defines terrorism as an action to terrify. There are diverse definitions that attempts to clarify the precise meaning of terrorist, however there is yet an exact and mutually accepted definition by the international community. Until today, the world is still groping for the right definition that can be used worldwide to deter and eliminate terrorism. A definition that can be used worldwide is vital to stop and eliminate terrorism.

This is because the definition of terrorist used by one or certain parties may actually become an idol or freedom fighter of another which views "your terrorist is our liberator" (Balakrishnan, 2002:1). It will be more difficult when something or someone labelled as terrorist has instead become respected by others. This means that the definition of terrorist can be changed according to conditions and interests of certain parties or countries. This is illustrated when the Ireland's Republik Army (IRA) in British government are called a terrorist group however they are described as freedom fighter by the people of Ireland (Wariya, 1989:52) .

The U.S regards terrorist group as a group that has received training or has been taught guerrilla tactic and strategy with the use of force (Henderson, 2001:4) . These groups are considered terrorist, as they would do anything by any means to continue their struggle. Generally, most understanding of terrorism involves threatening on public target (Hoffman, 1994:28). In the past, their initial motives are mostly political based and their actions are generally to seek wide publicity. Now terrorism has become increasingly dangerous compared to the past because terrorists now aim for maximum destruction by using weapons of mass destruction in the effort to seek publicity. Howard (2001), pointed out that terrorism is one of a method in war. The act of terrorism are based on three major goals, which are:-

- (i) To initiate propaganda or attract international attention by displaying capabilities.
- (ii) To weaken the enemy.
- (iii) To provoke and ensure enemies are weakened thus attracting international sympathy so that an objective is achieved .

The word terrorism is largely believed to be an English word. However, some suggested that the word derives from Latin, namely *terrere* which means to tremble and combined with the French suffix *-isme* which means to practice (Truman, 2003:2). According to Henderson (2001), the U.S defined terrorism as a criminal act which involves the deliberate use of force having a goal or particular purpose. The U.S has also

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defined international terrorism as an act of violence carried out by individual or a particular group in one country that has an international impact (Truman, 2003:4-5). Terrorism activities carried out have political objectives or a particular motive. Hoffman (2002:5) explained terrorism as :-

“Terrorism is mainly perpetrated for a political goal. It is an action to use terror or cruelty or threat using force to achieve political purpose” .

Hence, they will not heed the consequences that would befall civilians. The actions are planned by the group members expecting to stir panic in the society at the same time attracting world attention. These measures not only are capable of generating psychological effects to the society, but also destroy property and civilian life. Henderson (2001:5) said that one person's terrorist is everyone's terrorist. Harmon (2000:xv) explained that terrorism has correlation with force that produce the willingness to commit violence in achieving a desired goals without taking into account the implications. Whereas, according to Kegley (1990:1) terrorism are dangerous groups of *simplificateurs* and *generalisateurs* .

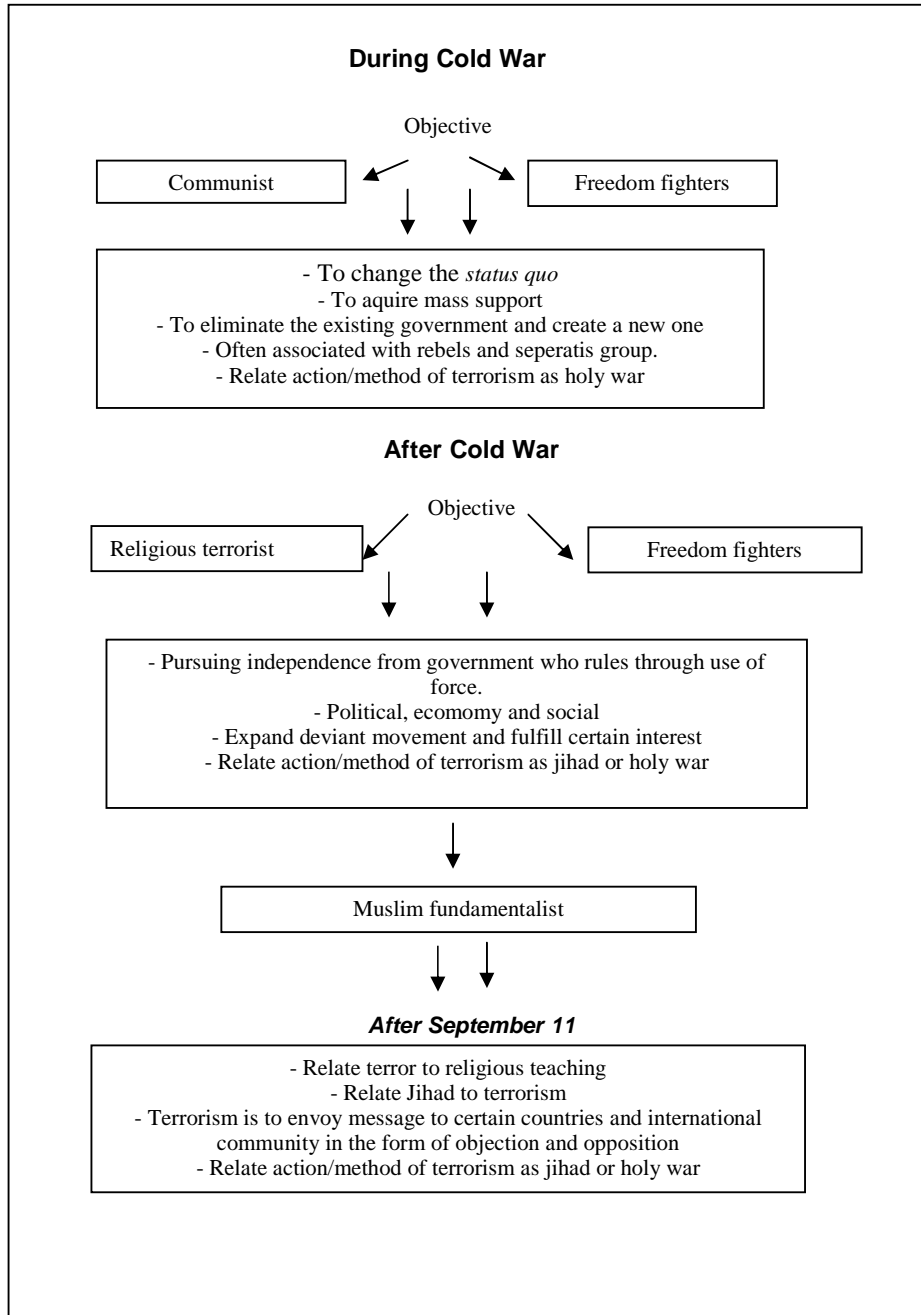
One of the types of non-conventional war as a result of the evolution of non-conventional war types is violence or terrorism. Howard (2001) emphasised that terrorism is a war method. It is an evolution of non-conventional war types. Balakrishnan (2002:5) views terrorism as a weapon by radical groups (terrorist) to perform insurgency war. However, after the end of Cold War, terrorism expanded by using force involving modern weaponry, bombs, suicidal squad, sabotage, intimidation, smuggling, kidnapping, threat etc. Hence, terrorism could be perceived as an act to create fear performed by an individual or particular group expecting to create a huge impact and change the status quo of a situation. The carried out terror undeniably has a certain motive, whether base on politics or economy .

4.0 Definition of Terrorist in Southeast Asia

Terrorist activity is mainly an evolution of terrorism activities that have emerged since the Cold War. However, the definition on movements are used differently (please refer to diagram 2). Wariya (1989:52) explained that trans-national have major features, which are non-governmental organisations that functions not merely in one place but beyond borders and have motive or objective. Conflict of interests between trans-national and inter-national would result in dispute and conflict.

“Specifically, non-state actor region refers to national liberation movements and terrorist groups. An example includes Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), Irish Republican Army (IRA), Moro National Liberation Movement in Southern Philippines and Pattani in Southern Thailand (Wariya, 1989:52)”.

Diagram 2. Terrorism during Cold War, after Cold War and after September 11



The evolution of terrorism activity development in Southeast Asia was also discussed by Balakrishnan (2002). In general, the evolution and development of terrorism activity can be divided into three phases; during the Cold War, after the Cold War and after September 11, 2001 (please refer diagram 2). He explained the terrorism activity involving separatist and development of communist guerrillas during the Cold War (Razak et.al,2006:82). Terrorism activity is connected with the development of deviant movements such as Al-Arqam and the like (Pileh, 2001:12 13). Whereas after September 11 attack, terrorism was perceived to be connected with Islam (Apandi, Shariffudin, 2007:239,Balakrishnan, 2002:1 30). According to Ishak (2001b:21), the scenario of terrorism development in Southeast Asia are ethno-religious based. He explained that:-

“Terrorist movements based on ethno-religious have also plagued Indonesia, where Jakarta became the focus of serial bomb attacks, while Malaysia is astounded with the appearance of Al Mau’nah militant movement and KMM (Malaysian Militant Group)”.

There are various opinions lodged by various scholars related to terrorism induced by worldwide terrorists. The terrors carried out have special purposes, especially political and economic. This motive is visible through the 11 September 2001 tragedy, which has destroyed the World Trade Centre (WTC) located in New York that was the United States economy landmark, whereas Pentagon symbolizes U.S’s military power. The September 11 attack was assumed to cripple the economy of US by destroying the WTC and the attack on Pentagon was to expose its defence system weakness, besides counter attacking U.S for previously terrorizing some third world countries. The attacks have significantly affected U.S’s power and tarnish George W. Bush’s image (President of United States at the time) who often boasted that US as the most advanced economic nation and strongest in term of defense.

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Terrorist activities are difficult to detect because the groups possess a global network system and are not limited to a specific area. US have failed to track the actual mastermind who had planned the September 11 attack because Al Qaeda does not have a fixed operation centre and is not linked to any country. Similar to the bomb explosion in London on the 7th of July 2005 (Utusan Malaysia, 31 December 2005:21). Based on British security report, it was believed that the mastermind of the explosion were also previously involved in a few terrorist operation and are related to Al Qaeda (Utusan Malaysia, 15 July 2005:17). Terrorist can not be regarded or labelled to any country.

This is because terrorist groups constantly move, where the location or the position of the group is difficult to trace, a result of an integrated networking. For example, Al-Qaeda which operates around the world should not be connected or protected by a country, especially Islamic countries. Same goes to Jamaah Islamiah (JI), this group should not be linked to any country whether Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines or Thailand, just merely based on the assumption that the group were located in those particular countries. Terrorism activity use small scale action, method that are easier and allow greater impact. This involves a meticulous planning and small scale attack according to the suitability of time and place. What is important is the after effect of the action towards a certain country that could attract world attention. For example, the train station bombing in London in July 2005 is to produce a situation of fear and chaos in London. The bombing also illustrates the existence of a terrorist group in Britain, thus the British government should be aware and alert of their movement (Utusan Malaysia, 31 December 2005:21). The bombing did indeed create fear and threaten British security system.

The appearance of terrorism as a regional security problem should be necessarily viewed in a wider perspective. Terrorism is not a novel issue in ASEAN countries, because since the colonial times a few ASEAN countries have faced with terrorism, mainly leftist movements and communists. Terrorism in SEA which have appeared in recent times, can be categorized within two types; religion based terrorism

(religious terrorism) and terrorism which appeared due to political instability and government weakness in a country. Terrorist activity based on religious conflict in Southeast Asia can be illustrated by the few serial bombings, such as the explosion in Indonesia and Manila that has the tendency to be anti-Christian. The church bombings in Indonesia are associated with the Islam-Christian conflict in several Indonesian provinces, especially in Ambon (Hamzah, 2002:490). Mahmud (2002a:46) said terrorism in SEA are also connected with religious elements :-

“Jemaah Islamiah (JI), Indonesian Mujahidin Council (MMI) and Malaysian Militant Group (KMM) are terrorist groups under Abu Bakar Basyir’s leadership with a target to established Daulah Islamiah Raya, a large Islamic country which encompasses Malaysia, Indonesia, Southern Thailand, Philippines and Singapore”.

The second form is terrorism activities due to inside political instability and government's weakness one country (Ishak, August 2001a:16). For example bombing in Philippines by KAS related to the injustice of the government (Christian majority) towards Muslim society in Southern Philippines (Islam,1998:452). After the terrorist attack of September 11, the world headed by the US had accused and pointed their fingers to the Islamic fundamentalists groups. Since then, Islamic fundamentalists were tracked down and regarded as extremists, radical and supporters of terror. Islamic fundamentalists bad image was later tainted with incidents of religious extremist comfonting against the society. This conditon has given the opportunity to U.S to fight against the “Muslim world”. U.S promoting war on terror linking to “Arab-Islamic terrorist” had contributed to the image that Muslim are terrorists.

The Western media have successfully mould a sentiment of 'Islamophobia' associating Islam with violence and cruelty (Apani, Shariffuddin 2007:239). This was clearly demonstrated when Malaysian, described as a model of an Islamic nation, was also connected with Islamic fundamentalists, together with other SEA countries

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including Indonesia. There are theories that assume that the appearance of terrorism are a result of religious clash between Christianity and Islam and also between West and East. However, most Islamic world leaders, including former Malaysian Prime Minister, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad rejected the attack on WTC as war between religions (Islam vs Christian/Jew) or religious clash, although the scholars were able to validate that Islam is struggling with Christian/Jew. Moreover, during the Foreign Ministers special session of Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) in 2002 has open the opportunity to OIC countries to participation in :-

“To address this issue to the United Nations to urge in helping to clean the Muslims image. It is important to find or provide a suitable definition on terrorism that could be accepted by all parties (including non-Muslims), identify the cause, consider appropriate steps in handling the issue that is acceptable by all sides without linking it with race, religion or culture.” (Samah, April 2002:12 15).

Since the September 11 attack, the US have launched war on groups considered terrorist. KAS separatist group has been labeled as a terrorist group which possesses network and contacts with JI and Al-Qaeeda (Kassim, 2003:41). KAS and JI were declared terrorist groups by the U.S and the UN (Mahmud, November 2002b:46 47). This terrorist labelling also suggested other Muslim militant movements, such as Kumpulan Militan Malaysia (KMM), Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF, Philippines), Pattani Liberation Front (PULO, Thailand) among others (Sathian and Derin, 2006:148-155; Shahari, 2001:16). This phenomenon has directly associated Islamic groups as terrorists. In fact it has worsen when a country, especially an Islamic country, was also labelled as a terrorist state by the West.

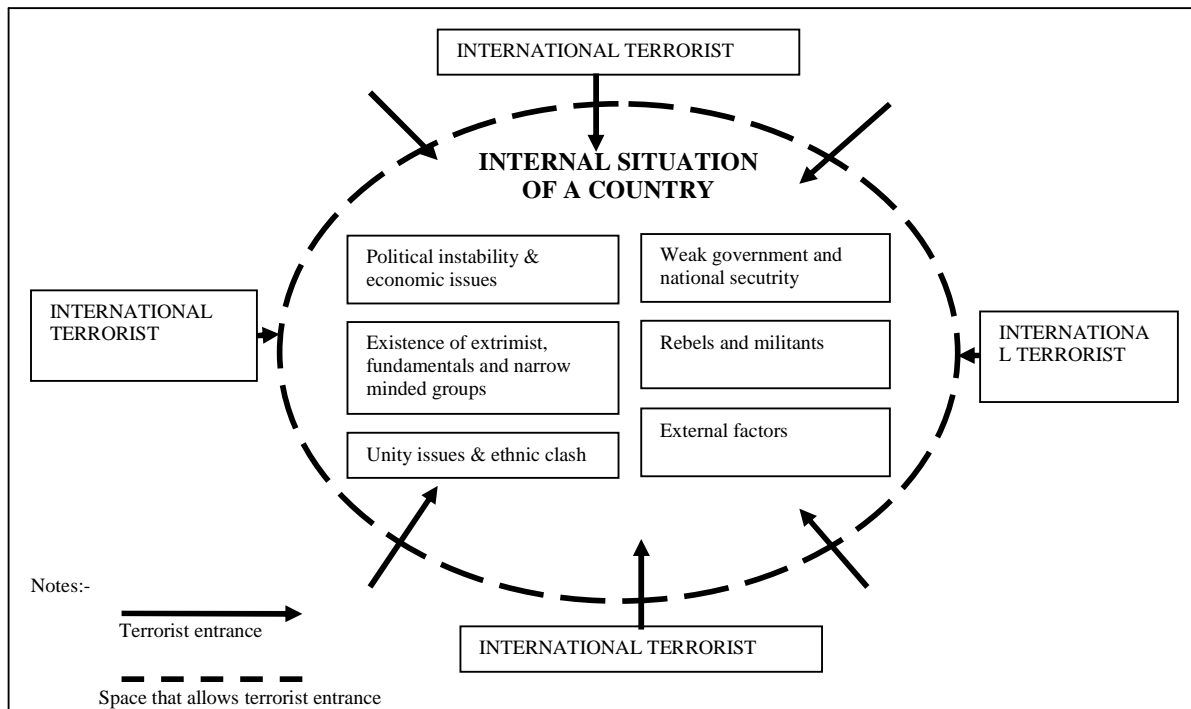
The measures to label a country and Islam as terrorist is considered unreasonably bias. According to Dr Mahathir Mohamad, extremist groups are not always Muslim, but are also from other religions. The labeling of terrorist was in fact also given to Malaysia because Malaysia is an Islamic

countries and alleged of protecting terrorists (Gunaratna, 2002:164). As a consequence, Muslim are being harrassed, the Western world have increasingly lost confidence and belief in the Muslim countries. This developments had directly created a bad image for Muslims worldwide. The westerns' doubt and concern are visible through the actions they have introduced in terms of regulations and law on Muslim, such as tight restrictions and inspections in airports and open areas.

5.0 How did International Terrorists Enter Southeast Asia?

Terrorism is the act of terrorist activity conducted by an individual or particular group contradicting to the international norms that rejects terrorism. Realizing that terrorism is opposed by the international community, terrorist groups has used religions or beliefs as elements of their struggle in committing violence. It is to attract international attention to legitimize their terrorist acts utilising the term Jihad, Holy War, Martyrdom, or the last resort to fight againts infidels.(Apandi, Shariffuddin 2007:239) This terrorist groups has taken the step to distort and mislead religious understanding. This method in its own way has been able to convince people to join the terrorist groups especially when religious elements are incorporated in the battle. (please refer diagram 3)

Diagram 3. Elements that opens the entrance to International Terrorist into a country



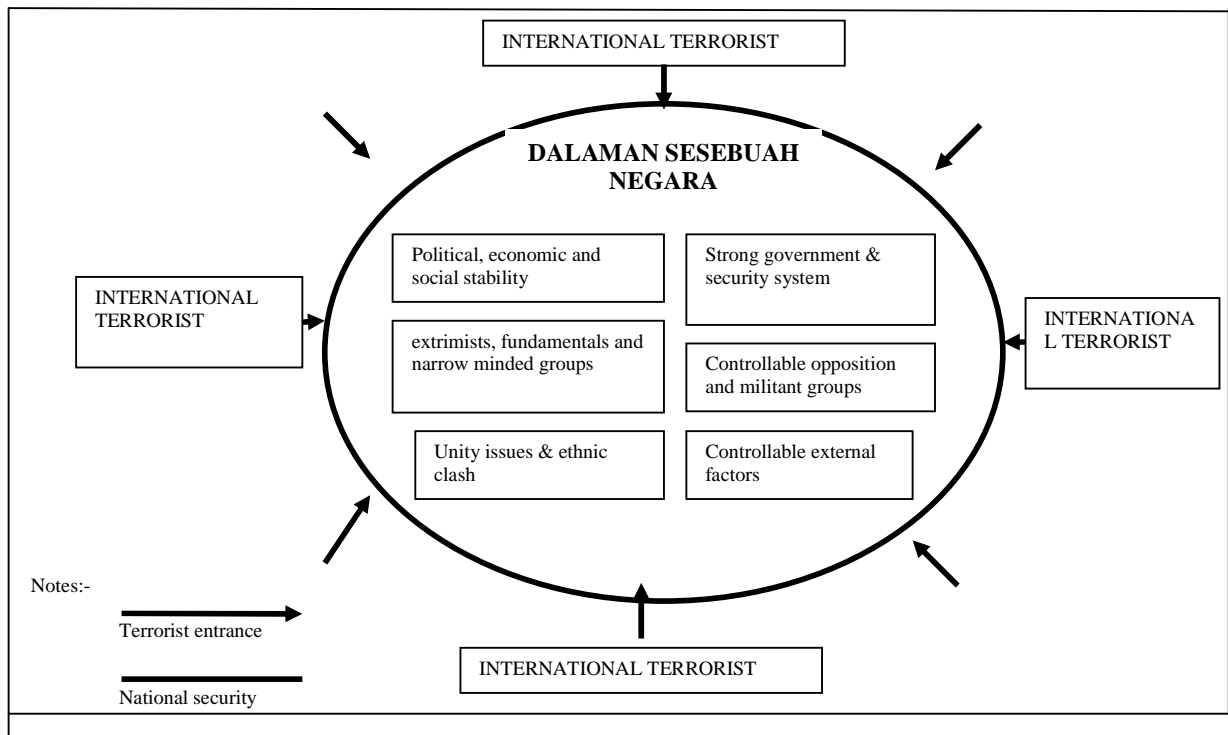
There are often a cluster in society who are extremist, fundamental, conservative and poorly educated, this is a form of opportunity for terrorists groups to spread their teaching and recruit more members (please refer to diagram 3). In other words, terrorist group can infiltrate into a society through disseminating religious teaching and also through places that enables acceptance of terrorism (Marin,2008:61);Massa, January 2002:46 47). Terrorist would tend to use weak countries as the location of terrorism movement. This is because a countrys' internal weakness such as political instability, rebellion, ethnic clash, corruption, extremist, narrow mindedness, fragile legal system will open an opportunity to terrorist groups to infiltrate and step in a country. For example, Moro rebels in

Philippines has permitted Al Qaeda's international terrorist to enter into Philippines and provide a few of Moro's location as training sites. Having such group of extremist and narrow mindedness had caused the formation of terrorist group such as JI in Indonesia and KMM in Malaysia.

The issue here is what is the motive or purpose of the terrorist to enter a specific country? In general, there exist two purposes why terrorist enter a country i) To make a country as a base camp and as target in the long run. Terrorist will assist and collaborate with local rebels and militant in ensuring their survival. It is a collaboration between international and local terrorist groups. This can be depicted through the terrorist movements in Philippines (MIFL), Indonesia (JI), Thailand (PULO), Malaysia (KMM). This will ensure that the international terrorist groups have continuous support, protection and additional members. ii) To make a country a target within limited time. Those countries having strong political stability and security system, are merely target of limited time. It is difficult for terrorist to stay in these countries for long period. This is because the countries' stability closes the chance for terrorist. This can be illustrated by the attacks in the U.S (11 September 2001), Spain (bombing in Madrid) and Britain (bombing Londons' train system). Thus these countries as only targets and they reside within limited duration (that is to complete a terrorist operation).

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Diagram 4. Elements that that strengthen a country and prevent International terrorist entrance



The development and vitality of terrorist groups in Southeast Asia are associated with the weakness of national security (please refer diagram 4). The weakness of a country's security not only refers to military and law enforcement but are also dependent on strength of government elements and another country. Elements such as politics instability, economic problem, weak government and security system, the existence of extremist, fundamentals, and narrow minded groups, local rebels and militant, unity issues and ethnic clash and external factors (international) are regarded as "parasites" to the country. Failure to control and prevent, will open a space to international terrorist to capitalize the opportunity in expanding their activities. Furthermore, it

could make a country as a headquarter and perform operations for a long period of time. However, if a country is strong from the aspects of the political stability, economy, good system of government and security, moderate views in religion and beliefs, good education system, all of this may act as a country's defence system from the terror of international terrorist. In other words, international terrorist will find it difficult to enter or based its operation since there is little space to enter.

6.0 Conclusion

Terrorism developments at an international level have made an impact in Southeast Asia. The attack on U.S in 2001 has become a motivator to the increment and rise of terrorists group groups worldwide. This phenomenon has spread to Southeast Asia where terrorist groups seem to be mushrooming in several SEA countries. The growth and vitality of terrorist groups in Southeast Asia are highly connectd to the weakness of a nations' defence system. The weakness of a country does not only refer to military power and law enforcement but also dependent on other elements in the government and country. Problems such as political and economic instability, weak government and security system, existence of extremist, fundamentals, narrow minded groups, local rebels and militant, unity issues and ethnic clash and external factors (international) are all viewed as parasites to a countrys' defence system. Failure to control and prevent, will provide a space to international terrorist to capitalize in expanding their activities. Furthurmore, it could make acountry as a headquarter and perform operations for a long period of time. However if a country is strong from aspects of the political stability, economy, good system of government and security, moderate views in religion and beliefs, good education system, all of this may act as a country's defence system from the terror of international terrorist.

Those elements undeniably are element possessed by Southeast Asian countries in dealing with terrorism. It has become Southeast Asia's main objective to eliminate

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terrorism. The method utilizing force, such as attacking terrorist locations and hideouts are still considered ineffective. This is because military campaigns in Philippines (July 2000), Indonesia (2002), Afghanistan (2002) and Iraq (2003) only show success win in the battle, but the irony in general is that it has failed to eliminate terrorism completely. Instead, terrorism has increased due to the measures by force. Hence, negotiation or diplomacy is regarded to be a suitable method to resolve this issue. It can solve problems between different groups in the society with government in a more civilized manner and less blood. Organisations such as Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Non Alignment Movement (NAM) and Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) may serve as mediators to organise solution diplomatically, which will hopefully create peace and regional stability.

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