
The 2002 Bali Terror Attacks Aftermath: How Southeast Asia Became a Breeding Ground for Terrorism

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Abstract: *The Post-Cold War Period has paved the way for more awareness towards non-traditional security concerns, including terrorism, and the Southeast Asian Region is no exemption. This paper examines the factors that made Southeast Asia an attractive breeding ground for terrorist groups since the deadly 2002 Bali Bombings up to the present, how different state and non-state actors in the region have been responding to this issue over the years, and the implications of these terrorist attacks to security management in the region. It is argued that factors such as weak regimes, and ineffective regional counterterrorism measures have all contributed to the attractiveness of the Southeast Asian region to terrorist groups. The paper's implication for future research is that a closer attention should be paid to Southeast Asian region in terms of terrorism studies compared to the rest of the world because most of the terrorist activities have indeed pivoted towards the region since the 2002 Bali Terror Attacks.*

Keywords: *Southeast Asia, terrorism, security, Global War on Terror*

1. Introduction

The 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States in 2001 was a breakthrough in the history of terrorism and international relations and immediately placed terrorism at the forefront of security concerns by most of the international community. This was led by former President George W. Bush with his declaration of the 'Global War on Terror' (GWOT). The declaration was based on the assumption that the 9/11 attacks signaled a more chaotic international security landscape. In fact, there has been an increase in terrorist activities worldwide and it was a phenomenon mixed up with cases of insurgencies, usually starting as domestic in nature and eventually transcending to regional or international in nature.¹

While the general character of terrorist activities before 9/11 were usually nationalist or separatist movements, the post-9/11 trend was more about Islamic religious extremism. The Southeast Asian region, being one of the regions of the world with a significant number of Muslim population, undeniably became an area of concern when it comes to the issue of terrorism. Despite the 9/11 attacks, terrorism did not initially become an immediate concern for the region. In fact, it was only a year after when Southeast Asia finally acknowledged the existence of an imminent terrorist threat in the region when the Indonesian Island of Bali was attacked by terrorists resulting in deaths and injuries. The acknowledgement is evidenced by the priority given by the region's leaders to countering terrorism as reflected in the official statements of the 2002 ASEAN Summit in Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei Darussalam and the following 2003 ASEAN Summit in Phnom

¹ <https://ourworldindata.org/terrorism>

Penh, Cambodia.² On the international level, the US government took the initiative to reach out to Southeast Asia to forge mutually-beneficial strategic agreements in connection to the ‘Global War on Terror’. The said initiative, however, did not successfully unite the region in terms of coming up with a cohesive regional counterterrorism measure.

Aspects such as the difficulty of coming up with a general definition of terrorism that can encompass all activities considered as ‘acts of terrorism’ in the past is a general issue in the terrorism literature, and is the case in the Southeast Asian region. The region has experienced several acts that fall under the currently-accepted international definition of terrorism even before the 9/11 attacks, but ASEAN is still working on its definition of terrorism, let alone its actions in response to them. Other common themes revealed from the literature review include the implications of terrorism to international relations and diplomacy, and much of these studies are focusing on Western cases. There are only a few works on terrorism focuses on the Southeast Asia, and most of them are written at the height of the post-2002 Bali terrorist attacks and focusing on religious extremism/radicalism.

This study explores the domestic and regional factors that contribute to the increase of terrorism-related activities in a particular geographical area, specifically in the Southeast Asian region, such as the state’s provision of the basic social services to the people and regional counterterrorism measures. The different basic social services provided by Southeast Asian states and how the people respond to its failures, including their decisions to join terrorist organization will be examined closely. Moreover, an assessment will be done to the different regional mechanisms available to Southeast Asian states for counterterrorism to find out why they fail to meet their objectives.

2. The Literature

Acts of violence that come in many different forms and fueled by different agenda have been occasionally happening in some parts of the world before and after the 9/11 attacks in the United States. Some of these acts were categorized under terrorism, and a targeted analysis of the activities that occurred after 9/11 and their frequency established clearer patterns on what makes an activity an ‘act of terrorism’. Specifically, most of the activities labeled as acts of terrorism are perpetrated by religious extremist groups, and a significant number of cases are common in Asia, particularly in West, South, and Southeast Asia. The terrorism studies literature is slowly reaching the point where a well-defined category of terrorism can be established, but it may still be a long journey ahead.

A lot of events that happened in the past have been labeled by some state governments, the media, and even ordinary citizens as “terrorist attacks” or terrorist activities”, but at what point do we consider something as an act of terrorism? Being one of the hardest terms to define in International Relations and other related disciplines, coming up with a generally-accepted definition for terrorism is like “searching for the “Holy Grail”, where many knights tried to sought after it but

²Almonte, J. T. (2003). Enhancing state capacity and legitimacy in the counter-terror war. In *After Bali: The Threat of Terrorism in Southeast Asia* (pp. 221-240).

only a few were able to accomplish it”³. In fact, the challenge to define terrorism has always been present. To add to the complexities, changing and evolving character of it makes it even hard to come up with a definition. As a result, some scholars do not feel the necessity to define such term because of its complexity. One of the first attempts to define terrorism was by Schmid et al. (1984)⁴ where he compiled 109 scholarly definitions of terrorism and claimed that there are as many definitions of terrorism as there are scholars in the discipline. In the United States legal context, however, it is encouraged to come up with a single definition of the term to draw the line on who has to suffer the legal consequences. But, the danger of coming up with a narrow definition could “permit those responsible for terrorism to avoid the legal consequences of terrorism”⁵, hence the US Federal lawmakers could leave the quest for definition to the academia.

As more and more activities considered acts of terrorism have been occurring particularly in Southeast Asia, several scholars have attempted to trace the history and the origins of terrorism in the region and its ties with bigger terrorist groups in the Middle East and Central Asia, as well as how terrorism in Southeast Asia could evolve into something that should concern the international community. The significant frequency of terrorist attacks that occurred in the Southeast Asian region after the 9/11 attacks and after the 2002 Bali Bombings has resulted to several literature seeking to explain this phenomenon. A number of literature consider Southeast Asia as an important region of interest on terrorism since the American government’s declaration of ‘Global War on Terror’ and discussed several factors on why Southeast Asia can be considered “The Second Front”⁶.

Al Qaeda has been the most sought after terrorist group since the 9/11 incident, and has been growing and progressing since then. Started as a group meant to counter the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, it evolved into a transnational network because of the establishment of the World Islamic Front for Jihad against the Jews and the Crusaders in February 1998. Finally, the ideology and tactics of the Al Qaeda has inspired other groups in South and Southeast Asia to do the same in their own respective regions.⁷ Hence, several studies have claimed the links, if not the inspiration, of terrorist groups in Southeast Asia to Al Qaeda.

The terrorism problem in Southeast Asia, given the weakness of the domestic institutions of some countries and also its transnational nature, require solutions that are regional in nature. At the early stages when terrorist threats are not really regional in character, states have also been hesitant to cooperate because of the mistrust they have with their neighbors especially during the early stages of the foundation of ASEAN.⁸ However, the 2002 Bali bombings was a wake-up call for more cooperation in the region, but a lot has to be done. Several scholars have pointed out that while ASEAN expressed immediate efforts after a series of terrorist attacks happened in the region in

³Perry, N. J. (2003). The Numerous Federal Legal Definitions of Terrorism: The Problem of Too Many Grails. *J. Legis.*, 30, 249.

⁴Schmid, A. P., Jongman, A. J., & Documentatiecentrum, S. W. I. E. (1984). *Political terrorism: A research guide to concepts, theories, data bases and literature*. Amsterdam: North-Holland.

⁵ Perry (2003)

⁶Gershman, J. (2002). Is Southeast Asia the second front? *Foreign Affairs* 81, 60.

⁷Gunaratna, R. (2016). TERRORISM IN SOUTHEAST ASIA—THREAT AND RESPONSE. In Chaliand G. & Blin A. (Eds.), *The History of Terrorism: From Antiquity to ISIS* (pp. 420-434). Oakland, California: University of California Press. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctv1wxrp4.21>

⁸Abuza, Z. (2011)

2000s, most of them only remained on paper⁹ and sub-regional cooperation (in a form of bilateral or trilateral agreements) have proven to be more efficient than ASEAN-level regional approaches of cooperation¹⁰.

The 9/11 attacks have prompted the different states in Southeast Asia to craft their own respective counterterrorism measures, whether or not they were previously directly affected by any terrorism-related activity. This must not come in a surprise because the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and its so-called the “ASEAN Way” is indeed significantly preventing the region into reaching a certain consensus on so many issues, including a possible regional counterterrorism measure. In fact, ‘pooling of sovereignty’ feature of a regional organization is totally absent in the case of ASEAN because of the “ASEAN Way”, which therefore is the very hindrance from coming up with a regional counterterrorism measure¹¹. ASEAN member states’ loyal adherence to the non-intervention principle of ASEAN has been barring them to reach a regional agreement on how to deal with terrorism in the region, and the same logic applies to the failure of the organization to manage other problems in the region.

The majority of the existing literature on terrorism could be enriched in the following ways: First, since most of the currently existing work on terrorism sees the issue in an international perspective, not a lot of works have look closer into the regional and even domestic aspects, especially since terrorism-related activities vary a lot in so many aspects per location. Second, the majority of works in the Terrorism Studies literature are mostly focusing on the incidents that happened in the Western Hemisphere and its origins in Central and West Asia, including Northern Africa. While there are a few scholars who wrote about terrorism specifically focusing on Southeast Asia, most of them are focusing on the aspects of Islamic extremism, their links to the bigger international terrorist groups, and their general implications to the affairs and relationships of states.

Hence, this study intends to look closer on the side of the states, its institutions, its affiliations, and how they can possibly contribute to the degree of the success of the different external factors into perpetuating terrorism-related activities in the Southeast Asian region.

3. Research Design

This paper is intended to identify specific domestic and regional factors that contribute to the occurrence and increase of terrorist activities in a particular region. Specifically, this paper looked at the Southeast Asian region for three major reasons. First, since the 9/11 attacks and the US Government’s declaration of “war on terror”, a significant aspect of the US foreign policy was geared towards getting the states in Southeast Asia on board to join the “war on terror” by proposing mutually-beneficial military and security strategies. Hence, the international community is considering the Southeast Asian region as the “Second Front” in the global war on terror. Second, since the 9/11 attacks followed by the 2002 Bali Bombings, there has been a significant number of

⁹Almonte, J. T. (2003). Enhancing state capacity and legitimacy in the counter-terror war. In *After Bali: The Threat of Terrorism in Southeast Asia* (pp. 221-240).

¹⁰Singh, D. (2003). ASEAN Counter-Terror Strategies and Cooperation: How Effective?. In *After Bali: The Threat of Terrorism in Southeast Asia* (pp. 201-220).

¹¹Chow, J. T. (2005). ASEAN counterterrorism cooperation since 9/11. *Asian Survey*, 45(2), 302-321.

terrorist attacks that occurred in the Southeast Asian region. The table below shows the recent terrorist attacks that happened in Southeast Asia from 2016 to 2018:

DATE	PLACE	PERPETRATOR
14 January 2016	Jakarta, Indonesia	ISIS
28 June 2016	Puchong, Malaysia	ISIS
2 September 2016	Davao City, Philippines	Maute Group
23 May-23 October 2017	Marawi, Philippines	Maute Group, Abu Sayyaf, Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, Ansar Khalifa Philippines
22 January 2018	Yala, Thailand	Unknown

Source: ASEAN Post

Lastly, given that a significant number of terrorist attacks in the international level are perpetrated by Islamic extremists, the Southeast Asian region being the largest Islamic region in the world is worth examining in the context of terrorism. The study will not look into the direct links of Islam and terrorism, but it will look into how Islam could be a facilitating factor to the influx of terrorism in the Southeast Asian region.

The Hypothesis

Given the research gaps revealed by the literature review, there are factors or a combination of factors that were not examined by previous studies to determine the reasons behind the increase of terrorism-related incidents in Southeast Asia. This then leads to the paper's hypothesis:

The weak or lack of institutional mechanisms of governments to provide basic social services to the people, combined with the lack or absence of a region-wide counterterrorism measures, makes the Southeast Asian region more vulnerable to terrorist attacks and become the 'second front' of terrorism.

4. The Methodology

Dependent Variable

The study's dependent variable is the influx and increase in the presence of terrorist groups and terrorist activities in Southeast Asia. Influx and increase in the presence of terrorist groups and terrorist activities can be defined in terms of how the threat perception from acts of terrorism changed since the 9/11 attacks and the declaration of the global war on terror. Moreover, it is also measured in terms of the increase in the number of acts of violence categorized as acts of terrorism. Reasons or indicators defined by selected literature on why Southeast Asia is dubbed as the "second front" in the global war on terror is also considered as a measurement. The reason for the measurements is to reflect periodical change from 2002 to the present. Data and information will be gathered from different academic sources, including those which have already analyzed the different terrorist activities that have occurred in Southeast Asia. Moreover, another source of

information will be reliable media and news networks and data and publication by think tanks which reported and analyzed the dependent variable.

Independent Variables

The study explores two independent variables: (1) weak domestic institutions and the lack of social services, and (2) weak regional counterterrorism measure due to the lack of institutionalism of a regional organization and the states' willingness to cooperate.

Weak domestic institutions and lack of social services was measured by the inefficiency and the ineffectiveness of basic social and economic institutions to provide the basic welfare needs of its citizens. It will be based on its past performance and contributions to the achieving of different goals set both by the government and institutions such as the United Nations Development Programme. It will also be measured by the strength and legitimacy of the governments of the states under study.

Weak regional counterterrorism strategies due to the level of institutionalization of regional organizations and willingness of the states to cooperate was measured by how regional institutions like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has addressed issues related to terrorism since the 2002 Bali Bombings and how it managed the security aspect of the region in terms of which issues were prioritized. The institutional mechanisms of ASEAN and its past performance in dealing with different security issues were also considered. Moreover, different bilateral, trilateral, and multilateral agreements involving Southeast Asian states directly and indirectly concerning terrorism will also be taken into account in comparison to the regional agreements in terms of efficiency and effectiveness.

5. Case Presentation, Analysis, Discussion and Findings

Terrorism in Southeast Asia

The 9/11 attacks and the Global War on Terror might have heightened the awareness and the vigilance of the international community to act on terrorism, but the Southeast Asian region has been dealing with this issue even before 2001. However the nature of terrorist activities in this part of the world is highly domestic – usually between the government and secessionist movements. In fact, several countries in the region have been dealing with this as far as the Cold War period.

The end of the Cold War did not signal an end to these terrorist activities in Southeast Asia. Particularly, the change of the international political landscape in the post-Cold War period also changed the terrorism landscape in Southeast Asia: terrorist activities are becoming more transnational than merely domestic, and the factor of religion and religious extremism started to enter the picture. Most terrorist activities are performed by Islamic fundamentalists compared to other religious and ethnic groups. Therefore, the rise of terrorist activities in Southeast Asia after the Cold War is highly fueled by the emergence of radical Islamic movements in Southeast Asia in the 1990s, which can be traced to the following reasons:

“...reaction to globalization — which has been particularly associated with the United States in the minds of regional elites — frustration with repression by secularist governments, the desire to create a pan-Islamic Southeast Asia, reaction to the Israeli occupation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and the arrival of terrorist veterans of years of fighting in Afghanistan. The forging of connections between Al Qaeda and domestic radical Islamic groups in Southeast Asia is part of this trend.”¹²

As previously argued and as several studies have revealed, defining terrorism and to encompass all previous cases labeled as ‘acts of terrorism’ in a single comprehensive definition while also taking into account future cases, has always been a struggle inside and outside academia. Inside academia, while terrorism is currently considered a highly political issue, several theoretical frameworks trying to provide answers to research questions on terrorism also include the participation of other fields of study, such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, development, and even economics. Cases covering the technology involved in terrorist activities are covered by the fields of cyber security, natural sciences, and information technology. For the purposes of this study which focuses on the Southeast Asian region, the political and international relations aspect of terrorism is highlighted.

The contributions of the variables identified in the hypothesis have been seconded by the patterns of terrorist activities observed in the Southeast Asian region. In terms of the possible contribution of the institutional strength of the governments of these countries, the governments of Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines have responded differently to the Global War on Terror. 2000s was a decade very politically distinct from the 2010s in terms of dealing with the issue of terrorism, however terrorism remained to be an issue. For instance, the counterterrorism strategies of Presidents Arroyo, Aquino, and Duterte are completely different, but the terrorism situation in the Philippines independently evolved alongside the changes in administration. In the case of Indonesia, the socio-economic situation and the political party dynamics drastically changed from Megawati’s administration to Widodo’s administration, and it affected the vulnerabilities of Muslim Indonesians to possibly get recruited by the Islamic State and it also affected the way Indonesians view the existing problem of terrorism in their country. Looking at these specific factors requires zooming in to the domestic political situations of these Southeast Asian countries, which will also reflect on their foreign policies in terms of dealing with terrorism in the regional level.

A State-Level Analysis of Terrorism in Southeast Asia

ASEAN is expected to lead the region-wide initiatives on counterterrorism in Southeast Asia, but no matter how grand the regional solutions may be, the participation and cooperation of the individual member states is what matters more. Since its foundation in 1967, ASEAN has proven that its seasonal ineffectiveness stems from domestic factors of the individual member states themselves. Circumstances such as the failure of one state to satisfy the basic social services of its people could not only affect this state’s domestic situation but the effects could also spill over to its other states with common social denominators such as economic capacity and religion.

¹²Vaughn, B. (2010). *Terrorism in Southeast Asia*. DIANE Publishing.

States in Maritime Southeast Asia experiences most of the terrorism-related incidents in the region which are linked to radicalism and religious extremism, and over the years, their respective governments have been working towards militarizing their counterterrorism strategy as also advised by security analysts¹³. However, other analysts who are skeptical about militarization of counterterrorism strategies are saying that it could possibly “aggrieve or isolate populations vulnerable to radicalization”¹⁴. Governments of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore have all attempted to suppress terrorism with the said traditional method, but have experienced varying, inconclusive results.

People’s universal right to feel safe comes with the help of the government to provide basic social services to them. Naturally, people will trust a government who does not fail them on this aspect, but if this very basic task of the government will become absent or lacking, the people will resort to other sources. These other sources include the private sector, non-government organizations, religious groups, and other segments of the society, including terrorist organizations. Since radicalization is one major reason why terrorism-related activities are becoming more rampant in the Southeast Asian region, some security analysts say that “countering narratives assumed central to radicalization” or “winning the hearts and minds” method could be an alternative solution to militarization¹⁵. However, this method is more of a long-term solution, but will definitely cater to solving the domestic factors (or even people-level factors) that contribute to terrorism in Southeast Asia.

In Southeast Asian region, Indonesia is seen to have become the epicenter of terrorism, given its “size, openness and lack of consensus among the moderate majority about the nature of the threat”¹⁶. This is not-so-distantly followed by the Philippines. While the recent incidents of terrorism in these two countries are mostly domestic in nature, the mobility of the terrorist groups have seen to be transcending beyond their respective national borders, given the transnational nature of the networks of these terrorist groups which extends outside the region. In the case of the Philippines, it has a clearer perception of the terrorist threat and its origins which could be traced back to history, but it is not the case in Indonesia. In Indonesia, several factors such as the role of religion in Indonesian politics and most especially the fear of stigmatizing Islam.

The peace process roadmap of the individual Southeast Asian states may vary in terms of so many elements (1) the government’s history and relationship with the radical/secessionist groups, (2) their type of regime, (3) their perceived importance of higher-level counterterrorism solutions such as regional and international as well as their willingness to cooperate to these external options available to them, and (4) the state’s economic capacity, among others. However, one thing that is for sure is that the progress of the peace process will only be seen in terms of the level trust of the people to the government. Non-traditional counterterrorism solutions such as the restorative

¹³Tan, S. S. (2018). Sending in the Cavalry: The Growing Militarization of Counterterrorism in Southeast Asia. *PRISM*, 7(4), 138-147.

¹⁴Greer, A. & Watson Z. (2016). How to Counter Terrorism in Southeast Asia. Retrieved October 15, 2019 from <https://thediplomat.com/2016/08/how-to-counter-terrorism-in-southeast-asia/>.

¹⁵Greer, A. & Watson Z. (2016)

¹⁶Jones, S. (2012). Changing terrain of terrorism in South-East Asia. Retrieved October 15, 2019 from <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/changing-terrain-terrorism-south-east-asia>.

“winning the hearts and minds” will not be as close as effective if it will be led by a government not trusted by the people.

The ‘ASEAN Factor’

Despite the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the waging of the ‘Global War on Terror’ being primary threats to international security, terrorism is not really a new concept to the region. In fact, much of the nationalist and secessionist movements that happened in the region since the post-Cold War period used terrorism as a tactic, and Southeast Asia has been dealing with it since then. However, it remains a regional problem until today, and one of the reasons is possibly because ASEAN was lacking some efforts as the primary institution created to lead the security management in the region. The existing past and present efforts of ASEAN to deal with the issue on terrorism are placed under the transnational crime category.

In general, one common challenge that ASEAN faces whenever it attempts to provide a region-wide strategy for different issues include the seeking the cooperation and consensus of the member states, since over the years it was evident that most of the time the member states will prioritize their national interests and their relationships with the Great Powers instead of its commitment to the organization. The same story could be seen with how ASEAN is dealing with the problem of terrorism in the region. While it is recognized as a regional issue, a regional solution involving the commitments of the whole region is a little absent.

The fact that terrorism and counterterrorism did not have its own category clearly manifests that ASEAN used to not prioritize terrorism as a regional problem or threat. The 9/11 attacks did not even convince the Southeast Asian region that there is an imminent threat to everyone’s security. In fact, based on how the Southeast Asian states responded from the US initiative on the ‘Global War on Terror’, the region did not really recognize the impact of the threat compared to the rest of the world. It was not until the 2002 Bali Bombings when the Southeast Asian region directly felt the threat coming from terrorism.

The 2002 Bali Bombings suddenly changed the way on how Southeast Asia view terrorism as a problem. It unified the threat perception of the entire region and terrorism suddenly became a priority issue. As a response, ASEAN expressed its prioritization of terrorism as a regional problem during two consecutive ASEAN Summits: the 2002 Brunei Summit and the 2003 Phnom Penh Summit. Moreover, different bilateral and multilateral agreements were signed by Southeast Asian states since then. On the other hand, being the pivotal organization in Southeast Asia, ASEAN also initiated several efforts that are geared towards counterterrorism in the region: the MALSINDO and RECAAP; AMM Transnational Crime; SOM Transnational Crime; ADMM; SEA Counterterrorism Centre in Putrajaya; and the Treaty on Mutual Legal Assistance on legal matters.

However, a significant factor that hinders ASEAN from achieving the objectives of their efforts to solve the problem of terrorism in the region is its limited role and command power among states as it can only lead in the security management of the region at most. Moreover, the ‘ASEAN Way’, which all member states religiously abide to, rests in the norms of sovereignty, non-intervention, and institutional structure, making it even harder for ASEAN to try to assert its desire to involve everyone in regional counterterrorism. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the counterterrorism

efforts in Southeast Asia has improved given the increased participation of the member states, but efforts only arises in an ad hoc capacity. Therefore, while a united regional counterterrorism measure is close to happening, ASEAN needs to further assert its pivotal role in the regional security management.

Despite ASEAN being founded since 1967 and has been uniting the entire region to deal with different issues and achieve goals together, the trust factor of Southeast Asian states is also one thing keeping them from solving the terrorism problem altogether. It can therefore be implied that ASEAN's regionalism, collective identity-building, and trust-building efforts are not really serving their purpose. Moreover, on the 'Global War on Terror', the United States took advantage of the varying threat perceptions and uneven concept of collective identity of Southeast Asian countries by convincing them that joining the 'war' is beneficial to their own respective security interests. Lastly, several instances which Southeast Asian states refused to share information related to terrorists is another evidence that ASEAN lacked the mechanism to establish confidence among its member states.

Given ASEAN's shortcomings on building a region confident enough to cooperate towards counterterrorism, other possible regional alternatives are available, such as the militarization of counterterrorism. Given the evolving nature of terrorism and the increasing degree of threats to the region as evidenced by the Marawi siege, a logical idea for counterterrorism is to involve the military.¹⁷ However, a problem with how to harmonize the military of the different countries is expected to arise from this situation. Considering the different nature of the military capacity and the willingness of the states to share their military for purposes that surpasses the interests of their own national borders, a regional militarization is unlikely to be used for counterterrorism measures. Furthermore, a proposed militarization of the regional counterterrorism strategy will have implications to the fulfillment of the duties of the respective national military forces of the Southeast Asian countries with regards to protecting their own national borders from external threats. Specifically, Jakarta and Manila considers this unpopular counterterrorism strategy as a threat to their domestic order because the military will now have an undivided attention looking after their own respective national security.

Towards a Regional Counterterrorism Strategy

Considering the shortcomings that Southeast Asia and ASEAN towards a harmonized counterterrorism strategy, some positive notes can still be observed. First, while most of the time the 'ASEAN Way' is seen by states as a hindrance to make regional goals happen, it has to be noted that while ASEAN member states are having difficulties reaching a consensus, it is mostly because they are putting their own respective sovereignties first¹⁸, which is also a trademark of ASEAN also known as non-intervention. Hence, at some point, it could be possible that an individually-initiated counterterrorism strategy can work better than a consensus-based regional one because as long as the states are acting on the same set of goals, regional norms can be put second. Since its foundation, the primary challenge for ASEAN is always about convincing the entire region to agree on regional

¹⁷Tan, S. S. (2018). Sending in the Cavalry: The Growing Militarization of Counterterrorism in Southeast Asia. *PRISM*, 7(4), 138-147.

¹⁸Chow, J. T. (2005). ASEAN counterterrorism cooperation since 9/11. *Asian Survey*, 45(2), 302-321.

policies and common standards, which involves sharing of responsibilities, costs, and information. These clearly is contradicting the principle of sovereignty and non-intervention. At the very least, ASEAN should convince all member countries to prioritize counterterrorism while acting on their own individual capacities.

Given the examination of both the domestic and regional landscape of Southeast Asia in terms of dealing with terrorism in the region, it is important to note that none of these two levels should be prioritized more. It is because given the nature of terrorism in the region, states must start coming into a consensus that terrorism is both a domestic and regional problem, and it therefore requires both domestic and regional solutions. Domestically, states could continue working on their respective peace process roadmaps with radical/secessionists/terrorist groups, but at the same time, a specific level of cooperation with the regional security community in the ASEAN level is also expected of them, whether a solution requires a traditional (military) or non-traditional (restorative) approach, or both.

Conclusion

This study explored domestic and regional factors that might have significantly contributed to how terrorist activities have been flourishing in the Southeast Asian region, namely weak state regimes and institutions, and weak counterterrorism measures in the regional level. However, these three factors are not sufficient enough to assure the possibility of the presence of terrorist groups in a specific area. Moreover, it is noteworthy that there might be other factors that could contribute to the phenomenon that are worth examining. Recognizing that terrorism is both a national and regional problem and therefore identifying its root causes and designing solutions could be done in both levels is one important consideration that can be derived by this study. Depending on other external factors not considered, a closer examination on specific cases could help strengthen the arguments of this study.

This study also focused on terrorist activities that occurred in the Southeast Asian region which was a combination of insurgencies and Islamic extremist attacks because these are the common threats faced in the Southeast Asian region. The strength of the relationship of the factors considered and the outcome could also be examined considering other types of terrorist attacks that occurred in the region and not included in this study. Other types of terrorism-related activities occurring in other parts of Southeast Asia (specifically in the mainland area) can also be examined vis-à-vis this study to test commonalities and strengthen the correlation between the variables tested.

Alternative hypotheses could also include interventions done by Great Powers like the United States, or the geographical proximity of the region with South Asia and Central Asia where there is a huge number of cases of terrorism. Other related research questions that can be explored include the impact of ASEAN in Southeast Asian counterterrorism, how the 'ASEAN Way' facilitates or hinders counterterrorism in Southeast Asia, and how the 'Global War on Terror' was able to help Southeast Asia in terms of counterterrorism. This study could be expanded using different cases, such as different geographical areas (Latin America, Europe, Central Asia, or South Asia).

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