



# **RADICALISM AND EXTREMISM: SELECTED WORKS**

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## Foreword



Since the occurrence of the 11 September tragedy in 2001, also commonly referred to as the 9/11 tragedy, Islamophobia and extremism phenomenon became common to the world at large. Both of these elements spread rapidly and have changed the world's perspective on Islam and its followers. Each layer of the Islamic communities had to go through various depressing situations and are faced with mind and identity confusion. Such external and internal factors are the significant elements to be considered when discussing about Islamophobia and Extremism as a subject of research and discourse and also debates be it amongst laymen or even up to the highest international level such as at the United Nation's assemblies.

Out of the various layers within the Islamic community hierarchy who are involved in terrorism, the youths are found to be the largest contributors. Research has shown that 59 percent of those who are involved in terrorism-related activities world-wide are youths and majority of them are students. This includes school students and students from Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs).

In Malaysia, students from the Public Universities (UA) and Private Universities (US) are seen as easy targets for the penetration of such activities. Youths in these institutions are easily persuaded and indoctrinated by subversive and terrorism related elements. Thus, research and also academic and general publications related to students of HLIs learning institutions as produced by Dr. Mohd Mizan b. Mohammad Aslam and the team of researchers who are involved in publishing this book is extremely relevant to the current situation. Such write-ups should be disseminated to all segments of society, especially the students of higher learning institutions in the country.

**DATO' SERI IDRIS BIN JUSOH**

Minister of Higher Education

Ministry of Higher Education



## Preface



Several years back, the world was in a state of grief due to the inhumane actions of militant groups such as the Jemaah Islamiah and Al-Qaeda towards innocent civilians. While our thoughts are still with them, we were then, quite recently, surprised by the Daesh ideology. Since the arrival of Daesh activities on the shore of Malaysia, until the year of 2016, over 200 individuals were arrested by the Royal Malaysian Police (PDRM), and more Daesh members are being identified and arrested ever since. Daesh activities in Malaysia are on an increasingly alarming trend as it also involved students, particularly students of the higher learning institutions (HLIs).

The extent of the HLI students' involvement with Daesh, including how and who are the agents involved in spreading its ideology still leaves a lot of question marks. Many issues are said to be linked to the involvement of HLI students with Daesh. Could the HLIs' ecosystem itself be the catalyst that attracts the students to join Daesh? Looking at the long-term perspective, educated youths are the pillars of the nation towards attaining a developed nation. Hence, it is important that all parties remain vigilant in the efforts to combat this problem as it poses a national security concern and could halt the development of the nation.

Therefore, a thorough research should be conducted by the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) in eradicating the Daesh related issues while exploring the best ways in handling the Daesh challenges among HLI students. Research and participations by relevant parties must be instrumented to identify the factors which contribute to the spread of Daesh among students. It is hoped that this publication could deliver a positive impact, particularly to MOHE in its effort to barricade the Daesh ideology from spreading and influencing HLI students.

**TAN SRI DR. NOORUL AINUR MOHD. NUR**

Secretary General

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## RISING TO THE CHALLENGES OF ISLAMIC EXTREMISM AND MILITANCY IN MALAYSIA

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### ABSTRACT

In Malaysia, the social and economic development can be seen as a two-edged sword. It reduced poverty and deprivation among the Malay-Muslim population and resulted in making them not to seek solace in a violent *jihad*. Malaysia has been able to remove this root of discontent and grievances in the society. However, on the other hand, it is also noted that many cases of violence and forms of religious extremism and the push for a change among Muslim groups come from the middle class, of whom, after achieving some degree of economic and social comfort; they now claim political rights due to dissatisfaction with the current system and their eagerness to change. Their dilemma is that economically they benefited from the system while their ideological inclination has not yet been fulfilled. At this juncture, these groups cannot afford to destroy the foundation of their economic and social well-being, since the future is unpredictable. The challenge to the Malaysian state is how to balance the inevitable demand for democratic rights and at the same time keeping the situation under control. It is observed that confrontations between Islamic extremist groups and the government in Malaysia are an exception rather than the rule. They do not operate on a large scale or nationwide, but rather confined to particular groups with demands ranging from reforms within the existing socio-political framework to a regime change by force. The success of Malaysia's de-radicalization program could be attributed to several factors, of which the most important is its societal values.

**Keywords:** Extremism, Militancy, Islamic extremist, Religious extremism, De-radicalization

## Introduction

Malaysia is considered as a secular democratic country. Even so, Islam occupies a significant position in its politics and has been able to influence political discourses and practices. For the Malay-Muslim majority, Islam is more than just a system of beliefs and an ethnic identity marker in a multi-ethnic society. It is also a reference from which concepts, principles, rules, norms and laws are drawn to provide the basis for the government's formation and its political and social reforms. With this being the case, it is not surprising to find Islam entrenched in the Malaysian Constitution as the official religion of the Federation and its constituent states. Political parties, non-governmental organizations, loosely structured congregational groups (*jemaah*) and militant or radical groups which appeared on the country's political landscape, of which dominating and having control over Islamic symbols, leadership and institutions in the last four decades are also established based on the same Islamic values. Some of these Islamic groups operate within the national boundary, and some even develop extensive networks which transcend national borders.

Irrespective of their goals, organizational structures and the extent of their networks, the activities of the Islamic political party, politically-engaged Islamic NGOs, *jemaah* and militant groups are of a great concern to the Malaysian authority if they are causing a political instability, disrupting the harmony, hampering the development of the economy, endangering the regime survival and threatening the national security. Furthermore, in the post-condition of 9/11 and the global war on terror, any slight pieces of evidence of Islamic militancy in the country will result in Malaysia being blamed for acting as the 'hotbed of terrorism' by the international community. As a consequence, such label may lead to external political pressure or military intervention as well as reducing foreign investment into the country. Consistent with the current policy of controlling and monitoring religious groups in Malaysia, the government has at its disposal two laws which can be invoked to weaken or suppress those Islamist groups whose activities are deemed to disrupt civil order. They are the provision in the Administration of Islamic law concerning 'deviationist teachings' in Islam (*ajaran sesat*) and the Internal Security Act (ISA). While it is expected that the Malaysian government will use these mechanisms to suppress undesirable Islamist groups, on the other hand, the actions, if not taken wisely could also violate the law of civil liberties. Moreover, it could also invite criticisms from the Malay-Muslim populace as being anti-Islamic. Such criticisms, in return, may reduce the state's credibility as the key

transmitter of Islamic doctrines, policies and programs in the country. Even worse, it will put the government in a bad light of PAS, its main rival in politics.

Since the 1970s, Malaysia has identified Islamic extremism and militancy as one of the threats to its national security. Although relatively small in number and strength, groups operating under this tendency could cause serious security concerns of the state. Therefore, the government has adopted strategies of suppression and engagement to respond to these challenges. The state has openly declared that it will not tolerate any groups or activities that would create disunity and disturbance in racial harmony in a country whose survival depends heavily on internal peace and stability. While the state considers it necessary to eliminate threats and challenges from Islamic extremism and militancy, it is also mindful of the fact that antagonistic policies towards Islamic groups might result in a backlash that will endanger regime security and national unity. It must be acknowledged that in reality, in Malaysia, the influence of Islamic extremists and their activities is limited due to certain factors, of which some are unique to Malaysia, as well as the effectiveness of measures taken to eliminate this influence.

## The Development of Islamic Groups in Malaysia

Islamic organizations and movements in Malaysia have been in existence even before the rise of the phenomenon called Islamic revivalism in the 1970s. The oldest and most established entities among the organizations is the Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS), a political party that has become the main rival of the current ruling component party in the Malaysian government, the United Malays National Organization (UMNO). PAS has been in existence since 1951 and advocates the formation of an Islamic state, an objective that is not yet achieved. Although currently, PAS is leading the government in only two states (Kelantan and Kedah), since the general election of 2008, PAS has gained stronger supports from rural-based Malays in the states of Kelantan, Kedah, Perlis and Terengganu. The support for PAS has also broadened to include many urban-based followers in other states such as Perak, Selangor, and Kuala Lumpur.

Aside from PAS, there are now several Islam-oriented, non-governmental organizations and institutions occupying the civil society in Malaysia. These organizations grew out of the needs and desires to provide social and economic facilities to Muslims while some are devoted to raising the level of Islamic

consciousness in the community. Among them are the *Yayasan Dakwah Islamiah* (Islamic Dakwah Foundation), *Pertubuhan Kebajikan Islam Malaysia* (Malaysian Muslim Welfare Organization, or PERKIM), Malaysian Muslim Youth Movement, (*Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia* or ABIM), Malaysian Muslim Students Association, and Sisters in Islam. In addition, institutions set up by the government include the Institute of Islamic Understanding (IKIM), the Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), and the Department of Islamic Advancement (*Jabatan Kemajuan Islam* or JAKIM). The establishment of these organizations is not politically-motivated, but to support social and religious activities of its members and target groups. PERKIM for example is an organization which was set up to look into the welfare of new converts to Islam, while others emerged from practical considerations and the need to promote greater consciousness about Islam. These groups and many others continue to exist and have not yet proven to advocate militant ideologies.

A growing challenge for the authorities since the 1970s has been the activities of *dakwah songsang* (deviant *dakwah*) groups which propagate activities that are considered as extremist in nature and thus posed serious threat to the public order and racial harmony. For instance, two violent incidents in 1978 and 1980 served to highlight the seriousness of potential extremism and militancy in Malaysia if they are not contained. In 1978, a group of Muslim fundamentalists, caught desecrating all statues in a Hindu temple except one, were beaten to death by a vigilante group of Indian temple guardians. In October 1980, another incident occurred, which confirmed the fears of the authorities about the violent potential of certain deviant groups, when a group of Muslims attacked a police station in Batu Pahat, Johor. Although both incidents appeared to be ‘minor’ by the international standards, in Malaysia, they are looked upon as a worrying trend and therefore needed to be ‘nipped in the bud’; It serves to discourage other potential extremist groups from developing and propagating terrorist acts.

In this early period also witnessed the surfacing of groups associated with *dakwah songsang* and Islamic radicalism. In 1977, a Penang-based Crypto cult emerged to claim that the Malaysian government is not giving Islam its proper due and aimed to set up a theocratic order using violent *jihad*. The government took action by clamping down the movement only in 1992 since the government did not think that the group’s activities back then are severe enough to threaten public order and national security. Another group, whose interpretation of Islam is in opposition to the government is the *Koperasi Angkatan Revolusi Islam Malaysia* (KARIM, or Malaysian Islamic Revolutionary Front). Formed in 1974 in Kuala

Lumpur, KARIM preached to overthrow the government through violence. It was later banned, and its leaders were detained under the Internal Security Act (ISA). In 1980, riots by farmers in Kedah demonstrating against the government's move to introduce a forced savings scheme were traced to have a connection with a militant organization called *Pertubuhan Angkatan Sabilullah*, which according to the government have had a number of companies owned by members of the opposition party, PAS as associates. These groups are relatively unknown to the public, and their influence did not spread beyond the confinement of their groups. One of the reasons for their inability to expand their influence is due to the small membership and effective actions taken by the government through the use of strong measures to control and suppress their activities in the name of national security.

## State Response: Rationale and Mechanisms

By realizing that, religious extremism, if not monitored may endanger domestic harmony, public safety, and in worst case scenario, regime survival. Luckily, the Malaysian government has formulated and implemented two approaches to counter and contain the danger. These actions can be summed up as suppression and engagement which have proven to be effective in combating religious extremism. In relation to this claim, former Minister of Home Affairs, Tun Musa Hitam affirmed that Malaysia's comprehensive strategy to fight extremism consists of a "*complex process of accommodation (when this is fully justified), co-optation (when this is required) and confrontation (when it is necessary)*".

Since the 1970s, contestation emerged from Islamic groups whose aim is the replacement of the regime in power with a 'more' Islamic one, if not with one that is entirely Islamic. Such groups including *Arqam*, an organization which became radicalized and manifested its violent opposition to the authority since 1988. It is said that *Arqam* has an extensive network in Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, and even in Central Asia. The government feared that the group might subvert established Islam, create disunity among Muslims and eventually take over power. In response to this challenge, the government used both repressive and dissuasive methods. Throughout the 1990s, the Malaysian public had witnessed a systematic campaign against *Arqam*, launched through the mass media and the distribution of pamphlets, Friday sermons and public lectures in mosques and offices. Investigations were conducted to ascertain whether or not the activities

of *Arqam* are dangerous and indeed a threat to the national security and racial harmony. In 1994, *Arqam* was accused of harboring extreme political ambitions and its leaders have plans “to gain political power through magic and violence”. In August 1994, the National Fatwa Council issued a ruling which declared the teachings of *Arqam* as “deviationists” (*ajaran sesat*), resulting in the banning of the organization by the government. *Arqam*’s leader, Ashaari Muhammad fled to Thailand, but was later arrested in September the same year and brought back to be detained under the Internal Security Act (ISA). He was subsequently released in 2004 but subjected to constant surveillance by the Malaysian authorities, and therefore *Arqam* never got back to its former ‘glory’.

Not all government policies which use force in tackling challenges of the regime security from Islamist groups are successful. The Memali incident of November 1985 illustrates the limits of using force to suppress what was perceived as extremism. The police raid on the villagers, ordered by the then acting Prime Minister cum Minister of Home Affairs, Musa Hitam, resulted in the death of 17 people (14 civilians and four police officers). The Government’s White Paper was published after the incident blamed the confrontation on the extremists who are trying to spread deviationist teachings and disrupt public order. As for the Minister, the affair dented his political credibility and wisdom towards his ability in handling sensitive issues such as responding to the challenges opposed by the Islamic groups. Although the affair happened more than two decades ago, it is neither forgotten nor forgiven, for its memory is still kept alive by the relatives of the survivors. The Islamic Party of Malaysia, PAS, commemorates this incident as an embarrassment to the government, as well as a proof of the government’s injustice in dealing with opposing Islamic groups.

The beginning of the new millennium witnessed a growing threat to the government from Islamic extremist and militant groups in Malaysia. An incident related to militant Islamic activities surfaced in June 2000 when a group called ‘*Al Maunah*’ managed to successfully pull off an arms heist at a Malaysian Army Reserve Camp in Perak, stealing weapons from the armory. It proved to be a huge embarrassment for the government given the manner in which the group managed to penetrate the camp’s security by dressing up in military attire and drove jeeps painted in camouflaged green. Their leader, Mohamad Amin Razali, confessed that they are on a mission to overthrow the Malaysian government by force. The siege by the Malaysian security forces resulted in the surrender of the group’s members. Its leader was convicted of trying to wage war against the King and was hanged in August 2004. While the other members received various degrees of sentences,

including life sentence and detention under the ISA. The government did not take any action against the group before this since there is no proof that their activities are disrupting public security or detrimental to national security.

The dismantling of the Al Maunah group is followed by other operations to suppress several other militant Islamic organizations and groups whose activities are considered threatening to public security. They include an Islamic militant group called the '*jihad gang*', a group that is connected to a range of crimes over a period of two years, including the bombing of a church, an Indian temple, the murder of a politician and several other criminal activities. Their criminal activities made it easier for the government to justify their elimination. Another militant group called the KMM - *Kumpulan Militan Malaysia* (the Malaysian Militant Group) founded in 1995 by a Malaysian, Zainon Ismail, was also trying to overthrow the Malaysian government and subsequently establish an Islamic regime. Similar to the *Al-Maunah* group, KMM's operational strategy was a combination of criminal activities and political militancy. KMM was also believed to have a wide range network with militant groups outside of the region, including *Majlis Mujahidin Indonesia* (MMI), *Jemaah Islamiah Singapura* (JIS), and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). KMM also dispatched its members to take part in the conflict in Ambon, Indonesia between the Christians and the Muslims. The Malaysian government launched a nationwide operation to capture KMM members between December 2001 and January 2002, resulting in the arrest of more than 70 members, including one of its leaders, Nik Adli Nik Aziz, of whom were later detained under the ISA act.

In many of these security operations (police and military) against Islamic extremist groups, the Malaysian government resorted to the use of the Internal Security Act (ISA) to detain those arrested in the operations. While the general public in Malaysia, as a whole, seem did not mind with the use of the ISA act on militants and extremist elements, there are segments of society who viewed this act with great concerns. In August 2001, the Malaysian Bar Council released a statement which says, "*with concern the alleged threat to national peace and security posed by members of the KMM*". At the same time, it noted: "*with equal concern the use of the ISA in the arrest of such persons*". The Council suggested that these arrests can be made through other available statutory provisions such as the Penal Code and Arms Act or Firearms Act. The Malaysian Bar Council also urged the government to allow detainees to have access to their constitutional rights and trial in the court of law. However, such dissenting opinion did not affect the efficacy or the continued usage of ISA as a mechanism to control extremism and militancy in the country.

## Putting Them Back on the Right Track: De-Radicalization Program

As indicated above, suppression is only one of the means available to the state in its campaign against Islamic militancy. A more subtle method which promotes the engagement of groups or individuals into renouncing their activities of which regarded as prejudicial to the national security is also taken into consideration. The engagement constitutes policies and programs designed to win the hearts and minds of the targeted groups with the aim to neutralize or to win them over. In Malaysia, this has been successfully employed earlier during the war against communist insurgents. Later, usage of the ‘soft’ method is based on the refinement, adaptation and elaboration of the methods employed during this period.

Malaysia’s engagement policy on Islamic extremists includes a program called “de-radicalization”; targeting those detained under the ISA. The government has formulated a structured program designed to rehabilitate those individuals or groups who were involved in activities considered as jeopardizing the national security. The Malaysian de-radicalization program is a concerted effort among the police (Special Branch) and various government agencies. The role of the Police/Special Branch in this program is to focus on the issue of national security, although principally, the Special Branch remains as the main architect of the rehabilitation program. The Malaysian de-radicalization program is different from those programs in many other countries in a way; it separates those detained under the ISA from the common criminals because they need a different type of rehabilitation. A de-radicalization program for religious extremists, for example, requires the role of religious institutions such as JAKIM to take care of the spiritual aspect during the treatment.

The program consists of three stages, namely the early detainment period, the detainment period and the post-detainment period. In the first stage, the individual who commits an offense prejudicial to the national security can be detained for a maximum period of 60 days for investigation purposes. The main objective at this stage of detention is to “win over” the detainee through various methods. If the authorities are satisfied that the detainee no longer poses a threat, then he might be released. If not, the detainee will be sent to the Kamunting Detention Centre for two years and may be further extended if an extension is necessary.

The second stage of the de-radicalization process begins once the detainee is placed at the Kamunting Detention Centre, which is under the purview of the Prisons Department of Malaysia. While undergoing the rehabilitation program, a prisoner has access to the rights of reassessment and the opportunity to appeal to the Advisory Board of whom will be reviewing his/her case every six months. The rehabilitation program, known as “Human Development Program” (HDP) covers three areas of discipline; personality enhancement, social skills, and training program. The main objective of the HDP has been to enable a detainee to return to the society without many disjunctures since the modules in the program are designed to gradually ‘mold’ them towards the values and practices of the society which they have deviated from. At the Detention Centre, a detainee will undergo a rehabilitation program to ‘disengage’ himself from his past activities. Relevant agencies and individuals are asked to collaborate in this program, especially in teaching and facilitating the modules tailored specifically to the purpose of rehabilitation. There are three main issues of contention among Muslim detainees which the de-radicalization program aims to correct. Firstly is the association of *jihad* among detainees with violent means and the act of martyrdom. Secondly is the contention that Malaysia is not an Islamic country since it does not implement the *Hudud law* and its political system is Western oriented. The third is the detainees’ hatred against the West, especially the United States and its policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian issue. The modules taught during the detention period seek to provide detainees with a correct understanding of Islam, expose them to various problems in the Muslim world through open intellectual discussions with the experts. The third stage in the rehabilitation program is the post-detainment period, which begins immediately after the release of the detainee. Even after his release, an ISA detainee will need to keep in ‘close contact’ with the police via regular reporting to the police station nearest to his domicile.

Although there is no survey available to determine the success of this program, it is believed that the Malaysian de-radicalization program has managed to rehabilitate extremists and to eliminate their activities. Despite its unpopularity, the ISA has been effective as a mechanism to contain the spread of extremism and militancy in Malaysia. It has unwittingly created and instilled fear into the minds of the public of the consequences of jeopardizing the nation’s political stability and national security. While there are those who opposed the ISA even if employed with good intention, there are others who view ISA as a ‘necessary evil’ to prevent the nation from descending into chaos. Some argued that ISA is preferable in the Malaysian context rather than inviting external powers to safeguard the nation’s security and handle delicate issues such as religious extremism.

## Future Challenges and Conclusion

The success of countering extremism and militancy in Malaysia is due to several factors. Malaysia is a moderate Muslim country, a situation born out of several circumstances and factors. The majority population of the country, the Malays, have a peace-loving culture, a culture of tolerance and willingness to help. While the Malays are known to be religious, they are not fanatics. Their understanding of '*jihad*' is not translated as armed struggle, but that of a moral struggle. The idea of '*jihad*' as an armed struggle is an alien culture introduced from outside of the Malay culture. Until today, the concept of 'violent *jihad*' has not caught up with the Muslims in Malaysia. There is no group viable enough to propagate such *jihad*. Moreover, no real issue could be turned into a common cause which can be exploited to galvanize the population's support for a violent *jihad*. This notion is in contrast with other Muslim societies such as in the Middle East or Pakistan, where a culture of political violence seemed continuously perpetuated.

A recent survey indicated that among the Malay-Muslims in Malaysia, there is a preference for a gradual change in the society, as opposed to violent change. This attitude is in tandem with the culture and character of the Malays who would normally consider every aspect of a subject before making changes in the society, even when these changes are to be made in the name of Islam. Another contributing factor in facilitating the efforts at combating religious extremism in Malaysia is the streamlining of religious education through the Ministry of Education and religious authorities. The Ministry provides guidelines on 'standardized' religious education made available to students. The monitoring of religious schools and *pondok* schools, further reduced the potential of these institutions turned into becoming a 'hotbed' of extremism and militancy or a 'factory' for producing *jihadist* such as in the case of Pakistan. Contrary to several foreign media reports regarding the support for Osama bin Laden among Malaysian youths just because they are found selling and wearing Osama's T-shirts; in reality, there is no real excitement for Osama or *Taleban* among youths in the country. Malaysian youths have become savvy about generating income from an unlikely source or a phenomenon since these are the same guys who sell and wear Michael Jackson or Che Guevara T-shirts. Such action only indicates an entrepreneurial prowess rather than a commitment to an ideology or a political cause.

In general, Malaysia enjoys political and social stability, peace and economic development and keen on keeping them like so. The monarch is considered as one of the important pillars of the Malay society has always acted as a ‘pacifier’, provider of moral guidance, and a symbol of mediation in an adverse situation. As the head of Islam, the monarchy institution in Malaysia has the authority at both formal and informal levels, to guide religious activities and orientations. Radicalization to the Malays would be contrary to the culture of peace and harmony of their society and its ‘*adab*’ (civility). The monarchy institution is indeed a respectful institution and considered as above politics, serves as a moderating influence which restrains radical attitude and activities among Malay-Muslims in the country. The multi-ethnic, multicultural, and multireligious character which Malaysia has are factors which act as a deterrent to religious extremism in the country. The state is acutely aware of; it has to develop and cultivate a policy of moderation so as not to antagonize the various groups and stop them from falling into extremist groups of different religions and cultures. Malaysia’s uniqueness lies in its ability to balance and accommodate different demands unique to different ethnic and religious groups with the necessity of the oneness of the nation. With a small population and a fairly controlled and disciplined society, the prospect of an over-excited militant galvanizing the population towards the path of violence has a much lower chance of success in comparison to a country easily consumed by mob passion such as Pakistan or Indonesia. The success of Malaysia’s containment of religious extremism and de-radicalization policy must be seen in the light of these factors that are unique to Malaysia.

By any standard, especially in the Muslim world, violence resulting from religious extremism and militancy in Malaysia is an exception rather than the rule. Unlike Pakistan, which is going through a period of intense terrorist activities, Malaysia does not have the dynamics of militancy, poverty, and political instability which can precipitate upheavals to the country. Malaysia’s Islamic radicals do not have the strength or the grounds to galvanize the support of the masses. Despite being politically divided between two major political parties, the majority Malay-Muslim population of Malaysia share a common aim and an equal opportunity to promote the interest of their group. Such situation is not found in some Muslim countries which practice politico-sectarian divide. In retrospect, it can be said that the Malaysian authorities’ denial of the growth of *Shiism* in the country is a form of pre-emptive measure to stem out potential sectarian violence. In addition, Muslims in Malaysia do not feel aggrieved by any denial of fundamental rights unlike the case of the Malay-Muslims in Thailand, or that of the Muslim minority in the Philippines. However, it remains vulnerable because of the country’s close

proximity to troubled areas and the exposure to transnational linkages of the terrorist network in an age of globalization. Malaysia also has open borders and fairly liberal immigration rules which could lead to intrusion by persons who may be prejudicial to the nation's security.

There is a growing consciousness in Malaysia about free space and the role of civil society among citizens and rulers alike, although it is still restrained at the moment. Media in Malaysia are not entirely free, unlike those media in Pakistan or Indonesia, where the governments allow them to fuel passion and violence through reporting and description of sensitive events and issues. The Malaysian media accepts this limitation of its role through a kind of self-censorship to avoid instigating pandemonium or creating violence. The state takes a pre-emptive measure to ensure a delicate balance and vulnerable peaceful co-existence between groups of different and opposing intentions through controlling the media; a step that can be best described as out of necessity, but temporary in nature.

It is common to make a correlation between the level and condition of socio-economic development with the rise of religious extremism and militancy. In Malaysia, the social and economic development can be seen as a two-edged sword. It reduced poverty and deprivation among the Malay-Muslim population and resulted in making them not to seek solace in a violent *jihad*; a fact that occurs in contrary among Muslim societies outside of Malaysia. Malaysia has been able to remove this root of discontent and grievances in the society. However, on the other hand, it is also noted that many cases of violence and forms of religious extremism and the push for a change among Muslim groups come from the middle class, of whom, after achieving some degree of economic and social comfort; they now claim political rights due to dissatisfaction with the current system and their eagerness to change. Their dilemma is that economically they benefited from the system while their ideological inclination has not yet been fulfilled. At this juncture, these groups cannot afford to destroy the foundation of their economic and social well-being, since the future is unpredictable. The challenge to the Malaysian state is how to balance the inevitable demand for democratic rights and at the same time keeping the situation under control.

In conclusion, it is observed that confrontations between Islamic extremist groups and the government in Malaysia are an exception rather than the rule. They do not operate on a large scale or nationwide, but rather confined to particular groups with demands ranging from reforms within the existing socio-political framework to a regime change by force. The state introduced laws, some of them

are controversial, in order to deal with the challenges and threats to its national security. Among these laws, the most prominent is the ISA, of which, although criticized, but still in use. In the event of September 11, 2001, criticisms on ISA became slightly muted, enabling the government to justify its use without causing too much embarrassment. It lends credibility to what the government has been doing all along; that it is necessary to use repressive measures to eliminate the dangers posed by the militants to the national security. The success of Malaysia's de-radicalization program could be attributed to several factors, of which the most important is its societal values. The Malaysian political system and societal values allow little room for religious extremism and militancy. The state and the society find consensus on the value of moderation, the understanding of Islam as a religion of peace, and the appropriate strategies to deal with contests coming from extremist groups or individuals.

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## DE-RADICALIZATION PROGRAMS IN MALAYSIA: IMPLEMENTATION POSSIBILITY FOR DETAINED MALAYSIAN HIGHER INSTITUTIONS STUDENTS

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### ABSTRACT

This article discusses the approach used in de-radicalization programs in Malaysia. Four stages of radicalization, of which pre-radicalization, self-identification, indoctrination and action are discussed. Based on some literature review and observation on de-radicalization programs implemented in this region, each country has its method of counterterrorism. The programs bring positive impacts to the society as a whole. However, there are some similarities in the approach used by the four countries through their counseling programs which emphasize on the communication between the terrorist and psychologist. Based on the results, various factors did contribute to the involvement in terrorism. Therefore, these programs are aimed to guide them to return to the right path of Islamic teachings which encourages its followers to conduct a moderate way of life and avoid violence, which in return will portray a negative image of Islam to the world. Moreover, the society should also play its roles in motivating former terrorists in order to prevent them to return to the radical ideology. Furthermore, the role of family as the closest unit in de-radicalization process is also discussed in this paper. Several limitations on the secrecy of the methods implemented by these countries are also seen throughout the research. As a whole, the benefits of de-radicalization programs are seen clearly, and most of the programs implemented were successful.

**Keywords:** De-radicalization, Terrorism, Counterterrorism, South-east Asia Countries, Malaysia, Singapore

## Introduction

In 2002, the President of the United States of America, George W. Bush announced that South-east Asian region is the second layer in the so-called 'global war on terrorism' (Aslam, 2013). In the regard, South-east Asian countries such as Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, and Malaysia are considered as hot spots for terrorism. After the end of Al-Qaeda threats and terrorism, the world is threatened by a new terrorist group called the Islamic State (IS). This group who shares the same ideology with the earlier group is, even more, extreme. They are known by the act of propagating various kinds of extreme ideologies. The motive is to create chaos and panic in societies so that the targeted countries will face social and political instability.

Most of the groups that are engaged in terrorism are known to uphold the wrong concept of *jihad*. While mainstream Muslim scholars define *jihad* as a struggle against sin that can sometimes be manifested by actual fighting, provided that certain rules govern the fight (Chertoff, 2008), terrorist groups, on the other hand, ignore the specific restrictions of *jihad* and confront the West using their own justification of *jihad* (Chertoff, 2008). In this regard, al-Qaeda argued they are not bound by the *sharia* restrictions on *jihad* since they perceive a war as 'just a war' (Martin, 2010).

Misinterpretation of Islam is considered as the justification of the terrorists' ideology. The propaganda has influenced youngsters who are involved in terrorism. As a consequence, their naive minds condone to the idea of purifying their sins through IS, especially by participating in the act of suicide bombing. There are also victims, of whom affected by misinterpretations of Quran and Hadith given by the IS in order to justify their involvement in violence. The concept of suicide bombing amongst militant groups began in the early 1980s. Al-Qaeda's *Jihadi-Salafi* ideology adhered to the first launch of suicide bombings at the US Embassy in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 and followed by the 911 attacks on 11 September 2001. These suicide bombings were based on the *Jihadi-Salafi* ideology held by certain militant groups, for instance the Jemaah Islamiah (JI) and Islamic State (IS). JI militants were the first to launch suicide attacks in South-east Asia with the Bali attack in October 2002 which killed 202 people. The *Jihadi-Salafi* ideology hinges on the belief originated from a country in the Middle East: blood and property of non-Muslims and Muslims who are not from their group and fight for the establishment of an Islamic state through armed forces. They reject the

democratic election system and constitutionalized country. The ideology has now spread around the world, including Malaysia, even though Al-Qaeda and JI are currently paralyzed.

Terrorist groups such as the al-Qaeda, *Jemaah Islamiyyah (JI)*, and recently Islamic State (IS) have their strategies and modus operandi in recruiting and communicating with potential victims. We observed that most of the detainees involved in radicalism are among teenagers. The major factor that caused their involvement was social media's attack. The word 'attack' refers to the ideology that is widespread in the social media. Such medium is chosen due to the fact that social media has become one of the primary means of communication of youth nowadays. Furthermore, social media is used to launch the 'soft attack' due to its criteria such as low cost, ease of access, spread anonymity, decentralization, global connectivity and lack of regulation. These criteria played a major role in the dissemination of radical messages, the creation of virtual ideological community, the raising of funds, the communication between members of terrorist organizations, the radicalization of vulnerable individuals, and to extend the recruitment of new members. In relation to that, terrorist groups are also trained to manage and fully exploit the social media as their main medium to spread their ideologies and to recruit new members. Additionally, based on several interviews with the detainees, family and social problems are found to be the reasons for them to get involved in radical movements.

## Definition of Radicalization

Radicalization has been accepted as a field of study in the recent years. Since the acceptance is relatively new, a universally accepted definition of the concept has yet to be developed nor defined. Nevertheless, there are some definitions elaborated by researchers to describe radicalization. The definition of radicalization is often centered around two different foci. Firstly, on violent radicalization, the emphasis is on the active pursuit or acceptance of the use of violence to attain the stated goal. And secondly, in a broader sense of radicalization, the emphasis is on the active pursuit or acceptance of far-reaching changes in society, which may or may not constitute a danger to democracy and may or may not involve the threat of or use of violence to attain the stated goals (Veldhuis et al., 2009).

## Process of Radicalization

Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) (2006) states that, there are four stages of radicalization: pre-radicalization, self-identification, indoctrination, and action. Similarly, Silber & Bhatt (2007) also state four levels of the radicalization: pre-radicalization phase, self-identification phase, indoctrination phase, and *jihadization* phase.

Pre-radicalization stage is the condition in which an individual lives a normal life before he or she starts to involve in militant activities. At this juncture, most of the individuals are not exposed to or have not adopted any radical ideologies as their ideologies yet. The self-identification stage is when an individual is keen on learning and understanding a radical ideology which indirectly leads him to form irrational thinking, coupled with internal and external factors such as economy, social, political, and personal. The third indoctrination stage is where an individual tends to learn a radical ideology and gathers with other people who share a similar way of thinking under the guidance of the ideological mentor. The last *jihadization* stage is in which an individual accepts and obeys the leader's commands to participate in *jihad* and self-designate themselves as holy warriors or *mujahedeen*. Ultimately, the group will begin operational planning for the *jihad*, or a terrorist attack. This stage will also include planning, preparation, and execution of attacks.

In the case of this study, it clearly shows that there are various contributing factors to an individual's involvement in militant before he/she clearly demonstrates his/her participation in violence. Each party in the social community is responsible for ensuring the radical ideology which offers attractive slogans, a platform to show dissatisfaction or revenge against the society, an adventure to be recognized as heroes and heaven in the Hereafter is not spread to each level of society, especially the youngsters. Efforts and preventive measures have been taken to fight against terrorism. Among them is the implementation of the de-radicalization program which is widely applied in the Middle East, South-east Asia, and other regions which are prone to terrorism.

## Definition of De-radicalization

De-radicalization can be understood as the process of changing the attitudes and behaviors of former terrorists to reject violence as an ideological, religious or political goal that may cause harm to national security, political, and economic instability or threats to human life. However, many scholars defined de-radicalization differently. According to Ashour (2008), de-radicalization is “the process in which a radical group reverses its ideology and de-legitimizes the use of violent methods to achieve political goals while moving towards an acceptance of gradual political and economic changes within a pluralistic context”.

It is observed that de-radicalization has given new impetus to former militants to lead a normal life and adhere to the religion, of which emphasizes more on the oneness of God, having faith in unseen things, encouraged to do good deeds and shun evil, and reward its followers by allowing them a save passage into heaven on The Day of Judgement. It is also consistent with the teachings of religions, especially Islam, which encourages every believer to practice moderation in all actions in order for them to earn rewards and enter the Paradise on the Day of Judgement. In contrary, teachings of radical ideology encourage the use of violence and at the same time, risking the lives of innocent people in order to meet the demands and interests of unscrupulous individuals.

On the other hand, Neumann (2010) explained that it is important for the society to accept former terrorists back into the community since it will determine whether the implementation of de-radicalization is a success or a failure. Most of the time, after a de-radicalization program is over, it is hard for former terrorists to get the public’s acceptance due to the fears that they might not fully recover even after undergoing the de-radicalization program or they might attempt to return to the militant group in the future. Arguably, individuals who had lived in a hostile and troubled area would find it very difficult to coexist with those who live in a democratic society such as in Australia or Great Britain.

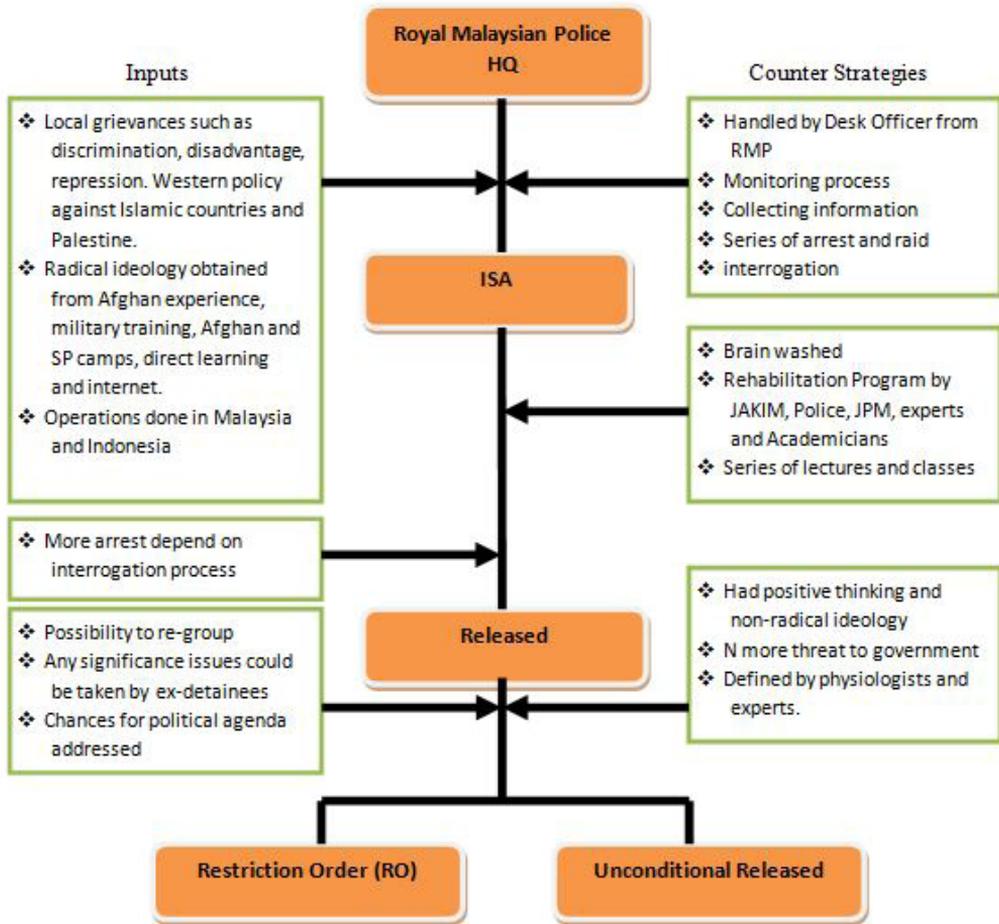
For example, in Afghanistan, individuals are constantly surrounded by trauma and continuously bombarded with harsh realities in the country. Such predicaments would make it difficult to implement and maintain the “aftercare” required for the rehabilitated militants, and the de-radicalization program would simply fail as a result of re-exposure to the influences of radicalism. Therefore, the society plays an important role in giving encouragement and providing financial assistance to

former militants in order to help them lead a normal life and to enable them to recover from terrorism fully.

## De-Radicalization in Malaysia

Malaysian de-radicalization initiative is majorly through the introduction of the Religious Rehabilitation Program. Most of the programs are based on re-education and rehabilitation. Re-education focuses on correcting political and religious misconceptions of militants, while the strategy of rehabilitation is adopted for careful monitoring of militants after their release (Noor & Hayat, 2009). Family members of detainees are also engaged in the process by giving financial support to the detainees. Once they are released, former militants are also given the assistance to reintegrate into the society. The following chart describes the process of de-radicalization practiced by the Malaysian government.

**Process of De-Radicalization by Malaysian Government**



**Chart 1: The continuing process of de-radicalization and inputs needed by police to encounter a threat from militant groups in Malaysia (Aslam, 2015)**

As illustrated above, the main entity responsible for the de-radicalization program is The Royal Malaysian Police (PDRM), and several stages are required for the process of de-radicalization. After being arrested, detainees will be taken to the RMP (Special Branch Department) at Bukit Aman, Kuala Lumpur for interrogation. From the information obtained, detainees will be commanded to be

detained under the ISA (current ISA is replaced by POTA and SOSMA) for two years (minimum). At this stage, depending on the information given by detainees, more arrests will be carried out. After being released, detainees will be put under the Restriction Order (RO), and some will be given unconditional release. The Malaysian government also implements a counter strategy which incorporates the RMP (Special Branch Department), the Prime Minister's Department, the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia, and other related agencies (Aslam, 2015).

Rehabilitation is considered as the most important tool in countering radicalism. This is because the spiritual element embodied within the rehabilitation program can solve the problem effectively. A program conducted by a religious department, namely JAKIM emphasizes on religious counseling towards detainees. This approach in return will help JAKIM to explore and detect detainees' misinterpretations about Islam. During the process of religious counseling, several experts such as *Ustaz* and *Ulama* will be invited to clarify the aspects of religious doctrine and detainees' belief system, where most of them uphold the wrong perspectives about Islam (Ali, 2007). At the end of the program, a radical ideology based on the *salafi-wahhabism* thinking will be replaced by a more authentic Islamic teachings especially towards the real meaning and idea of *jihad*. Currently, the de-radicalization program is proving to be effective due to the presence of recovered ex-prisoners such as Ahmad Wan Ismail and Suhaimi Mokhtar.

The rehabilitation process is divided into four phases in order to accomplish the de-radicalization program. In the first stage, counselors from JAKIM and police officers extricate any negative ideology or twisted Islamic perceptions. Next, counselors play their role by opening up discussions, and misunderstood ideologies are then addressed. At this point, each counselor faces a challenging task since militants will try to defend their belief system. Counselors are required to counter this with quick answers, clear, and profound knowledge of Islam, because usually, detainees would, at first argue that the counselors are infidels. In the third stage, all twisted Islamic concepts and ideologies will be replaced with the correct interpretations of the Quran and *Sunnah*. Once all of these aspects are covered, a more comprehensive education on Islam begins (Aslam, 2015).

Besides rehabilitation process for detainees, the Malaysian government also gives exposure to the detainees' family members on how to break the cycle of indoctrination and to prevent future influences of radical ideology since family members are usually in the state of shock and in need of clarification on what

is exactly happening. Moreover, Malaysian government also gives financial support to detainees' family members in order to help them to survive during the absence of their husbands, wives or children. This particular program may assist them in giving useful perspective and prevent misunderstanding towards the de-radicalization initiative. Other government agencies such as *Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat* (Social Welfare Department) and *Pusat Zakat* (State Alms Centre) are also assisting these families by giving them the financial support that they need on a daily basis.

According to the Special Branch Director, Datuk Seri Muhammad Fuzi Harun, rehabilitation and de-radicalization programs have shown positive signs in combating terrorism and extremist violence in Malaysia at almost 95 percent of success rates. Most of the detainees that are released have successfully reintegrated and returned to the society while only five percent of the released detainees returned to their old antics (Ismail, 2016). The Special Branch Director also said that the rehabilitation period must comply with the legal provisions under the Prevention of Crime Act (POCA) and the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), namely the production order. As a step to avoid relapse cases which would jeopardize the nation's security, this provision is used to give as much input as possible to detainees or their family members (Ismail, 2016).

## Conclusion

The results showed that in order to fight against terrorism, various methods should be implemented according to situations when dealing with different backgrounds and understandings of Islam among the Muslim population. It is observed that the cause of common Muslim grievances has not been addressed. The inconsistent foreign policy of the United States also contributes to the backlashes and vendettas towards the Middle East, especially on its tendency to support Israel rather than addressing all underlying issues which can sometimes seem like a war on Islam, especially in the eyes of radical Muslims.

Muslims worldwide feels injustice over Israeli military actions which openly do injustice to the people of Palestine, of which also supported by a major power like the United States of America. Millions of people in the Middle East perceive themselves as victims of America's unjust policies. History has shown that superpower and its allies have supported undemocratic regimes such as Saddam Hussein in Iraq and the military administration in Algeria.

It is also observed that work in the field of radical Islamism and religious terrorism, in general, is suffering from a huge knowledge gap. For instance, the phenomenon of religious terrorism crosses so many academic fields, including political science, sociology, psychology, theology, economics, anthropology, history, law, and international relations. Due to this overlapping field of studies, it creates a challenge to academicians who are unaccustomed to collaboration. Furthermore, the distinctive perspectives and modes of research engaged by scholars in each of those disciplines have led most of them to rely on familiar perspective and long-established arguments that are prevalent in each field.

In order to solve the problem, there is a need to understand the core problems faced by the Islamic community. Several crucial issues that should be taken into consideration by various parties are, for instance, the curriculum of Islamic subjects taught in schools and universities. Furthermore, the true meaning and exact concept of *jihad*, as well as a broader understanding of *jihad*, should also be implemented to avoid misconceptions. Undeniably, it is tough for any governments of the region to settle issues related to militant ideology and radicalism if they are unwilling to understand the fundamental problems and preventing them from getting worst. For example, radical Muslims in Southern Thailand clearly have no relations to terrorism; their struggle lies with patriotism and the re-establishment of the Malay-Pattani Kingdom. To generalize militant activities in South-east Asia as being the same as militant activities in Afghanistan or the Middle East is overly simplistic because the roots of the struggle are different.

There should be a distinction between moderate and extreme Islam to aid the identification of radical Muslims. Moderate Muslims such as in Malaysia and Brunei, have shown their ability to assimilate with current situation and be rational about it. The majority of Muslims in this region holds moderate beliefs in Islam and always wish for peace and harmony. Only a small number of Muslims are involved in terrorist activities. However, violent activities carried out by these individuals did tarnish the image of all Muslims and create misconception about the true nature of Islam.

Conclusively, appropriate methods or programs, such as de-radicalization have the potential to reduce society's involvement in developing militant propaganda, of which in return will threaten the stability of national and international security. Improvement on existing modules used in the de-radicalization program is seen as crucial, especially towards instilling patriotism among former terrorist prisoners. It is hoped that through patriotism, youngsters, in particular, will not reinvolve with

radical movements. Every entity should take part in monitoring former families or parents who were involved in radical movements. If they are found still involved with any radical movements, precautionary measures should be taken into account since there is a high possibility that a new breed of terrorists will be produced sooner or later. Besides sharing experiences with former militant prisoners, society can also raise awareness of the danger of radicalism in order to avoid being stuck in this retrograde culture.

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# TYOLOGY OF RADICALIZATION: AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE EVOLUTION OF EXTREMISM IN MALAYSIAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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## ABSTRACT

Higher education students are the most vulnerable entity to be mired in terrorist-related activities. University students are extremely porous and are in search of their identities. Therefore, this makes them as an easy and pliable targets. This paper analyzes how students are transformed from ‘nominal believers’ to activists, extremists, radicals and ultimately terrorists. Every single phase aforementioned is explained in details; regarding criteria and indoctrination process. An understanding of the typology of terrorism is the only way to counter and to enable us to take proper measure to overcome the issue of terrorism among university students. This paper is based on literature review, library research, and open-ended interview as preliminary guidelines for those who are involved in student affairs departments. Further research has to be explored in this context, especially to develop a preventive policy and to help rehabilitate students in Malaysian universities who have already been indoctrinated into the terrorist beliefs.

**Keywords:** Terrorism, Typology, Radical, Extremist, al-Qaeda, Jihad

## Introduction

The pathway to becoming a radical Muslim is divided into six degrees, beginning with normal followers, occasional followers, activists, extremists, radicals, and militants. Each stage represents a different level of faith and consistency of practicing Islam. These six clusters will be elaborated in order to show how Muslims shift from one stage to another; from normal to extreme or vice versa. These clusters can be understood from the report by The Washington Institute for Near East Policy (2009) which states, “Individuals can turn by stages, into sympathizers, supporters, and ultimately, members of terrorist networks”.

The same thing can happen to higher education students in this country. Every student can be placed at any degree of radicalism that is suitable for them as expounded in the Typology of Radicalism couched in this paper. Students who come from various socio-cultural backgrounds are bound to have different views and knowledge regarding radicalism. The readiness of some of these students to get involved in radical and violent activities is one aspect that was evaluated and expounded in this paper. The focus was on university students who are considered vulnerable and easily exploited. The radical beliefs easily influenced students who hail from remote areas and have a background in the science stream and do not have enough exposure to matters related to radicalism.

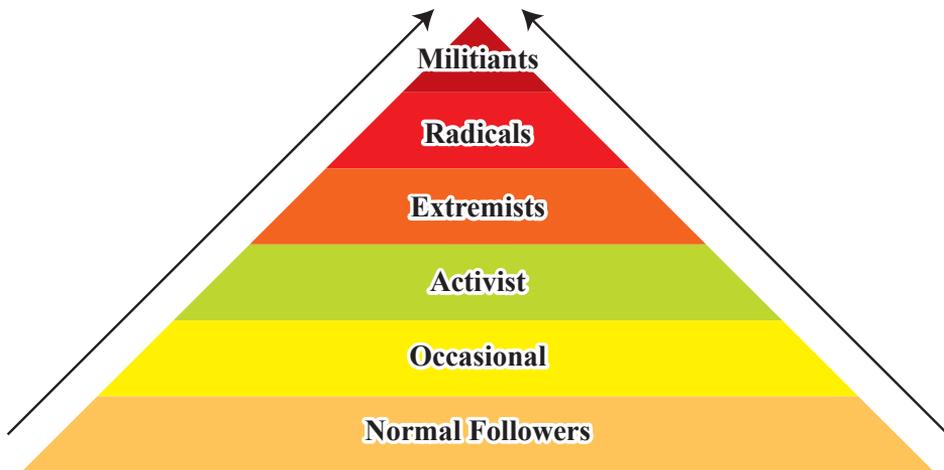
## A Typology of Radicalization

Nominal believers or ‘cultural Muslim’ is the first stage and poses the lowest threat of becoming a radical. Normally, this type of follower is well educated, open minded and lives a modern style of life in all aspects. They may be recognized as ‘secular Muslims’, which has a different meaning to modern day secular. At this stage, Muslims inherit Islam from their parents and therefore the need to explore Islamic teachings more deeply are not applicable.

Nominal believers declare themselves as Muslims, but the ways they act and speak, do not portray their faith. This level is represented by followers, who sometimes do not practice fasting during the month of Ramadhan, do not wear scarves and do not pray regularly. They may go to the Mosque for Friday prayers, or at least twice a year at *Eid Fitri* (After *Ramadhan* celebration) and *Eid Qurban* (Pilgrimage celebration).

They may not be keen to discuss Islam openly, either because they do not fully understand it or to avoid misinterpretation. They like to mingle with people who have similar views on Islam. They are materialistic and work hard to become known as elites. Living in luxury and elegance can be measured by the way they dress, their cars, houses, the places they eat or meet friends. During their pastimes, they like to do activities such as playing golf, going to exclusive clubs and others. Normally, they stay in ‘elite’ residential areas and are connected to political leaders, businessmen or corporate people.

Only a small number of Muslims are involved in violence and terrorism. The diagram below shows the different levels of activism, starting with normal followers as the biggest group and militants as the smallest group.



**Graph 1: The Muslim’s radical pathway.**

When facing difficulties in life such as family or personal problems, Muslims return to the foundation of Islamic teachings. They will quickly discover their Muslim identity and defend it, regardless of whether they understand Islam or not. However, they agree that Islam is the resolution and the fundamental principals of the religion are important. For example, most ordinary believers in Malaysia have secular lifestyles; they live in luxury, but when they have personal problems such as marital or moral difficulties, they will return to Islam as the only way of life.

Muslims in this category are easily recruited as radicals and militants. Without a strong foundation, they can be manipulated by charismatic leaders during their journey to find a new ‘way of life’. Situations could be further worsened when the leaders have a corrupt ideology and hidden agenda. For example, in the ‘Sauk tragedy’ in Malaysia back in 2002, the *al-Maunah* leader, Mohd Amin Ghazali displayed an image of kindness, generosity, humility, and piety among his followers. Starting with ‘*silat*’ (Malay martial art) training, he opened a free public clinic for traditional treatment and ‘*Fardhu Ain*’ (personal obligation) classes. Sometimes, he claimed to have corresponded with *Djinnns* (Genie) and said his soul has travelled to the *Ka’abah* in Saudi. Amin successfully manipulated his followers (nominal followers) to believe in what he did is right and that *al-Maunah* is practicing true Islamic teachings.

Young Muslims in this category also respond to a radical message because they feel excluded from their societies, and sometimes feel trapped in poverty or authoritarian regimes in the Middle East and beyond. Others, who are well-off and well-educated, live in the Western democratic nations, but struggle with issues of belonging and identity and find that the radical message resonates with their experience and circumstances.

The second phase, which is ‘occasional’, represents people who attend the mosque or *Surau* (Prayer Hall). People from this category are clearer about their identity than nominal followers. They are willing to show their identity and intent, but are content to live without the pressure of being ‘pious’ Muslims. They have freedom of choice and can be identified by the symbols they wear, such as the *kupiah* (skull cap) for men and scarves for women. They are quite happy to choose their identity without pressure from other parties.

They attend the Mosque when the need arises, but do not usually pray regularly. People in this category are happy to take part in the rituals and the customs of their tradition without making a fuss about it. They put God first in their lives and firmly believe that God has a great and supernatural power to make everything happen, regardless of whether humans like it or not. They show their devotion and loyalty to the *Shari’ah* and the *ummah* as the absolute way of worshipping God. These people are happy to send their children to Islamic schools. Nowadays, most of the Islamic schools in Malaysia are filled with urban youngsters. Families prefer their children to have Islamic education in order to stop immoral influences in their lives.

The third stage represents ‘activists’. These people can be measured by their piety and commitment to attend the Mosque. Compared to occasional followers, activists are consistent in their attendance to the Mosque and always try their best to be present. Activists observe the regular prayer times. They are actively involved in discussion with the Islamic community, either at the Mosque or other places. From their perspective, regular attendance is considered essential and compulsory for every Muslim. They may be critical to Muslims who are lacking in their commitment to prayers or activities at the Mosque.

They attend the Friday or *Jumaat* prayer regularly. The *Jumaat* prayer is used for the promotion of faith and as a gathering place for the Muslim community. Followers take this opportunity to discuss the five pillars of Islam and all issues relating to the *Ummah*. In some states such as Kelantan, Kedah, Perlis and Terengganu in Malaysia, Friday is a holiday. Therefore, it is convenient for people in these states to perform their *Jumaat* prayers. Activists may spend half of Friday morning learning about *kitab* (holy books) until *Jumaat* prayers which start at about 12.30 and continue until 2.00 in the afternoon.

They also perform *puasa* (fasting) for 30 days during the month of *Ramadan* (one of the holiest months in Islam). They are expected to fulfil this obligation without any objection. They may confront others who do not perform their *puasa*. They feel that by fasting for a month, Muslims are united, giving love and affection to one another and helping each other in practical ways. They view Ramadan as a month where people of all status and degrees of wealth are equally hungry and believe that fasting enables the unity of *Ummah*.

People at this level are involved in *Usrah* (group discussions), either initiated by the Mosque or other groups. The matters discussed are focused largely on understanding Islam and common interests regarding faith, which covers *Shari`ah*, academic and rational debates, and discussion about Islam as a way of life. *Usrah* usually takes place at the Mosque. The main objectives are to create an Islamic environment and to focus on deepening piety.

Normally, these people are keen to perform the *Hajj* as their main aim. They are granted travel to Mecca for *Hajj* either from bank savings or from other sources, such as selling their properties, loans or money from their children. In this context, Malaysia is the only country which established a bank for *Hajj*, namely ‘*Lembaga Tabung Haji*’ (Pilgrimage Board of Malaysia). *Lembaga Tabung Haji* assists Muslims in Malaysia in terms of saving for their pilgrimage.

People from this group also encourage their family to become good Muslims. Children in these families recite al-Quran as a sign of loyalty to Islam, either forced by their family or by their own choices. They may sometimes read al-Quran, but not every day, because of the time constraint and Quranic literacy levels. Moreover, families in this category are willing to send their children to the Mosque or to an *Ustaz's* (Islamic teacher) house to learn al-Quran. Activists know how to read al-Quran, and they are ever ready to protect al-Quran from all sorts of threat.

The fourth stage is 'extremism'. Extremists are more enthusiastic about their faith and more deeply committed than normal followers, occasional or activists. 'Islam, as the way of life' is the priority in their life, and they have a strong feeling that the only way to be loyal to God is to practice *Shari'ah* principles in their daily lives. These people also make *jihad* as part of their life and work hard to establish it. *Jihad* from their perspective are *jihad* in the economy, *jihad* in social, and *jihad* in politics as well as the true *jihad* (on the battlefield). However, they are committed to worshipping God and obeying all of the commandments cited in the al-Quran and as-Sunnah.

Extremists focus on making the *Hajj* (pilgrimage) at least once in their life. They perceived *Hajj* as the final destination of their life and plan to reperform the Mecca assembly in the future. They perceived *Hajj's* experience as the center of all their practices. Their faith will only be completed when they finished the pilgrimage. These people have a critical view on those who do not intend to perform *Hajj*. Their children will have a personal fund to educate and foster them to perform *Hajj* when they are ready. Most of the extremists' children in Malaysia have their *Lembaga Tabung Haji* account from infancy.

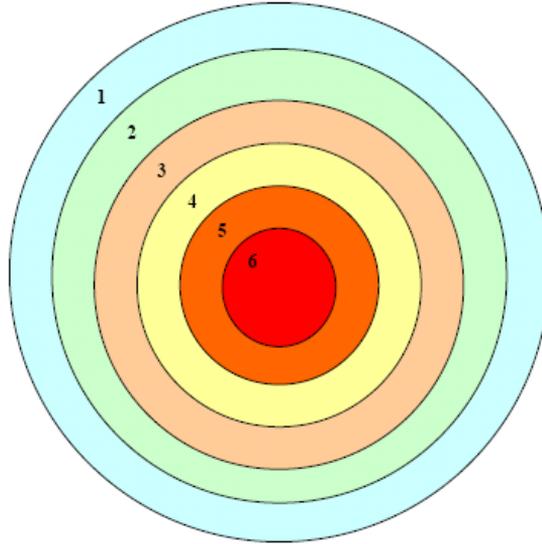
*Hajj* is not just an opportunity to gain a title and to wear *kupiah* as an identity, but it helps Muslims to become aware of the far-reaching bonds which unite them. Their perspective on *ummah* becomes wider because of the *Hajj* experience. *Solat* only unites them at their place, but the pilgrimage bonds the community of humanity from all over the world, no matter where they come from, their race or custom. All of them travel to Mecca with one aim, which is to glorify God and to show their obedience to Islamic teachings.

The fifth level represents the 'radical'. At this level, social actions resulting from the feeling of obligation and commitment as well as duty makes this degree different from the previous stages. The radicals want to help individuals, the community, and the nation to seek *redha* (*contentment*) from God. They intend to

save others from *dholalah* (going astray). The main objective is to save the *ummah* from *Thogut* (Satan). *Redha* is one of the obligations for radicals and must be used to guide people towards the right path. For example, *Front Pembela Islam* (FPI) in Indonesia attacks gambling and vice premises during the month of *Ramadhan* in order to get rid of *dholalah*.

Since the era of the Prophet Muhammad, radicals have successfully expanded Islam to all over the world through commitment and always felt an obligation to do so. They are keen to share Islam with others and *da'wah* (preach) to the masses. Malaysia has had Islam since the 13<sup>th</sup> century, brought by Muslim extremists who came from the Middle East and Southern India. They were committed to teaching people about Islam and felt obligated to increase the number of Muslims, which led them to travel to this region centuries before colonization.

Radicals sturdily opposed everything propagated by the Westerners, especially on attitudes (behavior), lifestyle, and goods. As part of the *jihad*, their struggles are to contest what they perceived as ignorance vigorously, and they have to be carried out with implicative acts such as demonstrations or isolation, not just discussions in Mosques or any Islamic gazebos. They have negative views on others who do not show their willingness to oppose Westernization. They encourage the public to join Islamic activities, especially those intended to get rid of the bad Western influences. Therefore, radical movements such as *Front Pembela Islam* (FPI), *Forum Komunikasi Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jamaah* (FKAWJ) and *Kesatuan Aksi Mahasiswa Muslim Indonesia* (KAMMI) are always demonstrating on the streets in order to achieve their objectives.



**Graph 2: Veitch’s Pathway to Radical Religion. The red circle represents militants, orange-radicals, yellow-extremists, gray-activists, green-occasional and blue-normal followers.**

The most significant level in the typology of radicalism is the ‘militant’; the one who takes violence as a means of propagating Islamic teachings. It is the radical who has grown impatient with the pace of change. After growing up and being influenced by radical scholars or teachers, they may transform themselves from radical to militant. This level can also be referred as militants who organize themselves in vigilante groups, and ready to resort to violent methods in order to protect and execute what they perceived as Islamic goals. The most extreme version of this level is terrorism.

Normally they believe that the *ummah* needs a major jolt to bring it to the true faith. Militants also consider violence and brutality as part of their tools to bring about change, either in politics, society or the economy. They have different perspective towards the meaning and interpretation of al-Quran. They also carry out a political agenda based on an extreme understanding of the al-Quran and *Sunnah*. The militants would take whatever steps necessary to make sure others implement their knowledge of Islam.

Militants only see the final objective, and then look for a way to achieve it no matter what. Regardless of death or physical destruction, the target must be achieved. This is why killing, bombing, hijacking, kidnapping, stealing, and destruction are common in militant movements. They will use any weapons such as bomb, pistol, machine gun, Molotov cocktails or chemical bombs to achieve their objectives. Furthermore, they may commit suicide bombing as one of the effective methods to destroy their enemy. Enemies range from invaders, non-Islamic governments to Westerners, military, police, and civilians. The 9/11 tragedy clearly shows that militants victimized innocent people to fulfil their political objectives.

Militants urge people to follow extreme Islamic teachings (their own interpretation of Quran). Their ultimate aim is to establish the world with an absolute obedience to God's principles through the al-Quran and *Sunnah* such as what has been done by the ISIS.

## Conclusion

All those involved in handling students, especially the student affairs department and the alumni division must play a specific role to curb radical beliefs among students. A system that detects and classifies students based on the degree of radicalism which they espouse must be developed via the data discussed above. Apart from that, since lecturers are considered close to students, they must play a significant role in helping the university and the country to eradicate radicalism. Friends who are close to individuals thought to have ties with radical elements are considered cordial and trusted by them. Therefore, concerned parties must be wise and always be one step ahead of the Generation Y students so that the culture and problem of radicalism could be overcome. A suitable approach that is in tandem with today's contemporary age must be implemented by university management so that this issue can be curbed and dealt with conclusively.

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## CONSENSUS, TERRORISM AND PEACE - THE ROLE OF MALAYSIA'S MEDIA TO PROMOTE WORLD UNITY IN THE POST-SEPTEMBER 11<sup>TH</sup> SCENARIO\*

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### Abstract

September 11, 2001 has brought to the fore the issue of international terrorism calling for a global consensus to bridge ideological, cultural and political gaps between the West and East. Given that Malaysia is characterized by a blend of East and West as well as the status of a progressive Muslim nation, the key question posed in this paper is whether Malaysian media are able to build the much needed global consensus in a multilateral context, particularly amongst South East Asian countries. This calls for an examination of the Malaysian media culture as, for instance, through a random survey of media reports, commentaries, and letters from the Malaysian mainstream media following the two tragic events of 9-11 and the US-led strikes against Afghanistan. The study looks at both articles and letters to assess whether the government and the journalists' views are similar to those of the population at large. The results show that while the mainstream media in Malaysia can enlighten the West on perceived injustices leading to grievances, they are also in a unique position to initiate a reform of moderate and liberal thinking in the Islamic world. The emergent moderate and balanced stances as highlighted in this study lead to the conclusion that the Malaysian media have the scope of fostering greater understanding across religions, cultures and societies, the very foundation needed both to establish a consensus with regard to international terrorism and to build a world of peaceful coexistence for future generations.

**Keywords:** Afghanistan, global consensus, international terrorism, Malaysia, media culture, 9-11

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## Peace and terrorism: Towards a global consensus

September 11 or 9/11 has brought to the fore the issue of international terrorism calling for a global consensus to bridge ideological, cultural and political gaps between the West and East. The fateful day in 2001 will be remembered in history as a day of dramatic significance completely altering the world political scenario. Meticulously organized, today's international terrorism is no more confined to isolated incidents in conflict-strife regions of the world.

The world woke up to see that terrorists are no longer afraid of the United States of America, hitting her hard right from under her mighty military nose. The tragic strike on World Trade Centre left no less than 5000 people dead. True to its unpredictable yet volatile form, terrorism was to hit again in about a year's time. The serene island of Bali trembled with blasts on October 12<sup>th</sup>, 2002 ending the region's belief it is safe from terrorism. It left more than 200 people dead.

Such recurrent acts of terrorism accentuates the need to build a global partnership to resist terrorism irrespective of ideological, cultural and political identities. A multilateral consensus is needed on the very definition of terrorism, just as a physician is required to diagnose a patient before prescribing appropriate treatment. The Information Age enables the global media's farflung wings to play a momentous role in building understanding and cooperation amongst people across societies. However, consensus remains a far cry as a result of increasingly divergent views represented by American or Western media on one hand and Muslim or Middle Eastern media on the other hand.

To expect a uniform monotony in media opinions across boundaries and cultures is to pin our hope on a false presumption that media is completely objective. The media is more often than not inclined to a particular side bearing the opinions and values of the writer, institution publishing it, and usually more subtly, the society in which it is produced and circulated. Malaysia is characterized by a blend of East and West as well as the status of a progressive Muslim nation. Given this, Malaysia may be able to rise above the partisan tendencies of their counterparts in West or Middle East to show a higher degree of objectivity and balanced perspectives. The key question posed is whether Malaysia's media is able to build the aforementioned much needed global consensus in a multilateral context, particularly amongst South East Asian countries. This calls for an examination of the Malaysian scenario, in particular, the media culture within the country.

## Malaysia: Middle-of-road case?

Has Malaysia carved a unique position for itself in the geo-political setting of the world? The country has been time and again addressed as a modern Muslim nation. Malaysia had one of the fastest expanding economies in the region prior to the 1997 Asian Economic Crisis from which it has recovered to continue its since march towards its vision of achieving the status of a developed nation by 2020. Malaysia maybe one of the most ideal candidates to lead the global initiative for consensus on peace and terrorism, given its status as a Muslim-majority nation emphasizing on growth and development instead of extremism. Irrespective of religious affiliations, Malaysia has pursued close economic ties with its neighbours within the Association of South East Asian Nations or ASEAN.

Malaysia stands tall today as a liberal Islamic country, stressing on the development of science and technology, being run by a democratically elected government and not by Muslim clerics. The country propagates a modern and progressive version of Islam acceptable to changing times. As the friendly, peaceful and modern face of Islam, Malaysia maybe in the best position to build a consensus to establish regional security as well as establish unity, cooperation and understanding between countries. Malaysia's policies have been to achieve a certain balance between matters of international concern, and those of Islamic nations. Similarly balanced perspectives are seen in the media, providing the opportunity to enlighten both ends of the spectrum thereby emerging close to the seemingly impossible consensus on terrorism and peace.

## Malaysian media

Malaysia has 27 daily newspapers, consisting of vernacular as well as English language publications. The key players in the English language press are The New Straits Times (NST) and The Star. The NST is the country's leading broadsheet newspaper and has had the highest readership over the years. It has a long-standing tradition of being the most credible daily representing the official views of the Malaysian government. The ruling Barisan Nasional coalition enjoys influence over editorial or news policy, which means the views represented by the NST are almost synonymous with the government's stance. The same can be said of The Star and other vernacular dailies, which are related to major concerns of the ruling coalition parties.

The Malaysian media has been criticized time and again for its lack of transparency or independence from the government. Press freedom has been a sensitive issue, as the media is somewhat controlled when it reserves comments that may hamper national security. The press works within the directions of the government in the local and international arena as the mouthpiece of the government to voice its concerns and views of international importance. Given the balanced perspectives of the Malaysian government finding itself in the middle of East and West, this means the media also correspondingly sings a balanced tune trying to accommodate views of both ends of the spectrum. Ironically, the success of the Malaysian media to build consensus by providing balanced perspectives may actually be because of its lack of independence from the government's official stance, which seems also similarly impartial in understanding both East and West. Thus, as the Malaysian government plays the role of building a world consensus on peace it is only natural that its mouthpiece media also play a similar role. Before we proceed as to whether the media will be able to build such desired consensus, it is important to assess the neutrality of the views reflected in the pages of its English language and vernacular news media in the first place.

## Hypothesis: The neutrality of the Malaysian media

Given Malaysia's unique status as a modern Muslim nation and the mainstream media's role as a mouthpiece of the establishment, it can be hypothesized that the Malaysian media will generally provide a balanced view in respect to international terrorism like 9-11 or Bali bombings. It is expected that this view will generally accommodate concerns of the West as well as East, thereby establishing some form of multilateral consensus in terms of peace and terrorism in the global arena. After all, the present Malaysian government finds itself faced with grave threat of extremist political forces, including an opposition party aspiring to build a theocratic Islamic state, as well as illegal paramilitary outfits posing danger to the country's national security.

The March 21<sup>st</sup> 2004 resounding victory of the ruling government under the leadership of the new Prime Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi put to rest the strong opposition from the Islamic political party. At the same time, Malaysia has been and still is a strident voice against unilateral international aggression such as the war on Iraq and its foreign policy has generally been sympathetic to the cause of humanity in terms of loss of property and life of innocent victims.

Echoing the sentiments of the government, it is proposed that the Malaysian media will also be able to accommodate views from both sides of the spectrum thus emerging as a unique, rational and constructive voice in respect to current geo-political situation in the post-September 11 World. This unique voice of the Malaysian media balancing security concerns of the West and identity concerns of the East will help ensure greater understanding, cohesion and cooperation between countries in the ASEAN region. To test this hypothesis, a random survey is carried out on media reports, commentaries, and letters from the Malaysian mainstream media following the two tragic events, to assess whether they are able to strike a unique balance that may be a conduit for understanding between countries in the South East Asian region, as well as for the world as a whole. The study looks at both articles and letters to assess whether the government and journalists views are similar to those of the population at large.

## 9 -11

Rarely has a single incident in recent times caught the attention of the worldwide press as much. The terrorist attack on World Trade Centre and Pentagon in the United States on September 11<sup>th</sup>, now infamously referred to as 9-11 was also the main highlight of media reports in Malaysia. The mainstream media's coverage of 9-11 and its aftermath attempted to give both sides of the story. They sympathized with America's concerns, but at the same time condemned American aggression in Afghanistan, similar to the official stance of the Malaysian government.

### **Barbaric act of unmitigated terror**

In the immediate aftermath of the September 11<sup>th</sup> tragedy, the Malaysia media joined the worldwide chorus of unequivocal condemnation of the attack on World Trade Centre and Pentagon. Columnist Askiah Adam (2001) termed the attack as a barbaric act of unmitigated terror perpetrated by cold blooded killers who have brought evil to anew, demonic high. In the same commentary published in the Focus segment of the newspaper, Adam observed that such attackers don't have a place in modern democratic societies. In his weekly column, Abdul Kadir Jasin (2001) writes, .... our heart goes out to the American people in their hour of tragedy and states that such terrorism is an act of barbarism condemnable by civilized society. Shamsul Akmar (2001) felt that the international community is appalled

by this horrendous act. Columnist Fatimah Abu Bakar wrote how she feels the pain and fear of the American people. There was no hesitation as NST vociferously condemned the tragedy of 9-11.

### **Why? Victims of the folly of American leaders?**

Immediately after the attack, there were rampant speculations regarding the individuals or organizations behind the attack. The American government was under public (and media) pressure to point to the people responsible for the terrorist attacks as well as to explain to the public as to why the world's best intelligence system failed to predict a terrorist aggression of such a large scale. Intense soul-searching followed initial disbelief and the immediate question was the reason behind 9-11. The American media largely ignored the root causes of the tragedy, preferring to see such a vast demonstration of discontent as a mere terrorist event isolated from geo-political scenario vis - vis American foreign policy.

In this respect, the Malaysian media was able to strike a better balance in terms of objectivity. Despite the fierce condemnation, the Malaysian media had a distinctively unique perspective representing the liberal Muslim ideology opposing such attacks but at the same time criticizing American policies. Adam (2001) identifies a number of factors that have led to anti-US sentiments worldwide, including American inaction allowing renewed Israeli violence against unarmed Palestinian civilians, support of Israeli atrocities on the displaced and stateless, unfair terms of trade and global hegemony. Columnists like Adam attempt to go one step further than mere condemnation of the assault, as they feel that America needs to do some soul-searching to discover why such zealous anti-US sentiments exist in the world today.

Columnist Aishah Ali (2001) declare that the American media needs to investigate why the devastation of September 11<sup>th</sup> happened, calling for an analysis of what might have contributed to the atrocities. Though Ali is undoubtedly against terrorism, she feels that this might have been a wakeup call for America as multitudes feel grievances against the US due to wrong handling of foreign policy matters by the United States, particularly the Middle East affairs. She says that there is a need for the US to find out which policies might have caused such resentment, frustration and desperation and to cause such a tragedy. Some even directly blamed US leaders as the co-accused for 9-11. Columnist J.K Lee (2001) felt that the nearly 6000 people who lost their lives on September 11<sup>th</sup> were victims of the

folly of American leaders and the brutality of the terrorists combined. He called upon America to learn how to win the hearts and minds of the people in the rest of the world instead of relying on bullets and bombs to ease anti-US sentiments. In terms of soul searching, Malaysian media was able to touch on possible flaws of the American foreign policy in causing worldwide resentment and in risking lives of American citizens, unlike its American counterparts who preferred to see the terrorist events without attempting to understand possible causes.

Writers anticipated that the attack on Afghanistan would only provide fodder for fanatics. Columnist Johan Jaffar (2001) felt the Americans need to realize why they are despised in the Muslim world and to understand why the Muslim population is agitated, suggesting that the strikes against Afghanistan will only increase the grievances. Sarah Sabaratnam (2001) quoted one of her friends to sum up the Malaysian perspective that September 11<sup>th</sup> cannot be justified, whatever the cause. That is wrong and should be condemned. However, if foreign policy has been cited as the cause for the incident, then it needs to change. This reflects the Malaysian perspective. However, such calls for soul-searching should not be misconstrued as a form of rationalization of the September 11<sup>th</sup> mayhem. The Malaysian perspective did not condone violence and in fact vehemently condemned the attack, but at the same time proposed that some soul-searching is required on the part of both West and East to effectively stop recurrence of such human tragedies in the future. After all, the Malaysian government and media share the concerns of the West to ensure extremists do not threaten national and regional security in South East Asia.

Does NST's readership agree? It seems so. Similar balanced perspectives and sentiments were evident in respect to contributors amongst the public. Views of condemnation as echoed by letter writer Ainal Ghazali (2001) who says that September 11<sup>th</sup> was the work of desperados seeking world attention. However letter-writers also called for soul-searching to investigate the causes of 9-11. Another letter-writer Hashim Ambia (2001) questions whether such horrendous crimes can occur without any reason or cause? Some writers suggested Osama was a creation of Americans during the Cold War and slammed double standards: Aishah Abd Rahman (2001), another letter-writer stated that US foreign policy is crippled with double standards, citing how the US condemned Musharraf for his undemocratic assumption of power, but now he has become a buddy. One letter-writer J. L. Christopher (2001) wrote from Arizona stating that those who voice the need to search for the root cause of the attacks tend to believe that America is the cause and asserts a view of moral equivalency. He concedes that America has made mistakes in its foreign policy, but claims that almost every country has done

the same. This soul searching attempts to see the bigger picture without unbiased stances is conducive to build a world of better understanding, peace and harmony. Such views should be seen as friendly and constructive advice to America and not mere criticism for the sake of opposition.

### **Liberal Islam vs. extremism**

As Malaysia propagated a liberal, modern and progressive version of Islam compatible with economic and social development, its media can play a vital role to differentiate between extremists and liberal Muslims. Representing a unique liberal Muslim perspective, the Malaysia media predictably made great strides to absolve all Muslims of the collective guilt arising from the misdeeds of a few. This involved an attempt to distance misguided fanatics from liberal Muslims, which is why Adam (2001) wrote that true believers cannot perpetrate such cruelty and that Muslims cannot tolerate the inhumane sentiments that made possible the intended deaths of so many. The writer comments that if Islam is indeed the excuse for this act of extreme inhumanity, then no reasonable Muslim can applaud it. Writers like Adam also attempt to identify the attackers as misguided zealots not representing the true principles and faith of Islam.

Writer Datuk Seri Adib Adam (2001) states that terrorism is not exclusive to Islam and cites other cases of terrorism by people of other religions, including the Protestant-Catholic conflict in Ireland. Columnist Johan Jaffar (2001) says that Islam has been hijacked by these people. Another columnist Shamsul Akmar (2001a) questions whether the cause of fanatics is truly Islamic as killing, hostage-taking and armed rebellions killing innocents cannot be the teachings of the religion. The Diarist (2001) in his column regretted that innocent Muslims in the US and Europe have been bearing the brunt of an ugly backlash, calling upon the world not to associate Islam with terrorism. These columnists and writers underscore that both Muslims and Islam should not be held responsible for the criminal activities of a few fanatics.

Similar views are expressed by NST's readership calling for a line to disassociate such fanatics from the peace-loving religion of Islam. Letterwriter JE (2001) said that the extremist brand of Islam propagated by fanatics was a deviation from the true faith. At a time when the wrong doing of a misguided few has equated Islam with terrorism in the eyes of many, the Malaysian media is able to play a constructive role to differentiate extremists from liberal Muslims. This is bound to

create greater understanding between various religious groups in the region and elsewhere, as believers of other faiths will be able to see that Islam is not the cause but rather a lame excuse used by perpetrators of evil. This will help establish peace and cooperation as the significantly large population of non-Muslims in South East Asia will see that the violence perpetrated in the name of Islam in fact contravenes the basic tenets of peace emphasized by God in the religion's verses. This removes any suspicion of Islam and Muslims of this unhealthy activity in the South East Asian region given the demographic mixture of various religious groups in the population of the countries.

### **Afghanistan: Civilian misery**

The Malaysian media represents a balanced perspective expressing tremendous empathy with the suffering populace of Afghanistan, who were tortured by Taliban and then further tormented by the US-led strikes. The balanced stance taken by the Malaysian media following the 9/11 tragedy accommodated views of the West as well as East, condemning the mayhem unequivocally but at the same time standing by the side of humanity in respect to Afghanistan. Malaysia has pressed for a multilateral approach to resolving international issues including Afghanistan under the banner of the United Nations instead of unilateralist action by the United States.

In the initial reaction to September 11<sup>th</sup>, there was much speculation on probably American retaliation. Though understanding America's reasons for retribution, the Malaysia media largely opposed a full-scale war. Columnists like Adam (2001) felt that such war was bound to lead to unsavoury circumstances in the form of civilian misery. One writer Ashraf Abdullah (2001) questioned whether the attack of a state by another state can be tantamount to a form of terrorism too, thus giving credence to the view that two wrongs don't make one wrong right. The readership agreed. Letter-writer Kassim Ahmad (2001) pleaded for US to be sensible in its retaliation. He hoped that rational voices will emerge (in the US) to stop a process that will bring calamity to us all. Rozi Ali (2001) wrote that understandably, its citizenry demands retaliation, but the US should react strategically and rationally.

The fallout of the US-led strikes against Afghanistan in retaliation and retribution of September 11<sup>th</sup> saw the Malaysian media condemning the attack due to the suffering of innocent civilian victims. Once again, the Malaysian media represented a unique liberal Muslim perspective in that it does not condone atrocities

of the Taliban regime but at the same time protest the air strikes due to civilian victims. Writers like Saleh Giles (2001) emphasized that even before the US-led strikes, the people of Afghanistan were already being abused, starved, maimed and killed due to the cruelty and callousness of the Taliban which legitimised murder and subjugation. Such writers don't mince their words in condemnation of the Taliban, stressing that Muslims wince in horror and shock at the way the Taliban has used a great religion like Islam to justify such cruelty and barbarism and no government that behaves with such cruelty and disdain against its own people has the right to continue to rule over them. She feels that the Taliban has unleashed their own peculiar version of death and destruction on the innocent people of Afghanistan and ought to be kicked out for terrorizing their own people, but agrees with the former Malaysian Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohammad that such air strikes will accomplish little.

Such writers like Giles feel that air strikes will only lead to further pain, fear, deprivation and death for the Afghan population unless real change comes to them. She feels instead that it is more appropriate for countries representing the United Nations and Organization of Islamic Countries to unite in ousting regimes like Taliban for butchering their own people and immolating their own nations. In her column, Vasanthi Ramachandran writes, Killing innocent people is victory to terrorists. She criticises the attack on Afghanistan and questions whether two wrongs make one right, stating that children should not be made victims of war. She also questions the appropriateness of Bush's One for All and All For One motto in style of the Three Musketeers in attempting to show Might is Right. She says she grieved and mourned the Americans sorrow (of September 11<sup>th</sup>) but does not see the nobility of war. Johan Jaffar (2001) in his column pleads that the voice of reason should prevail as terror begets terror. Jaffar reminds the US that the suffering of the people in Afghanistan may be another battle cry for the militants and excuse for terrorists to wreak more havoc.

Some writers raised concern about continued bombardment of Afghanistan during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. Diarist (2001) in his column hoped that the US will listen to the pulse of Muslims and wage the campaign against terrorism without of fending Islamic sensibilities. Writer K. P. Waran (2001) echoed the view and noted that bin Laden has to be eliminated because of his terrorist activities, but the strikes have to be swift to ensure it does not coincide with Ramadan and doesn't let civilian casualty numbers mount. Writer Datuk Mohamed Jawhar Hassan (2001) felt that the United Nations is the best bet for justice to be done for the lives lost in America ensuring there are no excesses done

in the name of freedom and justice on one hand, or Islam on the other. Writers like Giles (2001) agree with the United States that the Taliban regime should be ousted, but seek other alternatives than air strikes. Other alternative measures are likely to yield more success than military offensives. The Malaysian media has shown that protesting the mayhem of September 11<sup>th</sup> does not equate to blindly following the United States line. According to columnist Shamsul Akmar (2001 a), Malaysia is one nation that will never believe in the killings of innocents, Americans or Afghans and thus pulverizing Afghanistan is something as unpalatable to Malaysians as the September 11<sup>th</sup> attack.

Similar views are echoed by letter-writers responding to 9-11 and US retaliation against Afghanistan. One letter-writer Ainul Ghazali (2001) compared the US-led strikes on Afghanistan to a Malay proverb on someone who burnt the mosquito net in an effort to be rid of one tiny, irritating mosquito. He likens the strikes to an attempt to annihilate a race from the face of the earth and protests the attacks. Another writer Prabha Pankajan (2001) used a similar phrase, stating it is not necessary to burn the garden to get rid of the weeds. Bulbir Singh (2001) even commented that he preferred intervention of the UN, questioning whether America's attack was justice or revenge.

Letter writer P. D. Wren (2001) declares that, the regime in Afghanistan is responsible for its own fate. Letter writer Nuraina A. Samad (2001) opined that the world cannot be party to this war against Afghanistan and US should not act with revenge. One writer Hassan Talib (2001) appreciated what America has indirectly done for Malaysia and the world but at the same time feels that America should not react like King Kong on top of the WTC with its fury and anger. These views are in line with the balanced perspective highlighted above.

There were some who believe that Israel was exploiting the US wrath for its own interest. Azmi Atan (2001) wrote, using the US anti-terrorist campaign as a veil Israel is trying to convince the Bush Administration to act against the Palestinians. From another point of view, letter-writer Andrew Lam (2001) suggested that apart from calling US to halt strikes against Afghanistan, countries should press the Taliban to surrender Osama, which will make the Americans stop the attack. Another writer T.E.H says it is necessary to destroy the leaders at the headquarters to destroy terrorism, as Taliban train and spread terrorism to the world. T.E.H (2001) seems to justify life is such that many innocent people will lose their lives for the guilty. GMH (2001), a letter writer also supported US retaliation, declaring that those who ask US to stop bombing should also ask the terrorists to stop the

attacks. The views by letter-writers Atan, Lam and T.E.H were in contrast to the mainstream media perspective expressed by columnists and writers. In the later stage of the US-led strikes on Afghanistan, there was much speculation on the next location of the War Against Terrorism. Different analysts and commentators believed that the next phase, is an attack on Iraq and some other Muslim countries. The attack on Iraq has materialised and still unresolved till today. The Malaysian media's stance on this was similar to the attack on Afghanistan, as columnists and writers felt that such military offensives do not help to combat terrorism but result in the suffering of innocents. Veteran journalist Munir Majid in his article felt that if the US takes the War Against Terrorism to countries like Iraq, it will destroy all hope of a truly international campaign against terrorism due to the unwillingness of many Muslim countries to participate in an extended campaign of such sort. Majid advised US policymakers of caution in drawing parallels with the Cold War, as the enemy this time is unconventional and shapeless. He suggests that under such circumstances the US should not pursue this war in the same manner as the Cold War strategies and should instead look for a worldwide consensus on fighting terrorism. He feels that excessive military action will split the world in two, causing a division that would pit the Western against the Islamic world and eventually lead to an international reign of terror. He urges US to come out of the Cold War thinking and feels that the US should play the card right to create a new world order which is not an uglier reflection of the Cold War. Columnists like Majid in the Malaysian media attempts to promote consensus and understanding to fight terrorism. Such consensus is vital to establish peace through greater understanding and cooperation of religious and ethnic groups within the South East Asian region, between countries like Malaysia and Thailand, and the outer world alike. The sympathies to America for 9/11 remain, but this is not necessarily equated to apologies for innocent victims of Afghanistan.

### **Unholy jihad**

Representing a balanced stance, the Malaysian media also called upon the Muslim world to do some soul-searching of its own. This is indeed praiseworthy as the Malaysian media can be seen to be leading the initiative amongst the liberal Muslim intelligentsia to cause a reform in the thinking, perspectives and ideology of the Muslim world as a whole, which augurs well for relationship between Muslims and others in the South East Asian region as well as elsewhere. By asking the Muslim world to do its own soul-searching, the Malaysian media has effectively asked Muslims in the region and other parts of the world to be open-minded,

liberal and pluralistic in nature. Columnists like Farish A. Noor (2001) explains that it has become painfully clear that the Muslim world as a whole has lost its moral compass and sense of direction. Noor feels that tragedies like September 11<sup>th</sup> are a result of endemic crises in the Muslim world, for which the Muslim world deserves as much blame as the West. Noor urges the world to understand that vast power differentials and enormous cleavages of wealth in the Muslim countries have led to a social divide and that those who feel themselves marginalized and silenced by the structural inequalities shaping their political universe will rise up in revolt against the order. He feels that the world should come together as one.

Both the West and Muslim world need to make honest and determined effort to correct the imbalances and injustices, including the gulf between rich and poor and haves and have-nots. The writer feels that the West needs to do more, but the Muslim world at the same time needs to regain its direction and sense of moral balance. He calls for an effort for the Muslim world to understand other communities, as well as a need to ensure that Islam is not pit against non-Islamic. The writer also underscores the need for discarding the defensive posture and instead accepting reality that life is hybrid, plural and complex. Noor suggests that Muslims need to be more dynamic, open and inclusive rather than being at odds with others. The article by Noor shows how the Malaysian intelligentsia and media have tried to provide an alternative Muslim voice that represents an open and liberal brand of Islam which encourages broadmindedness, tolerance and modernism.

At a time when the antics of a few misguided fanatics have unfortunately put Islam into disrepute, such views assure the world that Osama bin Laden and his cohorts may not be representative of true Islam and the Muslim community. In another article, Noor (2001 a) says that, Muslims in particular must realize that our true allies are those peace loving advocates of democracy and justice in the West, and not the mullahs who call upon us to murder others in the name of our religion. Some columnists disputed the legitimacy of fanatics calling for jihad, or holy war, Abdul Kadir Jasin (2001) in his weekly column writes, that not every Muslim calling for jihad has sufficient understanding of the religion. Jihad itself has been so badly corrupted by politics and fanaticism that it has lost its true meaning. Letter-writers largely echoed views by Noor and Jasin. One writer Alex Zander Hashim (2001) commented that the divide between the so-called holy and unholy side is an artificial divide and that the Muslims should overcome the paranoia about the enemy out there syndrome, the enemies of Islam, etc.

He urges Muslims not to heap bitterness and resentment to others. Such liberal views propagated by the Malaysian media attempts to reduce tension between Muslims and believers of other faiths in the South East Asian region and elsewhere by asking Muslims to be open minded and not swayed by the fuzzy logic of fanatics who have narrow vested political interests. It is hoped that this will lead to greater understanding and cooperation between the diverse religious and ethnic groups in South East Asian countries like Thailand and Malaysia. As ASEAN expands in its role and operation towards greater economic cooperation and integration, such understanding is an imperative for success of the member countries. The Malaysian media has played a commendable role to ask the Muslims to clean their own backyard first.

### **Vulnerable Malaysia**

The aftermath of the September 11<sup>th</sup> mayhem held immense significance for the Malaysian media in trying to draw parallels with its own domestic political scenario. The New Straits Times is owned by a media group known for its closeness to the Malaysian establishment and ruling party. It is only natural that the newspaper attempted to help the establishment gain political mileage in the days following the assault. This was particularly visible in the Letters to the Editor section of the newspaper, which saw many readers condemning the opposition, ultra-right wing, PAS party for sympathizing with Osama bin Laden and Taliban. The same occurred with respect to columnists and writers. Despite the element of political mileage, the perspectives of the Malaysian media reflect a sense of vulnerability shared by Malaysia, South East Asia and the world alike after the September 11<sup>th</sup> tragedy. The media has expressed the sentiments of intelligentsia and population that Malaysia should not sit idle while knowing potential terrorist threats maybe brewing right under the country s nose.

This can be applied further to the region itself. It is important for the countries in the South East Asian region to be aware of the terrorist, extremist and theocratic threats existing within its boundaries in the greater interest of peace, understanding and cooperation within the ASEAN grouping. Some columnists called upon the government to enact legislation to thwart fanatic terrorists in the domestic scenario. Farish A. Noor (2001b) in his column says if Muslims of the world want to do something about this crisis, they could do no better than to stop listening to the Mullahs who have brought them nowhere. Ironically, the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> has also given the opportunity for the Malaysian media to justify the existence

of harsh legislations like the well-known Internal Security Act, which used to be decried as being oppressive by foreign countries and human rights organizations before this. In an article on his weekly column, columnist Harun Hashim (2001) justifies the existence of the law and declares that, Internal Security Act 1960 has to remain on the statute books to combat terrorism in Malaysia. He condemns the incident as a dastardly attack. He feels that other governments should also consider enacting such heavy-handed legislation to ensure there is an effective machinery to detect, curb and prevent the commission of terrorist acts. Writers also did not miss the opportunity to justify the draconian Internal Security Act (ISA). Datuk Seri Adib Adam (2001) also praised the wisdom of the former Prime Minister (Tun Mahathir) and the Malaysian establishment to invoke the ISA, stating that, it took terrorist attacks on the WTC in New York and the Pentagon in Washington and its tragic outcome to silence critics (of the ISA) who lived by the misguided notions of personal freedom.

This effectively takes a snide at foreign critics of the ISA who have remained relatively silent after the attack. He also feels that the US should re-examine its exuberant value system and suggested that September 11<sup>th</sup> could have been avoided if the US had more aggressive surveillance to counter terrorism. Some columnists referred to September 11<sup>th</sup> as a warning to Malaysia that it must remain committed to democracy and refrain from supporting extremists. Abdullah Ahmad (2001) writes that Malaysia must not turn to extreme view or practices and instead be committed to the principles of moderation. Such writers hope that US and other human rights organization will refrain from criticizing draconian laws in the near and distant future. Thus, it can be seen that the Malaysian media has used the September 11<sup>th</sup> incident to convince the people of the need to have such despotic legislations like ISA in the interest of the country. Many writers including Fatimah Abu Bakar (2001) expressed a sense of vulnerability and that what happened on September 11<sup>th</sup> can happen anywhere.

Letter-writers agreed. One writer S.A.M (2001) wrote that Malaysia is a beautiful country with a moderate government and capable leaders and urged people not to be deceived by those who are crazy for power, and absolute power at that, whose only desire is to impose their will on others for their own selfish gains. This can be considered as a subtle attempt to draw parallels between Taliban and PAS, both being associated with extremism that opposes individual freedom. S.A.M slams PAS for jumping onto the religion bandwagon by calling on Malaysians of the Muslim faith to engage in a jihad or holy war against the US and its allies. Many letter-writers shared Fatima Abu Bakar's sense of vulnerability.

One letter-writer RBZ felt that any measures are justifiable in the interest of the nation's economic and security interests, hoping that the US has hopefully learnt the lesson.

### **World peace: Inter faith understanding**

The Malaysian media attempted to analyze the long-term implications of September 11 on international relations, particularly relations between the United States and Muslim world as a whole. Former diplomat Datuk Yusof Hashim wrote an article predicting that the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks could be the watershed in the relationship between US and Muslim countries, as the former is more aware of its vulnerabilities and would be more disposed towards a balanced and fruitful relationship. The writer feels this will help Americans avoid unending periods of uncertainty and insecurity in the future. This represents another liberal Muslim viewpoint that calls for greater understanding and interaction between the West and the Muslim world to achieve peace and harmony.

An editorial (Editor, 2000) felt that Malaysia's gentle strain of progressive Islam, consistent stand against terrorism, record in countering ideology-inspired militant extremism makes her the logical choice as one of the dominant parties in any coalition against terrorism. A Kadir Jasin (2001 a) hoped that America would understand that the hearts and minds of the people must be won; the battle against terrorism cannot be won by military operations alone. This means that the post-September 11<sup>th</sup> world may have greater unity and understanding. Nuraina A. Samad (2001) wrote how there has never been a time when the interesting discussion of Islam been more intense since September 11<sup>th</sup>. Farish A. Noor (2001) in his column calls for the creation of a meaningful alliance built on a common understanding of universal justice that unite communities rather than driving them apart and against each other.

Some suggested that US should take proactive efforts to ensure that fanatics do not have a war cry or cause. Zaharan Razak (2001) compliments America as the epitome of human achievement but at the same time hopes the country can reconstitute itself in terms of its multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religion reality to ensure that the reasons of hate, the fertile soil for the Osamas of the world to grow, will be nullified. Letters-writers also called for restraint and consensus through dialogue to achieve peace. One letter writer Yusuff Woozeer (2001) called upon President Bush to look for inspiration from Pope John Paul's call in Kazakhstan for dialogue and negotiations to solve conflicts. V. Thomas (2001), a

letter writer suggested that UN should set up, a Religious Council to deliberate on and decide matters concerning inter-faith issues.

The call for greater understanding and cooperation between various faith groups underscores the fact that the definitions of humanity, peace and terrorism are not society-specific but universal in nature. Samuel Huntington's prophecy of the Clash of Civilizations is negated by the Malaysian media, which calls for universal justice irrespective of religious identity. In fact, what is denoted by the term civilization is one and this sets the theme for future relations between the Muslim world and other countries in the world. Such a stance and attempt by the Malaysian media to establish consensus augurs well for understanding between the various faith groups composing the diverse demographic structure of South East Asian countries like Thailand and Malaysia.

### **Osama the coward**

As far as the guilt or innocence of Osama bin Laden is concerned, the Malaysian media maintained a form of neutrality despite unequivocally condemning violence in the name of religion. Though they printed the excerpts of all the released tapes, including Osama bin Laden's statements as well as the tape the US claims proves his guilt, they have not made any comments charging or absolving him of September 11<sup>th</sup>.

Most columnists and writers interestingly remained more or less silent on this issue, though letter-writers were vocal. However, a few writers suggested that evidence should be made public as a subtle attempt to question as to whether it is justified to implicate Bin Laden without evidence. K. P. Waran (2001 a) in his article also calls upon the US government to make public evidence gathered after the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks implicating Osama bin Laden and his coterie. Perhaps, the silence of most columnists and writers on this issue is due to diplomatic sensitivity and lack of empathy for bin Laden. The Malaysian mainstream media establishment appears to be unsympathetic to bin Laden irrespective of his guilt or innocence in September 11<sup>th</sup>, given his fanatic credentials and suspected links with extremist parties within the country. Some even accused US of creating fanatics like Osama. Writer Johan Jaffar (2000) echoed the sentiments of many who believe Osama is undoubtedly the creation of American policy in the region, referring to the Cold War history. Another columnist Aishah Ali (2001) also questions that the US has not been able to establish proof as yet to the prime suspect Bin Laden.

Interestingly, NST wrote an editorial (Editor, 2001 a) on a relatively unrelated TIME s annual Man of the Year issue. In a write-up, the newspaper questioned the hypocrisy of TIME magazine in naming Rudy Guiliani as Man of the Year, instead of Bin Laden, a man whose impact did not stop at the steel-melting fires, the entombment of thousands of innocent lives, the visual hole in the Manhattan skyline and the hole in America s psyche. It is to remind the readers that TIME founder Henry Luce felt the criteria for the award is the person who most affected the news of our lives, for good or ill. This shows some form of objectivity by the local media in its views, despite the fact that it shed no crocodile tears for Bin Laden or his cause. However, letter-writers were more vocal in this issue.

There were attempts by some readers like Ainul Ghazali (2001) to question America s assault on Afghanistan based on suspicion that Osama bin Laden was there. He felt that US was being hypocritical towards Bin Laden dead or alive despite law stipulating that no one is guilty until proven so. This letter writer feels that, US should not be the world s police in championing human rights when it does not practice what it preaches. The same writer also questioned the influence of Bush administration on American media to propagate its own propaganda to convince people.

A letter written by Md. Zulfadzli Mohd. Ali (2001) believes that pinpointing Osama Bin Laden and Afghanistan government is a means to divert attention from the US government inability to defend the country. Letter writers Mohidden Abdul Kader (2001) and Mariam Ansari (2001) also called upon the US government to declassify its evidence to inform the public of the evidence against Bin Laden, but at the same time questions the validity of such evidence. Aishah Abd Rahman (2001) wrote that twenty years ago, the Americans created Osama Bin Laden thus agreeing with Johan Jaffar. Letter-writer Andrew K. L. Lam (2001) calls Osama a coward who stirred up the hornets nest, but innocent people are becoming victims and that bin Laden is a coward hiding behind innocent Afghan people.

Some letterwriters supported the hunt for Bin Laden, hoping that everyone will benefit and breathe easier if he is brought to justice, stating that they feel vulnerable as September 11<sup>th</sup> could happen in our own land as well. The balanced stance of the Malaysian media is once again seen to be accommodating the perspectives of both West and East. It condemns terrorism and remains largely unsympathetic to Osama Bin Laden irrespective of his guilt or innocence in the New York tragedy due to his extremist credentials but at the same time asking Americans to rethink their foreign policy and avoid creating monsters. The Malaysian media does not

ignore the fact that Bin Laden was in fact a creation of the West during the Cold War, something that the United States and the world as a whole have to pay for today. Such balanced perspectives help identify some causes of today's tragedy for us to take note of in the interest of averting future tragedies thus helping build peace in the South East region and world alike. A new world Order based on such understanding of past policy mistakes by great powers will augur well for a world consensus on peace.

## Bali

Similar to the September 11<sup>th</sup> tragedy the Malaysia media maintained a unique balance with respect to covering and analyzing the terrorist bombing in Bali. The aftermath of the Bali bombing saw a convergence in perspectives of West and East as the threat to security was now at the doorsteps of the South East Asian region, holding vast implications for countries like Malaysia and Thailand.

### **Universal destructive repercussions: It's the economy, stupid**

At the time the Bali bombing news reached Malaysian shores, the initial reaction was one of shock since Bali enjoyed a unique reputation as a tourist haven of the East and stood out as one of the most peaceful and safest places in Indonesia (Utusan, 2002) if not in the Southeast Asian region. The country's media found it unimaginable that a peaceful island of mainly Hindu believers would be the target of a terrorist attack. The region woke up to the ugly truth that international terrorism remains inherently unpredictable, hitting where it is least expected, thus, once again raising the importance of an urgent global consensus to fight it.

In its efforts to emphasize the destructive repercussions of such terrorist attacks for the region as a whole, the Malaysia media focused on the potential negative impact on the South East Asian economy. Newspapers highlighted the negative consequences of the Bali blast to the Malaysian economy, especially as the United States, Australia and several European countries issued warnings to its citizens to refrain from travelling to the region. The well being of the region was thus at stake by the wrongdoing of misguided fanatics.

## Global partnership

Once again, the Malaysian media maintained a unique balance by identifying the negative consequences of the bombing, but at the same time protesting the warnings issued by Western countries as being counterproductive and detrimental to efforts of stamping out terrorism. The mainstream media and the population as a whole were generally united in their discontentment regarding the warnings stating that Malaysia or other parts of the region are prone to terrorist strikes. Malaysia's Minister of Culture, Arts and Tourism Datuk Paduka Abdul Kadir Sheikh Fadzir (Murugiah, 2002) in an interview with the NST accused Western governments of making the situation worse.

Western countries should help us, but by making baseless comments they are instead helping the terrorists and becoming their loyal allies. Terrorists know that if they blowup one place, they can create mass pandemonium, he said. Munir A. Majid (2002) agreed as he felt that the West ignored the fact that other countries like Malaysia were also victims of such terrorist attacks. Instead of issuing warnings detrimental to economic health of countries like Malaysia; which implies success of terrorists to instil fear and intimidation, the West should build partnership with the East to help each other to fight this common evil. Majid expressed displeasure of the West's lack of concern over the damage that indiscriminate advisories about impending terrorist acts would cause to national economies and life.

Letter-writer Dr A. Soorian (2002) opined that by discouraging its citizens from travelling to Southeast Asia after the bombing, the Australian government had fallen into the trap of the terrorists. He accused Australia for practicing double standards by not issuing similar warnings against its citizens travelling to the US after September 11<sup>th</sup> though Australians were victims of the tragedy as well. Attempting to strike a chord of unity between the West and East to fight international terrorism, Farish A Noor (2002) emphasizes that terror networks are not unique or exclusive to the Muslim world and there have been countless acts of terror carried out in other countries like Sri Lanka, India, Spain, Italy, China, Russia, France, Germany, Britain and even the United States itself.

The country's media felt that by issuing warnings to tourists visiting South East Asia, the West has been unfair to countries in the region like Malaysia which perceives itself as active an anti-terrorist country. Malaysia had taken pains to distance itself from factions that were considered terrorist sympathisers. The country's effective measures to combat extremists showed that the authorities

would not tolerate any form of religious extremism that can cause social unrest or anarchy. News reports quoted former Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad as saying that the warning issue made by the US made it obvious that the superpower had disregarded Malaysian cooperation in combating terrorism, while Minister Datuk Abdul Kadir emphasized that the country has taken all precautions to stamp out extremist thinking and inculcate a love for peace and goodwill and hatred for terrorism (Murugiah, 2002). The government has attempted to track down terrorists including members of the Jemaah Islamiah group in various phases of its anti-terrorism campaign following September 11<sup>th</sup> and both prior to and after the Bali incident (Charles, 2002).

Despite condemning and expressing shock at the Bali bombings, the Malaysian media true to its moderate and balanced form, also called for soul searching on causes leading to such inhuman tragedies. Columnist Farish A. Noor (2002) highlighted that some of the Bali clubs adopted a whites-only policy barring Indonesians who have every right to go to a club in their own country. Careful not to condone violence, Noor, however, suggested that tourists should treat local customs and practices with care in order to help avert such future tragedies. Such statements should not be seen as justification for the bombings. In fact the media has been unequivocal in its condemnation. Views calling for soul-searching intend to put the tragedy in the context of identifiable causes in order to avert future recurrence. Similar to the media's perspective with respect to September 11<sup>th</sup>, the Malaysian media has balanced the views of the West and East by sharing concerns of insecurity, but at the same time mentioning how future repeat of past mistakes can be avoided. While countries like Malaysia are adopting harsher anti-terrorism measures to clamp down on terrorists, the West should also reconsider some of its foreign policy attributes and attitudes of its people that may contribute to discontent. Avoiding future tragedies will mean reducing discontent as well as cracking down on extremist forces.

In its quest to build global partnership to fight international terrorism like the Bali incident, the Malaysian media prominently reported steps to cooperate with neighbours including Thailand to clamp down on terror camps. The media suggested setting up a multilateral regional framework involving Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and Australia to combat terrorism by promoting cooperation and exchange of information regarding terrorist activities in the region. The Star Online (2002) reported that Malaysia agreed to setting up of the regional training centre on counter-terrorism that will be called the South-East Asia Centre for Counter-Terrorism to establish cooperation between the West and East. The

Malaysian media has been ardent in its assertion that international terrorism does not have boundaries or religious identity. Instead of blaming countries by issuing self-defeating warnings vindicating the skewed aims of misguided fanatics, the time is ripe for building a consensus between West and East to cooperate with each other. Once again, distancing extremism with peaceful Islam, columnists like Noor tried to explain how violence should not be equated to the religion, its adherents or countries with predominantly Muslim population. Such views attempting to establish consensus augur well for aims to establish peace and security within both the South East Asian region and the world alike. By highlighting the effective measures taken by authorities like the Malaysian government to combat extremism, the Malaysian media has opened the doors for the West to think of countries in the region as partners sharing the same concerns and fears of insecurity, thus requiring cooperation instead of self-defeating warnings. The country's mainstream media show the need for such cooperation across borders in the South East Asian region and elsewhere to fight terrorism as the negative consequences are universal, affecting not only the West, but also other countries including liberal Muslim states like Malaysia.

### **Balancing and accommodating West & East: Malaysian media and world peace**

In the Information Age, media is considered to be a powerful tool affecting lives of millions across geographical and political borders. According to the Society of Professional Journalists (2002), public enlightenment is the forerunner of justice and the foundation of democracy. The duty of the journalist is to further those ends by seeking truth and providing a fair and comprehensive account of events and issues. Conscientious journalists from all media and specialties strive to serve the public with thoroughness and honesty.

In order to maintain their ethical obligation to inform, journalists as reporters and opinion-makers need to ideally ensure objectivity, neutrality and impartiality. However, in reality, such complete neutrality rarely exists, as it is impossible to avoid news bias. According to Michel Parenti (1998), selectivity is needed as no communication system can hope to report everything. Once a process of selection takes place, there is no avoiding biasness because what gets chosen into the news is dependent on the journalists, editors and owners of the media organizations. The mainstream media in Malaysia, similarly, cannot be considered to be free of bias, but this writer concludes that the bias towards the official stance of the

ruling coalition in fact leads to a form of neutrality when it comes to covering the international arena. Aware of its economic and business links with the West, the Malaysian government has continuously portrayed the country as a moderate, modern and progressive Muslim state. This is more importantly so because of domestic concerns as well, the ruling coalition sees a political threat in extremist parties led by opposition PAS party which aspires to build a theocratic state in diverse Malaysia. The Malaysian government thus understands the security concerns of the West because it suffers from similar threats within its borders. At the same time, the Malaysian government maintains a strategic balance in its line of rejecting unilateral action, instead preferring multilateral action under the auspices of the United Nations. The government's official stance has been one that is sympathetic to innocent casualties of humanity, while it clamps down on extremists within its borders. Echoing the sentiments of the government, the Malaysian mainstream media has been able to provide balanced perspectives in the post-September 11<sup>th</sup> scenario by unequivocally condemning terrorism but at the same time calling for soul-searching and rethinking of American foreign policy. The media view represents the government's perspective, which lies on humanitarian lines instead of religious identification. Such balanced objectivity accommodating perspectives of both West and East forms a good foundation for developing a multilateral consensus based on understanding and cooperation between both ends of the spectrum. Having played a largely objective role expressing both sides of the story but taking a principled stance on humanitarian grounds, Malaysian media's call for soul-searching amongst the West as well as Muslim intelligentsia may hold significance in bridging the gap between both sides.

This writer holds the view that the most significant contribution made by the Malaysian media is to question the root causes behind September 11<sup>th</sup>. While the writer shares the unequivocal view of universal condemnation of September 11<sup>th</sup> tragedy, at the same time, the United States need to do some soul-searching especially with respect to foreign policy handling in the Middle East. The United States should understand the sentiments and sensitivities that breed violence, because only this can truly avoid future tragedies of such a scale. At the same time, the media passionately calls upon Muslims to carry out some soul-searching of their own and distancing themselves from misguided fanatics perpetrating violence in the name of religion. Concerted efforts of developed and developing nations in the West and Muslim world should seek to find an everlasting consensus to avoid recurrence of such tragedies. This will be possible only if the United States acts as a fair international policeman and truly seeks to understand the reasons for its perceived unpopularity in certain parts of the world, while the liberal Muslim

nations and people make a united stance against terrorism in the name of their peaceful religions.

Instead of looking at the tragedies superficially as isolated incidents of terrorism, the country's media, to its credit, has shed light by analysing related issues of causes and consequences to provide a comprehensive picture in a historical context. At a time of greatest need for global consensus, the role of the Malaysian media in fostering understanding gains heightened impetus. Despite criticism, time and again, for its lack of independence from government, it is concluded that echoing the government sentiments has actually led to a balanced stance taken by the Malaysian media that maybe able to bridge a new world Order based on peace and coexistence for both sides of the spectrum, thereby effectively challenging Huntington's prophecy of the Clash of Civilizations. This writer concludes that Malaysian media has shown that definitions of peace and terrorism are not necessarily specific to civilizations or groups but in fact universal in nature.

It is imperative to organize greater exchanges amongst media publications in the South East Asia region, particularly Thailand and Malaysia. As the bilateral ties between these countries grow further, media exchanges should be developed. This will help expand coverage of the balanced perspective by Malaysian media in the international arena, creating greater understanding, cooperation and cohesion between the two countries as well as the South East Asia region at the same time. The balanced perspectives taken by Malaysian media shows that terrorism is a global concern, some of the security issues faced by the West are just as relevant to countries in this region. The views of the mainstream media also show that Islam cannot be single-handedly held responsible for carnage carried out by misguided fanatics.

The call for liberal Muslims to distance themselves from the clutches of vested interests of fanatics is vital for the future stability of the South East Asian region, given the diversity in races, ethnicities and religions across the countries. In addition to this, the call for soul-searching on part of the West is bound to lead to a greater understanding and cooperation between all countries in the world alike. While the mainstream media in Malaysia can enlighten the West of perceived injustices leading to grievances, it is also in a unique position to initiate a reform of moderate and liberal thinking in the Islamic world. The emergent moderate and balanced stances from the spectrum of views of West and East as highlighted in this study leads to the conclusion that the Malaysian media has the scope of fostering greater understanding across religious, cultures and societies leading to

world peace. This is the very foundation needed in order to establish a consensus with regard to international terrorism and to build a world of peaceful coexistence for our future generations.

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## CONTAINING MUSLIM EXTREMISM AND RADICALISM\*

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### Abstract

This article argues that wars, atrocities, radicalism and extremism have been caused by many interrelated external socio-economic, political and ethnic factors, even though religious communities are involved. However, internal factors such as the role of religious education, are instrumental in understanding religious radicalism and extremism, including among some Muslims. This article also elucidates the dual nature of Islamic religiosity in Asia i.e. its manifested diversity and underlying unity, traces Muslim historical treatment of religious extremism, and suggests that certain methodological and doctrinal aspects of contemporary Islamic education may have contributed to an extremist outlook and behavior. It offers a few specific and practical recommendations involving the external and internal factors to significantly reduce the phenomena of extremism among Muslims, especially in Asia.

**Keywords:** Radicalism, extremism, external factor, internal factor, contemporary Islamic education.

### Introduction

The issue of Muslim extremism and radicalism in Asia is indeed important not only in its already huge Asian contexts, but also because in a globalized world, Asian developments are linked to developments in other parts of the world. However, the problems of extremism and radicalism and their relationship to international relations and security are not only limited to Muslims but also to those who profess other religions and secular ideologies. It is indisputable that national, regional as international conflicts and tensions have been justified in the name of various factors namely religion, ideology, King, Country or even Humanity.

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These factors were not, and are not used in strict isolation. Often times, several factors were, and are involved in different orders of influence. For example, the colonization of Latin America and large parts of Africa and Asia from the 16<sup>th</sup> century was perpetrated in the name of the King (country) and God, while the First and Second World Wars and the Korean and Vietnam Wars can be attributed to ideological and national causes, in which God played a much smaller role, if at all. The Balkan ethnic cleansing, where the victims were largely Muslims and where the perpetrators were mostly orthodox Christians, was neither motivated by ideological nor national reasons, but more by ethnic and socio-economic ones. The mass genocide in the Christian majority state of Rwanda is largely tribal; the Ugandan civil war is primarily due to Christian religious radicalism, the mass killings of the Muslims in the Ivory Coast were committed by Christian and Indigenous groups, while the exact reverse is true in southern Sudan. The two decade old Sri Lankan civil war between the Hindu-Tamil minority separatist group--- some of whose methods are quite similar to the Muslim terrorists-- against Buddhist-Sinhalese majority is driven by ethnic and religious factors (GlobalSecurity.org. 2008).

## Diversity And Unity Of Asian Muslims

Muslims in Asia are divided into three categories: the Majority (Malaysia, Indonesia, Pakistan, Brunei), the Indigenous minority (Singapore, India, Thailand, Philippines, China), and the Immigrant minority (Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Australia), each with its own peculiarities, reflecting the rich diversity of global Muslim thought, cultures and political experiences. The overwhelming majority of Southeast Asian Muslims adhere to the Ash'arite theological framework and the Shafi'ite legal school; compared for example to Indo-Pakistani Muslims who are Maturidite and Hanafite. Both groups have had different political experiences with Western colonialists and have chartered different political frameworks. Despite these differences, Asian Muslims---like their co-religionists everywhere---are unified with each other through certain basic aspects of the worldview and ethical and legal principles of Islam. A most noteworthy indicator is that one of the most comprehensive and authoritative work on the Creed of Islam by the 12<sup>th</sup> century central Asian Maturidite theologian, Abu Hafs Najmuddin al-Nasafi was translated into Malay and commented upon and widely read in the Malay-Indonesia world till at least the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (al-Attas 1988, Wan Mohd Nor and Khalif 2009).<sup>2</sup> Beside this, Asian Muslims also possess a sense of *ummatic* solidarity which is further facilitated by an efficient modern communication technology.

These unifying elements and a sense of ummatic solidarity explain why gross atrocities against Muslims and the prolonged deprivation of their homeland and ancestral rights--for example in Palestine, Southern Thailand, and the Philippines the discrimination against fellow Muslims in other parts of the world, and any efforts at denigrating or belittling the fundamental aspects, pillars, and institutions of Islam--- such as on the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad---will naturally elicit responses from Muslims everywhere. The varying degrees of intensity and expression of these responses depend on the educational level, socio-political organization and leadership of each Muslim community.

Atrocities against Muslims and attacks on Islam are certainly not recent phenomena as witnessed during the centuries of Christian crusades and the Spanish Inquisition (in which the Jews also suffered, albeit on a relatively much smaller scale) that followed the colonization of Muslim lands. In addition, attacks on various aspects of Islam have been carried out in the writings of numerous Christian missionaries, Western orientalist, political scientists, sociologists and journalists, notwithstanding many great contributions some of them have made. Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and *Covering Islam* (1981) are just two of the most popular expositions of these aspects.

## Muslim Moderates And Extremists

Extremism (*ghuluw*) is a vice in the Islamic worldview and ethics, while moderation (*wasatiyyah*), which has been universally practiced throughout its history including in Muslim Asia, is a praiseworthy virtue (*fadhilah*). Presently, the terms Muslim moderates, fundamentalists, and radicals are interpreted from the dominant Western perspective, which generally seems to equate secularized and westernized Muslims as moderates and inclusive; traditional Muslims as fundamentalists and exclusive; and all Muslims who oppose Western and non-Islamic intellectual and geo-political hegemony as radicals and even militants. The largest majority of Muslims are moderates even if some of their traditional religious views and social-legal practices are not acceptable to modern secularists, or even when they have to resort to military means to defend their homeland and their basic human rights. In their struggles against various Western colonial forces from the 16<sup>th</sup> Century CE onwards, these moderate Muslims derived their inspiration and strength from Islam and its military aspects of Jihad, but did not wage wars of terror such as the intentional killing of non-military population, the destruction of

non-military institutions and buildings, and suicide bombings as recently employed by militant extremists. Briefly, it is instructive to note that throughout most of its history, Muslims have succeeded in intellectually rejecting the extremists of various philosophical, theological, mystical and political orientations. Many eminent Muslim scholars such as Abdul Qahir al-Baghdadi (d.1037) in *al-Firaq bayn al-Firaq*, Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali (d. 1111) in *Tahafut al-Falasifah*, *Ihya Ulumiddin*, and *Munqidh minal Dhalal*, and Taj al-Din al-Shahrastani (d.1153) in *Kitab al-Milal wal Nihal*, and in the Malay-Indonesian world, Nuruddin al-Raniri (d. 1658) in *Hujjat al- Siddiq an daf' Zindiq*, have identified many of these groups and their doctrines. Even the Khawarij and Batini Assassins---the Hashahshiyun---who managed to create tremendous mischief, were finally intellectually defeated and made socially insignificant (al-Attas 1986: 186-192; 199-221).

The recent atrocities committed by Muslims as recently as the last Sept 21<sup>st</sup> 2008 Marriott Hotel bombing in Islamabad (although no Muslim group has yet claimed responsibility has been blamed by the Pakistan Interior minister, *Tehrik e-Taleban e-Pakistan* (TTP), on a militant group suspected to have links with it al-Qaeda (The Times 2008) ---are largely a modern phenomena, and can be attributed to many interlinked external and internal factors. Contemporary Muslim extremism can be contained and intellectually defeated and socially ostracized if the external and internal causes can be properly addressed.

### **External factors**

By external factors, we mean certain long-standing problems, such as that of Palestine, where Muslim holy and historic places and symbols are grossly affected, where many of their fellow Muslims and Christians were oppressed, and where international laws, which have been vigorously and systematically applied against other offending nations rightly or otherwise---have been consistently ignored in this case. The half a century of displacement from their homeland and the constant humiliation and suffering will naturally elicit a deep-seated resentment and anger within the psyche of these generations, not only against the direct perpetrators, but also their allies. This state of mind shows not only the utter disregard for all international laws and conventions, but also for themselves. Hopelessness breeds fearlessness, not courage. These factors that contribute to the rise of modern Muslim radicalism in the Middle East are also found, to a large extent---although not with a similar degree---in other parts of the world where this radicalism rears its contemptuous head. The loss of ancestral rights and privileges and the socio-

economic deprivation and political alienation within new modern nation-states are evidenced in the decades-old conflicts in Kashmir, India, Southern Thailand, Southern Philippines, and Central Asia. The less publicized nature of the conflicts in these regions does not negate an almost similar sense of desperation for group existential survival against oppressive national governments.

Another key external factor that has contributed to the deepening Muslim cynicism and distrust towards some Western powers and their allies, especially in the age of electronic communication revolution, is Islamophobia and the related double-standard attitude towards Islam and traditional Muslims. Muslims notice that while the Western media generally treats most non-Western religions and their cultural manifestations as positive reflections of the rich diversity of the human tapestry, a similar stance has not been shown towards Islam. While in all Muslim countries---with Malaysia as one of the better examples---non-Muslims were and are given the rights to practice their religion, in liberal Western countries, who are championing global human rights, multiculturalism and tolerance, Muslim religious freedom is being restricted under various pretexts.

Repeated incidences of Islamophobia and the double standards on Islam and Muslims will not only be used as fodder by Muslim extremists and militants to recruit new members worldwide. Leaders of Islamic countries have regularly expressed concerns regarding Islamophobia, the latest being the statements of the Foreign Minister of Malaysia in Washington on Sept 25<sup>th</sup> 2008 (*The Star* 2008; OIC 2008).<sup>3</sup> The awareness of the discrimination against Muslims has also reached higher levels of Western leadership. For example, on 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> Oct 2007, the Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE) organized a conference on discrimination and intolerance towards Muslims in Cordoba attended by high level officers from 56 member states from Europe and Central Asia as well as non-governmental organizations (*AFP* 2007).

However, I concur with scholars like Bassam Tibbi and others, that attacks and critics on the politicization of Islam should not be equated with Islamophobia, although he and many Western scholars only regard the non-politicization of Islam as one that is publicly secular and free from its Sha'riah obligations (Tibbi 2006: 70-74).

## Internal factors

However, the internal factors in the rise of modern Muslim radicalism are more significant which help to explain the inability to control the negative effects of the deplorable external challenges: 1) Detraditionalization and demysticization of Islamic discourse and ethics, and 2) Loss of proper and legitimate religious and political authorities.

Traditional Islamic education, which was interpreted and practiced through an authoritative sufi perspective, the mystical dimension in Islam, helped to spread Islam in Asia and Africa and created civilizing influences in all fields. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the influence of a narrower and more legalistic vision of Islam has made political power the most central element in religious discourse and struggle, and has denuded the comprehensive sufi ethical narratives and denigrated a whole tradition of spiritual luminaries. Since then, the philosophical and curricular orientation of traditional Muslim education has indicated a much heavier bent towards the legal and political aspects of Islam.

The sciences of tafsir, hadith, and jurisprudence and their major scholars and figures have been rightly venerated, but at the expense of the sciences and the scholars of theology and intellectual Sufism. Since in Islamic intellectual history, most scholars were multi-dimensional and were authoritative in many different fields, the rejection of theological and sufi scholars entails also the denuding of works on tafsir, hadith and jurisprudence contributed by theologians and sufis such as Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali (d. 1111), Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi (d.1240), Jalaluddin Rumi (d.1273) etc. These trends have excluded even the Asha'arites and all the Sufis from the category of the Sunni community which, to them consists only of the Hanbalites and the scholars of hadith, after the three generations of pious ancestors after the Prophet Muhammad (Tim Ulin Nuha Maahad Aliy 2003; Kamaruzzaman Yusoff et. al. 2002).<sup>4</sup>

In conjunction with these trends, the key term which comprehensively reflects the Islamic concept of education, *ta'dib*, which was traditionally used by all Muslims, especially the Sufis, was dropped out of currency and replaced exclusively by *ta'lim* (instruction) and *tarbiyyah* (training). Increasingly, we also notice that scholars and writers such as Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d.855 CE), Ibn Taymiyah (1328), Said Qutb (1966), Abu A'la Maududi (1979), who suffered physical sufferings from political leaders, were given greater authority and a more elevated status than others. It needs to be said though, that Ibn Taymiyah and especially Ibn Hanbal

were highly prominent traditional scholars were not politically partisan, whereas Said Qutb and Maududi were self educated Islamic writers and key members of politically interested Islamic organizations. The fundamental agenda of these groups, such as al-Qaeda, Jamaah Islamiah, Darul Islam Nusantara and Hizbu Tahrir is to re-establish the global Caliphate and to set-up idealized transnational Islamic states. Hizbut Tahrir, for example does have a large following in Indonesia, and a much smaller one in Malaysia (Musa 2008: 112-115; 78-93).<sup>5</sup>

The trends cited above are also a response to the gradual but effective secularization of Muslim governing elites in most parts of the Muslim world. These leaders, with their secular personalities and ineffective socio-economic policies, have created disillusionment among the population on modern political experiments and on the positive elements of modernity. State appointed religious authorities are perceived to be fettered by an executive branch, many of whom are influenced by Western liberal ideas, and who are not respected by the more serious minded among the Muslim masses. Truly independent- minded and traditionally moderate religious scholars are sidelined both by Muslim governing elites and non-Muslim supporters at home and abroad. The almost total rejection of the modern nation state and the extremists' calls to "return to Islam" through the establishment of an idealized Islamic state and total implementation of the Shariah, are also intricately linked to these developments.

The increase in democratic space in the post-Suharto Indonesia and in Malaysia can be misused by small independent extremist Muslim groups to exercise the Islamic commands of jihad and *amar ma'ruf nahi mungkar* (commanding good forbidding evil), and to express the solidarity of Muslim brotherhood. These are shown by fighting against the allegedly anti-Islamic Western nations and their institutions, disrupting entertainment, gambling and prostitution outlets, and attacking aggressive non-Muslim groups and religious establishments perceived to be aggressively against Islam (Zainuddin Fananie et al. 2002; Endang Turmudi & Riza Sihbudi 2005; Musa Jaafar 2008: 112-115).<sup>6</sup>

Under the present circumstances, non-Muslims, whether in the West or the East, seem to measure the moderateness of Muslims with the latter's affinity with the secular and western worldview and ethical orientations. In most conferences and dialogues, most of the "moderate" Muslim scholars and leaders, men and women invited to participate therein are mostly secularized and Westernized, the traditional attire notwithstanding. These "moderates" who don't really represent the majority Muslim religious view---would regularly receive various financial

and socio-political support from non-Muslim leaders and institutions. This would further confirm the long-standing mistrust among the majority of Muslims that non-Muslims, especially those in the West, have an agenda of trying to subvert Islam, to mold it into their own image, and to westernize it. Dialogues between such Muslim “moderates” with their non-Muslim and Western counterparts are thus not reaching the target audience and instead, have derailed their noble objectives, while alienating and radicalizing previously moderate Muslims. Inter-faith and inter-civilisational dialogues can be helpful to promote mutual understanding, compassion and benevolence.

Similarities, wherever they exist, must be emphasized. But it is clear to me that the greatest challenge is not to force an artificial unity amidst fundamental and meaningful differences because this will lead to radicalism among those who feel that the truly distinguishing aspects of their legion, culture and identity have not been properly recognized and acknowledged as such, but are forced through a prism of another, and more dominating worldview. The greater challenge, and a more honest one, is to recognize and admit these differences and to place them accordingly. Reality, as aptly observed by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, is difference, and knowledge of a thing is possible because of its distinguishing characteristic(s) from others. Justice is attained when we are able to recognize this and to ensure that everything is put in their right and proper places (al-Attas 2001).

The right and proper place of some matters are determined primarily by a just implementation of a legal system while of some other matters they are decided by a proper understanding and right application of the historical, moral, and religious traditions of a people. Oppression, barbaric acts, and injustices have been carried out against fellow humans because of the inability to justly treat the differences between us.

## Suggestions And Conclusion

To contain Muslim radicalism, both the external and internal factors must be seriously and urgently addressed, and with sincerity. While radicalism and extremism are not only religious in nature, but also tribal and secular, religious leaders and institutions can play an effective role in minimizing conflicts that not only involve religious issues but also, and more importantly, involving non-religious matters.

I would like to offer the following suggestions without, in any way, pretending to be original.

1. Internal reform of Muslim religious education should be of utmost priority, concentrating first at the higher levels, especially the *madrasah* and the university. This reform can be done by re-traditionalizing Islamic education and re-introducing proper Sufi narratives and ethical discourse by authoritative and traditionally moderate scholars representing their Community, and who may be critical of certain secular and Western ideas and institutions. Subjects dealing with modern humanities, including comparative religion should be introduced. A very good example where many aspects of this proposal were successfully carried out was the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC) Kuala Lumpur during the leadership of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (1988-2002).<sup>7</sup> Westernizing or liberalizing traditional Islamic education will be counter-productive (Blanchard 2007; US Agency for International Development (USAID) 2003).<sup>8</sup>
2. The establishment of a more just and transparent leadership and governance, who are not perceived to be Western stooges. The West's persistent support for political leaders who are widely perceived as unjust and corrupt will increase support for Muslim extremists and radicals.
3. Permanent peace in the Middle East, especially in Palestine and Iraq, must be urgently achieved. Muslims and Arabs must accept the right of Israel to exist and prosper within the boundaries determined by the UN; but Israel and the international community should help with the restorative and other forms of compensation for the Palestinian people to live and prosper with meaningful independence (BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights 2008).<sup>9</sup>

4. A similarly permanent solution to the problems of indigenous Muslim minorities must be found. They should be made to understand that they must live under current national governments but meaningful autonomy should be granted. Their religious, linguistic, and cultural identity should be protected, and their socio-economic opportunities should be enhanced. The economic costs to carry out these and the above suggestions are certainly high but the alternatives have been proven to be worse on all fronts: economic, social, and the security of the region and the world. Consider for example the financial costs of the Iraq war and the war on terror on the US alone. On June 30, 2008, US Congress has approved a total of about USD\$864 billion to cover all military operations, base security, reconstruction, foreign aid, embassy costs, and veterans' health for the War in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere since 9/11/2001 till part of FY2009, and which is estimated to increase to USD1.3 or 1.7 trillion by FY2018 depending on troop levels (Belasco 2008).
5. Migrant Muslim communities in Asia and elsewhere should be given due rights like others. They must recognize the true responsibilities within the new nation-states and contribute their utmost to be the moral and socio-economic strengths of the nation. British government's reported sanctioning of shariah judges in the currently five Muslim courts to rule on family law as well as financial disputes with the full power of the British judicial system, through the county courts or the High Court, if indeed true, is a very positive development (Times 2008: 14 Sept; Oct 31).<sup>10</sup>
6. The international community should be more consistent in their efforts to promote international peace, inter-religious tolerance, and prosperity of the human race, as much as humanly possible. Demonizing Islam and Muslims because of the faults of an extremely small number, while conveniently ignoring or glossing over the more serious atrocities against Muslims and others by other religious, secular or tribal entities will only breed a larger number of Muslim extremists and radicals worldwide and make many Muslims less supportive of the international community's peaceful endeavors.

## Notes

- 1 This paper is a corrected version of the one presented at the *Seminar on Islam and Asia: Revisiting the Socio-Political Dimension of Islam*. Jointly organized in Tokyo by Japan Institute of International Affairs (JIJA) and Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia (IKIM), 15-16 October 2008. I wish to thank Hisham A. Helyer, Fellow, Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations (CRER), University of Warwick, UK for his critical comments.
- 2 The earliest extant Malay manuscript is the Malay translation of the Aqa'id of al-Nasafi dated 1590 CE while Malay commentary on it---*Durr al-Fara'id bi Sharh al-'Aqa'id*--- was accomplished by Nur al-Din al-Raniri in 1631CE which was widely copied throughout the Malay Archipelago. See Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas. 1988. *The oldest known Malay manuscript: The 16th Century Malay translation of the Aqa'id of al-Nasafi*. Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya. Between August-December 2008, we found several copies of al-Raniri's manuscript, only four of which are complete. See Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud and Khalif Muammar. 2009. Kerangka komprehensif pemikiran Melayu Abad ke 17 Masehi berdasarkan manuskrip Durr al-Fara'id karangan Sheikh Nuruddin al-Raniri. *Sari. International Journal of the Malay World and Civilisation* 27(2): 119-146.
- 3 The Star, 26th Sept 2008. See 1st OIC Observatory Report on Islamophobia - May 2007 - March 2008. [www.oic-oci.org/oicnews/is11/english/Islamophobia-rep-en.pdf](http://www.oic-oci.org/oicnews/is11/english/Islamophobia-rep-en.pdf).
- 4 See, for example, a very popular book published by one religious school in Surakarta, Indonesia, Tim Ulin Nuha Maahad Aliy, *Dirasatul Firaq: Kajian Tentang Aliran-aliran Sesat dalam Islam* (Solo/Surakarta: Pustaka Arafah/ Pustaka Ulin Nuha, 2003). For a study of Muslim perceptions on radicalism in Malaysia 2004-2006, see Kamaruzzaman Yusoff et. al, *Persepsi Masyarakat Islam Tentang Radikalisme di Malaysia*. National University of Malaysia. IRPA Projek 0702020029 EA 263.
- 5 M. Musa bin Jaafar. Tarbiyah Jihadiyah. Sumber Ideologi Salafiyah Jihadiyah di Malaysia. Unpublished MA Thesis. Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, National University of Malaysia, Bangi. 2008. pp. 112- 115. pp.78-93. M. Musa was a staff of Royal Malaysian Police Force at Bukit Aman, Kuala Lumpur.

- 6 For studies on these activities in Indonesia, see Zainuddin Fananie, Atiqa Sabardila and Dwi Purnanto, *Radikalisme Keagamaan dan Perubahan Sosial*. Surakarta: Muhammadiyah University Press and the Asia Foundation, 2002; Endang Turmudi and Riza Sihbudi, eds. *Islam dan Radikalisme di Indonesia*. Jakarta: Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia, 2005; on the activities of one such group Malaysia such as the now defunct Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia (KMM), see M.Musa bin Jaafar, *Tarbiyah Jihadiyah Sumber Ideologi Salafiyah Jihadiyah di Malaysia*. Unpublished MA Thesis. Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, National University of Malaysia, Bangi. 2008. pp. 112-115.
- 7 See Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas: An Exposition of the Original Concept of Islamization* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1998); idem, *Budaya Ilmu: Satu Penjelasan* (Singapore: Pustaka Nasional, 2003).
- 8 See Christopher M Blanchard. *Islamic Religious Schools, Madrassa: Background*. CRS Report for Congress. Order code RS 21654. Updated January 23, 2007; also US Agency for International Development (USAID). *Strengthening Education in the Muslim World*. USAID Issue Paper. No 2 June 2003.
- 9 For a more elaborate discussion on the various UN Resolutions pertaining to the rights of Palestinian refugees and on the compensation for various losses, see BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights. <http://badil.org/solutions/text01-text03.htm>. access on 9/16/2008.
- 10 Times (London) 14 Sept 2008. However, Jack Straw the Justice Secretary, stressed that Sharia law should not be made a separate system in the UK, and that its provisions should not conflict with English law. (Times (London) Oct 31, 2008.).

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# UNDERSTANDING THE THREAT OF DAESH IN MALAYSIAN HIGHER LEARNING INSTITUTIONS

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## ABSTRACT

The development of Daesh has become one of the biggest impacts on the jihadist community in Muslim countries, particularly in Indonesia and Malaysia. They have managed to recruit the youth through social media, particularly those who enrolled in higher learning institutions and those who have shown some interest in their activities. In this regard, it is compulsory for the government to implement various approaches in order to overcome the threat of Daesh at the higher learning institutions in Malaysia.

**Keywords:** Jihadists, Daesh, National Youth Policy (NYP), JAKIM

## Introduction

The Minister of Higher Education, Dato' Seri Idris Jusoh stated that in Malaysia, currently, the increment of the university's enrollment is quite high. Almost 40% of the total population of the post-secondary student are eligible to enroll, as compared to only 4% 40 years ago. In relation to the increasing number of student enrollment in the university, it is believed that the Daesh has taken advantage of this situation by recruiting these students for their so-called *jihad* and ultimately create an Islamic state.

Based on the latest development of terrorism in Malaysia, since the formation of Daesh, it is estimated that over 150 Malaysian citizens, of whom believed to have been involved in terrorism activities have been arrested. In response to this alarming terrorist development, police and security agencies in Malaysia have taken the initiative to conduct briefings to university students on the danger of

Daesh since students are believed to have the inclination towards accepting the terrorists' ideology easily. In this regard, this essay tries to uncover the causes of university student's involvement in Daesh activities and how the government reacts in order to control this issue.

## Daesh recruitment among university students

Currently, under the National Youth Policy (NYP), Malaysian 'youth' is defined as those aged 15 to 40 years old. However, the definition will be changed between the age of 15 to 30 in 2018. For the purpose of this essay, the youth is defined as those aged between 18 to 25 years old. Youth in this range of age is considered fragile and porous. Therefore, their minds can be easily permeated and poisoned, thus susceptible to follow a certain ideology. Psychologically, this group of age can easily be exploited, given a proper and efficient approach is implemented. The psychological state is a contrast to those who are more mature and have various kinds of commitments.

It is known that Daesh recruits the youth in the Middle East for their so-called *jihad* through several ways, such as the social media, as well as *usrah* at local schools, colleges and universities. Since youth at universities are given the freedom to choose their own path in life, and due to the fact that they have undergone a highly controlled educational system which fraught with disciplinary rules all this while, involving in Daesh's so-called noble cause (*jihad*) seems promising in giving them the ultimate goal in life and later redeem themselves as *syahid*.

In general, students at a university can be divided into two categories: science stream and non-science stream. From these two types, science stream students are found far more easily influenced by the Daesh ideology as compared to non-science stream students. This is because, science stream students have the tendency to look at things more objectively and less subjectively. To them, there are only two elements to consider in life, of which white or black. In relation to this notion, Assistant Professor at the University of Nottingham Malaysia, Guy Burton stated that, "Radicalisation is prevalent, especially among younger individuals, who are more liable to see the world in black and white, to have a sense of idealism in stark contrast to the grubby realism and pragmatism of the day to day world."

Youth tend to dabble in life which fraught with wrongdoings and sinful activities. Out of guilt, they will strive to redeem themselves with their past deeds and return to the straight path. So much so, they even take shortcuts in order to atone their sins or the easiest way to heaven. One of which is through *jihad*. Although the notion seems legit in redeeming themselves, but most of the time they misunderstood the concept of *jihad* altogether. The most common type of *jihad* is where an individual is trying very hard to improve his/her relationship with Allah, and sometimes it could also mean the fight against those who are oppressing others.

On the other hand, the recruitment of female university students by Daesh is through the method of love and care. They will use various alluring traps towards female students in order to get them to be involved in their activities. Usually, female students are seen easily smitten, and would fall for an Arab or a white Caucasian look. In relation to this claim, Ayob Khan stated that in December 24, 2014, police arrested a 27 year old female university student who was married to an ISIS fighter through Skype in a private institution in Klang Valley.

Moreover, with rapid development of digital technology such as WhatsApp, Instagram, text messaging, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, students are prone to be involved in Daesh activities easily. There was a case of 20 years old Syamimi Faiqah, a former student at the International Islamic University College of Selangor, who was persuaded to join Daesh only through Facebook in October 2014. Another case was an arrestment of a 22 year old Public University's male student in Perlis at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport. It was known later that the reason for his involvement in Daesh was due to the sympathy for Daesh after only watching their propaganda video on YouTube.

In addition, Daesh also takes advantage on *usrah* or small discussion groups which focuses on understanding further the teachings of Islam. *Usrah* is one of the most efficient ways for university students who are wending their way in life looking for directions. Therefore, in this regard, they have the tendency to follow a particular teaching or ideology espoused by certain groups. If this teaching or ideology is moderate and proper, no ailment will come out from it. However, if it is otherwise, there is a good reason for us to be worried. In the case of an arrestment of a 24 years old Muhamad Razin Sharhan Mustafa Kamal in Beirut, Lebanon 2012, he admitted that his involvement in Daesh was due to an *usrah* led by a former Daesh, Yazid Sufaat.

Another factor such as a fractured and broken family is also found to be the main reason for university students to be involved in Daesh movement. Students from such families are susceptible to the adverse influence due to their empty souls and disoriented minds. Moreover, followers of a certain political party are also prone to be involved in Daesh movement. For instance, some political parties require their followers to adhere to the '*baiah*' system which make them become secretive and abide by the concept of 'secret within a secret'. Furthermore, introversion is also an aspect worth to be accounted for the students' involvement in Daesh movement. Some university students choose to be by themselves and do not mix around or care much about their surroundings. They rarely socialize and most of the time are consumed by their own thoughts on life. Indeed, they are entirely different from those who are extroverts and ambivert. Due to the frustrating conditions, they are found to be easily influenced by the Daesh movement which propagates the wrong concept of *jihad*. In relation to this notion, a psychology consultant, Zac Parsons stated that, "Teens tend to be more vulnerable to the appeals of ISIS for similar reasons that they are attracted to sex, drugs, alcohol, and other 'adult' activities — it's the world that is clearly run by adults, and they want to be a part of that."

## How to overcome Daesh

In March 2016, it was reported by the Associated Press that Malaysian police have arrested more than 160 people who were suspected of having ties with Daesh within the past two years. Based on the evidence which shows efforts are actually carried out by Daesh to recruit Malaysian youth, especially those in higher learning institutions, Malaysian authorities should consider implementing policies related to anti-terrorism.

Firstly, the government needs to allocate space and channels for university students to express their views, ideas, desires, and others that are important in their lives. Otherwise, rest assured, they will find other alternatives that are beyond our comprehension. One good example is a program called *Mahasiswa Islam Tolak Keganasan*, organized by The Malaysian Islamic Development Department (JAKIM) at the National Muslim Undergraduate Leadership Convention, Selangor in 2015.

Secondly, The Ministry of Higher Education should train the Deputy Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs, Deans, hostel Wardens, *Ustaz*, and Student Affairs

Department officials to adopt a friendly and non-belligerent approach, in response to a statement by Rais Yatim which states, personnel at university's security and management division should check on student's background and control the increasing number of cases of aggressive action by militants in alluring the youth via Facebook. Besides that, Institutions of higher learning must also embrace approaches that are suitable to the current psychological and recreational needs of their students. This can be done through providing various recreational activities for instances futsal, aerobics, paintball, *FitMalaysia*, running man, horse riding, and Zumba dance.

The university should also curb students' activities in order to prevent the recruitment by Daesh by appointing students who are known to have misleading views on things with high posts and positions with huge responsibilities. This approach in return will ascertain a continuous relationship between these types of students and universities' personnel. Moreover, universities are also required to set up a network of information providers by appointing students whom they trust as informants to 'spy' on other students. Not only students as informants, other personnel such as security guards, janitors, and other ancillary staffs should also be involved as informants.

In addition, the university compound must be gazetted as a restricted area for any subversive elements and activities. Security at university's access points must be enhanced. One good example in terms of security measures among foreign students, Sunway University Senior Executive Director, Elizabeth Lee said, "they must achieve at least 80% of attendance and must pass all subjects taken in the past year. If they are found missing during class sessions, this could eventually lead to a police report and the cancellation of their student visas".

On the other hand, universities may cooperate with the police and the special branch in terms of surveillance. In this regard, Malaysia's Police Inspector-General, Khalid Abu Bakar said on 9 July 2016, "We have already engaged with the higher learning institutions, and will work closely with them in identifying those who are suspected to be involved."

Furthermore, there is a need to establish small scale *usrah*/religious study groups for students to partake on a regular basis. This is vital in order to nourish their souls and eventually prevent Daesh's infiltration. Universities are also required to expel students who are found guilty of involvement in Daesh activities. This kind of action will send a strong message to the other like-minded individuals

to not get involved in Daesh activities. In addition, an initiative by the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCCM) in organizing a program which allows youth to partake in the conversation about issues pertaining to Daesh such as why Daesh is considered as a terrorist movement and what have they done should be acknowledged and praised.

The responsibility in preventing Daesh ideology from penetrating the minds of university students is not only placed on the government, but parents of the students as well. A suitable approach must be implemented in order to deal with parents of those who are involved in Daesh activities. Parents' advice and words of wisdom are considered effective to coax their kids to repent and revert. Indeed, patience is crucial in parenting, and successful parents are those who understand their children's unique ways of learning and treat them fairly.

## Conclusion

The impact of Daesh on Muslim countries is significant and has the potential to become even greater. Recently, Malaysia and Indonesia are mentioned to be the next target of Daesh movement. Indeed, their main target is our youth, especially those in higher learning institutions. It is proven that Daesh has managed to recruit young people through social media, *usrah*, and a misleading concept of *jihad*. In order to deal with the threat, a collective effort among government agencies, police, universities, and parents are needed. This effort in return is able to control the participation of university students in Daesh activities.

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## DRUGS & HUMAN TRAFFICKING: A TERRORISM FUNDING

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### ABSTRACT:

Although the linkage between terrorism and other related crimes, such as drug trafficking is evident and has been recognized by the United Nations Security Council, a thorough understanding is needed to develop solid strategies to prevent and disrupt these crimes. According to the UNODC's World Drug Report 2007, the total potential value of Afghanistan's 2006 opium harvest accrues to farmers, laboratory owners, and Afghan traffickers have reached about \$US3.1 billion. In addition, it was reported that in 2004, some 400 tonnes of cocaine are exported from one Latin American country, with an estimated domestic value of US\$ 2 billion. How much of this money is used for perpetrating acts of terrorism? The estimates varied. However, even a small percentage would be more than sufficient for individuals or groups to plan, finance and carry out terrorist acts. Indeed, drug trafficking has provided funding for the insurgency and those who use terrorist violence in various regions throughout the world, including in transit regions. In some cases, drugs are used as the currency in the commission of terrorist attacks, such as in the case of the Madrid bombings.

**Keywords:** Terrorism, Isis, Islam, Jihad, Syahid, Special Branch, Caliph, Interpol

## Introduction

The United States Department of Defense defines terrorism as the calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are political, religious, or ideological. Based on the definition, we can identify terrorism involved in the process of violence, crime and attempts to scare the society of particular interest. The terrorists plan their attacks to obtain the greatest publicity and plan their strategies to attain financial support for their activities.

A study from the United States Institute of Peace in 2010 found that among 2032 foreign fighters who joined *al-Qaeda*, being a so-called identity seeker was the largest reason to join the terrorist organization. Most of the groups that are engaged in terrorism bring the concept of the *Jihadist*, but they misuse the term *jihad*. Mainstream Muslim scholars defined *jihad* as a struggle against sin that can sometimes be manifested by actual fighting, provided it is governed by certain rules (Chertoff, 2008). Terrorist groups ignore the specific restrictions of *jihad* and fight the West by this ‘justification’ (Chertoff, 2008). *Al Qaeda* argued that they are not bound by the *sharia* restrictions on *jihad* since they perceived a war to be a ‘just war’ (Martin, 2010). Misinterpretation of Islam is considered as the justification of the terrorist ideology. Youngsters that are involved in terrorism are being influenced by the propaganda touted. Consequently, their raw minds considered joining the IS as a shortcut to solace, especially in the act of suicide bombing.

The methods that are usually used by the terrorist organizations to gain fund are through drug trafficking, black market oil trade, arms smuggling, human trafficking, kidnapping, money laundering, donation, bank robbery, taxes, and sponsors. However, in this paper, we only focus on the two commonly used methods by the terrorists to gain funds, which are drug trafficking and human trafficking. The main reason why these two methods are chosen to be discussed in this paper is that they always appear in the media and pose an indirect effect on the society.

## Drug Trafficking

Based on the United States's reports, terrorism and drug trafficking are interconnected and have become the source of finance for their illegal activities. This is because drug trafficking is linked with money, tactics, geography, and politics in ensuring their agenda is achieved. It can be seen in 2002, several high-ranking members of the terrorist organization were indicted in the United States for drug trafficking. After several interrogations, the authority indicated that these terrorist organizations were generating their fund based on international drug trafficking.

Countries that are reported to be highly involved with illegal drug trades are Colombia, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Myanmar and Turkey. Terrorist groups finance their activities with the proceeds derived from the transnational organized crime, particularly in small arms and drug trades. A close connection has been shown to exist between the illicit drug trade and organizations that sustain themselves through the income generated by such activities.

Lately, various crimes, especially drug trafficking and the threat of terrorism have become the concerns of various nations. These illegal activities involved cross-border criminal groups that trade drug (drug cartel), people trafficking, piracy, and trafficking of firearms. The activities are also known as the issue of "new security". For example, a drug smuggling syndicate that involves not only drug trafficking, but also money laundering that worth billions of US Dollars (United Nations Office on Drug and Crime, 2011). Based on the historical experience, Malaysia has confronted problems involving drug abuse and trafficking and among the first to declare drug as a threat to the national security. It is undoubtful that the drug menace in Malaysia has some connections with the international syndicates, of which targeting Asian countries for drug trafficking and terrorist activities (Abdullah, 2012).

In Malaysia, smuggling, trafficking, abuse, and addiction of drug have become major threats to the national security. Abdullah and Iran (1997), and Winer (1986) affirmed that smuggling is occurring almost daily at the country's border. According to Ahmad (2001) smuggling and drug trafficking have increased significantly on a daily basis. The success of these smuggling syndicates poses a threat, and its penetration has tarnished the integrity of control over the national borders.

Furthermore, since Malaysia is strategically surrounded by the South China Sea and the Straits of Malacca, as well as sharing borders with Thailand, Indonesia, Philippines and Singapore, Malaysia is prone to illegal activities that are hard to be detected by the authorities. In this case, the issues of sovereignty, border integrity (territorial integrity), the survival of the political system, social, economy, and civilization of a country, including its society (political, social, economical, and cultural survival) should be studied in depth so that the existing security system can be improved and eventually makes Malaysia free from terrorist threats (Abdullah & Embong, 1999).

This notion is in line with the views of Hoadley and Ruland (2006) who wanted Malaysia's national security aspects reviewed. By in-depth examination of the aspects that could threaten the national security, any future occurrences on these aspects are anticipated and eventually resolved with ease. Drug menace is among the aspects that may expose Malaysia to any security threats. Based on the views of Hoadley and Ruland, it clearly shows that drug is indeed a threat to the security of Malaysia and therefore should be reviewed.

More to that, there is also an increasing trend for drug trafficking, particularly in South-east Asia, specifically in the traditional type of drug and synthetic drug smuggling (Annual Report of the Royal Malaysian Police, 2011). As reported by the Federal Bureau of Investigation United States, an organized crime is considered as a serious criminal activity and claimed that the traditional type of drug and synthetic drug smuggling is one of these organized crimes, "... an organized crime enterprise is a continuing conspiracy, having an organized structure, fed by fear and corruption and motivated by greed" (Banks et al., 2009).

The discovery of string and the detection of large-scale drug trafficking by the authorities in Kuala Lumpur should be taken seriously, and immediate action should be taken (the Narcotics Department, 2011). In line with the notion, an action was taken by the Narcotics Department of the Royal Malaysia Police (PDRM) by demolishing several clandestine laboratories, drug stores, and cash proceeds from illicit drug trafficking activities in Penang (Utusan Malaysia, 2012). Apart from that, efforts by the government agencies such as the Customs Department and the Pharmacy Department of the Ministry of Health did help in dealing with drug trafficking by finding evidence related to the drug business in Malaysia (Report Narcotics, 2012).

The failure of government and enforcement agencies in enforcing drug laws will allow this illegal activity to be rampant. For example, in Myanmar (Burma), poppy cultivation was banned for many years, but the enforcement was temporary due to the fear; it may cause ethnic hatred (Young, 2002). In addition, some countries are profiting handsomely as a result of the cultivation, processing and distribution of heroin (Young, 2002; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2005).

In this case, Afghanistan and Myanmar are considered as two major producers of opium in the global community and both countries exhibit the characteristics of a weak and unstable government that suffers from a variety of internal violence issues (Office of United Nations on Drugs and Crime, 2005).

For example, Afghanistan is still unable to take full control of its political power in many parts of its territory. The Central government of Afghanistan was allegedly profited from and has a direct relationship with the drug trade (Curtis, 2005). The direct involvement makes Afghanistan known as the world's major producers and exporters of heroin.

The opium-rich region known as the Golden Crescent is an area encompassing the mountainous border areas of Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan. Opium is also cultivated in this region (Southwest Asia) since at least the sixteenth century (Booth, 1996). He added, "trafficking of opium in the Golden Crescent has become known as the early trade along the Silk Road and maritime trade, Arab, especially in the area of Kunduz and Kabul in Afghanistan and Pakistan's Makran coast served as a commercial center for opium traders".

Malaysia is also working with international bodies such as the eradication of the United States to curb such activities, including serious management and enforcement aspects, in order to avoid any existence of a threat to the national security. While Brownfield and William (2011) argued, it is the failure of the state that caused drugs to become a threat to the national security of Malaysia. Medicinal products in some countries have not been considered as illegal since the term itself may contain a lot of meanings. On this matter, according to William, a tight control should be imposed on medicinal products in order to avoid abuse by the public.

This predicament is backed by a study that confirms changes did occur in the economic distribution and security threats caused by the shifts of demand for drugs. The international communities are aware of this predicament and began to create agencies that can help them to tackle this issue. These agencies are, for

instance, the United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC), the World Customs Organization (WCO), the International Police Organization (Interpol), and The International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) (Fazey, 2007).

## Human Trafficking

Human trafficking is not new to us. However, its sophistication, complexity, and mechanism of how women, children, and men are trafficked are continuously changing over time. Therefore, no power in this world can eliminate human trafficking as a whole. Human trafficking is considered as a serious crime and inhumane. Men, women, and children are usually the victims of human trafficking in their countries as well as abroad. Almost every country in the world is affected by human trafficking, whether as a country of origin, transit or destination for victims.

Human trafficking is often described as the process of recruitment and transportation of people using deception or force for the purpose of exploitation (Howard & Traugher, 2013). Common uses of human trafficking victims are prostitution or domestic servitude, such as hard-laborer or involuntary activities (Howard & Traugher, 2013). Human trafficking is different from human smuggling, in which human smuggling involves immigrants being facilitated by illegal means, whereas trafficking uses threats, force, coercion or deception towards victims (Blue Blinfold, 2012).

Terrorist organizations see human trafficking as an effective tool that serves several purposes. The contributions of human trafficking to terrorists are the retention of male foreign fighters, as well as to generate income and to destroy the enemy psychologically. Furthermore, trafficking is also regarded as a war tactic (Binetti, 2015). For instance, ISIS's kidnapping and enslavement of Yazidi women and other female prisoners constitute to human trafficking (Binetti, 2015). Less attention is given to the phenomenon whereby ISIS's female recruits from the West, who are 18 years of age, in average, may also be considered as victims of entrapment and trafficking because of the techniques used to lure these young women and how they are exploited upon arrival in the ISIS-held territory (Binetti, 2015).

We can say that there are three major types of trafficking, which are human, weapons and drugs. Out of these three, human trafficking seems to have the least statistics record. For example, the estimated profit from human trafficking ranges from \$9.5 billion a year to \$42.5 billion a year (Howard & Traugher, 2013). Current evidence suggests that human trafficking continues to benefit from an increasingly globalized world. Even with the heightened awareness of the problem among both academics and policymakers, the number of human trafficking cases increases annually due to the grown ability of traffickers and trafficked victims to move around the globe (Gonzalez, 2013). Human traffickers have been known to adopt the tactics and strategies from drug traffickers. These tactics include moving goods (i.e. The trafficking victims) in a low-cost and high-volume manner, forming a trafficking ring with high consumption and small savings, depleting natural resources, enabling violent entrepreneurship, using trade and development strategies, and employing the methods of traditional slavery (Howard & Traugher, 2013). Their intelligence is acknowledged due to their success in adapting their business tactics with the current environment of trade operation.

However, the link between this form of organized crime and terrorism are less pronounced due to the profits gained from human trafficking is less than the arms and drug trafficking. Nevertheless, the evidence suggests that the nexus between human trafficking and terrorism is indeed growing. Specifically, human traffickers and terrorists seem to benefit from using the same routes and similar illicit financing sources. In areas where both terrorism and human trafficking have thrived, the likelihood of a symbiotic relationship between human trafficking and terrorism is greatly increasing. Selected cases have shown that supporters and facilitators did use human trafficking to support terrorist activities.

Currently, there are approximately 27 million people being enslaved throughout the world, and 2.5 million of them are located in the United States alone. The statistics indicated that slavery still exists throughout the entire world, and human trafficking is an ever increasing phenomenon that heightened the concern of the international community. Human trafficking is one of the fastest growing criminal activities in the world and the third most profitable international criminal activity after drugs and arms trafficking. Traffickers prefer human trafficking over weapons or drugs because people can be sold and resold.

## Drug And Human Trafficking: Terrorism Funding

In the era of globalization, patterns of violence have become much more sophisticated and complex due to the changes in the diversity of tactics and strategies implemented by the terrorist groups. Based on the observations, the researchers found that most of the events associated with international terrorism are a reaction, taken by force by a group or individuals towards the ruling of a government that are deemed oppressing the rights and needs of the general public.

In this case, the terrorists also found inserting the element of struggle in the name of religion in order to gain sympathy and support from the public. Most terrorist activities occurred when there is no more room for a discussion between the two sides at loggerheads. Political interests and power are also seen addressing other matters that resulted in a clash of interest on the importance of eliminating the acts of violence by terrorists.

The main factor that constitutes a continuous drug trafficking activity is due to the porous border. Malaysia and Indonesia share most of their areas and are always in confusion to track down militant members. Porous border makes it easy to move between countries such as in the Malacca Strait, Johor with Batam, and Sabah and Sarawak with Kalimantan. Terrorists are active in both Malaysia and Indonesia, and it has been an issue affecting both countries. Therefore, enforcement in border control should be enhanced in order to root out terrorist activities and drug smuggling.

Border activity is made possible since Muslims move between borders without a visa. Lack of power in controlling these two countries further enabled terrorists to travel easily. Moreover, since our faces are alike and our language is easily imitated, it is difficult to distinguish from a Malaysian, to a Filipino or an Indonesian. Being neighbors, Malaysian and Indonesian Muslims can move in between the two countries freely (no visa needed). Therefore, it gives the opportunity for Muslims to exploit the situation. Some of them are travelling for business and leisure, but some are travelling for the militant purposes.

The cooperation between governments is found to be ineffective and fragile. Issues of sovereignty, such as the dispute over *Pulau Batu Putih* (Pedra Branca Island) between Malaysia and Singapore, Sipadan and Ligitan Islands between Malaysia and Indonesia, and Spratly Island between Malaysia, Philippines, China,

Vietnam and Japan are still unresolved. This issue could be worsen if the countries involved choose a military action as a tool to solve the problems.

Besides, the never ending internal conflicts among the ASEAN countries also contribute to the terrorist activities. As a member of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) countries, Malaysia is recognized by the world as a country which possesses political and economic stability. Due to this recognition and excellent diplomatic ties among the OIC members, Muslims from OIC countries come and live freely in Malaysia without a visa. Unfortunately, some of them have exploited this opportunity by propagating militant ideologies and initiating plans for violent attacks such as what had happened prior to the 9/11.

Malaysia's role in being a haven for militant activists, which facilitated the terrorist attacks in the US is uncovered after the investigation of 9/11. An international terrorist, Wali Khan Amin Shah, who has a close contact with Ramzi Ahmed Youssef, the man who is responsible for the 1993 New York World Trade Centre (NYWTC) bombing, was captured in Malaysia in 1995. There is evidence that suggests, well-known terrorists such as Zacharias Massaoui, Khalid Midhar, and Nawaf al-Hazmi did enter Malaysia during January and September 2000. All of them are accused of conspiring to launch terrorist attacks on US civilians. The Downing Street memo also reported the role of Malaysian-based Iraqi Shakir in facilitating the arrival of one of the 9/11 hijackers for an operational meeting in Kuala Lumpur.

Besides that, the issue of internal politics of a country could also allow the entry of this illegal activity. Terrorists will always benefit from events that involve internal crises such as defects in the structure of the country's political leadership. For example, the largest Malay Muslim opposition party, Partai Islam Semalaysia (PAS), claimed that the Islamic country declared by Mahathir was un-Islamic since it is straying far from the actual meaning of Islam. This declaration, as claimed by the PAS leaders, is politically motivated rather than intended to establish a true Islamic country.

## Conclusion

There are many ways for a terrorist organization to gain funds. However, drugs and human trafficking are found to be their main sources of income. Therefore, every nation in the world, especially countries in the South-east Asia is required to take action in curbing the threat of terrorism. Indeed, it is quite impossible to cut down the demand for human trafficking especially in those countries which depend on foreign workers. South-east Asia countries are also needed to strengthen their laws towards synthetic drugs related substances such as ice and methamphetamine.

Undeniably, those who are involved in drug and human trafficking may work hand in hand with those who are involved in terrorism. They need terrorists to sustain the industry by giving them the protection and camouflage in ferrying either drugs or people from one place to another. For terrorists, they need the industry since it gives fund to their movements as well as to sustain themselves. These groups complement each other and are not concerned about the law and order.

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## THE THREAT OF ISIS (ISLAMIC STATE OF IRAQ & SYRIA) IN SOUTH-EAST ASIA: THE NEW EPISODE OF WAR ON TERRORISM

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### ABSTRACT

After the 9/11 episode, the war on terrorism dominates the humanity issues and have grown throughout the four corners of the world including the South-east Asia (SEA) region. The area is considered highly fragile due to the never-ending geopolitical conflicts, prolonged fights between ethnic, religious enmity, and Islamic malpractice teachings. On the principles of brotherhood in religion and in finding the easiest path to heaven through the concept of jihad, the relationship between the people in SEA region with the people in the Middle East became closer. The existence of ISIS is a result of the Western attacks on Iraq and Afghanistan. ISIS has attracted many jihadist fighters, including people from SEA region to partake in their struggle to establish 'New Caliph'. Indirectly it becomes a new episode in the war on terrorism. This paper tries to explain the effects and consequences of the movement of ISIS in this region. Series of arrests by the government of Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines towards people involved in the movement of ISIS proof that a greater threat awaits this region. Questions on how and why the region is involved, as well as the long-term effects are presented in this paper. Secondary data, a literature review, and open-ended interview were conducted with selected respondents. It is hoped that findings from this study will help the authorities in each country in the SEA region to address and develop policies related to the threat and the war on terrorism.

**Keywords:** Terrorism, Isis, Islamic State of Iraq & Syria, Jihad, Syahid, Special Branch (Sb), Islam, Caliph, Interpol

## Introduction

After the end of threats and terrorism of the group of *Al-Qaeda*, a new terrorist group known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), also referred as Islamic State (IS) emerged. The IS threat should not be taken lightly since they have proven their ability to move systematically and exist in many countries, particularly in the middle east. The IS's activities and modus operandi are similar to the ones with *Al-Qaeda*'s. The impact brought by IS cannot be underestimated, especially with the advancement of today's technology and the era of globalization that make the world easily accessible.

### The South-east Asia As "The Second Front In The War On Terrorism."

In 2002, United States of America's President, George W. Bush announced that the South-east Asian region is a second layer in the so-called 'global war on terrorism'. His statement was released when it is proven that the SEA region became a 'hot bed' and 'safe haven' for terrorists in countries such as Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei.

The fight against *Al-Qaeda* and IS as well as other groups that are involved in terrorism could not run away from the concept of *jihadist*, of which spearheaded by Sheikh Abdullah al-Azzam of Palestinian/Jordanian in the 1940s, especially during the Afghan-Russia War. He was known as the 'Father of Global *jihadist*' and the founder of *Al-Qaeda*. Since then, movements and political groups based on religion began to rise. The threat of terrorism in the modern era started by *Al-Qaeda* during the Russian-Afghan war from 1979 to 1989. *Jihadist* fighters came from all over the world, including the South-east Asia region. They returned to their respective countries after performing their obligations in Afghanistan and started to look for a new franchise to perform *jihad* in order to strengthen their faith.

*Jihadist* fighters in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, and the Philippines espoused a unique and complicated historical background, and due to these conditions, they are ever willing to help in the proliferation of terrorism in this region. For instance, in Thailand, there was a problem between the southern part (the separatist) and the government in Bangkok. The separatist group who fought

for the Sultanate of Patani, of which once a powerful monarch was destroyed by a confidentiality agreement between the Kingdom of Siam and the British in Malaya back in 1909. The agreement is known as the ‘Siamese Treaty 1909’.

In the Philippines, the Sultanate of Sulu, who conquered most of the southern part of the Philippines and Borneo island, including Brunei, was having problems with the central government in Manila. A renowned figure, Nur Misuari started forming the MNLF and later followed by the formations of the MILF, *Abu Sayyaf* Group and the *Rajah Solaiman* Group. These splinter groups who already gained the autonomy status by the government of Manila are still fighting for the establishment of a country called Mindanao.

Indonesia is suffering from a series of clashes and battles, for instances, with groups led by Abdullah Sungkar and Abu Bakir Bashir of whom fighting for the establishment of *Darul Islam Indonesia* (DII), and Ajengan Masduki who started a movement in the 1940s and still active until now, fighting for the establishment of the Islamic State of Indonesia. Historically, Indonesian’s independence went through a series of gruesome events that led to the existence of several clusters of extreme and radical Islamic and political movements. In early 2000, the issue of religious strife between Muslims and Christians became an excuse for the *jihadist* fighters to resume their *jihad* in Indonesia. As a consequence, a series of bombing activities were seen, such as in Kuta Bali in 2002, Kuningan in 2004, Australian Embassy in 2009 and 2010, and many more.

Singapore has a slightly different storyline. Although there is an absence of terrorist assault, according to Abu Kabar Bafana, after his detainment under the Internal Security Act (ISA) back in 2003, some plans such as an MRT train explosion, an attack on Naval camp and a series of discussions to perform the act of terrorism in the region were often held in Singapore. Recently, the incident at high-security detention; the escape of Mas Kastari Selamat really shocked the world. This event proves that the threat of terrorism still exists and do get sympathy indirectly from various parties.

While in Malaysia, on the other hand, indirectly, the country has made possible for the terrorist groups to cooperate and plan several acts of terrorism within its ground. According to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) of the United States of America and the Royal Malaysian Police (PDRM), the plans are not only meant for the South-east Asia region but also covering other territories. In relation to evidence found by the aforementioned authorities, well-known figures such as Hambali,

Abu Bakar Baashir, Khalid Sheikh Mohammad, and Zacharias Mouassoui have further confirmed the role of Malaysia in the terrorist activities. The 9/11 attacks were indeed discussed and planned in Kuala Lumpur in the year 2000, and this information was uncovered after the aforementioned well-known terrorist leader's followers detained in Guantanamo Bay leaked it. Moreover, *Jemaah Islamiyah* was also established in 1993 by Abu Baakar Bashir and Hambali, of whom has strong ties with the *Al-Qaeda* and *Kumpulan Militant Malaysia* (KMM).

Currently, the threat of terrorism in the region of South-east Asia is no longer significant after the mass movement of eradication by the governments involved since 2006. Most of the 'masterminds' or the 'key players' involved were arrested, killed or fled, and some left their terrorist activities after going through the 'de-radicalization' program.

## The Treat of ISIS In South-east Asia

After the end of *Al-Qaeda's* threat in the region came the IS movement. Although the movements did not give any direct impact on the South-east Asia region as yet, a long-term effect is expected to occur. Until today, various countries have made prevention and deterrence measures on the IS activities. In Malaysia alone, it is recorded, a total number of 76 people were arrested, and 21 are dead as a result of their participation in the *Jihadist* activities, and more than 100 fighters still remain in the Middle East. It is estimated that more than a thousand IS followers are from Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore, Brunei, Vietnam, and Myanmar, and they are believed to be in the Middle East to perform *jihad*. Many of them have died and some of them are still under custody by the governments in the Middle east.

Presently, most of the *jihadist* fighters are in Iraq and Syria as well as in some other countries such as Egypt, Yemen, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Turkey. A question is raised regarding their lives after achieving their militancy goals. Personally, I see that the threat is undoubful. Indeed IS is a sophisticated militant group that could regain its strength and disturb the stability in the South-east Asia region. The notion is based on the following conditions:

## 1. Historical backgrounds and the separatist movements

The world is aware of the ‘never-ending separatist and splinter group’ in the South-east Asia region. The long-lasting conflict between Groups that fight in the name of religion and the secular-oriented Government open up opportunities that could be taken by the IS *jihadist* in order to revive their ideology of *jihad*. The revival is in relation to the obligation of each IS follower in embracing their so-called *jihad* spirit throughout their lives. If this so-called revival movement does exist, certainly there will be groups who will take advantage of the establishment of the Abu Bakar Training Camp in the late 1990s, the same tactic carried out by the then *Jihadists* to support MILF movement that eventually became the site for the movement of *Jemaah Islamiah* in recruiting its members.

## 2. The porous border

The leakages of boundaries among countries in the region are undeniable. Thousands of small islands have been the sites for militancy movement and criminal activity. Since only a speedboat is needed to travel between countries, which could take up only a few hours of travelling time, it makes their operations, and movements even easier. Moreover, due to the shared identity, race, and religion, the *jihadists* will easily gain sympathy from the locals and eventually make their way to revive their movements. In addition, since some of the locals possess ‘dual citizenships’ it may cause delirium among the authorities, and gives them the advantage to move easily between two borders.

## 3. The Law enforcement is weak

Each country has their own laws and sovereignty. The laws were developed according to the needs and circumstances of the society. However, issues such as Government’s inconsistency in complying with the law and delaying the process of making and implementing new law will allow any militant groups to take advantage of the situation.

#### **4. The issue of Myanmar**

Myanmar's Rohingya issue has made this region unstable. In the latest incident, it is recorded that 409 immigrants from Myanmar known as Rohingyas or the 'boat people' landed in Aceh and Indonesia, more than 1,200 landed in Malaysia, and around 800 of them landed in Thailand. To this day, intelligence affirmed that thousands more are still living in the ocean and waiting for the right time to land in this region. The crackdown on human trafficking in Thailand recently has caused dozens of dead bodies buried due to starvation and being killed have made this issue even worse. Since the government of Myanmar does not recognize the Rohingyas in the North and South borders of the country, it is feared that this incident would be taken as an advantage by the IS militants to recruit new *jihadist* and establish a new base in the region. The Malaysian government sees this problem as a global problem rather than regional, supported by the Indonesia and Thailand.

#### **5. The issue of the Spratly Islands**

Territorial dispute on coral reefs that are rich in oil and natural gas resources have made the local territory unstable. The dispute does not only involve Asean countries such as Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Vietnam, but also countries outside of the region such as China and Russia. Certainly, each one of the aforementioned countries will defend their rights and demand their fair share on the territorial that is believed to be the world's second largest oil field. It is feared that the dispute will lead to a bloody conflict in the so-called 'zone of peace and safe'. If this situation occurs, certainly, it will be easier for any terrorist groups to move in and propagate their ideologies. Even after the conflict is over, a civil war could have happened between two parties who had fought side by side, exactly like what had happened in Afghanistan; a fight between two big groups namely Burhanuddin Rabbani and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.

#### **6. Governance problem**

Poor governance and too much of bureaucracy have made this region weak. Plus, the issue of corruption has long been the underlying of criminal activity. In fact, several reports stated that it even spread to terrorist activities and others. Although the issue of human trafficking has been resolved recently, arms smuggling and protection of terrorist activities funded and given by certain governments in

this region in order to protect their own interests is extremely dangerous and could make this region in a state of “fragile” and unstable.

## **7. Terrorist-friendly policy**

The policies developed in this region are designed to make the social market economy and the region more open and universal, exactly as those policies implemented by the European Union. However, such policies are taken advantage by terrorist groups. For example, an immigration policy that does not require a visa and financial ability as well as evidence of accommodation while staying and this have made way for terrorist groups to move easily.

Lastly, it is not fair to talk about all of the above without providing preventive measures that could be taken to overcome them. Among actions that could be taken by countries involved in order to restrain this kind of activity from spreading are:

### **1. Disseminating understanding of the true concept of jihad**

All South-east Asia countries must provide a clear and correct understanding of *jihad*. The true concept of *jihad* must be disseminated and applied among Muslims in this region in order avoid any misunderstandings of the concept. However, these days, extremist groups have misinterpreted the concept of *jihad*; and only wanted to understand Islam based on their preferences in order to achieve their objectives or agenda. As a consequence, eventually, this situation will separate the society into two groups, of which Muslims who truly understand Islam, and those who wanted to understand Islam based on their own interests. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the government to educate the public with the true teachings of Islam before the public is given the wrong concept of Islam by leaders of the extremist or terrorist groups.

### **2. The law enforcement**

Law enforcement is among the most significant weaknesses in the region. The previous discussion has made it clear on this weakness and activities that may lead to terrorist violence. If no action is taken drastically and holistically in the enforcement of law, it is expected that IS will be a burden for countries in this region. Although there are some countries such as Brunei, Thailand, and

Singapore which allow detention without trial up to two years or more under the Internal Security Act (ISA), in some countries however, such as Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines such law has been removed and introduction of new laws may allow the spreading of the IS ideology.

### **3. Social media monitoring**

Social media has become a very effective and influential tool in modern days. It allows youngsters to have access to a very broad range of social media applications such as Facebook, Whatsapp, Twitter, Instagram and many others. More than 50% of those who are involved in the IS were recruited through social media. The recruitment was made possible due to the ability of the social media to disseminate negative messages quickly and effectively. Moreover, they have the expertise, and highly trained members to do the recruiting worldwide, including the South-east Asia region. Some of the women followers were lured into getting married on Skype or other video conferencing applications. Eventually, this group of followers feels sorry when they found out that the IS movement is not really what it seems to be. Recent studies have shown that some of the followers produced bombs and explosive devices by just following the remedies and steps available on the internet. Therefore, in order to prevent social media from being used as a recruitment tool by the terrorists, governments in this region should create a network of cooperation and establish a 'one-stop center' to deal with the threats that are related to cyberspace.

### **4. Systematic border control**

Countries in this region should establish monitoring and strategic cooperation. Broad border routes and delirium identity espoused by the residents of the surrounding areas have made the terrorism issue even harder to constrain. Therefore, a mechanism that is more structured and 'hard' has to be implemented in order to avoid any serious, unwanted incidences. The problem of 'boat people' will further exacerbate this situation. Trans-border Crime is also a problem that has long been and should be taken seriously by all parties. These issues are also global in nature and should have a wider mechanism in dealing with them. An intervention by the Interpol in ASEAN resolving Asean

problems is very much needed. It is feared that when the *jihadist* militants returned, they will perform the so-called *jihad* across borders and ultimately establish the '*Daulah Islamiyah*' or Islamic Caliphate.

## 5. Settlement of regional issues

Issues such as human trafficking, the 'boat people' and the dispute on Spratly islands must be handled carefully and wisely. Without tolerance and political will, regional issues are tough to be resolved. Myanmar, for example, must first resolve their internal problems by recognizing the Rohingyas in order to avoid tension among the Asean countries. China and the Philippines should be more prudent in their demands for equal rights on Spratly islands which are also claimed by the neighboring countries. The tension between these two countries is no longer a secret, especially in building equipment and related facilities on Spratly islands. All in all, regional issues should be resolved by each State in order to maintain local and regional safety.

## Conclusion

Based on the points elaborated above, it appears that the IS threat does exist and has a direct impact on the South-east Asia region. History has proven that the involvement of previous batches of the *Jihadist* fighters in Russia-Afghanistan war as well as training and full support of *Al-Qaeda* has made the region highly influential. The same conditions are also expected when thousands of IS militants who are from this region are back from Iraq and Syria.

With training, opportunities, capabilities, and comprehensive relationship created by members of the IS, it is found that this region has a great potential to engage in terrorism. The threat of IS cannot be taken easily because of the rapid advancement and easy access to technologies and applications. All parties must play their role in curbing the threat of IS. Countries in the South-east Asia region should take severe effects that occurred in the countries of the Middle East as a lesson in order to prevent the same thing happening in this region.

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## MALAYSIA'S POST - 9/11 SECURITY STRATEGY: WINNING "HEARTS AND MINDS" OR LEGITIMISING THE POLITICAL STATUS QUO?\*

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Since the Emergency, the Malaysian government has maintained a security policy which somewhat paradoxically combines the use of coercive, repressive legislation with a "hearts and minds" ideology. Following 9/11, I argue that the government has adapted this "hearts and minds" approach to the so-called War on Terror. The Barisan Nasional governments of Mahathir Mohamad and Abdullah Badawi both formulated ideological strategies designed to undermine the ideological strength of al-Qaeda and establish Malaysia as a leader of the Muslim world. Mahathir and Abdullah hinged their ideological approach on a state-constructed form of Islam and sought to portray Malaysia as a tolerant and moderate Muslim country. However, it will be shown that the use of ideology in Malaysia is often calibrated to ensure regime security rather than national security. The Malaysian government has used its ideology to promote elite interests and limit the discursive space for alternative and opposing viewpoints. Significantly, ideology has been used to justify crackdowns against genuine political opponents and to legitimise the political status quo.

**Keywords:** Malaysia, terrorism, counter-terrorism, war on terror, Islam, Islam Hadhari, ideology, Mahathir Mohamad, Abdullah Badawi

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## Introduction

Ideology in Malaysia is essentially a security tool, but one which focuses the terrorist attacks of September 11 (9/11), the government has increasingly used a variety of ideological tools to limit the discursive space for counter-narratives and also promote the interests of the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition, and its most dominant member, the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), a Muslim-Malay Party. The regimes of Mahathir Mohamad and Abdullah Badawi both embraced a similar security strategy, though each of them used different ideological approaches to pursue their political interests and dominance. In the Malaysian context since 9/11, ideological mechanisms have been used to limit the space for ideas which challenge the status quo and therefore the regime's legitimacy. Moreover, ideology has legitimated not only the application of the coercive security apparatus but the regime which has used it. The focus of ideology in these two administrations was on a state-constructed form of Islam, designed to appeal to domestic and international audiences.

Security policy in Malaysia has historically been predominantly concerned with protecting the BN regime, rather than dealing with genuine security threats. In Malaysia, the regime and the state emerged at approximately the same time and the same regime has remained in power since the Independence in 1957. This has meant that the institutions and instruments of the state have become synonymous with the regime which uses them - one reinforces the other. All state power is vested in the Executive, itself composed of members of the ruling BN regime, thus guaranteeing complete control of the apparatus of the state. Given the regime's political dominance, it essentially controls the very concept of security, with policy-makers often defining security in terms of issues that affect the BN. Malaysia's security policy has been in place since the Emergency period (1948-1960), during which Malayan forces, supported by the British, fought against Communist insurgents. In this period, the British centralised significant power in the hands of the government, notably through the creation of a number of repressive Emergency Regulations. Working hand-in-hand with the use of these regulations, somewhat paradoxically, was a 'hearts and minds' campaign launched by the government. It was designed to win the loyalty of those susceptible to Communist propaganda and was regarded as one of the most notable and successful components of the regime's anti-Communist strategy. The Emergency period thus established Malaysia's security policy as one which was operationally oppressive but ideologically focused on dealing with the root causes.

To date, Malaysia continues to combine the use of coercion and a ‘‘hearts and minds’’ ideology as part of its security strategy. The function and operation of the coercive and ideological apparatuses often overlap but, for the sake of clarity, this paper discusses them as separate and focuses specifically on the use of ideology. This article argues that ideology has played an increasingly important role in Malaysia’s security strategy since 9/11. This paper first establishes the details of this strategy and outlines its coercive and ideological components. The ideologies of Prime Ministers Mahathir Mohamad and Abdullah Badawi are then separately assessed. It is argued that there is great continuity between the two administrations in this context as Mahathir and Abdullah each employed a security approach featuring coercive elements and ideological formulations which emphasised the specific pro-capitalist, pro-status quo vision of Islam endorsed by UMNO. Despite a broad commonality in approach, Mahathir and Abdullah both presented a unique vision of how to ideologically combat extremism at home and abroad. Mahathir’s approach emphasised root causes, a return to the hearts and minds campaign of the Emergency era. Mahathir used Malaysia’s position as an ally of the Muslim and Western world as a platform to attempt to salvage the image of Islam in the post-9/11 global climate. While advocating similar issues, Abdullah brought all the ideological elements together in a single package. The package *Islam Hadhari* or ‘‘Civilisational Islam’’ represented a push by Malaysia to export its security model and by extension its model of governance. This would buttress the legitimacy of the BN regime at home and abroad.

Underlying both ideologies is the use of a particular form of Islam to combat extremist thought. Islam is fused, with varying degrees of success, with the security agenda. In defining Malaysian Islam as ‘‘moderate’’ and ‘‘progressive’’, Mahathir and Abdullah have attempted to promote a state ideology which emphasises the BN’s interests while continuing to exclude any radical or ‘‘deviant’’ interpretations of Islamic texts. Ultimately, this ideology is used in the domestic context to ensure the continuation of the current political climate one in which the UMNO-dominant BN is in political and economic control. At the international level, the ideology is used to emphasise Malaysia’s position as a leader of the Muslim world, as well as to advance the cause of Islam in general, and thus solidify the government’s Islamic credentials to the majority Malay constituency in the domestic sphere. Above all, this article will demonstrate that national security in Malaysia has become synonymous with regime security, with policies in this context often focused on eliminating political and ideological rivals to the BN’s continued hegemony.

## The Malaysian Security Model: Coercion And Ideology

Since the Emergency, the Malaysian government's security approach has combined the use of a coercive apparatus with various ideological mechanisms. These mechanisms have been designed to promote the interests of government, limit the spread of alternative ideas, and justify not only the use of the coercive apparatus but also the continued hegemony of the BN regime itself. Although this article focuses on the use of ideology in the post-9/11 context, it is important at the outset to establish both apparatuses, as each has played an important role in the maintenance of regime, rather than simply national, security.

The coercive apparatus is comprised of a number of repressive laws enforced by an obedient police force. The laws include the Internal Security Act (ISA), the Printing Presses and Publications Act, the Emergency Ordinance, the Official Secrets Act and the Sedition Act. The legislation is preventive in nature and focuses on maintaining the political status quo and eliminating any physical or ideological challenges to the regime's legitimacy. For example, the ISA provides for preventive detention and allows the government to extend the period of detention by a period of two years, though this can continue indefinitely, with minimal judicial review. Under section 73 of the ISA, any police officer may arrest and detain without warrant any person who has "acted or is about to act or is likely to act in any manner prejudicial to the security of Malaysia or any part thereof." This provision is so vague that many legitimate activities, such as criticism of government policy, could fall within its scope. Complementing the ISA, the Sedition Act prohibits virtually all activities seen as causing disaffection towards the government or communal ill will. Given the preventive nature of such legislation, Francis Loh Kok Wah has likened the use of the coercive apparatus to internal "pre-emptive strikes."<sup>1</sup>

The ideological apparatus provides a balance to the coercive apparatus, focusing less on overt coercion and more on dominating the ideological space within Malaysia. Ideology serves two functions in the specific context of security. First, it serves a security function, that being it limits the space for ideas which challenge the regime's legitimacy. General ideological constructions which have performed the security function, to varying degrees, include Vision 2020 (a broad development strategy which promoted the continuation of the political status

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1 Francis Loh Kok Wah, 13 August 2007, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang.

quo and thus the exclusion of dissenting views), the New Economic Policy (an affirmative action policy which promoted Malay interests above those of other ethnic groupings and helped cement UMNO's dominance at the centre of political power), and, as this article will particularly demonstrate, Islam itself. The second function of ideology in Malaysia is that it has a legitimating function. Ideology serves to legitimate not only the application of the coercive apparatus but the regime which wields it. In this respect, the legitimating component also has a security function in that it attempts to ensure regime security, which it must be said is the overarching goal of the security apparatus as a whole. Overall, there is no single overarching ideology which dominates Malaysia's security discourse different ideological constructs come and go according to political and societal interests. However, a key theme in all these constructs is on winning the hearts and minds of those regarded as threat to the security of the nation and, more commonly, the regime. In the post-9/11 era, Islam has been the central element of this strategy.

The definition and usage of the term ideology varies between different theoretical frameworks. Put simply and broadly by David E. Apter:

[ideology] links particular actions and mundane practices with a wider set of meanings, giving social conduct a more honorable [sic] and dignified complexion. This is, of course, a generous view. From another viewpoint, ideology is a cloak for shabby motives and appearances.<sup>2</sup>

Ideology can therefore legitimate and give meaning to social conduct but can also provide a justification or "cloak" for more dubious actions.

Ideology of course operates in every level of society. My focus is on the state level and how this is utilised in the security context. In this paper, I am using a definition of ideology and a view of its function which is specific to the Malaysian context, though it does feature some commonalities with previous constructs. The works of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and Antonio Gramsci establish the importance of consent and ideological tools to the maintenance of state power.

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2 David E. Apter, *The Politics of Modernization* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 314.

Their work draws attention to the point that ideology is primarily deployed by governments to sustain the political power of the elite. However, it must be noted that their accounts do not fit neatly into the Malaysian context. The issue of class dominates their formulation of ideology, which somewhat weakens their overall applicability to the Malaysian case study which is dominated primarily by ethnic interests and racial issues.

Anthony Downs' construction of ideology as a political tool is, broadly speaking, more applicable, given that ideology has been used in Malaysia primarily for political purposes. For Downs, ideology is defined as "a verbal image of the good society and of the chief means of constructing such a society."<sup>4</sup> Ideology is a political instrument used to define the parameters of society. Downs contends:

In modern political science, ideologies are nearly always viewed partly as means to political power employed by social classes or other groups, rather than as mere representations of actual goals.<sup>5</sup>

It is the uncertainty of modern politics<sup>6</sup> which has made ideology a "weapon" of political parties in their quest for office. Ideology is thus seen predominantly as an election tool. Downs' contention that ideology is fundamentally a political tool supports my construction of the Malaysian ideological apparatus. The apparatus itself is primarily concerned with the interests of the ruling political coalition and limiting the potential for counter-narratives.

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3 See for example: Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology: Part One* (New York: International Publishers, 1970), 47; Frederick Engels, 'Engels to Franz Mehring', *Marx and Engels Correspondence*, [http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1893/letters/93\\_07\\_14.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1893/letters/93_07_14.htm), 1893 (accessed 29 May 2008); Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*. Volume III (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 171, and; Antonio Gramsci, *Letters from Prison. Volume II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 172. For analysis of Marx, Engels, and Gramsci's accounts of ideology, see: Helen Marshall, *Not Having Children* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1993), 15-16; Ken Morrison, *Marx, Durkheim, Weber: Formations of Modern Social Thought*. (London: SAGE Publications, 1995), 45-46; Roger Simon, *Gramsci's Political Thought: An Introduction* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1982) 45-46, and; Richard Howson and Kylie Smith, "Hegemony and the Operation of Consensus and Coercion" in *Hegemony: Studies in Consensus and Coercion*, eds. R. Howson and K. Smith (New York: Routledge, 2008).

4 Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), 96.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid., 97.

David E. Apter also applies a political perspective to ideology. He argues that, "It is the relation to authority that gives ideology its political significance." Ideology supports the elite by justifying its exercise of power.<sup>7</sup> Ideology serves as "the link between action and fundamental belief" and "helps to make more explicit the moral basis of action."<sup>8</sup> Ideology is linked to the establishment of identity and solidarity. In this regard, Apter notes ideologies can be used by political leaders to create a sense of shared feelings and understanding and communicate a common condition.<sup>9</sup> Ideology in Malaysia is linked to the creation of a shared identity, not dissimilar to the view of ideology put forward by Apter. In Malaysia, much emphasis is placed on establishing ideological frameworks which promote a specific identity within particular ethnic groupings or, on rare occasions, across multiple ethnic groupings. The government's Islamisation agenda specifically targeted the Malay community, and attempted to promote a particular vision of Islam which served the broader interests of the regime. By contrast, Mahathir's Vision 2020 agenda aimed to appeal to all Malaysia's ethnic communities, though it was likewise constructed to support the political status quo favoured by the BN and, in particular, UMNO.

Despite these similarities, my concept of ideology departs from the views put forward by Downs and Apter because I view ideology specifically within the Malaysian context. Moreover, I see the ideological apparatus as concerned primarily with security and not only with politics. Above all, it will be shown that, in Malaysia, ideology legitimises the use of coercion and, more broadly, the regime which deploys it. Ideology is also utilised to limit discourse within the country. This is fundamentally an attempt to eliminate the threat of rogue ideas which could damage the political status quo. Mahathir and Abdullah's use of Islam post-9/11 will be used to demonstrate this.

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7 David E. Apter, "Ideology and Discontent," in *Ideology and Discontent*, ed. D. E. Apter (New York: The Free Press, 1964), 18.

8 *Ibid.*, 17.

9 Apter, *The Politics of Modernization*, *op.cit.*, 328.

## Hearts And Minds: Mahathir And The War On Terror

Before and after 9/11, Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad resisted the trends of international politics that went against Malaysia's and, by extension, his administration's interests. Mahathir carved a unique place for Malaysia in the world community: that of an opinionated, often controversial, but always, at least rhetorically, independent Muslim country. Throughout his tenure, and in varying contexts, Mahathir sought to portray Malaysia as an example to be followed by other Muslim populations, be they Muslim states or Muslim minorities. The War on Terror era was no different in this respect with Mahathir formulating a "hearts and minds" ideological response to the issue of international terrorism designed for both international and domestic audiences.

### The International Dimension

Internationally, Mahathir's response to the changing dynamics of the post-9/11 world was to formulate a unique ideology which both supported and condemned the approach of the US. Mahathir pledged his support for America's campaign against international terrorism and quickly signed on to the War on Terror. Malaysia began to be promoted as a model Muslim country, both by foreigners and the Malaysian government itself. Mahathir has denied that Malaysia set itself up as a model, stating:

All we did was to do what we think is right according to the fundamentals of the Islamic religion. It is others who make this remark that we appear to be a model of tolerant Islam, not us. <sup>10</sup>As far as we are concerned, we will do what we think is right by our religion.

Contradicting this, however, the Mahathir government invited Westerners to Malaysia in the aftermath of 9/11 to examine what he referred to as a "model Islamic state" and to "clear confusion over Islam in the West."<sup>11</sup> Though the coercive elements of both the US and Malaysian domestic counter-terrorism campaigns became increasingly similar (most notably with the adoption of the US PATRIOT Act), Mahathir differentiated the ideological component of his strategy from that of the US. Mahathir's immediate response to 9/11 was to urge

10 "Ask the Malaysian Prime Minister", *BBC News*, 13 October 2003, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/talking\\_point/3191639.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/talking_point/3191639.stm) (accessed 17 June 2008).

11 Lawrence Bartlett, "Government offers alternative view of Islam in wake of terror attacks", *Malaysiakini*, 18 September 2001, <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/4723> (accessed 17 June 2008).

the American government not to seek revenge. Days after 9/11, Mahathir stated, ‘‘Retaliation will lead to the deaths of many people and will be followed by more counter- strikes.’’ The rejection of a military-only approach to counter-terrorism became a common theme in Mahathir’s ideological response to War on Terror era terrorism. This was particularly prominent in his opposition to US-led invasions of both Afghanistan and Iraq. In the aftermath of the first Bali bombing, Mahathir again re-emphasised this point, declaring that the attack showed the failure of America’s militaristic strategy. Mahathir argued the US had failed to proceed on the basis of ‘‘reason and logic’’, particularly since it had made no attempt to address the root causes of terrorism. Mahathir instead emphasised an approach focused on undermining the root causes of terrorism, stating in a letter to French President Jacques Chirac:

As a doctor, I am trained to treat the disease not the symptoms. Terrorism is the symptom of the disease of injustice, discrimination and oppression of the Muslims. Cure the disease, terrorism will if not disappear completely at least be much reduced.<sup>12</sup>

For Mahathir, ‘‘the principal cause is the Palestine issue.’’ Mahathir argued that while Palestinian ‘‘acts of terror’’ are rightly condemned by the world, the ‘‘more terrifying acts of the Israelis’’ are not. He continued:

This blatant double standards [sic] is what infuriates Muslims, infuriates them to the extent of launching their own terror attacks. If Iraq is linked to the al-Qaeda, is it not more logical to link the expropriation of Palestinian land and the persecution and oppression of the Palestinians with September 11? It is not religious differences which angered the attackers of the World Trade Centre. It is simply sympathy and anger over the expropriation of Palestinian land, over the injustice and the oppression of the Palestinians, and Muslims everywhere. If the innocent people who died in the attack on Afghanistan, and those who have been dying from lack of food and medical care in Iraq, are considered collaterals, are not the 3,000 who died in New York and the 200 in Bali also just collaterals whose deaths are necessary for the operations to succeed?<sup>13</sup>

12 Letter dated 17 October 2001: Cited in Abdullah Ahmad, ed., *Dr Mahathir’s Selected Letters to World Leaders* (Shah Alam: Marshall Cavendish [Malaysia], 2008), 32.

13 Mahathir Mohamad, ‘‘Speech by Prime Minister, the Honourable Dato Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad at the Opening Session of the XIII Summit Meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement at Putra World Trade Centre’’, speech, XIII Summit Meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement, Kuala Lumpur, 24 February 2003, <http://www.nam.gov.za/media/030225na.htm> (accessed 19 February 2008).

In Mahathir's view, resolving the Israel-Palestine issue is key to addressing the threat posed by al-Qaeda. A broader root cause identified by Mahathir is the relentless military attacks against Muslims. In a letter to George W. Bush on 4 October 2001, Mahathir stated that the "problems" of Palestine, Chechnya, Iraq, Iran, Sudan and Libya all geopolitical hotspots involving Islamic movements must be solved in order to deplete the ranks of the terrorists. Mahathir argued that the bombing of Afghanistan "would actually result in the spawning of more terrorists" rather than effectively eliminate the threat.<sup>14</sup> Mahathir further claimed that the War on Terror had foolishly devolved into a war against Muslims which, in turn, would only create more violence. He noted, "While Iraq, Iran and North Korea are labelled as the axis of evil, action is concentrated only on Iraq and Iran, Muslim countries."<sup>15</sup>

To combat the "anti-Muslim hysteria", Mahathir pushed for an official definition of terrorism that removed any link to religion. Mahathir's definition was as follows:

Armed attacks or other forms of attack against civilians must be regarded as acts of terror and the perpetrator as terrorists. Whether the attackers are acting on their own or on the orders of their governments, whether they are regulars or irregulars, if the attack is against civilians, then they must be considered as terrorists. Groups or governments which support attacks on civilians must be regarded as terrorists, irrespective of the justification of the operations carried out, irrespective of the nobility of the struggle.<sup>16</sup>

It was hoped this definition would be adopted by other nations. The issue of definition was canvassed in Mahathir's opening speech to the meeting of Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) Foreign Ministers in Kuala Lumpur in 2002. Using this definition, Mahathir argued that Palestinian and Tamil Tiger suicide bombers, attacks against civilians by Israeli forces, and the 9/11 attacks<sup>17</sup> must all be considered as acts of terror and its perpetrators condemned as terrorists. Mahathir's views failed to gain the consensus of the OIC.

14 Susan Loone, "Govt's 'successful' anti-terror campaign was not only about arms: PM", *Malaysiakini*, 16 November 2001, <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/5528> (accessed 12 March 2008).

15 Shingto Ito, "US anti-terror campaign targets Muslims: Mahathir", *Malaysiakini*, 14 December 2002, <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/13951> (accessed 12 March 2008).

16 Elina Noor, "Terrorism in Malaysia: Situation and Response", in *Terrorism in the Asia-Pacific: Threat and Response*, ed. Rohan Gunaratna (Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 2003), 165-166.

17 "OIC rejects Mahathir's labelling of Palestinians as terrorist", *Asian Political News*, 8 April 2002, [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m0WDQ/is\\_2002\\_April\\_8/ai\\_84640338?tag=content;coll](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0WDQ/is_2002_April_8/ai_84640338?tag=content;coll) (accessed 17 June 2008).

The OIC particularly objected to the inclusion of Palestinian suicide bombers.<sup>18</sup> Although Mahathir failed to achieve his goal at the OIC conference, he nonetheless continued in his attempt to divorce the concept of terrorism from Islam. In July 2003, Mahathir opened a global conference of Islamic scholars aimed at countering misconceptions about Islam.

These attempts to focus on root causes can be seen as part of a wider ideological strategy adopted by the Mahathir administration in response to post-9/11 terrorism. Mahathir claimed Malaysia had been successful in combating terrorism domestically because it had not relied solely on arms but had adopted an ideology aimed at eliminating the conditions which allow militancy to breed.<sup>19</sup> Defence Minister Najib bin Tun Abdul Razak summarised the approach while visiting the US in 2002:

In addition to pursuing a military/security solution, we believe that we must win over the hearts and minds of our people by ensuring higher standards of living, eliminating poverty, providing quality education and health services, and creating more jobs. In essence, we must create hope, not despair; a more promising future is the antithesis of a breeding ground for future militants.<sup>20</sup>

The often-cited historical parallel in this context is the Emergency. The success of the Malaysian state in defeating the “communist terrorists” is owed not to the military strategy alone but to winning the hearts and minds of the segments of the populace who were vulnerable to Communist propaganda. According to Mahathir, speaking in November 2001, this strategy ensured the “terrorists” lost their civilian support. Mahathir claimed the Emergency era government studied the causes of the disaffection of the “terrorists” and their supporters and then took “remedial action”, according citizenship rights to over a million non-Malays. Mahathir insists that this won the loyalty of the disaffected and helped mobilise support for the state against the Communists.<sup>21</sup>

18 Noor, “Terrorism in Malaysia”, *op. cit.*, 166.

19 Loone, “Govt’s ‘successful’ anti-terror campaign was not only about arms”, *op. cit.*

20 Najib Tun Abdul Razak, “US-Malaysia Defense Cooperation: A Solid Success Story”, *The Heritage Foundation*, 3 May 2002, <http://www.heritage.org/Research/AsiaandthePacific/HL742.cfm> (accessed 14 February 2008).

21 Mahathir Mohamad, “The need to identify the terrorists and remove the cause of terrorism”, speech, Conference on Terrorism, Kuala Lumpur, 16 November 2001 in *Terrorism and the Real Issues: Selected Speeches of Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Prime Minister of Malaysia*, ed. Hashim Makaruddin (Subang Jaya: Pelanduk Publications, 2003), 35.

Mahathir had clearly attempted to use Malaysia as a model for the rest of the world to emulate. The promotion of the ideological component of Malaysia's counter-terrorist strategy was, at least in part, designed to further legitimise the Mahathir administration specifically, the BN regime generally, and the domestic security apparatus as a whole.

### **The Domestic Dimension**

Domestically, Defence Minister Najib emphasised the administration's ideological imperative to distance Islam from terrorism:

At the same time, of course, the proper interpretation of Islam by our people is imperative; that Islam is a religion of peace and tolerance, and is against violence and senseless killing.<sup>22</sup>

The government saw a state-sponsored Islam, coupled with a strong coercive apparatus, as the key to combating so-called extremists or, more specifically, those who deviate too far from Malaysia's state-building, capitalist, BN-dominant framework. This creates an almost paradoxical situation, where hearts and minds are won by essentially forcing the Muslim population to adopt the state brand of Islam out of fear of being detained for any deviation. At the domestic level, ideology continues to ensure the BN's perpetual dominance, while at the international level the goal is to provide an alternative to the militarism of the US thereby appeasing Mahathir's international and domestic Muslim audience.

A key element in the promotion of official Islam was the government's strategy of limiting, if not eliminating, counter-narratives and alternative interpretations. For example, almost immediately after 9/11, the government launched a campaign aimed at curbing radicalism within the education system. Seen as part of the wider hearts and minds campaign, it attempted to deal with the "pipelines" of deviancy by placing religious education in the hands of the national government.<sup>23</sup> In October 2001 the government gave notice that kindergartens, schools and colleges run by the opposition Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) would come under closer scrutiny out of concern such institutions might prove to be a breeding

22 Najib, "US-Malaysia Defense Cooperation", *op. cit.*

23 Maria A. Ressa, *Seeds of Terror: An Eyewitness Account of al-Qaeda's Newest Center of Operations in Southeast Asia* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 76.

ground for extremism. Mahathir stated these schools brought “no benefit to Islam” and instead “shape from a very early stage the thinking of pre-schoolers to hate the government and vote for a political party.”<sup>24</sup> More broadly, there is now greater scrutiny of private religious schools and their syllabi, with the government introducing a programme (JQAF, an acronym for the teaching of *Jawi*, the Arabic alphabet system for the Malay language) designed to build a Malaysian identity in accordance with Islamic teachings for Malaysian primary school students.<sup>25</sup> This represents a clear application of the Malaysian ideological strategy in which one type of Islam (the state-sponsored version) is promoted to the exclusion of all others. While this embeds in Malaysia a non-violent form of Islam, essential for a developing and leading Muslim state in the post-9/11 world, it stifles debate and ultimately promotes a rigidity within Malaysian Islam that is the antithesis of the ‘progressive’ model it believes itself to be presenting to the outside world.

Overall, I argue that Mahathir’s post-9/11 ideology had both international and domestic components. Internationally, Mahathir sought to establish Malaysia as a model Islamic country and a leader in the Muslim world. Mahathir pushed for an understanding of the ‘root causes’ of the War on Terror and shunned the militarism of some of Malaysia’s allies. An attempt was also made to disassociate Islam from terrorism. Domestically, Mahathir, backed by a strong coercive apparatus, enforced Malaysia’s state-sponsored form of Islam as its ideology. UMNO’s interpretation of Islam allowed little space for Islamic radicals to manoeuvre and was thus seen as an antidote to extremism. Mahathir’s security ideology therefore contained a dualism: at the international level, Mahathir spoke out against the use of force as a response to terrorism while, domestically, his state ideology was implemented with the help of the government’s coercive apparatus. Elements of Mahathir’s ideology were incorporated into that of his successor, Abdullah Badawi, with the latter repackaging state Islam into a concept and commodity known as *Islam Hadhari*.

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24 Brendan Pereira, “KL to keep close eye on schools run by PAS”, *The Straits Times*, 16 October 2001.

25 Elina Noor, “Al-Ma’unah and KMM in Malaysia”, in *A Handbook of Terrorism and Insurgency in Southeast Asia*, ed. A. T. H. Tan (Cheltenham and Northampton: Edward Elgar, 2007), 185.

## Abdullah And Islam Hadhari: Moderate Or Moderated Islam?

Abdullah Ahmad Badawi took the reigns of power on 31 October 2003 following a planned and orderly leadership transition from the Prime Ministership of Mahathir. Abdullah promised a kinder, gentler approach than that of his predecessor, asking the Malaysian populace to “work with me, not for me.” That said, Abdullah also used a blend of coercion and ideology as part of his security strategy. Abdullah’s security approach was similarly directed at eliminating threats to regime, rather than national, security. In terms of national ideology, there was also much continuity between the policies of the two Prime Ministers. Reflecting the anti-extremist emphasis of Mahathir, Abdullah noted in his maiden speech as Prime Minister the need to be firm and oppose extremism, terrorism and militancy.<sup>26</sup> Abdullah likewise regarded Israel- Palestine as a crucial causal factor for international terrorism. The difference in the rhetoric of the two is therefore somewhat minimal what is notable is the *form* in which the rhetoric was delivered. Although Mahathir certainly saw Malaysia as a “model” Muslim country, Abdullah’s *Islam Hadhari* concept took it one step further by crafting a broad philosophy designed to appeal to domestic Muslim and non- Muslim audiences as well as Muslim populations abroad. Abdullah had embraced Malaysia’s role as a leading Muslim country to the extent that he had repackaged the Malaysian brand of Islam into an exportable commodity.

*Islam Hadhari* is composed of 10 principles. The first principle is, faith in and piety to Allah. Although seemingly dismissive of the other religions in Malaysia, this principle also emphasises a belief in freedom of religion and the lack of compulsion in religion, as derived from the Quran. The fourth principle a vigorous pursuit and mastery of knowledge and the fifth balanced and comprehensive economic development illustrate *Islam Hadhari*’s economic undertones. The fourth aims are to face the challenges of globalisation, integrative knowledge, science and technological advancement through the production of human resources. The fifth seeks to combine “moral economic practices” with a “comprehensive economic development” approach. In short, these principles seek to<sup>27</sup> put into practice Abdullah’s notion that “Islam is a religion for development.”

26 Bakar, O. “The Impact of the American War on Terror on Malaysian Islam”, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 16, no. 2 (2005): 122.

27 Sim, R. “Islam Hadhari and PM’s aspirations”, *New Straits Times*, 26 June 2004. See also: Abdullah Badawi, “*Islam Hadhari* and the Malay Agenda”, speech, UMNO’s 55th General Assembly, Kuala Lumpur, 23-25 September 2004 in *Islam Hadhari: A Model Approach for Development and Progress* (Kuala Lumpur, MPH Group, 2006), 3.

The eighth principle is ‘cultural and moral integrity.’ This consists of internalising ‘high moral values’ that ‘ensure prosperity, harmony and peace in a multi-racial society.’ Moral development and economic development are seen as coinciding. The remaining principles of *Islam Hadhari* are: a just and trustworthy government; a free and independent people; a good quality of life for the people; protection of the rights of minority groups and women; safeguarding the environment, and; strong defence capabilities.

The terms used were fairly general and as such could be applied in other contexts. *Islam Hadhari* marked a shift toward understanding the contemporary era within the framework of Islam.<sup>28</sup> Liow argues what was actually innovative about *Islam Hadhari* is the form of the idea, rather than its actual content. Abdullah had succeeded in expressing the state’s well-entrenched ideology in ‘readily identifiable and catchy Islamic terminology.’<sup>29</sup> In structuring *Islam Hadhari* in these ways, Abdullah hoped to refocus Islam as a ‘progressive’ religion which emphasised personal and societal development.<sup>30</sup> Moderation in Islam was to be restored and the ‘mainstream’ embraced.<sup>31</sup> Ultimately,<sup>32</sup> it aimed at alleviating the many problems seen as plaguing the Islamic world.

*Islam Hadhari* was an attempt by the Abdullah administration to continue Mahathir’s policy of disassociating Islam from terrorism. In a speech in New Zealand in 2005, Abdullah linked *Islam Hadhari* to the anti-extremist agenda. Abdullah stated, ‘I can confidently say that we in Malaysia have succeeded in containing extremism and radicalism.’ Abdullah claimed that the elimination of poverty and the provision of good governance are ‘key’ in the fight against radicalism and, in this context, presented *Islam Hadhari* as Malaysia’s approach for achieving such a national order. Abdullah noted:

28 Syed Ali Tawfik al-Attas and N. T. Chuan, *Abdullah Ahmad Badawi* (Subang Jaya: Pelanduk Publications, 2005), 140.

29 Joseph Liow, ‘The Politics Behind Malaysia’s Eleventh General Election’, *Asian Survey* 45, no. 6 (2005): 920.

30 Noor, ‘Al-Ma’unah and KMM in Malaysia’, *op.cit.*, 185.

31 Mohamed Sharif Bashir, ‘Islam Hadhari: Concept and Prospect’, *Islam Online*, 3 March 2005, <http://www.islamonline.net/english/Contemporary/2005/03/article01.shtml> (accessed 21 April 2008).

32 Noor, ‘Al-Ma’unah and KMM in Malaysia’, *op. cit.*, 185.

I would like you to know that this approach has also been inspired by our firm belief that good governance, healthy democratic practices, empowerment of the citizenry through education and equitable sharing of the benefits of economic growth will remove any attractiveness towards radicalism and blunt any tendencies towards extremism. We in Malaysia would like to show by example that a Muslim<sup>33</sup> country can be modern, democratic, tolerant and economically competitive.

Abdullah's Deputy, Najib Abdul Razak, shared the sentiment. In 2004, Najib likewise argued that *Islam Hadhari* was timely since Muslims had been viewed with suspicion since 9/11. Najib claimed *Islam Hadhari* to be a vehicle for change, to present to the world that Islam advocated peace and progress.<sup>34</sup> The impact of *Islam Hadhari*'s anti-extremist component will be analysed in two parts: the first dealing with the domestic political landscape, the second with the attempt to export the model.

### **The Impact of *Islam Hadhari* on the Domestic Sphere**

To spread the *Islam Hadhari* philosophy, the government, via the Information Ministry's Special Affairs Department, launched a five-year information campaign in the wake of the elections. Led by a panel made up of religious leaders, journalists, academics, lawyers and psychologists, the campaign involved 600 speakers disseminating information on the concept to the public through various forums. Illustrating the centrality of *Islam Hadhari* to the government's ideological cache, in 2007 Abdullah gave a RM50,000 cheque to each Member of Parliament, Muslim and non-Muslim alike. The funds were to be used to create awareness of the project in their constituency. Although significant capital was thus spent promoting the concept, it is evident that the government itself did not fully embrace it. As noted by *de facto* opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim in 2008, four years after the concept was fully articulated:

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33 Abdullah Badawi, "Islam Hadhari and good governance", speech, Victoria University, Wellington, 31 March 2005, <http://www.pmo.gov.my/webnotesApp/Abdullah.nsf/f51b39741cd58c9448257084000a19c8/d33361f0890dd06548256fe700190019?OpenDocument> (accessed 18 February 2008).

34 "Najib: Islam Hadhari not something new", *New Straits Times*, 14 December 2004.

What is so Islamic about the Hadhari model when corruption is more endemic now? You detain people without trial. The media is also not free.<sup>35</sup>

The government's commitment to practicing the *Islam Hadhari* philosophy on the operational level is therefore questionable. A question is raised as to whether the concept was always merely a strategy for winning Malay votes whilst not alienating the non-Muslim community rather than a genuine attempt at transforming Islamic thinking at home and abroad.

*Islam Hadhari* was also utilised to justify subsequent government crackdowns on "deviant" sects, as well as to provide ideological support to the existing coercive apparatus. In the weeks following the BN's success in the 2004 election, 70 members of Tarikat Samaniah Ibrahim Bonjol, a Muslim sect, were arrested in Selangor by Islamic religious authorities. It was claimed the sect had a "casual" attitude towards prayer and marriage and considered the Quran to simply be merely a historical text. Such views clearly ran counter to the *Islam Hadhari* project which used the Quran as its foundation, viewing it as a holy document. This helps account for the sect's removal from the public sphere. Subsequent to the arrests, the state Menteri Besar Khir Toyo announced that he would act against the more than 60 "deviant" sects said to be operating in Selangor.<sup>36</sup> The BN believed it had been given a mandate in the elections a nation-wide endorsement of *Islam Hadhari* and was using it as a new ideological justification for the continued use of the government's coercive apparatus.

The government's crackdown on Sky Kingdom represented a further attack on ideological rivals to the national brand of Islam. In 2005, the Sky Kingdom, a religious sect in Terengganu, was shut down by the state Islamic development committee on the grounds the movement possessed documents contrary to Islam. The leader of Sky Kingdom, Ayah Pin, had a large following among Muslims, Christians, Buddhists and Hindus inside and outside the country, with an estimated 5,000-10,000 Malay followers and 30,000 followers from other ethnic groups.

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35 Andrew Ong, "Anwar: PM akin to a communist leader", *Malaysiakini*, 29 January 2008, <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/77599> (accessed 30 January 2008).

36 Leslie Lau, "Backed by Muslims, KL takes on extremists", *The Straits Times*, 6 April 2004.

Although the group claimed not to be militant in nature, the government alleged Ayah Pin was a threat to national security, with Abdul Hamid Othman, religious advisor to Abdullah, stating, “Of course he must be arrested because his influence will jeopardise not only religion but also political stability.”<sup>37</sup> However, the sect itself posed no discernible threat to the security of the nation. The threat Sky Kingdom posed was ideological, in that its controversial views on religion and lifestyle offered an alternative albeit one seemingly without mainstream support to that provided by the government.

In terms of Malaysia’s Islamic politics, *Islam Hadhari* provided the government with the opportunity to ideologically out-manoeuvre PAS. Abdullah claimed that *Islam Hadhari* was an attempt to prevent Malaysia’s Muslim population falling into PAS’s trap.<sup>38</sup> Abdullah set out the long-term political goal of the project in these terms:

Muslims are easily motivated by religious arguments, including what PAS is telling them. We have to tell them what it is (to correct any misunderstanding).<sup>39</sup>

*Islam Hadhari* allowed the government to more firmly define the terms, aims and parameters of the state brand of Islam. Islamic groups operating outside the state Islamic project were consequently easier to identify. PAS itself was also given increasingly little ideological space it either agreed with the state Islam project and operated within that framework, or it rejected it and risked being cast as an outsider, essentially an enemy of the state. *Islam Hadhari* therefore can be seen as an extension of the campaign against deviancy, a campaign which began decades earlier.

While *Islam Hadhari* was said to promote a moderate form of Islam, it has inspired an increase in more rigid readings of Islam’s holy texts. Since the concept’s introduction, Abdullah claims that some elements in Malaysia have actually become more conservative and radical, stating:

37 “21 Sky Kingdom members arrested”, *Malaysiakini*, 4 July 2005, <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/37573> (accessed 18 February 2008) and; ‘Molotov cocktails rain down on Sky Kingdom’, *Malaysiakini*, 18 July 2005, <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/37997> (accessed 18 February 2008).

38 Cited in Terence Chong, “The Emerging Politics of *Islam Hadhari*”, in *Malaysia: Recent Trends and Challenges*, eds. S. Swee-Hock and K. Kesavapany (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2006), 38.

39 “Non-Muslims won’t be marginalised”, *Bernama Daily Malaysian News*, 9 March 2004.

Let me be clear *Islam Hadhari* is not a blank cheque to bring about conservative revivalism in this country... While I will protest Islam's position and the role of the Shariah courts from being undermined, I will also ensure that no one tries to hijack Islam in Malaysia in order to breed intolerance and hatred.<sup>40</sup>

*Islam Hadhari*, by further institutionalising Islam and bringing the religion even more to the forefront of domestic politics, had inspired increased Islamisation of the public itself though not in the direction desired by the government.

Indeed, Malaysian political commentator Farish A. Noor contends that the lack of a truly moderate Islam at the governmental level has seeped into the grassroots of the population. Owing to the patronage system established by the NEP and UMNO in general, Farish contends the Malay community has been rendered dependent on the goodwill of the government, economically, politically, and ideologically. The end result of this "suffocating patronage", Noor argues, is that the Malays have become "more defensive, reactionary, conservative and narrow in their worldview."<sup>41</sup> This goes against the "universal" claims of the *Islam Hadhari* agenda.

Though portrayed as moderate both domestically and internationally, the moderate profile of *Islam Hadhari* is thus highly questionable. By nullifying the appeal of PAS's brand of Islam, at least temporarily,<sup>42</sup> some began to find it hard to distinguish between the Islam of UMNO and PAS.<sup>43</sup> The contradictions within the BN's domestic performance and strategy ran counter to the moderate claim. Malaysian academic and commentator Khoo Boo Teik observes that UMNO's "moderation" is not clearly defined. For example, it is not clear how the government's use of the ISA, the Sedition Act, and the Official Secrets Act *gels* with the *Islam Hadhari* philosophy.<sup>44</sup> The continued limitations on civil liberties within Malaysia contradict the progressive claim of the concept. Books said to deviate from the teachings of Islam are routinely banned.<sup>44</sup> The intolerance toward

40 "Malaysia's Abdullah vows to take 'stern action' against racial troublemakers", *AFX Asia*, 15 November 2006.

41 Farish A. Noor, "Islam Hadhari cannot correct itself", *Aliran*, 27 February 2008, <http://www.aliran.com/content/view/441/40/> (accessed 7 March 2008).

42 Chong, "The Emerging Politics of *Islam Hadhari*", *op. cit.*, p. 38.

43 Khoo Boo Teik, "The house of the rising sons: What they didn't debate at the UMNO general assembly", *Aliran Monthly*, 24, no. 9 (2004), <http://www.aliran.com/oldsite/monthly/2004b/9c.html> (accessed 7 March 2008).

44 Farish, "Islam Hadhari" cannot correct itself", *op. cit.* For a list of the books banned by the Malaysian authorities in 2006 (56 in total), see: SUARAM, *Malaysia: Human Rights Report 2006: Civil and Political Rights* (Petaling Jaya: Suaram Komunikasi, 2007), 54-60. For another example of this policy see also: "Ministry Bans 11 Books About Islam", *Bernama Daily Malaysian News*, 29 January 2008.

other interpretations of Islam such as Sky Kingdom indicate not a moderate Islam but rather a moderated, controlled version which eliminates any threat, real or otherwise, to the political and economic status quo. Overall, the long-term impact of *Islam Hadhari* on the domestic sphere in Malaysia appears to be twofold. First, it illustrated that the Muslim population and the population in general would support an interpretation of Islam that was consistently promoted as moderate, whether it was so or not. Second, it provided the government with a justification for the continued use of its coercive apparatus, as elements deemed as going against the moderate image the Abdullah administration sought to portray at home and abroad became more readily identifiable.

### **Internationalising UMNO: The External Impact of *Islam Hadhari***

Despite the patchwork nature of *Islam Hadhari*'s domestic implementation, the first full term of the Abdullah administration saw *Islam Hadhari* promoted widely to international audiences, Muslim and non-Muslim alike. In a sense, the product being sold was the UMNO/BN model of development, at the core of which is its state-sanctioned version of Islam. *Islam Hadhari* was portrayed as a model for Muslim development, nationally, internationally and spiritually, as well as an ideological counter to the extremist ideologies of al-Qaeda and its various cells.

A primary function of *Islam Hadhari* was to solidify Malaysia's place as a model Muslim nation and leader of the Islamic world. With Malaysia presiding over the OIC under Abdullah, *Islam Hadhari* allowed the Prime Minister to "internationalise UMNO's religious credentials beyond their former association with only national development."<sup>45</sup> Abdullah proclaimed that it was Malaysia's "duty" to: demonstrate, by word and action, that a Muslim country can be modern, democratic, tolerant and economically competitive.<sup>46</sup>

Although acknowledging *Islam Hadhari* was not a "one-size-fits-all" solution, Abdullah emphasised that Malaysia nonetheless provided an insight into how to successfully build a "progressive and modern Muslim nation."<sup>47</sup> The very

45 Khoo, "The house of the rising sons" *op. cit.*

46 Cited in Ioannis Gatsiounis, "Islam Hadhari in Malaysia", *Center on Islam, Democracy and the Future of the Muslim World*, 16 February 2006, [http://www.futureofmuslimworld.com/research/pubID.43/pub\\_detail.asp](http://www.futureofmuslimworld.com/research/pubID.43/pub_detail.asp) (accessed 17 June 2008).

47 "Malaysian PM Takes 'Islam Hadhari' to India", *Islam Online*, 22 December 2004, <http://www.islamonline.net/English/News/2004-12/22/article03.shtml> (accessed 22 April 2008).

vagueness of the *Islam Hadhari* concept and its principles has allowed for the internationalisation of the UMNO model. Academic Terence Chong notes that its ambiguity has “endowed *Islam Hadhari* with the flexibility to respond to both domestic local politics and the global “War on Terror.”<sup>48</sup> Abdullah’s claim that several countries sought to discuss the concept with Malaysia would appear to be a confirmation of this.

In 2004, before the elections were held, Abdullah stated that several countries expressed an interest in *Islam Hadhari* and a desire to adapt it to their circumstances. This was a clear attempt by the Prime Minister to use his international standing as a Muslim statesman to bolster his electoral appeal to the domestic Malay masses. In the years that followed this statement, however, there are only a few examples of countries indicating an interest in *Islam Hadhari*, let alone implementing it. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh of India stated that his country shared Malaysia’s view of Islam as a “civilisational force” and described *Islam Hadhari* as “timely and necessary.”<sup>49</sup> In 2006, Brunei also expressed an interest in the *Islam Hadhari* approach.<sup>50</sup> There is little indication these statements are more than mere rhetorical support as it does not appear that either country has since put *Islam Hadhari* into practice. The concept has attracted little support in neighbouring Indonesia and the Philippines, where Ioannis Gatsiounis argues it would presumably be most attractive, given the similarly flexible variants of the Islamic faith in those countries.<sup>51</sup> *Islam Hadhari* proved more successful at the OIC, with it being incorporated into the Makkah Declaration and the summit’s joint communiqué in 2005.

In terms of the wider War on Terror, the concept has had more, albeit still limited, success. During a working visit to Malaysia in 2005, Robert Zoellick, now US Deputy Secretary of State, was briefed on *Islam Hadhari*. Of particular interest to Zoellick was the concept’s applicability to the situation in Iraq and whether the Malaysian government could use its experience to help.<sup>52</sup> US image builder Karen Hughes reaffirmed this during a visit to Malaysia later that year. Hughes stated that the BN model provided an “outstanding” model of governance for Iraq.

48 Terence Chong, “Beating terror, the McDonald’s way: A global movement should adapt itself to local needs just like Islam Hadhari has,” *Today (Singapore)*, 1 February 2006.

49 “Islam as a civilisational force, India shares Malaysia’s vision”, *Hindustan Times*, 22 December 2004.

50 “Brunei keen on Malaysia’s ‘Islam Hadhari’ Concept”, *Organisation of Asia-Pacific News Agencies*, 5 July 2006.

51 Ioannis Gatsiounis, *Beyond the Veneer: Malaysia’s Struggle for Dignity and Direction* (Singapore: Monsoon Books, 2008), 184.

52 “Malaysia a model Muslim nation, says Zoellick”, *New Straits Times*, 10 May 2005.

Hughes secured a pledge from Malaysia to spread *Islam Hadhari* to help fight terrorism in Iraq, stating, “*Islam Hadhari* has a powerful message of inclusion and tolerance.”<sup>53</sup> Other Middle Eastern countries have reportedly also invited Malaysia to describe the concept.<sup>54</sup> In terms of the so-called Second Front of the War on Terror (Southeast Asia), the most notable, though seldom reported, instance of *Islam Hadhari* being used to fight extremism is in Mindanao in the Philippines. According to Malaysian academic Norulhuda Othman, Mindanao illustrates a “practical example” of promoting *Islam Hadhari* and counter-terrorism, with the Abdullah administration providing medical aid, development assistance, economic planning and having meetings with local leaders and government representatives to, essentially, help set up a Malaysian-style government.<sup>55</sup> Most of this has occurred behind closed doors and, as such, the direct success of this policy is difficult to ascertain.

*Islam Hadhari* signals not just an ideology to combat extremism within the Muslim world, but provides to the rest of the world, the West in particular, an interpretation of Islam and a soft power tool that counters extremist ideology. Abdullah denies this:

It is not an approach to pacify the West. It is neither an approach to apologise for the perceived Islamic threat, nor an approach to seek approval from the non-Muslims for a more friendly and gentle image of Islam. It is an approach that seeks to make Muslims understand that progress is enjoined by Islam.<sup>56</sup>

However, there is much evidence to suggest that *Islam Hadhari* is more than a philosophy to be emulated by other Muslim countries. For example, Abdullah later claimed there was a noticeable difference in the tone and views of non-Muslim communities overseas after 9/11 when compared to their views after the *Islam Hadhari* concept was explained to them.<sup>57</sup> Foreign Minister Syed Hamid

53 Leslie Lau, “Malaysia the way to go for Iraq, says US image czar”, *The Straits Times*, 26 October 2005.

54 Chong, “The Emerging Politics of *Islam Hadhari*”, *op. cit.*, 41-42, and; Ahmad Osman, “Other Muslim states show interest in Islam Hadhari”, *The Straits Times*, 29 September 2004.

55 Norulhuda Othman, 25 July 2007. Department of Southeast Asian Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur.

56 Abdullah Badawi, “Islam Hadhari in a multi-racial society”, speech, Asia Society of Australia, Sydney, 8 April 2005, <http://www.pmo.gov.my/webnotesApp/Abdullah.nsf/f51b39741cd58c9448257084000a19c8/311ee38bcfdd22e348256fde00089b82?OpenDocument> (accessed 18 February 2008).

57 “Islam Hadhari: Give ideas, detractors told”, *Bernama Daily Malaysian News*, 2 July 2005.

Albar also noted that several European countries saw *Islam Hadhari* as a useful “platform” to foster more effective relations.<sup>58</sup> Syed has stated that *Islam Hadhari* would help improve communications between the Islamic and non-Islamic world and could help prevent a “clash of the civilisations.”<sup>59</sup> *Islam Hadhari* ultimately allows Malaysia to position itself as a model Muslim society, one which counters the view prevalent in the West of Islam as radical and backward. The post-9/11 world increased international interest in a moderate Islamic ideology and Islam Hadhari responded.<sup>60</sup>

*Islam Hadhari* offered a “moderate” form of Islam at a time when Islam was associated with extremism and violence.<sup>61</sup> Abdullah’s *Islam Hadhari* attempted to reclaim Islam’s image, “to extricate the Islamic world from this crisis and to help the process of rehabilitating ourselves to restore Islam’s past glory.”<sup>62</sup> Ultimately, while *Islam Hadhari* made a relatively minimal impact at the international level, it can be regarded as a success for the Abdullah administration in one important respect it positioned Malaysia as a leader of the Islamic world and therefore further legitimised the BN regime.

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58 “Positive response for Islam Hadhari from abroad”, *Bernama Daily Malaysian News*, 18 July 2005.

59 Gatsiounis, *Beyond the Veneer*, *op. cit.*, 183.

60 Chong, “The Emerging Politics of *Islam Hadhari*”, 41-42.

61 Khoo, ‘The house of the rising sons’, *op. cit.*

62 Abdullah Badawi, “UMNO’s 57th Annual General Assembly”, speech, UMNO 57th General Assembly, Kuala Lumpur, 15 November 2006, [http://www.pmo.gov.my/webnotesApp/Abdullah.nsf/f51b39741cd58c9448257084000a19c8/3c88fd1e03\\_a2\\_48da4825722700186ac2?OpenDocument](http://www.pmo.gov.my/webnotesApp/Abdullah.nsf/f51b39741cd58c9448257084000a19c8/3c88fd1e03_a2_48da4825722700186ac2?OpenDocument) (accessed 18 February 2008).

## Conclusion

In Malaysia, ideology has been increasingly used to promote government interests and limit the discursive space for alternative and opposing viewpoints in the aftermath of 9/11. The ideologies of Prime Ministers Mahathir Mohamad and Abdullah Badawi both attempted to deal with the root causes of terrorism, internationally and domestically, and in doing so utilised a security policy which blended coercion and ideology. Each premised his ideological response on a form of Islam which promoted, first and foremost, the regime's interests. Mahathir positioned Malaysia as a leading Muslim country and attempted to formulate a new discourse on "moderate" Islam in the post-9/11 climate. Many of Mahathir's ideas were repackaged and slightly retooled in Abdullah's *Islam Hadhari* project. There are elements to be admired in the ideological approaches of both Prime Ministers. Their strategies represented a cohesive attempt to undermine extremist interpretations and promote a more peaceful view of the faith. On the other hand, the ideological approach of both leaders was most concerned with maintaining the domestic political status quo. The strategy of both was to limit the ideological space of their opponents and use 9/11 as a pretext to further restrict the discourse on Islam in their country. While internationally and domestically the Islamic agendas of Mahathir and Abdullah were promoted as genuine attempts to rally the Muslim world against terrorism and undermine the influence of extremists, the ultimate goal of their ideological approach was to maintain the legitimacy of the existing political order within Malaysia.

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## THE THIRTEEN RADICAL GROUPS: PRELIMINARY RESEARCH IN UNDERSTANDING THE EVOLUTION OF MILITANCY IN MALAYSIA\*

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### Abstract

Malaysia is one of earlier nations in Southeast Asia which concerned with radical and terrorist group. There are at least thirteen militant groups identified by the Malaysian Home Ministry as having planned and or attempted a violent takeover of the country's administration. Significant radicalism emerged in Malaysia in 1970s. Some of these groups have tried to stir up trouble related to ethnic relationships in Malaysia, and some have been involved in terrorist activities. This paper attempts to highlight the origins and the foundation of these groups and their relationships with contemporary radical ideology.

*Keywords:* Radicalism, terrorist, militant, violent, and ideology

### The Militant Groups in Malaysia

Malaysia's post independence history recorded at least 13 militant groups operating nationwide since the first one emerged in 1967.<sup>2</sup> A major factor for the fanatical ideology emerged was the Islamic revivalism. Islam remained the principal factor in dominating socio-politics in Malaysia decades ago. Malay Muslims believe, Islamic revivalism was a sense of going back to the basic tenets of Islamic teaching. It is important to purify oneself from *maksiat* and discard hedonistic and materialistic values brought by westerners. Furthermore, Islam also recognized *syumul* or the perfect way of life. '*Islam is a Way of Life*', a set of universal, timeless, complete and fully detailed moral and wise values for the benefit of mankind. It is part of a voluntary charter or mutual contract between the Creator and His creation.

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One should maintain morality and faith in the ultimate justice and in return, he will receive salvation from his Creator. Jansen in his book '*Militant Islam*' also gave an immaculate definition about Islam as;

“.....a vast and integrated system of law, it is a culture and a civilization; it is an economic system and a way of doing business; it is a polity and a method of governance; it is a special sort of society.....”<sup>3</sup>

In addition, the creed that Islam is a *syumul* religion in every aspect of Muslim's life including politics and governance has become the prominent theme of Islamic revivalism in Malaysia as well as world-wide. Islam is widely known as a religion that does not admit any separation between politics and religion. However, separation was implemented during colonization and also in the post independence era in many countries including Malaysia.<sup>4</sup> The grievances of political leaders in post independence and the struggle to establish the purifying Islamic political system have been among major factors in employing a radical Islamic ideology. There are thirteen of the '*Islamic militant*' groups in Malaysia for the period 1967 until 2002.

### *The Tentera Sabilullah (Holy War Army)*

*Tentera Sabilullah* was formed in 1967 as the first Islamic-related militant group in Malaysia. The existence of this group related to an incident in January 21, 1965. It happened when the *Persatuan Melayu Semenanjung* (Peninsular Malay Organization) was banned by the government because it was racially-based movement. But the turning point for *Tentera Sabilullah* to become extremists was the '*Hartal*' incident (general strike).<sup>5</sup> Linked with the devaluation of Malaysian currency after the economic crisis in 1967, the municipal government had been torn by factionalism and charges of corruption, criminal elements and secret society thugs, which raised the tension in Penang. The Labour Party, whose members were mainly Chinese, called for a *Hartal*. On 24 November 1967, 5 people were killed and 92 injured. The government made a prompt decision to put Penang under curfew and sent in extra soldiers and police.<sup>6</sup> However, the tension in Penang spread out to neighbour states including Kedah and Perak as well as Kuala Lumpur. A month after the anarchy and militant acts in this small island, authorities discovered *Tentera Sabilullah* who were a secret Islamic religious based group operating in Kedah and Bukit Mertajam.<sup>7</sup> *Tentera Sabilullah* aimed to create

chaos and raise tension between religions in Malaya at that time. Their intention was to take revenge for the Muslims who died as a result of the *Hartal* incidents in Penang and Kuala Lumpur. An official report, released by Tunku Abdul Rahman in January 1968, said that, during the riots, 29 people had been killed, more than two hundred people injured and about 1,300 arrested by the police.<sup>8</sup>

Members of *Tentera Sabilullah* were unhappy with the arrest of their leaders. Most of the leaders were detained because of public accusations of a racist nature during the period of *Hartal*.<sup>9</sup> *Tentera Sabilullah* made arson attacks on several Mosques and *Surau*<sup>10</sup> in Kubang Pasu, Kubur Panjang and Tanah Merah in Kubang Pasu district in Kedah, Malaya in 1967.<sup>11</sup> The main goal for these attacks was to suggest that non-Muslims had participated in attacking Muslims' sacred places and later would turn to an ethnic clash.<sup>12</sup> However, this plot was uncovered not long after the incidents. Fourteen leaders of the *Tentera Sabilullah* were arrested and 281 surrendered to the authorities for their part in stirring up racial violence.<sup>13</sup> Most of the *Tentera Sabilullah* members were also members of the Pan Malayan Islamic Party (PMIP), a legitimate right wing extremist party, as reported in the *Straits Times* on 27 December, 1967 and *Eastern Sun* on December, 28, 1967. This group did not initially dissolve after the raid in 1967 and 1972. This group re-activated under the new leader, Isa bin Hussein who was known as '*Bong Isa*'. He successfully expanded his influence to re-establish the new *Tentera Sabilullah* in Kota Setar, Jitra, Gurun, Kulim, Baling, Sungai Petani and Kangar in the northern states of Malaysia. The principal objective for this group was to build an '*Islamic State*'. He favourably got mass support from society especially in rural areas.<sup>14</sup> This group also enhanced their support after the last two Prime Ministers (Tunku Abdul Rahman and Tun Abdul Razak) administration showed they were not keen to establish pure Islamic-based state in Malaysia.

Notwithstanding, this group gained a strong grassroots support and domestic dissolution happened after PAS<sup>15</sup> agreed to joint '*Alliance*' with UMNO, MIC and MCA in 1973.<sup>16</sup> However, in 30 October 1978, the right-wing of *Tentera Sabilullah* formed a new radical group called *Pertubuhan Angkatan Sabilullah* or in short forms known as P.A.S. This new group shared the same crucial objective with *Tentera Sabilullah* which is to establish '*Islamic State*' through militant means.<sup>17</sup> In 23 January 1980, riots in Kedah by farmers demonstrating against the government's move to introduce a forced-savings scheme, were traced and linked to P.A.S. A peace demonstration in front of Wisma Negeri in Alor Star, Kedah turned to chaos and resulted with fourteen P.A.S. and three PAS members being arrested.<sup>18</sup>

### *The Golongan Rohaniah (Spiritual Group)*

This group was established in 1971 by Haji Abdul Talib bin Haji Ahmad @ Haji Abdul Mutalib Naim in Kelang, Selangor. Most of the activities preaching about Islam based on the book written by him entitled ‘Mengenai Roh’ (*Knowing Soul*). After five years existence, Golongan Rohaniah successfully gathered support from society including government officers and villagers around Kelang valley.<sup>19</sup> Golongan Rohaniah has no threat to any parties at the beginning. This group was changed to be a militant movement after Abdul Mutalib repressed his followers to establish “*Islamic State*” by toppling down the ruling government with militant activities<sup>20</sup>. Furthermore, this group also aimed to demolish the Constitutional Monarchy and Parliamentary Democracy system in Malaysia.<sup>21</sup> After their radical and militant strategy was uncovered by police in 1978, eleven people most of whom’s were leaders at top positions were arrested under the ISA. Followed by their arrest, eleven automatic revolvers, 743 bullets, a hand grenade were unearthed by several raids in a few places in Kelang valley. Moreover, lots of group symbols, drafted manifesto, military uniforms and sixty group flags were confiscated by the authorities.<sup>22</sup>

### *The Koperasi Angkatan Revolusi Islam Malaysia (Malaysian Islamic Revolutionary Front-KARIM)*

Another group whose elucidation of Islam threatened the Malaysian government was the Koperasi Angkatan Revolusi Islam Malaysia (*Malaysian Islamic Revolutionary Front*). KARIM was founded in 1974 by Mohd Ali bin Abdul Rani in Kuala Lumpur, later piloted by Kamarudin bin Abdul Manaf until 1983.<sup>23</sup> In the early 1980s, KARIM gained the support of about nineteen people including one former Malaysian Military commando elite. KARIM preached to vanquish the ruling government through violence and militant activities.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, KARIM established their target to assemble a new republic in this country which is known as the *Government of Islamic Republic* in 1983.<sup>25</sup> They also were working with their ability to prepare the new government lead by Kamarudin Abdul Manaf. In January 1980, KARIM was banned after fourteen of their members including five leaders were detained under the ISA. Lots of ammunition such as 282 bullets, a hand grenade and a bayonet were seized by the authorities. KARIM was recognized as the grass-root of militancy operated in Malaysia.<sup>26</sup>

## *The Kumpulan Crypto (Crypto Group)*

Crypto emerged in 1977 with an operation centre in Penang and later expanded into mainland especially in Seberang Perai, Kulim, Selangor and Kuala Lumpur.<sup>27</sup> Mokhtar bin Hassan formed this group with the main argument that the Malaysian government was not giving Islam its appropriate and rightful due. Mokhtar used ‘black magic’ as part of his method to gain support from the masses and also to sustain his objectives. Mokhtar claimed he is the *Imam Mahdi* (A Awaited Saviour) who comes into this world to save people. He also claimed the thirty days of fasting in Ramadhan month as a form of torture. Moreover, he declared the Kaabah in the Saudi Kingdom as stone and nothing special. People who perform hajj actually worshipped an idol and waste their money to travel to Saudi just performing deviance. The ‘five pillars’ in Islam should not be followed exclude’s ‘Give Alms’ or *zakat*. ‘Preaching of Faith’ or *Shahadah*, Prayer, Pilgrimage and Fasting were alternative and not compulsory. Heaven is in this present world and there is no more life after death. People should enjoy their life in this world. Every marriage will be witnessed by the moon and the stars as the greatest creature by God. The functions of priests at the wedding ritual were not required.

Furthermore, Mokhtar also planned to set up a ‘Theocratic Government’ by *jihad*. Theocratic order also known as ‘*The Government of Jesus*’ easily collected strong support from police and military members in order to oust the ruling government in the future. In order to make preparations for the returning of *Jesus* into this world, Crypto followers need to establish the own government with focus on politic and economic system. After five years operating in Malaysia, the authority took action to clamp down on the movement. The raid successfully uncovered the things used for the preparation of their own government including flags, special identity cards, ‘Crypto’ currency and uniforms with their own style.<sup>28</sup> This group has been halted and dissolved after nine of their leaders were arrested under the ISA on the 23 and 24 of March 1982.<sup>29</sup>

## *The Kumpulan Mohd Nasir Ismail (Mohd Nasir Ismail Group)*

The militant group with shortest lifespan in Malaysia was identified as the Kumpulan Mohd Nasir Ismail (*Mohd Nasir Ismail Group*). This group was founded in the early 1980 by Mohamad Nasir Ismail, who was a former Cambodian Military

officer. He lived in exile in Malaysia from the Pol Pot regime that ruled Cambodia between 1975 until 1979. He then claimed that he was an Awaited Saviour or *Imam Mahdi* who has been chosen by God to protect human beings from disaster and *Dajjal*.<sup>30</sup> Thirty members called ‘*God’s Army in the Earth*’ operated in Batu Pahat, Johor. They did their operations secretly. The authorities discovered this group only after the attack at the Batu Pahat Police Station on 16 of October 1980. The attack was

launched 10 months after its creation. They used *parangs* or long knives during that attack. They also believed that they were immune from any kind of weapons or bullets. They made this attack as a starting point to control the whole of Malaysia and to establish an Islamic State in Malaysia.

Eight of the members of Mohd Nasir’s group were shot dead by the police and eight more were detained. Seventeen policeman and civilians were injured during the attack that was recognized as the first Islamic-based militant attack in Malaysia. Only one report was published about the existence of this group, which is the Malaysian Government White Paper. In November 1980, this group was declared as ‘deviant’ and was banned by the Malaysian government. Numbers of their followers were arrested during the series of raids in the vicinity Batu Pahat district in Johor Bahru.<sup>31</sup>

### *The Kumpulan Revolusi Islam Ibrahim Libya* (Ibrahim Libya Islamic Revolution Group)

Kumpulan Revolusi Islam Ibrahim Libya was founded by Ibrahim Mahmood, or ‘*Ibrahim Libya*’ as he was popularly called, in April 1985<sup>32</sup>. He was a member of the strong Islamic opposition party called PAS. He also had held senior positions in PAS, at Baling district and Kedah state levels. *Ibrahim Libya Islamic Revolution Group* was associated with the Memali incident that had happened on the 19 of November 1985. Fourteen people including Ibrahim Libya were killed in the Memali incident<sup>33</sup>. The incident sparked a long-run conflict between the government and PAS members. PAS described those who were killed as *al-shahid* or martyrs. Ibrahim Libya was called *al-Shahid Ibrahim Libya* by his followers, contrary to the Government’s stance of calling those who died “militants”.<sup>34</sup> Educated at the University of Tripoli and Al-Azhar University, Ibrahim Libya was a popular religious teacher based at a Madrasah in Kampung Memali in Mukim Siong, Baling Kedah. As a religious teacher and among the prominent PAS

leaders, Ibrahim Libya was accused by the Malaysian government of manipulating Islam by the distribution of radical teaching in the states of Kedah, Penang and Perak. Among the Kumpulan Revolusi Islam Ibrahim Libya's objectives, extracted from the Malaysian Government White Paper<sup>35</sup> was to encourage Muslims to perform Jihad against any government who does not implement Islam in their administrations. The group also aimed to protect Ibrahim Libya from arrest by police in any circumstances. Furthermore, this movement also wants to expand the teaching of Ibrahim Libya and the ideology of radicalism. Finally, they also seek to overthrow the Malaysian government in order to establish an *Islamic Revolution Government* in future.

The Malaysian government reacted by claiming Ibrahim Libya as a 'deviant' Muslim. The government also declared his ideology was untrue and restricted his activities. This stance reached its pinnacle when government security forces raided the *Markaz* or Ibrahim Libya residence complex while he was conducting religious lessons. The *Markaz* was guarded by hundreds of Ibrahim Libya's followers; they tried to protect him from arrest by the Police.<sup>36</sup> Eighteen people were killed during the disastrous confrontation between Ibrahim Libya's supporters and the police. Police reported fourteen deaths from Ibrahim Libya's members and four from police. Thirty seven people were injured and 166 arrested after the incident.<sup>37</sup> The Malaysian Government White Paper reported that dozens of traditional weapons were confiscated in the raid including pump guns, long knives (*parangs*), swords, short chopping knives (*parang kontot*), arrows and molotov cocktails.<sup>38</sup>

### *The Kumpulan Jundullah (Jundullah Group)*

Kumpulan Jundullah (Jundullah Group or Allah's Army Group) was formed in Pantai Cinta Berahi (later known as Pantai Cahaya Bulan) in Kelantan by Abdul Latiff bin Mohammad. Abdul Latif, who was a former Deputy Commissioner of Terengganu PAS, fashioned this group on 29 of August 1987, just less than two years after the bloody Memali Incident. Most of the members were drawn from people who were influenced by Abdul Latif from Kelantan and Terengganu. Abdul Latif was illustrated as a charismatic, clean and committed-Islamic cleric leader especially to Kelantan and Terengganu PAS members. Most of the members were recruited with the militancy activities that happened in every meeting. Jundullah's members also had had training in Southern Thailand with separatists and rebellists from time to time because of the convenience of the border.<sup>39</sup>

The main objective was to toppling the ruling government with violence and to construct the 'Islamic state' in Malaysia. They were willing to fight with authorities to achieve these objectives. However, this group was stopped and dissolved after most of their leaders were detained under the ISA in October 1987 by the 'Operasi Lalang'.<sup>40</sup> Operation Lalang or 'Weeding Operation' also referred as 'Ops Lalang' started on October 27, 1987 by the Malaysian police, to crack down on opposition leaders and social activists. The operation saw the infamous arrest of 106 persons under the ISA including Abdul Latif and Jundullah's leaders as a tool to prevent ethnic tensions and riots in Malaysia.

### *The Kumpulan Mujahidin Kedah* (Kedah Mujahidin Group)

*Kumpulan Mujahidin Kedah* (KMK) was formed in February 1986 after a secret meeting held at Manir Mosque, Terengganu. This meeting was organised on the 24 of January 1986 by an ad-hoc team including Zainon Ismail.<sup>41</sup> KMK played a crucial role in establishing KMM in April 1996 after it was instructed to by Abu Bakar Chik and Zainon. Teachings formerly emphasized Jihad as a main goal and necessity in every Muslim. The true Islamic state can only be created by the '*ruh Jihad*' or the soul of Jihad. KMK also encouraged its members to find *syahid* or martyr as the highest point of faith and to gain a good reciprocation or rewards from Allah. On the basis of finding jihad, this group attacked and set ablaze the Semarak stage in Sik, Kedah on the 05<sup>th</sup> of June 1988. This attack was regarded by the police as a series of attack operated secretly by the KMK.<sup>42</sup>

Malaysian authorities discovered this group after spying and monitoring KMK members since the Semarak incidents. On May 1989, KMK totally disbanded after 23 of their leaders and members were detained under ISA. 18 of them surrendered within a few days of the thorough police operation. After spending two years in ISA detention camp, the detainees agreed to become not involved again with any kind of action that may stir stability and security in Malaysia either in the short or long term. However, a few figures escaped from arrest and were living in exile for some years. They went to places where they could get shelter and avoid spying by the police and the authorities.<sup>43</sup> Among them, was Zainon Ismail and Zulkifli bin Mohammad who later flew to Pakistan before entering Afghanistan to join jihad against Soviet Russia in Argoon. They took part in this war under the instructions of Commander Khalid Zubir from the Pakistani-Punjabi Camp.<sup>44</sup>

## *The Kumpulan Perjuangan Islam Perak* (Perak Islamic Movement Group- KPIP)

A month after KMK was established in Kedah, Kumpulan Perjuangan Islam Perak (*Perak Islamic Movement Group* or KPIP) emerged in Perak state in March 1986. KPIP was formed by Sidek bin Mohd Noor who was a Chamber of Perak PAS Youth leader in correlation with establishing KMK. KPIP gathered at least fifty youths especially from Felcra Lekir, Pangkor Island and Pasir Salak in Perak Tengah.<sup>45</sup> KPIP's main objective was to physically and mentally prepare their members through military training. These preparations were important for KPIP for toppling the Malaysian government in the future for a pure Islamic-based government. To make sure these goals were achieved, they were involved in violent activities in Perak in 1988.<sup>46</sup> Among them were set fire to the Sports Toto (*Malaysian Legal Lotteries and Gambling*) outlet at Jalan Silibin, Ipoh Perak in the 10<sup>th</sup> of April 1988 and again on the 15<sup>th</sup> of October 1988. Arson attacks on two cars outside of the Ipoh City Council in Perak to show their protest on the Nation Lottery Concert on the 19<sup>th</sup> October 1988. Arson attacks on the Hilir Perak Malay Teachers' Union building in Teluk Intan, Perak on the 31 October 1988. Set fire to the temporary offices of the proposed Taiping Funfair on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November 1988. Attempted to set ablaze to a bus from Roadways Company in Ipoh on the 27<sup>th</sup> November 1988. This group was banned and dissolved in May 1989 after twenty seven people including KPIP leaders and members were detained by the police in *Operasi Kenari II* (Kenari Operation II) between October 1988 and May 1989. Although this group was broken down physically, but not totally destroyed, some of their members were believed to have fled to live in exile in Afghanistan rather than be arrested under the ISA.<sup>47</sup>

## *The Kumpulan al-Arqam (al-Arqam Group)*

Some reports do not include al-Arqam as one of the militant groups orchestrated in Malaysia. The Pentagon and CIA also do not recognize al-Arqam as a terrorist group that carry out militant activities. But Malaysia, especially under the Mahathir Mohammad administration, saw that al-Arqam might use forces, create chaos or split the solidarity of Muslims in the country.<sup>48</sup> Al-Arqam was banned by the federal government in June 1993. It happened after their Islamic teaching was considered deviant due to the mystics of al-Aurad Muhamadiyah.<sup>49</sup>

However, main reason the government banned this group was because al-Arqam was building-up the “*Badar*” military unit. This special military unit consisted of 313 members, with the long term aim of toppling the government in order to establish an Islamic nation. Al-Arqam established networking in almost all Southeast Asia countries including Thailand, Indonesia, and Singapore and also in Cairo, Egypt.<sup>50</sup> Ashaari Muhammad founded Al-Arqam in 1968. By August 1994, al-Arqam was officially blacklisted in Malaysia and had gained an estimated 100,000 followers. More than five Al-Arqam members including Ashaari Mohammad were arrested under the ISA after raids at the group’s main camp at Kampung Sungai Penchala, Kuala Lumpur.

He took as his inspiration the works of the Sufi Sheikh Muhammad Bin ‘Abdullah as-Suhaimi, who died in Kelang, Selangor in the 1920s.<sup>51</sup> By declaring as-Suhaimi as the Imam Mahdi, Ashaari was already sheering into the realms of Islamic heresy. His declaration that the Mahdi would rise from the dead was among the claims which led to the group becoming barred in 1994. Ashaari told his followers that he was receiving dreams that came directly from the last prophet “*Muhammad*”. He also declared himself as a prophet and he had the power to forgive people’s sins. Ashaari told his followers to leave from their homes if their families did not agree with his teachings. Members also worked for small money at the numerous businesses which Ashaari owned. They also lived only in Al-Arqam “communes”. By the time of Ashaari’s arrest, he had established 48 of these communes across Malaysia. Each commune had its own school, business and health clinics.<sup>52</sup> Followers wore Islamic regalia - long flowing robes and turbans for the men, and black robes and *niqabs* (face-veils) for the women. He was called “*Abuya*” or “father of the people” by his followers and wrote several books and his sermons were distributed on audio cassettes. Male followers were urged to engage in polygamy, in the manner of their leader.

Al-Arqam members were intelligent and managed their company wisely. They gathered 400 trading companies, including 56 manufacturing companies, 20 department stores, 52 retail shops, 18 restaurants, as well as several publishing companies. It had gathered assets worth \$8,000,000,000.<sup>53</sup> During the 1980s, stress between the government and Ashaari increased. Al-Arqam was barred from operating in any government premises, and its publishing permit was cancelled.<sup>54</sup> Ashaari had shown the problem that he may face and decided to move with his wives to Chiangmai, Thailand, where he had strong support from local Muslim. The end of the line for Al-Arqam had come in 1994, when the Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohamad decided that the group posed a threat to national security.

Media reports suggested Ashaari had gathered a fighting force in Thailand, and was ready to overthrow the government.<sup>55</sup> Tapes of Ashaari's conversations with prophet Mohammed had circulated, in which it was suggested that Allah had chosen Ashaari to become the leader of Malaysia's Muslim community.<sup>56</sup> Some press reports had said that Ashaari had openly stated his intention to come from Thailand and challenge the leadership in Malaysia. He said he would lead the country one day. Ashaari was by this time banned from entering Singapore, Indonesia and Brunei.<sup>57</sup> Al-Arqam was declared illegal under the Societies Act of 1996 on August 25<sup>th</sup>, 1994. Ashaari was officially detained under ISA on the September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1994. Interpol collaboration managed to arrest Ashaari and his entourage while they were in hiding at Chiangmai, northern Thailand. Then, Ashaari deported to Malaysia and was subjected to interrogation by Islamic authorities, along with seven other prominent members of Al-Arqam. Ashaari Muhammad was then placed under a form of virtual house arrest on the island of Labuan, under strict supervision of the government.

Although al-Arqam did not really pose a big threat to the Malaysian government, the intention to establish an Islamic government by toppling down the current government showed the characteristics of militancy and extremism. Furthermore, al-Arqam also informed the *Badar* military unit in the Kingdom of Thailand to prepare for the establishment of an Islamic country with Ashaari as the next Prime Minister of Malaysia.<sup>58</sup> With vast support from followers both domestic and regional, it was strong enough to create chaos and long running problems. Malaysian authorities acted carefully and were aware this group that had strong grass-root support and fanatical perspectives on Ashaari. Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi has said "that legal action will taken against anyone who tries to reestablish the Al-Arqam group."<sup>59</sup>

### *The Kumpulan Persaudaraan Ilmu dalam Al-Maunah* (Brotherhood of Al- Ma'unah Inner Power)

Al-Maunah was formed as a legal inner power group registered on the 15<sup>th</sup> of April 1999. Al-Maunah was an organization that "implemented the teaching of martial arts particularly the development of one's inner power and the practice of Islamic customary medicine". The group declared membership of more than one thousand people spread throughout Malaysia, Brunei, Singapore, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.<sup>60</sup> This group also claimed to be a Non Governmental Organization

(NGO) involved in martial arts with international and local members including civil servants, security service personnel and even some members from UMNO coalition party.<sup>61</sup>

A-Maunah was led by Mohd Amin bin Mohd Razali a former army corporal who came from Kampung Sauk, Grik Perak. This group was prominent by their audacious raid on July 2, 2000 at the Malaysian Army Reserve Camp at the Temenggor Dam, Grik Perak. Al-Maunah members instructed by Mohd Amin managed to enter the camp's security infrastructure by disguising themselves in military uniforms and driving jeeps painted in camouflage green as Malaysian Army Jeeps. Disguised as senior army officers, they claimed to be making a surprise inspection of the Battalion 304 in the *Rejimen Askar Wataniah* (Malaysian Army Reserve) camp. This group successfully took away a huge cache of firearms and ammunition, including 97 M16 assault rifles, two Steyr AUG rifles, four GPMGs, six Light Machineguns, five grenade launchers, 182 M16 magazines, eight extra barrels of GPMGs, three extra barrel of LMGs, 26 bayonets, 9,095 rounds of 5.56mm and 60 rounds of 40mm ammunitions.<sup>62</sup> Besides this audacious raid, al-Maunah members also attempted to blow up the 'Carlsberg' factory in Shah Alam with a rocket-launcher. They inflicted some damaged to the 'Guinness Stout' refinery in Sungai Way and the Hindu temple in Batu Caves, Selangor. Al-Maunah strongly opposes the idea of elections. Only true and pure Islam should be implementing in Malaysia by terrorist means as had been done by al-Maunah members.<sup>63</sup> Zabidi Mohamed, one of the defence counsels on the al-Maunah trial said, al-Maunah members were manipulated by Mohd Amin. Al-Maunah members were loyal, and blinded by their leader. Fanaticisms were also among the reasons why these people join al-Maunah. As he said:

*...in the promise of a better afterlife, and believe on their leader have a "mystical powers", and the group would be assured of a better enrolment... the followers would believe that the leader is purist. They would idolise him. 'Taksab' with the leader can make them break the law as what had happened to the Al-Maunah members...*

Members believed that Al-Maunah was the only way to set up an Islamic state in Malaysia. To achieve that, it should be done by force and using terrorist means. Al-Maunah members were also frustrated when the authorities were not giving *ulama* a bigger place in government and socio-politics. Moreover, Islamic clerics, such as *ulama*' from Pas were denied the ability to hold *ceramah* (sermons). Malaysian security forces launched a high-status action against the al- Maunah camp in Sauk,

Perak in July 2000. During the confrontation, 19 members were arrested and two deaths reported. Al-Maunah took four hostages which were two police personnel, Sergeant Mohd Shah Ahmad and Detective Corporal Saghadevan, as well as civilian Jaafar Puteh and army personnel, Trooper Matthews anak Medan. Zulkefli Makinudin,<sup>64</sup> in his judgement said:

*Mohd Amin was responsible for shooting to death Special Branch police officer R. Sagadevan, and in directing to Jemari to shoot to death Special Operation Force Ranger, Matthew anak Medan<sup>65</sup>...Mod Amin as a leader of the al-Maunah movement, was the mastermind behind the mission to overthrow the government by force in the name of Jihad.*

Following this, members of *al-Maunah* apprehended in the raid were later charged with treason and plotting to overthrow the government in order to bring into being an Islamic state. They were found guilty of waging a war against the Yang Dipertuan Agong (King of Malaysia). Mohd Amin Mohd Razali, Zahit Muslim and Jamaludin Darus were sentenced to death, while the remaining, 16 were sentenced to life imprisonment.

## The Kumpulan Militan Malaysia

Less than a month since the botched robbery at the Southern Bank Branch in Jalan Gasing, Petaling Jaya Selangor, 9 members of a new militant group were discovered. The group orchestrated several criminal and militant acts and later claimed to be a defender of the creation of a purist Muslim society in Malaysia via '*Jihad*'.<sup>66</sup> KMM was founded by Zainon Ismail, who was a member of the PAS Youth State Committee in the Kedah state from 1991 until 1996. Zainon, who is referred to as "Cikgu Non", was very charismatic and respected both in his village in Kampung Memali, Mukin Siong, Baling Kedah and in the opposition party (PAS). KMM was influenced by the Indonesian *ustazs* (clerics) who were influenced by *Wahhabism* ideology. These *ustazs* were successfully propagated by KMM members to follow the orthodox interpretation of Islam.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, KMM urged its followers to go to war against the enemies of Islam especially to the people or institutions and governments who resisted the application of Islamic law and applied secularism and non-Islamism, by appealing to the *jihad*, emphasizing the meaning of armed struggle. KMM had strong connections with KMK and KPIP.<sup>68</sup> Although these two groups were dismantled by '*Ops Kenari*'

between October 1988 and May 1989, the key radical idealists were able to flee to Middle Eastern countries and avoid arrest.<sup>69</sup> They participated in the Afghan-Russia war as *Mujahidin*. Some of these idealists were Zainon Ismail, Solehan Abd Ghafar and Zulkifli Mohammad. Zainon and Zulkifli were in Argoon, the place in Peshawar bordering Afghanistan. They believed they were the first Malaysians there as Mujahidin and they were ordered to join the Punjabi Mujahidin Camp.<sup>70</sup> The police discovered KMM on the 12<sup>th</sup> of October 1995, when founded by Zainon Ismail. KMM had roots with Halaqah Pakindo, a clandestine movement formed as an alumni association for Malaysian graduates from religious institutions in Pakistan, India, and Indonesia. Zainon Ismail, who was involved in the Semarak attack in 1988, established this group in conjunction with a meeting at Kuala Lumpur with Abu Bakar Chik in 1996.<sup>71</sup> This evidence gathered from police interrogation and investigations consequently exposed the fact that these group members were Malaysians who were educated in the Middle East and India as well as Pakistan. They performed Jihad in Afghanistan during the Russia-Afghan war and more recently in Ambon and Maluku in Indonesia during the religious tension there, started in 1999.<sup>72</sup>

*...They were believed to have been indoctrinated and recruited into the Afghanistan based mujahideen whilst studying in universities in Pakistan, Egypt and India...<sup>73</sup>*

KMM was linked to an array of crimes since 1999 including the bombing of churches, an Indian temple, a video centre, an attack on a police station, the murder of a local politician, an attempt to attack the US Navy convoy, an attempt to murder two ethnic Indians, and armed robbery and many more.<sup>74</sup> Their aim was to weaken the government through acts of terrorism including agitating ethnic and religious divides.

## The Jemaah Islamiyah (JI)

Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) has made Malaysia one of their important bases for orchestrating attacks and operating militant activities in Southeast Asia.<sup>75</sup> Several months after the uncovering of the KMM, Malaysian police discovered another Islamist-militant group operating under-ground called JI. JI was uncovered after interrogation and further investigation by police on the arrest of KMM members for an attempted robbery at Southern Bank in Petaling Jaya Selangor in May 2001.

Yazid Sufaat, a Bio Chemistry graduate from the California State University, Sacramento was detained on the 9<sup>th</sup> of December 2001 and was uncovered as the real face of JI.<sup>76</sup> JI has a high reputation around the world since the 'Bali Bombing 2002, the disaster that has shifted human thought and belief. 'Global war on terrorism' recognized JI as the second most wanted terrorist group after Middle East based terrorism group, al-Qaeda. Historically, JI has strong roots with the Pertubuhan Darul Islam Indonesia (DII).<sup>77</sup> The origins of JI could be traced to a *pesantren* founded in Solo, Indonesia by two radical Muslim clerics, Abdullah Sungkar and Abu Bakar Ba'asyir. These two clerics were deeply affected by the DII movement and have thus attempted to carry on in its tradition.<sup>78</sup>

Sungkar and Ba'asyir migrated to Malaysia in 1985 to avoid further prosecution by the Suharto regime. They established JI in 1993 after they laid foundations in Ulu Tiram, Johor and Kuala Pilah, Negeri Sembilan. The ideology of establishment *Darul Islam* and the *jihād* concept from *wahhabism* thought was preached by Sungkar and Ba'asyir from a series of *usrahs* and religious classes.<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, this group produced a book called *Pedoman Umum Perjuangan al-Jamaah al-Islamiyyah* (General Guidelines for the Jemaah Islamiyyah Struggle or in short PUPJI) as the crucial source in their *jihād* to be obeyed. From Malaysia perspectives, JI's radical ideology represented threats to the security. Their teachings tended to push on the militancy rather than trying to keep society living in harmony and tolerance. To establish *Daulah Islamiyyah* consisting of Malaysia, Indonesia, Southern Philippines, Singapore and Brunei, JI extremely prefer their followers to only follow *Salafus Soleh* (a righteous predecessors of Prophet Muhammad) doctrine as the trueness of Islamic preaching.<sup>80</sup> Others such as contemporary sects like *ahli sunnah wal jamaah*, *tareqad*, and *syiah* was regarded as deviant.

Need to establish a total Islamic State through *jihād* and *dakwah*. Malaysia and Indonesia were recognized as un-Islamic countries because the Quran and the Sunnah were not implemented in the legislation or administration. Should follow the concept of *Kafir Harbi* (belligerent infidels) for non Muslim and the need to perform *jihād* on them. Most of the followers were willing to wage war on the Indians and Chinese in Malaysia because they were averse accepting Islam. And regards a democracy as a western tool in the new-colonialism era and in other words was deviant from true Islamic teaching. Islamic caliphate has been broken down by British and Western super powers since the 14<sup>th</sup> century laving Muslims and their territories weakened and paralyzed. JI also sustained Osama Laden and al-Qaeda's anti-US sentiment. JI also strongly believed that the *Salafus Soleh* approach was the only way to generate and enlarge an Islamic Caliphate again.

According to PUPJI, JI suppose to be lead by *Amir* who appoints and controls four councils which is governing council, religious council, fatwa council and disciplinary council. The governing council is headed by a central command that oversees the leaders of four territorial divisions or *mantiqis*. The *mantiqis* followed by *Wakalah*, *Sariyah*, *Katibah*, *Kirdas*, *Fiah* and *Thoifah*. JI also comprised four major divisions, which is Mantiqi 1 - Peninsular Malaysia, Singapore and Southern Thailand. Mantiqi 2 - Indonesia (except Sulawesi and Kalimantan). Mantiqi 3 - Eastern Malaysia, Kalimantan, Sulawesi and Southern Philippines and Mantiqi 4 - Australia and Papua New Guinea.

JI organized special task for every *mantiqis*. Mantiqi 1 had responsibility for fund raising; Mantiqi 2 was given the primary mission on the promotion of *jihād*, Mantiqi 3 created for logistical and the place for *jihād*. However Mantiqi 4 never established but planned by JI for the future expansion.<sup>81</sup> Malaysia was the location for three meetings of the *Rabitatul Mujahideen*, a coalition of Jihadist groups from Southeast Asia organized by JI in 1999-2000. The alliance facilitated co-operation and the sharing of resources among the groups, in terms of training, procurement of arms, financial assistance and terrorist operations. The objective was to unify the Islamic militant groups in the region, with the ultimate goal of realizing the *Daulah Islamiyah*.<sup>82</sup> This group had short term military training in various places in Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Johor, Pahang, Kelantan and Sabah. JI formally halted and abandoned from actively operated in Malaysia since raided in 2001. But the threat of JI still there especially some of the members still at large in Indonesia and Southern Philippines.<sup>83</sup> Malaysian police listed at least 337 of JI members either still in Malaysia or used to be in Malaysia including Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, Nordin Mohd Top, Hambali and the late Dr. Azhari Hussin. Only 68 had been detained with most of them were released under the restriction order.<sup>84</sup>

## Conclusion

In conclusion, thirteen militant groups in Malaysia who strongly believed and applied the concept of militanism and acted violently appeared since independence. This group being militant and extreme with various methods and different modus operandi, but all of them shared the same ideology which is in struggle to established Islamic state through violence and was trying to create chaos and panic in society and was aimed for country's social and political instability. Most of these groups declined the constitutional law and the system of democracy implemented by Malaysian government. They accused it was inherited from British which is based on westernization and secularization and also did not follow the Islamic principles.

The Malaysian government is acutely aware that social political grievances need to be adequately addressed to prevent exploitation by extremists. It also needs to allow political parties to have their say without worrying about diluting its own power. The latest general election result showed that the increasing price of goods as well as religious and race tensions have contributed significantly to turmoil for the incumbent Barisan Nasional (National Coalition) party and have resulted in its worse performance outcome for the fifty years it has been ruling Malaysia.<sup>85</sup> It is clear that the ruling government faces significant challenges in maintaining its political power and ensuring stability in the country in the future. Malaysia should be well aware that the current threat from radicals is important, one type of political warfare that requires not only security action but also a comprehensive counter-strategy. No single country in Southeast Asia should feel complacent about what they have done so far.<sup>86</sup> The threat from radicals, and especially Muslim militants, will continue unless comprehensive action can be taken. This initiative may take a long time to succeed, but it is absolutely essential that it is carried out.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Mohd Mizan is PhD student in school of Government, Victoria University of Wellington, doing research about Southeast Asia conflict with focussing in regional terrorism.
- <sup>2</sup> Interview with R. Hashim at Bukit Aman Police Head Quarters. Kuala Lumpur on the 30 Dec 2007.
- <sup>3</sup> G. H. Jansen, *Militant Islam*. (New York: Harpercollins College Div., 1979), p. 17.
- <sup>4</sup> K. Abdullah, "National Security and Malay Unity: The Issue of Radical Religious Elements in Malaysia," *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 21 (2), (1999), pp. 261-262.
- <sup>5</sup> L. N. Snider, "What Happened in Penang," *Asian Survey*, 8(12) (1968), pp. 960-969.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 962-966.
- <sup>7</sup> "Hartal," *Straits Times*. 27 December, 1967.
- <sup>8</sup> "Hartal in Penang," *Eastern Sun*, 09 February, 1968.
- <sup>9</sup> Of those arrested, 113 were found to be aliens, and the government instituted banishment proceedings against four of them, besides leaders from Pan Islamic Party, leaders and members from Labour Party and Alliance (party from ruling government) also detained as reported from *Eastern Sun*, 09 February, 1968.
- <sup>10</sup> Surau or Musolla is Muslims's small prayer place normally located in every small village for daily prayers. Surau not for performing Jumaah prayer but often used for Eid prayer as well as place for Islamic class and series of talk.
- <sup>11</sup> Interview with R. Hashim.
- <sup>12</sup> R. Hashim, *Gerakan Militan Islam Yang Mengancam Keselamatan*.
- <sup>13</sup> Interview with R. Hashim.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>15</sup> For the sake of contesting in the general elections of 1955, the party was re-registered under the name *Pan-Malayan Islamic Party* (PMIP). The name was later changed to *Parti Islam Se-Malaysia* (PAS) during the Asri Muda era in the early 1970s.
- <sup>16</sup> PAS and Alliance also reached an agreement on the principle of having coalition governments at state and federal levels. With that coalition, UNMO-PAS administration would be actualized in Kelantan, Perlis, Kedah, Terangganu and at least one one PAS leader would be co-opted in to the Federal Cabinet.

- 17 J. C. Liow, "The Mahathir's Administration War against Islamic Militancy: Operational and Ideological Challenges," *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 58(2), (2004), pp. 241-243.
- 18 Malaysian Government White Paper, *The Threat To Muslim Unity and National Security: Malaysia Government*, (1984). p. 5.
- 19 R. Hashim, *Gerakan Militan Islam Yang Mengancam Keselamatan*.
- 20 Interview with A. R. Hashim at Bukit Aman Police Head Quarters. Kuala Lumpur on the 7<sup>th</sup> January 2008.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Malaysia Government White Paper, *The Threat To Muslim Unity and National Security*. p. 5.
- 23 R. Hashim, *Gerakan Militan Islam Yang Mengancam Keselamatan*, p. 42.
- 24 J. C. Liow, "The Mahathir's Administration War against Islamic Militancy," p. 243.
- 25 R. Hashim, *Gerakan Militan Islam Yang Mengancam Keselamatan*, p. 43.
- 26 H. Hayatudin, Most KMM Members Are Opposition Party Members Operating in Terengganu, Kelantan," *News Straits Times*. 14<sup>th</sup> October, 2001.
- 27 Interview with A. R. Hashim on January 2008.
- 28 R. Hashim, *Gerakan Militan Islam Yang Mengancam Keselamatan*, p. 44.
- 29 Malaysian Government White Paper, *The Threat To Muslim Unity and National Security*, p. 5.
- 30 Also known as "The Deceiver/impostor", is an evil figure in Islamic eschatology. He is to appear at a time in the future, before the Day of Resurrection, Judgement Day. Dajjal is a common Arabic word, used in the sense of "false prophet".
- 31 Malaysian Government White Paper, *The Threat To Muslim Unity and National Security*, p. 5.
- 32 Interview with R. Hashim in 2007.
- 33 "The Battle for Memali." *Far Eastern Economic Review (FEER)*, 05 December 1985.
- 34 Interview with Omar I. at Police College, Cheras. Kuala Lumpur, on the 01 December 2007.
- 35 Malaysia Government White Paper, *The Memali Incident*, (Kuala Lumpur: Government of Malaysia, 1986).
- 36 J. C. Liow, "The Mahathir's Administration War against Islamic Militancy," pp. 241-256.
- 37 R. Hashim, *Gerakan Militan Islam Yang Mengancam Keselamatan*, pp. 45.

- 38 Malaysian Government White Paper, *The Threat To Muslim Unity and National Security*, p. 5.
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- <sup>85</sup> "Malaysia prime minister rejects calls to resign amid rare political turmoil," *The Jakarta Post*, 15 March 2008, available at <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2008/03/14/malaysia-prime-minister-rejects-calls-resign-amid-rare-political-turmoil.html> (Retrieved 15 March, 2008).
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