THE ROLE OF ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS IN COMBATING TERRORISM IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

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ABSTRACT

Southeast Asia had a very long history of fighting terrorism. But the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 against the United States ushered a new era of terrorism all over the World. The region too had experienced this change. The deepening integration with global economy of the region has thus made it more vulnerable to this newer kind of terrorism. The Southeast Asian regional cooperation as a result has elevated its level to a higher ground. The era of terrorism in the region can be divided into two categories like first the era prior to 9/11 and second the aftermath of 9/11. The existence of terrorism however finds its roots into colonization, nature of regional mechanism, inter-state conflict, civil strife, economic globalization, rise of radical Islamism etc. The purpose of this paper is to look into the potential causes of terrorism in the region and how far the formation of ASEAN as a regional organization has been able to fight of this menace along with an insight to a probable future of the security mechanism of the organization in tackling the tide of so called neo-terrorism in the region.

Keywords-terrorism, regionalism, organization, regional integrity

INTRODUCTION

Since 1990 ASEAN has been held up as a kind of role model for a regional organization and it has been facing a great deal of bad press because of its failure to find regional solutions. Originally it was set up to deal with diplomatic issues in the year 1967 but gradually it found it confronted by a number of challenges which are of different dimensions.[1] ASEAN has completed three decades of existence to this day and its main role is not only to establish a broadly defined regional security but also to affirm its future role in maintaining a secured regional integrity within the region. There have been various dimensions of collective behavior in tackling various issues within Southeast Asia. Although ASEAN was not the first attempt at international cooperation within Southeast Asia nevertheless it has been most successful. Before ASEAN, Association of Southeast Asia (ASA) was formed but it failed as an effective organization because the membership was limited. [2] Indonesia was absent in the grouping and that was a serious drawback for the organization. The formation of ASEAN was to deal with the various complicated regional problems that have been plaguing the region. But since the late 1990s the organizations has failed to find regional solutions to a growing number of problems. Originally set up as a diplomatic community the organization found itself facing problems of other genre like security, key foreign policy issues and transnational threats like terrorism. The Ninth Summit of ASEAN however saw a silver lining of success with the Bali Concord IT from 7-8 October 2003, ASEAN. Bali was also, notably, the location of ASEAN's first concord agreement in 1976 which codified a code of non-interference. The location of the summit in Bali, the scene of Indonesia's worst single act of terrorism a year prior to the meeting, was also an important vote of confidence from the ASEAN leaders in Indonesia's progress on checking domestic terrorism. While terrorism might be the greatest immediate challenge to confront ASEAN since the end of the Cold War, a host of long-term diplomatic, security and economic issues remain on ASEAN's agenda.

This paper deals with the ever growing threat of terrorism in the Southeast Asian region which triggered to a greater velocity after the 9/11 attacks on the American Twin Tower and the Pentagon. The menace of terrorism in a general way finds its roots in the extreme version of Islam which was not a characteristic of the Southeast Asian Nations. 'Islam as "the unconditional surrender to the will of Allah" constitutes one of the most remarkable developments in world history. Its ideas and thoughts, rendered through the prophet Mohammed and the holy Qur'an, have been adopted in wide parts of the world. In contrast to Christianity, Islam is much more than a religion; it is a "way of life" that encompasses all areas of human activity, private and public, ranging from the theological to the political. In the course of time, within Islam several different traditions have emerged that, on one hand, retain the unity of the believers but, on the other hand, led to much diversity. This diversity has become even more complex as the Islamic religion was engraved upon existing local tradition in a different manner throughout various regions of the world.'[3] Islam has penetrated the region of Southeast Asia through cultural exchange between Middle East and the region. In fact the region has the most populous Muslim inhabitants than any other country in the world with Indonesia being the largest Muslim country in the world along with Malaysia, Southern Thailand and parts of Philippines. The colonial era in Southeast Asia has further steered the spread of Islam that had set foot on the region approximately around the 1500s. However the Islam that was practiced in the region was relatively much moderate than what was and practiced in the Middle East and Persia. This was

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[1] Anthony L.Smith, (2004), "ASEAN Ninth Summit Solidifying Regional Cohesion"
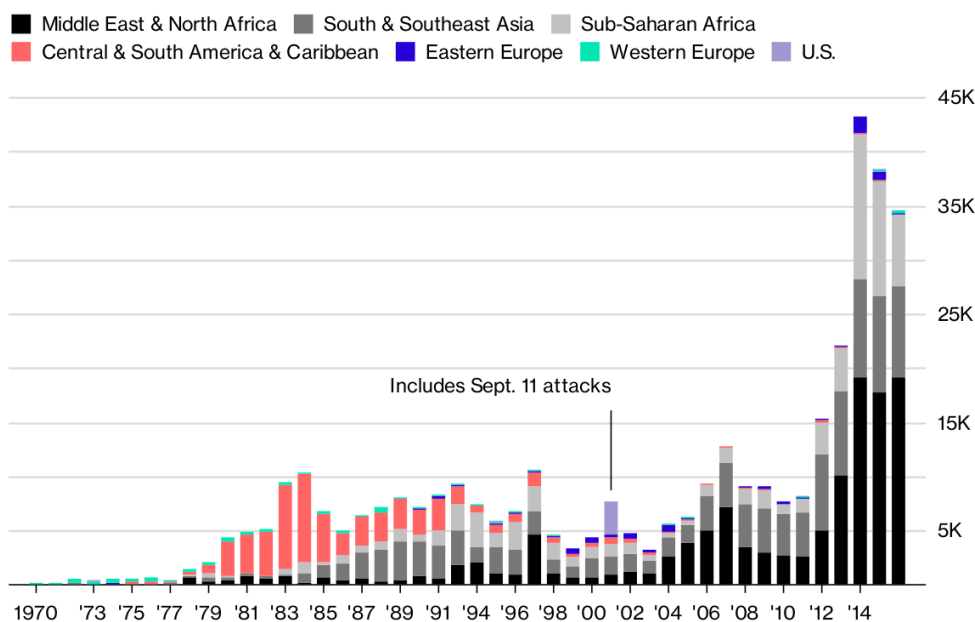[2] Association of Southeast Asia was formed on 31ˢᵗ July, 1961 and consisted of Phillipines, Thailand and Singapore.

[3] Houben, Vincent J.H (2003), "Southeast Asia and Islam", The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, Vol. 588, Pg. 1-2

due to the fact that Islam was laid on the base of the Hindu civilization that spread from India, and on the local culture of animism. Within the colonial grip the region witnessed modern technological advances like printing technology; ship building that reduced the gap between various regions. With this the Islamic ideology spread even more rapidly between Middle East and Southeast Asia. The admixture of Islamic theologies with the local culture gave rise to the Wahabi Islamic culture.[4] However radical Islamism has raised its head in the region especially after 9/11 attacks which has set a benchmark for a new era in terrorism involving even stronger and complicated networks with regional Islamist groups in the region like Jemaah Islamiya. Southeast Asia, not being a stranger to terrorism has seen various extremist groups using violent tactics especially during 1990s. The incident of invasion of Afghanistan has triggered an influx of battle in Southeast Asia resulting in a wave of violence. The 2002 Bali attacks left 200 dead and ushered in a new era of transnational terrorism. Besides Jemmah Islamiyaah the prominent groups are Abu Sayaff and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). With this situation in hand ASEAN faces a very difficult task as a regional organization to fight back against it. In the light of the fact that the region has a history of terrorism and popular sympathy for radicalism make the situation even more complicated to handle. The governments of the member countries must aggressively set aside their differences and cooperate with each other to prevent counter terrorism and uproot the diverse terrorist groups and extremist tendencies without alienating the population that are vulnerable to radicalization.

Terrorism's Toll Through the Decades

Deaths in attacks, by regions with highest numbers

- ■ Middle East & North Africa ■ South & Southeast Asia ■ Sub-Saharan Africa
- ■ Central & South America & Caribbean ■ Eastern Europe ■ Western Europe ■ U.S.

Includes Sept. 11 attacks

Source: National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), University of Maryland. (2017). Global Terrorism Database (GTD) [Data file]. Retrieved from http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd

Bloomberg

THE TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS ACTIVE

'Because of the increased lethality of terrorist organizations, thanks to advancements in technology, weapons, and training, governments cannot wait until a terrorist attack occurs to act. Therefore, responses must be largely preventive. However, traditional law enforcement mindset is to wait for an incident to occur in order to begin an investigation. Without preliminary evidence, current criminal-justice systems will not permit wire-tapping, surveillance, arrests, raids, and searches of premises. Even today, law enforcement systems are designed to act efficiently after the event to investigate, collect evidence, arrest, charge, and prosecute. Unless there is a lead, the average police officer will not expend the time, energy, or resources to pursue a case. Therefore a sea change in the culture of law enforcement is essential to combating terrorism. Instead of building cases by

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[4] "Wahhabism is a puritanical form of Sunni Islam and is practiced in Saudi Arabia and Qatar, although it is much less rigidly enforced in the latter. The word "Wahhabi" is derived from the name of a Muslim scholar, Muhammad bin Abd al Wahhab, who lived in the Arabian peninsula during the eighteenth century (1703-1791). Today, the term "Wahhabism" is broadly applied outside of the Arabian Peninsula to refer to a Sunni Islamic movement that seeks to purify Islam of any innovations or practices that deviate from the seventh-century teachings of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions"- Blanchard Christopher M. (2008), "The Islamic Traditions of Wahhabism and Salafiyya", CRS Report of Congress, https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/RS21695.pdf

gathering evidence in order to prosecute, law enforcement authorities must invest their assets in collecting intelligence so as to better detect and disrupt terrorist attacks. These pro-active disruption efforts would involve confidential informants, undercover officers, and cultivation of other assets, as well as their effective management; a mind and resource intensive process.'[5] The following image shows the various terrorist organizations and the frequency of the attacks that have been carried out by them throughout the region. The image gives a fair idea about the intensity of attacks of which the New People's Army can be seen vividly active between the mid-1980s to mid-1990s and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) being active mainly during the 2000s. The others like Abu Sayaf Group (ASG) and Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Movement (BIFM) has minimal activity throughout the decades while groups like Khmer Rouge and others has ceased to act or has been disbanded completely.

Ten Most Active Groups in Southeast Asia, 1970-2013
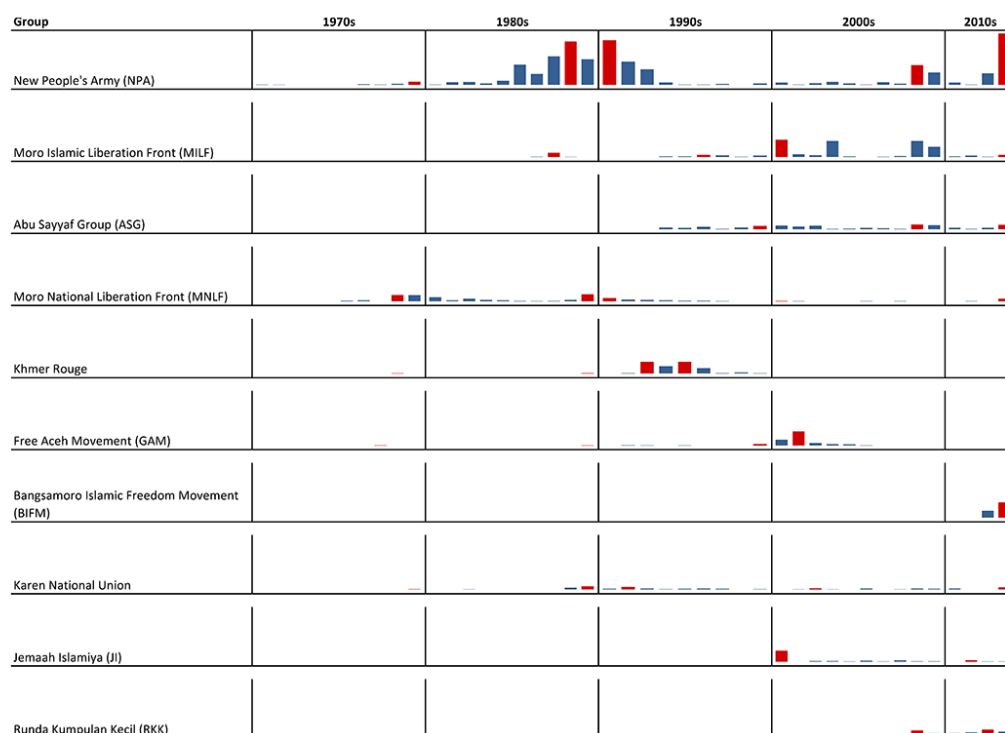
However considering the bigger picture here the role of the Al Qaeda and ISIS (Islamic State) has to be focused as a part of the discussion in influencing the above mention terrorist groups which were operational in the region but with such a robust influence has taken a serious threatening shape. In the post-9/11 world, the landscape of terrorism in Southeast Asian has undergone profound change. Aftermath of the United States related invasion in Afghanistan in October 2001 and Iraq in 2003 Al Qaeda's structure has been significantly dispersed and as such the weakened organization started to influence its international counterparts including those in Southeast Asia in order to continue its campaign of international terror. In these endeavors, al-Qaeda provided ideological, financial, and operational support to groups such as the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) in the Philippines, Lashkar Jundullah in Indonesia, Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia (KMM) in Malaysia, Jemmah Salafiyah (JS) in Thailand, Arakan Rohingya Nationalist Organization (ARNO) and Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO) in Myanmar and Bangladesh, and Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), a Southeast Asian organization with a presence in Australia. According to scholars there have been clear indications that the Al Qaeda has ideologically penetrated the Southeast Asian regions by building base operations since the 1980s. 'Mohammad Jamal Khalifa, the brother-in-law of Osama bin Laden, established the Manila, Philippines branch of the International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO). The IIRO is a "respectable" Saudi charity that provides assistance to Islamist groups in the region, and at the time also served as a regional hub for al-Qaeda. Additionally, 1993 World Trade Center bomber Ramzi Ahmed Yousef and 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammad traveled to Southeast Asia in 1994 to plan the elaborate "Bojinka" operation, which included the bombing of 12 US airliners over the Pacific. Similarly, within the MILF Camp Abu Bakar complex, the Kuwaiti trainer Omar Al Farooq established Camp Vietnam

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[5] Rohan Gunaratna, 'Terrorism in Southeast Asia: Threat and Response', Center for Eurasian Policy Occasional Research Paper Series II (Islamism in Southeast Asia), No. 1, Hudson Institute.

to train Southeast Asian groups in guerrilla warfare and terrorism. The aim of these operations was to build a committed core of operatives to "liberate" suffering Muslims in US supported regimes throughout the region.'[6]

Terrorist attacks in Southeast Asia
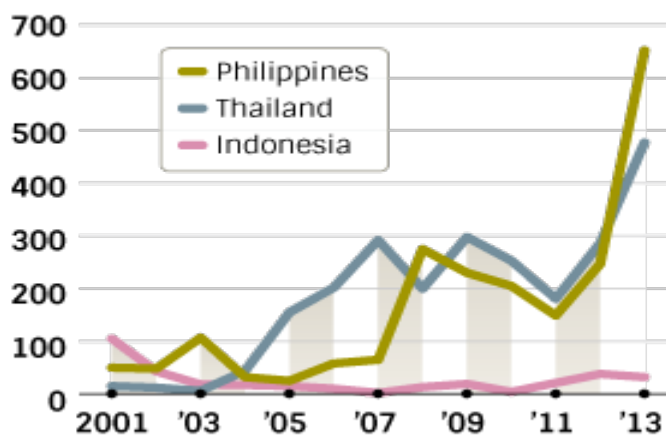
Source: National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), 2013

Apart from the Al Qaeda the Islamic State has also has tightened its grip over the region specially with the weakening of the former. 'This prolific expansion of the Islamic State (ISIS) has been distinguished to be radically different from the Al Qaeda in territorial gain and influence since 2014. In order to understand and explain how the ISIS acts differently from its predecessor the concepts of hybrid warfare and grey zone conflict have been useful. A hybrid adversary essentially employs a synergized form of conventional warfare, irregular warfare, and criminal methods to obtain political objectives. Hybrid adversaries operate and thrive in the grey-zone conflict space that spans from proto-state administration to military operations short of high-intensity war. In spite of its de-territorialized character, the hallmark of ISIS distinguishes it from the hybrid state actor that gives the organization certain resilience. The battles for Palmyra and Ramadi in early 2016 demonstrated that rather than fighting to the death to defend its strongholds, the pragmatism of "trading space for time" is an option for ISIS. Despite the loss of several key towns and cities in both Syria and Iraq, ISIS has demonstrated the ability to put up stiff resistance in strategic locations such as Mosul. More importantly, the recent physical roll-back of ISIS in the Middle East does not necessarily mean that ISIS is a spent force in other regions of the world particularly in Southeast Asia. The manifestation of the ISIS threat is more prominent in Southeast Asia than in other parts of the Asia-Pacific region. Dozens of sailors and tourists have been abducted and held hostage by Abu Sayyaf in the vast porous archipelagic boundaries shared by Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines in the Sulu and Sulawesi Seas. The death of kidnap kingpin Abraham Hamid in December 2016 highlights one such manifestation in Southeast Asia, the kidnap-for-ransom grey zone where criminals and ISIS affiliates intertwine. It is in such poorly governed grey zones that ISIS and its Southeast Asian affiliates would seek to exploit and expand both its influence and physical presence.

ISIS affiliates in Southeast Asia will increasingly exemplify traits of a hybrid organization as fighters return to the region and bolster existing regional organizations. Up to 700 Indonesian and Malaysians have traveled to Syria and Iraq, fighting together in a designated Southeast Asian combat unit, Katibah Nusantara. An influx of returning battle-hardened fighters and their foreign comrades not only brings renewed tactics and organizational capabilities, but also the potential of linking existing organizations in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines in an increasingly complex network of returning fighters, foreign fighters, local jihadists, and criminal elements.'[7]

THE PREVENTIVE MEASURES

'The preventive measures that can be effective in fighting back terrorism can be summarized as follows
1. The terrorists' negative thinking processes and worldview, e.g., their tendency to think in a binary mode, needs to be eradicated. There is a need to counter the false myths of radical Islam about jihad and suicide bombing, killing people in the process along with the conception of allegiance and non-allegiance.

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[6] Gunaratna, Rohan ((2007). Terrorism in Southeast Asia: Threat and Response. Center for Eurasian Policy Occasional Research Paper Series II (Islamism in Southeast Asia), No. 1, Hudson Institute
[7] Weichong, Ong (2016). 'Islamic State in Southeast Asia's Grey Zones'. The Diplomat, https://thediplomat.com/2016/12/islamic-state-in-southeast-asias-grey-zones/

2.   In the rehabilitation and reintegration process the government must give the target group hope that there are other non-violent means available to resolve the conflict because the terrorist groups exert a powerful influence over their members. The sense of belonging and exclusivity diminishes the individual's personal and moral judgment. This is the power that can make violence against the perceived enemy not just acceptable but necessary.

3.   Good intelligence can provide opportunities for exploitation. The support of the community is important. Any amnesty or surrender policy should be carefully administered and publicized to avoid counter propaganda.

4.   A range of policy instruments would be required in an effective strategy against terrorism. These would include tactical counter-terrorism measures such as military force, intelligence, criminal law enforcement, and strategic initiatives at the political, socio-economic and ideological level. Since each of the initiatives also has their drawbacks and limitations, a balance must necessarily be maintained in pursuing each of the approaches.'[8] 'However in spite of all the threat and responses that can be fathomed recent studies have painted a bleak picture of the prospects for regional cooperation (ASEAN) in counterterrorism in Southeast Asia. While some have argued that beneath the rhetoric of amity among member nations of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), there, in fact, has been a disturbing picture of non-cooperation between ASEAN intelligence services. The regional responses to terrorism in Southeast Asia has been and continues to be a fairly substantial level of counterterrorism collaboration between the intelligence and security services of the ASEAN states and their partner countries which is not optimal on the wake of the growing terrorist activities in the region but nevertheless ASEAN states have in fact already collaborated rather extensively in the regional war against terror, either among themselves or with Western nations. The capture of key militants from the clandestine radical Islamist group Jemaah Islamiyah who were ostensibly involved in terrorist atrocities in the region is a good indication that interstate cooperation has not only taken place but has proven effective.'[9]

A kind of bottoms-up approach has been adopted by ASEAN to fight off terrorism which is an inward looking regional stability and security. The ASEAN has concentrated on comprehensive security agenda rather than external military threats. ASEAN's response to terrorism has been organized by joint declarations like the Declaration on Joint Action to Counter Terrorism of November 2001 and the Declaration on Terrorism signed in early November 2002 were issued in response to 9/11 and the Bali Bombings respectively. Besides joint declarations ASEAN has also cooperated with external powers like the United States and Australia in combating terrorism through mutual cooperation and pacts. 'The ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Trans-national Crime (AMMTC) has brought together the respective home ministers and has constituted the core of ASEAN's counter-terrorism collaboration. Special areas for discussion have included intelligence sharing, law enforcement, airport security, bomb detection, and others. The ASEAN Chiefs of National Police (ASEANOPOL) meetings have also aimed at promoting operational cooperation. Recent cooperative efforts have been rather disappointing, however, failing to contribute significantly to counter-terrorism. It is perhaps not surprising therefore that many of the operational responses have occurred at a sub-ASEAN level through bilateral and trilateral agreements. In spite of all these endeavors the Association is not yet equipped to offer a sustained response to a series of issues ranging from terrorism to environmental degradation and pandemics. Strengthening its operational capacities through the realization of a security community will be ASEAN's primary challenge in the years to come'[10]

ASEAN should, in case of states at the receiving end of hybrid adversaries of the terrorist organizations and grey zone conflict, develop policies that allow the respective government agencies of the member countries to respond in a timely and proportional manner. Such policies should develop a range of response options below the escalatory threshold of high-intensity war, but should send a clear signal to the hybrid adversary of the will and capability of the target state to respond. They could range from a multi-national response, such as the Malaysian, Indonesian, and Filipino joint maritime patrols in the Sulu and Sulawesi Seas, to the retooling of national military and domestic security agencies to counter hybrid threats.

In cases where the hybrid adversary may not be deterred, such as radicalized ISIS affiliates bent on suicide tactics, the focus should be on building resilient systems that are able to bounce back quickly. The savage violence of ISIS and its affiliates will continue to appeal to a tiny minority in Southeast Asia, but there is evidence to suggest that the resilience of local societies can tap into to enable target states to bounce back quickly in event of ISIS-inspired violence. Hybrid adversaries in the grey zone will be a driver of global and regional conflicts, but ASEAN should do well to ensure that the impact remains largely in the grey zone.' [11]

The following figure shows the current ISIS influence over Southeast Asia.

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[8] Terrorism In Southeast Asia : Threat and Response, Report of International Conference, THE Institute Of Defence And Strategic Studies And Office Of The Coordinator For Counterterrorism, U.S Department Of State Washington D.C., 2006

[9] Smith, Paul.J, (2005) 'Terrorism and Violence in Southeast Asia: Transnational Challenges to States and Regional'

[10] The Fight against Terrorism: What Role for ASEAN? Ralf Emmers, 14 November 2007

[11] Weichong, Ong (2016). 'Islamic State in Southeast Asia's Grey Zones'. The Diplomat, https://thediplomat.com/2016/12/islamic-state-in-southeast-asias-grey-zones/

ISLAMIC STATE-LINKED TERROR ATTACKS

Infographic by Rafa Estrada
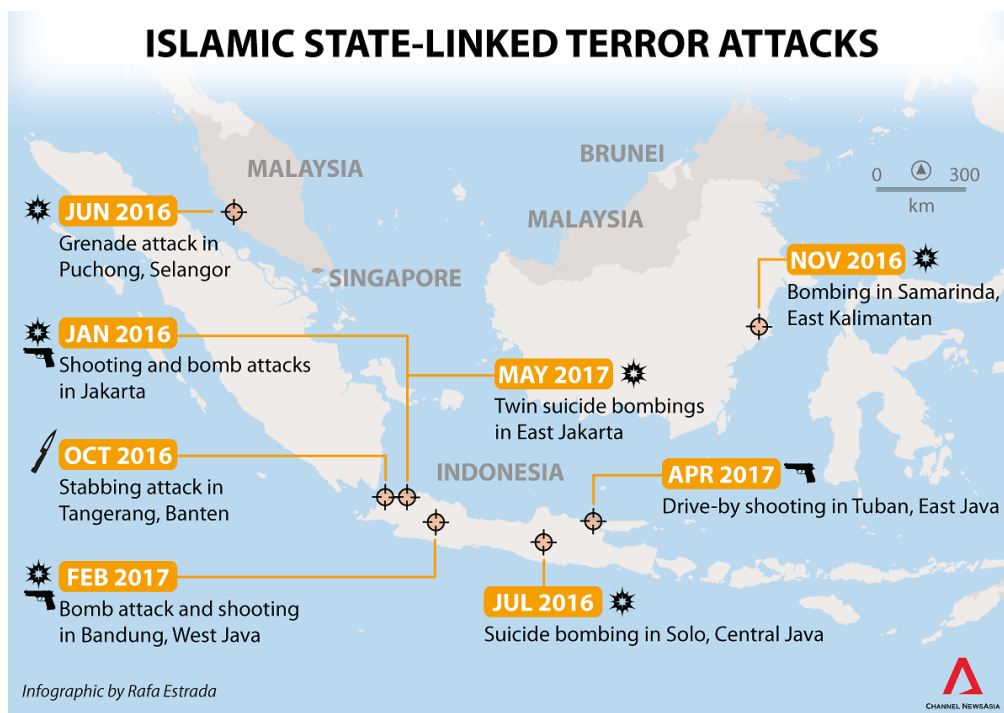
The regional integrity has to be maintained to fight of this increasingly growing menace and in fact ASEAN as a regional organization should not only remain silent to ensure to quarantine the impact on the grey areas but to wipe out the grey areas itself by doing away the regional tensions and conflicts between the member countries. These inter-state tensions provide the perfect nurturing environment for the terrorist organizations to strengthen their roots in the region. ASEAN hence should leave no stone upturned to thwart the growth of such environment and hence check terrorism for good. 'The differing understanding of terrorism as a security threat, it should be hardly surprising that differences exist over counter-terrorism strategies and the resources channeled towards them even among states where terrorism is perceived as a direct security threat. Each country in the region has a different understanding of terrorism and also their problems have differing roots eg. Philippines where terrorism is treated mainly, if not exclusively, as a form of heightened insurgency carried out by the MILF in Southern Philippines which must be defeated through military means. Singapore, which sees itself as a tempting target of Islamic terrorists because of its wealth, the heavy concentration of its national infrastructure within a limited geographic space, and its close security links with the US, which had become closer since September 11, focuses heavily on the hybrid politico-security approach of homeland security, which stressed infrastructure protection and heightened surveillance.'[12]

But the thing which matters even more than a regional integrity are the people and their thoughts and beliefs. Terrorism has no religion. Often it's the tendency to relate Islam with terrorism but in reality, it's the group of certain people who vouch for such barbarism. It has to be kept in mind that terrorism shouldn't be seen as those who carry it out in the name of religion. The people who incite or even create indirectly an environment favorable to all these terrorist mindset are equally responsible. There should be more studies where the thoughts and mindsets which favour such vicious concepts and actions like terrorism are not only discussed but also the solution to such are provided. It can be concluded in this paper that if the common people irrespective of their beliefs and mindsets refuse to foster such thoughts which render to inflict terror or to hurt other sentiments or annihilate the ones whom they consider enemies or unworthy, the problem of terrorism will cease to exist on this face of the earth. It has to be considers that the world is made of common people and their strength together is unmatchable so if the minds of people can be improved that in turn will improve a nation as a whole in this way a region and lastly the world will make its way to its freedom from terrorism. It's the responsibility that has to be taken up by the people collectively only then will the barbaric mindset will come to its halt.

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