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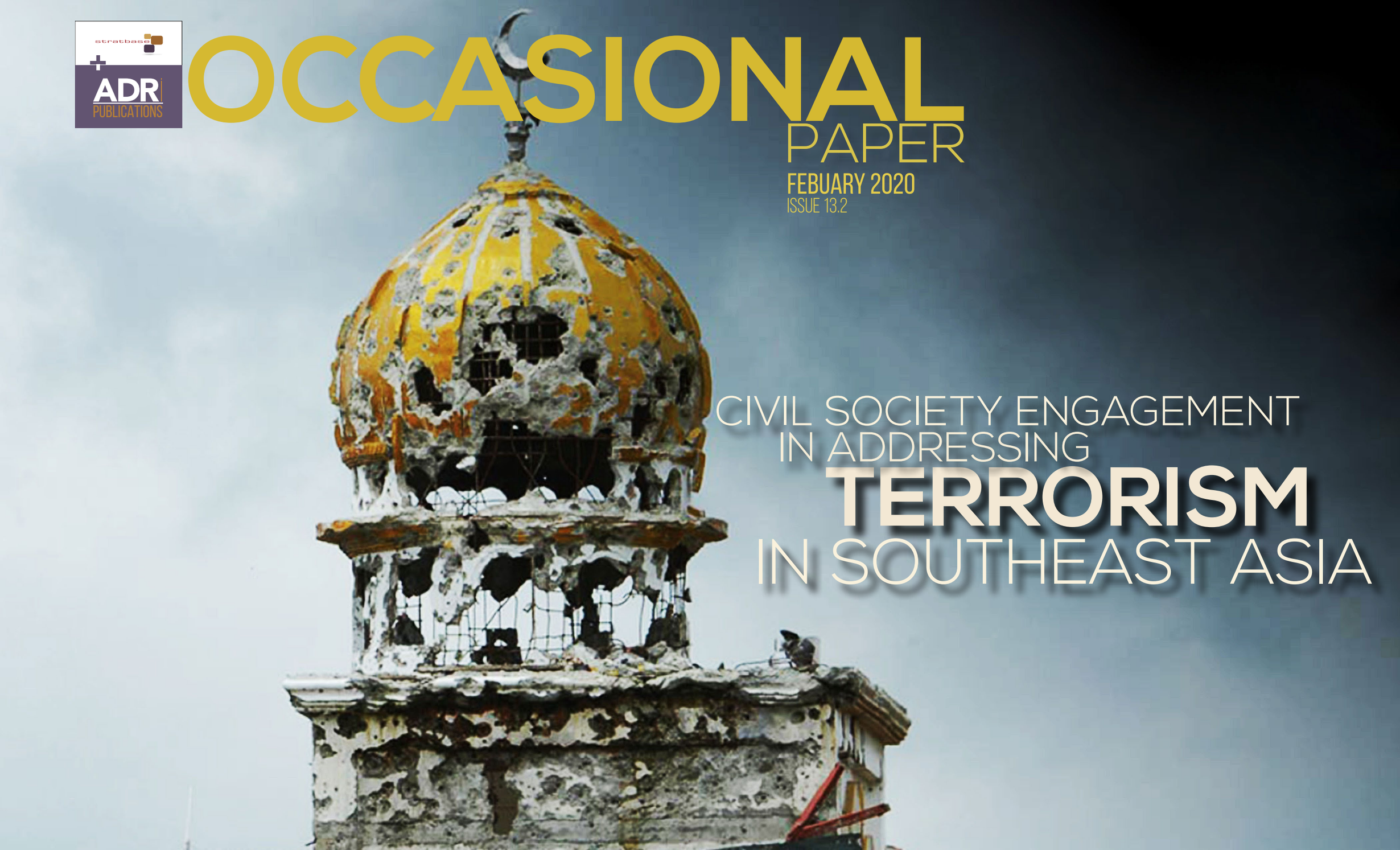
PUBLICATIONS

OCCASIONAL PAPER

FEBUARY 2020
ISSUE 13.2



CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT IN ADDRESSING TERRORISM IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

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A GROWING CONCERN

> A study of 158 countries by the Institute for Economics and Peace reveals that acts of terrorism increased dramatically by 234 per cent from 2002 to 2011, peaking in 2007 and subsequently plateauing, but not decreasing. The highest rise occurred over the period from 2005 to 2007, with 72 countries experiencing increased terrorist activities. Between 2007 and 2009, Pakistan, Afghanistan, andthe Philippines were subjected to surges of terrorist attacks

Domestic violence, insurgency, and acts of terrorism usually have their root causes at the local level. They generally stem from hitherto iniquitous socio-economic, cultural, and political structure of society in spite of the attempts of government to equitably distribute the fruits of development, expand economic opportunities, increase the latitudes of political freedom, and heighten peoples' civil and cultural rights. Hence, socio-economic issues or development concerns, good governance, human rights, and rule of law have been in the forefront in resolving political violence, and most recently terrorism.

Terrorism is seen as a global phenomenon after the 11 September 2001, known as the 9/11 attack in the United States where close to 3,000 civilians, cutting across 80 nationalities, were indiscriminately killed by suicide plane attacks on the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York, the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., and in Pennsylvania (the plane crashed before hitting its target). Given varied standpoints and interpretations of such a tragic event and regardless of motives, it was generally seen as a "terrorist" act. A day after, the United Nations' Security Council (UNSC) issued Resolution 1368 which condemned the attack and considered it an "act of international terrorism, a threat to international peace and security." Further, it stipulates that:

> *… all States to work together to bring to justice the perpetrators, organizers, and sponsors of terrorist attacks and stresses that those responsible for aiding, supporting or harbouring the perpetrators, organizers and sponsors of these acts will be held accountable (par 3, italic from the original)*
>
> *… [And] expresses its [Security Council] readiness to take all necessary steps to respond to the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, and to combat all forms of terrorism, in accordance with its responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations. (para. 5) (UNSC 2001a).*

This was followed by the UNSC Resolution 1373 on 28 September 2001 which encouraged UN member states to share their military and police intelligence reports on terrorist groups in order to thwart international terrorism, ensure that terrorist acts are "established

https://asiatimes.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Singapore-offers-cargo-plane-drones-to-help-Philippines-fight-terrorism-1726653

* THE VIEWS AND OPINIONS EXPRESSED IN THIS PAPER ARE THOSE OF THE AUTHOR AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REFLECT THOSE OF THE INSTITUTE.

serious criminal offences in domestic laws and regulations," (par. 2[e]) and inhibit the commission of extremist acts by exchanging information between and among states in "accordance with international and domestic law and cooperate on administrative and judicial matters" (par 3 [b]) (UNSC 2001b). Subsequently, the Security Council's 15-member Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC) was created to oversee the implementation of the said Resolution as well as enhance the capacity of member states to fight terrorism.

In the Southeast Asian region, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) adopted the Declaration on Joint Action to Counter Terrorism on its 7th Summit on 5 November 2001 as an expression of solidarity with the US and international community against "terrorist attacks on humanity." (ASEAN 2001). Operational guidelines for regional cooperation against eight (8) transnational offenses were further provided in May 2002 through the "Work Programme to Combat Transnational Crime" endorsed by the ASEAN's Senior Officials Meeting on Transnational Crime (SOMTC). It covers the following transnational crimes, namely: terrorism; illicit drug trafficking; trafficking in persons; money laundering; sea piracy; arms smuggling; international economic crime; and cybercrime.

Nonetheless, five (5) months after the ratification of the "Work Programme," operatives from Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) which is committed to the establishment of an Islamic state in Southeast Asia (SEA), bombed the Kuta area of Bali, Indonesia in October, leaving more than 200 civilians dead and over 400 injured, mostly Australian and western tourists. This ghastly incident preceded ASEAN to acknowledge the threat posed by Islamist terrorism in SEA.

A study of 158 countries by the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) reveals that acts of terrorism increased dramatically by 234 per cent from 2002 to 2011, peaking in 2007 and subsequently plateauing, but not decreasing. The highest rise occurred over the period from 2005 to 2007, with 72 countries experiencing increased terrorist activities. Between 2007 and 2009, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Philippines were subjected to surges of terrorist attacks (IEP 2012).

Cognizant of the soaring cases of terrorism-related violence in several countries, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), unanimously adopted the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in its Resolution 60/288 in 2006 (UNGA 2006a). In its annexed Plan of Action, the Strategy explicitly identifies its four (4) pillars which need to be implemented in a balanced manner, namely: (1) addressing the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism; (2) measures to prevent and combat terrorism; (3) measures to build states' capacity to prevent and combat terrorism and to strengthen the role of the United Nations system in that regard; and (4) measures to ensure respect for human rights for all and the rule of law as the fundamental basis for the fight against terrorism.

Moreover, the Strategy affirms the determination of UN member states to "further encourage non-governmental organizations and civil society to engage, as appropriate, on how to enhance efforts to implement the Strategy" (UNGA 2006 par 3[e]). The vital role of non-governmental and civil society organizations (NGOs/CSOs) in the global strategy against terrorism has likewise been highlighted by then UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in his April 2006 report entitled "Uniting against Terrorism: Recommendations for a Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy". (UNGA 2006b A60/825).

Banking on the UN's Strategy against terrorism Ban Ki-moon, the successor of Kofi Annan, presented before the UN General Assembly the Plan of Action in Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) on 24 December 2015. Specifically, the Plan has seven priority areas: (1) dialogue and conflict prevention; (2) strengthening good governance, human rights and the rule of law; (3) engaging communities; (4) empowering youth; (5) gender equality and empowering women; (6) education, skill development and employment facilitation; and (7) strategic communications, including through the internet and social media (UNGA 2015).

Apparently, the UN's Strategy against terrorism and PVE's Plan of Action recognize that extremism is a function of several factors, including among others: a lack of socio-economic opportunities; marginalization and discrimination; poor governance, and violations of human rights and the rule of law; prolonged and unresolved conflict; and radicalization in prison. It is argued that if the drivers of extremism and radicalism are substantially addressed, the threat of terrorism would subside. As stated in the beginning, if governments governed in a more inclusive, fairly, and just manner, terrorists have no cause to advance.

Yet, much to the desire of governments to actively respond to their peoples' needs and demands, there are limits to what governments can do by themselves. As Ban-Ki-moon admits, "Governments cannot do it alone. We need to engage all of society – religious leaders, women leaders, leaders in the arts, music and sports." (2015). Hence, civil society must be regarded as a critical interlocutor in identifying and responding to popular clamours and aspirations. In fact, the PVE's heavily relies on the engagement of civil society. Ucko (2018) avers that civil society has to be empowered by governments and supported at the local level who have the "legitimacy, reach and understanding necessary for effective interventions" (p. 257).

Against this backdrop, the paper explores the significance and role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in countering terrorism, especially in Southeast Asia. Likewise, it shall examine the crucial challenges CSOs face in working with the state in impeding extremism in the region. Towards the end of the essay, recommendations are made in terms of policies that may be taken to enhance state and CSO relations in their common thrust to mitigate, if not, completely resolve terrorism.

Image Credit: opensourceagenda.com/philippines/philippines-teetering-edge-state-terrorism/, ronald jumawan photography

THE QUEST OF DEFINING TERRORISM

The broad and divergent interpretations on what constitutes as a terrorist or extremist act continue to baffle experts across different fields. Some definitions focus on the terrorist organizations' mode of operation while others emphasize the motivations and characteristics of terrorism, the modus operandi of individual terrorists, etc. The statement, "One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter," which stresses that it all depends on the perspective and the worldview of the one doing the defining, has become not only cliché, but also became one of the most difficult obstacles in dealing with terrorism. In the struggle against terrorism, the problem of definition is a crucial element in the attempt to coordinate international collaboration, based on the currently accepted rules of traditional warfare.

Jonathan White (1991) says that terrorism has multiple definitions classified according to type: (a) simple - violence or threatened violence intended to produce fear or change; (b) legal - criminal violence violating legal codes and punishable by the state; (c) analytical - specific political and social factors behind individual terrorist acts; (d) state-sponsored - terrorist groups used by small states and the Communist bloc to attack western interests; and (e) state - power of the government used to terrorize its people into submission.

From a survey of 109 scholars who defined "terrorism," Alex Schmid (1983) concludes that it is an abstract and highly subjective concept dependent on the view-and standpoint of the target individual or group of the terrorist act. Bruce Hoffman (1998) discloses that a terrorist is an individual prepared to use and committed to employ force in the attainment of his or her goals. Terrorists believe their cause to be altruistic and serves for the betterment of society (p. 43).

There are over a hundred different definitions of terrorism in the various international and regional treaties and conventions on international

terrorism. There exists no single acceptable definition of terrorism. Even the UNs PVE Plan of Action does not have a fixed definition of either terrorism or "violent extremism" to give states the prerogative to define it in accordance with the precepts of international law and human rights. It states:

> *Definitions of 'terrorism' and 'violent extremism' are the prerogative of Member States and must be consistent with their obligations under international law, particularly international human rights law. Just as the General Assembly has taken a practical approach to counter-terrorism through the adoption by consensus of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, this Plan of Action pursues a practical approach to preventing violent extremism, without venturing to address questions of definition. (italics provided) (UNGA 2015, para 5)*

The lack of a comprehensive, universally accepted definition of terrorism makes it difficult to distinguish the difference between a violent act directly conducted by the state and/or its instrumentalities against its own people on one hand, and violence instigated by a non-state and sub-national group affecting same group of people on the other hand; between legitimate self-determination struggles and assertion of state's sovereign right; between violence brought about by iniquitous socio-economic and political structures and violence that brings about instantaneous deaths and destruction to properties.[1]

The ambiguity in the term challenges delineating terrorist acts from acts of civil society that advances lawful dissent within the purview of defending democratic socio-economic, political and cultural rights. The prevalent definitions of terrorism entail some difficulties, both conceptual and syntactical. It is not surprising that alternative concepts like guerrilla movements, national liberation movements, resistance movements, freedom fighters, and others, are generally used to describe and characterize the activities of terrorist organizations.

By resorting to such tendentious nomenclatures, for instance "peoples' movements," some terrorist organizations and its supporters gloss over the realities of terrorism, thereby establishing their activities on more positive and legitimate foundations. Moreover, terms not opposed to the basic values of liberal democracies, like "popular republican movement," "patriotic front," "national liberation," etc., carry very few negative connotations than the term "terrorism."

Ensuing studies on terrorism and extremism have sought to fill in the absence of a universal definition by advancing three criterias on what constitutes a violent extremist/terrorist actor: (1) transnational reach; (2) decentralized operations; and (3) ideological opposition to the very values and structures of international society (Boutellis and Fink 2016, pp 6-7). Featuring this kind of criteria in the UN's PVE Plan, the term "terrorism" would not only be delimited and demarcated, but also decouples it from any single religion, creed, colour, ethnic group, or any identity marker.

UNDERSTANDING CIVIL SOCIETY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Primarily, civil society is associated with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or groups, and charities. It is oftentimes referred to as the civic or "third" community, and non-profit sector, in contradistinction to public and private sectors. It may consist of a range of voluntary associations including political parties, trade unions and professional bodies, private foundations, educational and research institutions and think tanks, religious, faith-based and community-based organizations, and women empowerment, human rights, social and environmental groups working on a definite and defined interest and aspiration of a particular sector of society but operating outside of governmental and private (commercial and for-profit) sectors or spheres.

The diversity of Southeast Asia in terms of state system, type of regime, societal structure, stage of economic development, cultural framework, and breadth and depth of peoples' activism, makes the region an excellent case in which to interrogate the scope and limits as well as ascertain the quality of civil society. Understanding civil society in Southeast Asia would give a better appreciation how it would be able to contribute in mitigating if not eradicating the roots of terrorism in the region.

Unlike in Europe and in North America where civil society is highly distinguishable from the state, civil society in Southeast Asia is less distinct. Schak and Hudson (2003) argue that the dividing line between the spheres of civil society on one hand and public and private sectors on the other hand in Asia is blurred. The state plays a central, if not domineering role, in the formation and establishment of civil society organizations (CSOs). They are not just "autonomous, non-state voluntary organizations" (pp. 3-4) but intricately intertwined with the power and function of the state. The independence of CSOs from the state is therefore dubious.

Subscribing to Schak and Hudson, Johan Saravanamuttu (1997), using his survey of civil societies across the region, declares that CSOs are weak compared to the power of the state because they "have had their incipient features shaped primarily by the economic milieu engendered by a dominant state structure," rather than having grown organically out of politics (p. 2). Ben Kerkvliet (2003) says that while there are several budding and emerging CSOs in Vietnam, they continue to be highly constrained by the state. In spite of their peaceful advocacies for reforms in government institutions, laws, and communication and media, they are not allowed to criticize Communist Party leaders or officials, the military, and national policies, and thus cannot be unreservedly "political" lest they lose what space they have (pp. 15-16).

David Brown and David Martin Jones (1995) avow that the dominant party regime in Singapore has effectively restrained the political

participation and free exchange of ideas among the middle class. This renders the process of democratization in illiberal democratic Singapore "the expansion of political participation and consultation within the limits defined by the state" rather than the project of an adversarial civil society. (p. 84; also in Jones and Brown 1994). In a later study of Jones (1998), he finds out that a "modular civil society" – one premised on the differentiation of political and socioeconomic spheres – is not emerging in the region but a "political change reflects a conservative, managerial strategy to amplify political control by forging a new relationship with an arriviste middle class (p. 163).

In Malaysia, NGOs were able to perform a central role in both electoral and informal politics since their proliferation from the 1980s until the late 1990s. Their active participation in politics outside the state pressured the latter to open a wider democratic space notwithstanding the presence of institutional constraints that inhibit the promotion of human rights and advancement of the rule of law – less independent judiciary, controlled media, and employment of the Internal Security Act (ISA), among others. Francis Loh (2003) argues that Malaysians disillusioned with political parties and electoral politics precipitated CSOs to engage in informal politics. The political mobilization of CSOs did not only offer the venues for participation outside the channels of electoral politics, but also permit them to work with opposition political parties that eventually helped "to enrich those parties as well as hasten the process of political reform" (see also Weiss 2006). However, Saliha Hassan (2002) warns that NGOs need to be aware of both exclusionary tendencies and state co-optation to enjoy the expanding space for democratic participation.

Gerard Clarke's (1998) in-depth study of the Philippines notes that NGOs both strengthen and weaken civil society. He illustrates how state-civil society collaboration fortifies the state and expands civil society political participation. His study shows that civil society is less concerned with its autonomy from the state when they can achieve their objectives through a strategic alliance with the state.

Image Credit: cnn.com/news/news/regions/612240175/held-[illegible]-maute-in-marawi-armm-gov/story

Indonesia, according to Robert Hefner (2000), is an Islamic state that supports "democracy, voluntarism, and a balance of countervailing powers in a state and society" (pp. 12-13). He notes the emergence of a Habermasian public sphere in Muslim Indonesia by highlighting "civil pluralist Islam." Further, he says that:

> *…this democratic Islam insists that formal democracy cannot prevail unless government power is checked by strong civic organisations. At the same time... civil associations and democratic culture cannot thrive unless they are protected by the state that respects society by upholding its commitment to the rule of law. (p.13).*

Overall, civil society in the region may not be a consistent force for democratization or so staunchly independent from the state as most Western literature presumes, yet it may still be an important space, among others, for political engagement and transformation. This recalibration of the concept "civil society" offers a clearer lens on the notion of civil society-state nexus in the region more generally. Furthermore, Alagappa (2004) concludes, among others, in his volume Civil Society and Political Change in Asia that Asian civil societies bear features of both neo-Tocquevillian/liberal democratic (associational) and neo-Gramscian/New Left (cultural and ideological frames) with the former gaining ascendancy as state institutions gain legitimacy.

Although there has been a proliferation of CSO, it has not resulted in the institutionalization of non-state public sphere. CSOs generally have yet to establish themselves as an independent and autonomous entity from the state. While CSOs have checked the power of the state on the one hand, and influenced the political dynamics of communities on the other, interactions between these two spheres vary significantly in contemporary Southeast Asia. The opportunities for civil society to engage with government may be limited in countries where civil society structures are weak or non-existent and conversely, may be boundless in countries where civil society is robust and vigorous.

CHALLENGES FACING CSOS AND STATE RELATIONS

Given the colonial history of Southeast Asian countries, except Thailand which served as a buffer state between the British and French empires, and difficulties encountered by leaders to building their nation-state after their respective independence owing to numerous rebel groups seeking power, the relationship between state and civil society is tainted with mistrust. Many governments are deeply suspicious of civil society, and would actively resist any national or international effort to boost its power relative to the state.

Sumpter (2018) opines that security forces engaged with counter-terrorism are "not accustomed to working with community stakeholders and civil society organisations." He further elaborates:

> *Whether due to past allegations from NGOs of human rights abuses, or government agencies simply perceiving themselves more capable, the reluctance to allow local actors to take control of CVE (Controlling Violent Extremism) initiatives in the West is even more pronounced in post-authoritarian nations.*

This predicament results in a poor engagement between civil society and state. Cooperation, coordination, and exchange of information related to terrorism between civil society and government cannot materialize in a hostile environment. It was even accounted that a number of CSOs in Indonesia having CVE programmes are not being coordinated nor harmonized with the efforts of the state, hence lead to wastage of resources (Sumpter 2018).

The dilemma in establishing a working relationship between civil society and state is compounded when one operates in a less democratic and less politically open society, in an authoritarian or anocratic state. In such situation, radicalization is not atomized but open and widespread -- deepening the conflict between contending forces and widening the fissures of society amid parties, ethnicities, social groups, and ideologies.

The inability of autocratic and anocratic regimes in SEA to accommodate civil society or provide CSOs reasonable democratic space to engage in socio-economic activities and political reform endeavours on the notion that they threaten the stability of the state does not rest on any material basis. A study by Jeong-Woo and Murdie (2018) yielded no evidence proving that legal restrictions on civil society diminish the number of terrorist attacks within the country. Accordingly:

> *… the number of restrictive legal measures and the sheer existence of such measures didn't achieve statistical significance. Their results remained robust even after controlling for the factors associated with various national economic and political characteristics, including GDP per capita and the level of democracy.*

Generally, Southeast Asian political elites have restrictive attitude towards CSOs as the latter speak out against human rights abuses, demand resolution of local grievances, and clamour for social justice. However, it has been an established fact that restricting CSOs from undertaking their legitimate functions simply exacerbate the risk of future terror. Greer and Watson (2016) argue that traditional "retributive" anti-terror approaches -- which include military or police action and legal imprisonment – though urgently needed, "aggrieve or isolate populations vulnerable to radicalization." They claim that "retributive approaches do little to reduce recidivism rates or disrupt the underlying cycles of anger and grievance central to radicalization."

Singapore's multi-stakeholder collaboration and grassroots approach, despite a less democratic society, is worth mentioning. Its Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG),[2] is a voluntary group of ulama and asatizah (Islamic scholars and teachers) in Singapore, has been

deemed successful in countering extremism through a "restorative" approach. Its mission is to restore and rectify the "misinterpretation" of Islamic concepts and disrupt or counter the narratives assumed central to radicalization. It works within the "hearts-and-minds" strategies which is aimed at understanding one's personal motivations and refocussing them to a more constructive venture. Similarly, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiya, two of Indonesia's largest Muslim civil societies, launched programs to counteract ISIS narratives. Following the January 2015 Indonesian terror attacks, NU denounced ISIS through the social media under the hashtag #KamiTidakTakut (#WeAreNotAfraid).

WHAT IS TO BE DONE? ENGAGING CIVIL SOCIETY AND MITIGATING TERRORISM

It is important to understand that civil society engagement is about participation and partnership with the state. Contracting an institutional relationship, either formal or informal, with the state is complementary, not a rivalry, to parliamentary democracy or representative democracy. Citizen participation carries its own legitimacy; it does not need to borrow its legitimacy from representation, not even to any institutions or instrumentalities of government. Its legitimacy emanates from what it does. The legitimacy of CSOs and their networks are bolstered by the validity and integrity of their ideas, by the values and interests they promote, and by the issues and programmes they care about. CSOs provide the platform and channel to variegated voices of social groups and causes of marginalized sectors which the state needs to hear and act upon. Rosand (2009) moreover imparts that CSOs can promote a culture of tolerance and pluralism and play a strategic role in protecting local communities, countering extremist ideologies, and dealing with political violence.

CSOs are important to every society, regardless of regime and state system not only because they reflect peoples' concern but also due to their potential of filling in the imperatives of socio-economic and political development. And through them, society can get things done better either by offering an alternative system of delivering public goods and services or providing unorthodox strategies in achieving development goals and objectives. CSOs are not only effective agents and facilitators of change agents but also effective institutions in mitigating politico-cultural exclusion and socio-economic marginalization of the poor. Although CSOs are neither elected, thus not accountable to the electorate, nor have any contractual relationship with the governed and cannot claim any form of representation, their limitations constitute a comparative advantage since their sense of virtual independence, in whatever manner or form give them relative freedom, flexibility, and space imperative in national and good governance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

PARTNERSHIP

As the UN PVE's Plan of Action has identified the lack of socio-economic opportunities, marginalization and discrimination, poor governance, and violations of human rights and the rule of law as key "push" factors, i.e., the conditions conducive to violent extremism and the structural context from which it emerges, ASEAN member states could develop their respective multi-disciplinary national PVEs in partnership with CSOs/NGOs -- delineating areas for bilateral and multi-lateral collaboration among SEAn countries – to fortify the social compact against violent extremism through a comprehensive socio-economic, political and cultural plan.

Considering that terrorist and criminal actors operate in both the physical and cyber space, measures to curb terrorism cannot be limited to state actors. It is now an inescapable option that governments of ASEAN states must engage CSOs, the academia and the private sector to prevent and counter violent extremism. Ryacudu (2018) concedes that "around the world, these actors have proven to be creative and effective in crafting initiatives to counter the terrorist threat and promote moderation… civil society actors have a better reach within the respective communities" (p.3).

Partnership could be aligned with the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).[3] The Agenda for Sustainable Development calls on countries to realize 17 SDGs by 2030. It focuses on three dimensions of sustainable development: social, economic and environmental, as well as important aspects related to peace, justice and effective institutions. Nonetheless, goal 16 aims directly to the issue of terrorism as it pursues to "promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels." Goal 16.A specifically states:

> *Strengthen relevant national institutions, including through international cooperation, for building capacity at all levels, in particular in developing countries, to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime. (UN Sustainable Development Goals)*

COMMUNITY WORK

CSOs need to engage proactively with marginalized communities on issues of good governance, protection and defence of civil, political, and cultural rights, and multilateral and inter-disciplinary approaches to poverty reduction and social justice – factors that nurture terrorist acts. Activities in the community that raise awareness on human rights and rule of law are essential in enhancing peoples' participation in the political process deepening the understanding and practice of

democracy and exercising their fundamental rights and freedoms.

It is foremost to realize that if people in the community take ownership over their activities, they will consequently protect and defend their community from any violent incursions regardless where they emanate from. Community stakeholders do recognize the critical issues facing the neighbourhood and will more likely possess the legitimacy required to engage those seen as illegitimate. This engagement ensures "softer" and less militaristic approach to counterterrorism.

In the same way, CSOs can catalyse the creation of safe spaces for discourse and conflicts between individuals and groups in the community are resolved by mutually acceptable means of addressing grievances. Through this process, rifts and tensions in the community are healed even before they flare up into a contagion. CSOs may also consider engaging in outreach activities and take initiatives to address the root causes of terror-related motivations and actions.

EDUCATION

Collier's (2000) study shows that the presence of a high proportion of uneducated young men in society increases the risk of conflict, whereas the greater educational endowment lowers the risk by around 20 per cent each year. The provision of universal primary education would be very important in reducing the incentive to send children to schools especially religious schools which have historically served as a breeding ground of extremists.

Besides, it is vital for CSOs/NGOs as well as state's security forces to comprehend that human rights and rule of law are a valuable framework for developing effective counterterrorism strategies rather than an obstruction. Towards this effort, specific activities may include providing information to school students, youth workers, and police and law enforcement officials on the provisions of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other relevant laws and statutes that protect and defend basic civil, political, and cultural rights of people regardless of religious beliefs, creed, colour, and ideologies. The diversities of people and communities have to be accepted as facts.

MEDIA

Media, such as print media, publishing, the news media, photography, cinema, broadcasting (radio and television), and advertising, has been playing a prominent role in creating and shaping public opinion. They perform effective tools in either strengthening or weakening society; either advancing democratic rule or reinforcing totalitarian or dictatorial regime.

It is therefore essential for CSOs/NGOs to forge a critical but collaborative relationship with the media and the entertainment industry in order to secure a healthy exchange of reliable information, challenge fallacious or inaccurate portrayals of events, and create a constructive debate on issues that relate to public security, human rights, and rule of law. Media engagement would likewise trigger an examination within the media professionals on the manner how minority groups are depicted, religious sects are identified with a certain terrorist organization, and draw attention on their responsibility in forestalling prejudices, discrimination, stereotypes, and unfair or erroneous presentation of individuals or groups.

ADVOCACY AND RESEARCH

Think tanks, academe, educational and research institutes, and other research-oriented CSOs may contribute in producing high-quality evidence-based research in the fields of extremism, terrorism, political violence, and related areas that can be the basis of advocacy, policy formulation, and strategic reforms of the state to effectively mitigate or prevent terrorism. Michaelson (2008) perceives that studies may include surveys on the impact of counter-terrorism measures and factors that lead to support extremist ideas and ideologies and commit acts of violence. He notes further that an increase in "statistical and monitoring work would enable civil society to engage with government in an open and facts-based dialogue about the effectiveness of counter-terrorism measures" (p. 345).

ENDNOTES

[1] The obscurity of the term "terrorism" generally absolves the state or other states from acts of terror either against its own people or people of other states. For instance, how different is the death of about 3,000 innocent people from the World Trade Center in 11 September from more than 500,000 suspected communists who died during American-supported Suharto's regime in Indonesia in 1965?; from 200,000 civilian casualties in East Timor's campaign for self-determination?; from more than 10,000 non-combatant Acehnese killed by Indonesian military since 1976?; from roughly 60,000 Muslims slain, mostly unarmed and defenceless people, at the height of Marcos' campaign against the separatist movement in early to mid-1970s?; from about hundreds of thousands of civilians who lost their lives in America's bombs in Vietnam, Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan among others?; or from 40,000 children who die everyday in Asia, Africa, and Latin America due to poverty, malnutrition, and disease because of state's apathy, corruption, and poor governance?

[2] The Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG), officially launched in 23 April 2003 as a voluntary group consisting of individual ulama and a community of asatizah (Islamic scholars and teachers) in Singapore. It was originally formed to rehabilitate Singaporean Jemaah Islamiyah detainees and their families through counselling but has since expanded to promote a wide range of social discourse on extremism through dialogue sessions, publications, and community engagement in schools, mosques, and online communities. See https://www.rrg.sg/

[3] See https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/ for details

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