

## The Threat of Radical Thinking and Extremism in the Nusantara (Malay Archipelago)

Ancaman Pemikiran Radikal dan Ekstremisme di Nusantara

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### ABSTRACT

*The world has witnessed the emergence of radical and extremist ideology which poses a threat to international security by influencing society towards excessive acts. Radical and extremist ideology is not only limited to certain territories but covers the entire Islamic world including South-east Asia. The evolution of ideologies from the West based on a doctrine of violence leads to conflict or clash of cultures and civilization, especially for societies in South-east Asia. Hence, the purpose of this article is to identify the forms of radical and extremist threat which apply specifically in South-east Asia. In addition, this writing aims to identify methods or measures in handling the issue of radicalism and extremism which occurs in South-east Asian states. Writing methodology is qualitative with a historical and current phenomena approach based on data findings through literature review and document analysis. Research findings conclude that radical and extremist ideology poses a threat to society and state so as to challenge multiculturalism policy of a state. The push and pull factor also plays a role in spreading this ideology within society. Therefore, this article attempts to bring a reply narrative based on pro-active methods and measures in the prevention of and dealing with this complex global issue.*

*Keywords: Threat; radical; extremism; prevention; Nusantara; South-east Asia*

### ABSTRAK

*Dunia menyaksikan kemunculan ideologi radikal dan ekstrem yang boleh mencetuskan ancaman kepada keselamatan antarabangsa dengan mempengaruhi masyarakat kepada tindakan yang melampaui batas. Fahaman radikal dan ekstrem ini bukan sahaja terhad di wilayah tertentu malah mencakupi seluruh dunia Islam termasuklah di Asia Tenggara. Evolusi ideologi dari Barat yang berasaskan doktrin keganasan membawa konflik pertembungan budaya dan peradaban terutamanya masyarakat di Asia Tenggara. Juteru itu, artikel ini adalah untuk mengenal pasti bentuk ancaman radikal dan ekstremisme yang berlaku khususnya di Asia Tenggara. Selain itu, matlamat penulisan ini adalah untuk mengenal pasti kaedah atau langkah dalam menangani isu radikal dan ekstrem yang terjadi di negara Asia Tenggara. Penulisan ini menggunakan kaedah kualitatif menerusi pendekatan sejarah dan fenomena semasa berdasarkan dapatan data melalui tinjauan kepustakaan dan analisis dokumen. Dapatan kajian merumuskan bahawa ideologi radikal dan ekstrem boleh membawa ancaman kepada masyarakat dan negara sehingga mencabar dasar multiculturalism sesebuah negara. Faktor tolakan dan tarikan juga memainkan peranan dalam penyebaran ideologi ini ke atas masyarakat. Justeru itu, artikel ini cuba membawa naratif balas dengan kaedah dan langkah yang pro aktif dalam mencegah dan menangani isu global yang kompleks ini.*

*Kata kunci: Ancaman; radikal; ekstremisme; mencegah; Nusantara; Asia Tenggara*

### INTRODUCTION

The West diverted world attention by placing the 2001 September 11 post tragedy as the commencement of the war on terrorism to war on Islam (Muqtedar Khan 2004). The slogan built upon this ideological platform indirectly dragged Islam into the arena of the clash between the West and Islam, labelled as a religion of violence. As a consequence of the

event, the West was able to continue colonizing all Arab lands until the present by killing Palestinians, Syrians, Iraqis and citizens of other Middle-East states. The Western worldview gave rise to Islamophobia, a phenomenon which triggers conflict between cultures and civilizations. According to Rahimin et al. (2018), the Western worldview is racist and dichotomous in regarding the West as superior to other races, especially the Muslim

society in the world. Hence, the West introduced a new ideology, New-Orientalism as a response to the 2001 September 11 event (Kerboua 2016).

The term Islamophobia was first introduced in the Runnymede Report 1997 based on six key concepts: i) Islam is a static religion and cannot be adapted in the reality of the new world; ii) Islam does not share the same values as other religions; iii) Islam is an archaic, barbaric and irrational religion; iv) Islam is a religion inferior to the West; v) Islam is a religion of violence which supports terrorism; vi) Islam is violent from the point of political ideology (The Runnymede Trust, 1997). Western ideas of thinking which constitute their views against Muslim states undermine the multiculturalism policy of multireligious and multiracial states. The accusation against Islam as the cause of all forms of violence affects relations between religions, in particular, between Islam and other religions (Marranci 2004).

The statement that Islam is a religion of violence, radicalism and extremism clearly contradicts with the goal of Islamic teachings that Islam brings mercy to the entire world. In reality, radical and extremist acts are also committed in the name of other religions. The evolution of radical ideology developed in response to forms of oppression and tyranny perpetrated by the West and is translated as extremist acts in the final phase of Islamic awakening (Siti Zubaidah et al. 2017; Ahmad Munawar et al. 2018). Various Islamic movements emerged in reaction to Western exploitation of the Islamic world, including South-east Asia. Although there are differences in the push and pull factor which lead to radicalism and extremism in the South-east Asian region, the overall inclination is still towards the same goal. South-east Asia has a high density of Muslims, which constitutes 40% of the region's population and more than 15% of the world Muslim population.

Thus it is not surprising that this region is known as the second front after the Middle-east in confronting the issue of global violence (Tan 2003). According to the Soufan Group (2015), statistics up to the year 2015 showed that almost 750 foreign fighters moved from South-east Asia to Syria and Iraq to join militant groups there. And of those who returned to the South-east Asian region, 162 of them returned to Indonesia and about 5 persons returned to Malaysia. Thus, political turmoil in the Middle-East makes room for radicalism and extremism in South-east Asia so as to threaten regional stability (Wan Kamal & S.N. Izah 2014).

## THE TERMINOLOGY OF RADICALISM

The term, radical or radicalism, etymologically originates from the Latin word *Radix* which means root (Kautzer 2016). Radical is also used to mean basic, primary and natural. Synonyms for radical are extreme, extremist, revolutionary, fanatic and militant (Waite 2008). Radicalism also means ideology or beliefs which aspire for drastic political and social changes (IYRES 2017). The European Union (2002: 2) states that radicalisation is a:

Complex phenomenon of individuals or groups becoming intolerant with regard to basic democratic values like equality and diversity, as well as a rising propensity towards using means of force to reach political goals that negate and/or undermine democracy.

Understanding of the term radicalisation is not limited to a belief or political ideology. Wilner and Dubouloz (2010: 22) stated that radicalisation is:

The process by which an individual or group comes to adopt increasingly extreme political, social, or religious ideals and aspirations that either 1) reject or undermine the status quo or 2) reject or undermine contemporary ideas and expressions of freedom of choice.

The concept of radicalisation does not refer to social characteristics but are more focused on social and political changes advocated. In the sociological perspective, radicalisation is divided into two: first, violent radicalisation which stresses on acceptance of violence to achieve particular goals. Second, efforts to teach or accept changes in society, that may or may not be dangerous for democracy or involves threats and violence, to achieve certain goals (Veldhuis & Staun 2009).

Radicalism is an attitude or thinking, consisting of four characteristics: First, there is no tolerance and no appreciation for opinions of others; Second, a fanatic attitude which justifies oneself by putting blame on others; Third, a closed attitude and efforts to appear different; And fourth, a revolutionary attitude, that is inclined to use force to achieve goals. However, radicalisation need not be a threat to society. It is one of the strengths to change for the better such as supporting human rights for freedom and abolition of slavery. It becomes a threat to society only when it is accepted, supported, acted upon or involved with violence (OSCE 2014).

Based on the definitions submitted above, radicalism is an individual or group ideology which insists on or urges immediate and rapid changes.

Radicalism is said to be rejection or refusal to accept an existing system by breaking oneself loose from various life, political, educational, religious, institutional dimensions and social matters (Wan Kamal et al. 2014a).

### THE TERMINOLOGY OF EXTREMISM

The Guideline for Prevention of Extremism and Radical Ideology among Youth and the Community issued by the Institute for Youth Research Malaysia (IYRES), Ministry of Youth and Sports (KBS) quoted the definition of extremism given by the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) in the year 2014 that extremism is the ideology of an individual who is too bigoted, extreme or excessive about religion but does not have a clear understanding of the Islamic religion, especially relating to *Akidah* (creed) and Islamic laws. According to Yusuf al-Qaradawi (1990), extremism literally means to be as far as possible from the midpoint. Figuratively, it refers to a similar isolation or remoteness in religion and thought including attitude. Among the effects of extremism is exposure to danger and insecurity. An individual or group which subscribes to extremism is known as extremist.

Interpretation of religious extremist is subjective, that is, based on the view of the interpreter. For some people, an armed Muslim group which acts militantly is said to be a religious extremist and terrorist. However, some other people may view this militant group as *Mujahidin* who strive to fight oppression and injustice inflicted by the Western world on the Muslim world. Nikhil Kanade (2016) stated that politics and religion are combined in using the term *Jihad* in a certain context leading to war and conquest. The statement submitted clearly shows that extremist groups use the name of Islam in spreading an ideology mixed with divisiveness in religion in order to justify the group's plans and actions. Hogan (2005), in supporting this statement, states that extremism occurs when an extremist group with a certain ideology threatens others with ideology opposed to the group's ideology.

Noresah Baharom (2007) stated that the term extremism has a similar meaning to the term radicalism which means an ideology (including stream and belief) which aspires for drastic changes in the socio-political arena. Thus, this attitude which excessively aspires for drastic changes causes a group of radical humans or with radical

ideology to be inclined towards executing a mission by disregarding any laws. This group subscribes to the Machiavellian (Nicolo Machiavelli, d.1527AD) philosophy that the ends justify the means. (Zul'Azmi & A. Sunawari, 2015). In this context, manifestation of the meaning of extreme illustrates an extremist as using force and violence leading to destruction and harm not only to individuals but to the surrounding community as well.

### CHARACTERISTICS OF RADICAL AND EXTREME THINKING

Yusuf al-Qardawi (1990) stated that there are six signs of a religious extremist or one who subscribes to radical ideology or extremism:

1. Fanatic about an opinion and does not acknowledge others' opinions. He does not take into account *Maslahah* (public interest), the objectives of *Shariah* and present reality. He is not open-minded to hold discussions with others to seek and take opinions that are supported by stronger argument and reason.
2. Imposes on others something that is not obliged by Allah and takes a tough stance by rejecting permissible concessions and easing of hardship.
3. Being stern at the wrong time and place such as being strict in problems of legal rulings (*Furuk'*) and contentious legal matters (*Khilafiyah*) on which jurists are divided in their opinions, while core matters are forgotten, that is, to correct the *Akidah* (creed).
4. Coarse in mingling, abusive in speech and harsh and rigid in conveying *Dakwah* (preaching).
5. Prejudiced toward others by making unfounded accusations, concealing others' goodness and at the same time exaggerating their mistakes.
6. Arbitrarily declares someone as an apostate or unbeliever (*Takfir*) thus permitting taking the person's life and confiscation of his property. *Takfirs* every person who commits major sins, who does not accept his ideas and thinking and does not pledge allegiance to the group.

Based on the above characteristics by al-Qaradawi, it is clear that radical ideology leads to extreme acts which deviate from Islamic teachings. In addition, factor of ignorance and lack of knowledge is also one of the causes for *Takfir* of others who differ in opinion, without *Tabayyun* (verification) based on true knowledge (Wan Kamal et al. 2014b).

## THE HISTORY OF RADICALISM AND EXTREMISM

Radicalism and extremism is not something new, it became a phenomenon since some time ago. It refers to an excessive attitude, practice of old and harsh teachings and has existed since pre-Islamic times. This attitude frequently happens in religious practice. This ideology is divided into two, first, the *Akidah* (creed) aspect and second, in the practice of religious teachings. Examples of the first are: faith in the Christian doctrine of Trinity which exalts Prophet Isa (a.s.) to the status of God. The Shi'a Rafidah adherents are radical and extreme by elevating 'Ali bin Abu Talib (r.a.) as superior to Abu Bakar bin Abu Qahafah (r.a.), 'Umar bin al-Khattab (r.a.), and 'Uthman bin 'Affan (r.a.). Some of them even regard Ali bin Abu Talib (r.a.) as higher in status than the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) himself. More than that, some Shi'a followers regard 'Ali bin Abu Talib (r.a.) as the *Dhat* (essence or being) of Allah. Second, in religious practice; an example of excessiveness is worship or prayer (Ibadah or Solah) throughout the night depriving of sleep and so on (Afroni, 2016).

Extremists may be viewed as intimidating and alarming with adverse effects on the public. Extremism can be in various forms such as claims, views, action, movements, struggles or crusades, teachings or activities which are radical or extreme (Abdul Rahim 2002). The process of radicalism and extremism may be broken down into four phases. According to Silber and Bhatt (2007) the four phases comprise of pre-radical, self-identification, indoctrination and the final phase, *Jihad*. The first phase, pre-radical is where the individual lives a normal life before getting involved with terrorist activities. The second phase is self-identification wherein the individual is interested to learn and understand radical ideology, indirectly forming irrational thinking, in addition to being influenced by the push and pull factor such as social, economic, political and personal, leading to terrorism. The third phase is indoctrination whereby the individual is inclined to learn radical ideology with other like-minded individuals under an ideology mentor. The final phase is *Jihad* whereby the individual receives and obeys commands and joins in *Jihad* regarding himself as a *Mujahidin* or holy warrior. Through these four phases stated, the individual begins with radical ideology and ends with extremist acts.

It is clear that there are various factors which contribute to individual involvement in militancy

before an extreme attitude and action is revealed. Every member in social community is responsible to ensure that radical ideology that deviates from the Islamic path is not propagated to any levels of the community. Not to mention the slogan to install the caliphate system and redeem sins through *Jihad* and martyrdom as well as reward of paradise in the hereafter (Mohd Mizan et al. 2016). This religious slogan is then exploited by non-Muslim groups who accuse Islam of being a radical and extreme religion.

There are many radical and extreme issues seen in the current context. Among the political issues which occurred in Moscow, Russia was when thousands of supporters of the opposition leader, Alexei Navalny, held a mass protest to demand for the resignation of President Vladimir Putin. However, the demonstration turned extreme when police used tear gas bombs and hit the supporters to disperse them (Agerholm 2018). And in Armenia, among about 15,000 protestors who opposed a hike in electricity tariff, one of them had sewn up his mouth so that he could not speak or eat and was able to only drink water. The society believed that a rise in electricity cost would cause a rise in prices of other necessary goods and services (Adrineh 2015).

In addition, the environmental issue much campaigned by activists the world over is also categorised as radical and extreme although it is a positive action for a true cause. For example, some societies in the world have taken to court their own governments and big oil and energy companies for failing to act and fulfil their responsibility to safeguard against the risk of dangerous matters which cause climate change in the world (UN Environment 2017). A rally of a right wing (white nationalist) group in New York turned violent when a car rammed a white extremist and the group that opposed the demonstration. This threat caused the Governor of Virginia, Terry McAuliffe to announce an emergency order after one person died and two policemen were killed in a helicopter crash outside of Virginia. The violence was caused by bigotry and hatred which has long existed between the right wing group and anti-demonstrators. It caused threat of civil disorder, death, commotion, destruction of public property and injury to the public (Stolberg & Rosenthal 2017).

Based on the incidents or phenomena which happened in the abovementioned state, radical and extreme issues appear to cover not only wars in Syria and other Muslim states, but unwarily, other countries as well. Thus, it is unfair for the West to label Islam as a religion of terror because radical and

extreme issues occur not only to Islam but to other religions as well, in particular, Christianity (Anwar et al. 2013).

#### THREAT OF RADICALISM AND EXTREMISM IN SOUTH-EAST ASIA

According to Sara Zeiger (2016), compendiously, South-east Asia is now exposed to the risk of three threats of violent extremism. Firstly, radicalization, recruitment and individual movement from this region to Iraq and Syria, and their return to launch attacks in South-east Asia. This threat appears to be increasing from time to time whenever there is a high probability of terrorist fighters' return to South-east Asia, bringing with them the ideology, trained skills and international extremist networking. The fighters return to cooperate with existing recruit cells and as coordinators for launching minor attacks at the local level. The second threat is individual radicalisation inspired by international conflict and carrying out attacks within the state. In this case, the individual does not have any relationship or connection with a terrorist group, but is nevertheless determined to launch an attack from being inspired by the group ideology. This type of attack frequently happens in South-east Asia including Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. The third threat is the relevance of global extremist ideology with local, historical and inter-regional conflict leading to the alliance of an existing local network to Daesh (ISIL) or al-Qaeda.

Gerard Chaliand and Arnaud Blin (2007) stated that al-Qaeda centred in Afghanistan and her allies are the mastermind for the dissemination of the ideology, financial support and operation of militant groups in South-east Asia. This includes the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) centred in the Philippines, *Lashkar Jundullah* in Indonesia, *Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia* (KMM) in Malaysia and *Jemaah Islamiyyah* (JI) operating in Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Singapore. The Daesh or ISIL use the original ideology of al-Qaeda after the latter's influence increasingly declined in South-east Asia and made Daesh or ISIL one of the most influential among the groups including JI, ASG and Jemmah Ansharout Tauhid (United Nations Security Council 2015).

The groups, JI, Mujahidin Indonesia Timur (MIT), Tawheed wal Jihal (TWJ), ASG and Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) have pledged allegiance to ISIL. Thus, with this

regional cooperation, this *Jihad* group is once again enlivened and emboldened after being contained by the state security authorities in South-east Asia. The increasing influence of militant groups has raised concerns about state security in South-east Asia not only for the Muslim community but the non-Muslim community as well.

In addition, the threat of radicalism and extremism may be viewed in terms of *Akidah*, *Shariah*, human rights and security. In a Periman Paper [76] (2014) it was stated that the threat in terms of *Akidah* is the exploitation of Islamic teachings. Terrorist groups have misinterpreted the Islamic concept of *jihad* in saying that an Islamic state can only be established through a *Jihad* war. Moreover, this militant group has also declared Muslims who do not go along with their ideology as unbelievers (Kafir) and made permissible shedding their blood. Another issue is the rejection of the governance system of a Muslim state which does not implement its particular mould of *Shariah* system.

In terms of *Shariah* and human rights, the militant group challenges Allah's laws by making women as sex slaves using the term *Jihad* sex. In addition, disseminating the threat of killing human activists and foreign reporters through the social media for the purpose of terrorizing the enemies such as in the case of American citizens, James Foley and Steven Sotloff, and British citizens, David Haines and Alan Henning. This militant group also acts harshly by using brutal force on people regardless of whether they are women or children.

In terms of security, this ideology rejects parliamentary democratic practice because it does not conform to the ideology's Islamic requirements. The threat of this ideology becomes increasingly dangerous with the appearance of the Islamic State (IS) which has emboldened the spirit of regional *Jihad* militant groups, once contained from spreading by state security authorities. The oppressed Muslim population including in Indonesia, Myanmar and Philippines have been called by the radical movement of al-Baghdadi to rise up against injustice perpetrated by their governments, further impacting the region's stability.

#### MEASURES TO PREVENT RADICALISM AND EXTREMISM

Muslim countries in the world are not excluded from the international community in formulating a policy to combat terrorism. As example, the Saudi Arabia

government formed the Islamic Countries Military Alliance which involve several other Muslim countries. Pakistan formulated a policy to oppose terrorist activities in a 64 Point National Internal Security Policy. UAE legislated Anti-Terrorism laws and Anti- Hatred Statute as a measure to deal with radicalism and extremism in the emirates and their citizens' abroad (Rafique 2017). Muslim states formulated an anti-terrorism policy to prove their stance to the world about the danger of extremism. The Australian Parliament passed a law, the Counter Terrorism Legislation Amendment (Foreign Fighters) in October 2014, which is also a supplement to the Anti-Terrorism Act 2005 (Parliament of Australia 2014). The purpose is to widen the jurisdiction of the security agency and to facilitate identification and prosecution of her citizens who go to conflict zones. The United Kingdom strengthened her law, Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures Act 2011, by giving the authorities power to revoke the passports of UK citizens who desire to go to states in conflict (United Kingdom Government, 2011). The US government enhanced the Patriot Act 2001 by allowing the government and relevant authorities to access social media websites in order to obtain information on citizens involved in radicalism and extremism (United States Government 2001).

Malaysian Parliamentarians unanimously agree to reject terrorism during a presentation of the White Paper. Among other strategies, Malaysia has legislated relevant statutes, including the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), Special Offences Security Measures Act (SOSMA) and National Security Council Act (NSCA). POTA and NSCA are supplements to the existing laws, the Prevention of Crimes Act (POCA), Penal Code and SOSMA. All the laws stated are measures to eradicate terrorism and threats within the state even though committed abroad. In October 2016, the Malaysian government launched the first terrorism prevention force, National Special Operations Force (NSOF) to stem terrorism in its early stage in operations to prevent, battle and eradicate threats of terrorism (Periman Paper [76], 2014).

Thailand has taken anti-terrorism measures in cooperation with USA and Australia. The Thai government participates in efforts to eradicate international terrorism through regional bodies such as Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and ASEAN Regional Forum. In the years 2015 to 2016, the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) under the government has the responsibility

to oversee internal security by running counter-extremism programs for the Muslim-Malay community in southern Thailand. The cooperation of Muslim leaders and non-governmental organisations is to spread moderation in Islam (Counter Extremism Project 2018a).

In dealing with counter extremism, Indonesia first discussed laws in the year 2016 to arrest citizens suspected of being terrorists as a prevention measure. In addition, the Indonesian government also took steps to prevent radical and extremist ideology which begin in prison because it was discovered that inmates spread such ideology to other inmates. In the year 2010, the Indonesian government passed the Presidential Regulation No. 46, which supplements the Anti-Terrorism Law No. 15 (2003). Based on this regulation, an interceptive body, *Badan Pencegahan Keganasan Nasional* (BNPT) was established to oversee the coordination of all existing anti-terrorism units in Indonesia (Counter Extremism Project 2018b).

The Philippines Congress passed the Republic Act No. 9372 known as the State Peace and Protection of Our People from Terrorism Act or better known as the Human Security Act 2007. This is the primary pillar of the anti-terror legislation of the Philippines. By virtue of this Act was established the Anti-Terrorism Council which heads other agencies in implementing the Republic Act. The Philippines government also established a National Counter-Terrorism Action Group (NACTAG) responsible for investigations and finding evidence for prosecution in the event of a terror attack. In the year 2013, the government passed the Republic Act No. 10365 to amend the Anti-Money Laundering (AML) Act 2001. This amendment has lengthened the list of criminals under the AML. The financing of terrorism is dealt with under the Prevention and Suppression of Financing Terrorism Act 2012 (Counter Extremism Project 2018c).

In other ASEAN states such as Myanmar and Brunei, there are special laws to deal with terrorist threats. Singapore and Brunei still use the Internal Security Act (ISA) to detain radicals and extremists.

## CONCLUSION

The rise of radical and extremist ideology in this region cannot be underestimated. Even though South-east Asian states provide their own preventive control system, inadequate and incomprehensive handling would pave the way for the emergence of religious radicalism and extremism. It is difficult

for Muslim societies to accept terrorism because Islam itself connotes peace and harmony. It needs to be stressed here that not all radical and extreme ideologies in religious interpretation gives rise to such a culture. A culture of radical and extremist thinking sets apart or isolates from mainstream thinking the group which advocates it and is thus capable of causing divisions in the society, state and even international relations. Although not all humans with extremist thinking must be terrorists, if there is no adequate control, they are easily influenced to join in the terrorist network.

The radical and extremist narrative needs to be in line with current developments. Various initiatives, measures and methods of containment need to be intensified in preventing and combating terrorism in the South-east region. Thus, ASEAN states need to cooperate and unite against all access, especially social media which may attract sympathy and trap members of the general public. At the same time, a special law need to be legislated and empowered to facilitate authorities to act. The concept of *wasatiyah* (moderation) needs to be applied at every level of society in South-east Asia as a reaction to global terrorism in this region.

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