

DE-RADICALIZATION PROGRAMS IN SOUTH-EAST ASIA: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF REHABILITATION PROGRAMS IN MALAYSIA, THAILAND, INDONESIA & SINGAPORE

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ABSTRACT

This paper discuss on the comparison of the approach used in de-radicalization programs in four countries of Southeast Asia. Before de-radicalisation programs being discuss in detail, definition and process of radicalisation is introduced first. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) (2006) stated there are four stage processes of radicalization which is pre-radicalization, self-identification, indoctrination and action. Based on some literature review and observation on de-radicalization program implemented in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand, each country has their own methods in counterterrorism. The programs bring positive impacts to the society at large. However, there are some similarities in the approach used by the four countries which is through counselling programs that emphasized on communication between the terrorist and psychologist. Various factors contributed in the involvement in terrorism based on the result. Therefore, this program guides them to return into the right path of the teaching of Islam which encourages its follower to conduct a moderate ways of life and avoidance of violence that portrays negative image of Islam to the worldwide. In addition, the society should play roles in motivating the former terrorist so they do not return to the radical ideology. At the end, the effect of de-radicalization programs will be seen and most of the programs implemented were succeed.

Keywords: de-radicalization, terrorism, counter terrorism, Jemaah Islamiyyah (JI), Islamic State (IS), Southeast Asia countries.

Introduction

Since 2004, the term radicalization has become central of terrorism studies and counter-terrorism policy-making. In 2002, United State of America President George W. Bush has announced that Southeast Asian region is a second layer in the so called 'global war against terrorism' (Aslam, 2013). The point from his statement is that Southeast countries such as Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia had become a hot spot for terrorism. After the end of threats and terrorism by the group of Al-Qaeda, the world becomes inhibited by the trait of Islamic State (IS), the new terrorist group. This group being militant and extreme with various methods and different modus operandi, but actually all of them shared same ideology with the earlier group. The ideology is to create chaos and panic in society and was aimed for country's social and political instability.

Most of the groups that are engaged in terrorism bring the concept of Jihadist but they actually misuse the term of jihad. Mainstream Muslim scholars define jihad as a struggle against sin that can sometimes be manifested by actual fighting provided this is governed by rules (Chertoff, 2008). Terrorist groups ignore the specific restrictions of jihad but fight the West on the basis of this 'justification' (Chertoff, 2008). Rather Al Qaeda argued they are not bound by the *sharia* restrictions on jihad since they perceive a war to be a 'just war' (Martin, 2010).

Misinterpretation of Islam is considered as the justification of the terrorist ideology. Youngsters that are involved in terrorist activities are being influenced by the propaganda touted. Consequently, their raw minded find shortcuts for past sins through involvement in the IS, especially in acts of suicide bombers. There are also the victims affected by the Quran and Hadith are deliberately misinterpreted by the IS as a justification for their involvement in the violence. The concept of suicide attacks among the militant groups that claimed to win Islam actually began in the early 1980s. Al-Qaeda's *Jihadi Salafi* ideology adhered

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to the first launch suicide attacks on the US Embassy in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 and followed up with 911 attacks on 11 September 2001. This is the *Jihadi Salafi* ideology held by groups like JI and the latest IS. JI militants were the first to launch suicide attacks in Southeast Asia with the attack in Bali in October 2002 that killed 202 people. The *Jihadi Salafi* ideology hinges on a belief that comes from a country in the Middle East, namely in short, to justify the blood and property of non-Muslims and Muslims who are not from their group and fight for the establishment of an Islamic state through armed violence. They reject the democratic election system and the country's constitution. Ideology is now continuing to thrive around the world, including Malaysia, although Al-Qaeda and JI have been paralyzed.

The terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda, Jemaah Islamiyyah (JI) and the recent group Islamic State (IS) have their own strategy and modus operandi in recruiting, communicating with the potential victim to be part of them. We can see that most of the detainees involve in radicalism are among teenagers. The major factor that caused the involvement of teenagers is by social media attack. The word 'attack' is refer to the ideology that are widespread in the social media, where we can say that social media has become the primary field of communication for youth nowadays. The terrorist choose to use social media as their 'soft attack' because of low cost needed, ease of access, spread anonymity, decentralization, global connectivity and lacking regulation which played an important role in the dissemination of radical messages, the creation of virtual ideological community, the raising of funds, the communication between member of terrorist organization, the radicalization of vulnerable individual and to extend the recruitment of new members. Therefore, the terrorist groups manage to fully exploit the social media as their main medium to spread the ideology and recruit members. Based on some interviews towards the detainees, most of the reason to get involve in radicalization is because they have family and social problems.

Definition of Radicalization

Radicalization has increasingly been subjected to scientific studies, a universally accepted definition of the concept is still to be developed and not defined officially yet. Nevertheless, there are some definitions developed by the researchers to describe radicalisation. Definitions of radicalisation most often centre around two different foci: 1) on violent radicalisation, where emphasis is put on the active pursuit or acceptance of the use of violence to attain the stated goal; 2) on a broader sense of radicalisation, where emphasis is placed on the active pursuit or acceptance of far-reaching changes in society, which may or may not constitute a danger to democracy and may or may not involve the threat of or use of violence to attain the stated goals (Veldhuis et. al).

Process of Radicalization

Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) (2006) stated there are four stage processes of radicalization which is pre-radicalization, self-identification, indoctrination and action which have similarities to what had been further explain by Silber & Bhatt (2007) regarding the four levels of the radicalization which consist of pre-radicalization phase, self-identification phase, indoctrination phase and jihadization phase.

First stage on pre-radicalization stage was the condition in which the individual live a normal life before they started to involve in the militant activities. In this stage most of the individual were not exposed to and adopted the radical ideology as their own ideology. The second stage was self-identification stage the individual keen to learn and understand the radical ideology which indirectly led him to form irrational thinking coupled with internal as well as external factors such as economic, social, political and personal, which plunges into the terrorism. The third stage was indoctrination stage where the individual tends to learn the radical ideology and gathered together with the other individuals who have a shared similar way of thinking under the guidance of mentor ideology. Last stage the jihadization stage which the individual accept and obey the leader command in participating in jihad and self-designate themselves as holy warriors or mujahedeen. Ultimately, the group will begin operational planning for the jihad or a terrorist attack. These will also include planning, preparation and execution of attack.

In this case clearly show that the various factors contributed in the individual's involvement in militants before they clearly demonstrate their involvement in the violence. Each party in the social community is responsible for ensuring the radical ideology is not spread into every level of society which offers attractive slogans, to show a dissatisfaction or revenge against the society, promise an adventure to recognize as the heroism and heaven in the Hereafter especially to young people. In order to fight against terrorism, efforts and preventive measure have been taken. Among them was the implementation of programs de-radicalization program that widely applied around the country in the Middle East, South East Asia and other region which have potential in terrorism.

Definition of De-radicalization

The de-radicalization can be understood as the process of changing the attitudes and behaviours of former terrorist to reject violence as an ideological, religious or political goal that may cause harm to national security, instability in politics and economy and threaten the human life. However many scholar had defined de-radicalization differently. According to Ashour (2008) defines de-radicalization as, " the process in which radical group reverses its ideology and de-legitimizes the use of violent methods to achieve political goals while moving towards an acceptance of gradual, political and economic changes within a pluralistic context".

It can be seen de-radicalization have given new impetus to the former militants to lead a normal life and adheres to the religion that emphasizes the oneness of God, faith in things unseen and encouragement to do good and shun evil and reward for allowing its followers into heaven in The Day of Judgement as promised God. In addition, it is consistent with the teachings of religion

especially the religion of Islam that encourages every believer to practice moderation in all actions to enable them to earn rewards and enter into Paradise during the Judgement Day as promised by God. It is contrary to the teachings radical ideology which encouragement on the use of violence and at the same time risking the lives of innocent people to meet the demands and interests of unscrupulous individuals.

Meanwhile Neumann (2010) had explained on the importance of the society to accept the former terrorist will shape whether the implementation of de-radicalization success or failure. Most of the time, after de-radicalization program finished and the former terrorist back into the society, it is difficult for them to get public acceptance for fear that they might still not fully recovered after undergoing a de-radicalization program or attempt to return to the militant group. It could also be argued the disengage individuals who live in hostile and troubled areas, would be vastly different from trying to disengage someone in a democratic society such as in Australia or Great Britain.

For example in Afghanistan, individuals are constantly surrounded by trauma and are continually bombarded with the harsh realities of living in that country. This would make it difficult to implement and maintain the “after-care” required for those being rehabilitated, and de-radicalisation programs would simply fail as a result of re-exposure to radicalising influences. Hence, societies play a vital role in providing encouragement and financial assistance to the former militants to help them lead a normal life to enable them to fully recover from terrorism.

De-Radicalization in Indonesia

After the confession made by the members of *Jamaah Islamiyyah* (JI) by exposing the terrorist act, the Indonesian government had launched several campaigns in order to minimise the damage made by the terrorist. Diverse measure had been taken such as civil defence, internal security, border security and increasing public acknowledgement on terrorist threat. To fight against the terrorist, security measure had been used to prevent the widely spread of radical ideologies. Indonesian government had to establish Indonesia National Counterterrorism Agency (*Badan Nasional Pencegahan Anti-Keganasan*) had been included in Indonesia's counterterrorism strategy immediately following the Bali Bombing incident in 2002. This agency plays important roles in counterterrorism and carries out several task including formulating policies, strategies and national programs on counterterrorism; monitoring, analysis and evaluation on counterterrorism; coordination on the implementation of prevention and fighting the propaganda of radical ideology on counterterrorism; and coordination on the implementation of de-radicalization.

Besides, The Indonesia National Counterterrorism Agency also had collaboration with the police by using the “soft” approach in order to prevent the spread of the group's radical ideology. The “soft” strategy refers to put on trust between the prisoners and the converted JI who had claimed going out from the radical ideology to persuade other members to abandon the violence and back to the real meaning of life. For example, Nasir Abbas who was a former Afghanistan militant who trained the Bali bombers. In 2004, after he was released from prison, he was involved in the de-radicalization program and helped track down and arrested his former companion. Apart from that, he also visits his colleagues who had undergone for the imprisonment for terrorist offences and convinced them to stop violence. By providing incentives and getting touch with the detainee's family, this process enables the police officer to put on trust the former detainees' obligation to restore and give new hope to the former detainees.

The persuasion agents such as Nasir Abbas had shown the success in convinced the two dozen former members of JI to cooperate with the government authorities (Sheridan, 2008). By using the persuasion agents also can help the former detainees to build their vocational skills which would allow them to mingle with the social community upon their return from prison. Besides, the police also provide special facilities to the terrorist detainees such as allowing their family to visit them, arranging their airfare, providing better housing facilities, meals, medical treatment and arranging the financial support for the detainee's wedding even during the custody. Therefore, the agency use hard and soft approach in ensure the detainees would be able back to the society and live a life free from radical ideology.

Furthermore, during the imprisonment the terrorist detainees have to through four procedural stages. The first stage is the observation process. At this stage the detainees will be interviewed by the prison officer in charge to address their background regarding their education, religious and family background as well as addressing the main reason they committed the crime. The second stage was when the terrorist detainees who have served one-third of their sentence and had shown good behaviour, they will be moved onto the medium security block. These changes happen to make sure the terrorist detainees will learn responsibility as community members in order to become independent and confident after they are released and could be able to integrate within the society. The third stage is provided for the terrorist detainees who had served for one-half sentences. At this stage they may work in the community near to the prison but still supervised by officers. The last stage the detainees who have served for two-third of the sentence and shown good behaviour. At this stage the detainees are granted parole and permitted to serve the rest of the sentence in the community.

In addition apart of the de-radicalization program in Indonesia also emphasis on providing counselling program for the terrorist detainees. This interactive medium act as the process to change their perception on terrorism and stated such action could have negative impact on national security and threaten the lives of innocent people especially children, women and elderly. Besides, through counselling also provide the opportunity for the detainees to debate the radical ideologies and back to real Islamic teaching based on *Al Quran* and *As Sunnah* as stated by The Prophet Muhammad S.A.W. However the program are still from achieving the desired outcomes as some of the terrorist detainees refuse to cooperate and claim Indonesian government along with the psychologist are *taghout*.

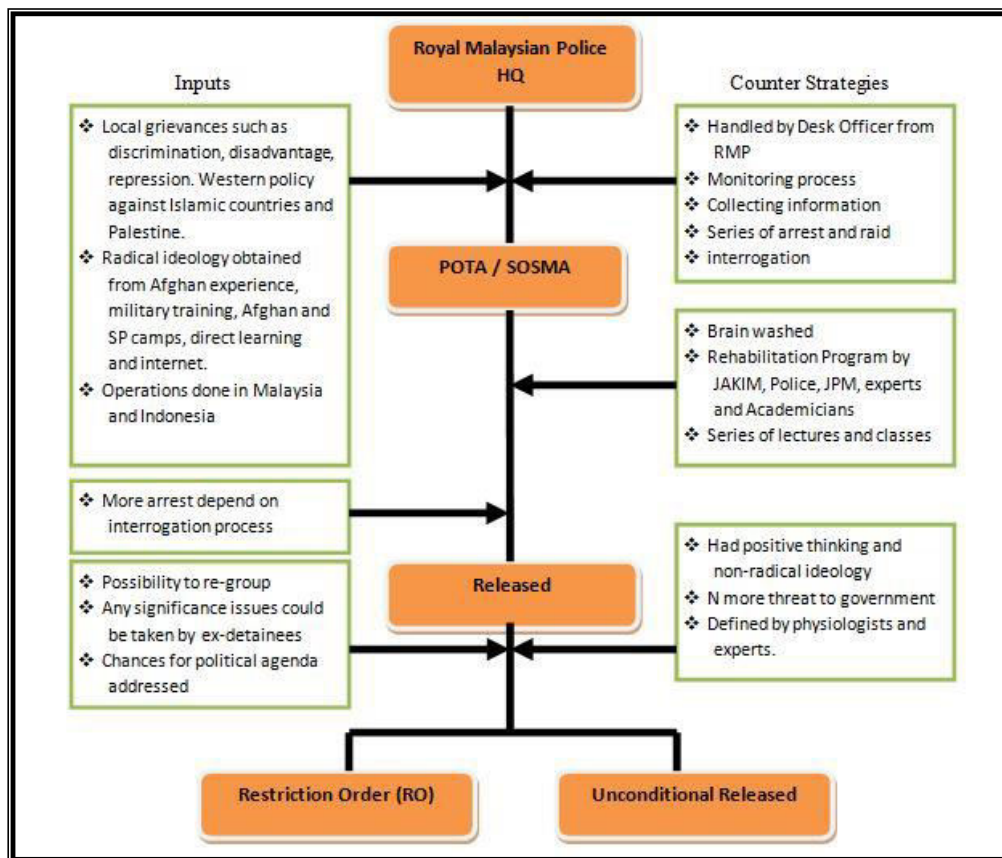
Last but not least, Indonesian government also provide vocational training for terrorist detainees in developing skills to encourage them to become productive and useful to community. Even though this programme is not well funded and comprehensive such as in Saudi Arabia rehabilitation centre but still the program had brought positive impact to the detainees after they release from the prison where during the training they have the opportunity in honing their skills in accordance with the requirement of market nowadays.

De-Radicalization in Malaysia

The major Malaysian de-radicalization initiative is by introducing the Religious Rehabilitation Program. Most of the program is based on re-education and rehabilitation. Re-education focuses on correcting political and religious misconceptions of the militants, while the strategy of rehabilitation is adopted for thorough monitoring of the militants after their release (Noor & Hayat, 2009). Family members of the detainees are also engage to the process by being supported financially when the militants are in detention. After their release, militants are also assisted with reintegration into society. This process helps to make a better understanding towards de-radicalization program. Consider the following chart is the process of De-Radicalization by Malaysian Government.

Process of De-Radicalization by Malaysian Government

Chart 3: The continuing process of de-radicalization and inputs needed by police to encounter threat from militant groups in Malaysia (Aslam, 2015)



As illustrated above, the main responsibility for de-radicalization programs goes to Royal Malaysian Police (PDRM) and the process went through a few stages. After being arrested, detainees were taken to the RMP (special Branch Department) at Bukit Aman, Kuala Lumpur for interrogation. From information obtained, detainees commanded to be detained under the POTA and SOSMA for two years (minimum). Depending on the information given by detainees, more arrests may have happened at this stage. Detainees were put under Restriction Order (RO) after being released but some went on unconditional release. Counter strategies were also implemented by the Malaysian government with co-operation between the RMP (special Branch Department), the Prime Minister Department, the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia and many more (Aslam, 2015).

Rehabilitation is considered as the most important tool in countering radicalism. This is because the religious approach of the rehabilitation program hits the root of the problem. The program conducted by the religious department is about religious counselling to the detainees which helps us to explore and detect their misinterpretations about Islam. The expertise in this area such as *Ustazs* and *Ulamas* have been invited to clarify about aspects of the religious doctrine and their belief system, where

most of the terrorist have wrong perspective (Ali, 2007): At the end of the program, the radical ideology based on *salafi-wahhabism* thinking will have been replaced by more accurate Islamic teachings especially regarding the real meaning and idea of *Jihad*.

To accomplish the de-radicalization program for the detainees, rehabilitation process is divided into four phases. In the first stage, counsellors from JAKIM and the police extricate any negative ideology or twisted Islamic perceptions. Next, counsellors play their role to open up discussions and the misunderstood ideologies are addressed. At this point, every counsellor faced a challenging task as the militants try to defend their understanding. Counsellors must counter this with a smart answer, clear and deep knowledge of Islam, because the terrorist detainee will at first argue that the counsellors are infidels. In the third stage, all twisted Islamic concepts and ideologies are replaced with the correct interpretations of the Quran and Sunnah. After all of these aspects are completed, more comprehensive education about Islam begins.

Besides rehabilitation process for the detainees, Malaysian government also gives an exposure to the detainee's family member in order to break the cycle of indoctrination and to prevent the influence from radical ideology. Usually, the family members must be in shock state and need clarification on what is happening. Therefore, it is crucial for them to know the right interpretation of Islam and making sure the family members do not become victims of the same deviant understanding of Islam. In addition, Malaysian government also support the family members financially by the aim of helping the family survive without their husband, wife or children. This special program may helps them in giving a good perspective and prevent misunderstanding towards the de-radicalization initiative. Other government agencies such as *Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat* (the Social Welfare Department) and *Pusat Zakat* (the State Alms Centre) are helping these families gain financial support for their daily life.

Based on Special Branch director, rehabilitation and de-radicalization programs in combating terrorism and extremist violence have shown a positive sign in Malaysia since they have almost 95 per cent success rate. Most of the detainees that were released had successfully reintegrated and returned to mainstream society while only five per cent of the released detainees returned to their old antics (Ismail, 2016). Special Branch Director, Datuk Seri Muhammad Fuzi Harun said the rehabilitation period must comply with legal provisions under the Prevention of Crime Act (POCA) and Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) which is called as a production order. As a step to avoid relapse cases which would jeopardise the nation's security, this provision is used to give as much input to the detainees or the family members (Ismail, 2016).

De-Radicalization in Singapore

According to Tan (2002) and Desker (2003) explain on the first threat interconnected with the religious ideology and terrorism with the arrest of Jamaah Islamiyyah (JI) terrorist in 2001 and 2002 for attempting to commit violent attacks against the western embassies. This crisis happen as a result of peer pressure from the Middle East which encouraged the Singapore Muslims to join the global militant organization such as Al Qaeda to fight for all oppressed Muslim worldwide (Hong, 2003). This tension also bring hostility between the Muslim and other races in Singapore in practising their religious obligation. The rise of the terrorist attacks by extremist Islamic group worldwide has contributed to inter-religious tensions between the Muslims and others in Singapore (Gopinathan & Sharpe, 2004). Hence, the crisis arise affected trust and confidence levels between various communities.

Meanwhile Singapore de-radicalization program differs compared to other countries in which the government had used a vetting process by the psychologist. This happen when Jamaah Islamiyyah (JI), a militant Islamic organization detained 70 members of the JI that affiliated with Al-Qaeda known as the global militant organization founded by Osama bin Laden. However 40 from 70 members of JI had been released after go through the extensive vetting process. Before the terrorist detainees released from the custody they have to go through several processes in order to make sure they really not involved in the militant activities. In the beginning, they have to screen the potential detainees actively involved in terrorism. Throughout the process the terrorist detainees they will be reviewed by the psychologist and given security assessment. This process is very important in order tries to understand a person's on extreme interpretation regarding their belief in religion and the involvement in militant act.

In addition to make sure the terrorist detainees were not isolated from the community as well as abandon from their relatives, the Singaporean government also offer counselling session through regular house calls to the family members of the terrorist detainees. This would enable to help them feel not isolated in the community and in return to commit in militant activities. Besides, the government also provide financial assistance for the families who have lost income because of the imprisonment as well as for the education support for their children.

However in terms of the effectiveness of the implementation of both program still in struggling to achieve the objective of the de-radicalization program. It is because the program contains no compulsory follow-up or reporting element to ensure the former terrorist detainees will not return to involve in the militants activities. Hence, the vetting process still needs improvement from time to time to ensure the effectiveness in the implementation of de-radicalization programs.

Furthermore, the Singapore government also take initiative in educating the Muslim community by calling the Muslim leaders and scholar discussing the ideological extremism and the implication to community worldwide. This initiative was the initial step to combat terrorism and provide understanding on the agenda of terrorists who abuse the use of Jihad in Islam to give a negative image of Islam itself. As a sign of support and fight against the terrorism and strengthen the unity among Muslim community, the 122 Muslim organization came together in condemning the terrorism and rejecting the ideological extremism (Hassan, 2007). Singapore government also organized discussion with Muslim scholars to combat terrorism. As a result from these discussions, it's come a book entitled, "Moderation in Islam in the Context of the Muslim Community in Singapore". This book had also

discuss on moderate ways in practising Islam obligation and the avoidance the ideological extremism and violence that will brought harm to the social community.

Based on the observation of the author, the de-radicalization programs was implemented all over the countries aimed to ensure the former detainees would not to commit crime after they back into the society and if the implementation of de-radicalization successful, it would bring enormous benefit to the government worldwide. Indeed, continuous and comprehensive efforts undertaken by the government to combat terrorism should be praised and improvement in the de-radicalization program is an obligatory with the uncertainty of political atmosphere at present to ensure harmony among the citizens are protected and to ensure national security free from militancy which sought to develop radicalism around the world.

De-Radicalization in Thailand

De-radicalization programs are introduced due to the critical issue regarding radicalization. We can say that this program is one of the initiatives in limiting, managing and mitigating radicalization. As all knows, most of the country in Southeast Asia is facing this problem and Thailand is unexceptional. For example in Thailand, the number of terrorism suspects in overcrowded prisons in the country is growing, affecting the management and rehabilitation of inmates. Most of the suspects are believed held in Thailand's insurgency-torn south, where rebels in Muslim-majority provinces bordering Malaysia have launched bomb attacks and shootings since 2004, targeting mostly troops or police but also civilians.

The Southern Thailand crisis can be seen from perspective of the insurgency in the southern provinces. The separatist insurgency is centered in Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat in Thailand's Muslim-majority south. Ninety-five percent of the population is Muslims. All together, Muslims in the southern region constitute 3.2 million or about 5 percent of the total population in Thailand. About 3500 people have died since the beginning of the insurgency (Aslam, 2008). Many more were detained by the Thailand government and some fled to Malaysia and to other Southeast Asian countries to avoid arrest and detention.

Unlike other countries, Thailand is facing problems in handling de-radicalization programs. The Thailand Prime Minister and province governors have frequently changed their perspectives but the issues remain. Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), Non Aligned Movement (NAM), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as well as the United Nations (UN) forced the government of Thailand to resolve the crisis. According to Aslam (2008), the government of Thailand responded sending thousands of troops into the Southern province, and forming the National Reconciliation Commission (NRC) (Aslam, 2008). They also sent the government representatives to visit and meet the locals to explain more about the terrorist ideology so that the locals would not get influenced easily. Thailand government also held hearing in the district court to all accused in such incidents. However, attacks and bombing series in the province continues to happen.

Conclusion

The results showed that in order to fight against terrorism various methods should be applicable according to the situation when dealing with various backgrounds and understandings of Islam among the Muslim population. It can be seen the root causes of worldwide Muslim grievances are not addressed. The inconsistent foreign policy of the United States also contributed to the backlashes and vendettas towards the Middle East especially in its tendency to support Israel rather than address all of the underlying issues can sometimes seem like a war on Islam, especially in the eyes of radical Muslims.

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

According to Cronin (2004a), work in the field of radical Islamism and religious terrorism in general suffers from a knowledge gap. Because the phenomenon of religious terrorism crosses so many academic fields including political science, sociology, psychology, theology, economics, anthropology, history, law and international relations, it creates a challenge to academicians unaccustomed to collaborating. Furthermore, the distinctive perspectives and modes of research engaged in by scholars in each of those disciplines have led most to rely on the familiar perspective and long-established arguments that are prevalent in each field.

Therefore, in order to solve the problem there is a need for understanding the core problems faced by the Islamic communities. The crucial issues should be taken into consideration by various party is about the curriculum of Islamic subjects been thought in the school and university. The true meaning and the exact concept of Jihad as well as the broader understanding of Jihad should be implemented to avoid the misconceptions. It is very difficult for any government of the region to settle the issues arise related to militant ideology and radicalism if they are not willing to understand the fundamental issues and prevent it before getting worse. For example, radical Muslims in Southern Thailand clearly have no relation to terrorism; their struggle lies with patriotism and re-establishing the Malay-Pattani Kingdom. To generalize militant activities in Southeast Asia as being the same as militant activities in Afghanistan or the Middle East is overly simplistic because the roots of the struggle are different.

There should be a distinction between moderate and extreme Islam in order to aid the identification of radical Muslims. Moderate Muslim majority countries in the region, such as Malaysia and Brunei, have shown their ability to assimilate with the current situation and to be rational about many issues. The majority of Muslims in this region hold moderate beliefs and wish for

peace and harmony. Only a small number of Muslims are involved in terrorist activities. However, violent activities carried out by these individuals tarnish the image of all Muslims and create misconceptions about the true nature of Islam (Aslam. 2015).

Therefore, appropriate methods or programs such as de-radicalization is potential in reducing society's involvement in developing the militant propaganda which is threatening to the stability of national and international security. Improvement of existing modules in the de-radicalization program is seen as crucial to instil patriotism among former terrorist prisoners that their past actions are not followed by young people in particular. Every party should look into the family or parent of the 'terrorists'. If the family is still radical, precaution should be takes into account because possibility for new breed of terrorists will exist sooner. Besides sharing experiences of former terrorist prisoners, society can also raise awareness about the dangers of radicalism and to avoid being stuck with this retrograde culture.

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