



The Problem of Islamic State in the Middle East: the Lesson for the ASEAN Region

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ABSTRACT

After the 9/11 incident, on 11 September 2001, had shaken the world, the United States declared “War on terror” to hunt down Osama bin Laden, the founder of Al-Qaeda, who believed to be the mastermind behind the incident. Although the operation was declared a success after 10 years of hunting, it cannot bring back peace to the world and the region. Instead, it has created a more extreme terrorist group aiming to establish an Islamic State as the centre and leader of all Islamic worlds known as “Caliphate”. Later on, the group had successfully occupied part of Iraq and Syria and declared the establishment of “Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant” and called itself “Islamic State” or “IS”. With the hard suppression and support of major powers such as Russia and the United States, Syria and Iraq were able to seize territory back from IS. Nonetheless, IS is still able to operate around the world by using social media as a tool to spread its ideology. In ASEAN, the world has witnessed the capture of Marawi, the city in Mindanao, the Philippines, by Maute who call themselves the “Islamic State of Lanao”. The Philippines government had spent 5 months to seize back the town and the Maute’s brothers were killed in the combat. However, the terrorist groups affiliated to IS are still operating in several countries of ASEAN such as Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines. The formation of the establishment of an Islamic State in the Middle East has resulted in intensified acts of terrorism around the world and ASEAN.

With the significance of the IS activities, this paper seeks to suggest lessons learned and proposes policies to strengthen and prevent the expansion of terrorism in the ASEAN’s region and Thailand. The scope of this research is the study of establishment of Islamic states in the Middle East compared with terrorist activities in ASEAN through 5 factors namely; history, geopolitics, internal factors, external factors and development of the situation.

Finally, I do hope that information from in-depth interviews with Thai and international experts will make the paper more valuable.

Keywords: Islamic State, Terrorism, ASEAN Community, Middle East

Introduction

As a result of the world's extremely shocking events on September 11, 2001, when two passenger airliners hijacked by a group of terrorists crashed into the north and south towers of the World Trade Centre complex, the then US president George W. Bush triggered the War on Terror initiatives to combat terrorism and urged other countries to join hands with the United States in fighting against terrorism.

During the several years of US-led war on terrorism in the Middle East, a group of terrorists had been founded in 2003 and known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) or The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), with an allegiance to Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). However, in 2014, ISIS proclaimed itself independent from Al-Qaeda, due to the different goals between the two groups as that of ISIS has been the foundation of an "Islamic state" and eventually renamed its organisation as Islamic state (IS) which has been officially used up to now.

The "IS" group has attracted a large number of members of radical groups from around the world, as well as those from Southeast Asia, as IS fighters in the Middle Eastern battlefields. The IS fighters from Southeast Asia are believed to be the influencers of establishing an Islamic state from the Middle East into the Southeast Asian region (ASEAN), leading to seizure of parts of the southern Philippine city of Marawi (in the Province of Lanao del Sur) on Mindanao island by the militants of the Maute group, affiliated with IS group, which used the symbol of IS and called itself as the "Islamic State of Lanao".

Due to the expansion of IS group's influence in the Southeast Asian region is a major threat to ASEAN today, the Researcher is interested in conducting a research on "Islamic State in the Middle East: the Lesson for the ASEAN Region".

Research Objectives

1. To study the history and development of the Islamic State in the Middle East, from past to present and the influence of the Islamic State that affects the ASEAN region;
2. To study, analyse and compare the similarities and differences between relevant matters in relation to the establishment of the Islamic State in the Middle East and in ASEAN region.
3. To propose guidelines on international political policies for ASEAN countries in order to strengthen national security, prevent terrorism and curtail any terrorist expansion in the ASEAN region, including Thailand, in the future.

Research Limitation

During the research, although all interviewees in in-depth interviews were the experts and key decision makers in terrorism protection and counter-terrorism operations, with knowledge, expertise and previous study on terrorism, they similarly had a lot of duties and responsibilities, resulting in short periods of time for the interviews and being unable to obtain complete details on some preferable topics.

In addition, on the gathering of secondary data for the research, the information obtained from the interviewees was also limited, mostly because the interviewees could only give certain information they have at their disposal and answer all the questions openly when the answers would involve any critical information which cannot be disclosed.

Research Contributions

1. Know the history of the problems that led to the establishment of the Islamic State in the Middle East, which includes the situation and development from past to present, as well as the influence of the Islamic State affecting the terrorism in the ASEAN region;

2. Obtain an invaluable lesson from the study, analysis and comparison on the similarities and differences between all relevant matters in relation to the establishment of the Islamic State in the Middle East and ASEAN region; and

3. Be able to map out appropriate guidelines for the formulation of international political policies for ASEAN and Thailand in order to strengthen national security and prevent terrorist expansion in the ASEAN region, including Thailand, in the future.

Literature Review

During the research, the Researcher had studied a variety of theories related to terrorism and found that each theory had its prominent point, so six theories which could well reflect the internal and external factors affecting terrorism are presented as follows:

1) Religion-related philosophical theory explains how a religion can be used by a terrorism group as the motives for terrorism when religious teachings are interpreted in their favours;

2) Globalisation theory has pointed out that the Western-style consumerism, which has invaded into various countries and damaged the long-lived traditions, results in several misconducts against religious traditions, leading to the conflicts between different groups of people and finally to terrorism;

3) Social movement theory believes the ideology and actions of the state can be the important factors that can cause violence between the government and the anti-government group.

4) Structural theory has meanwhile pointed out environmental factors as the causes of terrorism, namely both internal and external political, economic, social and cultural environments.

5) Exclusion theory believes that when human beings fall into the victims of social exclusion they would eventually feel deprived, oppressed and frustrated,

resulting in unexpected violent behaviours.

6) Wave theory gives an explanation on modern terrorism by dividing the development of terrorism into phases or waves – from an aim to assassinate prominent figures during the first phase to an attempt to create new words and terms for terrorism and its operations in the second phase, an involvement in international politics with more international cooperation on counter-terrorism activities in the third phase and finally, the religious wave of terrorism when the terrorists would use their own religion as a motive to attack others and cause massive casualties.

Therefore, in order to enhance the understanding of the study on terrorism, the Researcher has scrutinised the patterns and development of terrorism from past till present as some of the terrorist operation patterns in the past have also been used till now, only with more complicated strategies. The terrorist groups in modern days have used their religion, beliefs, concepts and ideologies in the activities, such as the Taliban in Afghanistan, Al-Qaeda in Pakistan and the IS in the Middle East. The terrorist groups in ASEAN meanwhile seem to have adopted such similar strategies of using their religion and ideologies as the motives of the activities as most of them were found in Malaysia, Philippines and Indonesia, such as the Abu Sayyaf Group (in the Philippines) and the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and the Free Aceh Movement in Indonesia. From the preliminary study, it is found that the terrorist groups in the Middle East and in ASEAN are connected, with the ASEAN region believed to be used as a money laundering haven for IS which also give financial support for terrorist groups in ASEAN and a number of radical fighters from ASEAN found joining the IS in the Middle East. These activities reflect the relationship between the terrorist groups in the Middle East and ASEAN.

The results of the literature review, including the theory, form, development, terrorism and related

research reflecting the causes, motives and factors that influence terrorism which in the next chapter will be a study of the similarities and differences between the Middle East and ASEAN through various variables, including historical factors geopolitical factors, internal factors, external factors and situation development

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this Research is firstly to study the situation of the Islamic State (IS) in the Middle East and ASEAN region through five variables namely, historical factors, geopolitical factors, internal factors, external factors and situation development in order to identify the common factors which result in the foundation of IS and the development of IS groups in these two regions. Then, the results of the preliminary study will be analysed, with a focus of the comparison between the IS groups in both regions, in order to be used as an important lesson for Thailand and ASEAN as a whole, with recommended guidelines for handling terrorism in this region.

Research Methodology

This research is a qualitative research in which the researcher has divided the study data into 2 types, namely primary data, the first part, which comprises the information obtained from the experts and knowledgeable persons who have direct responsibilities or experiences in relation to the surveillance and prevention of terrorism problems in Thailand and ASEAN and secondary data, the other part, which has been obtained from the studies and researches from various academic papers which has earlier been made, as well as other related documents.

Research Findings

1. From the study of the history and development of the Islamic State in the Middle East, from past

to present and the influence of Islamic State issues affecting the ASEAN region, it can be summarised, as follows:

- After the First World War, the Middle East had been colonised by Britain and France, which were the two superpowers during that period of time and both countries have ruled and divided the Middle East into territories without paying any attention to the differences in race, religion and culture of the Middle Eastern countries, whose people became depressed and displeased with the colonial countries and eventually tried to organise themselves into groups to fight back against the superpowers, resulting in the development of terrorist groups in modern days. The Islamic State (IS) group in the Middle East separated itself from Al-Qaeda in order to focus on the establish of an “Islamic state”, but with the interference and support from foreign and regional countries like the United States, Russia, Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia the influence of the IS has expanded and its operations become more violent by using the conflicts between Iraq and Syria and consequently political instability in these countries as an opportunity for several forms of interference in an effort to counterbalance their power with each other, through overthrowing the leader of opposition groups or even giving support to terrorism operations.

- From the historical factors, the interference from the superpowers, from the past to present, no matter if it would be any form of support – finance, armaments or military training – to terrorist groups or the governments, the difference in ideologies and the internal political problems have all played their roles in eventually helping the IS group become stronger and be able to seize major cities along the border of Iraq and Syria, with an establishment of the city of Raqqa in Syria (in 2014) as its capital and later moved on to seize Mosul, a major city in northern Iraq, as its

stronghold (in June 2014).

- Many social media platforms were found to have been widely used by IS group as a tool to propagate its ideologies and radicalism, motivating “lone wolf” terrorist operations around the world as never before and also to successfully recruit a huge number of followers to join its militant fighters in Iraq and Syria, so many countries have considered such tactics as a tremendous threat to be closely monitored.

- Although the IS group in the Middle East had heavily attacked the governments of Iraq and Syria, with the support from the superpowers like the United States and Russia, until many large areas under IS were recaptured, leaving the remaining IS control of only 10% of the area earlier occupied in Iraq and Syria while IS fighters retreat to their hideouts or return to their own countries of origin. However, the terrorist group is found to still be able to use the same fighting tactics, such as guerrilla attacks, car bombing and suicide bombs and wait for the opportunities to build its new strongholds whenever possible, including the possibility in ASEAN region as well.

- In relation to the situation and influence of Islamic State issues affecting ASEAN region, it has been noticed that after the death of its leader, Osama bin Laden, many countries thought the influence of Al-Qaeda group around the world would lessen and the terrorism operations be minimal. Unfortunately, it turned out that the concept of cultivating seeds to create radical warriors and terrorism has been continuously spread by the new terrorist IS group, whose movements were originally in Iraq and Syria but were able to attract radical groups from all over the world, including ASEAN, to join their fights in the Middle East in an effort to jointly form the “Islamic State” in accordance with the group’s religious beliefs, and such beliefs have somehow spread to the ASEAN region later on.

- The relevance of the IS group and the terrorism in the Philippines was recognised after the attack and seizure of part of Marawi city by Maute terrorist group, whose operations had begun since 2013. The Maute group has an established link with Abu Sayyaf group through a coordination between Imam Bantayao and Isnilon Hapilon, a former Abu Sayyaf leader who declared himself “Amir” or “prince” of the IS group and later joined Maute group, making Maute group become a full-fledged terrorist group under IS umbrella in ASEAN region. On July 23, 2014, Isnilon Hapilon and his Abu Sayyaf group published a video which seen they swore allegiance to the IS leader and called their group as “IS of Lanao”.

On November 28, 2016, President Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines officially announced that the Maute group has a clear connection with the IS group and they had persuaded a new generation of fighters to join the group and was able to fight against the Philippine army for as long as 154 days, which is much longer than earlier anticipated by the Philippine government, giving evidence that the group had been financially supported by some sponsors behind the scene.

- For Indonesia and Malaysia, the two ASEAN countries similarly face with IS-linked terrorist group called “Katibah Nusantara Lid Daulah Islamiyyah” or the “Malay archipelago unit for the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria”. After an incident on June 28, 2016, at Movida nightclub in Puchong, Selangor, Malaysia, into where a grenade was thrown, Malaysian authorities confirmed that the attack was done by IS related group. The Malaysian police stated that even though the attack, with eight people injured, was done by two Malaysians, it was supported by one of the IS group members in Syria. The incident was described as the first ever IS terror attack in Malaysia.

- In Indonesia, on May 13, 2018, the authorities stated that there were suicide bombings at three

Christian churches in Surabaya, the capital of Indonesia's East Java Province, where six members of the same Muslim family, with the father being a former IS fighter in Syria and still in the middle of the government's attitude adjustment programme, separately attacked the three churches. These incidents were considered as the worst terrorist strikes Indonesia has seen in more than a decade. The father of the family drove a minivan with explosives into a church and put it in flames while the wife and two daughters, aged nine and 12, walked into the second church and detonated the bomb as the two sons, aged 16 and 18, attacked the third church on a motorcycle. The bombings killed at least 13 people and wounded other 40 people. According to the group's news agency, Amaq, the Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attacks.

From the above findings, it can be concluded that the situation and influence of Islamic State issues affecting the ASEAN region are, as follows:

- 1) It has incubated the concept of radicalism and the declaration of loyalty and allegiance to the Islamic State in the Middle East among regional terrorist groups;
- 2) It has increased the potential and reputation of local terrorist groups to regional level through the declaration of allegiance to the IS group and the adoption of dress code, Black Standard flags, black inscribed headbands and shirts with IS insignia; and
- 3) It has caused the imitation of IS tactics and strategies, such as a suicide bomb, which is different from the past when most terrorist operations involved explosive detonation or car bombing as in the bombings on the Indonesian island of Bali in 2002.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the influence of IS group in ASEAN has intensified as the incidents of IS-related terrorism in any country within the region

affect ASEAN as a whole. Even though each country might have considered anti-terrorism differently and was not aware much about international terrorism, the seizure of Marawi city in the Philippines has triggered the awareness on international terrorism and the influence of the IS group has become the important issue every ASEAN country paid more attention since each nation seemed to have quite a lot of risk factors which would be easily invaded by international terrorist groups.

2. Regarding the analysis on and the comparison between the similarities and differences between events leading to the establishment of the Islamic State in the Middle East and those in ASEAN, it can be summarised, as follows:

From in-depth study, it is found that the establishment of terrorist groups in the ASEAN region is not a new issue at all as in the past several countries had terrorism problems for some period of time, mainly with the armed terrorist groups which utilised violence in fighting and resolving conflicts against the federal governments due to their ideologies and the difference of religions and races which had occurred before the First World War and some of the ongoing problems are still existing up to now, they can be explained, as follows:

1) Historical factors

The terrorism problems that stemmed from certain historical factors in the Middle East and ASEAN region have apparently had several similarities and differences. One of the similarities is the invasion of colonial countries that divided colonised land into territories by drawing the border lines of the colonised countries, without taking into account the ethnic and religious differences of the population in such areas, as also seen in the case of the Philippines after the Spanish occupation which caused resentment and discontent with the influence of foreigner invaders, resulting in

the emergence of Muslim rebel groups, in the case of Indonesia where Dutch invaders spread Protestantism during the country's colonial period, causing native Muslim people to feel religious differences and dissatisfied with the influence of the Western invaders since then.

One significant difference in historical factors from the Middle East is that the conflicts between the rulers and the people in some ASEAN countries were caused by the differences in political goals between the two groups. For example, the case of Indonesia, the political goals of the past governments were to establish the Republic of Indonesia to be a secular state, not an Islamic state, by announcing the use of the Pancasila (Panjasila) as the national ideology of Indonesia. Meanwhile, some traditionalist groups, such as the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) movement, would prefer the foundation of the Islamic traditions, but some Muslim organisations disagreed and protested against NU movement by forming their own Islamic revival movement. In the case of Malaysia, the terrorism problem similarly arose from the differences in the ideologies between middle path Muslims, the same in other ASEAN countries, and those religious groups with conservative Islamic approaches.

2) Geopolitical factors

In ASEAN, the problem of terrorist expansion, as far as the geopolitical factors are concerned, is similarly with that in the Middle East in a way that there are some "grey zone conflicts", hindering any complete government operations in such areas as in the areas of the Philippines which are under the influence of the Abu Sayyaf group and the Moro Islamic Liberation (MILF). Moreover, with the geographic factor of having many islands, these areas have become suitable strongholds armed terrorist groups and criminals escaping from the power of the state easily as is happening in Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines. When the

IS was defeated in the main battle areas in the Middle East, it has become the important factor for the terrorist group to exploit such vulnerability to cooperate with ASEAN terrorist groups, which eventually raised their potential and reputation from local to regional level and publicised the existence of their groups to the world. The grey zone factor was clearly seen in the siege of Marawi city in the Philippines as the city had been considered as the area where the power of the Philippines authorities could not reach.

On the difference between the geopolitical factors of the Middle East and the ASEAN region, one significant factor is that different countries have clear boundaries with natural border lines, such as mountains, rivers and the sea, which would somehow obstruct the mobilisation of any large international forces, unlike the Middle East where lies a huge piece of land without any natural border line so it is more convenient for the movement of terrorist groups but at the same time very difficult with any obstruction. Therefore, the terrorist groups in the Middle East have been able to operate quite freely across several countries, especially in different countries with bad relationships between them and no collaboration on the interception of terrorist operation.

3) Internal factors

The differences in its people's beliefs and the support from the people considered to be in the same group have not affected much in ASEAN region where the Muslims in the mostly adhere to the middle path of Muslim ideologies and non-violence. There is no clear separation which countries are Sunni or Shia Muslims, unlike in the Middle East, so there has never been any conflict between countries in relation to the differences in religious beliefs. Meanwhile, from the history of ASEAN, although there were some conflicts which led to some types of terrorism, those called terrorist groups

did not have any goal to establish an Islamic state like in the Middle East but simply anti-government groups, demanding the legitimacy in politics and societies only. Therefore, it can be concluded that the terrorism in ASEAN has been limited, without violence and unlikely to obtain any support from different terrorist groups in other ASEAN countries.

4) External factors

The external factors, especially in the form of the interference from foreign countries which might directly affect the situation and development of terrorism, have minimal effects in ASEAN region, considered to be very much different from those in the Middle East where the superpowers have played a significant role through their interference and support in helping either the terrorists and the governments of their sides, in the provision of armaments and military trainings, which have unfortunately made the battle go beyond control. Fortunately, in ASEAN region foreign countries they seemed to have stepped in to render their support for anti-terrorism policies.

However, for ASEAN, the case of the siege of Marawi city in the Philippines may be a good case study in relation to the role of the superpowers which affected the situation of terrorism in the region. This is because during an in-depth interviews with the expert from a neighbouring country it was learned that the terrorist group that seized Marawi city used high speed boats using special fuel for their logistics and some modern telecommunication equipment that had never been seen in the area before and after the recapture of the city by the government troops, many modern weapons made by some superpowers were also discovered. Then, it seemed to be a quite clear evidence that why the Maute terrorist group could fight against the Philippine government troops for a long

period of time, if not having received the support from some superpowers due to a previous conflict with the Philippines on international politics.

5) Development of terrorism situation

The IS terrorists and the IS-related groups have been similarly using social media as the tool to disseminate their extremist concepts, through various platforms like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and so on, using the language of various countries around the world, which is considered to be the means to directly spread their concepts and ideologies throughout the world as well.

In the case of battle at the city of Marawi, it is clearly seen that the Maute terrorist group had the capability to capture such a large city for about five months, apparently much longer than the Philippine authorities had anticipated. Although the terrorist group was finally defeated, the seizure showed that the same kind of operations can happen again. In addition, it is also worth noting that in the first period to seize the city of Marawi the terrorist group had only about 180-200 fighters, but when the battle was prolonged the number of terrorists eventually increased to as many as 800. Such increase in the number of the terrorists was believed that a large number of local people who were not satisfied with the government decided to join the terrorist group, with some of them agreeing with the ideology of the IS group in the Middle East.

All in all, the expanding influence of the IS into the region has now become a major threat to ASEAN because, despite the Philippine government's recapture of Marawi city from the Maute group, the danger of terrorism still exists and has not yet vanished, maybe weakening for a certain period of time and awaiting the appointment of their new leader who would be a spiritual leader to succeed the group's ideology and to continuously spread their beliefs to the public in

general.

For Thailand, as part of ASEAN, which has been facing some unrest in three southern border provinces for some long time, the study found that terrorism situation in the southern region did not have links with the IS terrorist group. Moreover, one of the experts during the study interview said the Organisation Islamic Cooperation (OIC) recognised that Thailand has taken care of Muslims even better than some Muslim countries, so it confirmed that the IS group and its influence did not directly affect Thailand as it can be seen, as follows:

Firstly, there is no clear information that any Thai people joined the IS group but there might be some limited number of followers and admirers of IS social media monitoring, and still in small groups;

Secondly, there is no clear link between the separatist groups in the southern border provinces of Thailand and the IS group. However, any probability that some members of the separatist groups in southern provinces would be interested in travelling to join the IS group, as well as any movement by the followers of IS social media, in a bid to study the fighting strategies of the Middle Eastern terrorists for their benefits and adoption of further use cannot be overlooked; and

Thirdly, it is yet to be found that Thailand has been used for terrorist cell establishment of the IS group in order to recruit members or get financial support for the travel of local terrorist groups in ASEAN to join the IS group's battle in the Middle East. On the other hand, Thailand, as a regional transportation centre, might have been on a route for some terrorism-related members to travel to any third country or return to their countries of origin, or used as a centre to supply fake passports to this group of people.

3. The recommendations for the establishment of ASEAN and Thailand's international political policies to prevent terrorism expansion and to enhance regional

security and prevention. They are, as follows:

The recommendations for ASEAN

1) Prevention of the expansion of terrorist groups

In ASEAN region, it is found that there is a growing trend of terrorist group expansion still exist in some countries, such as Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines, with a possibility to become an important condition and loophole for the IS group to spread its influence in the region, especially on the extremist ideology and the armed battle for various groups to upgrade their fighting strategies, as seen in the Philippines in the case of the breakaway of Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) from the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). Therefore, it is a challenge for ASEAN members, including Thailand, to formulate substantial cooperative strategies and practical guidelines in an effort to prevent the expansion of terrorism in the region and not to let the IS group's exploit the region or spread its influence.

2) Maintaining relationship with the superpowers

ASEAN should play an appropriate role in the relationship with the superpowers towards its foreign policies and the cooperation in counter-terrorism while trying to maintain the stance on ASEAN's unity by not taking internal conflicts outside the region and not bringing external conflicts into the region. This is because international political relationships can adversely become a cause of terrorism as in the history some great powers utilised their policies to expand the influence as a means of imperialism establishment in a bid to colonise other countries by using forces for their invasion, domination and occupation of weaker and underdeveloped countries while some superpowers secretly supported terrorist operations in certain countries they wanted to undermine the national securities. Such ill-willing policies of the

superpowers have been recognised as the reasons why the terrorism in the Middle East has intensified, expanded and has become a large network in many countries, such as in the cases of Al-Qaeda and IS terrorist groups, as a negative result of the global political system becoming under both direct and indirect influence of the superpowers. Therefore, ASEAN must be careful in maintaining international relationship from the superpowers in order to prevent any interference from them as a means to avoid the repetition of the incidents in the Middle East which has become a large battlefield among different factions and groups.

3) Elimination of the conditions of conflict

It is recommended to thoroughly understand the history, reduce any conditions and not create any new conditions in order to prevent an incubation of radicalism, and meanwhile to also identify problems and solves them at the roots of the problems which can incubate the concept of radicalism. For example, if the problems arise from the difference in race or ethnicity, the reconciliation must be established through appropriate policies and legal improvements for all groups of people to have equal rights and freedom. If the problems stem from the difference in political ideology and religious beliefs, the solution should meanwhile be made by using a mechanism to create common understanding through the participation of all concerned parties in order to let these parties have an arena to express their opinions which would help reduce conflict conditions.

4) Not to use any force to solve problems

ASEAN has no sign of conflicts between different sects so there has not been any intense fighting. Therefore, the use of forces or military operations should not be a good solution, or, if necessary, any

military operations should only be used with caution in some specific areas since any casualty might induce those affected from such operations to become a coalition to support the terrorist groups.

5) Paying attention to state power-free areas

ASEAN members must focus on areas where terrorism previously existed, especially in the power vacuum areas to which the state power could not reached or in the grey zone conflict areas, causing the government be unable to fully operate in such areas. These types of areas have often been used by the terrorists as their strongholds, creating an alignment with local people and using the area for their movement, so the governments of relevant countries must pay special attention to such areas by fostering the cooperation on intelligence service systems and increasing intelligence sharing with other neighbouring countries in an effort to boost the efficiency of early warning and also prevent any embedment of terrorist groups before they can build up and expand their influence into a larger area.

6) Monitoring the risk groups

The increase in terrorism has been developed from one-man operation or “lone wolf” strategies in the first place, with an influence seen from several social media platforms. Therefore, the state authorities should have a surveillance system and appropriate procedures to prevent the expansion of the radicalism ideology and also change the preference of radicalism among certain groups of people to believe in the middle path principle the same way the Malaysian government has gradually cultivated the right concepts in accordance with the religious beliefs, as proposed at the 26th ASEAN Summit and endorsed as the Langkawi Declaration on the Global Movement of Moderates (GMM), which has later been adopted by the ASEAN Political-Security Community Blueprint 2025, by

outlining measures to help promote moderation and curb extremism throughout the region for each ASEAN government to use as one of its policies.

7) Cutting aids for terrorists

As continuation of terrorist activities usually relies on several types of supports, such a fact also applies in the case of ASEAN where some terrorist groups are still active because they receive some financial support from both legal and illegal businesses, armament support and terrorist training support. Therefore, it seems that the best way to prevent the expansion of terrorist groups would be to cut all forms of aids for the terrorists, in parallel to utilising some incentive and remedial measures to persuade the people who mistakenly joined the terrorist groups to return to their societies, such as the provision of sufficient education and vocational training, while having follow-up processes to monitor those people after their return to society.

Recommendation for Thailand

1) Maintaining good relations with other nations

The determination of national attitude towards terrorism and clear position is vital in order to show the country's responsibility for the problem of terrorism in Thailand, possibly by cooperating with ASEAN members and other nations to jointly prevent the expansion of terrorism threats on either role as a country of origin or a transit country. However, the policy setting must be made cautiously in order to avoid any non-preferable effects towards international relations, as well as those effects towards national interests.

2) Driving policies into practice

To prevent and solve the problem of terrorism, the formulation of appropriate policies and the establishment of an organisation with the mechanism

to implement policies are important factors to make the policies or measures become successful. At the policy making level, the importance of the threats from terrorism must be totally agreed and then there needs to have channels for the policies to be successfully implemented into substantial results, such as having modern and appropriate legislation to support all operations in compliance with the policies, defining an organisation or mechanism to support the appropriate terrorism solutions which can be derived by studying the suitable models used in other countries before adapting to fit the context of the situation in Thailand so that the problem of terrorism can be solved effectively.

3) The integrated intelligence mechanism

There should be an organisation that acts as an intelligence centre, with a major role in collecting all intelligence information from various units, under the existing government mechanism and clear responsibilities and authorities, especially regarding the request for intelligence information from existing agencies. In addition, the intelligence centre should have the potential to analyse the information before presenting them to the policy making level for further consideration and command.

4) The situation in the southern border provinces

It can be considered that the Royal-recommended strategies of "Understanding, accessing, developing" by the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej, in conjunction with government's politics-led military policies, would be the most appropriate approach that can be used as the core guideline in prevent any incubation of radicalism from the propaganda of the IS group as Thailand also has Muslim youths as a risk group which might be misled from distorted religious teachings and receiving some distorted information from the social media used by the IS group. Therefore, the operations

of all concerned government agencies in these border provinces must be well coordinated by educational institutes, the provincial Islamic Committees and other local government agencies in these provinces. Moreover, the activities between private Islamic schools and government schools in the border provinces should be jointly held on regular basis in order to foster the relationship and create the opportunity for those involved to be able to exchange the good attitudes towards each other which would be an important foundation for establishing the peaceful sub-region.

Research Discussion

The answer to research objective no. 1

After the First World War, countries in the Middle East had become colonies of either England and France which were the superpowers during the period of time and both superpowers ruled and divided the boundaries of Middle Eastern countries without taking into account the differences in race, religion and culture, causing local people to be depressed and dissatisfied with the colonial countries and leading to the groupings among local people to fight against the superpowers. Recently, the IS group in the Middle East has been heavily attacked by the governments of Iraq and Syria with the support from the superpowers like the United States and Russia so that several cities previously occupied by the IS group were recaptured, eventually forcing the IS terrorists to retreat to the desert areas and a large number of them return to their countries of origin and find some new bases for themselves, probably including those ex-IS fighters returning to ASEAN region.

The situation and influence of IS problems affecting the ASEAN region are, as follows:

- (1) Causing the incubation of radicalism ideology and the declaration of allegiance to the IS group;
- (2) Showing the preference of the IS with some

symbolic expressions, such as adopting IS dress code, using Black Standard flags and headbands or shirts with IS symbol; and

(3) Imitating IS operational tactics and practices, such as beheading of a foreign hostage and suicide bombings, in a bid to create a broader impact, which is quite different from the past when bombings were mainly used.

The answer to the research objective no. 2

When considering various important variables, the formations of the IS group in the Middle East and the terrorist groups in ASEAN have similarities and differences at the same time. It can be described, as follows:

Regarding the historical factors, both ASEAN and the Middle East share some similarities, especially on the invasion of the colonial countries to capture a huge area of land before dividing into the territories with the border lines they would like to have, without taking into account any difference in the ethnic and religion of the people in that area which have resulted in the uprising of local people and the formation of various terrorist groups to fight for their rights. The difference is that there is no fierce fighting between different Muslim countries like in the Middle East.

Regarding geopolitical factors, ASEAN is similar to the Middle East that here are certain areas which are free from state power with grey zone conflicts, causing the government be unable to fully operate in such areas. On the other hand, the two regions are different in a way that ASEAN countries have clear border lines, in the forms of mountains, rivers and the sea, making the mobilisation from one country to other countries in a massive force unlikely while the Middle East region is one same huge piece of land without any natural border which would ease the mobilisation of any massive armed forces and make it more difficult to

block such movement of the terrorist groups.

Regarding the internal factors, the Muslims in the ASEAN region have a middle path concept and prefer no violence, no clear division between Sunni and Shia sects like in the Middle East. In addition, the Muslims in ASEAN do not have a goal to establish an Islamic state but to ask for the legitimacy in politics and society, making the terrorism in ASEAN to be less severe and unlikely to get any support for their terrorism activities by those in other ASEAN countries.

Regarding the external factors, the role of the superpowers in ASEAN region is quite different than that of the superpowers in the Middle East which have played important roles in the interference and several forms of support to different groups of terrorists, such as the provision of training and armament for both the terrorists and the governments. In ASEAN, the involvement of the superpowers has been in the form of cooperation on anti-terrorism policies, except for the case of the capture of Marawi city in the Philippines which can be a case study on the role of some superpowers that could affect terrorism in this region after it has been found that, from the information given by an interviewed expert, the Maute terrorists had received much support from some superpowers and the seizure of the city was related to international politics.

Regarding the development of the terrorist situation, it should be noted that the IS group have successfully used the social media, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, as their propagation tool to disseminate their extremist ideas, similarly to the terrorist groups in ASEAN who might have imitated the IS means of propagation to spread its concepts and ideology to the outer world and probably with an intention to recruit new radical members as well.

The answer to the research objective no. 3

Recommendations for ASEAN

ASEAN should play an appropriate role in the relationship with the superpowers, with clear foreign policies to foster the cooperation in counter-terrorism and at the same time try to maintain ASEAN unity and stance, without pulling external conflicts into the region. Meanwhile, the region should focus on reducing the existing conditions and not creating any new condition which would lead to the incubation of any radicalism ideology, but would try to identify existing problems and solve from the roots of the problems which have somehow incubated the concept of radicalism in the region and then try to find the best solutions through mutual agreement and cooperation with other concerned nations.

In addition, ASEAN members must pay significant attention to the areas which the terrorist groups used to occupy, especially the power vacuum which is the state-power free zone with the grey zone conflict and the movement of any lone wolf group and try to persuade them to join the moderate group of people and cultivate the right concepts of religious beliefs into this group of people.

Recommendations for Thailand

For Thailand, the study has found that there has been no link between the terrorist groups in southern Thailand and the IS group in the Middle East. For the ongoing situation in the southernmost provinces, the Royal-recommended strategies of “Understanding, accessing, developing” by the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej, equipped with the politics-led military operations, would be the most appropriate way which can be used for the prevention of any incubation of the ideas for separatist groups and radicalism as propagated by the IS group in the Middle East.