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Human Security in Counterterrorism: When More Than Rhetoric Is Critically Needed

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Summary⁴

To what extent is human security relevant for terrorism and counterterrorism? Human security is rarely utilized as an operationalizing concept in terrorism studies, yet its basic tenets on individual security is relevant in understanding terrorism and counterterrorism approaches. This article argues that human security is useful to assess the government's responses to terrorism due to the fact that terrorist networks have exploited individuals' vulnerabilities to lure them to the network. The use of force alone is inadequate to neutralize the threats, human security will fill the missing pieces in counterterrorism to create a holistic approach.

Keywords: *Human Security, Terrorism, Counterterrorism*

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Human Security and Terrorism

The burgeoning literature of human security positions the task of human security analysis in identifying threats to the basic needs of ordinary people or individuals, which includes physical security, welfare, and dignity. It explicitly positions the people or individuals as a referent object of security, emphasizing on enhancing the physical security, welfare, and dignity of the world's inhabitants, regardless of their nationalities and their states' sovereign status. At the same time, it provides a moral critique towards the security studies itself for its traditionally geo-strategic nature in approaching insecurities

After all, human security does not purport to serve as bulwark against the nation-state establishment; but rather driven to align the agenda of physical safety and welfare of the people with the nation-state's political agendas. This condition pushes nation-states to cogitate about "the people" in its decision-making; for whatever decisions taken by government always impacts on the security and welfare of the people.

While human security may cover military and non-military issues, debates on its issues are still concentrated around traditional approach to security. It is undeniable that traditional security threat such as armed conflict can hamper meaningful human development. Whereas, human security perceives that situations in which access to healthy food, proper health services and educational facilities are lacking may serve as underlying factors for the arrival of political violence entrepreneurs that generate acts of terrorism and armed aggressions between people to advance political agendas. On other words, these non-military factors can act as an amplifying factor for insecurity in individual levels.

Human security became a catalyst in identifying prevention and response to terrorism; by considering the aspect of security, welfare, and dignity of the people. This article explores the relevance of human security in the radicalization and recruitment process as well as responses of the state to terrorism.

Understanding Radicalizations

Human security manifests in the search for the root causes of or underlying factors to the emergence of perpetrators (groups and/or individuals) of terrorism. These [factors](#) include level of education (national and individuals' levels), national welfare gap and economic development, individual's social and economic conditions, and political factors including political freedom, dictatorship/ democracy, the presence and degree of state repression and civil liberties. However, human security does not intend to explain the whole phenomenon of radicalisation, but rather to advocate the prioritization of the real people's suffering rather than the state.

Terrorist groups has learned to utilize human insecurity as a part of their propaganda narratives to entice aspiring terrorists. They have learned to exploit the people's weaknesses into something that benefits them. Inability of individuals to access proper education and economic opportunity, for example, can be labelled by a terrorist group as the [injustice](#) of the *taghut* (heathen) government against the Muslim community.

In another case, which involves a more traditional security threat, can be seen in the Syrian Civil War, in which the Shia "Alawite" regime of Bashar Al-Assad's atrocities against its own citizens

have attracted an influx of foreign terrorist fighters. The Syria Civil War has instigated the feelings of anger from Muslims across the globe, who identify strongly as a part of the “Global Ummah (community)” — a condition that has propelled aspiring jihadis to travel to Syria to defend the dignity of ummah.

This phenomenon is not unique to Islamic terrorist organizations. The perceived injustice also prompted radicalized individuals from different backgrounds to carry out terror attacks against the perceived “oppressor”. Right-wing lone wolf terrorist [Anders Breivik](#) detonated a bomb that killed 8 people and gunned down 69 others in two attacks in Norway in 2011 after distributing his manifesto via email, quoting the rhetoric of anti-Islamic movements’ and self-styled anti-jihadi persons online.

These cases illustrated that terrorism attracts individual from diverse backgrounds, religions, nationalities, or ethnicities. It is also not necessary to formally join a group, hence lone-wolf terrorism is more rampant. Moreover, poverty alone cannot explain contemporary terrorist phenomenon. In Indonesia, terrorist organizations lure a wide range of individuals — from high-rank civil servants, to street vendors — by exploiting the discourse of “global ummah”. Activism in terrorist activities also increasingly vary from direct involvement in perpetration of violence towards providing funds for others to travel to conflict zones, and translation of teachings from extremist religious interpretation.

Recruiters are more advanced in finding entry points to attract new sympathisers, usually by manipulating personal crisis as a drive for militancy. A psychological concept of [unfreezing](#) can explain on why there is a large number of recruits among Indonesian migrant workers. Individuals who are overwhelmed with fear after being disconnected from their usual routines or relationship, will usually seek for new routines and connections to provide a sense of safety. Recruiters often lure migrant workers through social media platform, offering a new community or relationships.

Other cases show that terrorist networks provide social welfare programs to ensure their members’ loyalty toward the group. [Gashibu \(Gerakan Seribu Sehari/1,000 A Day Movement\) and Anfiq Center](#), Islamic State (IS) – affiliated charity organization provide financial assistance for the family of detained inmates and offer a shelter house in Cilacap, Central Java prior making a visit to Nusakambangan Prison. To some extent, their program is more intense than the government’s, causing [recidivism](#) among released terrorist inmates.

This is a strong indication that tracking down terrorists and disrupting their attacks are no longer enough to stop terrorism. Even when attacks are absent, terrorists’ infrastructure is sabotaging the role of the state in the provision of human security.

The Overlooked Victims of Terrorism

Neorealist undertaking of counterterrorism emphasised the finality of eliminating the terrorist-enemy. But human security asserts that counterterrorism should provide security for the people whose security have been compromised by terrorism. Too much emphasis on neo-realist approach would lead terrorism responders to endanger the very people they are supposed to protect. On the other hand, human security rarely has strategy in deterring and

decapitating active terrorist cells. Without balance between the two approaches, terrorist groups will always find a loophole to keep their operations.

A good example of the shortfall in balancing the already escalating deterrence, pursuit and disruption of terrorist suspects can be seen in how some Southeast Asian governments miss out on supporting the lives of victims of terrorist attacks. The Philippines has just recently passed a [compensation bill](#) for the victims of Marawi Siege in 2017 where the ISIS-affiliated Maute Group occupied the city in 2017. The Philippines has prioritized the promulgation of Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020 which granted more power to the authorities to prosecute individuals suspected of terrorism and erode the rights of victims of acts of terrorism – including victims of wrongful detentions – instead of the compensation for Marawi Siege victims.

Meanwhile, Indonesia also produced a similarly draconian anti-terrorism law – Law No.5/2018 – which enabled the police to detain anyone who are “highly suspected” of undertaking a terrorist offence for a period of 30 days; the law omitted any need for preliminary evidence and, similar to its Philippines counterpart, missed out the obligation of the state to take care of terrorist attacks victims and compensate victims of [counterterrorism wrongdoings](#).

This was only recently corrected with the signing of Governmental Regulation No.35/2020 on the Compensation, Restitution and Aid to Witnesses and Victims. It provided a [short window](#) for victims of attacks to the Witnesses and Victims Protection Body (LPSK) before terrorist suspects are put on trial as defendants.

Neither the Philippines nor Indonesia provides any compensation or rehabilitation for victims of wrongful detentions. How this would impact on the overall effectiveness of counterterrorism remains to be seen, but it is difficult to imagine effective control over the power of authorities. When the authorities work under the presumption that no one is totally innocent once they are detained, a considerable room is opened for them to act in self-tasking and self-justifying character.

Reintegration Programme for Former Terrorists

Reintegration of former terrorists and combatants (or “formers” for short), providing them with new and self-empowering roles in the society is a crucial aspect of human security-relevant response to terrorism. Reintegration should focus on giving societal role for them, as well as protection from their former network. The government and experienced civil organisations (CSOs) should work together to provide suitable training for formers based on thorough assessments of each individual. The program should be tailored according to their skill set and passion. In addition, the government could also reduce social stigma against the formers by creating [a platform of dialogue](#) between the formers with a broader society. Ultimately, reintegration program is a two-way process whereby public acceptance is also crucial to enhance its effectiveness.

The state should also consider the balance between reintegrating formers with compensation and aid for victims of terrorist attacks and wrongful detention. Failure to strike balance has been found to raise [cynicism from victims](#) who witness the formers rise as social figures, degrading public support for the reintegration policy.

Putting forward human security means understanding that both terrorism and counterterrorism is an act of winning the hearts and minds of the people. Control over the use of force must be effectively conducted by the state. Excessive use of force would allow terrorists to exploit any form of human rights violations in counterterrorism operations. Subsequently, it will only create a vicious circle of terrorism: eradicating terrorists, but at the same time creating a new terrorist incubator.

Conclusion: Finding the Balance in Counterterrorism

Human security provides a simple yet strong formula that policymakers in counterterrorism should consider: when the state is absent from preventing harm and alleviating suffering of their own citizens, existing terrorist networks would replace their role. Human security does not pretend to have all the solutions for counterterrorism or replace coercive measures in responding to terrorism; deterrence, pursuit, disruption of the terrorist suspects is still paramount when active terrorist cells are present. Rather, human security advocates for framing the entire effort to respond to terrorism as an effort to provide physical security, welfare, and dignity for the ordinary people. This means counterterrorism should not stop at 'score-settling' between the state and terrorists and clearly should be more than eliminating the threat. Too much emphasis on the latter will result in inter-agency competition to be the first in neutralizing the enemy, and in turn lead to a fatal absence of inter-agency coordination where every agency holds different pieces of the puzzle needed to prevent the next catastrophe.***

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