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Foreign Assistance, CSOs, and Counterterrorism: Avoiding Competitions and Extending the Outreach

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Summary

Foreign assistance has been an indispensable part of Indonesia's counterterrorism efforts. In the aftermath of the 2002 Bali Bombings, Indonesia has been receiving foreign assistance to enhance its counterterrorism capabilities. The deadly attack in Bali sparked concerns over the fear of the growing terrorist networks in the country and the region. Almost two decades since the Bali Bombing, counterterrorism remains an unfinished problem in the country. Despite the significant contribution of foreign assistance in improving Indonesia's counterterrorism capabilities, doubts remain over the actual implementation. This article aims to understand the role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) as a proxy of the foreign agencies in implementing their programme. It will also attempt to understand the policies of the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT) in coordinating relevant P/CVE agencies in Indonesia.

Keywords: *Foreign Assistance, Developmental, Civil Society Organizations, Counterterrorism, Terrorism*

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The Early Stage of Foreign Assistance

The United States and its allies have concerted their efforts to eradicate terrorist networks and prevent terrorist attacks in the aftermath of 9/11 attacks. In line with its Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) campaign, the US also promotes its efforts in achieving the integrated goals of promoting democracy and development goals. The assistance is not only targeted to fund the security apparatus in polishing its capacities, but also other relevant governmental and non-governmental agencies in engaging groups or individuals who are prone to radical ideologies.

The early stage of foreign assistance to Indonesia's counterterrorism efforts were primarily on enhancing the capabilities of the police due to the urgent need to track down the mastermind behind the Bali Bombing. The United States and Australia, for instance, deployed their specialist team to assist The Indonesian National Police (POLRI) in scrambling for clues about the perpetrators. They managed to track down the owner of the vehicle that was used for the attack and identify the other perpetrators by tracing their line of communications. Subsequently, US and Australia have been providing substantial assistance for POLRI's special counterterrorism unit, Detachment 88. For instance, in 2003, the United States' Department of States Anti-Terrorism Assistance Program granted technical support for Detachment 88 (Reuters, 2010). In February 2004, Australia also helped Detachment 88 to set up a training centre in Semarang, Central Java called Jakarta Centre for Law Enforcement Cooperation (JCLEC) (Barton, 2018).

However, US and Australia realised that developmental programme to eradicate the root causes of terrorism is equally important. Both US and Australia's politicians delivered statements that highlighted the relationship between poverty, sluggish economic growth, and terrorism (Howell & Lind, 2009). Hence, the two countries created some adjustments in delivering assistance to other countries. The funds were not only targeted to security apparatus, but also other relevant institutions who can assist the developmental programmes.

The Growing Civil Society Organizations Networks

In the early stage of *Reformasi* era (1998-2004), many Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) were working on the demand of the abolition of *dwifungsi* of the Indonesian Armed Forces (TNI). Renowned CSOs, such as Propatria, Commission for the Disappeared and Victims of Violence) KontraS, and Imparsial, were pivotal in the Security Sector Reform (SSR) agenda. Although their involvements were not specifically in counterterrorism effort, the military reform agenda significantly contributed to the redefining of the role of the military and the shift of internal security role from the military to the police.

In the following years, CSOs in P/CVE started to grow in Indonesia. International organizations and foreign countries have approached Indonesia's CSOs to deliver their goals in P/CVE efforts, such as counter-radicalisations, deradicalisation, and reintegration programmes. Some of the notable CSOs - The Wahid Foundation, Institution for International Peace Building (YPP), C-SAVE, Peace Generation, Center for Radicalisation and Deradicalisation Studies (Pakar), Indonesia Muslim Crisis Center (IMC2), and Empatiku Foundation – have been active in conducting studies on terrorism issues in Indonesia, as well as providing training and rehabilitation programme for former terrorists. There is also an International CSO, such as Search for Common Ground (SCFG), whose Indonesian-branch has been delivering in-prison programmes, including the conflict management and life skill

trainings for prison inmates. These CSOs have been pivotal in complementing the governmental programmes and provide policy recommendations.

The growing number of P/CVE CSOs might also be attributed to the foreign assistance. Many local CSOs rely on the foreign assistance to run their activities. The vast number of P/CVE CSOs and the availability of foreign assistance should have enhanced the outreach of Indonesia's P/CVE efforts. In practice, however, overlapping responsibilities among CSOs frequently occur. Some CSOs are working on similar issues and offer similar programmes for the participants. The target of participants also tends to be similar because not all targeted individuals are willing to participate in the deradicalization or disengagement programmes. As a result, some individuals receive similar programmes from various stakeholders (Anindya, 2019).

Foreign agencies who fund the activities also lack assessments on how the programme could be best delivered in Indonesia. According to an executive director of a prominent P/CVE CSO, the funding is only sufficient for programmes delivered in Java and some other prone areas, such as Central Sulawesi and West Nusa Tenggara. However, the recent terrorist arrest trends in the past two years demonstrated that terrorist activities were not only concentrated in those areas. [Sumatera](#) and [Kalimantan](#) have also become the hideout of terrorist networks (AntaraNews Bengkulu, 2020; JawaPos, 2021). The assistance tends to be concentrated to Jakarta-based CSOs. There should be an equal support to improve the capabilities of regional CSOs as they are the closest to the target of participants. Eventually, it would streamline the monitoring mechanism because the regional agencies could reach out to the participants regularly. The programmes should not solely depend on the Jakarta-based agencies which require more budgets and human resources.

BNPT and Integrated Platform

These overlapping issues should have been solved by the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT) as the coordinating agency. The flow of foreign funding to relevant CSOs should have been coordinated and consulted under BNPT. In some cases, however, the foreign funders could contact the relevant CSOs directly based on their own assessment and personal networks.

The revised law on terrorism, Law No. 5/2018 and the Presidential Regulations No. 7/2021 on the National Action Plan on P/CVE demonstrate the government's attempt to fix the perennial problem of lack of coordination and transparency among relevant agencies. In an interview with representatives of BNPT, they explained that the institution has established Indonesia Knowledge Hub or [IKHUB](#) as an integrated platform to map out the programmes and initiatives of relevant governmental and non-governmental institutions. The idea to create this platform was first emerged in 2019. It was not until 2020 that the platform had finally started to be developed.

One of the reasons in creating this integrated platform was the foreign funders' programmes which were not in line with the goals of the Indonesian government. BNPT aims to ensure that the foreign actors will communicate their programmes through them, then BNPT will coordinate with other relevant agencies and map out which agencies should be engaged in the programmes, including CSOs. BNPT conducts the assessments based on each CSOs' expertise and coverages. Nevertheless, this platform is still far from perfect.

Conclusion: Looking Forward

P/CVE CSOs in Indonesia are advanced in terms of programmes and understand what should be done. Yet, many of them heavily depend on the foreign assistance to conduct their programmes. Foreign actors have their own agenda and demand toward the CSOs. Many of them may share similar targets of participants and type of activities. At the same time, CSOs also tend to share similar contacts of participants, leading to overlapping responsibilities. This problem will only jeopardise the counterterrorism efforts in the country. When there are “too many hands” on one participant, it would be difficult to assess the effectiveness of the programmes. Meanwhile, we need to understand which programme would fit better for the participants as the programme should be tailored based on the background and needs of each participant. IKHUB is still a work in-progress and BNPT has been working to improve it as a platform to coordinate the works of all relevant agencies and information on Indonesian counterterrorism. Nevertheless, this platform requires cooperation from the other relevant agencies to amplify its significances. Both foreign actors and CSOs should also create thorough assessments on how to extend their outreach and avoid the Jakarta-centric or Java-centric approach. Expanding the outreach will also help to study a wider group of people with different characteristics and backgrounds which will be beneficial for the study of terrorism and counterterrorism in general.

Notes on the Author

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Interviews:

- Interview with civil society activist in P/CVE. Online Google Meet, 23 December 2021.
- Interview with government official, BNPT. Online Zoom, 2 March 2022.
- Interview with academic, think tank. Online Zoom, 15 March 2022.

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