

The New-Old Terrorism Nexus in Southeast Asia and What it Means for Countering Terrorism

Andrew T H Tan

Abstract

Following 9-11, the USA was galvanized to act, convinced it had to take the war on terrorism to its sources, including in Southeast Asia, the so-called 'Second Front' in the global war on terror. The emergence of the 'New' religious terrorism, as outlined by Bruce Hoffman, has been epitomized by the links established by Al Qaeda within the region and the careful support and nurturing it provided to local jihadist groups. The regional network, the Jemaah Islamiah (JI) has an operational contour that includes Australia. But the 'New' terrorism has had to counter the established 'Old' terrorism motivated by ethno-political causes that long predated the emergence of Al Qaeda. The tension between religion and nationalism indicates the need to better understand the fundamental motivations or grievances that underlie terrorism as well as the need for a comprehensive approach to countering terrorism. These lessons have been reflected in the recent adoption by the US of a comprehensive strategy modeled in part upon the lessons of the Malayan Emergency, as outlined in the US Army Counterinsurgency Field Manual (2006) and the US National Defense Strategy (2008). Southeast Asia has long practiced, to varying degrees of competence, comprehensive counterterrorism approaches but the West may not have understood that comprehensive approaches is not just about offering carrots. The necessary sticks involved may not be palatable to Western democracies.

Introduction

Following 9-11, the USA was galvanized to act, convinced it had to take the war on terrorism to its sources, including in Southeast Asia, which was designated as the 'Second Front' in the global war on terror. The counter-terrorism focus in the region should come as no surprise, as Southeast Asia has the world's largest Muslim population. This opened the possibility of the Malay Archipelago becoming a sanctuary for Al Qaeda terrorists fleeing from counter-terrorism operations throughout the Middle East, including the US-led Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan in late 2001. Another key reason, however, is also evidence that Southeast Asia had a significant role in a number of major terrorist attacks, such as those on 11 September 2001 in the USA, the abortive Singapore bomb plots of late 2001, the attack on the USS Cole off Yemen and Operation Bojinka, in which terrorists planned to simultaneously attack a dozen American airliners in the Asia Pacific (Gunaratna, 2002: 175-6). In 2006, President Bush also revealed that regional Al Qaeda operatives in Southeast Asia had a role in the abortive plan to attack an office tower in Los Angeles (CNN News, 9 February 2006).

The emergence of the 'New' religious terrorism, as outlined by Bruce Hoffman, has been epitomized by the links established by Al Qaeda within the region and the careful support and nurturing it provided to local jihadist groups. The regional network, the Jemaah Islamiah (JI) has an operational contour that includes Australia. But the 'New' terrorism has had to compete with the established 'Old' terrorism in the region, that is motivated by ethno-political causes and that long predated the emergence of Al Qaeda. This 'Old' terrorism is epitomized by the existing Muslim separatist insurgencies in places such as Mindanao, Aceh and southern Thailand. For the purpose of the essay, existing, long-running insurgencies are included as part of 'Old' terrorism.

This paper explains the tensions between pan-Islamist religion and local ethno-national aspirations which have characterized Muslim rebellion in recent times. This tension indicates the need to better understand the fundamental motivations or grievances that underlie terrorism and insurgency in the region. They lead to the conclusion that there is a need for a comprehensive approach in order to counter local terrorists and insurgents, given the complexity of issues that underlie the resort to violence. In recent times, these lessons have been reflected in the recent adoption by the US of a comprehensive strategy modeled in part upon the lessons of the Malayan Emergency, as outlined in the revised US Army Counterinsurgency Field Manual of December 2006 and the US National Defense Strategy of June 2008. However, this paper argues that whilst Southeast Asia has long practiced, to varying degrees of competence, a comprehensive approach, the West needs to be very careful about the problems and prospects of this strategy. Essentially, not only is it a long-term ideological struggle requiring commitment and patience, what the Southeast Asian states have also learnt is that this approach is not just about offering carrots. The necessary sticks involved may not be palatable to Western democracies.

The Definition of Terrorism

Rebellion in Southeast Asia has expressed itself in two forms: terrorism, which is the use of violence, usually against non-combatants, as a means to further ethno-nationalist or political objectives; and insurgency (a term used interchangeably with

guerilla warfare), which organized violence aimed primarily at establishing bases that are secure from the control of the central government and which would enable the establishment of what amounts to a counter-government. In many cases, however, the line is blurred as insurgent groups have also used, sometimes through splinter or associated groups, terrorist tactics to further their aims.

Although Southeast Asia has been designated by the United States after the seminal terrorist attacks in New York and Washington on 11 September 2001 as the 'second front' in the global war on terrorism, there is little consensus within the region on the definition of terrorism. Indeed, many of the roots of rebellion lie within the region, such as the failure of the state, including the failure of nation-building and territorial governance after decolonization, as well as the state's practice of terror as a political instrument on ethnic and / or religious minorities. In some places, such as East Timor under Indonesian occupation, one of the main contributory factors to armed resistance stemmed in the first place from the excessive use of terror as a political instrument by the state itself. Thus, while terrorism has always been associated with rebellion, most scholars understand terror as a means to an end, given that states use it as well (Rapoport, 2006:4). The term 'terrorist' should therefore be seen as a neutral term to denote the use of terror by groups prepared to use such means. It should not carry with it the normative and pejorative connotation that assumes the privileging of the state, since terrorism is also a tool of the weak as well as used by states against armed rebellions mounted by ethnic or religious minorities.

The New Terrorism

The seminal terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001 in the United States appeared to validate the claims of Bruce Hoffman and others, who contend that 9-11 marked the emergence of a new wave of religious terrorism that would prove to be far deadlier than the old terrorist groups. According to the advocates of the 'new' terrorism, the characteristics of the new terrorism include: motivation by apocalyptic, millenarian religion that espouses violence; mass casualty terrorist attacks which could potentially involve the use of weapons of mass destruction; a transnational mode of operation that disregards national borders; a global presence, made possible by decentralized, networked organizational structures and local strategic alliances; the multinational

character and composition of its members; decreasing dependence on state sponsors as the ability to operate across borders has increased; and the exploitation and use of modern technology and communications to reach out to potentially millions of supporters as compared to the much smaller clandestine support base in the pre-Internet age. It has thus been argued that this 'new' terrorism is in fact a product of the global interlinked economy that has emerged from globalisation, and which has provided the conditions for its emergence (Hoffman, 1997).

Furthermore, Al Qaeda is the prototype of the 'new' terrorist organisation. Compared to old terrorist groups, Al Qaeda is a truly multinational enterprise, transcending national, language and ethnic barriers with its global reach. It has a network of dedicated local supporters through its local alliances worldwide. Al Qaeda is dangerous because of its declared interest in obtaining weapons of mass destruction, as well as its apocalyptic, religious vision. It is, in short, as Rohan Gunaratna concluded, it is a formidable threat to the international system (Gunaratna, 2002: 221).

How has the new terrorism manifested itself in Southeast Asia? The region became aware of its presence only after 9-11, when the covert terrorist network known as the Jemaah Islamiah (or JI) was uncovered following the arrest of 13 of its members in Singapore in January 2002. The JI planned to use 21 tonnes of a powerful fertiliser bomb, ammonium nitrate, in 7 truck bombs, to attack a number of targets in Singapore. These included US military personnel at a subway train station on their way to work at Sembawang (where a US naval logistics facility was based), US naval vessels at Changi Naval Base, key American multinationals, Western and Israeli embassies, and local Singaporean military facilities. The abortive attacks would, collectively, have constituted the largest terrorist attack since 9-11. They indicated that Singapore is considered by Al Qaeda as an iconic target, given the presence of thousands of Western and US multinationals, and Singapore's close ties with the USA and Israel.

Research by Sidney Jones and others have uncovered links between the JI network and the abortive Darul Islam rebellion in Indonesia in the 1950s (International Crisis Group, 8 August 2002). That rebellion, which aimed to establish an Islamic state in

Indonesia, resulted in the loss of some 25,000 lives. After it was crushed in 1960, however, its ideals have survived. Both Abu Bakar Bashir and Abdullah Sungkar, the alleged co-founders of the JI, see themselves as its ideological successors. In the 1970s, they established a boarding school in Java from which many JI members were educated. They later fled to Malaysia after attracting the attention of the security services, where they allegedly established the JI network in the early 1990s. The JI developed links with Al Qaeda through the ex-Afghan *mujahideen* volunteers who returned to Southeast Asia after fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 1980s. The JI is active in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Philippines and Australia, and aims to establish a pan-Islamic state in the region. It is, in short, a mini-Al Qaeda in Southeast Asia.

The JI has been responsible for many recent terrorist attacks. The list includes the Christmas bombings in Manila and Jakarta in 2000. It was involved in the abortive Singapore bomb plots of 2001, and carried out the Bali attack in October 2002 that killed 202 people, mostly Western tourists. In 2003, it carried out the Marriott Hotel attack in Jakarta. In 2004, it carried out the bomb attack on the Australian High Commission in Jakarta. It also carried out the second Bali attack in October 2005.

JI elements have also been involved in local Muslim militias responsible for violence in Maluku and Sulawesi, in Indonesia, the scene of bitter Christian–Muslim clashes between 1999 and 2002, resulting in the deaths of over 10,000 people. The causes of the local civil conflict lay in economic competition in the midst of the economic crisis gripping Indonesia at the time, which exacerbated resentment against the influx of mostly Muslim migrants. This resentment had been building for decades, with much unhappiness over the perceived Islamization of both the central government and the civil service. There has also been much resentment over the lucrative contracts held by military-backed companies engaged in fisheries, forestry and mining (Far Eastern Economic Review, 20 January 2000:18). Not surprisingly, calls for independence in these islands have been made (Straits Times, 23 June 2000:43). While many of these grievances are clearly not religious, religion became a central issue once violence broke out. After the conflict broke out, Javanese-based radical groups became involved. They included the Laskar Jihad (later disbanded in 2002), the JI, elements of the old Darul Islam, the Mujahideen KOMPAK (the military wing of a Muslim

charity), and a Makassar-based Muslim militia, the Laskar Jundullah, which has close links with Al Qaeda through its leader, Agus Dwikarna. Many of these radical groups believed that the Christian community in the islands posed a threat to Muslims and that the sectarian violence provided the perfect opportunity to develop the *jihadist* mentality that would strengthen support for the eventual establishment of an Islamic state in Indonesia and beyond.

In February 2002, a ceasefire was formalised into a peace agreement known as the Malino Accord (Government of Indonesia, 14 February 2002). But communal tensions have remained, stoked by the involvement of JI. In April 2001, three Christian men were sentenced to death for their roles in the sectarian violence, and one of them, Fabianus Tibo, named 16 Christian masterminds in his defence plea. Despite the subsequent executions of the three, a key demand of the Muslims has been the arrest of the 16 alleged masterminds. The peace agreements might also have had a chance of success had the promised economic reconstruction, social assistance programs and resettlement of displaced persons been carried out. Instead, massive corruption resulted in their failure. Thus, disaffected members of Mujahideen KOMPAK, comprising locals (some with dual membership with the JI), and who had relatives or friends killed in the conflict, have continued to carry out attacks against Christians (International Crisis Group, 22 January 2008:1-2).

In January 2007, two police raids in Poso in Sulawesi island after 3 schoolgirls were beheaded by militants resulted in the deaths of 17 men and the arrest of more than 20, most of whom were local JI members (International Crisis Group, 24 January 2007:1). The operations revealed the links between the JI in Java to the militant violence in Poso. Indeed, a steady stream of religious teachers had come to Poso since the sectarian conflict begun to proselytize and recruit, as the JI saw the area as having great potential to become a secure base for the establishment and expansion of a Muslim community according to radical Islamist precepts, given the very real grievances and sense of injustice local Muslims felt. JI's Javanese leaders in Poso were arrested or fled. The Poso operations also led to further arrests in March 2007 by Densus 88, the Indonesian police counter-terrorism unit, of operatives in Central and East Java, the seizure of a huge cache of explosives and weapons, as well as documents revealing JI's plan to assassinate police officers, prosecutors and judges.

In June 2007, a key JI leader, Yusron Mahbudi (Abu Dujana) was arrested, dealing a major blow to JI's overall operational capabilities (International Crisis Group, 16 February 2008:2).

Although many top JI operatives and bomb-makers have been arrested or killed, and the JI's Sulawesi operations shut down, some key bomb-makers, such as Mohamed Noordin Top, remain on the run. Together with the presence of *ex-mujahideen* from Afghanistan, new recruits from local conflict areas in Sulawesi and Maluku, and a solid core estimated to total more than 900, the terrorist threat from the JI, whilst diminished, remains serious.

Moreover, the JI is not the only radical terrorist threat. In the Philippines, the Al Qaeda-linked Abu Sayaff Group (ASG) has posed a serious threat to security. Founded in 1991 by former *mujahideen* who had returned from Afghanistan to South-East Asia, the ASG established links with Al Qaeda, which sent Ramzi Yousef (responsible for the World Trade Center bombing in New York in 1993) to train its members in the use of explosives. Through extortion, kidnapping for ransom activities, assassinations and urban bombings, the ASG has been able to wreak havoc in the southern Philippines. The ASG and JI carried out the deadly ferry bombing in Manila Bay in February 2004, which resulted in the deaths of more than 100 people (Tan, 2006:116-7). In August 2006, the Philippine army launched a major operation which led to the death of ASG leader Khadaffy Janjalani and the capture of ASG camps. Khadaffy however, has been replaced by Yasser Igasan, a Syrian-trained Islamic scholar believed to have close ties with foreign radical jihadists (GMA News TV, 27 June 2007).

Old Terrorism: Muslim Insurgency in Southeast Asia

The new terrorism however, exists in tandem with the old, more traditional forms of ethno-nationalist terrorism representing longstanding ethnic, religious, political, economic and social grievances that predated 9-11 and Al Qaeda. Indeed, the local dynamic is perhaps more dominant, when one takes into account the fact that almost all Muslim rebel groups, including Islamist radical groups such as the JI, in fact predated Al Qaeda and emerged in response to local grievances and conditions.

Indeed, despite claims of Al Qaeda penetration and co-option, the exact nature of the links between Al Qaeda on the one-hand, and local groups on the other, such as JI and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, is in fact disputed, on these very grounds (Barton: 2005 and Wright-Neville, 2004). This raises interesting questions relating to the ‘old versus new’ debate in terrorism studies (Isabelle, 2004:439-454). For instance, how “new” is the new terrorism in Southeast Asia?

Indeed, the old ethno-nationalist terrorism, in the form of Muslim separatist insurgency, has been going on for many years now, in places such as Aceh, Mindanao and Patani. Their persistence and severity have been indicative of the failure of the states involved to achieve legitimacy for their rule. According to Paribatra and Samudavanija, “in post-colonial SE Asia, it has been conveniently forgotten by central governments that the constructing of what is more accurately a state-nation merely means that external or western imperialism had been replaced by an internalized one, which is potentially more brutal and enduring” (Lim and Vani, 1984).

A brief survey of three Muslim separatist insurgencies in Southeast Asia indicates that whilst Al Qaeda had attempted to penetrate and build links with these local rebel groups, it has met with mixed results, as is had to battle the pre-existing nationalist imperative which remains strong.

The Moro rebellion in the southern Philippines has deep historical roots; over the years, massive Catholic migration from the north overwhelmed the native Moros so much so that by the 1960s, they had become a minority in their own traditional homeland. There are also problems arising from landlessness, discrimination, poverty and unemployment. The Moro National Liberation Front (or MNLF) led by Nur Misuari was thus founded in 1972 to preserve both Moro identity and the rights of the Moro people. What followed was a huge civil war. By the 1990s, another more overtly Muslim group, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front or MILF, became the dominant rebel group, eclipsing Nur Misuari’s group.

This new group established ties with Osama bin Laden, who provided funds through his brother-in-law then running a charity in Manila. Osama also provided instructors

(such as Ramzi Yousef) at an MILF facility called Camp Abubakar to help train the insurgents as well as regional militants. But the events of 11 September 2001, rather than galvanizing the MILF into revolutionary fervor, actually provided a boost to the peace process as the MILF leadership beat a hasty retreat from its links with Al Qaeda (Straits Times, 4 November 2002:A6). In March 2002, the MILF described as “unfair, inaccurate, unfounded” reports linking the MILF with terrorism, and insisted that it is in fact a “legitimate liberation organization,” stressing its participation in negotiations “for a peaceful settlement of the Bangsamoro problem.” Significantly, the MILF stated that it “counts on committed popular memberships who are not fanatical about their religion,” and declared that it would be contrary to the MILF’s declared goal and objectives to link up with “terrorism or any extremist groups using religious faith as a tool for terroristic activities” (Mindanao Times Interactive News, 2 March 2002). In April 2002, the MILF agreed to the joint training with the Philippine government of local ceasefire monitoring teams (Mindanao Times Interactive News, 18 April 2002). In June 2002, the MILF offered to fight “hand in hand” with the Philippine military to end the Abu Sayaff problem (Mindanao Times Interactive News, 13 June 2002).

This new-found realism on the part of the MILF did not go un-noticed. Indeed, the government’s chief negotiator for peace talks with the MILF, Jesus Dureza, paid the group the ultimate compliment when he stated in October 2002 that he found the MILF “friendlier than the government” in building a climate of peace and development in Mindanao, citing as an example military officials who seemed intent on continuing with the use of force to resolve the Moro problem (Mindanao Times Interactive News, 22 October 2002). The death of long-time MILF leader Hashim Selamat through natural causes in 2003 and the succession of Murad Ebrahim as the new leader have improved the prospects for peace. A moderate, nationalistic-type leader, Murad has reiterated the MILF’s territorial and nationalistic objectives. However, it is also widely recognised that the MILF is fragmented, with younger commanders sympathetic to Osama’s brand of radical pan-Islamic ideology, and have in fact given sanctuary to JI operatives on the run from regional governments. The failure of the Philippine Congress to rectify a peace settlement with the MILF in 2008 has also led to renewed fighting.

Another serious Muslim separatist insurgency existed in Aceh in Indonesia. Aceh has historically been an independent kingdom. After its incorporation into Indonesia, there has been a great deal of resentment over Javanese domination and corruption. This resentment has been accentuated by the widespread poverty and discrimination which exists despite huge gas deposits. The transmigration program has also introduced large numbers of Javanese migrants who are resented by the local Acehnese as they have displaced locals from the government and also in commerce. These fundamental grievances led to armed rebellion against the Indonesian state, led by the Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (or GAM). However, GAM has consistently emphasized that its struggle is not religious but territorial and nationalist in nature. Indeed, GAM opposed the attempts by Indonesian radical groups to establish a presence in Aceh. When Al Qaeda leaders led by its deputy chief, Al Zawahiri visited the province in 2000, for instance, they were rebuffed by GAM. After the events of 9-11, the then GAM commander, Abdullah Syafiah, who was later killed by Indonesian security forces, was amongst the first to send a message of condolence to the US Ambassador (Tan, 2004:178-9).

The massive tsunami in December 2004 which destroyed Bandar Aceh and killed 127,000 people in Indonesia had the effect of galvanizing the peace process, given the evident imperative for rebuilding. This resulted in the peace agreement in August 2005 in Helsinki, under which GAM agreed to disarm and take part instead in the political process, whilst the province would get greater autonomy and the military would withdraw (Tan, 2006:151).

Local elections were held in December 2006 and won by Irwandi Yusuf, a former commander of the main rebel group, the Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM). However, the peace agreement has been undermined by political infighting within GAM between the Old Guard exiled leadership and younger commanders who had fought in Aceh. Since gaining power in 2006, GAM has also failed to deal with the many economic and social issues in the province. In addition, the passage of the Law on Governing Aceh in June 2006 appeared to undermine the Helsinki agreement by weakening some of the provincial government's authority (International Crisis Group, 4 October 2007). Unless there is visible progress in meeting the political and economic aspirations of the Acehnese people, a return to violence by disaffected

Acehnese cannot therefore be ruled out. Worse, if the nationalists in GAM fail, the Acehnese could be more amenable to radical Islam.

Finally, there is the long-running Muslim separatist insurgency in southern Thailand. The southern provinces were part of the old historical kingdom of Patani, which was invaded by Siam in 1786 and then incorporated through the Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909. The Malays have always viewed this as unjust, viewing Bangkok as an occupying power. The Thai government increased this sense of alienation when it tried, prior to 1977, to pursue a policy of assimilation. This involved the centralization of the bureaucracy, which eroded the power of Malay royalty and the religious elite. The introduction of secular Thai education and language also challenged traditional Malay Muslim culture. The Malays were also unhappy with corruption and discrimination, with the Malays stuck at the bottom of the economic rung. Matters took a turn for the worse in the late 1990s, due to endemic corruption and mismanagement, which led to much discontent. The Thaksin government also centralised control in 2002 after it came to power. It took a tough, almost reckless approach to the separatist problem, emphasizing the use of military force to deal with the upsurge in insurgent attacks in early 2004. This led to the killing of 108 Muslims in April 2004, some of whom were sheltering at the historic Krue Se mosque. In October 2004, 78 unarmed Muslim protesters died after they suffocated in police vans at Tak Bai (Tan, 2006:198).

The Thai authorities initially claimed that the insurgents had deep links with Al Qaeda. But whilst there is evidence that JI and Al Qaeda operatives have found shelter amongst co-religionists in southern Thailand, there has been little credible evidence of deep links with them (Al Ahram Weekly, 6-12 March 2004). Although the level and organisation of violence dramatically increased from 2001, Western tourists and interests have not been targeted. The insurgency has remained local and nationalist in orientation, as well as largely confined to the four southern Muslim provinces. Indeed, according to key Al Qaeda-JI commander, Hambali, now in US custody, the insurgents had rebuffed Al Qaeda when approached for assistance to carry out bombings in Thailand. However, the events of 2004 could yet transform the separatist movement, which could turn southern Thailand into the region's Chechnya.

The above analysis indicates shared characteristics amongst the Muslim separatisms in Southeast Asia. In all three instances, in Aceh, Mindano and Patani, there has been a past importance as a separate state. There is also a strong sense of local identity, with Islam used as a focal rallying point in opposing the government, not surprising given the Islamic character of their communities. Indeed, it is the sense of being historically and culturally coherent communities that underlies their sense of nation, of having a right to exist as separate nation-states (Lim and Vani, 1984:12). There has also been the evident presence of local political, economic, and social grievances; a sense of relative deprivation; discrimination and prejudice; the presence of much resented migrant communities; mismanagement and corruption by the authorities; and a great deal of ignorance and insensitivity towards the Muslim communities by the central governments involved.

Thus, in joining up the dots to uncover the Al Qaeda network in the region, it is important to bear in mind that given the complex nature of Muslim rebellion in Southeast Asia and the presence of fundamental grievances, not every Muslim rebel in the region is a dedicated Al Qaeda operative striving to achieve pan-Islamist religious objectives. Local Muslims in places such as Mindanao, Aceh and Patani have home-grown political, economic and social concerns that long predated 11 September 2001 and Al Qaeda. While they may derive satisfaction and be galvanised by Al Qaeda's actions, fundamental grievances of a political, economic and social nature underlie armed Muslim rebellion in Southeast Asia. Armed rebellion, including separatist insurgency, has at its root socio-economic issues and grievances, which cannot be redressed solely through the use of force

The Comprehensive Approach to Countering Terrorism

The mixed results that Al Qaeda has had in its attempts to penetrate and co-opt the main Muslim insurgent movements point to the complexities of Muslim rebellion and the presence of fundamental causes in the region. These have important implications for counter-terrorism in Southeast Asia. While the new global religious terrorism as represented by Al Qaeda and its local supporters has established itself in the region, it has had to contend with strong ethno-nationalist impulses – the Old terrorism – which have proven to be stronger than radical pan-Islamism thus far. This raises some

interesting questions: how accurate is the 'new' terrorism paradigm in describing the nature of terrorism in the region? Is the concept and strategy of the US-led 'Global War on Terror' adequate or even relevant to the Southeast Asian context?

Indeed, understanding the complexity of armed rebellions in Southeast Asia is important if an appropriate and effective counter-strategy is to be devised. Southeast Asian governments themselves, except for the Thaksin administration in Thailand in the early part of this decade which adopted the kinetic military-oriented approach of the US Global War on Terror with disastrous results, understand this. It is for this reason that the regional approach, particularly in Malaysia and Singapore, and less successfully implemented due to governance issues in Indonesia and the Philippines, has been a comprehensive one based on winning hearts and minds. This approach has proven remarkably successful in countering the Malayan Communist Party's armed revolt in the 1950s, in the Malayan Emergency. Indeed, the British success in the Emergency, one of the few cases of successful counter-insurgency, has made this a useful case study. Essentially, the comprehensive approach rejects a purely military-security approach in favor of a more balanced use of a range of kinetic as well as non-kinetic instruments, such as security measures, development, political mobilization, psychological warfare and political negotiations to alleviate the underlying conditions that lead to insurgency and conflict.

The difficulties that the USA faced in Iraq, with a violent insurgency that has cost the lives of over 4,000 US troops since the US invasion of the country in 2003, led to a search for a strategy against insurgency and terrorism. British counterinsurgency (COIN) lessons, drawn from the successes of the Malayan Emergency in the 1950s thus became closely studied. British COIN success in Malaya has been attributed to "the abandonment of a coercion and enforcement approach in favour of a hearts and minds approach" (Stubbs, 1989:264). The US revised Counterinsurgency Field Manual (December 2006), overseen by General David Petraeus, thus makes a positive reference to Malaya and reads like a contemporary version of British COIN doctrine. According to the Manual, the keys to success lie in the following principles: legitimacy is the main objective; unity of effort is essential; political factors are primary; counterinsurgents must understand the environment; intelligence drives operations; insurgents must be isolated from their cause and support; security under

the rule of law is essential; and, counterinsurgents should prepare for a long term commitment (US Army Field Counterinsurgency Manual, 15 December 2006:Chapter 1-20 to 1-24). The Manual emphasized a comprehensive “hearts and minds” approach, as “COIN is fought among the populace” – a key lesson of Malaya (US Army Counterinsurgency Field Manual, 15 December 2006).

The implementation of the new, more enlightened US COIN strategy, coinciding with a surge in troops in 2007, appeared to have reduced the threat of insurgent violence in Iraq. But this relative peace can be partly attributed to the fact that the Mehdi Army, controlled by the Shia extremist cleric Muqtada Sadr, was ordered by Sadr himself to cease from military action. More significantly, an unexpected development was the revolt of tribal leaders that had been the backbone of the insurgency against Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), in the so-called Anbar Awakening (BBC News, 13 November 2007). The uneven and mixed results in Iraq raises the question of whether the much touted lessons of the Malayan Emergency could be the basis for modern COIN strategy. On this issue, Milton Osborne argued in 2005 that there were unique circumstances that explained British success in Malaya and concluded (perhaps too harshly) that “there is little to suggest that the way in which the Malayan Emergency was managed offers any lessons for Iraq” (Osborne, 2005:12). In any case, better COIN strategy and successes in Iraq would not remove the threat of global terrorism. Something more, perhaps a global grand strategy, would be needed.

In 2003, Thomas Mockaitis advocated a global counterinsurgency (GCOIN) strategy to counter this global insurgency (Mockaitis, 2003:21). He strongly advocated what is in effect classical British COIN doctrine as developed in theatres such as Malaya, albeit writ large on a global scale (Mockaitis, 2003:57). The call for a GCOIN strategy was similarly made by Hoffman in his testimony to US Congress in 2006. Such an approach, Hoffman stated, “would a priori knit together the equally critical political, economic, diplomatic, and developmental sides inherent to the successful prosecution of counterinsurgency to the existing dominant military side of the equation” (Hoffman, 16 February 2006:14). But the most cogent, and influential, elaboration of the new GCOIN strategy that would replace the unilateral, military-oriented GWOT has come from David Kilcullen, who advocated a strategy he calls “Disaggregation.” This focuses on “interdicting links between theatres, denying the

ability of regional and global actors to link and exploit local actors, disrupting flows between and within jihad theatres, denying sanctuary areas, isolating Islamists from local populations and disrupting inputs from sources of Islamism in the greater Middle East” (Kilcullen, 2004: Executive Summary). In this strategy, there is no need to pacify every insurgent theatre; it only demands the identification and neutralisation of those elements in each theatre that link to the global jihad. Just as the Containment strategy was central to the Cold War, GCOIN, Kilcullen argued, would provide a “unifying strategic conception,” or Grand Strategy, that has been lacking in the GWOT (Kilcullen, 2004: Executive Summary).

The swing from an almost overwhelmingly kinetic, military approach to a non-kinetic approach based on comprehensive “hearts and minds” has been reflected in the detailed prescriptions contained in the revised US Army Counterinsurgency Field Manual released in December 2006. Heavily influenced by the ideas of Kilcullen and other strategists consulted by General Petraeus, it is a very impressive document of 282 pages in length and expounds a sophisticated non-kinetic approach to counterinsurgency. This non-kinetic, comprehensive approach is also reflected in the first, detailed post-Rumsfeld US National Defense Strategy, overseen by Rumsfeld’s successor, Bill Gates, and released in June 2008.

Problems and Prospects for the Comprehensive Approach

The new approach however, is problematic for a number of reasons. Firstly, it has been argued that the comprehensive approach as practiced in Malaya is not likely to work in another different setting as the dynamics have changed. As Osborne and others have made clear, there were unique circumstances in Malaya in the 1950s that led to the defeat of the communist insurgency, such as the lack of support domestically due to the insurgency’s identification with an ethnic minority, the lack of external support, the superb intelligence apparatus that the British colonial authority possessed, the overwhelming number of security personnel compared to the guerilla movement, the use of forceful measures such as collective punishment, and the forced relocation of villagers, and the relatively small scale of fighting. Such features make comparisons with Iraq quite irrelevant (Osborne, 2005:12).

The new global counterinsurgency approach also requires a degree of consensus globally, amongst key allies as well as the international community. But in today's more fluid and complex world, with so many more non-state actors, and with the USA's soft power at a nadir in the wake of unilateral actions and Iraq, will a US-led global counterinsurgency strategy command the requisite political will and consensus that is required for it to succeed? There are also legitimate questions which can be asked regarding the seemingly obvious objective of winning hearts and minds in the Muslim world. Winning hearts and minds in the Muslim world, particularly in the wake of Iraq and eight years of the Bush Administration's hard military approach may prove well nigh impossible. How can the anger and hostility against the US be dissipated? How can the USA regain its moral legitimacy after frittering it away so quickly in Iraq, Guantanamo, Abu Gharaib, renditions and the use of torture?

Moreover, the new global counterinsurgency model appears to be a very soft reading of classical British Commonwealth counterinsurgency strategy. It has been completely forgotten that classical British strategy of winning hearts and minds is not just about winning over people and minimising the use of force. It also included very draconian measures, such as preventive detention (which is still being used by Singapore and Malaysia, which theoretically could mean a very long-term imprisonment without trial), the forced relocation of the population into strategic hamlets ringed with security (and operated much like a day-release prison camp), collective punishment of villagers and communities that are seen to be supporting terrorists, and finally, the extensive use of the death penalty. Although the ultimate objective of a comprehensive approach was to win over the bulk of the population, another key objective was also to increase their respect for the authority of the sovereign. A comprehensive approach therefore does not mean emphasizing the non-kinetic at the expense of tough security measures. In fact, quite forceful kinetic measures were employed in Malaya in the context of a comprehensive strategy. Indeed, success in the Malayan Emergency came about through a combination of draconian measures coupled with a comprehensive approach that sought to address fundamental political, economic and social grievances.

In the West today, are governments prepared to exercise a host of forceful pre-emptive measures such as the targeted assassinations of terrorist leaders, extensive

and long periods of preventive detention of suspected terrorists, and the use of a range of politically incorrect disincentives (together with incentives) to prevent terrorists from tapping into community support, funding and recruitment? If not, what can Western governments do to better balance the kinetic and non-kinetic instruments in a way that could win over those who might support terrorism and yet present significant disincentives to those who might want to participate in terrorist cells and plan and carry out attacks?

The comprehensive approach also requires patience and a long-term commitment. Indeed, insurgent wars in the Malay Archipelago have shown great persistence and longevity. The Malayan Emergency took 12 years to run its course, from 1948 to 1960, and even then, the communist insurgents remained contained, not defeated, and signed a peace agreement giving up their struggle only in 1989 (Beckett, 2001:63). Would the West have the patience and commitment to fight what is now recognized will be a long-term ideological struggle with militant Islam? Is the West prepared to tolerate a “long war” involving extraordinary counterterrorism measures that require the long-term compromise with personal liberties?

This paper does not advocate the use of draconian measures. The questions, and the analysis in this paper, merely point to the enormous challenges of counterterrorism that the West faces. The ‘comprehensive’ model or approach that has been promoted in US counterinsurgency and counter-terrorism strategy is no panacea. It is a default model given the absence of better alternatives. But the British Commonwealth experience, especially in Malaya, informs us that the best chance for it to work effectively requires a carrot and stick approach, and a long-term perspective and commitment that eschew the short-term quest for quick results. ‘Comprehensive’ means the effective use of both hard security measures in tandem with political, economic, social and psychological instruments. Southeast Asia has long practiced, to varying degrees of competence, comprehensive counterterrorism approaches but the West may not have understood that comprehensive approaches is not just about offering carrots. The necessary sticks involved however, might not be palatable to Western democracies.

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