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Combating Daesh: Insights into Malaysia's Counter-Terrorism Experience and the Deradicalisation of Former Detainees

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Abstract: Malaysia is no exception when it comes to the Daesh threat. Several vulnerable Muslim populations have been previously targeted by Daesh via specific modus operandi to fulfil the terrorism agenda. Based on a persistent concern about Daesh-related issues and their consequences, this article critically explores the role of the security agency, the Counter-Terrorism Division within the Royal Malaysia Police (RMP), in addressing Daesh radicalisation in Malaysia. It examines the process and effectiveness of the top down and 'soft' approaches undertaken by the RMP via the rehabilitation and deradicalisation of former Daesh detainees before they rejoin society. The research is qualitative, and is based on a focus group discussion and in-depth interviews with representatives from the Counter Terrorism Division, terrorism experts, government officials and former detainees. The findings show that the RMP's efforts to curb Daesh intimidation have been effective in terms of decreasing the number of new terrorism incidents, militant recruitment and the establishment of networks and cells. The introduction of 'Module 30', which involves theological and psychological improvement, and civil order, along with vocational training and 'lifelong-monitoring', has significantly contributed to rehabilitating and deradicalising the majority of former Daesh convicts in Malaysia, such that they embrace peace and renounce violence and religious extremism.

Keywords: Daesh; Malaysia; counter-terrorism; deradicalisation; former detainees

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1. Introduction

Malaysia has experienced terrorism in the past, mainly linked to regional terrorist groups such as Jemaah Islamiyah and Abu Sayyaf Group in the southern Philippines. Mubarok and Hamid (2018) argue that the dynamic of Muslim radicalism and terrorism in Malaysia can be traced back to the period of Darul Islam in the 1950s, which carried a different motive for developing and rallying support for the recognition of a moderate and peaceful Islam after independence from the Anglo-Saxon power. In addition, previous studies on past Islamic activism in Malaysia have often referred to the Darul Arqam movement, as this Sufi revivalism movement systematically faced government suppression that aimed to dismantle the movement, which was based on a divergence in the Islamic core belief that threatened state security (Abdul Hamid 1999). However, a comprehensive review reveals that Darul Arqam's economic progress and dynamic enterprises were growing robust, which led the state to halt the movement out of distrust of the possible re-emergence of Darul Islam's idea.

Further changing patterns of Islamic activism in Malaysia can be observed during the premierships of Mahathir Mohamad (1999–2003) and Abdullah Badawi (2003–2008); they displayed a capricious realignment and reconfiguration of their activities in order to be in line with non-Islamic forces in a burgeoning civil society characterised by a harmonious,

equilibrious existence. However, the idea of 'Islam Hadhari', which was promoted by Abdullah Badawi, ended due to the rise of Islamist conservatives (championed by the Pan-Malaysia Islamic party, popularly known in Malaysia as 'PAS') who deliberately interpreted Islam Hadhari as a political instrument (or propaganda) to be used to impose the Islamisation process via a top down approach, which was contradictory to peaceful coexistence in a multi-ethnic society (Abdul Hamid and Ismail 2014). Despite the possibility of an Islamic state emerging in Malaysia via militant means that remain remote, Malaysia is still within the radar of an active hub for militant recruitment.

Over the past few years, since the outbreak of the Arab Spring in Syria, the emergence of Daesh militants has caused terrorism fears in different parts of the world. Fears are not only focused on the Middle East, as threats of Daesh terrorism have also extended into the Southeast Asia region, particularly into Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines. A series of bombings, kidnappings and terror attacks have occurred between 2015 and 2019, which Daesh terrorists openly claimed as part of their prime modus operandi in establishing wider Daulah Islamiyyah or 'Islamic rule' (Marsili 2016; Ramakrishna 2017; Schulze and Liow 2019; Kadivar 2022). The first clear example of the Daesh threat in Malaysia would be the case of 'Lofti Ariffin 2014', and the emergence of a local militia group under the name of 'Katibah Nusantara' (Forces of the Archipelago), or the Indonesian and Malay unit of Daesh in Syria; this group manifested in the misinterpretation of jihad, particularly within the context of the local Muslim population (Singh 2017; Osman and Arosoaie 2020).

Lotfi, a widely respected Islamic school teacher (also an ex-Islamist party member) from the state of Kedah, attracted media attention both locally and internationally when he 'voluntarily' left the country with several other Malaysians in January 2014 to join the Syrian Civil War (Dass and Singh 2022). His actions were eventually considered by the Malaysian authorities to be a 'red button', as there were multiple claims from him and other jihadists that more Malaysians, especially youths from religious schools and institutions, were joining the battle in Syria. Given Lotfi's position as both an Islamic preacher among local Muslim adults and a Quranic school teacher in Kedah, concerns were raised by parents within the Islamic education sector in Malaysia that the threats of Daesh and Islamic radicalism could be spread at home via 'classrooms and lecture halls' if there was no stern action taken by the authorities.

These concerns appeared particularly relevant when a year later, on 21 February 2015, a 14-year-old Malaysian female student was detained by authorities at Kuala Lumpur International Airport after being suspected of attempting to head to Syria to join Daesh (Amira et al. 2020). Sources from Malaysian intelligence had confirmed that the student was persuaded to marry a Daesh militant after a series of 'Facebook chats', commencing in November 2014. In another incident, the Pakistani Airport Security Forces detained a young Malaysian male named Al Muhd Alfie on 23 September 2017, after he failed in an attempt to smuggle weapons and ammunition into Malaysia from Karachi (Tang and Tarmizi 2017). It was reported that Pakistani authorities seized four pistols, eight ammunition magazines and 70 bullets hidden in his bag and shoes. According to local people and neighbours in the area where he lived, Al Muhd Alfie appeared to be a regular Muslim student with no sign of being radicalised. However, Malaysian intelligence sources firmly believed there was a possibility that Al Muhd Alfie entered Pakistan with the intention of obtaining arms and smuggling them into Malaysia with specific 'Islamic jihad' intentions, including terrorism (Royal Malaysia Police 2019).

The most recent extremist-related incident was the arrest of eight college students and former teaching staff (seven of whom were foreigners of several different nationalities) for their involvement in spreading extremist ideology in one of the tertiary Islamic institutions in the state of Perlis in Malaysia in mid-2018 (Zolkepi 2018). These convicted extremists were suspected of spreading radical ideas among local Muslim students, such as the absolute rejection of the western democratic political system, the belief that the secular education system was 'haram' or forbidden, and support for the total separation of men and women in workplaces, which are totally against the spirit of the National Principles

(Belief in God; Loyalty to King and Country; Supremacy of the Constitution; Rule of Law; and Courtesy and Morality (Royal Malaysia Police 2019). Undoubtedly, such violent incidents occurring in recent years have caused a re-evaluation of radicalism threats, as well as of counter-terrorism and deradicalisation efforts in Malaysia; this is especially pertinent considering the previous attempts to recruit more sympathisers among Muslim youth in religious (Islamic) schools and tertiary institutions. There are currently around 100 Malaysians who have joined the fight in Syria and have become involved with terrorism plots locally—over 60 percent are youths aged between 16 and 30 years old (Royal Malaysia Police 2019). By targeting and recruiting vulnerable Muslim groups in Malaysia, such as secondary school students and youths in Islamic institutions, these potential 'Daesh sympathisers' can be indoctrinated and eventually ordered to carry out terror attacks with the sole aim to cause threat, disorder and political violence in the country.

Having considered the Daesh-related issues and the way that they could affect the region, this article argues that the contemporary threat of terrorism, radicalism and extremism by non-state actors could be effectively managed via appropriate 'top-down' strategies and 'soft approaches', without the state apparatus resorting to an armed response or coercive force. Within Malaysia's context, this article aims to explore in detail the involvement of the Royal Malaysia Police (RMP) as the prime security agency and law enforcement body addressing Daesh terrorism-related activities. This article specifically explains the roles played by the Counter Terrorism Division (E8 Unit) and Special Branch in managing Daesh terrorism and Daesh former convicts, both men and women. The background of the Counter Terrorism Division will be explained in detail by examining its strategies and the implementation of 'soft approaches' to combat the threat of Daesh militants. Discussion about the role of the RMP will emphasise two types of action: short-term action involving rule of law and regulation; and long-term action, such as rehabilitation (cure) and deradicalisation (prevention).

2. Methodology

The methodology for this research involved a qualitative approach, which was primarily performed via in-depth interviews, a focus group discussion with representatives of police officers from the Counter Terrorism Division, and semi-structured interviews with locally based counter-terrorism experts and former Malaysian Daesh convicts. All interviews were held between January 2020 and May 2021 in person in several different locations in Malaysia, apart from communication with former Daesh detainees, which was undertaken via a phone call, based on the protocol agreed to by the RMP. The analysis involves both descriptive and explanatory aspects. Several procedures were undertaken by the researchers in order to thematically analyse the interview data. Firstly, the researchers transcribed all the recordings and translated them from Malay into English. Secondly, the researchers grouped the recorded responses into specific questions in order to make sense of the data based on the research objectives. Thirdly, the researchers developed a list of themes to assess the connections between the data and the research objectives. Lastly, the researchers made comparisons between respondents' responses, based on their backgrounds, roles and experiences. The following sections will briefly explain some fundamental discourse on the relevant theories and conceptual frameworks, such as Islamic activism and social movement, security and securitisation, and terrorism; they will also highlight the background of the Counter Terrorism Division, with specific reference to the case of Daesh in Malaysia.

3. Islamic Activism and Social Movement Theory

Social movement or activism is not sui generis, because social movement commonalities are rooted in collective tactics and strategies in order to highlight the grievances vis a vis creating opportunities for organisational gains (Wiktorowicz 2004). Such targeted interests are in any social movement's influence across the region, religions and ethnicities. The processes involve a few main elements: resource mobilisation, decision-making, and

framing issues for rallying support and propaganda (Verges 1997). Wiktorowicz (2004) argues that social theory commonly adopts a resource mobilisation approach that connects activists' strategic decisions and framing approaches to understanding social movements. As a concept, mobilising resources in an organised manner helps to aggravate support or, worst, mobilise sources of misery to breed revolt. Second, strategic decisions demand activists to make choices driven by the rational actor model, which means that activists' actions work in the context of achieving goals through opportunities or constraints. Third, framing issues requires creativity in order to package ideas of primary concerns, which are then arranged and disseminated to persuade audiences and elicit support and participation.

For Islamic social movements, an individual grievance is a source in its natural form that can be transformed into a collective grievance. Utilising resources through the mosque, Islamic centre, community associations, families kinship circles, and sermons, creates the ability to protect the community from regime repressions (Hafez 2003). In addition, the dynamic of social movements strategically framing themselves as the beacon of hope for freedom or independence, such as the struggle carried by the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) in Algeria, demonstrates the agility of these movements to garner support beyond the belief system; this offers new avenues through which to evaluate Islamic activism (Verges 1997). Bayat (2005) argued that many narratives of Islamism and Islamist movements are treated simply in terms of religious revivalism or as something 'unique' that cannot be analysed from conventional social science perspectives. To challenge this statement he proposed that the perspectives developed by social movement theory can be useful to 'illuminate' aspects of Islamist movements. According to Sydney Tarrow, the dominant tradition of social movement theory is often viewed in terms of collective action by citizens who challenge state political power. Thus, movements are considered successful when they 'contest' and bring 'distraction' against a regime (Tarrow 1994, p. 177; Bayat 2005, p. 898). In reality, social movements are highly dynamic entities that are not just 'things'; they are primarily a process and should be studied as a historical phenomenon over a span of time. Social movements are also seen as the crucial building blocks for an evolving political order.

Social movements are in constant flow and motion, but the pace and direction of movements may change over time as a result of internal and external factors, such as state repression, internal splits, economic downturn and political instability (Bayat 2005, p. 897). Eventually, the combination of social movement perspectives with Islamist movements might produce a 'socio-politics and religious activism', which Bayat (2005, pp. 893–94) describes as " . . . extra-ordinary, extra usual practices which aim, collectively or individually, institutionally or informally, to cause social change". However, the nature of political openness and technology advancement might be different from one country to another throughout the Muslim states. Islamic activism is, therefore, about the level of extra-ordinary religiosity in the Muslim population in modern times, which may be involved explicitly in politics; Bayat (2005) terms this as 'Islamism'.

Bayat (2005, 2007) points out that it is essential to note that the term 'Islamism' is often taken to describe many different things in different national settings, of which only a few may be characterised in terms of social movements. For instance, in the Iranian context, the term refers to the revolutionary movement of 1979 and subsequently to the formation of the Islamic Republic, while in Turkey, the Islamists were organised in legal political parties, such as the former Refah Partisi and the current AKP. In Malaysia, the term Islamism was associated with PAS and the ideologies and activism of the Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia (ABIM) during the 1980s, when these movements proposed the idea of creating an Islamic state in Malaysia (Saidin 2018). However, throughout the 1990s and until recently, many changes have occurred within the context of global Islamic activism. The so-called Arab Uprisings of 2011 epitomised 'people power', but at the same time, the phenomenon spear-headed the global wave of 'religiously inspired' political violence against civilians and authorities in the name of 'Daulah Islamiyah'; this has opened opportunities for both (1) the emergence of Daesh terrorism, and (2) the state' re-evaluation of ways in which to address terrorism and securitisation approaches (Saidin 2020).

4. Non-Traditional Security and Securitisation Theory

Securitisation theory is a framework for understanding how certain issues, such as terrorism, are constructed as threats to national security and therefore require extraordinary measures to address them. According to this theory, security is not an objective condition but a process that is socially constructed through discourse and political action. Through an act of securitisation, a concern is framed as a security issue and moved from the politicised to securitised (Collins 2010, p. 498). The publication of Barry Buzan's *People, States and Fear* in 1991 marked the beginning of a major shift in the academic debate on the concept of security, and it merits extended treatment for its originality in developing a broader concept, along with analytical framework and wider context, for the study of security (McSweeny 1999, pp. 52–53). Buzan (1991), Sheehan (2005), and Hough (2004) have broadened the security issues into several sectors; military, economic, societal, environmental, political, health, criminal and natural. This effort has meant that the agenda of security and securitisation is no longer on the basis of state and military threats (traditional security), but that it also considers other critical security issues, such as terrorism and political violence.

In the context of terrorism, securitisation theory suggests that the way in which terrorism is framed and represented in public discourse can have significant implications for policy and practice (Eroukhmanoff 2017). For example, if terrorism is framed as an existential threat to national security, then policymakers may be more likely to adopt effective measures to combat it, such as military intervention or restrictions on civil liberties. The theory also highlights the role of elite actors, such as politicians, in constructing security issues as threats. Elite actors can use their power and influence to shape public discourse and set the agenda for security policy. This can sometimes result in policies that are not necessarily in the best interests of the public, or that exacerbate the problem they are intended to address (Eroukhmanoff 2017). Securitisation theory provides a useful lens for understanding how terrorism and other security issues are constructed and addressed by policymakers. It highlights the importance of critically examining the ways in which security issues are framed in public discourse and the potential implications of these constructions for policy and practice. The following section will discuss, in detail, the conception of terrorism and how to deal with it from the perspective of a top-down approach.

5. What Is Terrorism? How Can It Be Defined?

The term 'terrorism' literally derives from the word 'terror', which means the use of extreme fear to intimidate people for various reasons. Obviously, this term has a negative connotation (Griset and Mahan 2003). However, some academics, such as Chalk (1996, p. 9), Martin (2006, p. 45), Lutz and Lutz (2013, p. 275), Whittaker (2003, p. 5), Cronin (2002, p. 32) and Brown (2008, p. 107), agree that terrorism appears to be relatively hard to define based on one single definition. Cronin (2002, p. 32) states that terrorism is notoriously difficult to define, in part because the term has evolved and in part because it is associated with an activity that is designed to be subjective. This subjectivity has brought about many definitions of terrorism from different academicians, research analysts, policymakers and institutions.

Heywood (2011, p. 284) defines terrorism, in its broadest sense, in reference to attempts to further political ends by using violence to create a climate of fear, apprehension and uncertainty. Pachanda (2002, pp. 4–5), on the other hand, defines terrorism as a state of terror, panic and a fear psychosis that is created by the terrorist using violent methods in order to force, coerce and blackmail authorities to accept their demands. Terrorism implies intense fear that is caused for the purpose of coercing or subduing. Meanwhile, the American definition, used by the US Department of Defense, FBI and State Department, has generally classified terrorism as a premeditated and unlawful act in which groups or agents of some principal engage in the threatened or actual use of force or violence against human or property targets. These groups or agents engage in this behaviour when intending to purposefully intimidate governments or people in order to affect policy or behaviour with an underlying political objective (Martin 2006, p. 48). A potentially more

insightful explanation of terrorism comes from Chalk (1996, p. 22), who proposes that terrorism is the systemic use of illegitimate violence that is employed by sub-state actors as a means to achieve different political objectives by different groups. It is a psychological tactic that seeks to spread fear-inducing effects in a target group that is wider than the immediate audience through the actual or feared indiscriminate targeting of non-combatant victims and property. It can be regarded as a means of political communication that aims to influence behaviour through the precipitation of a general fear of collapse that is exploited to alter political attitudes in such a way as to benefit the group concerned.

From the various definitions of terrorism, we can distil key similarities and thus derive several significant points, as suggested by Lutz and Lutz (2013, p. 275). Firstly, terrorism involves the use of threat or violence by an organised group to achieve political objectives. Secondly, the violence is directed against a target audience that extends beyond the immediate victims, who are often innocent civilians. Thirdly, while a government can be the perpetrator of violence on a target, it is considered an act of terrorism only if one or both actors are not of a government. Finally, terrorism is a 'weapon of the weak', and includes a variety of tactics and techniques in order to achieve an ultimate agenda.

6. Terrorists and Motivations for Terrorism

Terrorists and their associated terrorism are different from other types of criminals and other forms of crime because terrorism is conducted by a sub-national group or non-state entity with an identifiable chain of command or conspiratorial cell structure, whose members wear no uniform or identifying insignia (Whittaker 2003, p. 9). The decisive element that distinguishes a terrorist from a criminal is the political motive (Pachanda 2002, p. 9). Moreover, the goal of terrorists is to engage in attacks on symbolic targets to get the attention of the common people and thus provoke a popular response that would ultimately overturn the prevailing political order (Cronin 2002, p. 39). Strong motivation leads terrorist groups to strive for their objectives and future goals.

Whittaker (2004, p. 51) simplifies the motivation of terrorism activities as follows: (1) To acquire what is unfairly denied, such as land, freedom, basic rights and opportunities; (2) To reassert identity, status, and legitimate possession, where these are challenged or lost; (3) To protect where an entity is threatened or ill-treated; and (4) To restore where former rights, privileges or advantages have been denuded or taken away. However, these motivations vary depending on the type of terrorist group. According to Cronin (2002, p. 39), Chalk (1996, p. 23) and Brown (2008, pp. 110–11), there are four main typologies of terrorist organisations currently operating, or which have previously operated, around the world. These types of terrorist group and their motivations (with examples) are detailed below:

(1) The nationalist, ethnonationalist and separatist. The goal and motivation for this type of terrorist group is to represent either an ethnically, territorially or nationally distinct people who are seen to be victims of some sort of political injustice. Terrorism is used to achieve national self-determination or separation. Examples include the following: Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in the Philippines; Patani United Liberation Organization (PULO) in Southern Thailand; and Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka.
(2) The extreme left-wing ideological organisations. This type of terrorist organisation commonly adheres to a universalist political truth and is typically motivated by disaffection with the prevailing political structure. Examples include the following: the former Italian Red Brigades in Italy; and the Japanese Red Army in Japan.
(3) The extreme right-wing organisations. This type of terrorist organisation generally claims to be supporting the status quo or defending the national interest, and operates with a typically racist and anti-immigration agenda and with xenophobic propaganda. An example is the former Klu-Klux Klan in the United States.
(4) The religious and 'sacred' groups. This type of terrorist organisation typically runs with the religious dogma that it is their mission to uphold the forces of good against

the forces of evil via specific political systems and governance. Most of them are inspired by the interpretation of key religious texts and sources. Examples include the following: Daesh; Al-Qaeda; and Jemaah Islamiyah.

Regarding terrorism strategies, each terrorist organisation has a different modus operandi. However, it appears that bombings, assassinations, kidnappings, hijackings and hostage-taking are becoming common acts of terrorist operation, as has been clearly witnessed in the case of Daesh in recent years. Meanwhile, Whittaker (2004, pp. 75–76) specifically states that the modus operandi of global terrorists are as follows: "bombs in vehicles; remote controlled explosions; Molotov cocktails; biological and chemical materials disseminated offensively; grenades; gun attacks; mortar attacks; attack with rocket launchers; knife attacks; machete attacks, hijacking of vehicles and aircraft; hostage taking; kidnapping; torture; sabotage of buildings, public facilities and transport; assassination; letter bombs".

7. How to Address the Problem of Terrorism? The Role of Intelligence Agencies and Anti-Terrorist Apparatus

The general objective of combatting terrorist activities is to neutralise the terrorist groups and in this context, to render the source of threat benign and minimise any possible effects from the threat (Whittaker 2003, p. 272). Options to resolve the problem of terrorism rely on a variety of strategies and tactics in an effort to predict, prevent and counter the terrorism threat. A number of studies have sought to identify the solutions for terrorist violence, such as the works of Abrahams (2008), Heywood (2011, pp. 296–300), Brown (2008, pp. 113–18), Lutz and Lutz (2013, pp. 283–85), Pillar (2008, pp. 376–88), Griset and Mahan (2003, pp. 277–92), Hough (2004, pp. 72–81), Banks (2005), Archick and Gallis (2003), Schmid and Crelinsten (1993) and Chalk (1996). Overall, this literature highlights the role of state intelligence and counter-terrorism agencies as the first necessary 'tool' to effectively prevent and tackle the threat of terrorism.

According to Martin (2006, p. 495), intelligence agencies involve themselves with the collection and analysis of information. Data are collected from multiple internal and external sources, and are evaluated by expert intelligence analysts. This process of intelligence collection and analysis is at the heart of counter-terrorist intelligence. The outcome of high-quality intelligence work can range from the construction of profiles of terrorist organisations, to tracking the movements of terrorists. An optimal outcome of counter-terrorist intelligence is the ability to anticipate the behaviour of terrorists and to thereby predict terrorist incidents. Moreover, Pillar (2008, p. 384) explains in detail that intelligence can perform three other functions that contribute to counter-terrorism. Firstly, intelligence can provide a more strategic sense of terrorist threats, for example, by asking the following questions: are they increasing or decreasing? which groups or states pose the greatest dangers? which areas of operation are of most concern? and so forth. Such strategic appraisals help to guide policy-making in all aspects of counter-terrorism. Secondly, intelligence can provide detailed support to other counterterrorism tools; for example, identifying and locating terrorists' financial assets. Thirdly, intelligence can gain access to and analyse information on terrorist organisations and infrastructures, enabling them to be disrupted. Intelligence service themselves may not accomplish the actual disruption, but the information they provide enables police or internal security services to conduct raids and arrest suspects. The following section will discuss in more detail the role of intelligence agencies in countering terrorism, using the case study of Daesh in Malaysia.

8. Daesh and Counter Terrorism in Malaysia

Daesh (al-Dawla al-Islamiya fi al-Iraq wa al-Sham) is an Arabic acronym for the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), and the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS). The term "Daesh" is widely used to refer to the group as a way of delegitimising its claims to statehood and undermining its propaganda (Malik 2018). The group emerged in the early 2000s as an offshoot of

Al-Qaeda and gained international notoriety for its brutal tactics, including beheadings, executions, and mass killings of civilians. It sought to establish a caliphate, or Islamic state, in parts of Iraq and Syria, and gained control of significant territory in both countries at its height (Ali 2020; Marsili 2016). However, in recent years, the group has suffered significant losses in territory and personnel, and its ability to carry out attacks has been significantly reduced. It has been targeted by a coalition of forces from various countries, including the United States and its allies, as well as regional partners, in a campaign to defeat the group and restore stability to the region. Despite these losses, Daesh remains a threat, with active cells and supporters in various parts of the world, including in the Middle East, Africa, and Southeast Asia. The group has shown a willingness to adapt and evolve its tactics, including through the use of social media and online recruitment, and has inspired individuals and groups to carry out attacks in its name (Ramakrishna 2017).

In a concerted effort to combat the threat of Daesh militancy, the Counter Terrorism Division within the RMP serves as the main intelligence agency mandated by the state for this purpose. In past decades, Malaysia has endured various threats from internal and external militant groups, such as the Japanese Red Army, Communist Guerillas, Al-Maunah, Jemaah Islamiyah and Abu Sayyaf dan Sulu terrorists (Zachary 2003a, 2003b; Liow 2004; Bakashmar 2008; Kheng 2009). Compared to previous militants, Daesh is perceived to be more dangerous due to its cross-border access, technological sophistication and large-scale operations (Weiss and Hassan 2015; Beccaro 2018). Daesh also has expertise in exploiting social media to disseminate its propaganda, which eventually appeals to some Malaysians who seek to join under the popular narratives of "martyrdom" and "Daulah Islamiyah" (Mohammad Aslam 2017). Daesh does not only target Westerners and non-Muslims, but also Muslim majority countries and their peoples who deviate from the cause of "Daesh jihad" (Cherney and Murphy 2019). The emergence of Daesh has undoubtedly led to a significant development in terms of securitisation and counter terrorism strategies in global society, including the Muslim world (Malik 2018). In the words of Kruse (2016, p. 201):

> Some Muslim countries have developed and implemented national strategies to deal with violent extremism based on their specific challenges, levels of threats, and local considerations. Such countries include Algeria, Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan, Malaysia, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the UAE, to name a few. These different strategies provide an insight into the direct steps that governments have taken and allows us to further understand the efforts made by some Muslim countries to advance the fight against violent extremism.

Malaysia, despite its status as a moderate Muslim state, is no longer scapegoated as a transit country but emerges as one of the countries targeted by Daesh (Gunaratna 2016; Chan 2018). Such an exposed threat tests the level of competency of the security forces in Malaysia when confronting these new-age terrorists. The challenges faced by the RMP are becoming increasingly complex, with the police force not only having to demonstrate extraordinary tactics in handling crimes that are now increasingly sophisticated and sleek, but also at the same time, dealing with order in their local precincts. Thus, when confronting the threat and impact of Daesh, the government, via the role of the RMP, has employed prevention, control and resolution, involving rehabilitation and deradicalisation processes.

9. Background of the Counter Terrorism Division (E8 Unit) of the Royal Malaysia Police

Since 1995, the Counter Terrorism Division had been considered one of the smallest units placed under the E3 Section of the Special Branch in the Police Headquarters in Bukit Aman, Kuala Lumpur. However, in March 2009, this unit was removed from the Special Branch and became a new department under the RMP, namely the Special Task Force Department (Operation and Counter Terrorism)—known as the 'Task Force'. This Task Force was officially established on 1 March 2009 by the former Chief Police, Musa Hassan, and was considered a separate agency from the Special Branch. It was set up to address acts of terrorism, its related threats and any organised crimes, so that the actions

taken would be more focused, integrated and effective. Most of the officers and members of this unit comprised personnel from the Special Branch who were integrated into the department. The establishment of the 'Task Force' was seen as being timely in order to deal with current threats to national security and organised crime faced by the country. The prime responsibilities of the 'Task Force' were to conduct intelligence operations and to combat threats in the form of militant activities or terrorism locally or internationally, and also to tackle any organised crime and money-laundering activities considered unlawful under the Anti-Money Laundering Act and Terrorist Financing Act (AMLA).

Since the establishment of the 'Task Force', several operations against militant groups—Al-Qaeda, Jemaah Islamiyah and Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)—have been launched. The 'Task Force' arrested four Jemaah Islamiyah members in Johor in June 2009 who were involved in an attempt to activate and recruit new cell members for jihad abroad (Royal Malaysia Police 2015). On 9 October 2009, the 'Task Force' successfully arrested two members of Al-Qaeda in Kuala Lumpur responsible for recruiting suicide bombers to launch attacks in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Iraq. In 2013, the 'Task Force' was abolished and reabsorbed into the Special Branch Department, and is now known as the Counter Terrorism Division, or E8 unit. This unit now exists in every single state in Malaysia and there are several thousand personnel nationwide.

The mission of the Counter Terrorism Division is to enhance relevant skill sets so as to develop effective strategies to curb threats of violence, premeditated crime and money-laundering. The Counter Terrorism Division undertakes planning, coordination and observation whilst also identifying threats that stem from individual or group activities in public. It analyses intelligence information and recommends legal action for any individual or group involved in militant threats and violence that potentially risk state security. The Counter Terrorism Division is also responsible for addressing militant threats by arresting individuals suspected of having been involved in militant activity; arresting and charging suspects using relevant regulations; and carrying out a rehabilitation process on ex-convicts involved in militant activities (Counter Terrorism Division, personal communication, 3 March 2021).

10. The Threat of Daesh in Malaysia: Procedures for Counter Terrorism

The Malaysian government has enacted a new prevention law, namely the Security Offence Act (Special Steps) 2012 or SOSMA (Faridah and Munzil 2016), purposely to address any subversive cases, premeditated violence and acts of crime that are detrimental to public order. The enactment is based on Article 149 of the Malaysia Federal Constitution. Article 149 states that the purpose of this enactment is to address the following cases:

(a) Causing premeditated violence on individuals or assets, and instilling fear among a great number of citizens;
(b) Evoking a sense of disloyalty towards the King (Yang di-Pertuan Agong);
(c) Affecting public security in the federation or any of its parts, or which threatens its security;
(d) Obtaining political change, other than via legitimate avenues (i.e., anything that has not been determined by the law).

Thus, the actions undertaken by the RMP to combat Daesh threats are undisputable and fall under a legal framework, as detailed above. The role of the Counter Terrorism Division begins with the intelligence information compiled by members, followed by information processing, evaluation and validation. Following this, and having obtained ample evidence, executive action and arrests will be undertaken by the E8 unit. Investigation papers are prepared by police officers to submit to the prosecuting officer before any charges can be made. The following information summarises the flow of actions implemented by the RMP when dealing with suspected Daesh cases:

(1) Collection of intelligence information
(2) Processing of information
(3) Arrest

(4) Investigation and the preparation of the investigation papers
(5) Rehabilitation and deradicalisation

10.1. Collection of Intelligence

An intelligence approach is adopted by the E8 Unit to identify and address Daesh threats. The unit has monitored the activities of certain individuals and groups who have demonstrated the tendency to be engaged in militant movements in Syria on the pretext of jihad obligations since the conflict erupted in March 2011. Mohamad Raby (personal communication, 11 February 2020) from the E8 unit of the Special Branch, Bukit Aman, asserted the following:

> The proactive steps of this unit highlighted the activities of a group known as Tandzim Al-Qaeda Malaysia (TAQM) in the middle of 2012. The group was led by Yazid Sufaat, a former right-hand man of Jemaah Islamiyah who had undergone an eight-year Arrest Order punishment under the Internal Security Act (ISA).

Two members of TAQM were arrested by Lebanese authorities on 12 October 2012 as they were trying to sneak into Syria. The investigation determined that both men used to attend an 'usrah' (private religious circle or gathering) with Yazid Sufaat. Another member of TAQM was shot dead in an incident prior to the intended launch of a suicide attack in Davao City, Southern Philippines, in November 2012 (Ayob Khan 2013). The RMP realises that the ideology of 'salafi jihadi' that is held by Daesh, as pointed to by Ali (2020), has commonalities with the dogma of previous militant groups in Malaysia, such as Jemaah Islamiyah, Al-Maunah, Al-Qaeda and others. This has triggered the RMP to take some early steps to curb and combat any efforts to recruit more Malaysians to join Daesh. After successfully targeting the TAQM group, the Counter Terrorism Division continued to undertake further operations between April and November 2014, and this led to a number of suspects being detained in connection with a plan to join terrorist groups in Syria, particularly Daesh.

The Malaysian experience in addressing past Communist and Islamist militant groups has undoubtedly helped in combating the new threats posed by Daesh. The Special Branch and E8 Unit have implemented intelligence techniques involving the listing and identification of individuals who have tried to recruit Malaysians. A thorough list of suspects and individuals believed to be involved in the recruitment of new members for Daesh has enabled the intelligence service to continue with a series of arrests. For example, the RMP successfully arrested 68 individuals in the country in February 2013, suspected to have been involved in, and supportive of, Daesh militancy. It is believed that they had planned to take part in Daesh causes in Syria and Iraq by entering the country through Turkey, as they had booked flight tickets from Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) to Istanbul. Most of these suspects were arrested during the flight checking-in process at the immigration counter (Counter Terrorism Division, personal communication, 3 March 2021).

By instilling the global jihad doctrine disseminated through the Internet and sophisticated technological advances, Daesh has continued to freely spread its ideology in the virtual world where it can be accessed and streamed easily by international communities (Jasmine 2016). Daesh followers often provide updated news and detail the latest developments in the wars in Syria and Iraq; such updates can influence Muslim communities who are sympathetic to the cause (Piazza and Guler 2021). Mohamad Raby (personal communication, 11 February 2020) acknowledges the following:

> With the boom in social media, recruitment of members involves 'baiah' or a swearing-in process that is not time-consuming, and does not require any physical movement where individuals meet or see the group leader—recruiting only requires Facebook, Twitter or Skype.

Thus, the promulgation of Daesh propaganda and ideology has become difficult to detect and has led to complications for the RMP in regard to keeping a tight rein on the influence of the group. Nonetheless, the Counter Terrorism Division has carried out

intelligence work from various angles thoroughly, and at the same time, has gathered intelligence with the cooperation of international intelligence agencies. This enables the E8 Unit to launch follow-ups and continue arresting those who have been identified. This strong cooperation between foreign intelligence agencies in sharing intelligence amongst members has opened doors for the Counter Terrorism Division to locate the Daesh network. The Division also receives assistance from the Malaysia Communication and Multimedia Commissioner so as to observe and detect the social media involved in spreading the influence of Daesh. This allows the E8 Unit to focus on security threats instigated by Daesh within Malaysia.

10.2. Processing Information and Arresting Individuals

After gathering intelligence information related to Daesh threats, the Special Branch and the E8 Unit process the information using their own channels, rather than necessarily resorting to the services of Interpol if the threat is from outside the country. The information gathered is processed systematically to ensure its validity and accuracy. Should the information be questionable, further investigation is carried out. The validity and the confidentiality of the sources from which the information is obtained is assured. A monitoring procedure also takes place and every movement of the suspected group is traced (Counter Terrorism Division, personal communication, 3 March 2021).

In processing 'highly classified' information, important data, such as the person's name, identification number and suspected activity, are recorded for future reference in case the same person appears in any criminal or violent activity in the future. The Special Branch has its own special unit for handling records, which retains the processed information. This information serves as the intelligence product that leads to any follow-up action related to the individuals or groups suspected to have involvement with Daesh. Normally, this process takes some time to ensure that there is sufficient evidence prior to a decision to take executive action. After the information is obtained and processed, the Counter Terrorism Division will take the relevant action, such as making an arrest.

Detention is the climax of the interaction between the RMP and persons involved in terrorism activities, and every arrest of Daesh personnel typically involves two major issues: focusing on the content of the teaching and knowledge disseminated; and interrogating the relationship or network, and individuals or groups that have been flagged at the 'red' level by Interpol. The same interrogation is undertaken with certain businesses that permit cash flow and channel dubious funds to Daesh. If the arrest is assessed only from one angle, it will appear that there is a sense of injustice. Thus, the arrest or raid on any Daesh elements by the Counter Terrorism Division must be perceived in a holistic manner and normally the E8 Unit will work together with the Special Action Unit, which is an elite tactical force unit within the RMP (Counter Terrorism Division, personal communication, 3 March 2021).

In the Security Offence Act (SOSMA) 2012 procedure, a police officer will have authority to apprehend any individual believed to have been involved in security offences, as determined in Section 4 (1). A police officer has the power to detain without a warrant due to the requirement that an arrest is made as soon as possible. In the period from 2013 to 2019, a total of 491 people suspected to have been involved with the Daesh militant group were arrested. Arrests related to violence in Malaysia are undertaken implementing SOSMA and the Penal Code (PC) Chapter VI (offences towards the country) and VIA (offences related to violence). The offences are found in the Penal Code, Section 130B to Section 130Z under the title 'promoting, recruiting, spreading, encouraging, helping, protecting, disseminating and organising' violent activities. From that number, a total of 26 people were charged under section 130G (PC) for 'promoting' terrorist groups through social media and four were charged under Section 130E (PC) for 'recruiting' new members through social media (Royal Malaysia Police 2019).

The Counter Terrorism Division has made many arrests of Daesh elements and sympathisers under the 2012 SOSMA laws and offences mentioned in the PC. The firm action taken by the RMP is often the centre of attention and has gained various reactions—positive

and negative—from various layers of society, including NGOs and political parties. The first arrests of Daesh elements involved Yazid Sufaat and his two friends Muhammad Hilmi Hashim and Halimah Hussien on 7 February 2013 for recruiting Malaysians to fight in Syria and encouraging terrorist acts, as specified under the PC. On 5 September 2017, the Counter Terrorism Division apprehended and arrested 19 people suspected of involvement in violent acts, including 8 individuals who had planned to launch an attack during the 60th Independence Day celebration in Independence Square and during the Closing Ceremony of the 2017 Southeast Asian (SEA) Games in Bukit Jalil. In October 2017, the Counter Terrorism Division arrested a male student in Pasir Puteh, Kelantan, believed to be planning an attack at the "Better Beer Festival 2017" in Solaris Damansara. The individual was suspected to have planned the attack using an Improvised Explosive Device (IED), and several non-Muslim houses of worship and entertainment centres around the Klang Valley were implicated (Royal Malaysia Police 2019).

10.3. The Total Number of Daesh Arrests under SOSMA 2012

Based on the retrieved report from the Royal Malaysia Police (2016, 2019), from 2013 to 2019, those involved in terrorism activities were investigated and arrested under SOSMA 2012. Within 28 days of arrest, the accused are charged in court. However, if there is insufficient evidence, the accused will be released under SOSMA and will be arrested under the Prevention of Crime Act (POCA) or Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA). According to Sisco (personal communication, 19 February 2020), a member of the Counter Terrorism Division at the E6 Unit of Security Intelligence Section in Bukit Aman, and Muhammad Zulkifli (personal communication, 19 February 2020) from the E8 Unit of Special Branch in Negeri Sembilan, stated that a case investigated under SOSMA is only be amended to the POCA or POTA if the person arrested is charged in court and receives a written instruction from the prosecutor that s/he is released. They were unanimous in saying the following:

> If the police do not succeed in providing through witness investigation any relevant documentation on an individual and the individual's purported action is not supported by any existential proof (even with hearsay stating that s/he is involved and indeed has a significant role in the offence), the police can resort to using POTA or POCA to prevent the individual from escaping legal action.

The power to re-arrest any suspected individual is with the police and without having to seek the prosecutor's permission. It is worth noting that the police should have solid grounds as to why the specific individual should be re-apprehended, as the case investigated under POCA and POTA will be referred to the Ministry of Home Affairs. POCA will be judged by the Crime Prevention Board, whereas POTA will be charged through the Violence Prevention Board with the outcome of a Detention Order. Statistics relating to the arrests of Daesh members by the Counter Terrorism Division are an important measure of the effectiveness of Malaysia's counter terrorism strategies to sweep Daesh out of the country; refer to Table 1 below.

Table 1. The Number of Daesh-related Arrests Under SOSMA 2012.

Year	Total Arrests	Gender		Age			
		Male	Female	<20	20–35	36–60	>60
2013	4	3	1	0	2	2	0
2014	59	45	14	7	41	11	0
2015	82	74	8	11	53	18	0
2016	119	109	10	3	87	29	0
2017	106	101	5	8	62	34	2
2018	85	79	6	2	42	37	1
2019	36	34	2	31	16	3	0
Total	491	445	46	62	303	134	3

Source: Royal Malaysia Police (2019).

From 2013 to 2019, 491 people suspected to have been Daesh militants were arrested—445 males and 46 females. Of these, 333 or 75% were Malaysians and 158 or 25% were foreigners. The RMP data show that the arrests made by the Counter Terrorism Division of suspects involved in Daesh in Malaysia rose from 2013 to 2016. However, from 2017 to 2019, the number of arrests decreased (Royal Malaysia Police 2019). The reduction is a significant indicator of the effectiveness of the role of the Counter Terrorism Division in curbing Daesh terrorism within Malaysia. Mohd Raby (personal communication, 11 February 2020) has further explained the reasons behind this trend:

> There are three potential factors that have caused a reduction in the number of arrests: firstly, possibly the action taken by the RMP is very effective and intimidating to Daesh members who are still at large and can still plan an attack; secondly, the exposure and publicity made during arrests has caused Daesh elements to become wary and cautious before planning any action; and thirdly, the deradicalisation programmes of other government agencies like the Prison Department, JAKIM and SEARCCT have been very effective.

It is noteworthy that it is not only males but also females who have been targeted by Daesh recruiters to commit 'jihad'. According to Muhammad Zulkifli (personal communication, 19 February 2020), there are females who have migrated to Syria:

> Due to the influence of male family members who are also militant, women may correspond through Facebook with Daesh members and agree to marry and move to Syria. There are also women who even have the ambition to die as syaheed (martyrs) as they want to atone for their past sins.

One of the victims of Daesh propaganda was an Usuluddin (Islamic theology) student from the University of Malaya called Siti Nor Aishah, who had declared and sworn her loyalty to a Daesh leader, Abu Bakar al-Baghdadi, as witnessed by Mohammad Wanddy Mohamad Jedi through 'Skype'. A 51-year-old woman from Selangor (willing to risk her own life) was also arrested as she launched an attack on non-Muslim communities in Puchong. She had recruited other individuals, including women, through social media platforms (Facebook and WhatsApp) using the name 'Kumpulan Makan-Makan Kak Nor' (translated as Sister Nor's eating group) to avoid being detected and caught by the authorities (Muhammad Zulkifli, personal communication, 19 February 2020).

10.4. Investigation and Preparation of Investigation Papers

After police officers have made an arrest (the police are authorised to arrest without a warrant within 24 h), they can detain the individual for no more than 28 days for investigation purposes under the jurisdiction of a superintendent police officer, according to Federal Constitution of Malaysia (1957) (Section 4 (5), Security Offence Act (Special Steps) 2012). Within this period, the investigation officer will conduct an investigation of the detainee, find witnesses who can potentially help the case, locate allies who are still at large, study relevant pieces of evidence, including any documents, record the statements made by the detainee and witnesses, and refer the Investigation Paper (IP) to the Attorney General in Putrajaya or the Head of the State Prosecution Unit for a verdict (Counter Terrorism Division, personal communication, 3 March 2021).

In the detention period of 28 days, investigation will be carried out with the detainee to get more information and evidence related to Daesh. Through the investigation process, a confession and the disclosure of any terrorist-related plans can be obtained, and these significantly assist the Counter Terrorism Division in handling Daesh threats, whilst also serving as an early preparatory step before follow-up actions. Most often, through this investigation, the police obtain further details and information. Several approaches have been espoused to ensure that the investigation process runs smoothly. There is a focus on the detainee's weaknesses, and his or her personal background is thoroughly investigated.

In running the investigation, the Counter Terrorism Division will be assisted by officers and members of other departments in the Special Branch. In addition, various

other appropriate and reasonable techniques are explored as the scope of the investigation is broad and unlimited. How the investigation is handled is an 'art' that an officer has to master, so that detainees will disclose the required information and eventually the purpose of the investigation will be fulfilled. The investigation focuses on the detainee's involvement and the real reason behind his or her Daesh involvement. The psychology and emphasis on Islam had become very useful in winning the hearts and minds of detainees and returning them to the right path (Counter Terrorism Division, personal communication, 3 March 2021).

11. Rehabilitation and Deradicalisation Programmes

Rehabilitation and deradicalisation are important elements in handling the threat of Daesh extremism and radicalism in Malaysia. The RMP through the E8 Unit appears to focus its efforts on combating violence, militancy and extremism; this is not only through policing and military methods, but also through the 'mind and soul', as radicalisation mostly involves cases of misinterpreted ideology and belief among the detainees. Resorting to punishment and a criminality approach alone is not the best solution to overcome terrorism and extremism, and a combination of a soft approach and conventional method is likely to offer a more effective alternative within the Malaysian context.

The rehabilitation and deradicalisation programmes for former Daesh detainees involve a collaborative and holistic effort between the RMP, Islamic Development Department (JAKIM), Prison Department and Ministry of Education. The programmes are a proactive step by the RMP to reduce the chances of former detainees becoming re-involved with Daesh-minded ideology and violence-related offences. The rehabilitation and deradicalisation programmes are divided into two sections. There is a programme for those arrested and imprisoned under POTA and POCA with four phases as follows:

- Phase 1: The first six months—induction with the Prison Department.
- Phase 2: The next six months—programme with the RMP, Prison Department and the Ministry of Home Affairs deradicalisation unit.
- Phase 3: The first nine months, second year—programme with the RMP, Prison Department and the Ministry of Home Affairs deradicalisation unit.
- Phase 4: Last three months—pre-liberation.

There is also a programme for those arrested under SOSMA which involves two phases as follows:

- Phase 1: The first three months—induction with the Prison Department.
- Phase 2: The Counter Terrorism Division aids the Prison Department in carrying out the deradicalisation programme for SOSMA detainees. The programme is ongoing until the detainees are released.

According to Wan Ruzailan (personal communication, 3 March 2021), an officer from the Counter Terrorism Division in Bukit Aman, for the rehabilitation programme of detainees connected with Daesh militancy, the Counter Terrorism Division, with the help of the Prison Department and Ministry of Home Affairs' deradicalisation unit, has established a specific module known as 'Module 30', which is divided into four sections. Firstly, there is a focus on morality and thinking aimed at neutralising the ideology of militancy, seeking to perform jihad and martyrdom based on the detainees' own (misled) interpretation and understanding. Secondly, from the aspect of Malaysian law and order, there is a focus on the impact of a subject's action from a legislative point of view. Thirdly, there is a focus on nationhood, seeking to create a sense of love, responsibility and belonging, as well as loyalty to the nation and country. Fourthly, there is a focus on psychology and family relationships through programmes that involve the close family members of the former detainees. Module 30, involving the above-mentioned themes—civil procedures, ideological change and psychological development—is strictly imposed by the RMP on Daesh detainees in Malaysia as part of the rehabilitation and deradicalisation programme before they are released to re-join society.

In addition, the researchers' focus group discussion with members of the Counter Terrorism Division identified that in the post-release programme, there is assistance and support in the form of vocational training, based on work skills, and a fundamental entrepreneurship course, provided to ensure that former detainees can sustain their livelihoods without having to return to violent activities (Counter Terrorism Division, personal communication, 3 February 2021). The programmes undertaken with detainees are seen to have had a positive impact. This is explained by Muhammad Zulkifli (personal communication, 19 February 2020):

> Statistics show that 97% of cases related to the rehabilitation of former detainees have successfully met the objective. These former detainees are happy to return to their families and society. They have also returned to work to build new lives after they are freed. Some start their own businesses, or work in agriculture and some work as security guards. There are some who are received back at the old workplace under the guarantee of the RMP that they are qualified to return to work.

Deradicalisation involves methods and techniques used to weaken and fully revert the process of radicalisation, as well as to mitigate the potential of society to succumb to the risk of violence. This strategy is based on the development and implementation of rehabilitation and reintegration programs for detained terrorists and violent extremists. According to Kruse (2016), the process of deradicalisation aims to treat former terrorists and violent extremists by providing a variety of programs that use religious and psychological counselling, family support and re-education for reintegration. Regular monitoring, including visits to the former detainees' homes and the need to report their movements in and out of the country to intelligence officers (IO) in the Special Branch, is also enforced. This was emphasised by one of the Daesh and SOSMA female detainees, where she explained that it was an obligation for her to inform the IO of outdoor movements after her release as a SOSMA prisoner. She said the following (personal communication, 7 August 2021):

> Every year the IO will be here—coming with a good intention. Then she will send messages, so we are still in touch. They still want to know, like, they will want to know everything perhaps until I die . . . (for example) I told her (the IO), I want to go to this specific place by car, riding with a former SOSMA prisoner. Then we will not be held up and suspected of meeting up, right? So for safety, I told her (the IO).

The RMP's rehabilitation and deradicalisation programmes, and the strategies for managing Daesh extremism, are crucial factors that contribute to the success of preparing former detainees to return to their family and society without the tendency to re-engage with violence and terrorism (Hamidi 2016).

The Effectiveness of Rehabilitation and Deradicalisation Programmes

Sabariah (2018), who studied the soft approach for addressing violent minds in Singapore, highlighted that Malaysia has also adopted the same approach and this has been an effective indicator in tackling violent ideology. According to Jasmine (personal communication, 15 January 2020), from The Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counter-Terrorism (SEARCCT), the militant rehabilitation programmes in Malaysia were originally implemented following the 9/11 incident in 2001. In essence, the programmes aim to revert the ideology of individuals driven by extremist thoughts and behaviour, and re-educate them according to the mainstream values appropriate for Malaysians.

As previously mentioned, one of the approaches undertaken by the RMP is to collaborate through partnerships with other significant agencies, such as the National Security Council, Prison Department and Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM). These governmental agencies have contributed their valuable expertise to the process of deradicalisation. According to El-Muhammady (2016), the outcome of the process can be seen in three categories of detainees. The first is grateful individuals, who are wholeheart-

edly ready to change their behaviour, who show serious readiness to cooperate and who are interested in learning about moderate Islam (as opposed to radical Islamist) or peaceful Islam (against the backdrop of those who are using Islam to justify their violent political action). This is a minority group, and they are ready to work hand in hand with the authorities to further expose terrorist networks. The second category is individuals who adopt the moderation approach, but at the same time still moderately believe in some part of the legitimacy of their Islamic struggle (including jihad). They are willing to leave violence, but still have faith in some of their interpreted Islamism ideologies, such as the long-term goal of establishing a global Islamic caliphate, as well as Sharia law implementation. This category is the majority. The third, and the minority category, is those who refuse to be rehabilitated, namely die-hard militants who reject moderate views and continue to defend their radical ideology, and have salient intention to conduct political violence. A former Daesh convict in Malaysia (personal communication, 7 August 2021), whilst undergoing a rehabilitation process in prison, admitted that the process of rehabilitation conducted by the RMP was well implemented; she took formal religious (Islamic) lessons with a teacher (provided by the prison) in which she properly learned to recite the Quran and developed some knowledge on tawheed, the basics of Islamic divinity and the consistent inculcation of prayers. She admitted that the programme had contributed to her beliefs and that by studying her religion more closely she understood her integrity as a 'true Muslim'.

12. Conclusions

The mechanisms of counter terrorism, delivered via the rehabilitation and deradicalisation of former Daesh detainees, have contributed to the success of the RMP in facing the threat of religious extremist groups. The intelligence strategies and techniques used by the Counter Terrorism Division and E8 Unit are effective in swiftly detecting the early involvement of some citizens in Daesh. There has been success in thwarting potential attacks in Malaysia. The article also argues that the Counter Terrorism Division not only plays a role in arresting individuals involved in heinous and violent activities, but also plays a significant role in curbing the spread of Daesh terrorist ideology in Malaysia; in other words, it embarks on an early prevention campaign through rehabilitation and deradicalisation programmes for former detainees. The effective and ongoing collection of intelligence from the Counter Terrorism Division ensures that any growth in extremist ideology is stunted early, before it becomes a 'disease' in society. The RMP and its Counter Terrorism Division, together with different state agencies, such as JAKIM, the Prison Department, National Security Council and Ministry of Education, have substantively contributed to the rehabilitation of former members of Daesh.

The RMP and Counter Terrorism Division carry out an important role in enacting a clear and effective procedure within the investigation process; this leads to the disclosure of information that leads to the arrest of Daesh members in Malaysia. A significant success factor includes the selection of police officers who are well qualified and have an appropriate background for obtaining information relevant to the investigation. The role of the Counter Terrorism Division in preventing the spread of Deash ideology is also supported via collaboration with international intelligence agencies, such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and International Police (Interpol). It is this joint effort that has made the role of the Counter Terrorism Division in Malaysia so effective in preventing acts of terrorism by Daesh. There have been many positive outcomes following the multiple operations conducted effectively and consistently by RMP; as such, the total number of arrests of Daesh militants has decreased between 2017 and 2019. As well as this impressive feat, the RMP, through the Counter Terrorism Division, has also successfully thwarted many potential attacks planned by Daesh. This is, without a doubt, an outcome based on the effectiveness of the procedure and the methodology for counter terrorism, including obtaining confessions and disclosures through investigation, intelligence and the sharing of information between various parties.

This article also asserts that the accomplishments of both the RMP and the Counter Terrorism Division in thwarting many terrorist attempts by Daesh are supported by the stringent laws in Malaysia (SOSMA, POTA and POCA). Prevention-based laws play an important role in the effort to curb and avert terrorism, including the threats posed by Daesh. Through laws targeted at prevention, the authorities can take early action to impede terrorist threats. The effective implementation of the rehabilitation and deradicalisation programmes for Daesh detainees, focusing on close collaboration amongst government agencies, has resulted in positive outcomes, with the majority of former Daesh detainees demonstrating significant change and being assimilated back into the community. However, there are still a few hard-core militants who reject rehabilitation, refuse to accept the idea of moderation and retain their radical ideology. However, all in all, the top down and 'soft approach' of the RMP through the Counter Terrorism Division has undoubtedly proved effective and, indeed, various intelligence agencies have confirmed that there is no new Daesh cell known to be operating in Malaysia. The decreasing number of arrests also suggests that Daesh activism is becoming increasingly paralysed. Decreasing activism is also fuelled by the absence of individuals who can lead Daesh in Malaysia after the death of their main group leaders in Syria in 2017 and 2019. This has indirectly affected Daesh activism in Malaysia and has led to a deteriorating pace in the recruitment of new Daesh members, whether local males or females.

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