



What Are the Root of Radicalism in Southeast Asian Countries

Description



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Muslim Zone in Southeast Asia

Southeast Asia consists of several countries, the majority of which are Muslim. It is stated that the boundary of Southeast Asia from the West in the Indian sub-continent and mainland China from the North. [1]The Southeast Asian region is also known as the Malay region. In this case, Islam and Malay become two coins to explain how socio-religious this population is.

Azyumardi Azra stated that “Southeast Asia (or Indo-Malay) is one of the seven areas of Islamic culture or civilization, which strictly consists of areas of Islamic-Arabic, Islamic-Persian, Turkish-Islamic, African-Islamic... The Indian subcontinent, Indo-Malay Islam, and the last area of Islamic civilization in the “*Western hemisphere ...*” [2] Under the Malay ethnicity emerged the nation-states, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei Darussalam. [3]

The number of Muslims in Southeast Asia is 534,309,000 million. The highest number in Indonesia (189,195,000), followed by Malaysia (14,371,000), the Philippines (4,393,000), Thailand (3,010,000), Burma (1,716,000), Cambodia (700,000), Singapore (663,900), Brunei Darussalam (245,000), Vietnam (65,000), and Laos (400). [4]

For Muslim – majority region, Howard M. Federspiel calls it as the “*Muslim Zone*” . He writes that phenomena are seen from this Muslim Zone that is existence similarity total enough population _ big inside _ religious [5]institutions, teachings, and values.

In addition to the first four countries, there are ethnic Malays who have powerful historical roots, namely Southern Thailand and Mindanao. So marriages between Malays and Muslims in these two regions have always led to prolonged conflicts today. Apart from these five countries, other countries are not dominated by Malays and Muslims, such as Myanmar, Burma, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. Buddhism mostly rules these countries. [6]

The Southeast Asian region has experienced a meeting of cultures such as China, India, Europe, and Islam. So before the first and second world wars, where the emergence of nation states in this region, this cultural meeting had created a process of *civilizational blending*. It was recently mentioned that the influence of the United States and Japan has become very strong in Southeast Asia. [7]

Southeast Asia is a region that expands the influence of the countries that once colonized here. The most dominant influence is religion because it can create political stability, such as the role played by Confucianism, Buddhism, and Islam. Then followed by economic interests [8].

In the socio-political field. Therefore, the history of Southeast Asia, in addition to the history of the kings, is also the history of wars for centuries, either with fellow citizens in Southeast Asia [9]or with the colonizers, the majority of whom came from Europe and America.

Islam and Wars in Malay World

In the history of Southeast Asia, some wars are most widely discussed, namely “the Babad war between Majapahit and Pajajaran, the Burmese attack on Ayuthia, then the war between Trunojoyo and Mataram, the fall of Malacca in the hands of the Portuguese, then the Sultan Iskandar Muda attack on the Malay peninsula.” [\[10\]](#)

In this case, Islam is the most dominant in the historical structure of Southeast Asia [\[11\]](#), especially in Tanah Melayu or the Archipelago. Islam is not only a personal religion but also a religion that unites various local interests in a frame of political power. Therefore, until the collapse of the Islamic Caliphate in the Ottoman Empire, there were still well-structured political forces in the form of a kingdom in Southeast Asia. Thus, it is not surprising that Islam ranks first as the population’s belief in Southeast Asia.

For example, during the war between Melaka and the Portuguese, Sultan Ahmad invited his people to fight by bringing Hikayat Muhammad Hanafiah. [\[12\]](#) In the mid-19th century, Moro Muslims in Southern Philippines struggled to defend their country and religion from Spanish colonialism.

Meanwhile, in the 17-18 century AD, Islamic leaders in Southern Thailand fought desperately to face the attacks of the Thai Kings, namely the Ayuthia and Chakri dynasties which is not to mention how the history of the war in several areas in Indonesia was when they fought the Dutch. [\[13\]](#)

At that time, they used Islam as a spirit of struggle, not in the category of nationalism assets. The conflict that arose to place Islam politically continues to this day, with various motives and influences.

In Indonesia, efforts to make Islam the basis of the state have echoed post-independence, from debates in parliament to the emergence of rebel groups disillusioned with the government in Jakarta. As for Thailand, the conflict to withdraw from the Thai government in Bangkok (*Krueng Thep*) remains volatile. In the Philippines, the power of not wanting to be part of the government in Manila still resonates.

Meanwhile, in Malaysia, the power of Islam with identity struggles has also created turmoil, although not in the separatist category. [\[14\]](#) In Thailand, the

conflict that arose was triggered by the unwillingness of the Muslim community to submit to the Buddhist government.

In the south of the Philippines, the Bangsamoro power did not want to be recognized as part of the Christian government in Manila. [\[15\]](#) It can be said that all events related to Islam are always associated with ethnicity. Even in these conflicts, the term used is not terrorist but separatist.

How do we understand the case of this ethnoreligious conflict forcibly withdrawn by the study of terrorists? How did the concept shift in Southeast Asia to meet the concept of nationalism that did not come from the region? By understanding this, it will be found that the struggle in Southeast Asia, especially those involving Islam, is more than a battle of concepts that arise from within Southeast Asia with those from outside Southeast Asia.

The cases that emerged in Mindanao and Southern Thailand were not at all related to the study of terrorists at first. As for cases in Indonesia already done appropriately before Indonesia hit tragedy 30 S / PKI in 1965. Meanwhile, in Malaysia, the desire to place the rights of Malays exploded on May 13, 1969. Cases involving issues related to Islam also occurred in Singapore on December 11, 1950. [\[16\]](#)

To make it easier for us to understand the issue of how to attract concepts related to conflicts involving Islam, we will present several cases in several countries in Southeast Asia. For this, cases in the Southern Philippines, Southern Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia will be selected.

Mindanao

The conflict involving Islam in the Southern Philippines involves an ethnic group known as the Bangsamoro. They inhabit in Mindanao, Sulu, and Palawan. Ethnically, the Bangsamoro consists of 13 sub-ethnics, namely: Badjao, Iranum or Ilanum), Jama-mapun, Kalagan, Kalibugan, Manguindanao, Marano, Molbog (Melebugnon), Palawani, Samal, Sangil, Tausug, and Yakan. [\[17\]](#)

Regarding the identity of the Bangsamoro, Renato T Oliveros said that " *their indigenous expression of Islam in Mindanao is their soul* ." [\[18\]](#) So, to understand Bangsamoro, there are two blends there, namely: Islam and Malayness. Islam means closely related to the arrival of Islam in this region.

According to history, Islamic traders and preachers came to Mindanao via Malaysia, Borneo, Sumatra. [\[19\]](#) Here one of the most well-known Malay-Islamic kingdoms in the history of

Bangsamoro is the North Sulawesi Kingdom which was founded in 1450. The first king was Seyyed Abubakar, who is considered by the people there to be a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad.

At that time, Seyyed Abubakar used the title Sharif Hashim. [20] During its heyday, this kingdom was able to control the Sulu Archipelago (including Sulu and Tawi-Tawi), North Borneo (now the country of Sabah, Malaysia, Basilan, Palawan, Sambowangan (now the city of Zamboanga and the provinces of Zamboanga del Sur and Norte). [21]

However, this Sulu kingdom was attacked by Spain in 1578. According to history, the Spanish could only control Jolo, but they failed to occupy the Sulu Kingdom. [22] The arrival of Spain has also brought addition to the power of weapons and culture and the religion that was carried, namely Christianity. They managed to control Southern Luzon to the Visayas in a short time.

Nevertheless, the fighting between Spaniards and Muslims in the South lasted until the late 19th century. [23] As well as Spain trying to take Mindanao, the United States has been trying for years to take as much of the island as possible. According to history, the American army controlled the Moro province starting in 1900-to 1913. [24] Americans think of Muslims in Mindanao as if they thought of the Native Americans (Indians) they had just conquered. [25]

Finally, in 1913, the American army managed to subdue the power of the Moro people. [26] Although the Philippines became independent in 1946, America's presence in this country remains so dominant and has strategic value. In Thing In this regard, Joseph Gerson wrote: "*As the last 100 years of Philippine history testify, military organization, foreign military bases, and unequal alliances have been essential to the United States Asia-Pacific empire.*" [27] After that, since the Philippines became independent in 1946, the Bangsamoro asked the United States to keep them out of the government in Manila. [28] The conflict between the Bangsamoro and the Philippine government began in the 1970s.

One movement against the central government in Manila is the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). They become "representatives" of the Bangsamoro voice to fight for the nation's rights. Then in 1996, their struggle was continued by the Moro Islamic Liberation Front ([29]MILF) . [30]

Southern Thailand

Cases that have occurred in Thailand have been going on for decades. The essence of this conflict is that the ethnic Malays, who are predominantly Muslim, do not want to join the government of Thailand, which is predominantly Buddhist. However, the conflict in Southern Thailand is no longer only fighting for the rights of the Malays [31], but there are national and international issues that have been mixed into it.

As is the case in the Southern Philippines, in this region, the kingdom of Pattani Darussalam has also emerged, which is very well known in the history of Southeast Asia. The history of this splendor was triggered by trading activities which caused not only the Thai kingdom to want to dominate it but also the Dutch, English, French, and Portuguese. [\[32\]](#)

King Rama I tried to control this area in 1785 until the Kedah, Kelantan and Terengganu Sultanates. According to history, the Siamese considered this annexation a regulation because they mentioned the Sultanate of Pattani as their territory since the early days of the Kingdom of Siam conquering the peninsula in the mid-13th century. The Malay region is still an independent country. However, since 1791, Terengganu and Pattani were ruled under the Songkhla Kingdom. Meanwhile, Kelantan and Kedah were under the control of the government of Nakhon Sri Thammarat. [\[33\]](#)

This is the beginning of the historical chapter of the Malay community's resistance in four provinces in Southern Thailand. The forced efforts of the Kingdom of Siam to control the Southern and Northern Regions of Malaysia led to various battles and conflicts to this day.

According to history, the ultimate anger of the Malays in the Pattani area was in 1902, when this area was formally handed over to the Thai Kingdom. This formalization is often referred to in *the Anglo-Siamese Treaty* in 1909, where Thailand ceded Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan, and Terengganu to the British. [\[34\]](#)

These four countries later became part of the then independent Malaysian government in 1957. However, historically, the Thai Kingdom also gave France their East region in 1893. [\[35\]](#) The politics of giving "colonial areas" by the Thai Empire was one of the strategies to secure their government from European invaders.

This forced effort met resistance from the Islamic leaders there which is related to the Thainization program carried out by the central government in Krungthep (Bangkok). However, the Malay resistance is no longer a "representative of an Islamic empire" but "a representative of an ethnic and religious group," which, according to Islamic leaders in Pattani, has no historical relationship with the Kingdom of Thailand.

However, this issue turned out to have severe implications for "who are the Malays" and "who are the Muslims," not only in Southern Thailand but also in the "face of Islam" as a whole in the country.

For the region, the four provinces still define themselves as "Malays" who are closer in their emotional connection to Kelantan and Terengganu than to Bangkok. [\[36\]](#)

Malaysia

This country is a collection of Malay-Islamic kingdoms that became independent from Britain on August 31, 1957. The main instrument in building the country's values is the concept of Malay and Islam. Anyone who wants to see Malaysia's development is always associated with the presence of Islam in playing its role in its development strategy. Malaysia has become a nation quite reckoned with in the Asia Pacific. [\[37\]](#)

However, the country of Malaysia continues to experience history like other nations in Southeast Asia, namely facing the invaders (Portuguese and British). However, suppose the history of Malaysia is related to the history of the archipelago.

In that case, it is part of the territory of several major kingdoms in Indonesia, namely Sriwijaya, Majapahit, and Aceh Darussalam. [\[38\]](#) Therefore, before Malaysia's independence, several state kingdoms had developed Islam as a political force in the Malay Peninsula. [\[39\]](#)

To see how the role of Islam in Malaysia is summarized, Kamarulnizam Abdullah wrote as follows:

Islam in Malaysia had emerged as the dominant religion and become part of ethnic identification for the Malays since the seventeenth century when non-Malays began to flock into the Malay peninsular under the British's colonial policy of labor migration. Islam has been the center of the social and cultural activities of the Malays. By the turn of the twentieth century, Islam became increasingly not only the symbol of Malay cultural dominance but also a powerful tool of the Malay elite in Malay politics. Consequently, conflicting views exist over Islam's role in Malay politics. The Malays, until today, are divided through political lines on this question. On one end, there is a tendency to maintain the role of Islam in private matters, but on another end, Islam has been promoted to encompass every aspect of human life. [\[40\]](#)

As stated above, Islam and Malay played an essential role in the history of Malaysia. [\[41\]](#) However, this country itself does not declare an Islamic State or a Religious State. [\[42\]](#) Therefore, the roots of radicalism in Malaysia rest more on issues of religious formalization in the form of social and political power.

In addition, conflicts that arise involve the role of Malays against non-Malays, such as Malays versus Chinese [\[43\]](#) or Malays versus Indians [\[44\]](#) who want to define who the *natives are*, and conflicts among Malays themselves, such as conflicts between political parties such as UMNO versus PAS.

The latter wants to establish an Islamic state that does not mention the Malaysian government's efforts to "manage" the countries in the Kalimantan (Borneo) island region, namely Sabah and Sarawak, so they are willing to remain subservient to the central government in Kuala Lumpur.

Therefore, unlike the cases in Mindanao and Southern Thailand, the complexity of the symptoms of radicalism in Malaysia is more prominent. [45] In Malaysia, the effort to establish an Islamic State is almost the same as the experience of post-1945 Indonesia.

However, in Malaysia, the issue of religion is mixed with the issue of ethnicity. Even if a conflict arises, it does not necessarily lead to violence in the name of religion or defending religion and the homeland. Malays in Malaysia demand an Islamic State. At the same time, Islam is the leading guide in development, as Mahathir [46] and Abdullah Ahmad Badawi did through Islam Hadhari. [47]

At other times, the Malays themselves do not really like other clans, which they think have usurped the rights of the Malays, as reflected in the May 13, 1969 riots. Several Islamic movements want to install Islam as the main instrument in Malaysia's development.

At first, in Malaysia, the issue of Islam and the symptoms of radicalism did not seem to be related to terrorism issues. However, what is certain is that the conflict in Malaysia can be mapped as follows: the Malay conflict with the Malay to establish an Islamic state; [48] the Malay conflict with China to limit the involvement of this clan in dominating the economic activities of the Malaysian state; and conflicts between the Malays and the Orang Asli. In this case, China will not unite with the Malays who want to make Islam the basis of the state.

All tribes can be united in Islam as long as they *convert to Malay* (read: convert to Islam) because Malays, in the view of the Malaysian constitution, are those who speak Malay, were born before 1957, and are Muslim. [49] However, the margins of the identity map in Malaysia still cause conflict, namely when Islam is used as a political force to unite all tribes or ethnic groups under the auspices of Malaysia.

Indonesia

This country is the country most closely related to the issue of terrorism in Southeast Asia. Therefore, when we discuss the issue of terrorism, it is necessary to understand that since the Indonesian nation became independent on August 17, 1945, the issue of Islam and separatism cannot be separated.

However, before Indonesia's independence, there were Islamic kingdoms such as the Kingdom of Aceh, Demak, and the Kingdom of Mataram. [50] The colonial experience is no different from other countries in Southeast Asia, which the Portuguese, Dutch, and Japanese colonized.

Therefore, this experience has also led to how to incorporate of Islam into the government system, where this religion should not be the basis or principle of the state. [\[51\]](#)

The most powerful tribe in Indonesia is the Javanese. [\[52\]](#) In fact, the philosophy of the Indonesian government is more taken from the Javanese breath than other tribes. [\[53\]](#) As for the trajectory of Indonesia's history, a lot has happened on the island of Java. If there are other "turbulent" areas, it must be considered a conflict that disturbs the country's stability.

In Indonesia, Islam has become a kind of value in the life of the Muslim community. At the same time, to glue the nation together, Islam is not used as the main instrument but Pancasila. In other words, if non-Javanese people want to leave Indonesia, they are seen as separatists. If Muslims do not want Pancasila as the basis of the state, they are seen as security disruptors.

Likewise, the dominance of the Javanese in several islands also sometimes creates cultural conflicts that sometimes lead to the bloodshed which is not to mention some of the government's attitudes that use Islam as an instrument to crush communist forces, which means that seeing the conflict in Indonesia starting from August 17, 1945, until today is challenging to explain from one perspective.

For example, the conflict in [Aceh](#). In the past, when DI/TII was declared in West Java and "accepted" in several regions (Sulawesi and Aceh), it was considered a form of resistance to the central government, which did not want to establish an Islamic state in Indonesia. [\[54\]](#) In this religious uprising, experts have relied on to find the historical roots of terrorism in Indonesia.

However, from the embryo of this movement, other separatist movements, such as GAM in Aceh, were proclaimed by Hasan di Tiro on December 4, 1976. From this path, this movement, even though it demanded independence from the central government, was not considered a terrorist organization. Finally, this movement can be summed up as an ethnic-nationalist movement. [\[55\]](#)

However, as we will see in the following chapters, GAM is still drawn to the issue of terrorism. It is sometimes associated with DI and the discourse on terrorism in Indonesia. However, as an ethnic-nationalist conflict, the GAM rebellion could be "resolved" on August 15, 2005. Even though there have been several attempts to make peace, it has failed. [\[56\]](#)

However, outside Aceh, except in Timor Leste and Papua, conflicts sometimes arise, always involving the religion of Islam in it. On the island of Java, social and political chaos often

becomes an arena for how to place Islam and politics in it. Meanwhile, outside Java, such as Ambon, Maluku, and Poso, they are more in touch with issues of ethnicity and religion. [57] Religious conflicts such as Islam versus Christianity often occur in Indonesia [58]. However, even though churches or mosques are burned, they are rarely mentioned as acts of terrorism, except for the Christmas Bombings.

It can be concluded that there are internal problems within the Indonesian state which then trigger the issue of acts of violence in the name of religion that lead to terrorism. In the Old Order, the discourse of Islamic resistance to the state wanted more of a Darul Islam.

Meanwhile, in the New Order era, the discourse of tension was more rooted in the issue of the national ideology, namely Pancasila. [59] Meanwhile, during the Reformation Order era, there was a desire to implement *Islamic Shari'a* [60] and establish an Islamic State, which may have originated from a dream during the Old Order era, namely DI/TII.

Therefore, it is not surprising that *terrorist experts* mainly refer to the internal problems of the Indonesian state if they look at the historical perspective of the emergence of terrorism in Indonesia. [61] This internal problem is closely related to the international situation in the Middle East and the attitude of the United States and its allies towards Muslims.

Conclusion

From the study above, several things can be underlined.

First, the study of terrorism in Southeast Asia cannot be separated from the activities of global terrorism symptoms. The influence of terrorism issues and movements in the Middle East has impacted the Southeast Asian region.

Second, in the study of terrorists, it turns out that there has been hegemony or coercion of the concept of a single door of understanding produced by Western scholars, whether they are engaged in purely academic research or research of a policy nature.

Third, as presented in this study, the ideology of killing is owned by humans, both those who wage war on terror and those seen as terrorists. In this case, [the roles of Man of War and Man of Terror](#) have influenced the spread of the spirit of hatred among humans.

Fourth, the terrorism movement in Southeast Asia is influenced by internal problems that are still happening. How to place Islam and Muslims in the life of the nation and state, which seems to be *homework* that countries in Southeast Asia have not completed; Muslim-majority and the world's largest.

- [1] (King and Wilder 2006)
- [2] (Azra 1999, 20).
- [3] (Kahn 2006) (Kim, Abdullah and Hao 2006) (Nasir, Pereira and Turner 2010.)
- [4] (Fealy and Hooker 2006, 7). About amount residents each country in Southeast Asia, see (King 2008, xvii) (Pew Research Center 2011b).
- [5] (Federspiel 2007, 3).
- [6] See for example (P. Taylor 2007).
- [7] (King 2008, 4)
- [8] (Reid 1990) (Reid 1982, 1-30)
- [9] (Riana 2009)
- [10] (Onghokham 1992, xxiii)
- [11] (Reid 1993)
- [12] About this story, read (Brakel 1988)
- [13] (Mansurnoor 2005, 16)
- [14] (K. Abdullah 2004)
- [15] (Tuminez 2007) (Kamlia 2004)
- [16] (S. M. Aljunied 2009, 106).
- [17] (Kamlia 2004, 93).
- [18] (Renato T. Oliveros 2007, 18).
- [19] (Jubair 1999) (Renato T. Oliveros 2007, 6)
- [20] (Jubair 1999, 7)
- [21] (Kamlia 2004, 97).
- [22] (Alojamiento 2007, 37)
- [23] (Federspiel 2007, 24) (Milligan 2003, 470)
- [24] (Abinales 2004, 17).
- [25] (Abinales 2004, 17). About the influence existence of American soldiers in Mindanao, read (Hawkins 2008)
- [26] (Tuminez 2007, 78)
- [27] (Gerson 1999, 399)
- [28] (Man 1995)
- [29] (Santos 2005, 2).
- [30] (Santos 2004, 164). Read also (Tuminez 2007)
- [31] (I. Yusuf 2006)
- [32] (Roux 1998, 225)
- [33] (Roux 1998, 225)
- [34] (Funston 2006, 78).
- [35] (Aphornsuvan 2008, 91)
- [36] (Suhrke 1977)
- [37] Look for example (Razak 2006)

- [38] (K. Abdullah 2003) (Andaya and Andaya 2001, 33-39).
- [39] (K. K. Kim 2001)
- [40] Abdullah, "Islamic Militancy in Malaysia." 249.
- [41] (Kheng 2002)
- [42] Look analysis in (Bustamam-Ahmad 2009)
- [43] About Chinese in Malaysia read for example (Suryadinata 2002) (Suryadinata 2007)
- [44] About India in Malaysia read (Sandhu and Mani 2006)
- [45] (Ahmad 2001)
- [46] Look Mahathir Mohammad's thoughts and policies in (Hwang 2003) (Mohammad 2002) (Welsh 2004)
- [47] (Badawi 2006)
- [48] Look for example (Isa 2001)
- [49] (Bustamam-Ahmad 2009) (Fernando 2006)
- [50] Look for example (De Graaf and Pigeaud 1985)
- [51] (Abdillah 1999) (Bustamam-Ahmad 2005) (Bustamam-Ahmad 2001) (Bustamam-Ahmad 2004) (Ismail 1999) (Maarif 1996) (Noer 1973)
- [52] Read concept power in ethnic group Java (Koentjaraningrat 1986)
- [53] Read (Lombard 2008) (Magnis-Suseno 2003). Regarding the development of Islam in Java, read (Beatty 2001) (Eiseman 1990) (Geertz 1960) (Lukens-Bull 2005) (Pranowo 2006)
- [54] About Aceh context, see (Jan 1975)
- [55] To find out the continuity of DI-Aceh's ideology with GAM, read also (Adan 2005)
- [56] (Aspinnall 2009) (Aspinnall 2009c) (Aspinnall 2006) (Aspinnall 2005) (Aspinnall 2009c). See also (Kingsbury 2007)
- [57] (Siregar 2002, 16-17).
- [58] For a list of Muslim versus Christian riots, see (C. F. Yusuf 2002, 62-64).
- [59] (Karim 1999).
- [60] (Bustamam-Ahmad 2007) (Jamhari 2005) (Ramly, Ahmad and Masroer 2006)
- [61] (Barton, Indonesia's Struggle: Jemaah Islamiyah and the Soul of Islam 2004)