Enhancing Counterterrorism Cooperation Through Transnational Communities [1]

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Despite the extensive counter-terrorism efforts invested by states in the region, terrorism continues to be a key national security threat among states in the Indo-Pacific region. During the earlier part of the century, terrorist organizations such as Al Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiyah were able to develop complex networks and systematically execute attacks across multiple states across the Indo-Pacific.[2] While the operational capabilities of these organizations are now degraded, a resurgence of violent extremism in the region inspired by the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL) calls for a re-evaluated strategy that recognizes the distinctive nature and tactics of ISIL.[3] Cooperation between states is therefore central to understanding the threat and developing a strategy to mitigate militant extremism in the region.[4]

In this context, this commentary explores the role of transnational communities in strengthening counter-terrorism cooperation.[5] It argues that transnational communities,

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[2] Zachary Abuza, *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003); Sidney Jones, "The Changing Nature of Jemaah Islamiyah," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 59, 2 (2005): 169-178.

[3] Joseph Franco, "Confronting the Threat of an ISIS," in *Learning from Violent Extremist Attacks*, ed. Majeed Khader, et al. (Singapore: World Scientific, 2018); Peter Chalk, "The Islamic State in the Philippines: A Looming Shadow in Southeast Asia?" *CTC Sentinel* 9, 3 (2016): 10-12.

[4] Bilveer Singh, "Terrorist Networks in Southeast Asia and Implications for Regional Security," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 10, 5 (2018): 8-10; Daniel Byman, *Al Qaeda, the Islamic State, and the Global Jihadist Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[5] Transnational communities "are social groups emerging from mutual interaction across national boundaries, oriented around a common project and/or "imagined" identity which is constructed and sustained through the active engagement and involvement of at least some of its members." See Marie-Laure Djelic and Sigrid

particularly track 1.5 diplomacy and higher education, can enhance counter-terrorism cooperation between Australia and the Philippines. The first section surveys the existing counter-terrorism initiatives of Australia and the Philippines and the second section discusses the potential contributions of transnational communities in boosting counter-terrorism cooperation between these two states.

Terrorism is an enduring national security issue that affects Australia's strategic environment. While there have been no major terrorist incidents in Australia during the last three decades, the state has enhanced its counter-terrorism efforts following the 9/11 terrorist attacks against its major ally, the United States of America. Australia's counter-terrorism strategy was first documented in the 2004 Terrorism White Paper (threats from transnational groups) and the 2010 Counter Terrorism White Paper (threats from local terrorist cells).[6] A more detailed approach outlined in *Australia's Counter-Terrorism Strategy* was reiterated in 2015 in response to strong indications of an imminent terrorist attack against the Australian homeland in September 2014.[7] The strategy presents four interconnected measures to address terrorism, with a focus on "prevention as a first line of defense against terrorism."[8]

The strategy's first measure is disputing violent extremist ideologies by encouraging communities (family and friends) and local organizations (non-government organizations) to disseminate their own messages that challenge violent extremist ideologies.[9] This requires investing resources to systematically empower communities and local organizations to utilize different forms of communications to share their thoughts on extremist ideas and undermine offline and online propaganda. The second measure is preventing people from becoming terrorists by addressing the drivers of radicalization and helping individuals at-risk. Tackling the drivers of radicalization involves improving social cohesion through initiatives such as education, providing job opportunities, and workplace diversity.[10]

Assisting vulnerable individuals requires supporting community organizations that cater to where these individuals live through financial grants, resources, and training.[11] The third measure is shaping the global environment by sharing information with partner states and helping regional partners build capacity. Information sharing is predominantly undertaken with the state's traditional partners (Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the USA) with the objective of disrupting terrorist financing, movements,

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Quack, *Transnational Communities and Governance: Shaping Global Economic Governance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[6] Australian Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Transnational Terrorism: The Threat to Australia* (Canberra: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2004); Australian Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Australian Counter-terrorism White Paper* (Canberra: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2010).

[7] Australian Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Australia's Counter-Terrorism Strategy* (Canberra: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2015).

[8] Ibid., vi.

[9] Ibid., 7-8.

[10] Ibid., 10-11.

[11] Ibid.

and networks.[12] In terms of capacity building, the state works with regional partners such as Indonesia to reinforce counter-terrorism laws, upgrade law enforcement skills, enable the use of networked technologies to counter-terrorism activities, and develop a response and recovery capabilities.[13]

The fourth measure is disrupting terrorist activity within Australia by using the options prescribed by the state's counter-terrorism legislation.[14] For instance, a first option is to warn suspected individuals that their activities are being monitored to discourage them from engaging in suspicious activities. More drastic options include the use of control orders issued by a court to impose restrictions on the behavior of individuals suspected of terrorist involvement, as well as preventive detention orders that allow the police to detain individuals when there is a threat of imminent terrorist attack.[15] The fifth and last measure is to enhance the capacity for effective response and recovery. This requires that government agencies be in a strong position to respond to a wide range of terrorist incidents and to coordinate recovery efforts to help citizens within and outside Australia. Domestic initiatives include working closely with key service providers to enforce standards for counter-terrorism measures, monitoring compliance, and ensuring that systems and infrastructures are resilient during terrorist attacks. Overseas initiatives involve strengthening consular assistance to victims and their families as well as closely coordinating with authorities of the state where terrorist attacks were executed.[16]

Terrorism is a prevalent phenomenon that continues to shape the national security priorities of the Philippines.[17] Even before the 9/11 terrorist attacks against the US, the Philippines was already a target of several significant terrorist attacks.[18] Despite this, the Philippines does not have a dedicated strategy to counter terrorist activities and prior to 2011, the counter-terrorism initiatives of the state were only discussed in classified documents. The Philippines' broad approach to counter-terrorism can be extracted from several government documents including the *National Security Policy 2011-2016*, the *National Security Policy 2016-2022* and more recently the *National Security Strategy 2018*.[19] The *National Security Strategy 2018* is instructive for this paper because it presents five "strategic actions" that the government intends to implement to counter violent extremism.[20]

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[12] This arrangement can be traced to the UKUSA Agreement of 1956 that provided the mechanisms for the exchange of signals intelligence between the five states.

[13] *Australia's Counter-Terrorism Strategy,* 12-13.

[14] Australia's laws against terrorism are in Part 5.3 of the *Criminal Code Act 1995.*

[15] *Australia's Counter-Terrorism Strategy*, 14-16.

[16] Ibid., 17-19.

[17] Peter Chalk, et al., *The Evolving Terrorist Threat to Southeast Asia* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2009).

[18] The Abu Sayyaf Group raided the Town of Ipil, Zamboanga del Sur killing 53 people in April 1995 while rogue elements of the Moro Islamic Liberal Front attacked multiple targets in Metro Manila killing 22 people in December 2000.

[19] Office of the President, *National Security Policy 2011-2016* (Malacañang: Office of the President, 2011); Office of the President, *National Security Policy 2016-2022* (Malacañang: Office of the President, 2016).

[20] Office of the President, *National Security Strategy 2018* (Malacañang: Office of the President, (2018), 40-42.

The first strategic action is to modernize the Armed Forces of the Philippines and develop synergy with the Philippine National Police. Upgrading the capabilities of both the military and the police is a fundamental task that has been long overdue for the Philippines. Previous studies have discussed the various challenges that relate to the modernization of the military and the police, but the principal reason for the delay is the gap between the national security priorities of the government and the existing internal and external conditions that affect the state's national security.[21] In this sense, the key concern is whether succeeding governments will continue the modernization efforts implemented by the previous and current governments.

The second strategic action is to disrupt the process of radicalization through information operations and education. This requires a coordinated government approach to strategic communications across all government agencies as well as a deeper understanding of terrorist propaganda and messaging through specialized training such as counter-terrorism strategic communications.[22] The third strategic action is to reinforce security in future and existing infrastructure projects to prevent militant groups from sabotaging these projects. A key task associated with this action is to assign government forces as well as private security, to defend infrastructure from militant organizations such as the Communist Party of the Philippines-New Peoples Army that destroy cell sites if "revolutionary taxes" are not paid to sustain their operations.[23] Another task is to work closely with private companies that manage critical infrastructures – electricity, water, telecommunications, and health services – to facilitate a more comprehensive response to the disruptive actions of militant groups. The fourth and most prominent strategic action prescribed in the *National Security Strategy 2018* is the strengthening of mechanisms for pursuing and maintaining peace with militant groups. This entails the enactment of several initiatives, including implementing the peace agreement with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, boosting the capacity of peace and development institutions such as the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process, addressing the grievances of indigenous peoples and farmers, and ensuring the delivery and monitoring of socioeconomic programs around the Philippines.[24]

A survey of the counter-terrorism strategies of both states reveals a shared interest in preventing terrorist activities by disrupting the process of radicalization. Since law enforcement operations are insufficient in addressing the spread of radical ideas, states acknowledge the need to develop calibrated strategies to counter terrorist propaganda and recruitment. This situation likewise reveals that despite the high level of threat that terrorism poses, coalitions that are critical in addressing the issue are largely disconnected and

[21] Renato C. de Castro, "Developing a Credible Defense Posture for the Philippines: From the Aquino to the Duterte Administrations," *Asian Politics & Policy* 9, 4 (2017): 541–563; Glenn Varona, "Politics and Policing in the Philippines: Challenges to Police Reform," *The Flinders Journal of History and Politics* 26 (2010): 101-125.

[22] William Maley, "Terrorism, Diplomacy, and State Communications," *ICCT Research Paper No. 8,* March 2018. https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/ICCT-Maley-Terrorism-Diplomacy-and-State-Communications-March2018-3-1.pdf

[23] Francis C. Domingo, "Explaining the Sustainability of the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army," *Small Wars Journal*, October 2013. https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/explaining-the-sustainability-of-the-communist-party-of-the-philippines-new-people%E2%80%99s-army

[24] *National Security Strategy 2018*, 42.

incohesive. Hence, while both Australia and the Philippines are taking steps in sharing their respective approaches to challenging radicalization, there is an opportunity for transnational communities to contribute to deepening counter-terrorism cooperation through Track 1.5 diplomacy and higher education.[25]

Track 1.5 diplomacy between think tanks and government is a vital strategy for enriching the discussion about counter terrorist propaganda and recruitment because think tanks can propose new ideas about addressing the sources of radicalization since they have access to expertise and are not necessarily constrained by government policies. Through these exchanges, decision-makers are given more options to consider when developing strategies and policies related to counter-terrorism. A prominent example that illustrates this point is the series of discussions and workshops under the aegis of the Albert del Rosario Institute of Strategic and International Studies and the Asia Pacific Pathways to Progress Foundation, Inc., which brings together not only members of academia, but also key policymakers, government policy analysts, and executives from the private sector.

Another potential opportunity for transnational communities is deepening the understanding of decision-makers through a more rigorous and systematic training in terrorism studies offered by colleges and universities in Australian and the Philippines. While the study of terrorism and political violence is a typical standalone subject in Australian Federal Police College and Australian Defense College, it is not clear if public and private higher education institutions in the Philippines have integrated this crucial subject in their respective curricula. In this regard, there are two ways the Philippine Government can strengthen its cooperation with Australia through higher education.

The first is to consider Australian universities and colleges as a priority destination for graduate education in the area terrorism and counter-terrorism. Graduate training in Australia can be beneficial because it can challenge prevailing counterterrorism strategies by exposing law enforcement and military personnel to alternative approaches that are based on strategies implemented in Europe and the USA.[26] Susceptibility to new ideas is crucial to developing progressive and research-oriented approaches to countering terrorist activities. The second is learning from Australian higher education programs. Graduate courses that focus on terrorism and counterterrorism in Australia are offered by universities and colleges that are often linked with government agencies to reinforce the significance of policy-relevance and real-world experience.[27]

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[25]Department of Foreign Affairs, "Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs Philippines co-hosts workshop on mainstreaming the prevention of violent extremism in the AFR Region in Brussels," 27 February 2017. https://www.dfa.gov.ph/phl-embassies-and-consulates-news/11805-philippines-co-hosts-workshop-on-mainstreaming-the-prevention-of-violent-extremism-in-the-arf-region-in-brussels

[26] Andrew Lauland, et al. *Countering Violent Extremism in Australia and Abroad* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2019).

[27] Examples include the partnership between the University of New South Wales and Australian Defense Force Academy; the partnership between Australian National University (National Security College) and Government of Australia, and the linkages between Macquarie University (Department of Security Studies and Criminology) and the Australian Department of Defense, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and the New South Wales Police Force.

In the case of the Philippines, cooperation between higher education and government training institutions not as progressive. Major government training institutions such as the National Defense College of the Philippines and the Philippine Public Safety College do not have sustained institutional partnerships with leading higher educational institutions and more importantly, do not offer dedicated courses on terrorism and counterterrorism. Learning from and adapting to selected practices of Australian higher education and government training institution are therefore advantageous for developing specialized graduate programs focus on terrorism and counterterrorism.

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