

Analysis of the Implementation of the ASEAN Political Security Community Framework in The Philippines in Counter Terrorism Efforts

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Abstract

This research aims to analyze the Philippines' failure in tackling terrorism based on the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) Blueprint mechanism. This research uses a descriptive-qualitative approach to describe facts, characteristics of subjects and objects precisely, also uses data collection techniques through literature review by collecting secondary data. The results show that although the Philippines has ratified the ASEAN Convention on Counter Terrorism (ACCT) in 2010, it still relies on a militaristic approach in dealing with the Abu Sayyaf group in Mindanao, which is contrary to the APSC framework that emphasizes a comprehensive security approach. Moreover, based on adherence theory and constructivism paradigm, the Philippines shows its identity incompatibility with the ASEAN framework, as its priority on counterterrorism relies on a militaristic rather than comprehensive approach. Therefore, the case indicates ASEAN's ineffectiveness in ensuring the level of adherence of member states to implement the agreed regional counter-terrorism mechanism.

Keywords — *Adherence theory, APSC, Terrorism, the Philippines*

1. Introduction

Substantial changes in the meaning of security in national security studies began to emerge, especially after the Cold War ended in the 1990s. Many experts believe that *traditional security* which is *state-centric* and *militaristic* has been replaced by *non-traditional security*, where threats do not only come from military aggression from one country to another country, but also from non-state actors who are starting to pose threats to sovereignty, and comprehensive national and human security. Mely Caballero, an international security expert defines *non-traditional security* as: "...challenges to the survival and well-being of peoples and states

that arise primarily out of non-military sources, such as climate change, resource scarcity, infectious diseases, natural disasters, irregular migration, food shortages, people smuggling, drug trafficking and transnational crime. These dangers are often transnational in scope, defying unilateral remedies and requiring comprehensive – political, economic, and social – responses, as well as humanitarian use of military force" (Caballero-Anthony, 2016:25).

One form of *transnational* crime is an act of terrorism. The largest act of terrorism in history that occurred after the Cold War was an act of terrorism by the Al-Qa'idah group which targeted the WTC building in New York on September 11 2001, killing around three

thousand people and thousands of others were injured. Al-Qa'idah's acts of terror then prompted the President of the United States at that time, George W. Bush, to launch the *Global War on Terror policy* which also attracted US allied countries in Africa, the Middle East and Asia to work together in carrying out joint military operations in the Middle East, as a form of *counter-terrorism effort* (Gaibulloev & Sandler, 2019:275-276).

In Southeast Asia, non-traditional threats originating from the activities of terrorist groups are a long-standing phenomenon, even long before the end of the Cold War. However, the momentum for increasing acts of terror in this region occurred significantly after the 9/11 incident, where Southeast Asia began to be known as a terrorist base apart from the Middle East and its surroundings (Mangku & Yulianti, 2021:90).

In the Philippines, acts of terrorism under the guise of separatist groups occurred in the southern part of the country, especially in the Mindanao archipelago. The Mindanao Islands themselves are home to many diverse ethnicities, and one of them is the Bangsamoro ethnic group, most of whom embrace Islam. Among the majority of Filipinos who are Catholic, the Bangsamoro ethnic group considers this to be a form of neo-colonialism by the government in Manila against the Bangsamoro Muslims, so they then staged a rebellion. The Bangsamoro rebel groups include the *Moro Islamic Liberation Front* (MILF), *Moro National Liberation Front* (MNLF), and Abu Sayyaf which often use acts of terror to carry out their actions (Chalk, 2021:117-119).

The MILF and MNLF groups have stopped their acts of separatism and terror after reconciling relations with the Philippine government, after which both were rewarded with the authority to govern the new Bangsamoro Muslim autonomous region, also known as *the Bangsamoro Autonomous*

Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) since 2014. Nevertheless, the Abu Sayyaf group rejects any form of peace with the Philippine government, and they continue to carry out acts of terror in Mindanao to this day. Not only that, in 2014 Abu Sayyaf officially affiliated its group with ISIS, and began making Marawi city the headquarters of Jihadist groups led by Abu Sayyaf, such as the Maute group and others. In response to this, the Philippine government then launched a military operation to retake the city of Marawi from occupation by the Abu Sayyaf group and other terrorist groups. In 2017, military operations were carried out, which then made Marawi city a battlefield between the Armed Forces of the Philippines and terrorist groups (Amin, 2018:222-223).

A problem then arises in responding to this. Basically, the Philippines is one of the many ASEAN member countries that must implement the 2015 APSC *Blueprint* or ASEAN Political Security Community Framework, where efforts to counter terrorism are carried out based on mechanisms that are in accordance with the articles stated in *the ASEAN Convention on Counter Terrorism* (ACCT) in 2007. APSC emphasizes improving security comprehensively, which means approaches in dealing with threats, especially the threat of terrorism, do not always use military force.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Research regarding the role of the APSC in dealing with acts of terror in the Southeast Asia region. Hendroy (2018) said that APSC's vision and mission to create a Southeast Asia region that is safe from the threat of terrorism actually needs to be questioned. He believes that a series of APSC mechanisms, such as training, intelligence interaction, and joint countermeasures planning to eradicate the threat of terrorism

have proven ineffective. Darmayadi et al (2023) complement Hendroy's research by saying that APSC procedures which are closely aligned with the principle of non-intervention are the main cause of ASEAN's failure in stopping the movement of terrorist groups in the Philippines.

More critical than previous researchers, Wicaksono (2021) stated that from the perspective of neo-institutionalism, ASEAN is nothing more than an organization that is not yet ideal in ensuring the continuity of a series of collaborative cooperation mechanisms to counter terrorism that ASEAN has created itself. Then, Setiawan (2019), using compliance theory and the concept of legalization, assumes that there are problems related to the level of compliance with *the APSC Blueprint* in the form of unclear obligations, performance and responses related to counter-terrorism efforts, so that the *APSC Blueprint can be said to have no legal-binding power*.

Finally, complementing previous research, Siallagan (2023) firmly stated that ASEAN's efforts through the ACCT mechanism in fighting terrorist groups, especially in the Philippines and its surroundings were ineffective, because they were unable to stop the movement of *foreign terrorist fighters* (FTF) entering the Philippines, so that security cooperation forums are only ceremonial without real action.

Based on a review of literature from previous studies, a temporary assumption can be made that ASEAN's failure in realizing a Southeast Asian region free from the threat of terrorism is due to nothing other than the lack of clarity, ineffectiveness and weakness of APSC cooperation through the ACCT mechanism in realizing this goal. However, there has been no comprehensive explanation regarding the failure to implement counter-terrorism based on *the APSC Blueprint*,

especially in the Philippines. Therefore, this research will further examine "How did the Philippines fail to tackle terrorism based on the *APSC Blueprint mechanism*?"

In the theoretical framework concept, this research uses obedience theory or adherence theory which was coined by Kreps and Arend (2006). In the field of International Relations studies, compliance or "compliance" is defined as the behavior of a country in following the provisions of applicable international agreements, rules and laws. A country is said to comply with an applicable international agreement or law if the country behaves in accordance with the provisions stipulated in the agreement or international law (Kreps & Arend, 2006).

Kreps and Arend provide a new, simpler term besides "compliance" to describe the relationship between states and international regimes. The term is "adherence", which is defined as the level of participation of a country in the international regime. In this case, the level of state participation based on the term "adherence" is not only limited to the state's behavior in implementing the provisions of the regime, but is based on the state's commitment to the regime.

Furthermore, to evaluate the indicators of a country in the international regime whether it can be said to comply with the provisions or not, paradigms in international relations must be used. There are five paradigms that can be used to evaluate a country's compliance with the international regime, namely: (1) *structural realism*; (2); *modified structural realism*; (3) *neoliberal institutionalism*; (4) *hegemonic stability theory*; (5) *and constructivism*.

In this context, to analyze the reasons for the failure of the Philippine Government to implement *the APSC Blueprint* to eradicate acts of terrorism in the country, the social constructivism paradigm is used. As explained

in the introduction, the Philippine government uses a militaristic approach in fighting terrorism in its country, which is certainly not in accordance with the ACCT mechanism under the APSC agreement. Constructivism in *obedience* theory has three specific explanations (Ibid , 2006).

First, countries bind themselves to an international regime based on *mere convenience* or mere convenience . *Second*, countries may bind themselves to an international regime based on the reciprocal benefits or *reciprocity* provided by the regime. Third, and most importantly, states obey and bind themselves to certain regimes because the regime reflects the state's identity or both have the same identity.

3. Research Methods

In this research, a descriptive-qualitative approach is used to describe facts, characteristics of subjects and objects accurately. The behavior, motivation and actions of the research object are things that want to be understood through this approach. Apart from that, this research uses a literature study method by collecting secondary data sources. The data sources processed consist of various sources, including books, articles, journals, online newspapers, websites, and other sources that provide related information. Next, secondary data collected from various literature is described in sentences and arranged into writing for discussion.

The purpose of the previous process is to make it easier to group the collected data according to needs. The purpose of grouping secondary data that has been collected is to make the data easier to read and understand and to obtain the necessary information. Next, the data is arranged, where the grouped data is connected according to the patterns found in the theoretical framework.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 ASEAN and Counter Terrorism Efforts

Even though terrorist activities began to emerge in the early to mid-1990s, the leaders of ASEAN countries did not seriously respond to it as a real threat until 9/11 occurred in 2001. In December 2001, ASEAN then held a *Declaration on Joint Action to Counter Terrorism* which states that all forms of acts of terrorism are a threat to humanity and cannot be justified for whatever reason, and can damage international peace and stability (Hendroy, 2018: 5).

In 2007, a consensus among Southeast Asian countries was formed in *the ASEAN Convention on Counter Terrorism* (ACCT) as an effort to tackle terrorism in the region. ACCT is actually *the output* of long discussions and meetings over many years within ASEAN. This convention is a guideline for ASEAN countries to prevent, fight and overcome terrorism through comprehensive cooperation. Based on its status, ACCT is different from other ASEAN conventions which only consist of declarations and conferences. ACCT's status, regardless of previous conventions, is higher because it contains a "legally binding" structure. Therefore, ACCT is one of ASEAN's outputs which is the basic pillar of the counter-terrorism mechanism in the Southeast Asia region (Ibid , 2018).

Maximizing these efforts is then linked to the ASEAN Political Security Community (APSC), as ASEAN's vision to create a safe region. APSC encourages ASEAN member countries to address all forms of security problems in the region, from traditional security problems to non-traditional security, such as the threat of terrorism. *The APSC Blueprint* contains a special mechanism regarding the steps needed to overcome terrorism (Ibid , 2018:6). These steps basically continue a series of ACCT mechanisms

consisting of 23 articles. The counter-terrorism efforts that ASEAN countries must carry out are listed in article 6 of ACCT, and some of them are:

1. Exchanging information.
2. Prevent terror groups from planning, funding and facilitating their actions.
3. Prevent the movement of terrorist groups through border control.
4. Increase training capacity and technical cooperation.
5. Increase public awareness and participation.
6. Conduct intelligence exchange.

The Philippine government, which is facing the problem of terrorism in its country, ratified ACCT on March 24 2010. Ratification by the Philippines indicates that this country is willing to comply with the special principles and mechanisms intended to combat terrorism (Siallagan, 2023:6).

4.2 Terrorism in the Philippines

After the 9/11 incident, the Al-Qaeda terrorist group has operated and built relationships with terrorist groups in Southeast Asia, especially in the Philippines. Southeast Asia has been Al-Qaeda's base of operations since then, where the group has penetrated territories in the Philippines and trained Muslims who were then sent to Afghanistan. In a sense, the penetration of terrorism has long inhabited the country that was once a Spanish colony. To overcome the threat of terrorism, the Philippines since the early 2000s has received assistance from various countries, especially the United States under President Bush's administration in the form of exchanging information and intelligence, military education and training, as well as funding of one billion dollars (Vaughn, 2015:1). Among the many terrorist groups entrenched in the Philippines, Abu Sayyaf is one of the terrorist groups that is widely known and uses the Southern Philippines, especially

Mindanao, as their base of operations. This group has been active since 1991, where United States diplomatic missions and Philippine government buildings were the targets of their acts of terror, and often targeted civilians, especially the Filipino people, who are predominantly Catholic.

Until the end of 2022, the Abu Sayyaf was still active in carrying out acts of terror which made the Philippines continuously haunted by the never-ending threat of terrorism. (Maulidita, Novita & Hikmah, 2023:36). Even though it is not a large-scale terrorist group, the existence of the Abu Sayyaf is difficult for Filipino troops to track, because this group uses guerilla warfare techniques, using the forests and urban corners of the Southern Philippines as their headquarters. To fund acts of terror, the Abu Sayyaf group not only relies on financial assistance from Al-Qaeda which is based in Afghanistan, but also carries out *criminal acts*, such as kidnapping, hijacking, extortion, hitmen and drug trafficking.

The kidnappings carried out are the main source of funding for the Abu Sayyaf group, and are estimated to contribute 90% of the funds to fund acts of terror. This group kidnapped and held hostage foreign nationals who were on holiday or visiting the Philippines, then demanded a predetermined ransom from the hostage's family.

Not only that, regarding drug trafficking, from the 2000s until now, the Abu Sayyaf group has collaborated with Chinese drug kingpins, namely the Triads, in their actions. Even though this group uses Islam as the ideology they are fighting for, they still carry out actions that are far from Islamic teachings. Furthermore, Abu Sayyaf is also said to be the main perpetrator of distributing marijuana and methamphetamine, as well as being involved in a series of illegal weapons sales. On this basis, the Abu Sayyaf is not only

categorized as a radical terrorist group, but also a *narco-terrorist* like in South America.

The militant actions of the Abu Sayyaf group began to become known to the global community when this group and another group, namely the Maute group, were involved in fighting in the city of Marawi. The battle, which took place from 23 May 2017 to 23 October 2017, involved Filipino troops with two terrorist groups which were then affiliated with ISIS. The fighting in the city of Marawi is said to be the same as the fighting that took place in the heart of ISIS' strongholds, namely Mosul, Raqqa, and Aleppo.

The fighting that occurred in Marawi quickly spread to various cities, because the Abu Sayyaf and Maute groups took over important locations, such as government buildings. In summary, these two terrorist groups tied to ISIS quickly and organizedly carried out acts of rebellion in various regions in the Philippines. Then-Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte announced on October 17 that Marawi had been liberated from the terrorist group after their leader, Isnilon Hapilon was killed.

The start of this fighting was caused by 300 members of the terrorist group Abu Sayyaf and Maute starting an attack in Marawi. Uniquely, the group members involve foreign nationals, such as those who come from Indonesia and Malaysia. The Abu Sayyaf and Maute groups used guerilla warfare tactics by building lines in ditches, and freed prisoners in Marawi city to join them. Suddenly, the Marawi battle caught the world's attention, especially ASEAN, which at that time began to respond to this with great concern (Wijaya, 2019).

Even though the Marawi battle has ended, the threat of terrorism in the Philippines is still ongoing. Murders, hostage-taking and armed attacks, as well as deadly suicide bombings occurred in the period 2018 to 2019. In July 2018, a Moroccan citizen named Abu

Khatir al-Maghribi allegedly intended to drive and blow up a van full of explosives into a graduation event in the city of Lamitan, Basilan to kill 4 thousand school children.

However, the van was stopped at a military checkpoint, where it blew up, killing around 10 people on the spot. In January 2019, an Indonesian husband and wife couple who tried to enter Syria, but were deported by Turkish authorities, then blew themselves up at a cathedral in the city of Jolo, Philippines, killing around 23 people, and 100 others were injured. In June 2019, two terrorists blew themselves up at a Philippine military camp in Sulu, killing five people and wounding 22 others. This was the first suicide bombing carried out by Filipinos, with one of the perpetrators known as Norman Lacusa.

In September 2019, an Egyptian woman blew herself up in front of the gate of a military base in the city of Jolo without causing any casualties. Two months later, an Egyptian citizen was arrested for an attempted suicide bombing in the same city (Mendoza et al, 2021: 248).

4.3 Counter Terrorism Efforts

In carrying out counter-terrorism efforts, the Philippine government has and is trying various methods. The Armed Forces of the Philippines play an important role as well as being the government's main instrument in eradicating terrorist groups entrenched in the southern provinces. The military is intensifying operations against ISIS (Abu Sayyaf) through military operations and legal action to cut off funding. Nevertheless, human rights activists say that Philippine security forces often use violence against ordinary people who are victims of wrongful arrest and labeled terrorists (Bureau of Counterterrorism, 2021).

Not only random arrests, but also killings of innocent people are also carried out by the Philippine military in the name of

efforts to eradicate terrorism. This was widely done when the Covid-19 pandemic broke out in the country, especially when travel restrictions and strict controls were implemented, the Philippine military acted randomly to look for people who were considered terrorists (Ibid, 2021).

In terms of law enforcement, efforts to counter terrorism by the Philippine government have been carried out through legislation that passed *Republic Act 9372 or the Human Security Act 2007*. This law specifically regulates criminal acts of terrorism, which also include acts of piracy, rebellion, murder, kidnapping, possession of illegal weapons and acts that are categorized as acts of terrorism (Umam, 2023: 1563).

Through the authority of state authorities, the Philippines has the *Armed Forces of the Philippines for Internal Peace and Security Plan*. *Armed Forces of the Philippines* (AFP) is the national armed forces of the Philippines, established in 1935. According to Republic Act No. 8551, responsibility for internal security was transferred to the *Department of National Defense* (DND) and the *Armed Forces of the Philippines* (AFP). The Philippine military has separated the *AFP Internal Peace and Security Plan* (AFP IPSP) into a special organization. IPSP is a plan and strategy developed by the AFP to overcome all forms of threats to national security and create a peaceful and stable situation in the Philippines. IPSP is also a special agency that handles acts of terrorism carried out by the Abu Sayyaf group.

Apart from law enforcement and state authority in dealing with terrorism, the Philippines also implements policies that involve the community and NGOs through social and community approaches, both from within and outside the country. For example, the *Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund* (GCERF) has partnered with at least 21 organizations or institutions in the

Philippines, ranging from education, *think tanks*, to religious organizations (Ibid, 2021: 1564).

Synergia Foundation, a GCERF partner in the Philippines since 2019 which has a model and provides an innovative approach in improving governance in the Philippines regarding complaints or public dissatisfaction with the government which is the main driver of extremism which leads to terrorism. *The Synergia Foundation* has created a network of mayors and governors who adopt a model of good governance, which they build with focus on the approach of accommodating community complaints and desires, as well as ensuring that programs are designed in a participatory manner using a sustainable framework (Ibid, 2021).

4.4 Theoretical Analysis

It has been explained in the previous theoretical framework section that a country shows commitment to an international regime/organization through the level of that country's participation in several things. Using a constructivist perspective, a state binding itself to a regime or international organization can be seen for three reasons, namely; *just convenience, reciprocity, and shared identity*.

The Philippines ratified the ACCT in 2010, which means the country is bound by the articles contained in the ACCT. *The APSC Blueprint* in 2015 emphasized that counter-terrorism efforts have become the main focus to create a safe and peaceful region through a series of comprehensive security approaches, where militaristic efforts must begin to be reduced.

The Philippines has implemented a series of counter-terrorism efforts outlined in the APSC Blueprint through the ACCT mechanism, especially in terms of social approaches to communities in the southern part of the country. Nevertheless, the Philippines still uses military force immeasurably and

often targets innocent people in practice. This shows the Philippines' lack of seriousness in complying with the ratified APSC framework.

Based on *the adherence theory* using the constructivism paradigm, the Philippines does not appear to have a compatible identity with ACCT. In a sense, *sharing identity* in terms of the Philippines' *national identity*, which wants to eradicate terrorism quickly and without having to look at humanitarian aspects, then makes the Philippines continue to take militaristic steps. Therefore, some of the rules in the ACCT are not implemented comprehensively by the Philippines.

4. Conclusions

After the 9/11 incident that rocked the world, terrorism became a concern for many countries, especially countries that later became targets of terror operations. In Southeast Asia, terrorist movements have existed in the region for a long time, but their frequency has increased after the events that occurred in the United States. In facing the threat of terrorism, ASEAN as a regional organization has responded through a series of conventions, namely the ACC which was then refined by the APSC framework. However, the Philippines, which is the base of operations for terrorist groups, especially in the Mindanao region, is less effective in implementing the rules stated in the ACCT. This is due to the incompatibility of the Philippine constitution which requires eradication terrorism quickly with ACCT's non-militaristic comprehensive approach.

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