

THE ROLE AND INITIATIVES OF MALAYSIAN GOVERNMENT AGENCIES IN COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM

Wan Ahmad Dahlan Abdul Aziz

ABSTRACT

The 21st century brought forward several economic, political and social challenges that had a substantial impact on any country's performance. The effects of globalisation had made countries become more reliant on each other. The COVID-19 pandemic had forced countries to adopt drastic measures such as imposing lockdowns to not just social activities but economic activities. This has brought forward new threats and challenges to government agencies that they would have to resolve in order to bring forward stability for their countries. These threats are in the form of violent extremism and terrorism comes in various forms and shapes. The primary initiative would be enhancing the role of government in using their resources in agencies, organisations and departments to help curb the extent of the damage and influences of violent extremism and terrorism. This paper explains the roles and initiatives taken by government agencies of Malaysia in order to prevent and mitigate violent extremism and terrorism.

Keywords: Public Security and Safety, Violent Extremism, Malaysia Government, COVID-19

INTRODUCTION

The advancement of security and safety globally had resulted in the need for every country to adapt and improvise on the measures taken in tackling the underlying threats. The advancement of technology and development comes together with the risks involved with threats. The most alarming threat is the terrorist attack that can occur in any country globally (Carter, 2015). The results of this event would typically lead to devastation and fatalities in the case of when acts of terrorism occur in such countries. (Freytag, Krüger,

Meierrieks, & Schneider, 2011).

Terrorism would be defined as a threat by using violence by individuals or groups to obtain political or social objectives through the intimidation of a large audience (White & Clear, 2002). It imposes costs on a targeted country through several avenues, such as diverting foreign direct investment (FDI), destroying infrastructure, redirecting public investment funds to security, or limiting trade, which eventually reduces the economic country's economic growth. (Enders & Sandler, 1996; Sandler & Enders, 2008).

Safeguarding a country from terrorist attacks has been the top priority, especially in a small country like Malaysia. However, having designated laws and regulations alone is insufficient in countering a terror attack. Its implementation and effectiveness in minimising the occurrence of terror attacks must be emphasised to ensure that the current initiative imposed is sufficient. The government is responsible for providing national security that is continuously safeguarded and maintained. In this context, Malaysia's national security refers to a state of being free from any threat, whether internally or externally, to its core values (National Security Council, 2021). Therefore, the responsibility of keeping the country safe from terror attacks should have started from the top of the government to the down grassroots of the people.

NATIONAL ISSUE

Malaysia has its first physical terrorist attack on July 4th, 2016, when the Royal Malaysia Police (RMP) confirmed that a grenade blast that wounded eight people at a nightclub in Puchong, Selangor was the first successful ISIS attack on Malaysian soil (The Strait Times, 2016). The grenade attack was carried out by two men on a motorcycle, who had pledged allegiance to terror group the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). "The attack was dictated by Muhammad Wanndy Mohamed Jedi, a 22-year-old Malaysian terrorist based in Syria. Wanndy, who was Malaysia's most-wanted militant, was killed by a drone attack in Syria in April. The Counter-terrorism police later captured

Jonius Ondie @ Jahali, 24, and Imam Wahyuddin Karjono, 21. Both have been sentenced to 25 years in jail” (The Strait Times, 2017).

Although only one physical attack occurred in Malaysia, it does not allow the authority to feel complacent. There is a lot of unpleasant news, such as online recruitment was carried out to recruit members from Southeast Asia to join the terrorist group as foreign fighters since 2014 (Samuel, 2016) and “ISIS has employed several methods to lure Malaysian youths to join Jihad in the Middle East, notably social media and *Usrah* (small group discussion) in local schools, colleges and universities“ (Sani, 2016). About 75% of the online recruitment of members who joined the terrorist group were from Malaysia and that at least 53 Malaysians were known to have joined ISIS in Syria (The Straits Times, 2016). In reality, the number could be higher than what has been reported. Meanwhile, the recruitment and radicalization of Malaysians have conjointly occurred through social media channels and encrypted electronic messaging apps equivalent to WhatsApp and Telegram (Hart, 2020), that prompt concerns for potential ISIS-inspired lone-wolf attacks.

In addition, Malaysia has experienced the invasion and cultivation of radical and extreme ideology that gain supported by its local politicians. It can be seen clearly by the issue of the Liberal Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) from Sri Lanka where several Malaysian politicians were detained because of being supporters and donate some money to the group. LTTE is more dangerous than ISIS and Al-Qaeda (Mohd Mizan, 2019), and this could resulted how horrible Malaysia safeness because of having the politicians that have gained trust from the people to bring Malaysia forward, but they involved themselves with the group that gazetted as the terrorist group who gave devastated to its government. The LTTE will remain on the list of a terrorist group (Fahmy, 2020). Malaysia is also threatened by the recruitment activities up to supporter issues by local Malaysian politicians towards international terrorist group organisations. All of these are explicitly threat to the nation making it important to investigate the measures enacted by governments and security agencies to mitigate the current and emerging threat to ensure the effectiveness of current initiatives introduced by the government of Malaysia.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The emerging attacks coming from violent extremism had changed over the years. These attacks were prevalent from the attacks towards important landmarks and government structures such as the September 11th (Goodrich, 2002) to the attacks in the form of violent protests that had used political influences towards the population (Kienle, 2012). This news of violent extremism had been successful in some states or nations and while some of the attacks had been thwarted by government programs that counter and prevent violent extremism (Briggs & Feve, 2013). The key findings of counter-terrorism studies stated that information intelligence, counter-terrorism programs, and the efforts made by the nation's government have a positive effect in reducing the rate of terrorism attacks (Carter, 2015; Kaplan, 2015) and violent extremism (Wulandari, 2019).

To address the source of these violent extremisms that can lead to terrorism, it would require extensive efforts from various parties such as the government, civil societies and individuals who understand violent extremism's narratives. In this context, the United Nations verified the conditions of promoting violent extremism is cultivated through the environment and radicalisation (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). Therefore, the government agencies play an important role in countering and preventing violent extremism as it is a foothold that keeps the nation together. This paper explores the various information and strategic approach used by Malaysian government agencies in counter and preventing violent extremism and terrorism. The information obtained here could provide further input for other nations or organisations planning to improve their roles in addressing such issues.

EXTREMISM AND PANDEMIC

Today, the world has suffered from coronavirus disease since the end of the year 2019, or it is the so-called COVID-19. Day by day lives of human beings changed gradually. A recent report by World Health Organization (WHO) demonstrated that in the middle of July, a total of 3.8 million world citizens

were infected and the number was an 8% increase compared to the previous week (World Health Organization, 2021). Meanwhile, COVID-19 cases in Malaysia have soar to thousands per day. July 2021 has witnessed the highest number of people infected by this virus reached 1 million people, and the numbers keep growing exponentially (Malaysian Ministry of Health, 2021).

Humankind today is struggling to fight the pandemic. The worsening part is this pandemic attack allows people to be more aggressive in their actions and thought. Moreover, due to new norms that brought them lives in strange lifestyle such as self-quarantine at home, they are not allowed to travel beyond a certain distance, and most of their lives time have been wasted inside the house. This situation encourages more innocent people to be in severe grievances and fears. It is essential to point out that if all of the issues mentioned before are a clear threat to the nation, several significant issues can be potentially categorized as threats to our safety and the nation's dignity. It has begun with the hate speech crimes that spread as fast as viruses among society.

In addition, it can also be seen through the global perspective which the pandemic had a massive impact on humanity were also threatened by terrorism actions. “The pandemic is likely to have increased the underlying drivers and structural factors that are often conducive to terrorism” (Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, 2021). The United Nations who has led by Security Council- Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC), Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) stated that 44% of survey respondents believe that COVID-19 has increased the threat of terrorism in their respective region, while respondents said countering terrorism (CT) (69%) and Counter Violent Extremism (CVE) (72%) have become more challenging as a result of the pandemic, and no doubts that half of the respondents (53%) believe that pandemic related socio-economic and political impact will increase the threats of terrorism and violent extremism in the future.

The COVID-19 has made Malaysia vulnerable to violent extremism, that indirectly impose threats to the security and safety of the country. Therefore, the government agencies are encouraged to also consider potential threats that arises due to COVID-19 in their strategic plan in preventing and countering violent extremism.

MALAYSIA AND ITS READINESS

In the aftermath of the attack on the World Trade Centre (September 11, 2001), awareness of terrorist movements has been increased among the world government. After more than a decade, it worsened when the pandemic happened, and it made them anxious and being protective become double efforts than usual (Goodrich, 2002). Indeed, Malaysia has never failed to improvise its mechanism in countering violent extremism. According to Jani (2017), Counter Violent Extremism in Malaysia can be divided into three approaches. Firstly, through legislation whereby Malaysia relies on anti-terrorism acts and together with the Penal Code, the Police can detain terrorism suspects and their supporters without a warrant, including those in possession of terrorist materials (flags, banners, or publications). These laws were introduced to empower the Malaysian authorities to deal with terrorist threats. Secondly, militant rehabilitation, through its purpose of efforts to deradicalize detainees during detention by bringing them back 'on track' and correct their ideology, and understanding about terrorism. Thirdly, the last approach in Malaysia to counter violent extremism, is through an educational initiative.

Malaysia has also evolved its law in counter-terrorism, which includes the launching of de-radicalization centre programmes by replacing the Internal Security Act (ISA) 1960 to the Security Offences (Special Measures) Act (SOSMA) 2012, as well as a new provision in existing penal code that covers terrorism-related offences. In addition to these measures is the establishment of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) 2015 and the Special Measures against Terrorism (in Foreign Countries) Act (SMATA) 2015.

Therefore, all of these power sources will encourage the hard work of all levels of the citizen to work efficiently, and it will be a tool for the authorities to take action against terrorists. These showed the readiness and

seriousness of Malaysia to combat the most dangerous threat to the nation.

THE PUBLIC SECURITY AND SAFETY: CUMULATIVE RESPONSIBILITIES

The security and safety of a nation are cumulative responsibilities throughout the country. Therefore, the implementation of policy related to the nation's security must have been done by many levels of society in the nation. The implementation of the policy is defined as a course of action or a programme of operations, chosen from among several alternatives by certain actors in response to specific problems (Popoola, 2016). It has been explained about the importance of policy actors as agents to policy implementation who will supervise and coordinate other involved actors in the implementation process. Meanwhile, several other scholars also proposed that actors in the policy process develop strategies and tactics, or can even able to adopt 'goal-oriented behaviour' (Knoepfel, Larrue, Varone, & Hill, 2011).

From the practical perspective, Malaysia has undertaken the initiative and implementation of this policy inclusively from various stakeholders. From the top of government who is making the policy and to the down of society level; likewise, from the agencies under ministries to non-governmental organisations and civil societies organisations who happened to be the policy implementation and execution agent. The most crucial phase that needs to be discussed is the implementation or execution phase, which involved the stakeholders or agencies under ministries who happened to bridge the policy from the top of government (ministries) to the down of citizens that will promote cum implement the policy. The stakeholders that can be considered to have responsibilities related to counter violent extremism in Malaysia can be seen through agencies under the Ministry of Home Affairs and other related ministries. Since this is a preliminary study, Figure 1 illustrates parts of the agencies that have been involved in implementing the counter violent extremism policy or initiatives in Malaysia, which are divided into two categories according to their role and responsibilities, namely the support agencies and special task agencies.

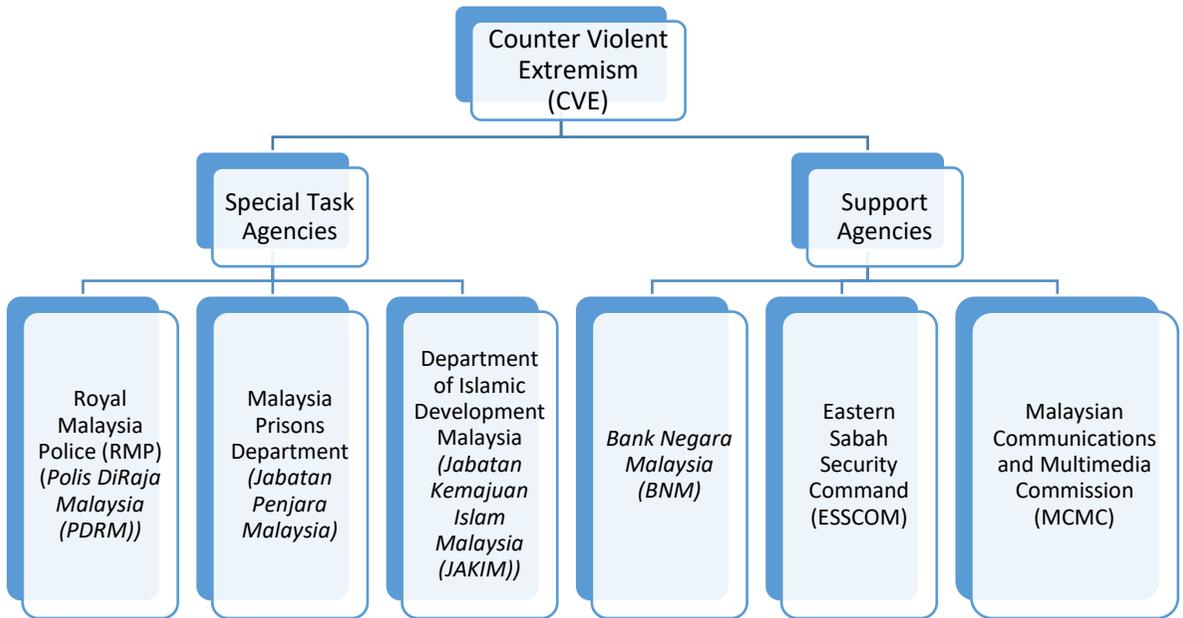


Figure 1: The Stakeholders Framework in Implementing Counter Violent Extremism (CVE) – Preliminary Study
(Source: Author’s analysis)

SPECIAL TASK AGENCIES

These agencies are the main actors responsible for implementing the policy, and at the same time, they are also the primary reference to other agencies in executing and enforcing the countering violent extremism initiatives, such as gather information as intelligence, detentions, interrogations, and rehabilitations. The special task agencies consist of three agencies: the Royal Malaysia Police (RMP), Malaysia Prisons Department (MPD), and Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM).

Royal Malaysia Police (RMP)

The Royal Malaysia Police (RMP) is one of the agencies under The Ministry of Home Affairs responsible for the protection of the public. The functions of the Police and various law enforcement agencies are to investigate any acts or omission that is contrary to law (Teh, 2021). These can be summarised into

three categories, namely: (1) the discovery that a crime has been committed, (2) the identification of the person/persons suspected of committing the offence, and (3) the collection of sufficient evidence to prosecute the suspect before the court” (Teh, 2021, p. 251). In addition, as stated in Section 3(3) Police Act 1967, they are responsible for maintaining law and order, preserving the peace and security of Malaysia, prevention and detection of crime, apprehension and prosecution of offenders, and the collection of security intelligence.

The police force has established specific units to prevent terrorist crimes that are always inter-related in their job scopes within the Police. They are two departments involved in countering violent extremism initiatives: the Department of Criminal Investigation and a Special Branch Unit. The Criminal Investigation Department is responsible for completing these tasks, such as human trafficking and also terrorism issues. The Criminal Investigation Department is headed by a Director, who is the Commissioner of Police and assisted by four Deputy Directors, namely the Deputy Director of Criminal Investigation (Intelligence/Operations), Deputy Director of Criminal Investigation (Investigation/Legal), Deputy Director of Criminal Investigation (Organized Crime), and Deputy Director of Criminal Investigation (Forensics/Databank/DNA/Strategic Planning). The existence of the unit caters to issues related to organised crime, in which terrorism is an example of organised crime, instead of human trafficking and drug smuggling, therefore it is included under Deputy Director of Criminal Investigation (Organized Crime) (Hoong, Wafa, & Eranza, 2013; Teh, 2021).

Meanwhile, the Counter-Terrorism (E8) Division of the Bukit Aman Special Branch is responsible for keeping the country safe from any acts that may jeopardize the country’s security, including terrorist threats. In fact, in 2019, the Special Branch has received The Star Sterling Service Award 2019 their relentless efforts and pursuits in preserving the safety and security of the nation (Timbuong, 2019). As to date, the Special Branch has been working closely with other agencies in countering violent extremism.

Malaysia Prisons Department (MPD)

Apart from RMP, the implementation of counter violent extremism involves the Department of Prison, which is under the Ministry of Home Affairs. There are three functions of the establishment of the prison; (i) carry out restraining orders by the court or authority over inmates until they are released, (ii) provide control over the inmates with humane treatment, and (iii) implement rehabilitation programs for inmates through a variety of approaches (Malaysia Prisons Department, 2012). The terrorist detainees will be isolated from other detainees, as they are enrolled with a different module according to the offences committed. In addition, a designated module is introduced, named rehabilitation conducted by the deradicalization panels from the religious department, psychologists and experts of counter-terrorism.

Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM)

This agency in Malay is also known as Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (JAKIM). Indeed, JAKIM is not under the Ministry of Home Affairs. Its parent agency is the Prime Minister's Department, but acts as an agent responsible for the terrorism issue. JAKIM works closely with the Ministry of Home Affairs' agencies, such as RMP and MPD. In addition, JAKIM provides modules of deradicalization and rehabilitation as in religious aspect since most of the religious extremists have diverged from the actual understanding of Islam. In addition to that, JAKIM will also provide experts to give a talk and discuss with the detainees to counter-narratives their knowledge and ideologies.

To conclude, premier actors play as the central agency in this counter violent extremism effort. As stated in Table 1, they are doing every stage of initiatives to counter violent extremism from the beginning to the end.

Table 1. The role and initiatives of Malaysian government agencies

Agencies	Role	Current Initiatives	CVE Approach
Royal Malaysia Police	Preserve the safety and security of the nation	Conduct investigation's and works closely with other agencies	Legislation / Militant rehabilitation
Malaysia Prisons Department	Carry out restraining orders, manage the detainees, and implement rehabilitation programs for inmates	Manage the detainees and organise rehabilitation programs for detainees	Militant rehabilitation / education
Department of Islamic Development Malaysia	Address the problem of radicalism due to religious misconceptions, and rehabilitate the detainees	Provide modules of deradicalization and rehabilitation as in religious aspect	Militant rehabilitation / education

SUPPORT AGENCIES

The support agencies refer to agencies under the same ministry or from other ministries which always helps the special tasks agencies in keeping the security and safety of the nation under control. These agencies are responsible to spread awareness as a prevention measure, enhancing security and enforcement policy and helping special task agencies implement the security policy. As shown in Figure 1, there are three main support agencies responsible in implementing counter violent extremism initiatives in Malaysia, according to the written law and regulations. Here are several agencies that have played their roles in countering violent extremism, namely

Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC), Bank Negara Malaysia, and Eastern Sabah Security Command (ESSCOM).

Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC)

The Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) is a statutory body established under the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission Act (1998). MCMC regulates and promotes the communications and multimedia industry development, including telecommunications, broadcasting, postal services, and digital signature.

MCMC in countering violent extremism, as threats from extremists is not necessary existed through physical attack only, but any potential threats or attempt to create threats also can be considered as assault to create chaotic situation among people. As reported by Carvalho et al. (2019) “Action taken includes investigations against those spreading the information, reports made against such abuses, taking down the content with cooperation from social media platform providers and referring the case to other agencies for further action”. They mentioned the current issue of a lot of criticism received, which around 21,296 reports on "3R" (race, religion and royalty) through social media posts. Therefore, the action taken by MCMC is valid as they played their significant roles accordingly. MCMC, in close collaboration with the RMP will not compromise and is committed to act against any party that threatens the security, stability and harmony of the country” (Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Comission , 2019)

Bank Negara Malaysia

Bank Negara Malaysia (BNM) is the only agency that monitored any activities related to terrorism financing. According to Bank Negara Malaysia (2014) “Terrorism financing is the act of providing financial support, funded from either legitimate or illegitimate source, to terrorists or terrorist organisations to enable them to carry out terrorist acts or will benefit any terrorist or terrorist organisation” (Bank Negara Malaysia, 2014).

As mentioned before, during the pandemic, due to restriction of the state border, no physical threat and terrorism activity could be detected, but not to online activity. This includes the widespread of money transactions as the online method. As mentioned by deputy governor, Marzunisham Omar (as cited in Visuvaseven, 2021) “Although the risk seems muted at the moment due to strengthened border enforcement, online activities and financial transactions related to terrorism could easily go under the radar of authorities”.

In addition, previously, in the considerable step taken by BNM has announced the launching of a public-private partnership where financial institutions can share information with law enforcers to combat money laundering and terrorism financing (Nufael & Azmi, 2019). This showed how serious BNM to counter violent extremism especially on terrorism financing aspect.

Eastern Sabah Security Command (ESSCOM)

The ESSCOM is the civil-military command established by Malaysian government to protect Sabah from the intrusion by so-called The Royal Sulu Army since 2013. It has consisted of all enforcement together such as army, immigrations, marine, coast guard and the RMP, and all of them will be coordinated under a command system (Dollah, Wan Hassan, Peters, & Othman, 2016).

In addition, they were recently restructured to improvise their security operations in the Eastern Sabah Security Zone (ESSZONE). Indeed, restructuring can further strengthen the cooperation and coordination of various security agencies, including ESSCOM’s civil division in ESSZONE. There was various detention of many intruders in Sabah from the Royal Sulu Army. This initiative and operations are also related to counter violent extremism action.

As discussed in early section, there are three approaches under Counter Violent Extremism in Malaysia (Jani, 2017) that are used in the study to understand the readiness of government agencies in countering violent

extremism. Firstly, through legislation whereby Malaysia relies on anti-terrorism acts and together with the Penal Code, the Police can detain terrorism suspects and their supporters without a warrant, including those in possession of terrorist materials (flags, banners, or publications). These laws were introduced to empower the Malaysian authorities to deal with terrorist threats. Secondly, militant rehabilitation, through its purpose of efforts to deradicalize detainees during detention by bringing them back ‘on track’ and correct their ideology and understanding about terrorism. Thirdly, the last approach in Malaysia to counter violent extremism, is through an educational initiative.

Therefore, Table 2 summarises stakeholder and their roles in implementing the critical part of counter violent extremism in Malaysia. The table depicted that all stakeholders (agencies) are taking their approach in executing counter violent extremism, but in detail, this cumulative responsibility seems like it has showing instability in terms of the role they played. The support agencies mainly focus on the first approach, which is legislation. Lack of attention was given on the militant rehabilitation and educational. Hence, it is recommended for the support agencies to also include the other two counter violent extremism approaches into their counter violent extremism initiative.

Table 2. Stakeholders and their roles

CVE Approach	Special Task Agencies	Support Agencies
Legislation	√	√
Militant Rehabilitation	√	X
Educational	√	X

(Source: Author’s analysis)

CONCLUSION

The paper finds that there are various stakeholders or actors involved in the implementation of the CVE policy. However, since it is a preliminary study, this study focuses on few government agencies which have implemented counter violent extremism policy, to understand the approach used and recommends for future improvement to making it a successful event. As to date, the involvement of various agencies in implementing this counter violent extremism policy can be said to be at a commendable level, however, there are future improvement needed. There is a need to enhance the competency of officers in respective agencies for them to be able to foresee potential violent extremism threats and prepare an action plan to manage them at source. Lack of guidelines on the counter violent extremism implementation has become the main challenges to respective agencies, that influences their efforts to successfully counter the violent extremism activities.

Therefore, there is a need for the regulator to develop a specific and comprehensive framework that provides a clear division of the name of responsible agencies, accompanied with their role and responsibility in the counter violent extremism initiatives. Due to the lack of a unified framework, policy actors tend to work in silos, leading to lack of integration between and among the agencies in countering violent extremism and terrorism. Various countries in the world had used the forces and tools of government in countering violent extremism and terrorism. The success of these countries in countering violent extremism relatively depends on the extent of the government's role and how much they would like to invest in such programs. They would always need to outweigh their future benefits and the extent of their capabilities due to limited resources. It would be a question of whether the government can meet the challenges that can take in as many forms of actions. The main context here is that violent extremism and terrorism can occur to any individual or entity. It is up to the role of government agencies to a certain extent in ensuring the nation's prosperity is well guarded. The paper highlighted on the strategies implemented by the national government agencies and the approach used in preventing and countering violent extremism and terrorism.

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