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The Role of Global Multilateralism in Combating Terrorism

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Abstract: This article discusses the role of global multilateralism in combating transnational terrorism. Modern terrorism has evolved beyond physical violence to include transnational networks that utilize technology, social media, and global ideology. In the face of this complexity, a multilateral approach is a crucial strategy because it enables cooperation between countries in the exchange of intelligence information, harmonization of legal policies, and collective action through international institutions such as the UN, INTERPOL, and the FATF. Using a qualitative-descriptive approach, this article examines the effectiveness of multilateralism through case studies of ISIS and Al-Qaeda. The results show that multilateralism has significantly contributed to limiting the scope for terrorist groups to operate, although challenges such as political inequality and limited coordination remain obstacles. This article emphasizes that multilateralism is not just a diplomatic tool, but a strategic necessity in building a sustainable global system for countering terrorism.

Keyword: Global Multilateralism, Criminal Terrorism, International Cooperation, ISIS, Al-Qaeda.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, terrorism has become one of the most complex and persistent threats to global peace and security (Sarjito, 2023). Terrorist acts carried out by non-state actors are no longer confined within national borders but have taken on transnational forms, both in terms of recruitment, funding, and the spread of violent ideology. Developments in information and communication technology, particularly the internet and social media, have further strengthened the ability of terrorist groups to conduct propaganda, recruit sympathizers globally, and coordinate cross-border attacks. This phenomenon has led countries worldwide to increasingly recognize that the threat of terrorism cannot be addressed unilaterally or through a solely domestic approach. A collective, comprehensive, and coordinated approach is required through an international cooperation framework known as multilateralism (Herjuno, 2018).

Terrorism, as a transnational organized crime and simultaneously a host of humanities, has prompted the international community to react by holding various conferences, resulting in various conventions related to terrorism. These conventions include: the South Asian States Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the Regional Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism, the Arab Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism (1998), the Treaty on Cooperation Among the Member States of the Commonwealth of Independent States in Combating Terrorism (1999), and the Convention of the Organization of the Islamic Conference on Combating International Terrorism (1999). (Md Shodiq, 2018)

Multilateralism in the context of counterterrorism refers to cooperation between countries within an international forum, institution, or mechanism to jointly address the root causes and impacts of terrorism. In this context, multilateralism encompasses not only military alliances or joint operations but also the harmonization of legal policies, intelligence exchange, financial transaction oversight, and education- and culture-based radicalization prevention. The United Nations (UN), through its resolutions and various bodies such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC), has established a global framework for counterterrorism. Furthermore, various forms of regional cooperation, such as the ASEAN Convention on Counter-Terrorism (ACCT), the Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines trilateral cooperation, and the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum (GCTF), demonstrate that multilateralism has become a key instrument in addressing this issue (Saptono et al., 2023).

However, the effectiveness of multilateralism in counterterrorism has not escaped criticism. On the one hand, multilateral cooperation provides ample space for coordination between countries; on the other hand, it also faces serious challenges in implementation. Differing national interests, inconsistent legal standards, sovereignty issues, and low trust between countries often hinder the realization of shared commitments. Furthermore, the multilateral approach is sometimes considered too bureaucratic and slow to respond to the rapid and adaptive dynamics of terrorism (Perwita et al., 2025). Terrorist groups are capable of metamorphosing rapidly, while multilateral mechanisms require time to establish consensus and establish legally valid working procedures.

Indonesia, with extensive experience in countering domestic and transnational terrorism, plays a key role in strengthening multilateralism in Southeast Asia (Pratama, 2024). Since the 2002 Bali bombings, Indonesia has become increasingly active in fostering international cooperation, both within the ASEAN framework and Interpol, as well as in bilateral and multilateral forums addressing counterterrorism issues. Indonesia is also actively involved in developing deradicalization protocols. However, the challenge of aligning national legal instruments with international standards remains a significant challenge, particularly in terms of aligning legislation, protecting human rights, and strengthening the capacity of law enforcement officials (Zamayya et al., 2025).

This research aims to answer a fundamental question: to what extent does global multilateralism contribute significantly to countering global terrorism, particularly in the context of a developing country like Indonesia? In answering this question, the authors analyze the international legal framework, practices of interstate cooperation, and structural and political obstacles to its implementation. This study also seeks to assess the effectiveness of multilateralism not only in terms of policies and agreements, but also in terms of concrete implementation on the ground, including case studies of actions against transnational terrorist groups such as ISIS and the Al-Qaeda network (Jamaah Islamiyah).

The urgency of this study increases when we recognize that terrorism is not only a threat to physical security, but also to democracy, pluralism, and civilized national life. Multilateralism, as a collective approach, is expected to address the need for more

coordinated action based on shared trust (Delanova & Yani, 2021). However, to ensure that multilateralism remains a mere slogan or rhetoric, a deeper understanding of its inhibiting and reinforcing factors is necessary. Therefore, in this article, the authors offers critical reflection and alternative solutions to the obstacles to international cooperation in countering terrorism in a sustainable and justice-based manner.

With this framework, this research will comprehensively discuss the dynamics of multilateralism in counterterrorism efforts, starting from the theoretical background and policy studies to an evaluation of the implementation practices of interstate cooperation. This study is not only academically relevant but also important as policy input in efforts to build stronger, fairer, and more efficient counterterrorism mechanisms in the future.

METHOD

This research uses a normative and qualitative approach, using library research. Data were collected through analysis of international legal documents, United Nations (UN) resolutions, multilateral agreements, reports from international organizations such as the UNODC and FATF, and relevant scientific journals. The analytical technique used is descriptive-analytical, with the aim of understanding the extent to which interstate multilateralism can play a role in countering terrorism. This research also uses a comparative approach to examine the effectiveness of multilateral cooperation in several case studies (Mirza et al., 2024), including Indonesia's role within the ASEAN framework and global counter-terrorism cooperation. This method was chosen to identify the strengths and weaknesses of multilateralism as a collective instrument in addressing the threat of transnational terrorism.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. The Development of Terrorist Threats in the Global Landscape

The contemporary global landscape demonstrates that the threat of terrorism is no longer static or limited to traditional armed groups. Instead, terrorism has undergone transformations in form, motives, strategies, and geographic scope in line with technological developments, global political changes, and complex social dynamics (Augustie et al., 2025). Modern terrorism relies not only on force of arms and physical violence but also utilizes cyberspace, global financial networks, and ideological narratives to expand its influence across national borders.

One significant development is the emergence of transnational ideologically driven terrorist groups, such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS, which are able to recruit members from various countries through social media and online propaganda. This phenomenon marks a shift from traditional models to decentralized networks of cells, which are difficult to track and eradicate conventionally. ISIS, for example, not only commits large-scale violence in the Middle East but also inspires lone wolf activities in various parts of the world, including Europe and Southeast Asia (Wibisono, 2021).

Furthermore, terrorism also tends to adapt to global issues, such as anti-globalization sentiment, socioeconomic inequality, religious discrimination, and immigration. In this context, terrorism emerges as a response to structural injustice, which is then exploited by non-state actors to justify violent acts in the name of identity or ideological struggles. This means that terrorism prevention can no longer be solely militaristic, but must involve a deep sociological and political understanding (Adinda et al., 2024).

Furthermore, information technology and digital finance have expanded the maneuverability of terrorist groups. The use of cryptocurrency for terror financing, communication encryption, and the dark web as a platform for manual attack deployment pose new challenges for countries in formulating effective counterterrorism strategies. The

threat of terrorism is also now more geographically dispersed, with the emergence of local groups inspired by global networks, such as Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD) in Indonesia. This situation necessitates strengthened international cooperation through a multilateral approach. Without an adaptive and inclusive collective response, terrorism will continue to transform and exploit gaps in a poorly integrated global system.

2. Multilateralism as a Counter-Terrorism Strategy

Multilateralism, in this context, can be interpreted as a form of cooperation between countries based on the principles of equality, mutual respect for sovereignty, and a shared commitment to global stability. One of the main forms of multilateralism in counter-terrorism is the establishment of international conventions (Ramadhan et al., 2023). The UN has established various legal instruments, such as the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism (1999), as well as a global strategy through the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

Furthermore, multilateralism is also manifested in practical cooperation such as intelligence exchange, cross-border law enforcement training, financial transaction monitoring, and countering radicalization through social media (Duarte et al., 2025). Forums such as Interpol, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), and the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) are the primary means for carrying out this cooperation. This multilateral cooperation. In this case, multilateralism is not only normative (creating rules) but also operational (implementing those rules).

3. Indonesia's Role in Multilateral Cooperation

Indonesia has been a key actor in the architecture of global and regional counter-terrorism cooperation. Since the 2002 Bali Bombings, Indonesia has strengthened regional cooperation efforts through ASEAN and internationally through involvement in forums such as the GCTF and UNODC. Indonesia was also a pioneering country in the ASEAN Convention on Counter-Terrorism (ACCT), which was signed in 2007.

In bilateral and trilateral contexts, Indonesia cooperates with neighboring countries such as Malaysia and the Philippines to counter the threat of militant groups in border areas. Joint operations, maritime surveillance, and intelligence exchange are important parts of these efforts. However, it is worth noting that Indonesia also emphasizes the importance of a soft power approach through deradicalization programs, community-based counter-extremism, and civil society engagement. This approach is Indonesia's unique contribution to multilateralism, combining security aspects and humanitarian approaches (Kristiyanti & Mahendro, 2025).

While the concept of multilateralism is theoretically ideal, in practice, a number of structural and political challenges hinder its effectiveness. One major challenge is differences in national interests between countries. Not all countries share the same perception of terrorism and counter-terrorism strategies. For example, the definition of "terrorism" itself is not uniform among UN member states, making it difficult to formulate a common policy.

Another challenge is the issue of sovereignty (Anggreni et al., 2024). Countries tend to closely guard their national sovereignty, making them less open to sharing information or accepting foreign intervention in counter-terrorism efforts. Furthermore, there is an imbalance in resources and capacity between developed and developing countries in implementing international security standards. Another criticism of multilateralism is that it tends to be slow and bureaucratic. Compared to the highly adaptive and dynamic threat of terrorism, multilateral cooperation mechanisms often take a long time to respond due to the process of consensus and ratification between countries.

4. The Effectiveness of Multilateralism: Case Studies of ISIS and Al-Qaeda

The effectiveness of multilateralism in combating global terrorism can be seen concretely through two main case studies: the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and Al-Qaeda. Both groups represent a complex, organized, and highly adaptable transnational threat to technological and geopolitical developments. Multilateralism, in the form of intelligence, military, legal, and economic cooperation, has been a key approach to curbing the activities of these two organizations. However, the results have been partial and uneven (Natasya & Yuniasih, 2023).

The case of ISIS serves as an example of how multilateral cooperation, while successful in military terms, faces significant challenges in post-conflict stabilization and preventing radicalization. Following ISIS's declaration of a caliphate in 2014, various countries formed an international coalition led by the United States, along with NATO, the UN, and regional countries such as Iraq, Turkey, and several Gulf states. This coalition conducted significant air and ground military operations, leading to the recapture of ISIS territory in 2019. In this context, global multilateralism has demonstrated success in coordinating cross-border military strategies. However, the failure to establish a stable and inclusive government in the former ISIS-controlled areas indicates the weakness of multilateralism in terms of reconstruction and preventing the roots of radicalism.

Meanwhile, Al-Qaeda, as a more dispersed and decentralized network, demonstrates the challenges multilateralism faces in confronting non-state terror networks that are highly flexible and not dependent on specific geographic regions. Following the 9/11 attacks, the UN Security Council passed several resolutions encouraging counterterrorism cooperation, including funding cuts and cross-border surveillance. Interpol and the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) also coordinated efforts to track extremist funds and movements. However, due to the loosely networked nature of Al-Qaeda, the organization was able to survive and metamorphose into various regions, such as Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) or Al-Shabaab in East Africa. This demonstrates that multilateralism requires a long-term and adaptive strategy, not solely based on military approaches or financial regulation.

These two case studies demonstrate that multilateralism is effective in creating international coordination and global pressure on terrorist organizations. However, this success depends heavily on strategic alignment between countries, sensitivity to local contexts, and implementation capacity on the ground. Multilateralism is not the sole solution, but it remains a vital component in countering global terrorism.

5. Harmonization of National and International Law

A key focus of counter-terrorism multilateralism is the harmonization of national laws with international standards. Indonesia, for example, revised Law No. 15 of 2003 into Law No. 5 of 2018 to expand the scope of criminal acts of terrorism and accommodate prevention aspects. However, this harmonization has not fully addressed human rights protection and still faces challenges in law enforcement at the local level (Nursabila, 2023).

In many cases, developing countries face obstacles in legal adjustment due to limited technical capacity, conflicts between norms and customary law, and domestic political resistance. Therefore, the role of multilateralism is also crucial in providing technical assistance and legal capacity to support these adjustments.

In addition to states, non-state institutions also play a significant role in multilateral cooperation, such as donor agencies, international NGOs, and think tanks (Tadem, 2021). They assist in prevention through research, education, training, and the development of counter-radicalism narratives. Examples include deradicalization programs supported by the UNDP and institutions like the Hedayah Centre, which collaborate with governments in the Middle East and Southeast Asia. These institutions can reach grassroots communities and

provide a more contextual and local approach to preventing violent extremism, often beyond the reach of formal security forces.

6. Multilateralism in the Digital Age

Terrorism currently utilizes the digital space to spread propaganda, recruit members, and raise funds through blockchain systems and cryptocurrencies. Therefore, multilateralism in the digital age demands cross-border cooperation in regulating digital platforms, tracking crypto transactions, and removing radical content on social media. However, this cooperation faces significant challenges in the form of differences in digital regulations between countries, the principle of freedom of expression, and the dominance of global technology companies that are not subject to the jurisdiction of any single country. Therefore, multilateralism in the digital sphere requires a new approach that collaboratively involves state actors and technology corporations (Susanti & Ismira, 2023).

Another important issue that should not be overlooked is whether multilateralism reflects global justice. In many cases, large countries have dominant influence in determining the direction of global policy, including counter-terrorism. This can lead to imbalances in implementation policy, where developing countries become mere objects of policy, not active subjects. In this context, multilateralism must be redesigned to be more inclusive, democratic, and responsive to global realities. International cooperation in counterterrorism should not be based on a hegemonic approach, but rather must promote solidarity between nations and respect universal human rights and dignity.

CONCLUSION

Global terrorism is a transnational threat that requires a collective response through a multilateral approach. Multilateralism enables cooperation between nations in intelligence exchange, legal harmonization, and prevention and prosecution measures through institutions such as the UN, INTERPOL, and the FATF. Studies of ISIS and Al-Qaeda demonstrate the effectiveness of this approach in limiting the scope and power of international terror networks.

However, the effectiveness of multilateralism depends heavily on political commitment, equality between nations, and sensitivity to local contexts. Multilateralism is not simply a diplomatic forum; it must be an active and adaptive collective framework in addressing the ever-changing dynamics of threats. Thus, multilateral cooperation is an essential strategy in building an effective, inclusive, and sustainable global counterterrorism system.

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