

Drug Mules in Drug Syndicates and Its Impact to Human Security in Malaysia

Premelatha A/P Marimuthu*
Bakri Mat

School of International Studies,
College of Law, Government and International Studies,
Universiti Utara Malaysia

*Corresponding author: prema_1512@yahoo.com.

ABSTRACT

UNDP's Human Development Report 1994 is perhaps among the earliest documents that recognized human security, a concept which eventually led to its frequent use among scholars and practitioners in the International Relations study. Relevantly, the study of drug trafficking from a human security perspective represents a significant shift from the mainstream paradigm which focuses more on state-centric rather than an individual human being. In Malaysia, the drug trafficking issue has been of great concern since the 1970s, not only to the public but also the government. This country has long been in the grasp of drug trafficking phenomena. Despite numerous efforts, prevention programmes, law implementations and regional initiatives in combating this issue, the struggle to eradicate or even minimize the problem has never been achieved fully. Drug trafficking trend in the country has evolved to a much greater phase. The trend now becomes more serious and life-threatening in recent times when human - also known as a drug-mule - are increasingly exploited and used as a tool to transport drugs. The purpose of this paper is to examine the modus operandi of drug trafficking network using 'drug mule' as a transporter of drugs in Malaysia.

In contrast to the mainstream state centric-based paradigm in international relations, this issue will be analysed from a human security perspective by utilizing the existing literature, such as books, journals, reports, magazines and newspapers. Preliminary findings from the literature suggest that drug trafficking continue to pose a threat to human security. The overarching goals of protecting human security cannot be achieved without the commitments from both the government and the international community.

Keywords: *Human security, International Relations, Drug trafficking, Drug mules.*

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INTRODUCTION

Globalization has opened up a new term in the aspects interrelations among nations. On the positive part, it has paved ways to new encounters, ideas, joint ventures, business strategies and so on. However, beneath this massive metamorphosis, lies a dark secret. The unheralded and unexpected side of globalization is a complicated network of illicit trade ranging from drugs and arms trafficking to the smuggling of human into slavery and prostitution. Among those, one of the largest and most profitable business is the market for illicit drugs.

Drug trafficking has become a global threat that undermines the security, development and the rule of law in almost every country. According to Rosenau, Gay and Musington (1997), a transnational threat is defined as ‘having causes and effects that cut across national borders, became a key player to the erosion of the nation-state’s power and authority, and it involves the action of non-state actors. Drug trafficking is a part of transnational threats. In the field of international security studies, some scholars refer to these problems as “*a grey area phenomenon*” or ‘*low-intensity conflicts*’ because they do not pose an immediate and obvious danger to a state or region in the way traditional military threats do, but they are dangerous too.

Malaysia has long been vulnerable to drug trafficking phenomena. Its long porous land and sea border and its strategic geographic position increase its vulnerability. To curb the problem, the government came up with strong policy statements by declaring drugs as a major national security threat. Despite numerous efforts, prevention programmes, law implementations and regional initiatives in combating this issue, drug-related offences have been on the rising trend. These phenomena not only affect a nation itself but it also causes a major concern to regional security.

Now, the evolution of drug evolved to a much-complicated phase where from the earlier cases when drugs transferred via non-human tools such as tyres, boxes, bottles, etc., now human used as a tool to transfer drugs.

There are numerous cases where people get duped to traffic drugs to other countries. These people are called drug mules. These drug mules' methods further complicate the existing gravely situation. These drug mules were paid extremely well and taking into consideration that the jobs given were really small compared to the amount they are being paid, these people fall into the drug trafficking syndicates (Zarina Othman, Nor Azizan Idris, Mohamad Daud Druids, 2015).

Drug mules are those who carry drugs bought by someone else across national borders (Fleetwood & Hass, 2011). Besides young males, children and pregnant were used. In most circumstances, education levels of drug mules are generally low, regardless of how they smuggled the drugs. These are cheap labours available for hire, in addition to their desire for money and relatively lower chance of being detected making them the best '*vehicle*' to smuggle and transport drugs.

Reported cases of Malaysian nabbed on drug trafficking cases continued to be highlighted in the local and international newspapers. Deputy Foreign Minister, A. Kohilan Pillai said that currently there are 1,900 Malaysian jailed in various countries for drug mules' offences. He added, from these numbers, 270 were detained in Thailand and 200 in Singapore. (<http://www.pemadam.org.my>)

Therefore, this study is designed to investigate the drug trafficking issues particularly on the issue of drug mule in Malaysia. The need for this research is because drug mules issue poses a great danger to the human security principle in terms of depriving human needs, rights and dignity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As defined in the 1994 Human Development Report, human security referred to as 'people's safety from chronic threats and protection from sudden hurtful decentred in the patterns of daily life'. Human security approach is concerned on human welfare instead of on military aspect. The idea is based on the principle of defending human life is important as compared to defending a land. Mely Caballero-Anthony (2010) described non-traditional threat as 'challenges to the survival and well-being of people and states that arise primarily out of non-military sources, such as climate change, cross border environmental degradation and resources depletion, infectious diseases, natural disasters, irregular migration, food shortages, people smuggling, drug trafficking and other forms of transnational crime'.

Hence, non-traditional threats, are indeed a threat to human security. Drug trafficking leads indirectly to violence and corruption and threatening human security by devitalizing government control (Muon Dandurand, 1999). On the victim perspective, they tend to develop extreme psychological disorder due to all the traumatized experience upon being detained. Families members of the drug mules or drug traffickers who were caught will also have to go through the same psychological dilemma, grief and remorse. This is a violation of the said human security agenda.

Drug trafficking has become complex and caused threats in international security. As the problems are widening, there are growing attention to fighting drug trafficking. As for Malaysia, drug trafficking phenomena is not a new crisis. The issue was taken seriously in the 1970s and from that period on, it has snowballed to a much greater, complicated and critical phenomenon. With the increasing attention given by the authority to these drug mules, it is a timely decision to look deeper into this issue. The literature reviewed in this part covers several kinds of literature that were previously done and to some extent, relates to this study. These literature reviews will be an important key element for a better understanding of this study.

DRUG TRAFFICKING IN MALAYSIA

Drug trafficking in Malaysia has become a national issue. Since its outburst in the 1970s, there seems to be like no ending to this menace. Despite that, Malaysia is committed to significantly reduce or eliminate this drug trafficking problem with the effort to strengthen its laws and orders. However, these efforts are futile as the results are far from its motive. The global crime is evolving at a much greater speed which makes the current enforcement tactics usually fails. Pierre-Arnaud Chouvy, (2013) agrees with these phenomena when he stresses that the effort to combat drug production and drug trafficking has failed due to lack of resources and weak domestic institutions. Ann Fordham (2018) is in line with Pierre-Arnaud Chouvy as she published an article titled “The drug market is thriving while the Commission on Narcotic Drugs Limp Along”.

To attain a wholesome solution to this problem, domestically, Malaysia must be aggressive and sound. This may sound easy, but with the pace the illicit drug trafficking syndicates operating now, this may be the hardest task to do. Malaysia is chosen by these drug syndicates merely because of its

strategic geographical location in South East Asia. Malaysia is mainly used as a transit country.

However, this scenario changes when the syndicates started to manipulate the local Malaysian to meet their goals via corruptions. Corruptions, indeed, are economically damaging. Ralf (2004) strongly agrees with these statements, and he emphasises on the severity of the situation as “where a state has failed to strengthen its hold on the drug trafficking problem, then, there will be a severe social, economic and political disaster”. This situation will increase the consumption of drug and leads to addiction which also caused violent crime to begin. Not only that, it affects the health of people, and the widespread intravenous usage spreads HIV/Aids disease. Since the victims of the drug are usually productive adults, this is considered as a waste to human potential.

Umavathi Ramayah (2006) also shares the same idea as Ralf when it is stressed that human, from all walks of life, is a potential victim for drug trafficking syndicates. According to her, even students from higher learning institutions are not spared, and in fact, these groups are often considered as easy targets by the syndicates. Azizah (2008) has researched drug misuse by school children, and it is undeniable that these syndicates even manipulate school children for their wealth gains.

DRUG SYNDICATES IN MALAYSIA

Drug syndicates are highly aware of the vulnerabilities in the international drug control system. The larger networks, especially, develop highly sophisticated counterintelligence against drug enforcement agencies. The syndicates know almost every law enforcement officer very well. They explore weak points, technical capabilities, vehicles, surveillance methods and potential informants. They pay generous bribes to collect information on law enforcement agencies and staffs. Transnational drug networks respond to law enforcement strategies by changing their routes, concealment and transportation methods and by recruiting couriers with different profiles (Ekici, 2016).

In Malaysia, drug trafficking syndicates have long been considered a threat to national security. The number of Malaysians who were exploited by these syndicates are alarming. On December 2011, former Deputy Foreign Minister, Senator A. Kohilan Pillay reported that 1,900 Malaysian jailed

abroad in drug-related offences. From these numbers, 270 people were detained in Thailand and 200 in Singapore. In a statement released by Bukit Aman Police Headquarters, specifically on drug mules' cases, from 2007 until 2010, a total of 239 Malaysian were detained in foreign jails. From this number, 120 were men, and 119 were women. Then, on 11th December 2016, we were shocked when two Malaysian were nabbed by Thailand Police with 140 bar heroin, weighing 52.4 kilograms and 41 kilogrammes of syabu which is estimated a few hundred million.

Just before that, in March 2016, 21 Malaysian drug mules were arrested in Thailand for heroin smuggling. All of them are facing life imprisonment in Thailand. Children too are not spared by these drug trafficking syndicates. On September 2016, Kota Kinabalu Head of Police, ACP M. Chandra reported that they had arrested three local drug traffickers who used two children aged 8 and 3, for drug trafficking. These people were arrested together with 503.56 gram of syabu worth RM65,000. These reports show that drug trafficking syndicates, in particular, drug mules, is not only a threat to human security but national security as well.

DRUG MULE AS A TRANSPORTER IN DRUG TRAFFICKING NETWORK

Just Besides that, preliminary finding also suggested that there is a crucial need for the study of drug trafficking, particularly on drug mules in the context of Malaysia. Most of the study done so far only focuses on the effect of drugs, its implications to the country, government initiatives and law implementations to curb the problem. Therefore, it is important to know in-depth about these drug trafficking phenomena in Malaysia, particularly on the issue of drug mules.

Consequently, there a few areas which need to be investigated. Until now, despite the issue of the drug being considered a threat to Malaysian national security, research on drug trafficking issues are still very limited. The question of what is drugs mules and how the drug mules operate their business, the reasons of the skyrocketing numbers of drug mules' offender despite numerous efforts taken to curb the problem, the pulling factors that lead drug trafficking in Malaysia and investigate the effectiveness of the preventive measures taken by Malaysian government to curb this menace needs an answer urgently.

METHODOLOGY

This study is based on qualitative case study research method, through an analysis on both, primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data in this research consists of original information collected from official documents such as Hansard or transcript of Parliamentary debates and government official reports. The secondary data for this research, on the other hand, is collected and derives from available published and unpublished materials such as books, thesis, journals, proceedings, conference papers, online database and local newspapers. These are the main references for this study.

This study employs content analysis to investigate all the information's that have been gathered. Content analysis, in this case, will enable the researcher to explore research trends and practices within Security Studies subfields, thus providing insight into primary and secondary data related to drug trafficking and particularly the issue of drug mules in drug trafficking networking in Malaysia.

DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTION

Malaysia has long been a victim of drug trafficking phenomena. Since its outburst in the 1970s, there seems to be like no ending to this menace. To make its situation worst, its strategic geographical location in Southeast Asia added up its vulnerability. Although most of the ASEAN countries declared drugs as illegal, somehow or rather, this illegality has been the main reason this underground business flourishes and now, transformed into a phenomenon which demands the attention of the whole world. It is indeed undeniable that drug trafficking network gains enormous profits through exploiting the price differences between source countries and final markets. Skilled international drug networks find astonishing ways to produce, traffic and market drugs, despite the measures taken by national and international governments. Drug traffickers are highly aware of the vulnerabilities in the international drug control system. To meet their target, they constantly develop highly sophisticated counterintelligence against drug enforcement agencies. These tactics are proven based on the arrests done by the Police Department and Immigration Department at our airports and borders entry points.

One of emerging worrying trend is the manipulation of the local Malaysian to meet their goals. They are called drug mules. These people were either

exploited or forced to become the transporter of drugs across borders. In most cases involving drug mules, drugs are inserted into the gastrointestinal system and later retrieved through a bowel movement. Drug mules also have to take good care in the packaging to ensure no leakage or rupture in the whole process. Leak or rupture means fatal. These drug mules, not only risk their freedom, personal safety, identity and values, but also their precious life. Thus, these phenomena gained the attention of the world.

The primary focus of this study is to examine the *modus operandi* of drug trafficking network using 'drug mule' as a transporter of drugs in Malaysia. This issue will be analyzed from a human security perspective, in contrast to the mainstream state-centric based paradigm in international relations. The purpose of this study, which is on the issue of drug mules, is an example of a non-traditional security issue in Malaysia that requires serious and urgent considerations. The findings of this study might produce a new direction in the effort of relevant authorities on tackling this menace.

CONCLUSION

Malaysia is committed to significantly reduce or eliminate this drug trafficking problem with the effort to strengthen its law and orders. Since its outburst in the 1970s, there seems to be like no ending to this menace, and soon it blanketed Malaysia to become a disastrous national issue. The Government, through its various departments, non-governmental organizations and social bodies has made tremendous efforts to overcome this problem. Despite having all these efforts, we still fail to reduce this problem, let alone putting a stop to it.

Drug trafficking, through the violence, corruption and other socially harmful consequences they entail, is a direct threat to human security. They also constitute an indirect but very real threat to human security by weakening the very same governance mechanism that is responsible for their control (Dandurand, 1999). On the victim perspective, they tend to develop extreme psychological disorder due to all the traumatized experience upon being detained. Families members of the drug mules or drug traffickers who were caught will also have to go through the same psychological dilemma, grief and remorse.

Having in mind that every citizen is a potential victim and vulnerable for this risk, therefore, it is timely to study the growth patterns and seek cooperation among countries to counter this problem once and for all.

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