

# **RESEARCH REVIEW**

Research and Publication Divisions,  
SEARCCT

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## MESSAGE FROM DIRECTOR-GENERAL

It is with great pride that I present the SEARCCT Research and Publications Division – Research Review 2024. This publication reaffirms our unwavering commitment to advancing knowledge, fostering critical discourse, and strengthening global resilience against the evolving threats of terrorism and violent extremism.

In today's dynamic security landscape, research and evidence-based analysis are indispensable pillars in shaping effective counter-terrorism (CT) and preventing and countering violent extremism (PCVE) strategies. The work undertaken by SEARCCT's Research and Publications Division plays a pivotal role in bridging the gap between theory and practice, ensuring that policymakers, practitioners, academics, and the public have access to accurate, relevant, and timely insights.

Over the past year, our research has examined a wide range of pressing security challenges, including the exploitation of gaming platforms by extremist groups, the intersection of artificial intelligence (AI) and terrorism, the nexus between transnational crime and foreign terrorist fighter (FTF) movements, the impact of mis/disinformation in radicalisation processes and the evolving role of women in terrorism. These studies contribute not only to academic and policy discussions but also offer practical solutions to counter extremist narratives, enhance resilience, and strengthen national and regional security frameworks.

A major milestone in our knowledge-sharing initiatives was the launch of the SEARCCT Centre of Research Excellence and Online Repository (SCORE) in 2025, a digital platform designed to provide accessible, high-quality research materials to stakeholders worldwide. SCORE stands as a testament to SEARCCT's dedication to enhancing research accessibility, fostering global collaboration, and informing evidence-based policymaking in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism.

As we move forward, SEARCCT remains committed to expanding its research horizons, strengthening strategic partnerships, and amplifying its impact. I extend my deepest gratitude to our dedicated officers, whose expertise, diligence, and commitment have been instrumental in

producing this review. Your contributions are invaluable in shaping a more informed, resilient, and secure global community.

I invite you to explore this publication and join us in advancing the global discourse on counter-terrorism and PCVE. Together, let us continue to challenge extremist ideologies, reinforce societal resilience, and pave the way for a safer and more peaceful future.

Thank you.

**DATO' GANESON SIVAGURUNATHAN**

Director-General

Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counter-Terrorism (SEARCCT)

## **ABOUT RESEARCH AND PUBLICATION DIVISION**

The Research and Publications Division serves as a cornerstone of SEARCCT's counter-terrorism and preventing violent extremism (PCVE) efforts. It plays a role in conducting in-depth research and producing a diverse range of publications, including monographs, journal articles, analytical papers, and research reports. These materials are disseminated in both print and digital formats to SEARCCT's partners, policymakers, practitioners, and participants in capacity-building programmes, ensuring broad accessibility and practical utility.

Beyond research and publications, the Division actively engages in knowledge-sharing initiatives, regularly presenting findings and insights at local and international forums, conferences, and academic discussions. These engagements foster critical dialogue, strengthen collaborative networks, and enhance global understanding of contemporary security threats and challenges.

As part of its commitment to knowledge dissemination, the Division launched the SEARCCT Centre of Research Excellence and Online Repository (SCORE) last year. This dynamic online platform serves as a comprehensive resource hub, providing access to an extensive collection of reference materials, research publications, and analytical insights. Designed to enhance knowledge accessibility, SCORE empowers researchers, policymakers, practitioners, academics, students, and the general public with credible and up-to-date information to support counter-terrorism efforts and prevent violent extremism.

The Division also leads public awareness programmes, notably the University Lecture Series (ULS) and Forum Kenegaraan. These initiatives are designed to educate and engage students on the threats posed by extremism and terrorism while equipping them with critical thinking skills to counter radical narratives and misinformation.

The Division focuses on a range of key research areas, including:

- Gaming and Extremism – Investigating the exploitation of gaming platforms for radicalisation, recruitment, and ideological dissemination;

- Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Terrorism – Examining the implications of AI technologies in evolving terrorist tactics and countermeasures;
- The Nexus Between Transnational Crime and Foreign Terrorist Fighter (FTF) Movements in the Sabah Tri-Border Area – Examining the intersection of transnational crime and FTF activities, with a focus on cross-border security challenges, illicit networks, and the movement of FTFs within the region;
- Mis/Disinformation and Hate Speech – Assessing the role of online propaganda in radicalisation, polarisation, and the spread of extremist ideologies; and
- Women and Terrorism – Analysing the roles, motivations, and impacts of women within extremist movements.

Through rigorous research, strategic publications, and public awareness initiatives, the Division remains steadfast in its mission to generate actionable knowledge, shape informed policy recommendations, and enhance counter-terrorism strategies at national, regional, and global levels.

## **EXPLORING PERSPECTIVES ON POTENTIAL AVENUES FOR PREVENTING AND COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM (PCVE) IN GAMING SPACES**

**Lead Researcher: Nurul Hidayah Mohd Noar**

The Christchurch and Buffalo attacks were livestreamed and mirrored the visual style of first-person shooter (FPS) games, prompting increased attention from researchers on the potential nexus between gaming and extremism. Studies have identified various ways in which extremists exploit gaming-related content, including the production of bespoke video games, modification of existing games, use of in-game chats, presence on gaming-adjacent platforms, incorporation of gaming cultural references, and the application of gamification techniques. Some theoretical and practical work has also explored how PCVE (Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism) programming can leverage gaming-related content and gaming-adjacent platforms. Conducting research in this area is crucial for gaining a deeper understanding of extremist risks in gaming spaces, which in turn informs the development of effective PCVE strategies within the space.

In response, SEARCCT is conducting a study to gain insights into Malaysian gamers' experiences in gaming spaces and to explore countermeasures against the global trend of extremist exploitation within these environments. SEARCCT has actively engaged with youth, gaming groups, and communities to build knowledge and understanding of the gaming ecosystem. These engagements have taken place through focus group discussions, interactive sessions during SEARCCT's University Lecture Series, and workshops such as *Partnering with Online Gaming Groups to Enhance Resilience* (POGGER).

Through these interactions, SEARCCT has gathered valuable insights into the role of gaming-adjacent platforms in community-building, exposure to hateful behavior and extremist content, and community-led initiatives aimed at safeguarding gaming spaces. To communicate the impact of its research, SEARCCT showcased a research poster at the *Terrorism and Social Media Conference 2024* and shared key findings in an internal session with SEARCCT colleagues. The full research report is scheduled for publication in the first quarter of 2025.



Terrorism and Social Media Conference 2024



Sharing Sessions with Security Practitioners



Focus Group Discussions with Esports Associations and Clubs



SEARCCT's University Lecture Series on 'Exploitation of Gaming Spaces by Extremists' at Asia Pacific University



Presentation of Findings at SEARCCT



Podcast on Gaming & PCVE



SEARCCT's University Lecture Series at Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS)

# THE MISUSE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) BY TERRORIST ORGANISATIONS AND NON-STATE ACTORS

*Lead Researcher: Muhammad Afiq Ismaizam*

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as a pivotal force driving transformative change across various industries, offering unparalleled potential for automation, data-driven decision-making, and personalised user experiences. Across sectors such as finance, healthcare, and security, AI's ability to swiftly analyse vast datasets has revolutionised operational efficiency and facilitated innovation. However, alongside its promise, AI also presents a range of challenges and ethical concerns. Issues such as job displacement, algorithmic bias, data privacy violations, and the ethical implications of autonomous decision-making systems underscore the need for responsible AI development and deployment.

Yet, a critical question arises: what happens if AI falls into the hands of terrorist organisations?

The misuse of AI poses profound ethical, societal, and security risks, as AI technologies can be weaponized for nefarious purposes. One of the most concerning instances of AI exploitation involves the manipulation of AI algorithms to spread misinformation, deceive individuals, and manipulate public opinion. Malicious actors can leverage advanced algorithms to generate deepfake videos and fabricate highly realistic fake news articles, leading to widespread disinformation campaigns and eroding trust in legitimate sources of information.

Additionally, AI can be employed to enhance cyberattacks, with adversaries using AI-powered tools to launch more sophisticated and targeted attacks, such as phishing scams, malware distribution, and social engineering tactics. Furthermore, the integration of AI into autonomous weapons systems raises significant ethical dilemmas, particularly regarding the potential for indiscriminate and unethical use of lethal force, exacerbating global security concerns.

Given the rapid advancement of AI technology, tracking its misuse by terrorist organisations and private actors remains a significant challenge. This research aims to address the following key questions:

1. How can the misuse of AI by terrorist organisations be tracked?
2. Are there verifiable cases where AI has been specifically used by terrorist organisations to further their strategic or operational objectives?
3. How do law enforcement and government agencies monitor AI-related threats?
4. What policy responses are available to protect citizens against AI-driven attacks?

By examining these critical questions, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the intersection between AI and security threats, offering evidence-based recommendations for policymakers, law enforcement agencies, and technology developers to mitigate the risks associated with AI misuse in the context of terrorism.



PERANTIS  
Conference 2024



CERDAS  
Programme @ Port  
Dickson



University Lecture  
Series @ Universiti  
Malaya



Terrorism, Counterterrorism and Rule  
of Law Summer School @ Asser  
Institute

# **EXPLORING THE NEXUS BETWEEN TRANSNATIONAL CRIME AND FOREIGN TERRORIST FIGHTER (FTF) MOVEMENTS IN THE SABAH TRI-BORDER AREA**

*Lead Researcher: Kennimrod Sariburaja*

This study explores the interrelationship between transnational crime and the movement of Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs) in Sabah, with a particular focus on illicit activities such as human smuggling, drug trafficking, and illegal trade. Sabah's strategic geopolitical positioning at the tri-border area of Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines has made it a focal point for non-traditional security threats. The region's porous maritime borders and extensive coastline along Sabah's Eastern Seaboard enable criminal syndicates and extremist networks to exploit security gaps, facilitating the unchecked movement of illicit goods, people, and finances. These threats are further compounded by socio-economic disparities and historical kinship ties, which provide channels for clandestine operations across borders.

The Sabah Tri-Border Area has long been recognised as a hotspot for transnational crime and terrorist activities. Groups such as the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), and Jemaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD) have utilised the region as a transit hub for operational movement, financing, and logistical support. The crime-terror nexus in Sabah is primarily driven by socioeconomic grievances and the exploitation of vulnerable coastal communities, who may engage in illicit activities either for financial survival or due to coercion. The illegal movement of FTFs from Indonesia and Malaysia into the southern Philippines, particularly via Sabah, underscores the growing role of smuggling networks and criminal intermediaries in facilitating extremist operations. The blurred lines between organised crime and violent extremism pose significant national and regional security concerns, as terrorist groups increasingly leverage criminal economies to sustain their activities.

Addressing this complex and interconnected security challenge requires a multidimensional approach that prioritizes enhanced border security, intelligence sharing, and regional cooperation between Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines. Additionally, counter-radicalisation initiatives, community resilience programs, and economic empowerment strategies must be strengthened to mitigate the vulnerabilities that enable the crime-terror nexus to thrive.

While extensive research has been conducted on terrorism and non-traditional security threats, this study seeks to introduce a new analytical framework that examines the specific factors linking cross-border crime and FTF movements in Sabah. The primary objective is to identify key security threats, analyse the transnational crime-terror nexus, and propose policy recommendations for mitigating risks and strengthening Sabah's security landscape within the broader context of regional stability.





Organised the RoundTable Discussion: The Nexus Between Crime and Terrorism in Sabah  
(20 November 2024, Kota Kinabalu)



Attended the Roundtable Technical Meeting on Policy, Regulatory and Cross-Border Information-Sharing Aspects of Handling Foreign Terrorist Fighters and Their Accompanying Family Members in Malaysia (30 April 2024, Kuala Lumpur)

## **UNDERSTANDING MIS/DISINFORMATION LANDSCAPE IN MALAYSIA FROM THE CONTEXT OF DIGITAL PLATFORMS AS A SOURCE OF RADICALISATION**

*Lead Researcher: Siti Hikmah Musthar*

The information ecosystem has evolved rapidly in recent years, with digital platforms playing a significant role in the widespread and open dissemination of information. Social media platforms, in particular, have become central to various activities such as socializing, knowledge sharing, and media consumption. However, their accessibility and ease of use also make them powerful tools for spreading false and misleading information. The low barriers to information exchange on social media can significantly influence public opinion and contribute to radicalisation.

In response to these ongoing challenges, this research aims to explore the role of digital platforms in the spread of misinformation and disinformation in Malaysia and their potential links to radicalisation. The study will examine the types of misinformation, their modes of dissemination, and their possible contributions to extremist ideologies. By analysing various digital platforms and assessing the impact of digital narratives on Malaysia's social, political, and cultural landscapes, this research seeks to deepen understanding of how misinformation fuels radicalisation processes and identify effective interventions to mitigate this issue.

The study will involve stakeholders from government agencies, academic institutions, and civil society organizations (CSOs) in Malaysia. These include the Ministry of Digital, the Ministry of Communications, the National Security Council (MKN), the Royal Malaysia Police (RMP), the Ministry of National Unity, the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC), Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM), and CyberSecurity Malaysia.

Thematic analysis will be employed to examine narratives circulating on social media platforms and identify emerging patterns. Additionally, sentiment analysis will be utilized to map and analyse hate speech networks and their connections to extremist narratives.

As a key output, this research will include a comprehensive literature review and in-depth interviews with experts and stakeholders from various sectors. The findings will inform research-based recommendations and guidelines for counter-terrorism practitioners, policymakers, and social media platforms. The goal is not only to identify and understand current narratives related to misinformation and disinformation but also to assess the role of social media in facilitating their spread, particularly concerning terrorism-related content.

Ultimately, this research is expected to produce a monograph and several scholarly articles, contributing valuable insights to the field of countering misinformation and radicalisation in the digital age.



Summer School on Misinformation, Disinformation and Hate Speech  
(Rome, Italy)



Support for Research Excellence (SURE) Workshop, Putrajaya

# **GENDER PERSPECTIVES AND WOMEN'S STRATEGIC ROLES IN PCVE AND COUNTER-TERRORISM STRATEGIES IN MALAYSIA**

*Lead Researcher: Siti Aisyah Tajari*

Violent extremism remains a significant threat in Southeast Asia, particularly in Malaysia and Indonesia, where extremist groups continue to operate. Historically, counter-terrorism (CT) and preventing and countering violent extremism (PCVE) efforts have been predominantly male-driven, often overlooking the crucial contributions that women can make. However, the integration of women's perspectives is now widely recognized as essential for developing more inclusive and effective strategies.

This research examines the diverse and strategic roles that women play in CT and PCVE initiatives across Malaysia and Indonesia. It highlights their active involvement in key areas such as community engagement, early warning systems, countering extremist narratives, and rehabilitation and reintegration efforts. Additionally, the study explores how gender dynamics and socio-political factors influence women's vulnerabilities to radicalisation, with particular attention to issues such as marginalisation and unequal access to resources and opportunities. This underscores the necessity of adopting gender-sensitive approaches in addressing these challenges.

A central argument of this research is that incorporating women's perspectives into CT and PCVE strategies is not merely a matter of gender inclusion but a strategic imperative. Women's experiences of radicalisation differ from those of men, and they often provide unique insights and capabilities that can significantly enhance the effectiveness of counter-extremism efforts. This challenge traditional perceptions of women's passive roles in terrorism and highlights their active agency in preventing radicalization and supporting rehabilitation processes.

The research seeks to address the following key questions:

- What roles and contributions do women make in PCVE and counter-terrorism efforts in Malaysia and Indonesia?
- How do gender dynamics and socio-political factors influence women's vulnerability to radicalisation and the effectiveness of counter-extremism strategies?
- What best practices and lessons can be drawn from existing gender-sensitive PCVE and counter-terrorism initiatives in Malaysia?

- How can policymakers and practitioners enhance the meaningful participation of women in national and regional counter-terrorism frameworks?

By addressing these questions, the study aims to generate evidence-based recommendations that contribute to the development of more inclusive and effective counter-terrorism strategies. It emphasises that gender-sensitive approaches not only empower women but also strengthen community resilience and enhance security. The findings from this research will provide valuable insights for policymakers and practitioners, fostering a deeper understanding of how integrating gender perspectives can improve PCVE and CT strategies across Southeast Asia.



Attended Regional Summit: Analysing Women's Role in Terrorism in Southeast Asia  
organised by IIJ  
(JCLEC HQ, March 2024)





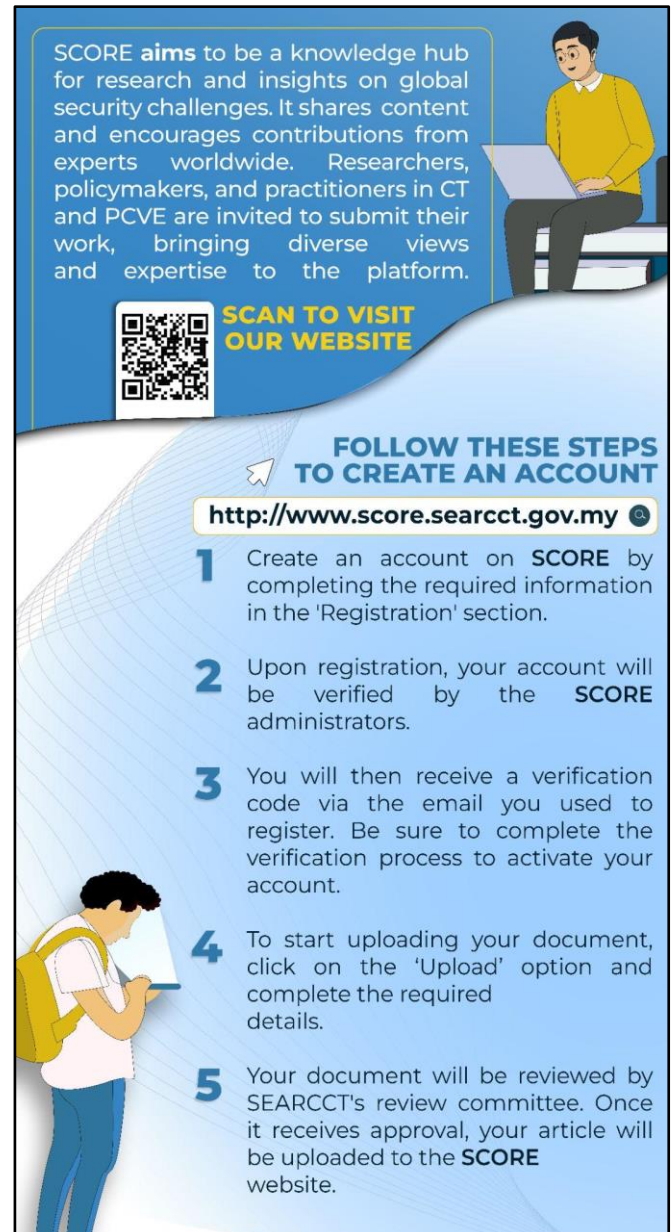
Attended International Women in CT Forum organised by JCLEC  
(JCLEC HQ, Oct 2024)

## SEARCCT CENTRE OF RESEARCH EXCELLENCE AND ONLINE REPOSITORY (SCORE)

The Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counter-Terrorism (SEARCCT) proudly unveils the SEARCCT Centre of Research Excellence and Online Repository (SCORE) in 2025 — a digital platform designed as a comprehensive resource hub for a vast array of reference materials and research publications.

The launching ceremony was officiated by YB Datuk Mohamad bin Alamin, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malaysia, who delivered the opening speech on behalf of YB Dato' Seri Utama Haji Mohamad bin Haji Hasan, Minister of Foreign Affairs Malaysia.

SCORE represents SEARCCT's latest strategic initiative, aimed at empowering academics, policymakers, practitioners, and the general public with critical insights into Counter-Terrorism (CT) and Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE). This innovative knowledge-sharing platform reinforces SEARCCT's commitment to fostering informed discourse, evidence-based policymaking, and collaborative research in the global fight against terrorism and violent extremism.



The infographic is titled 'SCORE' and describes it as a knowledge hub for research and insights on global security challenges. It encourages contributions from experts worldwide, including researchers, policymakers, and practitioners in CT and PCVE. A QR code is provided to scan and visit the website. Below this, a section titled 'FOLLOW THESE STEPS TO CREATE AN ACCOUNT' lists five steps: 1. Create an account on SCORE by completing the required information in the 'Registration' section. 2. Upon registration, your account will be verified by the SCORE administrators. 3. You will then receive a verification code via the email you used to register. Be sure to complete the verification process to activate your account. 4. To start uploading your document, click on the 'Upload' option and complete the required details. 5. Your document will be reviewed by SEARCCT's review committee. Once it receives approval, your article will be uploaded to the SCORE website. The infographic also includes a URL: <http://www.score.searcct.gov.my>. Illustrations of a person sitting on a laptop and a person with a backpack looking at a tablet are included.

SCORE aims to be a knowledge hub for research and insights on global security challenges. It shares content and encourages contributions from experts worldwide. Researchers, policymakers, and practitioners in CT and PCVE are invited to submit their work, bringing diverse views and expertise to the platform.

**SCAN TO VISIT OUR WEBSITE**

**FOLLOW THESE STEPS TO CREATE AN ACCOUNT**

<http://www.score.searcct.gov.my>

- 1 Create an account on **SCORE** by completing the required information in the 'Registration' section.
- 2 Upon registration, your account will be verified by the **SCORE** administrators.
- 3 You will then receive a verification code via the email you used to register. Be sure to complete the verification process to activate your account.
- 4 To start uploading your document, click on the 'Upload' option and complete the required details.
- 5 Your document will be reviewed by SEARCCT's review committee. Once it receives approval, your article will be uploaded to the **SCORE** website.

## NOTES ON RESEARCHERS

**Kennimrod Sariburaja** is the Director of the Research and Publications Division at the Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counter-Terrorism (SEARCCT), under the purview of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Malaysia. He holds a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Southeast Asia Studies, with a minor in International and Strategic Studies, from the University of Malaya. In 2015, he received the prestigious Chevening Scholarship to pursue a Master of Letters (M.Litt.) in Terrorism and Political Violence at the University of St Andrews, Scotland. He has authored numerous monographs and articles on terrorism, counter-terrorism, international security, and global politics. His current research focuses on online radicalisation, foreign terrorist fighters (FTF), border security, and the evolving role of new technologies in terrorism and violent extremism. In 2024, he oversaw the development of the SEARCCT Centre for Research Excellence and Online Repository (SCORE), further advancing SEARCCT's role in fostering resilience against extremism through research collaboration and knowledge dissemination.

**Muhammad Afiq Ismaizam** works as a Research Officer at the Southeast Regional Centre for Counter Terrorism (SEARCCT), under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. His research focuses on the development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its misuse by terrorist groups. Afiq was a former Research Fellow under the “Think Next, Act Next” – The Next Gen of EU-ASEAN Think Tank Dialogue”, which was co-funded by the European Union. Prior to this, Afiq was a senior manager of research and public affairs at the Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute (ASLI). While at ASLI, Afiq published research articles on topics such as mental health, political literacy and digital diplomacy. He also has work experience in management consulting and investment analysis. Afiq has an MA in International Affairs from King’s College London.

**Siti Hikmah Musthar** is currently a Research Officer at the Southeast Asia Regional Center for Counter-Terrorism (SEARCCT), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Malaysia. Previously, she was a Research Assistant at the Center for Transportation Research, University of Malaya (UM). Despite a diversion from the research field, she was exposed to a wide range of research-related tasks, including data collection, data analysis, and data management as well as research methodology and article writing. She graduated from Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) with a Master of Mass Communication in 2013. She is currently pursuing a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Communication and Media Studies at her alma mater, focusing her research on the area of components of persuasion. Her research interests include persuasive communication, hate speech, theory of human behaviour, and audience involvement.

**Nurul Hidayah Mohd Noar** is a research officer at the Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counter-Terrorism (SEARCCT), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Malaysia. She obtained her undergraduate degree in Social Science (Political Science) from the National University of Malaysia (UKM), Malaysia. She did her M.A. in Media and Information Warfare Studies in 2018 at the Centre for Media and Information Warfare Studies, Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM). Her role at SEARCCT includes conducting research activities on issues related to terrorism and counter-terrorism, organising SEARCCT's public awareness programmes such as the university lecture series and public forums, as well as moderating content on SEARCCT's very own podcast channel called the No-Book Book Club. Her current research interest covers gaming and extremism, particularly looking into how games and gaming can be utilised to prevent and counter violent extremism.

**Siti Aisyah Tajari** is a Research Officer at the Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counter-Terrorism (SEARCCT) under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Malaysia. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Strategic Studies from the National Defense University of Malaysia (NDUM) and is currently pursuing her Master's in Strategic Analysis and Security at the National University of Malaysia (UKM). During her undergraduate years, she was commissioned as a second lieutenant after completing three years of training with the Reserve Officer Training Unit (ROTU). Her research focuses on the integration of gender-sensitive approaches in counter-terrorism, with a special emphasis on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE) in Southeast Asia. Specifically, she examines the role of women in PCVE efforts across Malaysia and explores their contributions to community engagement, early warning systems, counter-narratives and rehabilitation programmes.