LIVING UNDER TERRORISM THREATS: SECURING OUR PUBLIC SPACES, MAINTAINING OUR FREEDOM

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"They who can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety."
-Benjamin Franklin-

When Franklin wrote his notable statement, he probably had predicted what the world would like in the next decade. The world that becomes too queer to call home and too precarious to shelter the liberty. We live surrounded by risk and the media never stop presenting us with full report of disasters, conflicts, and disorders that make us seems too close with every threat around the world. These global issues serve not only as a top conversation in the table of campus' brown bag seminar but also a hot topic in our lovely coffee table at home. People probably will voluntarily exchange their freedom to increase the sense of security by staying in fortress-like home, hardening their private properties or living under constant video surveillance technology. But yet, we still do not feel safe. This is the consequence of living under risk society.

These circumstances drive my research interest in the field of human safety and security in urban context. Previously, I focus my research on common disaster risk prevention but I realize that many serious risks come from human-caused threats. Crimes such as burglary, larceny, and theft are a part of daily threats that intimidate our well-being. But these traditional crimes have been studied extensively and well-constructed as conventional knowledge. But research about extreme crime such as terrorism that has great impact to our basal security unfortunately is still rare to find.

Terrorism as a new emerging threat

When it comes to the extreme threat in our society today, people will think some new terminologies that maybe unfamiliar in our personal lexicon. But it is a bit surprising that among

many novel threats we know presently, they are not entirely new and in fact already established hundred years ago. Terrorism is one example of these 'new but old' threat phenomena.

The popularity of terrorism as a contemporary threat reached its peak since the incident of 9/11 and spread widely to any other countries around the world in line with the resonance of war on terror movement. But people maybe forget that terrorism had already existed in our society long time ago even when the original term was not used yet. It was the era of French revolution that coined the popularity of this phrase through its historical period which was called 'the reign of terror'. It was used to portray the phase of horrible situation where violence suddenly became the core to regulate the security. This then lead to the adoption of terrorism term to name the action that promotes violence.

In the modern era, we faced many forms of terrorism that had specific characters in different period of times. Rapoport (2004) specifies them as terrorism waves to mark various shape of terrorism in several range of time. According to this perspective, terrorism had been evolving from anarchist (1880s), anticolonial (1920s), new left (1960s) and now turns to the era of religious and international terrorism. Even though our society apparently has experience to confront with different kind of terrorism threats but still we cannot stride quickly to grapple the development of terrorism action, organization, and characteristic that has also transformed to adapt current situation.

Unfortunately, the experts are still uncertain on how to deal with terrorism issues. They even cannot agree to provide universal and clear definition of terrorism. The critical debates embedded to this term are sometimes subjective and unfair when pointing some group as terrorist organizations if they contradict with government and particular political view. Meanwhile the state itself has potential to become a terrorist with its power and authority. But of course my research focus is not on these definitional debates. I concern more on how the effort of combating terrorism threat enters to the public life and fills our daily physical spaces.

Counter-terrorism in public spaces
The strategy of fighting terrorism can be simply divided into offensive and defensive measures. Because it is totally difficult to eradicate the terrorism by aggressive and military action, the

concern of counter-terrorism strategy has to concentrate on how to provide protection to the people. The logic is simple. If it is impossible to diminish terrorism completely, we still can serve protection by at least minimalize the effect of the attack.

Many countries especially in the west take the lead in developing alteration strategies of combating terrorism from offensive to defensive side. Since terrorist groups intend to maximize the effect of the attack thus it is not surprising that civil society probably the best target to deliver their message to the world. If we examine the trend of terrorist attack in the past 10 years we can see that neither military nor government symbol selected as the main objectives. But the soft targets such as public spaces where people congregate are always chosen to reach maximum casualties and also to terrorize the bystanders. The terrorists want to confirm that no place is safe and try to seek control over our sense of security.

Unfortunately, the public spaces also become major part of our daily activities where we work, play, even just pass by. These spaces in western society have been a symbol of right of accessibility that presenting the vibrant of urban life. But the openness of public spaces also offers the weakness to control the offender including terrorist who will take for granted of these spaces for their interest. In response, the counter-terrorism approach then extends to protect the public spaces. It manifests on the construction, arrangement and design of public spaces in the name of security. The fortress-like design to protect people is introduced to tell the terrorist that the places are guarded and at the same time to build the confidence of people that the places are secured. But in most extreme case, some public spaces are closed or limited to public to prevent further interruption of unwanted stranger.

This situation generates debates particularly from the field of planning and design professions. Most academic responses challenge the obtrusive security features that are unattractive in design and presumed to evoke the feeling of insecurity. They also attack the essential meaning of public spaces that start shrinking and reflecting the architecture of fear. There is a need to maintain the security without making a frightening impression. Then it is concluded that the unobtrusive security features can be the best approach for it.

Since these debates have been introduced by the experts, I wonder what common people think about these two forms of design. If the public as the real user of these spaces is the center of this design then it is crucial to know how people perceive the built environment. I try to assess and connect the physical and environmental features that support the feeling of security from different kind of counter-terrorism design. If we can figure out which design elements contribute to security perception then we can keep these essential factors into various type of counter-terrorism design strategy.

But bringing this particular research theme in my academic institution was not an easy task. Even though Indonesia experienced some serious attack in the last 15 years but surprisingly the research about the protection of people in public space from terrorism is very rare. When I introduced this topic, some people asked the relevance of it with our current situation. But I stuck to my argument that if we cannot learn how to secure our people for the most extreme threat like terrorism then we will fail to compete with more complex and advance human-caused threats. We should remind that this situation also happened when we first dealt with natural disaster decade ago and that time people still denied it as a serious threat.

Lesson learned from the Unites States experiences

In my SRA host institution, the University of Florida, I met Prof. Schneider who is well-known in research area of terrorism and design of public spaces. He gave attention to my research and gave credit to my topic because I choose an uncommon point of view of counter-terrorism design in the perspective of public perception. It is not surprising because as a new research interest, counter-terrorism design topic is not easily to find in common literatures of urban planning and design. Many researches and literatures in counter-terrorism design are also still focusing on physical aspect and sometimes neglecting the psychological side of users of this design.

During my research in the United States, I found that even though this country is the pioneer in counter-terrorism design, but there are still many arguments and critics exist about how to provide security without limiting accessibility of places and creating feeling of anxiety from the design. But there have been massive changes from using obtrusive security measures in public spaces to more unobtrusive and obscure features that embedded in line with the character of the built environment. The procedure to develop this strategy has been introduced widely to maintain

the nature of environment and keep the openness of spaces but at the same provide protection and security for the users. Because every place has different character and function thus it is very important to asses three critical step before deciding what kind of security measures that are compatible to the places. These three assessments -involving threat, asset and vulnerability analysis- are essential to conclude the potential risk of a place. By doing these analysis we can determine the proportionality and priority of security measures that are needed and formulate the best approach to accommodate them into design.
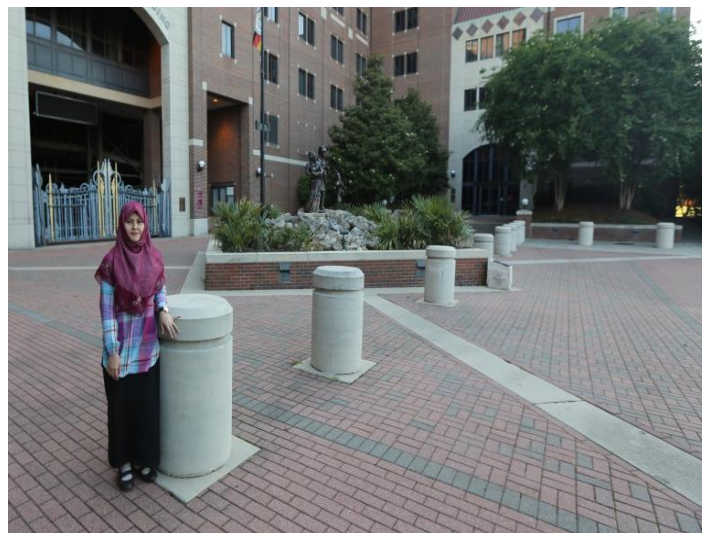

Fig.1 Unobtrusive security features embedded with character of public spaces

Another important aspect I found that it was important to bring all the stakeholders into design process because the public spaces encompass different kind of users with distinctive views. As national issues, security intersects wide interests from many groups of people. The academics particularly have to play significant role by doing research that reflecting and representing general interest of people.

In term of theoretical view, the theory develops in crime prevention through environmental design is probably the major basis theory to counter-terrorism design. Although this theory has been modified for extreme crime situation but Prof. Schneider encouraged me to explore the possibility of developing this theory that will fit with terrorism context. It gave me confident to focus my research in the aspect of environmental features influencing the perception of security that will contribute to enrich the theoretical perspective of counter-terrorism design. There is no investigation under these aspects existed yet. The result can be different with the finding widely accepted in traditional crime literatures. In addition, there is also new measurement developed to analyze the publicness of space in response to security (Nemeth, 2007). This tool can be promoted to maintain the balance between freedom and security of public spaces. It triggered me to create measurement that suitable for my research question in order to assess the perception of security in public spaces.

At the whole, my research in the University of Florida has sharpened my existing knowledge about this topic. At the end of my SRA term, I have developed new material into my research measurement to gain complete response of my research question. Therefore, I'm very thankful for this scholarship opportunity that contribute significant role to my next research step.

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