Winning the jihadists: education as an undisputed policing method

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Abstract

Education is a vital factor in policing violent extremism, jihadist tendencies, and early radicalization in the academic milieu. As students are increasingly recruited by terrorist groups, there is a need for synergy between law enforcement agencies, students, and other administrative authorities to help in the fight against jihadist tendencies and terrorism. This paper provides some adequate recommendations, after analyzing three indicators of radicalization in the academic milieu, which is necessary when policing this global menace.

Key words: education, radicalization, terrorism, jihad.

Introduction

The reconfiguration of international policing system, has been a generating factor of post 9/11 in the United States of America. Transnational actors like Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi charismatic and religious orders was fully legitimized because he had a PhD in Islamic law from the University of Baghdad, and crown himself as a descendent of Prophet Muhammed. In order to establish a working counter-terrorism policy, it is important to understand the agenda of jihadists and terrorists.

In a 2014 publication by Daesh, in relation to the creation of the new caliphate, an anonymous author posed that: "there shall be no more fake nationalistic border to split Muslims." Which some consider as an initiating factor of global jihad and imperialist aspirations. Daesh agenda is further described in the following words: "the aim of the Islamic State is to bulldoze all the Sykes-Picot borders which divide the Muslim world, with agenda to establish a global Caliphate." First, the "puppet rulers" in the Muslim world will be removed, followed by the seizure of Iran and Europe (Rome is defined as its capital) and finally Jerusalem because: "whoever rules Jerusalem, rules the world." the most important aspect of the Daesh text, is international conquests based on a hadith taken from Sahih Muslim, which is quoted as follows:

"Allah's Messenger said: You will attack Arabia and Allah will enable you to conquer it, then you would attack Persia (Iran) and He would make you to conquer it. Then you would attack Rome (Italy/Europe) and Allah will enable you to conquer it, then you would attack the Dajjal (in Israel) and Allah will enable you to conquer him."

In the quest for new world order, criminal agenda, some jihadist organization start with a small-scale Islamic State first while others may target the "far enemy" the protein alliance (the United States and Britain) and other European nations. In both cases, the motivation is similar: the foundation of a caliphate where sharia rules and the Muslim umma will be united. The main elements of this ideology, which may be defined as totalitarian following Arendt's concept, have been preached for nearly two centuries.

Recently, with the global participation of many men and women in the Syrian conflict, it has become clearly observable that the Islamist ideology has borne its fruits all over the world. Emmanuel Sivan and other scholars posed that, Islamist thought developed in different stages. Totalitarian behavior is strikingly similar to all Islamist movements, equally rethinking the Palestinian

resistance against Israel or as a social movement whose members were radicalised in jail by their Pan-Arabist-Socialist hangmen. Let us examine Hizb ut-Tahrir, which firmly criticises and rejects the Daesh version of a caliphate. Despite this, the "liberation party" is convinced that the caliphate is mandatory (by God) for Muslims as well as for the rest of the world.

In an article on Hizb ut-Tahrir Britain Website, Dr. Abdul Wahid states that:

"The scope of the Khilafah – and Islam generally – is not only the problems in the Muslim world—but also problems that confront the world as a whole, because the scope of the Islam is the whole of humanity." What about the Muslim Brotherhood? Hassan al-Banna said: "We believe that Islam is an all-embracing concept, which regulates every aspect of life, adjudicating on everyone its concerns and describing for it a solid and rigorous order."

Whereas al-Banna remains vague on what will happen to non-Muslim as soon as true Islam gets to rule, he is very clear about jihad:

"Allah has imposed jihad as a religious duty on every Muslim, categorically and rigorously, from which there is neither evasion nor escape. He has rendered it a supreme object of desire, and has made the reward of martyrs in His way a splendid one, for He has conjoined with them in their reward only those who have acted as they did, and have modelled themselves upon them in their performance of jihad."

He also corrects "young people of his time" who argue that the fight against the enemy has to be considered "the lesser" jihad and that the greater jihad is the one carried out by the spirit, saying that there is nothing like supreme martyrdom and the ones who strive for it on God's path. It's necessary to note that, Abdullah Azzam was not the first to proclaim jihad fard al-'ayn (a duty for all Muslims) during the fight against the Soviets in Afghanistan. Hassan al-Banna had said it before him. The struggle for an Islamic caliphate is not a goal "invented" by Hizb ut-Tahrir or Daesh. Right after the abolition of the caliphate in 1924, many Islamist thinkers tried to find a substitute. Rashid Rida proposed an Islamic State ruled by Turkish militias and governed intellectually/theologically by the Arabs.

"Terrorism is fundamentally the denial and destruction of human rights, and the fight against terrorism will never succeed by perpetuating the same denial and destruction."

Results and discussion

Prominent cases of student radicalization
Case 1: Dr. Mahmud Ahmad

Dr. Mahmud Ahmad case continue to expose some of the challenges, when jihadi enroll in to university, inadequate vetting and psychological detection or ideology. The fellow even managed to become a senior lecturer, teaching graduate and undergraduate students until the university was informed. Admittedly, detecting indicators of radicalisation is difficult. It requires certain techniques and expertise. But, in my view, it can be done if certain procedures are performed and thorough analyses are carried out.

In my analysis, Dr. Mahmud had already shown indicators of radicalisation at the beginning of his academic life. He enrolled in undergraduate programme in 1990s, in Pakistan's International Islamic University of Islamabad. The Malaysian police believe that during this period, he was in and out of Afghanistan, participating in training and guerrilla warfare, besides getting himself familiar with the extremist discourse. After returning from Pakistan, he enrolled for the Master's programme at the International Islamic University Malaysia in 2011. His thesis was focus on "Ibn Hazm on Christianity: Textual Analysis from Zahiri Perspective", drawing inspiration from Zahiri's methodology to critique discrepancies in the Christian belief. His work spills no element of radicalization, but further asserted that despite the Truth of the Qur'an, Muslims must practice wisdom and tolerance with regard to other religions.

However, his journey in to jihadist tendencies began, from his enrollment in to doctoral studies, when he secretly published a book under the pseudonym "Dr. Abu Hanzalah" entitled Iman Para Mujahiddin (Faith of the Fighters). In this book, he discussed the necessity of jihad (armed struggle) as the best solution to new paradigm in western world. during lectures, the fellow discussions were centered on jihad, the Palestine-Israeli conflict, US occupation of Iraq, and conflicts in Mindanao.

The several indicators of radicalization, but three shall be identify for this paper. The first indicator is his exposure to the extremist discourse during his stays in Pakistan. Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, attributes the period of 1990s-2000 to that of militant movements, which they referred to as a "[consolidation] period for their revivalist movements." Dr. Mahmud was in Pakistan and Afghanistan during this period. Security issues were focus on militancy.

The second indicator is his continuous "discourse of jihad" and his support to jihadist tendencies pulled Aishah Atam to adhere to the crusade. This quickly appeal to other students, his pattern of teaching and a fellow alerted Malaysian interrogator.

The third indicator, which is undisputed with jihadist groups or actors is the use of a pseudonym (which the latter use for the publication of his book), indicating his alliance to jihadist crusaders. Another indicator is the use of the pseudonym "Abu Hanzalah", in Islamic history, Abu Hanzalah was a fighter who fought in the Battle of Uhud. This appeals to the idea of a flag bearer for jihadist groups.

Case 2: Aishah Atam

Aishah Atam was a former student of Dr. Mahmud at UM. During her undergraduate studies, she attended Dr. Mahmud's lectures and gradually became attracted to his unique style and discourse, which she considered nonconventional and different from other lecturers. During lectures Dr. Mahmud was often frank and moody on issues relating to Muslim ummah and the urgency for jihad (armed struggle) in modern era. Aishah's plan for graduate studies, was to study the caliphate system, is abolition and why there had been no successful effort to revive it. Dr. Mahmud lulled her to study "jihad", by exploiting the book Tarbiyyah Jihadiyyah (Education for Jihad), written by Abdullah Azzam. He equally requested her to examine contemporary issues relating to Muslim society, history of jihadi movements and pioneers of jihadi movements. Acting on his advice, she acquired some books considered relevant to her studies. These books were confiscated in her possession and tendered in court as exhibits. Analysis by experts confirmed that these books contained extremist ideology. The titles of the books are as follows:

▪ Visi Politik Gerakan Jihad by Hazim Al-Madani and Abu Mus'ab As-Suri

▪ Deklarasi Daulah Islam Iraq by Dewan Syariah Daulah Islam Iraq, translated by Abu Hafsh As-Sayyar and Abu Musa Ath-Thayyar

▪ Merentas Jalan Jihad Fisabillah by Shaikh Abdul Qadir Abdul Aziz, translated by Hassan As-Sayyari

▪ Misteri Pasukan Panji Hitam by Muhammad Abu Fatiha Al-Adani, translated by H. Muhammad Harun Zein

▪ Masterplan 2020: Strategi Al-Qaeda Menjebak Amerika by Fahmi Suwaidi

▪ Dari Usama Kepada Para Aktivis by Syaikh Usamah Bin Ladin dan Syaikh Yusuf Al_Uyairi, translated by Umar Burhanuddin, Abu Hafs As Sayyar and Syahida Man

▪ Dari Rahim Ikhwanul Muslimin Ke Pangkuan Al-Qaeda by Ayman AzZawahiri, translated by Umar Burhanuddin.

In addition, she was also active on social media and used this as a platform to get connected with wider networks of militancy in Malaysia and Syria. Again, her activity and radicalisation went on undetected by the university authorities until her family reported her to the police. In my view, there is no doubt that Aishah had shown signs of radicalisation, particularly when she embarked on

her graduate studies. The acquisition of extremist literature, her closeness to Dr. Mahmud speed up the radicalization process. More so, where she leaved (an educational environment), could not spill out elements of "mental transformation" from an "ordinary person" to a person who had adopted a "radical ideology". Nonetheless, it is quite common for students at the graduate level to buy and read radical books especially for research purposes. In fact, there are many radical books and literature available in university libraries. These materials are available by the university for exploitation for research. Strict procedures are also implemented to get access to these materials. Thus, this situation makes detection work more challenging. It requires a certain expertise to be able to detect and verify such a transformation.

Case 3: Hafizi Jusoh

The case of Hafizi Jusoh is another example of student radicalisation. Hafizi also studied in Pasir Putih, Kelantan. He was detained by the counter-terrorism team for possession of three improvised explosive devices (IED), pipe bombs, ball bearings, and pictures, videos and documents related to Daesh. He was also charged for giving instruction to conduct terrorist activities via WhatsApp and for attending training for terrorist activities as preparation to launch an attack. According to the police, the suspect wanted to target the Octoberfest (Beer Festival) plannedto be held in Kuala Lumpur in October 2017. The plan was thwarted due to the intelligence-gathering and operation conducted by the Malaysian counter-terrorism team. Interestingly, neither his family nor friends detected Hafizi's radicalisation. In fact, the school reported that Hafizi was a good student and had demonstrated good academic performance for scoring 2.92 point in Sijil Tinggi Pengajian Malaysia (STPM) examination. Hafizi's case is another example of failure in detecting and preventing radicalisation in an educational environment.

The above three cases shared similar patterns: radicalisation occurs in the educational milieu; most persons involved have already exposed signs of radicalisation; institutional challenge in detecting the signs of radicalisation and preventive action; and persons involved are at the last stage of radicalisation; meaning, they have crossed the "red line" and violated national laws that warrant the police to arrest them.

The Roles of Educational Institutions in policing terrorism

Education is a strategic factor in combating and preventing violent extremism (CPVE) in society. University and high schools which radicals increasingly come from, can play vital roles in detecting, preventing, limit jihadists ideas, and as well tackle the threat of violent extremism either in their communities and society at large. The challenges are evident, and educational institutions, need to develop correct security strategy in order to counter and prevent violent extremism. There is need than ever to empowering educational institutions in order to CPVE.

University and school administrators need formal training to be more proactive in detecting extremist elements in their communities. Most administrator turn to preserve information, in order to protect the good name and image of the institution, neglecting the impacts and public interest which the incident might cause. Dr. Mahmud's case is a lesson to all public universities that, a proactive attitude is important to safeguard education institutions from being the target of jihadist recruitment.

Adequate vetting should be carried out on prospective lecturers and supervisors, in order to avoid any instrumentalization of students and as well prevent the spread of violent extremism in campuses. The vetting process will entail; identifying prior contacts with terrorist organisations, prior involvement in militancy, educational parcours and ideological orientation. This process should be in collaboration with security agencies in order to avoid the spread of jihadists ideologies to students and to safeguard campuses from being the hub of terrorist recruitment.

With the increasing victimizations of students in campuses, institutions need to redesign syllabi and incorporate peace studies elements in teaching. Introducing peace and alternative

dispute resolution studies and research in Universities, will be important in countering and preventing violent extremism. Seminar and debates related to the extremist discourse such as the concepts of jihad, democracy, Islamic state, fiqh al-awlawiyyat (science of priority), and wasatiyyah will be of importance in countering jihadist tendencies.

Conclusions

The world has moved from war to law, back to war, then to law and today is in the 'game' of religious extremism or jihadist tendencies. There is no doubt, that education is a vital factor in the development of security strategy and as well a major tool in combating and eradicating violent extremism, jihadist ideology and global terrorism. But this can only be achieved through collaboration between the community and law enforcement agencies.

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