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Editorial

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Assessing the risk and narrative of Islamist terrorism during the COVID-19 biological pandemic

Introduction

The COVID-19, a biological and a global pandemic viral infection currently sweeping through the world is a potential threat now posed by Islamist radical and extremist groups operating in Europe by weaponizing the virus as a means of transmission for a terrorist attack to the wider European community. The pandemic has nearly halted the economy and law enforcement and security agencies have been assigned to carry out policing and border controls due to movement controls resulting in lack of personnel and resources to curtail criminal activities and more so to address Islamist terrorism, radicalization and extremism.

Evolving paradigm

Islamist groups, especially the Islamic State (IS), has taken advantage of the COVID-19 pandemic and has made it a primary resource for their on-going cause of Jihad towards the West. The current narrative of Islamist jihadist groups is using the pandemic as a means for radicalization, funding, recruitment and terror attacks. The threat of this narrative came about in early January. Communications intercepted by the NTCN and IACSP via Islamist Jihadist chat groups representing IS in Southeast Asia, reveal that the COVID-19 had been a prime focus of IS from day one the virus became known. It has since been narrated as an easier alternative method and choice of a terrorist attack for their cause in jihad.

The telegram messages indicated that a strong link of jihadists online was transmitting messages throughout the region and this included European jihadist and radical groups that are able to access these chat groups originating from Southeast Asia. Islamists and radicals in Europe have been awoken from their sleeping cells and are now activated into carrying out "transmittable human to human virus" terror attacks using the COVID-19 to infect the infidels of the West. To mitigate this potential threat is by no means simple, regardless any robust risk assessment or preparedness of any tools used in risk management.

Islamist narrative on COVID-19 biological

Based on psychological analysis by NCTN and IACSP assessment on the narratives communicated through IS chat groups via telegram, indicates that the COVID-19 represents the “army of God sent to destroy the people who are not pure in heart”. It is also based on the narrative that the Chinese government is using this pandemic to rid the Muslims (Ummah) from their land where they gather to pray and proclaim Islam, propagating mistrust towards governments trying to prevent Muslims from their daily religious life such as going to the mosque and providing religious education as well as trying to prevent Muslims from celebrating the Holy month of Ramadan, the most important part of the Muslim religious beliefs in honoring Prophet Mohammad's teachings of God to show and do homage for the poor and needy. The narrative also presents their motivations through the dimensions of their beliefs, ideology and capabilities. The COVID-19 biological threat spread globally identifies three levels to attaining the virtues of jihad in response to the threat now posed by the infidels.

The first level identifies the “Test from God” that doing good deeds will save oneself from the wrath of God and this in return will elevate you in death to paradise (Jannah) for the deeds you have obeyed and done with purity. The fog (Dukhan) of the virus will spread the earth and will kill many people as part of the prophecy before the great Armageddon. Do good and good will be upon you as narrated within the analysis.

The second level identifies the “Preparedness in War” or the propaganda of online instructions, recruitment and fund raising to support the activities of the Ummah and taking from the rich Ummah while using undercover methods to attain funds. The recruitment process has now been diverted to the prophesy of Armageddon and this makes it all the sense to follow the path of jihad and to stay pure. Fund raising is a necessity to fund the Ummah and protect its religious doctrines and beliefs and to arm the Jihadists in fighting the enemy.

The third level is “Terror Attacks” aligned to attacking the Chinese globally for what they perceived is Gods wrath on them for marginalizing the Ummah in their country and propagating Communism within the land of Ummah for their own good. It also gives a clear command on global attacks at communities onto jihadists to be martyrs in spreading the virus through transmission of an infected jihadist by way of being appointed as God's army in the physical form.

Risk and COVID-19 radical and jihad operations

Risk assessment based on the COVID-19 and the mapping of potential terrorist or criminal acts based on the probabilities from the most-likely to least likely, it can be mapped into two perpetrator variables which is Non-ISIS and Pro-ISIS. Although the threat comes from most Islamist terrorist groups, the current is to identify the Islamic State and its global reach. This is the likelihood of the threat currently being propagated globally and this also includes the European Union member states that are already plagued by mass casualties.

According to interviews from Abu Thalut, Joko Jihad, Ibrahim Sunkar, Fatur, Muis and Aris Munandar - radicals from Indonesia, agree that regardless of the laws and rules, the Ummah will still congregate to pray where they are able to do so and whether there is a law to it or not. Within the EU member states, radical Muslims who fall under the Non-IS variables will not adhere to the social distancing policy as they believe during the Holy month of Ramada it is an obligatory statute to go to mosque to worship, be it openly or discreetly within their communities. They have the tendency to not comply with Western laws and deem it to be against Islam. They are the greatest potential to become COVID-19 carriers in the western communities. Given the relaxed laws within some EU states the probability is higher for the spread.

The Pro ISIS group is broken into two groups; IS sympathizers and ISIS terrorist. Sympathizers may not carry out acts of violence but that does not discriminate them from doing so. Their acts of terror may be

lesser if conducted. These sympathizers will not comply with any regulations or laws imposed by governments. They will continue the normal activities regardless of being infected and can transmit the COVID-19 virus to the community. This also may trigger lone wolf knife attacks if the prohibition to attend mosque is prevented as it is the Kafir system that must be fought off. The ISIS terrorists will conduct attacks against law enforcement and security agencies but in the EU, the IS sympathizers will be much deadlier than the ISIS terrorists.

The biological threat

The current threat of Covid 19 as a means of terror transmission of the virus by radical and Islamist terrorist groups in the EU member states is highly dangerous and invisible to law enforcement agencies. The Covid 19 is a biological security threat that can be categorised either by the term Natural Technological (NATECH) or Chemical, Biological and Nuclear Radiological (CBRN). Islamist terrorist groups have adopted the "new weapon" of choice which is invincible and easy to use by simple human to human transmission by Islamist lone wolves or would be martyrs who belief in the afterlife. It is the ones who now have been indoctrinated with the principle of the salaf + takfir = jihad equation. This indoctrination is harder to neutralise as the belief in these principles is the end result of violence incorporated into the current biological transmission.

In a telegram Pro ISIS chat group, one anonymous writing states:

"Today we are witnessing the start and the spread of a new and dangerous disease which have shaken the world and thrown all governments into panic. Their attention is diverted to that issue and even if they wanted to redirect their focus against us once more, the bitter truth is that they cannot afford to do that no matter how much they wanted!"

Allah 'azza wa jall in His Infinite Knowledge, knows what we do not and He open the door to countless things with just one event.

So, brothers and sisters, take advantage of how they are now misdirected and forced to let loose the strong grip they had on us, and to exhaust their finances and their resources upon this newly risen matter! The Kafir are being quarantined and kept their eyes strained, looking into the screens of their devices to fight us on the media front, their strength is destroyed on the physical front- and Allah knows best.

So, take advantage! And carry out Amaliyat (terror attacks) as according to your capability! Do something good which will benefit you and others with you-for the sake of Allah! And know that if one of you were to be quarantined, be glad and rejoice since you're since are being erased while your rank gets higher with your Lord-Inshaa Allah- and be certain that you will be superior if you are truly believers!

Glad tidings for the believers are expected! And be it terror for the disbelievers? Bi izillah"

Conclusion

The above illustrates the threat by Non-ISIS and Pro ISIS members globally. However, the threat in the EU member states remain potentially higher from IS sympathizers. Documented evidence from the US and Australia indicates that potential attacks towards law enforcement officers has been reported and is worrying. Addressing laws in charging a perpetrator on issues pertaining to the transmission of the virus to individuals or a community by a "so called sympathizer or Islamist terrorist operative is currently vague in the EU.

While laws and regulations are carried out within the EU, IS sympathizers and IS terrorist pose a great danger within the EU. Both can be categorized as potential carriers of COVID-19. The lack of resources and personnel especially within the Nordic countries, limits law enforcement and security agencies to monitor Islamist radical and extremist groups efficiently. This encompasses monitoring of the internet, marginalized Muslim youths within communities, local and international funding based on legit funds for Muslim organizations in deception of illegal funding for Islamist terrorism and criminal activities, reversed money laundering approaches, chat groups monitoring within the region and greater Europe and the perpetrated acts of transmitting the biological COVID-19 with impunity.

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