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RADICALISATION REDUX: BIGGER, BADDER, BOLDER?

Countering Violent Extremist Narratives

by

Dato'Saifuddin Abdullah
Chief Executive Officer
Global Movement of Moderates (GMM)
& Chairman of Youth Academy, Malaysia

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COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMIST NARRATIVES

Dato' Saifuddin Abdullah
CEO, Global Movement of Moderates Foundation
E-mail: saifuddin61@yahoo.com
FB: saifuddin61; Twitter: @saifuddinabd

Definition of radicalisation

- Radicalization as we understand in today's context is an idea popularized by European policymakers around 2004, following the Madrid bombings, who came up with the term "violent radicalisation"; What is generally understood as violent here is not violence in general, but terrorist violence towards civilians, and radicalisation is "an individual or group process of growing commitment to engage in acts of political terrorism"; Most studies focus on the process of radicalization and recruitment, and it is important because it seeks to understand the root causes of terrorism. (Alex Schmid, 2013)

- The process through which individuals and organisations adopt violent strategies, or threaten to do so, in order to achieve political goals. (Ongering, 2007), (Olesen, 2009)

- The social and psychological process of incrementally experienced commitment to extremist political or religious ideology. (Horgan & Bradock, 2010)

- Question: IS is more radical than al-Qaeda. Do the above definitions fit IS?

Radicalisation in Southeast Asia

- Although the current wave of radicalisation, with specific reference to the influx of foreign fighters swelling the ranks of IS and other militant groups in Syria and Iraq are of great concern in Europe and the Arab world, it is also of great concern to other regions, including Southeast Asia.

- There has been a precedent, in the 1980s, where many young men in Southeast Asia went to Pakistan and Afghanistan to help the locals in their efforts against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Like-minded people mixed around and were exposed to the ideas of Al-Qaeda and others, and when they went back, they carried with them the ideologies, know-how of guerrilla warfare, and their connections to the militant networks. They formed their own extremist groups, including Jemaah Islamiyah, responsible for most of the high-level terrorist attacks in the region in the past 15 years. (Joseph Chinyong Liow, 2014)

Radicalisation in Malaysia

- To date, more than 100 have been arrested by the Malaysian authorities, more than 80 of them are Malaysians, for activities related to IS, including attempting to travel to Iraq/Syria.

- More than 70 percent of radicalisation in Malaysia specifically related to IS were done using social media platforms.

- Not only young men, but also women and whole families are traveling, or at least attempting to travel, to join IS.

- Level of violence is escalating. Last year, for the first time, two Malaysians became suicide bombers and died for their cause.

Terrorist' Narrative (Thomas K. Samuel, 2012)

- We must act.
- Terrorism is the only way and it is a legitimate way.
- This is way is successful (now; not in the future).

Why?

- Andrew Silke (2014): Not only/always religious; Also ethnic, nationalistic and independence; Reform and replace existing government systems; Combination of the above.

- El-Muhammady (2014): Religious: the need to wage war in defence of the religion and to help defend its followers; Political: the need to fight the oppression of the less fortunate, and bring about justice; Personal: the need to make one's life more meaningful, to atone for one's sins, or to experience the thrill of combat.

- Sectarianism: some are attracted by the notion of championing their creed vis-a-vis the Sunni-Shiah divide, reflecting how sectarianism is also playing out in their region.

- Humanitarianism: some are motivated by the sense of injustice suffered by Syrians and the need to protect or avenge them.

- Misinformed understanding of scriptural tenets or ideologies.

Root Cause

- Understanding why a person has become radicalised is important, but it does not necessarily tell us why an entire movement has turned to violence. It is really about civil liberties; lack of political representation; failure of political movements; injustice; media effect.

- Most revolutions are not caused by revolutionaries in the first place, but by the stupidity and brutality of governments. (Sean MacStiofain, Provisional IRA chief of staff)

Support for violent extremism

- Soft Support: Not publicly supporting – empathy, prayer; Cooperate – do not inform – providing a safe community; Sharing online.

- Hard Support: Practical: finance, demonstrations, vote, store and hide weapons, safe houses, intelligence.

Government's responds

- Deter terrorist/supporters by introducing severe penalties and punishments; new laws.

- Increase the ability of the security forces (to identify, disrupt and incapacitate).

- Reduce the vulnerability of potential targets.

- Address symbolic needs (eg., "outrage at" events).

- Tackle underlying grievances and root causes.

Issues

- Can turn into a confused mix of initiatives; sabotaging each other. Reflects tensions and rivalries in the government's structures and systems.

- Some root causes are inconvenient truths – political untouchables (eg., fallout from a country's foreign policy on Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts).

- Governments are not always genuinely serious: Actions are short-lived; More about form than substance.

- Engage in policies that are known to be ineffective/counter productive (why apparently intelligent politicians, surrounded by more intelligent advisors, make obviously bad decisions in fighting terrorism); Because they care about other things MORE.

- Polls rise when government introduce aggressive actions; but recruitment also rise because they sense more injustice – driving more recruits to extremist groups; increased sympathy and support not only among the locals, but also international community – high poll: high toll.

Recommendations

- Holistic framework: some of which are stated in the Langkawi Declaration on the Global Movement of Moderates, adopted at the ASEAN Summit on 27 April 2017.

- The aim of the Langkawi Declaration is to advocate "moderation" as an ASEAN value and approach that promotes peace, security and development at national, regional and international levels. The Langkawi Declaration describes moderation in various aspects: promote respect, understanding and tolerance for social harmony; approach for sustainable and inclusive development, and equitable growth that provides opportunities and uphold dignity; commitment to democratic values, good governance, rule of law, human rights, fundamental freedoms and social justice; dialogues on all issues; a tool to peacefully bridge differences and resolve disputes; and vital to countering extremism, violent extremism and terrorism.

- Clear objectives: Undercut support for terrorism; Reduce the likelihood that youth will heed the call to terrorism; Disrupt the recruitment process.

- A regional and international effort. Needs to activate the ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation (AIPR). Work with initiatives like the ASEAN-UN Regional Dialogue (AURED.

- Focus not only on identifying and apprehending active terrorists. Also tackling the root causes (to deprive recruitment and support from communities).

- Explaining religion, eg "maqasid shariah" (higher objectives of the shariah); supporting "democrat Islamists".

- Not about "counter-narrative", but above "re-telling the narrative"

- Involve the civil society. Governmental resources are limited. Sometime, by their very nature, governments lack the credibility and influence to reach out to certain groups.

- Secure the support of the business sector, especially in the context of on-line strategies and activities.

- Efficient and effective on-line strategies and activities. Capacity building for social media outreach. Build a social network of people dedicated in countering radicalisation with specialised/focused areas of works.

- Education on the meaning of life, role of religion, inter-religious dialogue, respect and understanding of "the other". Eg of references: *A Common Word* (aimed at bringing Muslims and Christians together under solid theological grounds from both religions, for the sake of God and for the sake of world peace and harmony) and the *Amman Message* (to clarify the true nature of Islam). Although the two documents involves only two religions, but they are very significant in that they provide a template that can be used in the context of inter/intra-religious dialogues involving all religions.

- Encourage more research that involves field studies and collection of data from primary sources, including developing early warning tools.

- Take seriously researches that are related to this subject, eg. "Freedom of Religion and Belief in Southeast Asia" by the Human Rights Working Group (HRWG) and Indonesia's NGO Coalition for International Human Rights Advocacy; and secondly,

"Keeping the Faith: A Study of Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion in ASEAN" by the Human Rights Resource Centre, University of Indonesia.