



“NEW TERRORISM”? A STUDY ON ISIS (DAESH), AL-QAEDA AND MIT’S RELIGIOUS TERRORISM MOVEMENT IN THE POST-9/11

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Abstract

This article points out several ideas revolving around terrorism’s newness in the modern era. As a focus of this article, religious terrorism is mostly seen as a new pattern of terrorism since the incident of World Trade Centre in September 11th, 2001. The emergence of the post-2001’s groups of religious terrorists causes many debates between scholars on how they are perceived as new groups adopting a new pattern of terrorism. This written article captures elements of terrorism which will be put into discourse on whether those elements can support the notion of new terrorism or not. Regardless of history, tactics, motives, groups, and ideologies, those elements help this article to define whether religious terrorism done by ISIS (Daesh)/Al-Qaeda/MIT is a new terrorism.

Keyword: *Al-Qaeda, Daesh, ISIS, MIT, new, religious, terrorism*

Introduction

Most literatures around terrorism would assume that the recent tragedies of terrorism are emerging in a new way (Lesser et al., 1999; Hoffman, 2001; Tucker, 2001). Most scholars (Gearson, 2002, p.7; Kurtulus, 2011, p.480; Copeland, 2001, p.1) are triggered to dive into this issue had begun since the tragedy of 11 September 2001. Scholars who are working in this field of study have been continuing to pursue the aspects of newness by understanding the phenomenon. Not just concentrating on the historical aspects of terrorism, many have been studying the key elements of new terrorism (Neumann, 2009, p.14). Focusing on “new terrorism”, scholars should be a concern on what is terrorism, its goals, methods, instruments, targets, sympathizers, perpetrators and in when it is conducted.

The question of new terrorism should be relevant to the accidents in the post 9/11 era, which is inevitably connected from the growth of the use of communication as a media to either conduct, portrait, promote and embrace terrorism. However, those are just instruments to the innovation of terrorism, and they are not changing the traditional scare tactics to damage their victims psychologically (Gearson, 2002). While the discourses around terrorism may seem complicated, many people tried to understand according to their own personal interpretation of the issue and relate the “new terrorism” in a simplistic way by ignoring the history and goals of terrorism as well as the changes in trends (Kurtulus, 2011).

As a main point to understand terrorism, the initiative to conduct terror attacks vary (Crenshaw, 1981), but most scholars consider that it could be politically, ideologically, and religiously motivated. Historically, this can be traced back to the times before 9/11, especially the cases that happened in several places for example the sarin gas attack in Tokyo by Aum Shinrikyo group, the bombing in Oklahoma City by a Christian terrorist, Middle Eastern conflicts and there are still many more cases of terrorism (Duyvesteyn, 2004). Those cases, however, do not raise the concern as high as the present day where states are discussing the matters of terrorism by uniting each perception and agenda to understand the patterns of terrorism. But, since the tragedy of 9/11 in the USA, President George W. Bush started an agenda to combat terrorism called the Global War on Terror (Bakker, 2015), an initiative that invited other states as well as the international community.

The Global War on Terror can be assumed as the most triggering agenda to motivate the unity of ideas and discussions of how “new terrorism” operates from the international community and the states to face and fight against the threats of terrorism, in which ultimately becomes a political weapon to fight another political weapon (terrorism). Even though the 11 September 2001 tragedy marked the mainstream understanding of “new terrorism”, scholars like Gearson (2002) argued that the practice of terrorism post 9/11 and the anarchists of nineteenth century are quite similar especially the motives to be publicly viewed, expressing violence, and threatening the government. However, others like Simon and Benjamin (2000) also made a statement that what happened since the beginning of 1990s can be named as new terrorism due to the use of “religion” as the basis of conducting terror attacks.

Both arguments brought up different interpretation of the motive of terrorism. While Simon and Benjamin simply called the tragedies as new terrorism, as stated previously, scholars also need to understand the main motives of terrorism and the differences between what happened in the present and the past. That generalized and yet so poorly historical understanding of terrorism is affecting the study cases of Al-Qaeda, ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria or Daesh) and MIT (*Mujahidin Indonesia Timur* or *Eastern Indonesia Mujahideen*), by naming them as the representation of “new terrorism”. Also, there are arguments by scholars that the use of media by religious terrorist also a part of “new terrorism” thesis.

This essay will be first focusing on the debate of new terrorism which will draw the comparisons between each scholar’s interpretations and expose the characteristics of terrorism that do not make it new. Second part will include the details of Islamic organizations such as Al-Qaeda, ISIS and MIT regarding the arguments that made scholars continuously argue that the small changes in the practice of terrorism would make it worth to be called new. On the third part, there are claims of how the present terrorists use the media can be categorized as new terrorism that is also in discussion. The last part of this essay will conclude whether Al-Qaeda and ISIS cases according to their tactics and strategy as well as on the small changes that occurred in the past centuries done by traditional terrorists do not fulfil the eligibility to be categorized as new terrorism.

Literature Review

Is religious terrorism a “new terrorism”? For years, terrorism has taken a lot of forms in its mission to influence the world’s political circumstance. By spreading fear and terror which involves the digital world (Awan, 2017, p.138) and human activity, terrorism survived to a state where it can be easily approached and implemented in the present day. As time goes by, the act of terrorism itself still exists and even adopted new methods due to the globalization and the evolution of technology which helps the spread of information rapidly throughout the globe. Scholars like Simon and Benjamin argued about religious motive for terrorism specifically the cases that happened in the 1990s is qualified as new terrorism. But this notion of terrorism did not meet the conditions of the “new terrorism” thesis. On the contrary, religious motivation has already been contained in the old terrorism which occurred centuries ago (Duyvesteyn, 2004). Additionally, Duyvesteyn (2004) further explained that the “new terrorism” qualification should be based on historical evidence which has not encountered nor interpreted before. The pattern of terrorism has always been the justification of using violence to reach certain political agenda (Bakker, 2015).

Religious terrorism is somehow identified by several scholars as a new form of terrorism. The new form of terrorism itself is depicted to be based on religion by most organizations which perform terrorism and prioritized to launch a lot of attacks either to their targets or non-targets (Duyvesteyn, 2004). This brief definition shows that most of terrorist organization nowadays adapted religion as their basis of conducting attacks. The Iranian Revolution has become an example of success by Muslims to enforce the teachings and doctrines of Islam in the Qur’an (Hoffman, 2006). The obvious case of terrorism can be traced back to 1980s Afghanistan, when it was first come to known that terrorist organizations were adapting a new method of recruitment, therefore creating the foreign fighters who affiliated with the religion of Islam (Hegghammer, 2010). On the contrary, as mentioned in the introduction, the claims of religious terrorism that started since the time of Iranian Revolution are just poorly historical made arguments that do not concern on the cases which happened centuries ago.

In accordance with the argument of “new” as represented in the form of religious terrorism, regardless of its tactics and technology that had been used by terrorists in the present, cannot become the core of new terrorism (Copeland, 2001). This is because the bond between religion and terrorism has been established for more than a hundred years ago and done by past extremists (Hoffman, 2006). The case would be the existence of the Assassins in Persia and Syria which was popular in 1090 until 1275 for their religious sense of justice to promote Islam as the constructed moral system (Rapoport, 1984). Without the use of media to attract public attention, they performed the murdering of their targets in the public place and in important or sacred events according to Islam (Rapoport, 1984). Without ignoring other method related to their actions, the Martyrdom (death for the sake of religion) was also embraced by the Assassins as a possibility that could happen on their effort to terminate the enemies of Islam (Rapoport, 1984). The more widely spread notion of new terrorism probably triggered by the horrible event of 9/11 (Duyvesteyn, 2004). Furthermore, in the post 9/11, the Islamic terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS also adopted a quite similar principle as the Assassins regarding martyrdom which is jihadism according to the sect of Salafism (Sandal, 2018).

Comparing the events that happened in the post 9/11, 1990s and early 1000s, all of them had the same tactics and aims to create political changes which in this context are the changes based on each religious standard. Therefore, Bakker (2015) asserted that the act of terrorism has existed before the modern times and until the present era, there is nothing new in it. Otherwise, Tucker (2010) argued about the instrument that terrorist uses are the newness in terrorism for example the use of CBRN weapon. This statement does not age well because from time to time there will be future renewals on the use of weapon as a tool for terrorism which ultimately will result in an infinite loop of defining which is new terrorism and not each time there is a new kind of weapon. In this case, Duyvesteyn (2004) explained that no matter what kind of weapon terrorists use, the elements of surprise, provocation and public attention is the essential aspect of terrorism. Bakker (2015) further added that there is the element of subjectivity of each perpetrator in considering themselves as the hero of the action rather than the “villain”. This also explains that terrorists often justify their conduct.

As argued by Stern (2003), terrorist leaders use the aspects of religious teachings and values to influence their followers to struggle against secularism because of the occurring injustice caused by the international communities toward their faith. This is similar with the motives of other forms of terrorism which started from the grievances of the people that was used as a momentum by terrorism initiators to gain followers and build their power to carry out attacks toward their targets. Both similarities in the characteristics of terrorist’s motives in the past and present, the arguments of why there is no “new terrorism” is also backed by Crenshaw (2007) due to the dynamic environment caused by globalization which led to the advancement of technology and weapons while both old and new terrorism cases are mostly similar according to each of their motivation, especially religious motivations. The beginning of terrorism in the name of religion cannot be oversimplified as a new form of terrorism. There is the loss in defining what should be named as new terrorism and which view can make it determined as new.

Al-Qaeda, ISIS (Daesh) and MIT

As an organization, the name Al-Qaeda itself originated from Arabic roots meaning “the base” (Bakker, 2015) in which persistently holds the Salafi Islam doctrine to survive in the Western globalization of the world. The creation of the organization dated back before the tragedy of 9/11, although at that time it still not popular with the name “Al-Qaeda” (Burke, 2007). The group’s recognition by carrying the name “Al-Qaeda” was popularized post-9/11 by the Western governments, including the UK and the USA (Burke, 2007). After 9/11, evidence and report led to the connection between Osama and Al-Zawahiri as the main power to mobilize global jihadism and the birth of Al-Qaeda’s strategic moves (Gerges, 2005).

The fundamental value held by which is held by Osama bin Laden and Ayman Al-Zawahiri as the leaders of Al-Qaeda helps describe that the United States is preventing the group’s goals (Hoffman, 2006), and eventually viewed as Al-Qaeda’s archenemy. Bin Laden as the leader of Al-Qaeda seen the Muslim community’s potential to be unified through political expressions just as what the Qur’an (the holy text of Islamic religion) and the hadith (the examples of the prophet Muhammad) instructed since the times of the

prophet Muhammad in the premodern Arabia (Burke, 2007). By following the established teachings of Islam by the *salaf* (forefathers of Islam), most Muslims including Bin Laden believe that to grow power and spread the extensive influence of Islam is to follow the instructions of Allah and Muhammad (Burke, 2007). Therefore, the Salafism (originated from the forefathers of Islam) became the centre of Al-Qaeda's main principles to carry out their missions throughout the world meanwhile considering the United States and its Western allies as the main enemy of Allah.

While the focus of Al-Qaeda is mainly toward the American influence in the Islamic territories, the Islamic State has its different goals and focus. Although the Islamic State fundamentally holds the Salafi Islamic teachings just as Al-Qaeda, it attempts to be more radical to push the agenda of purification according to the Islamic religion throughout the world which leads to the declaration of all who opposed them becomes an available target of terror (Holbrook, 2015). There is no newness in it rather than the same cycle which applied by many terrorist organizations. As noted by Nukhet Sandal (2018), ISIS based its ideology of politics and war on the teachings of the prophet Muhammad and his disciples in the early Islamic age. There is a similarity in motive between Al-Qaeda and ISIS, although there is a slight difference between them.

ISIS was aiming to create a perfect Islamic authority in the world, by slaying both non-Muslims and Muslims (who did not follow the teachings of the prophet), unlike Al-Qaeda who was only slaying Non-Muslims of the Western world (Sandal, 2018). Despite having different goals, both jihadi groups believe that through the teachings of their prophet, they are commanded to fight against non-believers/non-Muslims. Moreover, this doctrine is also supported and mobilized by opinion leaders with knowledge of religious matters who are legitimized by the community based on the Islamic tradition (Aly, 2017). The instances above clearly stated that the foundation between the past group (Al-Qaeda), Daesh and MIT was basically religious motive. More precisely, both groups adapted the concept of "slaying the infidels" rule.

For decades, it has been known that Jihadists have been producing their propaganda through videos or printed materials without being noticed by the Western media (Stern and Berger, 2015). The portrayal of their strategy to spread their influence of terrorism is quite similar with the methods done by the Assassins in the past centuries. They mobilized their tactics underground without gaining public attention, starting from scouting the people who were sharing the same ideas and grievances to the individuals who were just interested to listen to their message of propaganda.

However, the priority for their propaganda for recruitment is mainly to target the people who are under the same religion while their scare tactics that applied in their propaganda are aimed to everyone who oppose their actions. This is visible to how they publicly execute their terror attacks which will gain a lot of attention, especially the headline news media in the present time (Bakker, 2015). While the comparison between how the past terrorists like Assassins and modern groups like Al-Qaeda and ISIS is only a matter of technology, they both similar each other according to their primary goals. Due to the modernization of technology, ISIS, MIT and Al-Qaeda, did use the media as part of their tool to spread the Islamic teachings.

The present scholars often give a simplistic notion that religious terrorism is indeed a new terrorism, ignoring their unavoidable impact of attack (Crenshaw, 2007). While the argument of “old” terrorism is targeting their victims specifically, it is problematic because the attack eventually caused other victims outside the designated target and makes this no different than the popularized “new” terrorism notion which based on religion (Crenshaw, 2007). In the discussion of Al-Qaeda, ISIS, and its Indonesian branch, the MIT, although they are different in their approaches to combat the non-Islamic elements, shows the similarity in both organizations’ tactics while there is a difference in their designated targets. Al-Qaeda led by Osama bin Laden tend to target Americans. This idea is called global jihadism, an agenda to enforce theocratic system in the world based on the rules of Allah and Islamic teachings (English, 2016). Indeed, holding the same principle as Al-Qaeda, ISIS came as a more systematic group in which proclaimed itself as a state. ISIS was led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as a caliphate, aims to build a religious authority in the world (Farwell, 2014).

In a similar way as ISIS, MIT determined its former leaders, Santoso (Sahrasad and Al Chaidar, 2016) and Ali Kalora (Ibrahim, 2021; IPAC, 2021) as its leader and an extension of power from ISIS. Both organizations used the media to show their existence (Galamas, 2015) to the world through their actions. However, there are differences in the use of media by both groups (Al-Qaeda’s use is different compared to ISIS and MIT) to achieve their success through their terror attacks by both organizations as well as the efforts in influencing the minds of the people who are not reachable by physical meetings are just “products of modernization” (Duyvesteyn, 2004, p.448-449).

As time passes by, the use of media is extensively developing from verbal, newspaper, radio, television and yet the most popular media nowadays called the internet and social media. In the modern world, when the press is somehow strongly controlled, limits the media coverage of terrorist propaganda (Asal and Hoffman, 2016) especially television, radio, and newspaper, which is quite logical why terrorists prefer using internet and other social media. Between ISIS and Al-Qaeda, the use of media is important but each group using the media differently. While Al-Qaeda was mostly focused on targeting its enemies (Americans), ISIS preferred using the media systematically as part of their propaganda (Farwell, 2014).

It was used by ISIS as well to portray their existence as a state with providing videos of beheadings done by ISIS’ Muslim to non-member Muslims, which had become a stone in the shoe by Al-Qaeda (Farwell, 2014). MIT and ISIS use the media mainly to radicalise their viewers about their alternate views of *Khilafah* and Jihadism in the Koran recruitment and guidance, attack plans, networking with other related groups and FTF (Foreign Terrorist Fighters) (Savitri, 2020, pp.320-321).

The ISIS and MIT used media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to spread the effect of their actions to its audiences (Farwell, 2014). This extensive use of social media applications is part of the propaganda by ISIS to influence and recruit individuals without the need of physical contacts. For example, the ISIS propaganda of suicide bombers is depicted as religious martyrs due to their obedience to Allah (Aly, 2017).

Recruits of ISIS take advantage from social media to connect with other fighters outside the territory to learn and exchange knowledges of warfare (Farwell, 2014). This makes the media as a window as well as guardian of every flowing information that mobilizes attacks from outside of the state (Asal and Hoffman, 2016).

Contested claims of present media as New Terrorism

As argued by Aly (2017), the ignorance of media element by those who opposes the new terrorism thesis is the main problem because there is an obstacle in understanding the new terrorism. To make such definition available, new terrorism must be interpreted based on how terrorists show their violent acts to the public (Friis, 2017). Friis (2017) explained that ISIS performed this kind of political technique by presenting violence expressively to the audience. Such performance could affect the audience of such violence to be either having a shift to praising such act or condemning it. Not only those actions trigger the audience, but they also draw more attention to a bigger audience since the first witnesses of the tragedy would possibly show what they had seen to others.

Therefore, terrorism has an attraction for its sadistic element (Friis, 2017). Her assumption is that the use of media in the public, helps to spread the cruelty of terrorism. This assumption somehow became a supportive argument for the mainstream discussion of new terrorism that because of the wide and global use of internet, terrorist groups are using social media as a faster media than the previous electronics or even papers. This mainstream discussion also in some ways could be backed by an argument from Krause (2018) that this method is used by ISIS extensively to recruit more members as well as spreading their message to the global audience, which is transformational from previous groups. However, terrorism in the past years and centuries was indeed caught media or public attention (Duyvesteyn, 2004). Therefore, scholars should not ignore the element of publicity in terrorism's nature.

The elements of surprise and publicity are prioritized by terrorist groups (Duyvesteyn, 2004), even nowadays by ISIS. In the past, radio, newspapers, and television are the only media which is advantageous for terrorist groups to publicize their actions (Duyvesteyn, 2004). With Islamic State's advantageous opportunity in this modern era, unlike groups such as Al-Qaeda and others, could not compete their velocity of member-recruitment. The internet as a new method to communicate can be used as a media to teach people who are never in physical contact with group to make bombs (Schmid, 2011), especially the popular use of social media. Through social media, as a method of recruitment, the widespread terrorist propaganda by ISIS creates lone wolf fighters even though these fighters are far away (Krause, 2018) from its occupied territories in Iraq and Syria. This is what strengthen the sympathizers as well as burdening to those who opposed the terrorist movements when they witnessed such shocking violence in the form of live video in streaming sites (Schmid, 2011). Media and Internet developed research to analyse terrorists' online activity by concentrating on their usage by terrorists to survive as a group alongside recruiting new members (Aly, 2017).

However, traditional terrorists relied on the element of publicity (Duyvesteyn, 2004) which also makes the use of media that occurred nowadays fit the criterion to be part of publicity. The use of modern media does not make the argument that terrorism is new

because of the extensive use of advanced media and technology in the present correct but rather, the argument needs to trace back to the nature of terrorism itself. There is also an attempt to call the terrorism in 1990s is “old” and the post 9/11 especially in the case of Al-Qaeda and ISIS “new”. As stated by Stern and Berger (2015), the terrorism done by white supremacists in 1990s used the bulletin board, an analogue form of present day’s social media newsfeed which does not make any differences. The use of social media also does not differ from the distribution of digital video or DVD by Jihadists due to the easier distribution through downloadable contents on websites that even existed before the rise of ISIS about a decade ago (Stern and Berger, 2015). Even if this example does not apply in the cases of the Assassins back in early 1000s, to gain attention from many people, they murder their victims in the public, government sites as well as in religious holidays where there are witnesses in which an extreme publicity (the aspect that used to support the qualification for new terrorism) is included.

Is religious motivated terrorism new?

Aside from its method, terrorism in its form as religious terrorism is not a new phenomenon (Spencer, 2006, p.14). Its existence dated back to the time of Zealots-Sicarii (Jewish Religious Group) in the 1st Century AD (Rapoport, 1984). By naming the religious violence motivation of Al-Qaeda, ISIS, and MIT’s as a new form of terrorism cannot be totally supported because as mentioned by Spencer (2006, p.24), the indiscriminate violence done by these “new terrorist” is merely a continuation of trend from those other terrorist groups (Zealots-Sicarii, Aum Shinrikyo, Irgun, EOKA etc) in the past (Rapoport, 1984; Hoffman, 1998). To support Spencer’s argument, Crenshaw (2008, p.120) also emphasised that contemporary terrorism has similar motives and elements with past terrorism.

Conclusions

The new terrorism thesis is still having a lot of deficiency in terms of history of terrorism since centuries ago. The notion of new terrorism should mainly concern on the development of terrorism tactics which is entwined with its historical forms, strategies, methods, and tactics especially religious terrorism. Scholars in the field study of religious terrorism in accordance with the cases of ISIS and Al-Qaeda must understand just briefly about the roots of their teachings which is Salafism alongside their tactics throughout the time.

The religious terrorism nowadays is easier to spread and act due to the use of the developed media and technology in the modern times. But to make the argument that religious terrorism with their use of modern media can be called as “new terrorism” must be supported with other aspects related to the patterns and tactics which has not occurred nor existed before (Duyvesteyn, 2004). There is almost no evidence regarding the differences between surprise and public attention done by today’s terrorists and those who operated in the past while both terrorists share the same goal which is the total annihilation of their enemy (Duyvesteyn, 2004). This pictures how Al-Qaeda and ISIS viewed their enemies as well as the anarchists in the 19th century as the secular terrorist, religious groups like Aum Shinrikyo in the 1990s and others that existed centuries ago like the

Assassins and the Zealots. Thus, the research on new terrorism should concentrate on historical context of terrorism and the difference of each group or perpetrator's motive and tactics in the past, the present and maybe in the future as well (Crenshaw, 2007). There are a lot of similarities between the old and new terrorism regarding their tactics, methods, and organization (Crenshaw, 2007).

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