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Christian Far-Right: Copying Jihadist Extremism?

By Amalina Abdul Nasir and V. Arianti

SYNOPSIS

The plan of a 16-year-old boy – inspired by Christian far-right extremism – to conduct a knife attack against Muslims in Singapore bears similarity to the modus operandi and weapon procurement of jihadi militants in the region.

COMMENTARY

IN JANUARY 2021, Singapore's Internal Security Department (ISD) arrested the youngest detainee under the Internal Security Act. Described by ISD as a Protestant Christian of Indian ethnicity, the 16-year-old Secondary 4 student was found to have made detailed plans and preparations to conduct terrorist attacks using a machete against Muslims at two mosques [here](#).

Despite ideological differences, such tactics are actually not new. They have also been observed on the part of Islamist militants in Indonesia. Hence mitigation efforts employed against Islamist militants in other Southeast Asian countries can likewise be used in the case of far-right militants as well.

Copying Western Terrorists

The Singaporean boy was self-radicalised and was particularly fascinated by the Christchurch White supremacist extremist attacker, Brenton [Tarrant](#). He watched Tarrant's live-stream video of the terrorist attack on the two mosques in New Zealand and later read his manifesto. Inspired by Tarrant, he planned to launch a similar attack in Singapore on 15 March 2020, marking two years since the Christchurch carnage.

He had chosen two mosques closest to his home as [targets](#). The teenager also referred to a Triacetone Triperoxide (TATP) bomb making manual as he contemplated

the idea of using bombs in his plan and intended to set the mosques on fire using gasoline – mirroring Tarrant’s plan.

In the same vein, such copycat attempts by another teenager had happened in Indonesia as early as 2016. The 17-year-old Indonesian Ivan Ahmadi [Hasugian](#), who supported the militant group Islamic State (IS) that was based in Syria and Iraq, was inspired by the church attack in Northern France which took place a month prior.

Two terrorists stabbed a priest in the chest and slashed his throat. [Copying this tactic](#), Ivan attacked the priest with an axe after the bomb he carried in his backpack failed to explode. Similar to the Singaporean teenager, Ivan also [consulted](#) a bomb-making manual; written by the Indonesian IS fighter in Syria Bahrun Naim.

In addition, both teenagers were obsessed with their extremist idols. The Singaporean teen planned to adorn a tactical vest with right-wing extremist symbols affixed to it similar to the ones worn by [Tarrant](#). He planned to decorate it with the Black Sun and Celtic Cross symbols. Parallel to this, Ivan also had a note “I Love Baghdadi”, referring to the IS leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, which he placed in the backpack that he carried during the [attack](#).

Procuring Weapons Online

In addition, a common approach is also seen in logistical preparations for the attack. This includes online procurement of weapons. The Singaporean teen, like Tarrant, planned to use an assault rifle to attack. He found a prospective seller on Telegram but later did not follow through after suspecting it was a scam when the buyer sought payment in [Bitcoin](#).

Nevertheless, he persisted to seek other ways to get hold of a firearm. He only withdrew the idea when he realised that it was challenging to get one given Singapore’s strict gun-control [laws](#). Due to logistical difficulty, he decided to resort to knifing attacks. He later found his choice of machete on Carousell. Although he had not made the purchase yet, he had archived the page and intended to save up money to eventually buy it.

There has in fact been a recurring trend in Indonesia with Islamist militants seeking to procure bomb-making ingredients and weapons online. Some Indonesian pro-IS militants have procured knives online such as [Mulyadi](#) and [Abu Rara](#) who conducted stabbing attacks in 2017 and 2019 respectively. It is often a preferred method in Indonesia in order to circumvent detection from authorities.

For example, in 2017, Young Farmer, another pro-IS militant who was previously deported from [Singapore](#), upon returning to Indonesia, managed to buy [hydrogen peroxide](#) from an Indonesian e-commerce platform, Bukalapak. This took place after he failed to buy them direct from a chemical store in Bandung (West Java) as the store required him to present his identification card and a declaration for the procurement. This attack plot was foiled by the Indonesian police.

In other instances, militants opt for offline payments to avoid any online traces of financial transactions. Dita Oepriarto, the mastermind of the Surabaya church

bombings in May 2018, paid for the TATP bomb ingredients he ordered online by cash at a [convenience store](#) instead of bank transfers. This allowed him to evade detection from authorities.

Mitigation Efforts

Drawing lessons from the abovementioned cases, regional authorities may consider the following measures. First, as militants across ideologies may deploy similar modus operandi, each country should continue to monitor the modes of lone actor attacks by religiously-inspired extremists and far-right supremacists of all stripes, so as to keep abreast of evolving tactics.

Authorities should also persist in tightening restrictions on possession of significant quantities of extremist material as these are strong indicators of radicalisation. For instance, the Malaysian authorities had arrested scores of individuals who possessed IS videos, images or [paraphernalia](#). This type of enforcement should be extended to individuals possessing far-right extremist paraphernalia.

Second, authorities can play a more active role in providing guidelines for e-commerce operators to detect suspicious transactions as the latter presently seem to have not imposed much restrictions nor requirement for the purchase of the materials that can be assembled into bombs.

For example, presently, in Indonesia, the police [mandate](#) chemical stores to report individual purchases of large quantities of hazardous materials that can potentially be used to make bombs such as potassium and black powder. This measure should also be extended to online stores, including those selling certain types of knives, with stricter purchase requirements in place.

Such mitigation efforts may not be bullet-proof, but policies need to be put in place and evolve according to developing trends and threats observed globally. In Singapore's context, these measures can complement the government's proposition for stricter law on guns, explosives, and weapons as recently tabled in [Parliament](#).

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