

The Changing Landscape of Terrorism in The United States After 9/11: The Transnational Network of White Supremacist Extremist Movement

Nuriyeni Kartika Bintarsari¹, Arif Darmawan²

¹Department of International Relations, Jenderal Soedirman University, Purwokerto, Central Java, Indonesia

²Department of International Relations, Jenderal Soedirman University, Purwokerto, Central Java, Indonesia

nuriyeni.bintarsari@unsoed.ac.id, arif.darmawan@unsoed.ac.id

Abstract

This article will discuss the rising cases of White Supremacist Extremist (WSE) movement in the United States, particularly since the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001 or known as the 9/11 terrorist attack. There are several official reports on the rising incident of attacks perpetrated by American inside the American soil, including Charleston Church's shooting in 2015, Tree of Life Synagogue shooting in 2018, and El Paso Texas shooting in 2019. Those shootings are motivated by hatred toward different races, religions, and ethnicities, and can be categorized as domestic terrorism. There are also WSE organizations such as the Atomwaffen Division and the Rise Above Movement (R.A. M) which has transnational network with other WSE based in Europe. This article will analyze the shifting paradigm of terrorism study in the US, from focusing on Islamist-motivated terrorism to the White Supremacist Extremist nurtured domestically in the US, it also offers insight into the transnational network of WSE between the US and Europe.

Keywords: *White Supremacist Extremist, Domestic Terrorism, Atomwaffen Division, Rise Above Movement.*

1 INTRODUCTION

The White Supremacist Extremist Movement (WSEM) is not a new phenomenon in the world politics. In the dawn of World War II, the world witnessed the rising of Nazi, an ultra-

nationalist political party in Germany, during the 1930s. Its leader, Hitler, has published *Mein Kampf*, which has become the main source of political ideology for Nazi during its reign (Holborn, 1964). The main ideology

of Nazi is to conduct a genocide and eradicate the whole population of Jews and other minorities in Europe. Nazi wants to eradicate the so-called lesser races, the sub-human, and the fears that the non-white or non-Aryan race will contaminate the greatness of German people is what motivated Hitler to wrote “the strength of the Germanic race may be sapped by the admixture of other races. Once the true Germanic elements will have gained full power over the people, it will be possible to eliminate racially inferior groups and to enhance the breeding of the superior racial stock (Holborn, 1964:545).” This belief is the driving force behind every White Supremacy Movement in the US, the perception that they are the superior race and now they are under siege within their own states because of the coming influx of immigrants from all over the world. Mostly the non-white immigrants and the descendants of Black slaves, which nowadays known as the Black American people.

The Soufan Center, a reputable non-partisan strategy and security research centre based in the United States, in its September 2019’s report stated “From Pittsburgh to Poway and Charleston to El Paso, white supremacist Extremists (WSEs) pose a clear terrorist threat to the United States...this report will demonstrate that they maintain links to transnational networks of like-

minded organizations and individuals, from Australia, Canada, Russia, South Africa, and elsewhere (The Soufan Center, 2019).” The danger pose by this type of terrorist organizations is no less dangerous than the Islamist or Jihadist form of terrorist acts. Based on the same report by the Soufan Center “white supremacy extremists were responsible for three time as many deaths in the United States as were Islamists (the Soufan Center, 2019).” There were several hate-related attacks perpetrated by the member of this group, for example the killing of 11 people at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, US, on October 27, 2018 (Beauchamp, 2020). Beauchamp’s report also mentioned that after the Pittsburgh’s massacre “there were shootings at two more American synagogues: one in Poway, California, and another in Miami.. There’s been an epidemic of physical assaults on Orthodox Jews in Brooklyn. The number of anti-Semitic incidents nationwide, ranging from violence to swastika graffiti on synagogues and on campuses, has been at historic highs for two straight years (Beauchamp, 2019).” Robert Bowers, the perpetrator of the attack at the Tree of Life Synagogue, is a former truck driver who allegedly has a link with one of the WSEM in the US.

Those shootings and other incidents are perpetrated by White Supremacist Extremist members, as similar incidents

also happened in 1957 and 1958, when White Supremacist targeted eight American Synagogues (Beauchamp, 2019). The attacks were motivated by the American Jewish involvement in the civil rights movement that gained its peak within that decade. The United States Government Accountability Office (GAO), conducted a research between September 12, 200, through December 31, 2017, using the US Extremist Crime Database, found that the WSE has done no less than sixty-two violence acts, which is thirty-nine more than the incidents perpetrated by the Jihadist groups (The Soufan Center, 2019). his research highlights a changing narrative of the terrorist threat in the US after 9/11, from Islamist extremist groups threats to the White Supremacy Extremist Movement groups, already incited several high-profile attacks on American soil.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This research will use the definition of terrorism and the WSEM to analyse the research question. The definition of terrorism according to the Title 22 of the US Code, Section 2656 d is “Premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents usually intended to influence an audience. The term’ international terrorism means

terrorism involving citizens of the territory of more than one country. The term ‘terrorist group’ means any group practicing, or that has significant subgroups that practice, international terrorism (Schmid, 2013, p.138).” This definition is relevant to the discussion of the transnational network of WSEM in several states, including in the United States. The definition of WSEM itself is found not in a theoretical conception but in its working definition as “a transnational challenge-its tentacle reach from Canada to Australia, and the United States to Ukraine-but it has evolved at a different pace in different parts of the world (The Soufan Center, 2019). The two definitions above will be utilized to analyse the WSEM, its transnational network and its impact on the security in the US in the recent years.

3 METHOD

This research is a qualitative method research, in the form of descriptive explanation. The research method to be used is a qualitative method. Qualitative methods are carried out by capturing various facts or social phenomena, through observation, then analyzing them and trying to carry out theorization based on what is observed (Bungin, 2007).The method used to collect data in this study is through literature research by going through

documents. The available documents are reports, letters, research journals, articles on the site, and other sources that have been confirmed to be credible.

4 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The threats posed by the WSEM, especially in the United States is said to be compounded by the attitude of Trump administration, since he is officially held office in the early 2017. Bergengruen and Hennigan (2019) wrote that “as President, Trump has repeatedly downplayed the threat posed by white supremacists. He famously blamed “both sides” for violence at a white-nationalist rally in Charlottesville, Va., in 2017.” The Trump administration also created several efforts to steer away the WSEM from being spotlighted as the growing threat in domestic terrorism, not only by downplaying the violence acts perpetrated by the members of WSE, but by insisting that the focus of terrorist threat in the US is still the Jihadist or Islamist extremists. The Trump administration has tried to change the name of the Countering Violent Extremism program to Countering Radical Islamic Extremism within the first week of its holding the office at the White House (Bergengruen and Hennigan, 2019). In the same report, it was also explained that the Justice Department,

the Department of Homeland Security, criminal justice apparatuses including lawyers and district attorneys, have reacted more swiftly in condemning the terrorist attacks done by WSE as domestic terrorism. The Soufan Center (2019) has examined that there are “two of the United States’ most prominent white supremacy extremist groups, the Atomwaffen Division (AWD) and the Rise Above Movement (R.A.M). “

These two groups have members who were the veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars in the early global war on terrorism or after the US launched military operations to Iraq and Afghanistan after 9/11. The report also mentioned the facts that R.A.M members have attended the celebration of Adolf Hitler’s birthday and visited Germany, Ukraine, and Italy to strengthen R.A.M ties with other white supremacy extremist groups, based in Europe. A founding member of the Atomwaffen Division, who is a member of the Florida National Guard, Brandon Clint Russell, was apprehended by the authorities because he has many explosive devices and materials in his possession. The AWD is “a dangerous white supremacy extremist group that taps into explicit and even tacit acceptance of racist views and encourages violence to intimidate minority populations in pursuit of its goal of destabilizing society to instigate a race

war (The Soufan Center, 2020).” AWD also a neo-Nazi extremist group that has extensive network with like-minded groups across Europe. Both AWD and R.A.M can also be designated as foreign terrorist organization due to their extensive transnational networks, which is something that the US government is considering to do for their next step to eradicate threats posed by these two groups. However, there are massive challenges in The Atomwaffen Division and R.A.M have several financial resources to fund their activities. Mostly self-financed or requiring donations from their members, they also use cyber activities or online mechanism to create more funds, such as: online shop selling the group’s paraphernalias, crowdfunding, cryptocurrencies, and other methods, both licit and illicit (The Soufan Center, 2019). Besides financing, these groups also use several methods as their recruitment ground, both offline and online. The groups use music, specifically white rock neo-Nazi kind of music that actively “trumpeted their racist, neo-Nazi, and white supremacist beliefs through song lyrics...the internet has allowed white supremacist and neo-Nazi music groups to gain further traction...as the music has become accessible worldwide (the Soufan Center, 2019).” Other recruitment method including using Youtube, encrypted chat apps, gaming

culture, and internet boards to attract potential new members online.

Based on their extensive network overseas, their wide ranging of financial sources and recruitment grounds, it is very legitimate to conclude that the US government still has a long way to go to eradicate the terror threats posed by the WSEM inside its jurisdiction.

5. CONCLUSION

This research has examined and analyses the changing landscape of terrorist threats in the US, especially after 9/11. In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, the alleged culprit of terrorist is the radical Islamists, people with middle-eastern descent face harsher judgments because of their supposedly radical leaning ideology. However, the most recent researches on terrorism revealed the fact that White Supremacy Extremism has gained its momentum during the Trump’s administration and has spread its movement transnationally. The Atomwaffen Division and Rise Above Movement are two most prominent WSE groups in the US, which also have extensive network with other WSEM in across Europe. These groups have launched several terror acts within the US soil and the US government must establish more sophisticated strategies to deal with white supremacy extremists.

References

- Beauchamp, Z. How the Pittsburgh Shooting changed American Jews. *Vox.Com*. Available at: <https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/2019/10/18/20899208/tree-of-life-anniversary-pittsburgh-shooting-american-jews> (accessed on November 2, 2020).
- Bergengruen, V. And Hennigan, W.J. (August 19, 2019). We are Being Eaten from Within. Why America is Losing the Battle Against White Nationalist Terrorism. *Time*. Available at: <https://time.com/5647304/white-nationalist-terrorism-united-states/> (accessed on Sept 2, 2020)
- Bungin, B. (2007). *Penelitian Kualitatif: Komunikasi, Ekonomi, Kebijakan Publik, dan Ilmu Sosial lainnya*. Prenada Media Group. Jakarta
- Holborn, H. (Dec 1964). Origins and Political Character of Nazi Ideology. *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 79, No.4, pp.542-554.
- Ramakhrisna, K. (2013). A Theoretical Framework for Understanding Radicalisation into Violent Extremism. *SEARCCT'S Selection of Articles*, 1, 1-16
- Schmid, A. P (ed). (2013). *The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research*. Routledge. New York
- The Soufan Center. (2019). *White Supremacy Extremism: The Transnational Rise of the Violent White Supremacist Movement*.
- The Soufan Center. (2020). *Special Report: THE ATOMWAFFEN DIVISION: The Evolution of the White Supremacy Threat*.