Tanja MILOSHEVSKA

A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF RADICALIZATION AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Abstract

Over the past decade, radicalisation has occurred as perhaps the most persistent conceptual framework for understanding micro-level modifications towards violence. Violent extremism and terrorism could be argued to be a function of society –as much as it is a reality of extremist groups or individuals who engage in violence due to ideological motivations. Radicalizing by evolving or embracing extremist beliefs that justify violence is one possible pathway into terrorism involvement, but it is certainly not the only one. Informed policies and practices to mitigate and prevent the spread of violent extremism require an understanding of these kinds of variations, not just general trends. The analysis of narratives used by the current radical and violent extremist groups' shows that socio-economic, political and personal grievances are effectively used to sway public opinion, disseminate messages, gain new recruits, and elicit sympathy. These narratives are generally merged with characteristic terms imbedded in issues of political instability, socio-economic stagnation, civic strife, and, in some cases, war. The purpose of this paper is to clearly understand the relationship between these terms, so that the prevention of violence and/or the threat of violence can be more successful.

Key words: radicalization, extremism, terrorism, violence, resilience.

Introduction

Radicalization towards violent extremism is a complex and multifaceted process that takes place at a variety of levels (individual, organizational and systemic).

A crucial moment in the process of radicalization is the "catalyst event" when a person becomes receptive to the possibility of new ideas and radical world views.

Terrorists and radicalized groups resemble an iceberg. Only a small minority of radicals use strategic violence to attract media attention. The majority of extremists are not visible and use non-violent methods, which are more effective in achieving their stated goals. Below the water level, there is a support base which occasionally agrees with the actions of the most committed militants and an even larger "silent minority" with a distaste for targeting non-combatants.

Counter-terrorism must target the visible part of the iceberg, whereas counter-radicalization needs to aim at the underwater section of the iceberg, which is much larger. Not the other way around (Muro, 2016).

Terminology

(Violent) Extremism

Any ideology that opposes a society's core values and principles. Many distinguish political from religious extremism. Although extremists do not necessarily engage in violence, the phrase violent extremism is used in contexts where extremist worldviews are accompanied by the justification and use of extreme violence (such as atrocity crimes) against those who do not share the same belief or ideology. Violent extremism may be expressed by individuals or groups through speeches or media posts, by carrying out isolated acts of violence in the name of extremist ideologies, or by physically joining violent groups. While violent extremism can be associated with any political or religious ideology, the term is usually equated with religiously-inspired, and especially Islamist-based, non-state violence. In a way, this research falls into the same trap, since it placed a particular focus on the patterns through which certain individuals become radicalised into espousing Salafi/Wahhabi-inspired Islamist ideologies and joining jihadi organisations as foreign fighters in Iraq and Syria. However, throughout the research process we explicitly recognised, and sought to uncover, the mutual interactions between Islamist violent extremism and other forms of political (e.g. far-right, nationalist) extremism, which contribute to their reciprocal radicalisation (Aroua, 2018).

Although extremists do not necessarily engage in violence, the phrase violent extremism is used in contexts when extremist worldviews are accompanied by the justification and use of extreme violence (such as atrocity crimes) against those who do not share the same belief or ideology. Violent extremism may be expressed by individuals or groups through speeches or media posts, by carrying out isolated acts of violence in the name of extremist ideologies, or by physically joining violent groups (Aroua, 2018).

Radicalisation

A process of increasing ideological and/or behavioural change that leads to espousing more extreme and potentially violent worldviews and actions.

The term "radicalization" refers to the process by which an individual increasingly espouses or supports extremist ideas. Radicalization is typically caused not by a single influence, but by a complex mix of factors and dynamics. It is a concept with different interpretations. In some cases, the term is used in a manner that suggests an implicit link between radical ideas and violence. This is problematic, both because not all who hold radical (or extremist) ideas will engage in or support violent action, and because the ability to hold ideas — regardless of their nature — is enshrined in international law as a fundamental human right (OSCE, 2019).

Cumulative/Reciprocal Radicalisation

The terms "cumulative" extremism and "reciprocal" radicalisation express the observation that current political polarisation does not happen in a vacuum but more often than not is a response to the actions and discourse of another group, for example, right-wing nationalistic groups. This is of great importance in a public debate that is still prone to considering radicalism and extremism as innate characteristics of a specific religion (often Islam).

Resilience (Unaffectedness)

Resilience assumes an awareness of the problem by various stakeholders in a community and their aggregated action to act against a certain phenomenon. It also includes the community's attitude toward such a phenomenon and their reaction in the wake of the emergence of the violent extremist activity, or even perceived as leading up to its appearance. It is never an absolute quality, but rather a systemic and changeable characteristic.

Vulnerability (Affectedness)

An affected community is one that has been influenced by ideological and/or physical forms of violent extremism such as pervasive radical ideology, ideologically motivated acts of violence, the incidence of foreign fighters originating from the community, and presence of actors that cultivate vulnerability towards violent extremism. An unaffected community is understood as one that does not display visible signs of radicalisation or violent extremism. (Morina at all, 2019).

As highlighted by Holmer and Bauman (2018), "violent extremist groups often harness their agendas to existing conflict dynamics and seek refuge and opportunity in poorly governed and conflict-prone environments. Understanding the root causes and dynamics that enable such groups to flourish requires a conflict analysis lens and relevant conflict analysis tools. Macro-level tools that examine violent extremist organizations without considering their relationships to other conflict dynamics run the risk of informing narrowly conceived countering/preventing violent extremism interventions that lack impact and sustainability".

The OSCE has specific and intentional terminology for these concepts: violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism. "Radicalization that leads to terrorism" refers to "the dynamic process whereby an individual comes to accept terrorist violence as a possible, perhaps even legitimate, course of action. This may eventually, but not necessarily, lead this person to advocate, act in support of, or to engage in, terrorism" (OSCE, 2018).

There are many definitions of radicalization but this paper is specifically interested in the process by which individuals "radicalize to violence". And not to just any type of violence, but to a specific type of political violence, namely illegitimate violence directed against civilians and non-combatants, also known as terrorism. As argued by Schmid, what is generally meant by radicalization is the "individual or group process of growing commitment to engage in acts of political terrorism" (Schmid, 2013). Finally, a working definition of "violent

radicalization" is provided by the European Commission's Expert Group on Violent Radicalization which has defined it as "socialization to extremism which manifests itself in terrorism" (Expert Group, 2008).

While violent radicalization has gradually moved to the top of the EU counter-terrorism agenda, it has been accompanied by a relatively embryonic understanding of the processes and interplay of factors that contribute to the adoption of radical ideas and behaviour. The term "radicalization" was brought into the policy discussion after the coordinated suicide bombing attacks in Madrid (2004) and London (2005) which targeted civilians using the public transport system and resulted in 191 and 52 casualties respectively. Several of the attackers in both incidents were home-grown terrorists which had either been born or socialized in the country and had adopted a new identity in which the struggles of their Muslim homelands played a powerful role in fomenting anger against the West. For the authorities, it soon became a priority to have a clearer picture of how young men from Muslim immigrant backgrounds radicalized in the West and were swept up by a seductive outlaw culture of violent Jihad (Muro, 2016).

Radicalization as a process

About the only thing radicalization experts agree on is that radicalization is a process (Schmid, 2013). As indicated in Figure 1, a basic understanding of this cognitive process would entail the gradual adoption of extremist ideas and would end, if completed, in the practice of violent extremism or terrorism.
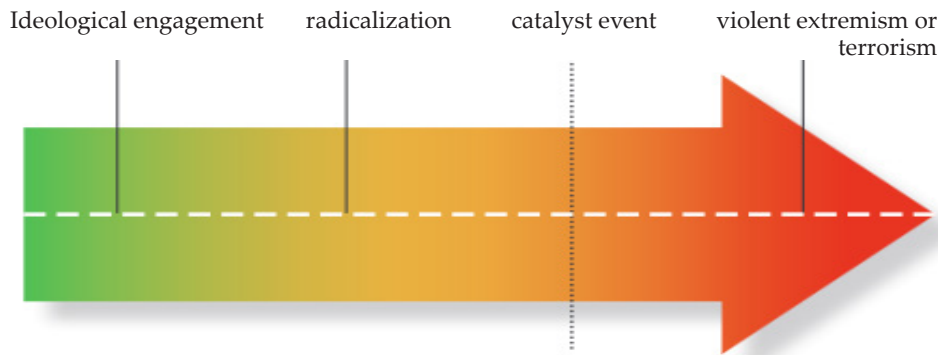

Figure 1: Racialization as a process

Figure 1 indicates that radicalization is best viewed as a process of change, a personal and political transformation from one condition to another. Becoming radicalized is a gradual process and one that requires progression through distinct states and happens neither quickly nor easily. Thus, a person does not become a radical overnight although the influence of a "catalyst event"

may accelerate the process. The catalyst event has been described by Quintan Wiktorowicz (2004; 2005) as a "cognitive opening" which makes a person more receptive to the possibility of new ideas and world views. This shocking event or personal crisis shakes an individual's certitude in previously held beliefs, prompts them to re-assess their entire life and become open to a radical change of values and behaviour. In the case of the terrorist organizations IRA or ETA, new recruits justified joining the ethno nationalist terrorist groups by referring to the killing (or torturing) of friends and relatives by the state, and it may therefore be assumed that terrorism was an act of vengeance. More recently, there is evidence that criminals who joined jihadist organizations like ISIS and Al-Qaeda realized that their criminal behaviour had been harmful and that they needed to break with their past and make up for their "sins". This "point of no return" provided the rationale for their turn to religion and justified the involvement with Salafist followers of the ultraconservative Sunni branch of Islam.

The catalyst event can take multiple forms:

√ economic (losing a job, blocked social mobility),
√ social (alienation discrimination, racism),
√ political (international conflicts) and
√ personal (death of a loved one).

In addition, there is a long list of triggers (real or perceived) which may initiate the progressive movement towards violent extremism.

Driving factors of violent extremism

The most popular approach to date in studying the phenomenon of violent extremism is to cluster its root causes and driving factors into two main categories:

1) Push factors or structural conditions (e.g. poverty, grievances, lack of access to political processes or justice, protracted conflict); and

2) Pull factors or direct drivers such as the ideological appeal or financial and social benefits of joining a violent group.

At the micro-level, the current research agenda on violent extremism tends to focus on the individual traits of radicalised youths, for instance by exploring cognitive propensities' role in the formation of maladaptive, high-risk mind sets (Allan et al. 2015; Dandurand 2015). Macro-level explanations of the structural causes of violent extremism also abound. The most widely cited root causes of violent extremism include political oppression, social exclusion, state repression, relative deprivation, poverty and globalisation (Dandurand 2015; Desta 2016). These structural explanations have marked a shift away from attributing violent extremism solely or primarily to religious beliefs. Scholars also emphasise the role of identity formation as a driving force for radicalisation processes (Schmitt 2017; Search for Common Ground 2017), and identify other drivers such as gender roles and honour (Atran 2006). The role of education

is also explored, whereby dysfunctional educational systems leave individuals with an inability to engage critically with information presented to them – especially among minority populations. The lack of proper religious education may further drive individuals to seek a simplified 'truth' – to be filled by religious indoctrination about Islam (or other belief systems) – which allows space for extremist narratives to take hold.

Forms and manifestations

Radicalization leading to violence is not a new phenomenon. It may take diverse forms depending on the context and time period, and may be associated with different causes or ideologies. In the last century many countries suffered from violence of different forms including, amongst others, urban violence, the emergence of a violent sub-culture, right- and left-wing extremist violence, nationalist and religiously motivated violence. The following descriptions are based on the report by the Centre for the Prevention of Radicalization Leading to Violence (2018).

Right-wing extremist violence is a form of violent radicalization associated with fascism, racism, supremacism and ultranationalism. This form of radicalization leading to violence is characterized by the violent defence of a racial, ethnic or pseudo-national identity, and is also associated with radical hostility towards state authorities, minorities, immigrants and/or left-wing political groups.

Left-wing extremist violence is a form of radicalization leading to violence that focuses primarily on anti-capitalist demands and calls for the transformation of political systems considered responsible for producing social inequalities, and which may ultimately employ violent means to further its cause. This category includes anarchist, Maoist, Trotskyist and Marxist–Leninist groups that use violence to advocate for their cause.

Politico-religious extremist violence is a form of radicalization leading to violence associated with a political interpretation of religion and the defence, by violent means, of a religious identity perceived to be under attack (via international conflicts, foreign policy, social debates, etc.).

Single-issue extremist violence is a form of violent radicalization essentially motivated by a sole and specific issue. This category includes the following groups if they use violence: radical environmental or animal rights groups, anti-globalization movements, anti-abortion extremists, sport-related violence, certain anti-trans and anti-feminist movements, and ultra-individualist or independent extremist movements that use violence to promote their causes. Murderers whose motivations are partially or wholly ideological may also fall under this category.

The range of violent actions and manifestations resulting from radicalization leading to violence can vary from verbal violence to terrorist attacks, including fires and damage to public goods, violent rallies, physical aggres-

sion, mafia-type activities and murders. Some forms of violence (e.g., verbal violence) can be the initial stage and foster other more severe and dangerous forms (e.g., physical violence or murders) (Glaser, 2017).

Trajectories and steps of radicalizations leading to violence

Although there are different individual trajectories and paths towards radicalisation leading to violence, it is possible to identify six steps through which young people can pass while undergoing the process of violent radicalisation. The paths of each person may be quite different, and the transitions from one to the other may not be that clear cut, but these six steps help in understanding some of the personal paths towards formation of radical beliefs and turning to violent acts, as well as why individuals may engage or disengage in the process of radicalisation. It is important to emphasise that not all the individuals going through the first stages reach the level of violent radicalisation. Likewise, it is possible to move between the "steps" and go back and forth within this model. The Moghaddam model (Moghaddam 2005, International Centre for the Prevention of Crime 2015) aims to show that radicalisation leading to violence is an outcome of much larger processes in society. It does not capture all possible forms of violence – instead, it captures important parts of the radicalisation processes leading to violence.

The trajectories of radicalisation leading to violence are articulated in this model around the following six steps, based on a metaphor of climbing a staircase to floors of increasing acceptance of violence, and may help in explaining better at which stage of violent radicalisation a person is, and what may be appropriate interventions at each level.

Ground floor: Psychological interpretation of material and social conditions.

• Subjective perception of deprivation, injustice, social immobility.

• Threats to identity.

• Influence of the media spreading the feeling of injustice.

First floor: Options envisaged against unfair treatment.
These options are:
• perception of the lack of or limited possibilities of social mobility and alternative ways to improve the situation

• perception of legal proceedings as unfair and biased.

These options generate a sense of injustice and illegitimacy of the normative system in force. The aggression felt is thus projected toward the other, held responsible for the problems, thereby making the transition to the second floor possible.

Second floor: Aggression
The second floor is characterised by the displacement of the aggression, which at this stage is verbal and physical. This is reflected by the direct or indi-

rect support of groups or organisations that advocate and promote a vision of "us against them".

Third floor: Moral commitment

It is the step where the violent group or organisation appears to support the process of engagement by persuasion and the justification of the means to achieve the ideal society. It employs the tactics of isolation, affiliation, confidentiality and fear.

These organisations are positioned at two levels:

• the macro level, as the only option to change the world or reform the society;

• the micro level, as the refuge for the outraged, the disaffected, the marginalised and other people who find themselves in similar situations.

Fourth floor: Categorical thinking and legitimacy of the violent group or organisation – Recruitment

• Entry into the violent group or organisation and beginning of the "secret" intrasocialisation.

• The group promotes the dichotomous thinking "us against them" and increases the isolation.

Fifth floor: The violent act and the mechanisms of inhibition

This is the operational phase, where individuals are equipped to carry out violent acts. They receive the necessary resources in order to inhibit the mechanisms that prevent taking violent actions:

• social categorisation, which is used to identify the target and the enemy

• the exacerbation of differences between the intra group and the extra group

• the prevention of any mechanism of inhibition. (Garcia, Pasic, 2018).

After analysing the forms and manifestations of radicalisation leading to violence, the influencing factors and the trajectories, it can be concluded that there is no absolutely clear cause–effect relation of radicalisation, but rather it is a complex process leading to it, which is different for each case.

Since the cause–effect relation is more than questionable, the term and logic of "prevention" is problematic from the social sciences point of view. In this sense, "prevention" would more precisely mean in this research "addressing radicalisation before it becomes violent" rather than "avoiding it" or "making sure it does not happen" (Garcia, Pasic, 2018).

Prevention of violent extremism and early detection of radicalization

This is a long-term process that involves a variety of actors at a different level starting from the community up to the international partners and policy

makers. As this work requires a multi stakeholder approach it is important to understand the different strategies and approaches that are developed for certain areas, regional, national, etc.

The North Macedonian Government has established a committee that will deal with this issue alongside with a strategy which will be later referred to as 'National Strategy for countering violent extremism' and an action plan which foresees how different actors and stakeholders will be involved in the development of such activities. The National Strategy on North Macedonia provides a unique focus on prevention activities and it defines it under 4 strategic priorities:

I. Prevent - flows of foreign terrorist fighters and militants and root causes of radicalization and extremism;

Goals:
✓ Strengthened institutional capacities
✓ Raising public awareness
✓ Strong and resistant community
✓ Preventing radicalization via Internet

II. Protect our people, their property, key and critical infrastructure from all threats, that are clear and present as well as potential and growing;

Goals:
✓ Proactive institutions in context of protection of the basic values, human rights and freedoms,
✓ Increasing the confidence among relevant institutions and citizens for protection against radicalization and violent extremism

III. Pursue threats of violent extremism and terrorism at their root in safe havens and where ever they pose clear danger to people and infrastructure; prosecute these threats actively, but fairly and transparently, and consistent with the rule of law;

Goal:
✓ Established set of measures for early detection of radicalization.

IV. Respond actively, aggressively, but always in ways that are transparent and consistent to the rule of law, in the spirit of solidarity and in ways that manage and minimize the consequences of a terrorist attack, by improving capabilities to deal with the aftermath, the coordination of the response and the needs of victims (National strategy of the Republic of Macedonia for countering violent extremism (2018-2022).

Goals:
✓ Deradicalization,
✓ Reintegration trough resocialization and rehabilitation,
✓ Coordination and cooperation.

Conclusion

Preventing terrorism through tackling radicalization and violent extremism has become a global feature of national strategies, resulting in the development of many policies and practices directed toward countering and preventing violent extremism.

These soft-power approaches aim at intervention before violence occurs, and have given rise to a new vocabulary: "preventing violent extremism," "countering violent extremism," and "preventing radicalization to violent extremism."

As drawn in this paper, even though the *process*es of radicalisation, the *ideology* of violent extremism and the *act* of terrorism have inter-reliant relationships, they are in fact three divergent terms that must be clearly understood.

Although acts of terror are not exclusively a product of the radicalisation process, understanding the correlation is principal to successfully countering violent-extremism.

References:

Allan, H at all. (2015). *Drivers of Violent Extremism: Hypotheses and Literature Review*. London: Royal United Services Institute.

Aroua, A. (2018). *Addressing Extremism and Violence. The Importance of Terminology*. Geneva: The Cordoba Foundation of Geneva. Available at: https://www.cordoue.ch/images/pdf/Papers/CFG_Con flictTransformationPerspective.pdf [Accessed 16 April 2022].

Atran, S. (2006). The Moral Logic and Growth of Suicide Terrorism, *The Washington Quarterly*, 29(2).

Centre for the Prevention of Radicalization Leading to Violence (2018). *Types of Radicalization*. Available at: https://info-radical.org/en/radicalization/types-of-radicalization. [Accessed 12 March 2022].

Dandurand, Y. (2015). Social Inclusion Programmes for Youth and the Prevention of Violent Extremism, in: Marco Lombardi et al. (eds.). *Countering Radicalisation and Violent Extremism among Youth to Prevent Terrorism*. Amsterdam: IOS Press.

Desta, T. A. (2016). *Preventing violent extremism: A new paradigm or evolving approach?* Bern: Swisspeace. Available at: http://www.swisspeace.ch/apropos /preventing-violent-extremism-new-paradigm-evolving-appro ach/. [Accessed 25 February 2022].

Engjellushe, M at all. (2019). *Community Perspectives on Preventing Violent Extremism Lessons learned from the Western Balkans*. Research Report. Available at: https://www.berghof-foundation.org/ fileadmin/redaktion/ Publications/ Other _ Resources/WB_PVE/CTR_PVE_WesternBal-kans_ Research_Report.pdf [Accessed 12 March 2022].

European Commission's Expert Group on Violent Radicalization (2008). *Radicalisation Processes Leading to Acts of Terrorism*. Report. Available at: https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/20080500_cscp_ report_vries.pdf. [Accessed 12 March 2022].

Garcia M, Pasic, L. (2018). Youth work against violent radicalization - Theory, concept and primary prevention in practice, Council of Europe and European Commission, Council of Europe Publishing: Strasbourg Cedex.

Glaser, M. (2017). "Extremist, militant, radicalised?" in Glaser et al. (Eds.) *Young and Radical. Political Violence During Adolescence*, Deutsches Jugendinstitut: Munchen.

Government of the Republic of Macedonia. (2018). National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism and Countering Terrorism, *National strategy of the Republic of Macedonia for countering violent extremism (2018-2022)*, Skopje.

Holmer, G., Baumann P. (2018). *Taking Stock. Analytic Tools for Understanding and Designing C/PVE Programs*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace.

International Centre for the Prevention of Crime. (2015). Study on *"Preventing Radicalisation: A Systematic Review*". Available at www.crime-prevention-intl.org/en/publications/publication/article/international-comparative-study-on-prevention-of-radicalisation.html

Muro, D. (2016). *What does radicalization look like? Four visualizations of socialization into violent Extremism*, Barcelona Centre for International Affairs.

Moghaddam F.M., (2005), The Staircase to Terrorism. A Psychological Interpretation, *American Psychologist*, Vol 60(2), Feb-Mar 2005, 161-169. Available at http://fathalimoghaddam.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/ 1256627851.pdf. [Accessed 10 March 2022].

OSCE. (2019). *Understanding Referral Mechanisms in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization That Lead to Terrorism Navigating Challenges and Protecting Human Rights.* A Guidebook for South-Eastern Europe, Transnational Threats Department: Vienna, Austria. Available at: https://www.osce.org/resources/publications. [Accessed 16 April 2022].

OSCE. (2018). *The Role of Civil Society in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism*. A Guidebook for South-Eastern Europe. Transnational Threats Department: Vienna, Austria. Available at: https://www.osce.org/resources/publications. [Accessed 16 April 2022].

Schmid, A. P. (2013). *Radicalization, De-Radicalization, Counter-Radicalization: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review*. ICCT Research Paper.

Schmitt, S. (2017). Lessons Learned from Countering Violent Extremism Development Interventions, *Small Wars Journal*. Available at: http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/lessons-learned-from-countering-violent-extremism-development-interventions. [Accessed 12 May 2022].

Search for Common Ground (2017). *Transforming Violent Extremism – A Peacebuilder's Guide*. Available at https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads / 2017/04/Transforming-Violent-Conflict-1.pdf. [Accessed 12 March 2022].

Wiktorowicz, Q. (2004). "Joining the Cause: Al-Muhajiroun and Radical Islam", *The Roots of Radical Islam*, Department of International Studies, Rhodes College.

Wiktorowicz, Q. (2005). *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West*. London: Rowman & Littlefield.