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| **The Process Of Radicalization In The Information Society Era** | Abstract  The Information Society, with all its success, has also paved the way to a more complex means of spreading radicalisation through the world.  Major General Abdulaziz Al Ansari  Chairman of Qatar National Counter Terrorism Committee |

**This paper is presented in the framework of the 7th Annual INTERPA Conference in Doha during 2-4 April 2018.**

**The theme of this year’s conference is “*New Trends in Combating Terrorism and Extremism*” and the paper discusses the issue of the *Process of Radicalization*.**

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**The Process of Radicalization in the Information Society era**

**Introduction**

One of the main aspects of our contemporary era is that we live in an Information Society. It could be defined as a society where the creation, distribution, use, integration and manipulation of information are significant economic, political and cultural activities[[1]](#endnote-1). In other words, it is a society in which advanced technologies are used to improve the living and working conditions of people. The process is amplified by the rapid development of Information Technology (IT) and communication tools like smartphones and other highly advanced technologies. This has to be also articulated with the Internet phenomenon, a virtual network that contains a wealth of information. The whole world has been brought together and has become a global village.

However, this aspect of modern societies has its disadvantages. Information can be utilized and manipulated by all kinds including criminals. Furthermore, in globalized societies dangerous ideologies are able to spread easier than in the past. This is the case of those who embrace violent ideologies through the process of radicalization. The Internet has become a safe haven for different sort of radicalized persons who try to incite and to recruit vulnerable people.

The roots of radicalization are deeper and several studies are covering this subject with different theories and explanations. Economy, psychology, psychoanalysis, history, political science, law, philosophy, religion ; all these fields are considered in order to comprehend one of this century’s main political challenges.

Radicalization can be defined as the process of indoctrination that generally accompanies the transformation of recruits into individuals determined to act with violence based on extremist ideologies. Radicalization to any form of terrorist violence is, in general, a phased process[[2]](#endnote-2). Various descriptions have been set with regard to the number and type of phases, stages or steps within the radicalization process of current terrorist groups like the terrorist organization the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and radicalization of European leftwing, rightwing or nationalists. The process of radicalization should be understood as a social phenomenon that leads to extremism and which can manifests itself in terrorism.

Historically, the first manifestation of terrorism, nourished by radicalization, was during the French revolution and was referred to an arbitrary policy used to victimize alleged or real political opponents[[3]](#endnote-3). Since then, the understanding of the term has been changing. Nowadays, the concept is more associated with acts of non-state actors that try to create disorder into a state and its institutions. Terrorism is difficult to define and prone to politicization[[4]](#endnote-4). In the context of radicalization, the idea of terrorism has a certain significant throwback. Terrorism is not the jihadist’s raison d’être but it is merely a tactic in the jihadist’s toolkit for achieving their larger aims (establishing a state after seizing a territory).

Behind terrorist acts, observers are more likely to find persons who have been attracted to terrorism through a certain radicalization process. Today, societies all around the world are facing waves of radicalization that find their manifestation into terrorist violence. Context-bound phenomenon par excellence, these current waves have global, sociological and political reasons as well as ideological and psychological ones. The radicalization phenomenon is then amplified in the Information society era as the spread of extremist narratives is accelerated by communication technologies.

**The gnarled roots of radicalization**

For radicalization to spread, and for individuals to join these waves, an alignment of situational, social/cultural, and individual factors is required. Political failures, religion misunderstanding, ethnic marginalization, ideals of honor, education and poverty are all recognized factors even if the evidence strength of a factor could defer from one to another. Numerous contributing factors[[5]](#endnote-5) can trigger the radicalization process in various degrees at the intersection of personal history and the enabling environment.

**Structural motivators**

It is impossible to single out one structural root cause to understand the radicalization phenomenon because a number of contributing factors can be analyzed as facilitators for the emergence of the radicalization process that might lead to terrorism.

**Political structural motivators**. Studies[[6]](#endnote-6) have shown that blocked political participation, widespread corruption and little hope for change can create grievances that can be harnessed by extremist groups to promote violent ideologies. Also, the lack of civil liberties is the most reliable predictor of radicalization. However, these analyses are limited in showing statistical correlations rather than cause and effect.

Governments’ failure to provide basic services – health, education and welfare – can provide an opportunity for extremist organizations to substitute the state and enables them to meet these needs and build support as a result. Extremists have proven ability to deliver services. The impact of this failure is two-fold: these organizations will gain support and legitimacy while the government and state structures will lose credibility and support. The phenomenon usually increases both the support of extremist groups and the potential for state failure. It should be noted that not all violent groups want to improve the situation of people and some of them are only eager to retain resources and power for themselves.

Some studied hypothesizes consider that events in Palestine, Iraq and other Arab countries are perceived as a global attack on Islam. Thus, some have a belief that Muslim nations are less prosperous than they should be and that is due to Western policies. This belief gives rise to widespread resentment and indignation and could be instrumentalized by extremist groups to radicalize people. Human rights violations and perceived overseas aggression can have a radicalizing impact on diaspora communities[[7]](#endnote-7).

**Social structural motivators**. The growth of religious and ethnic identities can be exploited by extremist ideologues. Radicalization is a social process in which identity is a key motivator why individuals become involved in violent extremism. Religion and ethnicity are among the most powerful expression of an individual or a community. Charismatic leaders can instrumentalise these key factors to spread radicalization.

Furthermore, inequality and institutionalized discrimination of ethnic or religious groups is widely believed to increase likelihood of radicalization. Economic, social and political marginalization has proven, through centuries, to have a nourishing effect on radicalization.

**Economic structural motivators**. Poverty and deprivation are major drivers of radicalization even if they have been dismissed as drivers of Western-focused transnational terrorism. In fact, there is a serious correlation between poverty and civil war. This phenomenon encourages radicalization although if poverty cannot be considered as an isolated cause.

Moreover, poverty creates frustration and underemployed young men with frustrated aspirations and a limited stake of the society are vulnerable in front of radicalization. Militant groups recruit from the ranks of the unemployed and underemployed. Extremist recruiters also target well-educated young men suffering from unemployment.

**Individual incentives**

Identity-formation is a normal, universal and psychological process. The search for personal and group identities can lead to radicalization among those who feel that their identity has been undermined by rapid social change[[8]](#endnote-8). Young people are mainly vulnerable to radicalization in this matter.

Studies[[9]](#endnote-9) in psychology are examining how the formation of an identity can become maladaptive. Researchers are also willing to understand why individuals are more vulnerable to radicalization than others. Some suggest that cognitive propensities can combine to create a mindset that presents a high risk of radicalization.

Ideals of masculinity, honor and the role of family breadwinner are increasingly in some society or disadvantaged communities. The loss of self-esteem can have considerable negative effect for young men. Extremist activity, after passing the radicalization process, may be sought to achieve status.

**Enabling factors**

Extremist mentors often target people with shared experiences of discrimination and exclusion because they are more susceptible to a legitimizing single narrative that binds together multiple sources of resentment and indignation. Radicalized mentors single narrative[[10]](#endnote-10) would then propose a simple solution that would lead to the process of radicalization.

Socioeconomic discrimination and ethnic marginalization could help explain why extremist groups are available to recruit support in large numbers. The use of a single narrative to justify, recruit and incite is a universal means among extremist groups. Today’s challenge is to know how extremist narratives work.

**Radicalization through the Internet**

Propaganda, incitement and recruitment of individuals to achieve terrorist crimes may be viewed as points along a continuum in the process of radicalization. Internet constitutes our contemporary par excellence medium that enables the spread of violent ideas.

**Propaganda**

One of the most developed means nowadays for extremists and terrorists to spread their ideologies is the dissemination of propaganda[[11]](#endnote-11). Generally, propaganda takes the form of multimedia communication that provides ideological and/or practical instructions, explanations, justifications and the promotion of extremist ideas. For instance, this may include video files or magazines.

The promotion of extremist rhetoric that encourages violent acts is a common trend on the Internet-based platforms that host user-generated content. Such content was distributed in the past to a relatively limited audience but today it can be easily transferred from a group of persons to another via internet. Several tools are available for extremists to diffuse their ideologies and encourage radicalization: social networking platforms like Twitter or file-sharing website like Youtube.

Extremist propaganda distributed via the Internet covers a range of objectives and audiences. It may also be tailored, inter alia, to actual or potential supporters of an extremist group. Propaganda aimed at a potential supporter of extremism may be focused on radicalization through messages conveying pride, accomplishment and dedication to an extremist goal. It may also include the use of psychological manipulation to undermine an individual’s belief in certain collective social values, or to propagate a sense of heightened anxiety, fear or panic in a population or a subset of a population. This may be achieved through the dissemination of disinformation, rumors and threats of violence.

The use of violent rhetoric by an individual or a group of individuals to incite acts of terrorism is considered unlawful by many countries. Extremists can provide through the Internet an abundance of material to download, edit, transform and distribute such content may be considered unlawful glorification of, or provocation to acts of terrorism. This is a classic means to radicalize young persons without being directly in contact with them.

However, it should be noted that human rights researchers have expressed doubt that the concept of “glorification” of terrorism is sufficiently narrow and precise to serve as a basis for criminal sanctions compliant with the requirements of the principle of legality. The concept raises also the issue of the permissible limitations of the right of freedom of expression, as enshrined in articles 15 and 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political rights.

In order to conceive correctly the process of radicalization, it is important to emphasize the distinction between mere propaganda and materials intended to incite acts of terrorism. In several countries, in order to be held liable for incitement to terrorism, the law requires manifestation of the requisite intent and a direct causal link between alleged propaganda and actual plot or execution of a terrorist act.

Otherwise, preventing and combating incitement to terrorism in the interest of protecting national security and public order are legitimate grounds for limiting freedom of expression, as provided under paragraph 3, article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. These grounds can be articulated with paragraph 2, article 20, of the Covenant, which requires the prohibition of any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence. It should be noted that any restrictions on the exercise of this right must be both necessary and proportional to the threat posed.

**Recruitment**

After preparing and diffusing their rhetoric, extremists will also develop relationships with and solicit support from those most responsive to targeted propaganda. Extremists are increasingly using rhetoric distributed via different channels, today mainly the internet, as a mean of clandestine recruitment[[12]](#endnote-12).

The reach of the internet provides extremists with a global pool of potential recruits. In fact, restricted access cyber-forums offer a place for recruits to learn about and provide support to terrorist groups. These forums also provide a venue for recruits to engage in direct actions in the furtherance of extremist goals.

Extremist rhetoric is tailored to appeal to vulnerable and marginalized groups in society. Sentiments of injustice, exclusion or humiliation are commonly the core on which the process of recruitment and radicalization is capitalizing. Moreover, the extremist rhetoric can be adapted to age, gender or social and economic circumstances.

Internet has become an effective medium for the recruitment of minors in order to spread the phenomenon of radicalization. They comprise a high proportion of users since because they are using new technologies at very young age and master them quickly and easily. Extremists use tactics to attract minors by using websites which propose a content is mixing cartoons and children’s stories with messages glorifying acts of terrorism and violent extremism. Other extremist groups have designed online video games.

Moreover, women play an important role in recruitment networks[[13]](#endnote-13). For instance, women had a key role in the Tétouan-Barcelona network: some extremists were radicalized in Tétouan (Marocco) and then travelled to Barcelona (Spain) to get married to a Moroccan who was not radicalized. When they arrived in Barcelona, they were still in contact with radicalized networks and started learning with them how to spread radicalization. They would also encourage young people, and their families, to travel to Syria. Samira Yerou is an example of those women who have become key recruiters.

ISIS has originally used what researchers call “the girl power”[[14]](#endnote-14). Women would are invest in producing a narrative where the terrorist organization would promise to provide to women a key role in this “society”: nurse, professor, recruiter, or a jihadi producer. Others would become a “fan girl”; they would use the Internet and social media to share ISIS videos and to bring support to their narratives.

**Conclusion**

Without a tailored counter-terrorism narrative along a tailored counter-terrorism policy, the process of radicalization in this Information Society will not be interrupted. A tailored counter-terrorism narrative should enhance an ideological resistance to the violent ideological discourse of radicalized persons. In addition, some solutions to stop radicalization depend exclusively on a political will to drain the sources of resentment and hatred that continue to fuel the process of radicalization.

**Recommendations**

1. Research is needed to study the strategies of indoctrination, mobilization and training adopted by terrorist organizations and their mentors with special focus on the role of internet.
2. Studies are needed on the institutions and organisations where radicalization leading to terrorism occurs (schools, religious settings, prisons and armies) and this with respect to them.
3. Studies should try to identify specific actions that have been successful in counter-radicalization strategies and initiatives.
4. More attention is needed towards the nexus between stereotyped narratives carried out by mainstream media and the roots of radicalization. To what extent and under which conditions does stereotyped narratives against one group of persons nourish radicalization?
5. Substantive and long-term studies are needed on the significance and impact of foreign conflicts, particularly in the Middle-East, in the case of contemporary terrorism and their effect on stimulating radicalization towards violence in Europe.

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