The University of Akron
IdeaExchange@UAkron

Honors Research Projects

The Dr. Gary B. and Pamela S. Williams Honors College

Spring 2015

The Psychology of Terrorism and Radicalization

Gina K. DeJacimo
The University Of Akron, gkd4@zips.uakron.edu

The Psychology of Terrorism and Radicalization

Gina K. DeJacimo

Department of Political Science

Honors Research Project

Submitted to

The Honors College

Spring 2015

Abstract

Terrorism and radicalized political groups are an ever-growing subsection of the American and international news cycles. Mainstream media outlets tend to focus on the atrocious actions of terrorists, leaving the American public without a true understanding of what encourages someone to become a violent, radicalized extremist. This paper intends to investigate possible psychological factors that can predict a person's likelihood to become radicalized and participate in a salafi jihadi terrorist campaign. If such psychological conditions exist, perhaps they are the key to preventing radicalization in the first place, and in turn, the key to preventing any terrorist activity. What other factors motivate someone to partake in terrorist activities? How can counterterrorism strategies distinguish between those who merely feel animosity towards the West and those who are indoctrinated to devote their lives to the West's demise?

While the concept of terrorism is by no means a new one, modern events have provided new opportunities for research and study. Beginning with the World Trade Center attacks of September 11th, 2001, we see a new era of terrorism in which Al Qaeda and its affiliates are able to recruit, train, and produce armies of radicalized fighters in record time, making the fight against terrorism an increasingly difficult one. By studying these modern examples of terrorism and combining this research with the behavioral sciences, we can gain some insight into the mind of a terrorist and the process by which organizations are able to meet the psychological needs of their recruits.

Previous research has concluded that almost all terrorists, including salafi jihadi extremists, do not suffer from any abnormal psychological conditions, as terrorist organizations extensively screen participants for any instability that may threaten their

mission. However, many terrorists do report feelings of doubt, persecution, and insecurity; these emotions are important in the framing of a terrorist cell's rhetoric to gain new members. Abnormal psychopathology is not an accurate predictor of one's potential to become a radical, violent Islamist extremist. Psychological factors, such as the quest for significance and identity, are very influential in prompting someone to interact with extremist groups. The manner in which terrorist organizations communicate with the public and their potential recruits is the defining variable that can determine to likelihood of radicalization. In turn, counterterrorism strategy must be focused upon dismantling the image that extremist groups project to the public and providing alternative options for those interested in joining a group to fulfill their psychological needs.

Introduction

Arguably the most defining feature of this century's political and global affairs atmosphere, terrorism grows in significance every day. The events of September 11th, 2001 have shaped subsequent presidential elections, international relations, and have even prompted the creation of an entire federal department. These events have also triggered an interdisciplinary response and a desire to prevent future international terrorism threats. Areas ranging from psychology and sociology to criminal justice and law enforcement are involved in the "war on terror," but it seems that most efforts to contain the culture of radicalization are in vain; some scholars liken al-Qaeda and its affiliates to "the mythical hydra that could grow multiple heads in place of those that were chopped off… able to spring branches around the globe in response to strikes by the United States and its allies that deal its defeats." (Kruglanski et al., 2014, p. 70) Despite extensive research, interrogation, and investigation, experts have yet to crack the code on how to stop terrorism in its tracks and improve global security.

In order to eradicate salafi jihadi terrorism, it is essential to understand what motivates terrorists to act; it is therefore important to understand the process of radicalization, which prompts terrorists to use violence to achieve their political goals. Are certain people more prone to radicalization? Do terrorists share a common psychological trait or disorder? How do salafi jihadi groups manage to recruit so many to their cause? Do culture and social psychology play a role in creating terrorists? All of these questions have been addressed in previous research and studies, the results of which will help determine the most probable reason for radicalization and the best approach to counterterrorism.

Defining "Terrorism"

A recent spike has been seen in the occurrence of terrorist activity and attacks, specifically in Salafi jihadi terrorism, but political violence is by no means a new concept. In fact, it has existed for hundreds of years, its definition fluctuating with generational and cultural differences. Crenshaw (1981) provides an early definition of terrorism:

> The term terrorism was coined to describe the systematic inducement of fear and anxiety to control and direct a civilian population, and the phenomenon of terrorism as a challenge to the authority of the state grew from the difficulties revolutionaries experienced in trying to recreate the mass uprisings of the French Revolution. (p. 380)

Modern definitions of terrorism have been streamlined to include various parts, which Schouten (2010) lists as: ""(a) the use of force or violence (b) by individuals or groups (c) that is directed toward civilian populations (d) and intended to instill fear (e) as a means of coercing individuals or groups to change their political or social positions." (p. 369) The definition that will be utilized throughout this paper comes from Title 22 of the United States Code §2b56f(d) and defines terrorism as: "politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience." (Taylor & Louis, 2004, p. 170)

Defining "Radicalization"

Another key aspect of terrorism is radicalization, a process that is complex and can vary among different geographical areas and cultures. Since it is an adjustable process, radicalization may be just as difficult to define as terrorism. Helfstein (2012)

simplifies the definition of radicalization to be: "the process by which people come to adopt extremist political beliefs with a particular emphasis on those ideologies that encourage violent action." (p.6) This violent behavior challenges and demoralizes what matters to the general population; for example, radical behavior such as crime challenges the safety of others.

Further discussion of radicalization, its process, and its motivations can be found later in this paper. We can now turn to the current literature available on this topic to outline what is already known about terrorist psychology. The next section will investigate different research studies and will discuss their findings within the context of this paper's hypothesis- that psychological needs prompt seekers to interact with Islamist extremist groups and the propaganda said groups employ are the defining variable that leads to potential Islamist extremists.

Literature Review: Specific Studies of Terrorist Psychology

Now that basic definitions of both terrorism and radicalization have been provided, we can turn to relevant theories and examples surrounding the psychological perspective of this phenomenon. It is important to note that the following examples are global in nature; they extend far past the American political sphere and conflicts that our country has been involved in. However, they cannot fully capture the scale of terrorism, as this technique has been used in all parts of the world for many years, and will likely continue as such without proper intervention techniques.

An interesting article that examines the psychology of terrorism and radicalization offers first-hand insight into the treatment of psychiatric patients who were involved in

terrorist campaigns. Written by Lord Alderdice, a psychiatrist, psychotherapist, leader of a political party, and Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly, this piece suggests taking a more "psychologically sophisticated way[s] of addressing the problem of terrorism." (Lord Alderdice, 2007, p. 201) The Lord spent his childhood in Northern Ireland throughout very violent days of terrorism. He states that despite popular allegations that terrorists are "psychologically disturbed," there are actually very few members with severe psychosis as they present a "high risk" for terrorist organizations. (Lord Alderdice, 2007, p. 201) However, his research has found that those who suffer from "sociopathic personality disorder" and do successfully enter a terrorist cell often break away and form their own branch of the organization as a result of intergroup arguments. The article supports the argument that more mental illness occurs after involvement with a terrorist organization than beforehand:

> Relatively few individuals who are directly involved in terrorism come along for psychological treatment. Those who do, tend to appear at the clinic when they are no longer actively involved. Some are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, which is by definition a set of symptoms that developed as a result of violent experiences rather than a pre-disposing factor to involvement. (Lord Alderdice, 2007, p. 201)

Later discussions of group and social psychology will offer other hypotheses of motivational factors for terrorism.

While terrorism in Northern Ireland has a place in the dialogue of terrorism and its motivational factors, there is no doubt that Islamic extremism is currently the most discussed type of terrorism in academic literature, and is also the primary focus of this

paper. Indonesian Islamic terrorism is discussed in an article from *The Asian Journal of Social Psychology.* Author A. W. Kruglanski (2013) offers another take on the relationship between psychological factors and the likelihood of becoming a radicalized terrorist, arguing that group dynamics and social psychology play a far larger role than individual mental illness:

> …through social networks the individual is exposed to an influence process whereby he or she ultimately gets persuaded and ends up adopting the way of thinking and the world view of the network… it is such an influence process that is critical and does not require an extensive network of interconnections with radically minded individuals. (p. 115)

Helfstein (2012) reinforces this concept, stating: "While the affect of social relationships may be limited in the awareness stage, they can be crucial as people continue down the pathway towards radical activity." (p. 20) Marc Sageman also references this theory in his article, "A Strategy for Fighting International Islamist Terrorists." He states that natural group dynamics lead to the escalation of ideals, making radicalization much more likely: "…groups acted as echo chambers, amplifying their grievances, intensifying the members' bonds to each other… Their turn to violence and the terrorist movement was a collective decision, not an individual one." (Sageman, 2008a, p. 227)

The current relevant theories on this topic suggest that group psychology may outweigh individual psychology in its influence upon the process of radicalization to violent behavior. Mental illness is not a predictive quality of radicalization, nor is relative economic conditions alone, as further discussion will demonstrate. There are also many

assumptions regarding the type of person that is most likely to engage in violent acts of terrorism, the majority of which have been proven to be false via prior research studies.

Common Myths of the Characteristics of Extremists

The first assumption about potential Islamist extremists is one that has already been discussed and can be reinforced further- that upon entering into the process of radicalization, the recruit is not mentally unstable. Venhaus (2010) states that while their actions may appear crazy to outsiders, no mental illness can be attributed to their choices: "After the radicalization and indoctrination process, his actions may appear utterly insane and irrational to an outside observer, but the young person who entered the process was mentally stable." (p. 4)

Next, it is important to note that economic profiles are not good indicators of whether or not someone will join a terrorist cell. While poor economic conditions can exacerbate feelings of injustice and distrust in government, they do not necessarily prompt someone to commit violent acts of terrorism: "Available evidence suggests that individuals are more likely to commit property crimes if they have lower wages or less education. The occurrence of violent crimes, including murders, however, is typically found to be unrelated to economic opportunities." (Krueger & Maleckova, 2002, p. 7) This statement can be applied to terrorism, since it is a very specialized form of violent crime with very specific motivations. However, economic conditions may be a predictor of violence at the national level, but should be distinguished from an individual motivator:

> While economic deprivation may not be associated with participation in terrorism
> and politically motivated violence at the individual level, it may nonetheless

matter at the national level. For example, if a country is impoverished, a minority of the relatively well off in that country may turn to terrorism to seek to improve conditions of their countrymen. (Krueger & Maleckova, 2002, p. 30)

Another assumption that has proven to be false about the majority of al-Qaeda recruits and other potential Islamist extremists is that they have a deeply held understanding of their Muslim faith. In fact, in a study of individuals who are "foreign fighters" for al-Qaeda, the majority was not exposed to in-depth religious teachings and since they did not fully understand their religion, they were more susceptible to misguiding by their superiors in religiously-motivated extremist groups. (Venhaus, 2010, p. 5) Although they may not fully understand it, their religion becomes an integral part of their collective identity. These extremists will eventually identify more with being a Muslim than with any other characteristic of themselves, allowing for terrorist groups to use religion as an influence in recruitment.

In summary, Marc Sageman (2008a) offers a concise description of what does not influence radicalization to salafi jihadi terrorism:

Contrary to popular belief, radicalization into terrorism is not the product of poverty, various forms of brainwashing, youth, ignorance or lack of education, lack of employment, lack of social responsibility, criminality, or mental illness. The mobilization of young people into this violent social movement is based on friendship and kinship. (p. 224)

If mental illness, relative economic conditions, and a deep understanding of Muslim faith are not sufficient conditions for predicting potential radicalization, the way in which extremist groups communicate with potential recruits must be a highly influential factor.

Psychological needs, such as the desires for community, identity, purpose, and security, motivate potential extremists to interact with terrorist groups, by which process they are exposed to a seemingly legitimate way to suit their needs. The following section of this paper will examine the hypothesis that the potential for radicalization is dependent upon seeking fulfillment of some psychological need, which is met with a response of proper propaganda, presentation, and group psychology within the Salafi jihadi community.

Hypotheses and Model: Relationships among Variables

After reviewing the literature that pertains to this research topic, we can clearly see that the relationship between mental illness and the likelihood of becoming a radicalized terrorist is relatively nonexistent. As Post et al. describe, "terrorist groups attempt to screen out mentally disturbed recruits- after all, they present a security risk." (2009, p. 14) Therefore, the academic community has concluded that mental illness is not a significant factor in the psychological motivations of terrorists, and as such, other variables must impact this trend more.

It appears, then, that the motivating factors to utilize terrorism to achieve political goals come not from the individual's psychological instability, but rather from their innate psychological needs and internalizing the ideology of the group or movement. Terrorist organizations can use these needs to their advantage and offer recruits ways to meet their needs for community and purpose, while framing their mission as an honorable one that will alleviate some of the hardships one might suffer. These hardships can include family instability, widespread conflict in their country, and a lack of career direction. It is important to note that while national conflict may influence economics,

personal economic deprivation has been proven to not be influential upon one's likelihood of joining a terrorist organization and becoming a radicalized extremist.

The following section of this paper will explore other motivations for terrorism and radicalization, including group dynamics and social psychological factors. By examining previous research by experts in the field, preventative measures will also be discussed and will center on combating these specific motivational factors. The conversation will be structured in terms of dependent variables (likelihood of becoming a radicalized salafi jihadi terrorist) and independent variables (propaganda and framing from terrorist groups and the exploitation of recruits' psychological needs). I hypothesize that the manner in which terrorist organizations communicate with their recruits, via propaganda, framing, and the exploitation of psychological needs, is the most influential variable in creating salafi jihadi extremists and terrorists. As recruits interact with a terrorist group, I believe that their chance of joining said group and becoming a radicalized terrorist increases because they are persuaded by what the group can offer them. I hope to present a clear delineation of the process of radicalization specific to salafi jihadi extremists and offer a method of counterterrorism strategy focused on redefining how potential Islamist extremists attempt to fulfill their psychological needs. After analysis, the best course of action to reduce the risk of radicalization will be presented and this paper's hypothesis will be supported or refuted.

Research Design: Potential Factors and Preventative Measures

In order to measure the previously outlined variables, a variety of scholarly articles will be cited and analyzed. These articles focus on interdisciplinary approaches to

understanding the concept of terrorism and the process of radicalization. Authors range from psychiatrists and psychologists to experts in intelligence and the law enforcement aspect of counterterrorism. While there is a wide breadth of information on this topic because of its growing importance, there are also limitations to one's research abilities. It is sometimes difficult to obtain first-hand accounts of a specific terrorist's psychological state since many still remain at large or have died during their time in a terrorist cell. One should be cautious of generalization about violent extremists; assuming that there is one profile for a terrorist that fits all discounts the differing dynamics that influence the process of becoming a terrorist in the first place. (Horgan, 2008, p. 84) By taking a qualitative approach, common themes among the available information can be outlined to draw conclusions regarding this paper's hypothesis, that Islamist extremist groups successfully frame their missions to fit the psychological needs for identity and community among potential recruits.

Group Dynamics and Cultural Norms

Of the many various disciplines involved in the "war on terror" and invested in understanding how to successfully halt the process of radicalization, the behavioral sciences aim to determine what specifically makes a person "susceptible to recruitment" by terrorist organizations. (Schouten, 2010, p. 371) Schouten (2010) argues "a focus on group and organizational dynamics, rather than individual psychology," to explain terrorist behavior. (p. 373) This approach also emphasizes questioning *how* one becomes a terrorist, rephrasing the usual question of *why* someone uses terrorism. (p. 373) He cites a study in which Middle Eastern terrorists were interviewed regarding their motives and concludes:

The most important influence was group behavior: individuals joined their

respective terrorist movements because "everybody was doing it." Incarceration

with fellow members of the group and like-minded individuals increased their

exposure and commitment to the group and its goals. (p. 374)

Research from the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point supports this theory,

stating that: "There are very few people who progress to violent action in

isolation…Many radicals have a history of social contact or reaching out to develop

relationships with like-minded individuals." (Helfstein, 2012, p. 3) Like anyone else,

terrorists seek out information from their peers regarding beliefs and behaviors, but it is

when the terrorist group has "a clearly defined chain of authority" that articulates their

mission "clearly and unanimously" that greatly influences the new recruits' attitudes and

fosters the creation of new beliefs and identities. (Taylor & Louis, 2004, p.170)

Pressure from the group or organization also impacts the tendency of one to

engage in acts of suicide terrorism: "this process of change is the result of interactions

among individual/personal experiences such as trauma and humiliation, social or

ideological reasons, and social or organizational pressures." (Schouten, 2010, p. 376) The

growing trend of suicide terrorism suggests that a strong influence from peers is

predictive of violent activity, says Schouten:

Terrorism is a form of targeted, rather than impulsive, violence. While the latter is

more commonly associated with major mental illness, the former is more likely to

be associated with group dynamics and personality characteristics, although more

significant mental illness can be a risk factor, especially in the case of lone actors.

(2010, p. 375)

However, this is not to say that suicide terrorists do not internalize the ideology that their respective terrorist group presents. Post and colleagues explore this concept further in their 2009 article, "The Psychology of Suicide Terrorism": "Collective identity and the group and social processes that consolidate that collective identity play a crucial role both in leading Muslim youth onto the path of terrorism and in reframing suicide as martyrdom." (p. 19) The idea of martyrdom, they argue, is such an integral part of Muslim culture that the value of suicidal violence is taught from an early age. Assaf Moghadam (2008) suggests that martyrdom is a successful tactic of persuasion and that "individuals and organizations will employ suicide terrorism if they are likely to enjoy social support for this tactic." (p. 53) Promises of rewards in the afterlife as well as the threat of humiliation from fellow group members if such a path is declined essentially forces young recruits to value the goals of the group more than their own lives. (Post et al, 2009, p. 19) This type of group psychology is incredibly effective among adolescents, who tend to listen less to their parents and more to outside sources, such as charismatic members of terrorist organizations. A "culture of martyrdom" paired with the vulnerability of impressionable young minds creates an endless supply of willing participants, thus making group psychology one of the most influential factors of violent extremism, specifically of suicide terrorism. (Post et al., 2009, p. 24) This "culture of martyrdom" resonates with the collective identity of both the nation they live in and with the terrorist group which potential extremists join. More discussion of collective identity can be found in the following sections.

The Quest for Significance

Another motivation for salafi jihadi terrorism, as scholars argue, is the presence of the "quest for significance." Kruglanski and colleagues (2014) explore this theory in their article, "The Psychology of Radicalization and Deradicalization: How Significance Quest Impacts Violent Extremism." This quest can have motivations that are culture-specific, but share characteristics which "constitute a major, universal, human motivation variously labeled as the need for esteem, achievement, meaning, competence, control, and so on." (Kruglanski et al., 2014, p. 73) While specific terrorists have their own specific goals, most include "honor, vengeance, religion, loyalty to the leader, perks in the afterlife, even feminism." (Kruglanski et al., 2014, p. 73) These goals of terrorism are part of general human needs for "esteem, achievement, meaning, competence, control, and so on." (Kruglanski et al., 2014, p. 73) It can be assumed, then, that people who commit radical behavior are seeking one of the previously outlined psychological human needs. They may adapt their morality to suit this behavior and may place these needs above any other, making radical behavior the means by which to achieve their main goal, whether personal or political.

The desire for significance can be awakened in a variety of ways, including a previous loss of significance or a prior humiliation, the anticipation of a future loss of significance or the threat of future humiliation, and the opportunity for significance gain or personal incentive. (Kruglanski et al., 2014, p. 74) In fact, such humiliations can provide motivation for suicide terrorism, as well: "Hopelessness, deprivation, envy, and humiliation make death, and paradise, seem more appealing." (Post et al., 2009, p. 19)

The quest for significance is a vital part of the process of radicalization, which, when interrupted, could reduce the amount of terrorists produced.

A fundamental desire for meaning exists in all humans and terrorists often see violent extremism as a way to achieve meaning and significance. When one does not have a clearly defined purpose in life or a strong personal identity, they often turn to a collective identity to provide them with some sort of reassurance of their self-worth. As Taylor and Louis (2004) argue, "a clearly defined collective identity is a necessary prerequisite for engaging in the process of defining a personal identity and, by extension, personal (self-) esteem." (p. 175) This collective identity can most often be found within the context of culture and religion due to the fact that it impacts "every aspect of a person's life." (Taylor & Louis, 2004, p. 174) Islamist extremist groups appeal to the need for collective identity by specifically targeting youths who live in a world of "social upheaval" with no real example of how to overcome their disadvantages and make a successful life for themselves. (Taylor & Louis, 2004, p. 177) There are a number of different categories of these seekers based on what exactly they are looking for, and extremist groups, specifically al-Qaeda, have specific ways to target each.

Various Seekers and Their Quests

The first kind of seeker or genre of quest for significance involves someone who is seeking revenge for the injustices he perceives as a result of society's prejudices against him. This "revenge seeker" is drawn to al-Qaeda's hatred of the West, whom he will blame for his misfortunes in life, even though he may not have ever had direct contact with the West previously. (Venhaus, 2010, p. 9) Such hatred will lead a potential extremist recruit to make generalizations that the West has no place for Muslims in its

society and culture and that any failures in the seeker's life are not his own fault, but that of his new foreign enemy. (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010, p. 800) Sageman (2008b) describes the evolution of this hatred for the West:

>…since 2003, it has been all about the war in Iraq, which has become the focal point of global moral outrage for Muslims all over the world. Along with the humiliations of Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo, Iraq is monopolizing today's conversations about Islam and the West. On a more local level, governments that appear overly pro-American cause radicals to feel they are the victims of a larger anti-Muslim conspiracy, bridging the perceived local and global attacks against them. (p. 40)

Islamist extremist groups prey on this feeling of injustice and prejudice by presenting an image of Western culture as selfish, wealthy, and discriminatory of people of Muslim faith. (Taylor & Louis, 2004, p. 176) When one perceives that they are under threat, they become open to radicalization from extremist groups that aim to conquer said threats.

Another kind of quest for significance involves the need for purpose and recognition; Venhaus (2010) refers to this potential extremist as the "status seeker." (p. 9) While the revenge seeker is more commonly found in Middle Eastern societies, the status seeker often originates from the West as an immigrant who is trying to assimilate or as a member of the American Muslim minority: "In ethnically divided Western communities, these young men find few fellow countrymen who have achieved high status, and they begin to perceive that prejudice and persecution is preventing their entire group from improving its lot." (Venhaus, 2010, p. 10) Groups like al-Qaeda prey on this psychological need for acceptance by maintaining their fame and perceived success to

convince the status seeker that "the surest route to respect is to join the global jihad." (Venhaus, 2010, p. 10)

The "identity seeker," on the other hand, aims not to prove their worth to others, but to themselves. An innate need for belonging and collective identity is arguably the strongest pull to join a group, and if no other legitimate alternatives are presented, groups like al-Qaeda appear a logical choice for the identity seeker. (Venhaus, 2010, p. 10) Similar to gang violence, offering strong examples of healthy group relationships is key to preventing the identity seeker from becoming interested in violent extremism. However, as is often the case with impoverished urban youths, many young men and women in Islamic societies never have the opportunity to form a collective identity that provides them with stability and direction:

> Who are particularly vulnerable in terms of a confused collective identity?
> …young people who are future oriented, who are anxious to get ahead but have no clear collective identity to provide them with the mechanisms and infrastructure for defining themselves, promoting a positive identity, and achieving their goals. (Taylor & Louis, 2004, p. 177)

Since terrorist organizations present a clearly defined collective identity in order to indoctrinate their members to the cause and discourage any deviation from their goals, young people are more likely to join because of the simplistic nature of this identity and the enduring promise of rewards from group superiors. Their personal identity becomes irrelevant and the collective identity takes precedence; because the identity seekers has a weak sense of self, they are more easily persuaded to adopt a new one.(Taylor & Louis, 2004, p. 180)

The final type of seeker that embarks of the quest for significance is the least common of them all- the "thrill seeker." Venhaus (2010) states that the thrill seeker tends to come from a middle- to upper-class family, is unsatisfied with his current employment, and "wants to prove his manhood by accomplishing an arduous task or surviving a harrowing adventure." (p. 11) Groups like al-Qaeda successfully prey upon the thrill seeker's need for adventure by presenting itself as an exciting and violent path through life. However, new al-Qaeda recruits rarely see battle at first; they are often subjected to simple tasks, such as providing transportation and meals to other members of the group. (Venhaus, 2010, p. 11)

The various psychological needs and their respective seekers elicit a variety of responses from Islamist extremist groups attempting to gain new members. If factors such as the desire for community, identity, and purpose are what prompt someone to interact with an extremist group, the way in which the extremist group responds seems to be equally as important. Quintan Wiktorowicz (2004) proposes a four-step process to explain the phenomenon of radicalization:

    1) cognitive opening—an individual becomes receptive to the possibility of new ideas and worldviews

    2) religious seeking—the individual seeks meaning through a religious idiom

    3) frame alignment—the public representation proffered by the radical group "makes sense" to the seeker and attracts his or her initial interest

    4) socialization—the individual experiences religious lessons and activities that facilitate indoctrination, identity-construction, and value changes (p.1)

The "cognitive opening" step takes place when an individual's quest for significance is awakened, as previously discussed. The "religious seeking" step occurs when an individual views their religion as an appropriate vehicle by which to develop their new collective identity; they identify as a Muslim and trust the information that other Muslims offer them. "Frame alignment" is what we can designate as the most important step of the process of radicalization because it is the step that connects what the seeker desires with what the extremist group can offer; the group's message fits with the seeker's Muslim identity. "Socialization" further enforces the identity of the group upon the individual, enabling them to meet their psychological needs by participation; the seeker feels he has to defend Muslims by responding to the injustices committed against them. Simply put, "the movement's schemata must resonate with an individual's own interpretive framework to facilitate participation." (Wiktorowicz, 2004, p. 5)

Appealing to the Need for Collective Identity

As Taylor and Louis (2004) discuss at length in their article, "Terrorism and the Quest for Identity," the unique trait of salafi jihadi groups like al Qaeda is that they successfully utilize the need for collective identity among new members, making recruitment a relatively easy process. Leaders of these groups focus on youths in their communities who do not have a strong sense of direction in their lives:

> These young people find themselves at a time in their life when they are looking to the future with the hope of engaging in meaningful behavior that will be satisfying and get them ahead. Their objective circumstances including opportunities for advancement are virtually nonexistent; they find some direction from their religious collective identity but the desperately disadvantaged state of

their community leaves them feeling marginalized and lost without a clearly

defined collective identity. (Taylor & Louis, 2004, p.178)

The authors cite refugees as an example of disadvantaged youths that are prime

candidates for recruitment to terrorist organizations. When one enters a refugee camp, it

is because they have left their home country for some reason; they seek asylum in a

country that will not persecute them for their religious or other affiliations and can

potentially offer them a higher standard of living. As such, these refugees sometimes

leave the collective identity that they associate with their country behind. This creates an

opportunity for groups like al Qaeda to offer a collective identity to those who "may not

be in a position to generate a collective identity on their own." (Taylor & Louis, 2004, p.

179) Often, the one remaining piece of their collective identity is their religion; by

focusing on that characteristic, extremist groups are able to foster a feeling of

community, which allows them to frame their mission around the Muslim faith. It is

important to note, however, that not all refugees reject their previous collective identity;

some "cling to the collective identity they know, even when that collective identity is not

serving them well." (Taylor & Louis, 2004, p. 179) It is mostly youths that are

susceptible to this kind of influence from extremist groups. It is also youths who are most

likely to engage in social networking, another tool that extremist groups use to procure

new members.

Socialization among Salafi Jihadi Extremists

In the age of modern technology, socialization among Islamist extremists and

terrorists has achieved a new ease of access and has reached a wider group than previous

face-to-face interactions were able to provide. The Internet, with its endless array of chat

rooms, blogs, social networking websites, and email servers, provides perhaps the biggest

asset to groups like al Qaeda. In fact, scholars have found that reading a "properly

worded Twitter message can release as much oxytocin (a hormone critical to bonding and

trust) as seeing a loved one walk into a room." (Helfstein, 2012, p. 24) Al Qaeda is able

to utilize modern communications, including the 24-hour news cycle and Internet sites,

which distinguishes their success from previous movements in history. (Venhaus, 2010,

p. 6)

These technologies facilitate the process of "socialization," which Wiktorowicz

(2004) says "is intended to alter the values of the individual so that self-interest is defined

in accordance with the goals and beliefs of the movement ideology." (p. 10) Socialization

among jihadi extremists can also be described as a "feedback loop," in which members

communicate with new recruits and become more invested in their cause. Reaching out to

new members via modern social networks "ties the members' identity even closer to the

movement." (Wiktorowicz, 2004, p. 11) In other words:

> The escalation to high   risk activism is a circular process whereby participation
>
> increases association with the activist network, in turn deepening ideological
>
> socialization, further fostering an ideological identity and ultimately increasing
>
> the likelihood of high risk activism. (Helfstein, 2012, p. 11)

Interaction among higher-ranking members and new recruits to these movements is

mandatory in some groups. For example, Al Muhajiroun, a radical British organization in

support of violent Salafism, requires that members hold an "open public circle" or

discussion in order to "create a profile for the movement, create public awareness about

the vital issues, and make new contacts." (Wiktorowicz, 2004, p. 21) Exchanges between

various members of a radical group and others in their social circle take place on a regular basis, as highlighted by various training manuals from various organizations. Socialization is of very high value among Islamist extremist organizations, suggesting that it should be utilized in counterterrorism strategies. Possible strategies will be outlined in the next section.

Policy Implications and Prevention Techniques

If the quest for significance, group dynamics, and propaganda from extremist groups influence the process of radicalization, any attempt to prevent terrorism must be structured around these themes. Analyzing the results of their research, scholars suggest various methods of prevention that involve interrupting strong group relationships to eventually break apart terrorist organizations. The quest for significance can be altered to focus on morally acceptable goals that are not achieved through violence, which can be accomplished through the process of deradicalization. Kruglanski et al. (2014) define deradicalization as "a decreased commitment to the ideological goal, accompanied by a resurgence of alternative pursuits and objectives." (p. 87) Deradicalization involves the reassignment of one's belief system, while disengagement refers to the "discontinuation of active participation in violence." (p. 87) It is important to distinguish between these two terms because someone may be disengaged with terrorist activity (for reasons ranging from injury to being reassigned to a less hands-on role within the organization), but still have a radical belief system. Someone who is disengaged but not deradicalized may still partake in violent extremism in the future as they still think it is a morally acceptable means to an end.

In addition to deradicalization and the interruption of the quest for significance, scholars link group psychology to being the most successful tool in counterterrorism strategies. Groups have an uncanny ability to influence their members by utilizing popularity and threats of exclusion to manipulate one's actions. Often, terrorists identify more as members of their given organization than as individuals with a distinct sense of self. Post (2010) states that "terrorists have subordinated their individual identity to the collective identity, so that what serves the group, organization, or network is of primary importance." (p. 16) Therefore, by challenging the collective identity of the group, terrorist cells will break down and not be viewed as legitimate, functioning organizations. Post (2010) addresses the process of utilizing group dynamics as a counterterrorism strategy and lists the steps needed to be successful:

1. "Inhibit" potential terrorists from joining terrorist groups and organizations;

2. "Produce dissention" within the groups;

3. "Facilitate exit" from the groups; and

4. "Reduce support" for the groups and "Delegitimize" their leaders (p. 23)

By creating doubt among group members, conflict between them will inevitably occur, resulting in the breakdown of faith in leaders, reduced support for terrorist cells, and the overall decline in terrorist activity.

Another possible method of combating the rise and radicalization of salafi jihadi extremists is to attempt to disprove the propaganda that is presented by terrorist groups. As previously mentioned, modern technology is an incredibly valuable asset to groups like al Qaeda. If terrorist groups can utilize these technological advances to further their

cause, why can counterterrorism not use the same techniques to their advantage? As

Horgan (2008) proposes

> The mass media, both journalistic and popular, has an underdeveloped but
>
> potentially significant role to play in contributing to the environment in which
>
> terrorism thrives and simultaneously in which the attraction to involvement in
>
> terrorism may be undermined. Challenges to the myths and lures of terrorism
>
> probably can be an effective counterterrorist strategy for both the group and the
>
> individual, but they can only be realistic and meaningful if they are directed at
>
> specific populations. (p. 91)

Since propaganda is only effective if the issuer is seen as legitimate and reliable,

discrediting terrorist groups' messages may be the key to reducing the number of new

recruits they are able to radicalize. Demonstrating the devastation that involvement in a

violent terrorist campaign can bring not only to the group's members, but to their families

and friends, may challenge the notion that terrorism is a legitimate means to an end. This

has already been utilized in Saudi Arabia, where a rehabilitation program suggests "that

counterpropaganda may effectively challenge the extremist beliefs of imprisoned

jihadists and their sympathizers." (Horgan, 2008, p. 92) Employing reliable, trustworthy

source of accurate information, such as respected Muslim clerics, may hold the answer to

distinguishing between the real messages of Islam and the messages that Islamist

extremist groups project, as Venhaus (2010) suggests: "If reeducation through religious

teaching can cause a fighter to renounce al-Qaeda, it stands to reason that religious

education programs conducted with younger participants could inoculate them against the

appeal of al-Qaeda." (p. 12) Further efforts must be made to continue this kind of work

and in turn, diminish the effectiveness of terrorist organizations and their methods of communication.

Conclusions: Toward a Terrorism-Free World

Through careful research and consideration, it can be concluded that the manner in which terrorist organizations communicate with their recruits, via propaganda, framing, and the exploitation of psychological needs, is the most influential variable in creating salafi jihadi extremists and terrorists. While this paper aims to focus on salafi jihadi extremists, this hypothesis can be applied to other branches of terrorism and may serve as a model for other counterterrorism techniques. While minor episodes of depression and anxiety are common among many terrorists, as they are among the general population, there is little evidence supporting the claim that severe mental illness is a predisposing factor to becoming a radicalized extremist. Intensive screening processes conducted by terrorist organizations eliminate potential recruits with psychological disturbances, as they present a major security risk to the group. However, psychological factors still play a major role in determining the success and prevalence of terrorism. Group dynamics, pressure from peers, fear of isolation, and the quest for significance all influence one to use violent extremism as a way of accomplishing their political goals. Counterterrorism, therefore, must focus on breaking down group and social relationships that reinforce radicalized and sometimes, cultural, beliefs that terrorism is morally permissible. Further research must take on an interdisciplinary approach that utilizes a combination of psychological trends and cultural observations to ultimately bring about the downfall of terrorism as a legitimate approach to politics and international relations.

References

Crenshaw, M. (1981). The Causes of Terrorism. *Comparative Politics, 13*(4), 379-399.

Dalgaard-Nielsen, A. (2010) Violent Radicalization in Europe: What We Know and What We Do Not Know. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, 33(*1), 797-814.

Donahue, T.J. (2013) Terrorism, Moral Conceptions, and Moral Innocence. *The Philosophical Forum, 1*(1), 413-435.

Helfstein, S. (2012) Edges of Radicalization: Ideas, Individuals, and Networks in Violent Extremism. *The Combating Terrorism Center at West Point,* 1-74. .

Horgan, J. (2008) From Profiles to *Pathways* and Roots to *Routes:* Perspectives from Psychology on Radicalization into Terrorism. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 618*(80), 79-94.

Krueger, A.B. & Maleckova, J. (2002) Education, Poverty, Political Violence, and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection? *National Bureau of Economic Research,* 1-47.

Kruglanski, A.W. (2013). Psychological insights into Indonesian Islamic terrorism: The what, the how, and the why of violent extremism. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology, 16*(1), 112-116.

Kruglanski, A.W., Gelfand, M.J., Belanger, J.J., Sheveland, A., Hetiarachchi, M., & Gunaratna, R. (2014). The Psychology of Radicalization and Deradicalization: How Significance Quest Impacts Violent Extremism. *Advances in Political Psychology, 35*(1), 69-93.

Lord Alderdice (2007). The individual, the group, and the psychology of terrorism. *International Review of Psychiatry, 19*(3), 201-209.

Moghadam, A. (2008) Motives for Martyrdom: Al-Qaida, Salafi Jihad, and the Spread of

   Suicide Attacks. *International Security, 33*(3), 46-78.

Post, J.M. (2010). "When hatred is bred in the bone:" the social psychology of terrorism.

   Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, 1(1), 15-23.

Post, J.M., Ali, F., Henderson, S.W., Shanfield, S., Victoriff, J., & Weine, S. (2009). The

   Psychology of Suicide Terrorism. *Psychiatry: Interpersonal and Biological*

   Processes, 72(1), 13-31.

Sageman, M. (2008a) A Strategy for Fighting International Islamist Terrorists. *The*

   ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 618(1), 223-

   231.

Sageman, M. (2008b) The Next Generation of Terror. *Foreign Policy, 165*(1), 36-42.

Schouten, R. (2010) Terrorism and the Behavioral Sciences. *Harvard Review of*

   Psychiatry, 1(1), 369-378.

Taylor, D. M., & Louis, W. (2004). Terrorism and the quest for identity. p. 169-185.

Venhaus, J.M. (2010) Why Youth Join al-Qaeda. *United States Institute of Peace Special*

   Report, 1-20.

Wiktorowicz, Q. (2004) Joining the Cause: Al-Muhajiroun and Radical Islam. *The Roots*

   of Radical Islamic Radicalism Conference. London: C. Hurst & Co. Publishers,

   Ltd.