

A Toolbox for Countering Extremist Religious Doctrines

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Preface

Definitions of “radical” or “extremist” are relative to the mores and norms of the societies in which they exist. The dictionary's definition for radical and extremist - “one who advocates or resorts to measures that are counter to the norm” forces one to define the “norm”. Therefore, any discussion of counter-radicalization must focus on the common culture and collective narratives of the community in which the radical ideology exists.

This paper deals specifically with radicalization of **Muslims**. Attempts to uncover “underlying causes” or “driving factors” of radicalization of **individuals** in Muslim communities tend to equate radicalization of Muslims to the propensity towards gang culture and violence in inner cities in western countries or to the dynamics that generates inter-racial violence in such countries. In many non-Muslim societies many of these also exist – occasionally in even greater intensity than in Muslim societies, however, they have not created similar movements of such intensity or global objectives.¹ This paper will take the position that that there are unique cultural and religious causes and dynamics that contribute to the radicalization of Muslims as opposed to radicalization of individuals in other communities. Social, political or economic circumstances are certainly contributing factors, however they are not the prime causes of the Islamist brand of radicalization in Muslim communities.

In order to understand Islamic radicalization underlying culture-dependent factors must be taken into account: traditional Islamic doctrines, which do not exist in other cultures; the special role of the Arabs in Islam and in promoting radical Islam throughout the Muslim world; the crisis of religious and temporal authority which Islam suffers from since the beginning of the 20th century and the

¹ Examples are in abundance: Irish, Basque and Kurdish nationalist terror may certainly accuse the U.S. and other Western countries of support of the UK, Spain or Turkey, but none have developed a policy of terror outside of their immediate targets; Tibet has been arguably occupied, colonized and oppressed more than any Middle Eastern Muslim society, but has not generated a terrorist movement at all; combinations of poverty, political suppression and even genocide exist in abundance in all of Africa much more than anywhere in the Arab world, but no trans-national terrorist movement has emerged out of Africa.

exacerbation of the friction with the West as a result of the large increase in Muslim immigrants in the West.

Radicalization of an individual tends to be incremental. Over a period of time, the radicalized individual gradually learns and integrates religious/ideological tenets, which become come together to form a radical Weltanschauung and justification of violence against others. One theory portrays a cycle of radicalization that consists of: (1) pre-radicalization, (2) self-identification, (3) indoctrination and (4) radicalization.² Another psychological etiology claims “Some join a radical group for thrill and status, some for love, some for connection and comradeship. Personal and group grievance can move individuals toward violence, with ideology serving only to rationalize the violence”.³ However, this order ignores the fact that positions that are perceived in one society as “radical” and “extremist” may be considered normative in another and hence are adopted by individuals in the second society not out of “radicalism” but out of conformism to what they perceive as the social and religious norms of their society. In such a case, self-identification takes place therefore before the first stage of pre-radicalization.

I will argue that the underlying problem is the cognitive dissonance for any Muslim living in the West between the principles of Islam, which he learns from his teachers and even his parents, and the de-facto behavior of his role models. Once the individual Muslim opts for the Islamic worldview at all, he is forced to realize that his teachers and parents in the West are living in a duality, which equates to hypocrisy. Radicalization is not so much a response to the individual’s own sense of grievance but to the inconsistency between two world views in which he lives which are totally and diametrically opposed. The key drivers to radicalization in Muslim societies are therefore **collective** as opposed to individual⁴– not an individual rebellious response to dissatisfaction in society by rejection of any authority, but rather a replacement of the “compromising” authority of parents, teachers and Imams with alternative– militant, uncompromising, and seemingly pristinely Islamic authority. In this sense, the Muslim radical is, in fact, a conformist. The toolbox for countering Islamic radicalism, must therefore take this into account.

How “Radical” is “Radical Islam”

One of the key fallacies in equating the process of radicalization of Muslims with “radicalization” phenomena of non-Muslims is to ignore the degree of overlap of the radical worldview with that of mainstream Islam. The popular distinction between “radical Islam” and “moderate” or “mainstream” implies that the former constitutes a sort of heterodox sect and that there exists a clear border or firewall between the two: superiority in numbers and orthodox legitimacy of the latter. These

² Joseph Lieberman, Chairman Susan Collins, Ranking Minority Member, *Violent Islamist extremism, the internet, and the homegrown terrorist threat*, United States Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, Majority & Minority Staff Report, May 8, 2008 online at: http://hsgac.senate.gov/public/_files/IslamistReport.pdf

³ McCauley, Clark and Moskalenko, Sophia (2010). Individual and Group Mechanisms of Radicalization. *Current Multi-Disciplinary Perspectives on Root Causes, the Role of Ideology, and Programs for Counter Radicalisation and Disengagement*, 82 – 91, p. 88.

⁴ Clark McCauley presents a “psychology of terrorism” which emphasizes the small group as projecting values that override those of the larger society in order to motivate the individual to self-sacrifice. This paradigm, however, does not fit cases in which the broader society expresses adulation towards the acts of the terrorist. Even the constant 20-30 percent of Muslims in the Middle East and Pakistan who express support for terrorism in public opinion polls is enough to provide this sense of a larger support group. See: Clark R. McCauley, *The Psychology of Terrorism*, Social Science Research Center, <http://essays.ssrc.org/sept11/essays/mccauley.htm> (viewed 8 January 2012)

assumptions though do not reflect the complex relationship between conservative Islam and its purist Salafi offshoots, and between the latter and the Jihadi ideology. Since there is no doctrinal “firewall” between the mainstream and the radical and the underlying principles and doctrines that guide the latter are not viewed by the former as contradictory to Islam, it is more precise to view “radical” on a spectrum – most of which remains within the borders of acceptable orthodoxy.

Consequently, the relationship between the main body of Muslims and the various radical trends suffers from asymmetry in favor of the latter. Radicals can evoke common religious narratives and beliefs and to present logic that mainstream orthodox Muslims find difficult to refute, while the “mainstream” often suffers from a sense of inferiority towards their zealous co-religionists.

Small maverick terrorist organizations of the 1970’s and 1980’s (Brigatti Rossi, Weathermen, Bader Meinhoff, Japanese Red Army, Aum Shinrikyo etc.) acted outside society and did not expect society to understand their avant-garde mission. In contrast, most of the *jihad* movements (with the exception of some *takfiri* movements) see themselves as acting within the fold of Muslim society. The differentiator between the drivers of terrorism of small maverick organizations and those of a Jihadi movement within a Muslim society is to be found in the perception of the terrorist of social and religious legitimacy of his actions.

Consequently, the radicalized individual in Muslim society enjoys a sense of “belonging” that radicalized individuals in other societies lack. The “support group” of a criminal is restricted and most of the people he interacts with outside his “gang” do not approve of his behavior (though they may be circumspect enough not to let him know that). He knows that external approval he receives is because they fear him and not because they love him. Terrorists who belong to a subset of an ideological map to which the broader society subscribes have the sense that they are a vanguard of their society and that deep down (or even on the surface) they are admired. This can be exemplified by comparing two terrorist cases: Timothy McVeigh and Nidal Hassan. The former did not care if there was even one American who agreed with him and did not see himself as representing a broadly accepted worldview. He knew he was a loner and was acting on his conscience - be the consequences whatever they may be. The latter felt that he will be idolized by millions of Muslims all over the world, his picture will be on posters as a martyr and he will be the namesake of thousands of Muslim babies. Denying McVeigh of a support group would not have mattered. Denying Nidal Hassan of that feeling may have affected his motivation. Therefore, any counter-radicalization strategy must target not only the hard core of the terrorist organizations and the population which is already radicalized but also the mainstream population which is – by virtue of orthodox Islamic doctrines – easy prey to radical recruitment.

Like any wide spread ideological movement, the various radical Islamic trends can be viewed as a series of concentric circles, with the small “**hard core**” of activists at the center, surrounded by **active supporters** (and financiers), **potential allies** drawn from a milieu of ideological movements with similar agendas; and finally a mass passive but **sympathetic population**. The relative “width” of each band differs from one organization to another; the greater the legitimacy of the “hard core” in society, the “wider” the inner band is. In other cases, the outer circle is the “widest”. Examples of the former are Palestinian Hamas and Lebanese Hezbollah – both of which operate in a supportive political milieu, which provides social and economic benefits for members of the “inner core”. Al-Qa’ida is the epitome of the latter, whereas the Muslim Brotherhood is located between these two extremes. The mutual influence of the inner and outer circles on the behavior of the organization is accordingly; the larger the inner core is, the greater its success in imposing its will on the public.

The Role of Religious Authority

Similar to the claim that juvenile delinquency is the result of the failure of the educational system; Islamist radicalization can be attributed, to a great extent, to a vacuum of modern secular or moderate religious leadership caused by a **crisis of religious and political legitimacy and authority**. The fragmentation of leadership within the Muslim world is the result of a loss of the source of legitimacy: nationalism has gone bankrupt, while liberalism was repressed by authoritarian regimes and could not blossom in the absence of a strong middle class. The rise of modern secular “revolutionary” regimes broke the traditional bond between the temporal ruler (Imam or Caliph) and the *‘ulama*. The clerics no longer shared power with the rulers, but were called upon to support them, nevertheless. This resulted in a steady decline of the Sunni orthodox religious establishments and a rise in the role of extra-establishment clerics.

The loss of legitimacy of the regimes and of their Islamic establishments along with the growing exposure of the public to issues which were once perceived as “high politics” (and hence not the concern of the average Muslim) created both a greater “demand” for such religious-political guidance, and a “shortage” of such guidance. In the absence of legitimate political leaders who could outline the political interest, this “demand” began to be filled by the non-establishment *‘ulama*. This trend has resulted in the emergence of a “supermarket” of “scholars” who issue religious rulings and legitimize various ideologies. The age of information has also opened up a new venue for the Muslim to acquire religious instruction - including instruction regarding the duties of *jihad* - without having to come in direct contact with the Sheikh he or she is consulting with. Islamic establishments and regimes of the Middle East did not show any inclination to join a global (that is, “infidel”) war against radical Islamic ideology and focused on putting down local political violence alone. Thus, they traded tolerance of *jihad* for local calm, and lost ground to radicals in their societies. Ultimately, these were the seeds that resulted in the landslide support for the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafis in Egypt, for the Nahda in Tunisia and for an Islamist oriented regime in Libya.

A relatively large portion of radical activists is “organizationally mobile”, absorbing new ideological components (often from the internet without even coming in contact with the “leaderships” who are spreading those ideas) and forming new local organizations. This tendency is compounded by the “Lone Ranger Syndrome”; the individual or small group which has absorbed the ideology and acts on it without any specific instructions. Therefore, future processes will also be determined, to a great extent, by leadership of radicals and moderates alike. This leadership is ostensibly a religious one, however, it increasingly does not derive its authority from the depth of its Islamic knowledge, but from its charisma; an authoritative and populist leader has considerable influence, for good and bad. The prime example of this type of leadership is Bin Laden himself whom Muslims from various backgrounds accept as a leader and as a political and ideological symbol. He did not engage in a pure Islamic discourse, but rather in an Arab-political one, using Islamic legal methods. His leadership was ostensibly a religious one, however, it did not derive its authority necessarily from the depth of its Islamic knowledge or his status as a religious scholar (*‘alim*), but from its charisma as a commander (*amir*), who struggles for the triumph of Islam and for conquests that will return the Muslims to their previous glory.

Socio-economic Factors

A major social factor in the spread of Islamic radicalism is the **breakdown of traditional sources of social authority** in societies with a relatively young population. This is a source of both the power of attraction of radical ideologies for youth and the reaction of the Islamic establishment and conservative elements to what is perceived as the “Westernization” of the youth. The conflict between Islam and the West is, in essence, a clash of values. In public opinion polls in Muslim countries Western influences are popularly identified with vulgarity, immorality, blatant sexuality and indifference to religion.⁵ It is to this that the Egyptian Islamist thinker, Sayyid Qutb referred as “intellectual and spiritual colonialism”, warning the believers that the enemies of Islam may attempt to disguise the conflict as an economic, political or racial struggle.⁶ This sense of infiltration of western culture into the Islamic space has created an internal clash between traditions and modernism, creating tension between generations, especially between in the context of the status of women. The accessibility of the message of western society poses a threat to the predominance of the traditionally dominant members of the family unit. This threat triggered a natural defense mechanism and a desire to reject the “corrupting” Western values. The West therefore, may be likened to the Sirens of the Odyssey – a dangerous “magnet”, which once succumbed to, will jeopardize core values of Islamic society – foremost among them, family values, the status of women and the authority of the elders.

Poverty and lack of economic horizons are frequently cited as major social sources of Islamic radicalism. These are, no doubt, causes of the attraction of Muslim youth to radical Islamic ideology. This is a solution in which the believer needs only to commit himself to the struggle for God to provide victory in return. On the other hand, the spiritual, ideological, political and even military leaders of the radical Islamic movements tend to belong to the economic and social elites. Most of them belong to the middle class and the lower-middle class in most Arab and Muslim nation-states.) Nevertheless, they derive popular support from the “masses”. This suggests that while **economic transformation** may be a necessary condition for the fight against Islamic radicalization, it is not a sufficient condition to uproot it.

Yet one more societal characteristic of many Muslim societies, which contributes to the rise of radical movements, is the near absence of an effective secular and liberal “**civil society**” as a “middle echelon” between the citizen and the State, a provider of services and identification. In Muslim countries, the Islamic forces play that very role. The absence of this civil society is manifested in the poor performance of liberal secular forces in the Egyptian and Tunisian elections in 2011.

⁵ Gallup Poll, March 12, 2002: Poll of the Islamic World: Perceptions of Western Culture.

⁶ Reuven Paz, Islamists and Anti-Americanism, MERIA, vol. 7, no. 4 (December 2003).

Radicalization in Immigrant Muslim Societies

The relations between immigrant communities and their home countries also play a pivotal role in radicalization processes:

- a. Failure of Muslims in the “Diaspora” to **integrate/ assimilate/ develop a local identification** with their new homes creates an “identity-deficiency” that leaves the field open for the identification with an amorphous trans-national “virtual *Umma*” in lieu of the lost national identity of the countries of origin, on one hand, and that of the not-yet-accepted countries of residence on the other hand.
- b. Exposure to events in the home country (behavior of the regime towards the population) has a radicalizing effect on immigrants and weakens the development of a bond with particular local interests.
- c. Family relations – cases of Muslims in western countries being recruited by their relatives in the home countries during visits or facilitating immigration of radical relatives. The family based network of al-Qaeda is a case in point.
- d. In many immigrant communities the populace is connected to media from the home country more than to that of the host country.
- e. Settlement of large numbers of immigrants in neighborhoods or even cities in which they are the majority impedes assimilation and allows the community to continue to follow customs which are anathema to the host country (arranged marriages of minors, female circumcision etc.). The existence of such communities provides justification for demands for application of Shari'ah law in them.
- f. The absence of Islamic schools in the host countries which integrate the host country's culture and mores forces the communities to import Imams and school books from the home countries and in doing so they import radical tendencies.

Two main models of relations between Western majority cultures and Muslim immigrants can be described: (a) the British form of declared pluralism and the Dutch concept of “integration” while maintaining ethnic differences and; (b) the paradigm (epitomized in France) of forced integration through uniformity of appearances (the *hijab* controversy) and de-communalization of religion. Neither have established a balance between civil and ethnic identity or succeeded in mitigating the attraction of second generation Muslims in Europe to radical Islam.

Paradoxically, **globalization of ideas** in the Muslim world has not mitigated radicalism and may even have contributed to its rise. The second-generation immigrant, who lives in an immigrant community in the West, speaks the language of his former homeland and is exposed to broadcasts, preaching and literature, which bind him intimately to his home country and to the grievances of that Mother Country. Furthermore, news, ideas and ideologies across countries and cultures and thus enabling a “cause célèbre” in one area to radicalize Muslims in remote parts of the world. Finally, free traffic of ideas facilitates the creation of a “virtual *Umma*” – in lieu of the lost national identity of the countries of origin, on one hand, and that of the not-yet-accepted countries of residence on the other hand.

Social legitimacy of terrorism gives rise to the legitimization of criminal elements in society. *Jihad* is a “criminality laundry”: it allows people who are anti-social and violent to give vent to these tendencies with impunity and under the “cover” of a legitimate (*jihad*) cause. The chaos, which *jihad* generates becomes in itself fertile ground for recruitment of new *mujahidun*. This is apparent in the West Bank and Gaza and has been abundantly proven in the method of the *jihad* movement in Iraq for recruiting terrorists.

The Political Dimension

The close affinity between the religious and political in Islam makes an attempt to isolate political causes of Islamic radicalism difficult. However, it is possible to characterize the political strategy of the radical groups. Eschatological tendencies notwithstanding, the “mainstream” of radical Islam, as embodied in al-Qa’ida and its affiliates, believes that it has a practical agenda which will achieve its political aims. The political analyses of *jihad* movements prove that within the general religious and eschatological framework, the *jihad* movements manifest a high level of strategic practicality.

The Islamist political grievance towards the West is both a historic and current complaint; the West is taken to task, for what it did in the past, for what it is doing, and for what it is. The historic grievance relates to the history of the political relations between the two civilizations, beginning with the Muslim victory over Byzantium, followed by the Crusades, and culminating with colonialism, patronizing mandates, economic exploitation and the existence of Israel. This sense of historic grievance is compounded by contemporary events such as Afghanistan and Iraq. However, neither the historic nor the current grievances are unique to the Muslim world; Asian civilizations (Hindu, Japanese and Chinese) have histories of local supremacy no less than Islam and have been culturally “colonized” by the West. These grievances have not led to a wide-spread phenomenon of animosity and terrorism against the West.

The role of politics in the etiology of radical Islam notwithstanding, it plays a central role in the strategies of radical organizations. On one hand, on the ideological level, it is difficult to prioritize *jihad* or to value one theatre of *jihad* or the struggle against a specific enemy higher than another. In their videotaped statements, Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri lash out equally at all: Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, the Egyptian and Pakistani regimes, the Palestinian Authority etc. Ideologically, there seems to be no territorial epicenter for their worldview (such as Iraq or Palestine). All are equal “symptoms” of a larger syndrome which is the “crusader” attack on *Dar al-Islam* and the collaboration of Muslim leaders with the Crusaders.

While the Israeli-Arab conflict is a popular battle cry for galvanizing radical Islamic groups, it seems that this issue was a marginal cause in the emergence of Islamic movements and was treated by them as just another symptom of Western domination. One salient question is the role of the Arab-Israeli or Israeli-Palestinian conflict in shaping Muslim opinion on the Western world. It seems that this issue was marginal in the local Islamic movements and was treated as just another symptom of Western domination. In Muslim public opinion, the West is accused of support of Israel against the Palestinians to the same extent that it is accused of “unfairness” towards the Muslims in general.⁷ In other words, the Palestinian issue is seen as a symptom of the Western conspiracy against the Muslims and not a leading cause.

⁷ Gallup Poll April 2, 2002, Islamic Views of the US: The Palestine Factor.

The Efficacy of Counter-Radicalization Efforts

Counter-radicalization efforts have been based on a number of approaches:

- a. **Moral arguments** - Efforts to denounce extremism on the basis that it contradicts universal principles such as freedom of religion, sanctity of civilian lives, etc.).
- b. **Community outreach** – examples of these are the UK “PREVENT” program.
- c. **Islamic de-radicalization programs** for “de-programing” of individual radicals. These programs are implemented with varied success in countries such as Yemen and Saudi Arabia.
- d. **Cultivation of liberal-reformist Muslim clerics and Sufi Islam** as a moderate counter-weight to radical Islam. This campaign is supported mainly by non-Muslims. The Sufi community by definition keeps its distance from political issues.
- e. **Importing of moderate Islamic mores** into the Arab-Muslim communities Islamic models from the moderate periphery – particularly Indonesia
- f. **Fighting fire with fire** – attempts to cultivate the non-violent but fundamentalist religious authorities (such as Yousuf Al-Qaradawi and the Muslim Brotherhood) as a counter-balance to the Jihadi-Salafi movements

Moral Arguments

The moral argument against radical Islamic ideology is usually based on western morality. The message is based on the assumption that there are universal values, which all religions inherently subscribe to (“the Golden Rule, inviolableness of innocents – particularly women, children and the elderly) and hence the counter message to Islamic radicalization must come from those principles.

This assumption however is simplistic and ineffective. Islam – unlike Judeo-Christian traditions rejects that the human being has an innate capacity to discern between good and evil. According to traditional Islamic belief, since God did not give the individual that capacity, He does not judge him for his actions but only for his "intentions" to serve God and do His will. Hence, Islamic culture relies heavily on obedience to authority for moral guidance based on exegesis from canonic sources or precedents.

The radicalized Muslim, therefore, is not a radical in the sense that he rebels against traditional authority and builds his own set of guiding principles; he is replacing the authority of his parents and Imams, which he views as hypocritical and appeasing of the “infidels” with a purist and non-compromising authority. The fact that this authority is frequently “virtual” and the radicalized individual cannot get close enough to him to see his own defects strengthens his commitment to it.

“Countering Violent Extremism”

Programs in the West (particularly in the UK and the Netherlands) for community outreach for “countering violent extremism” have also failed dismally. The British “preventing violent extremism” (“Prevent”) strategy failed. It was based on recruiting and funding community activities. However, since the leaders of the communities are the less assimilated, they much of the Prevent funding found its way to funding radicalization and not for de- or counter-radicalization. A critique of the UK Prevent strategy performed by Policy Exchange details the way that “PVE is thus underwriting the very Islamist ideology which spawns an illiberal, intolerant and anti-western world view. Political and theological extremists, acting with the authority conferred by official recognition, are indoctrinating young people with an ideology of hostility to west- ern values. This strategic error on the part of officialdom is born

of a poverty of aspiration: the belief of the authorities that they cannot reasonably ask angry Muslims for much more than a pledge not to use violence in Britain. The effect has been to empower reactionaries within Muslim communities and to marginalise genuine moderates, thus increasing inter-community tensions and envenoming the public space.”⁸

A major defect in these programs is embedded in the name itself: the programs are directed against “violent extremism”, ignoring for reasons of political correctness (commitment to liberal freedoms of speech and religion) the fact that

Islamic de-radicalization programs

De-radicalization programs have been developed in a number of Muslim countries – notably Saudi Arabia and Yemen. These programs have been lauded as unique attempts to wean radicals away from extremism by tackling the religious motivation (in the eyes of the “de-programmers” – the fallacies) that drive them. However the high level of announced recidivism (about 20% in the Saudi program) raises questions regarding the efficacy of the program and warrants a deeper look at its content.

The weakness of the “de-radicalization” campaigns in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States is that it is not the very legitimacy of waging *jihad*, which mainstream scholars oppose, but the application of the principle of *jihad* to present circumstances and the specific means used for fighting *jihad* in the cases under discussion. Hence, attacks inside Muslim countries are deemed illegal forms of Jihad as they cause “fitna”; attacks on non-Muslims in Muslim lands are illegitimate as they contradict the principle of “safe passage” according to the Koran. These counter-arguments suffer from two drawbacks: they do not attempt to undermine the core justification for radicalization, but rather to present either a legalistic case for refraining from violence in a given environment (which does not preclude the same people encouraging violence elsewhere); and they seem specious and unconvincing in contrast to the unambiguous message of the radicals. It is not surprising therefore, that in this debate the radicals frequently have the upper hand.

Cultivation of Liberal and Sufi Islam

Since 9/11 there have been efforts to promote liberal or Sufi Islam as a counter-balance to the radical narrative by proposing the message that restricts *jihad* to a spiritual struggle or Jihad by *da’awah*. These efforts have also met with limited success, as these streams remain out of the mainstream of Islamic orthodoxy and certainly hard line Wahhabi and Salafi schools – that are the breeding ground of radicalization and of the Jihadi movement. Therefore, a moderate spiritualist Sufi message will not easily woo a person who is in the process of accepting the radical message.

Alongside the vociferous voices of the radicals there exists a relatively small number of Islamic scholars who call for reform of one sort or another in Islam and updating Islam or reconciling it with the West. These scholars include: “Westernized” Muslim clerics who live in the West and have accepted various Western values – foremost among them democracy and human liberties; some portions of the “Wasatiyya” movement in Saudi Arabia; regime-oriented scholars in Jordan and Syria who promote, in the name of their regimes a moderate and non-confrontational version of Islam as a direct response to the radical narrative which threatens those regimes; indigenous liberal Islam such as in Indonesia and India; and Sufi leaders in the West and in the former Soviet Union (primarily in the Caucasus). The main issues on the agenda of these different trends are – in differing levels of emphasis – how to provide Islamic legitimacy to values such as democracy, equality between Muslims and non-Muslims in an Islamic society, women's rights, and to a state of permanent peace between

⁸ Shiraz Maher and Martyn Frampton, *Choosing our friends wisely - Criteria for engagement with Muslim groups*, Policy Exchange, London, 2009, p. 5.

Islam and the West. The "tool box" of most of these trends remains that of traditional Islam. In defense of their interpretation, the more conservative of these scholars invoke existing sources of Islamic *fiqh* such as *hujja* (demanding proof), *ra'i* (opinion), *ijtihad*, *maqsid* (the "intention" behind the Qur'anic injunctions), *maslaha* (public interest) and *jadal* (debate). The bolder and more "reform-oriented" scholars call for a revisionist view of Islamic history in order to uproot the radical narrative which feeds off the violent elements of that history and revival of schools such as the Mu'tazila and the Irja' which provided tools for a more moderate interpretation.

These trends however remain a minority – in many cases such as in Saudi Arabia and Egypt – they are even persecuted for their positions by the Islamic establishment. Therefore, the likelihood of an Islamic *Kulturkampf* over the relations with the non-Muslim world seems low. The strength of the Islamist camp is more frequently a result of the personal charisma of the religious leader than of the strength of his argument. Religious debate between moderates and radicals should not be expected to produce meaningful results. No moderate Islamic scholar has emerged in the Arab world who can lay claim to trans-national Islamic repute. Moderate scholars living in the West will not become real sources of authority for all Muslims, as Muslims in the Middle East tend to see them as compromised by the pressures of the non-Muslim governments in the countries in which they live. Initiatives for severe condemnation in Islamic terms of al-Qa'ida may occur, but these will come from "Westernized" Muslims and not from eminent religious scholars. The chances that respected Islamic institutions will declare judgments of *takfir* (declaring a Muslim a heretic) against the radicals are slim.

Religious scholars who reflect moderate views regarding the integration of Muslims in the West (*fiqh al-aqalliyyat* – minorities' religious law trend) include some scholars who take a radical position in the matter of *jihad* (e.g. Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi). These radical views are a kind of compensation for taking the more moderate views in the day-to-day issues. It is likely that this situation will not change, and that the sheikhs of the *fiqh al-aqalliyyat* group will not automatically become allies for the fight against the radical concept of *jihad*.

The prospects of liberal democracy and liberal civil society taking root and developing into a real antagonist of the radical Islamic narrative differ from one country to another. In general, secular civil society is not expected to take a leading role in the Muslim world in the near future, at least not in its Arab part. In the Muslim world, radical Islamic movements take some of the tasks of civil society, although they do not conform to the Western definition of such a society. The liberal civil society in the Muslim world is in constant retreat, a trend that is not expected to change. The role of the secular civil society will be greater in Muslim Asia than anywhere in the Middle East. However, within the Middle East the Syrian-Lebanese theatre may have the potential for both a renewed civil society and a mellowed (and chastised) Islamic movement. The Sufi roots of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and its experiences from the 1980's may bring it to moderate its positions.

Import of ideas from the periphery

Probably the paradigm of moderate Islam in South-East Asia is Indonesia. The Indonesian case seems to disprove the argument that a critical mass of social troubles in a Muslim country will automatically bring about popular support for the radical Islamic solution. Almost all the commonly cited conditions for the flourishing of radical Islamic fundamentalism do exist in the Indonesian context: cultural bewilderment in a changing world; a feeling of distress in increasing alienating urban centers; economic hardships; the annoyance of the luxurious life of the elites; the wide spread phenomenon of corruption; the intensification of inter-ethnic and inter-sectarian tension and conflicts; political ambiguity following the current transitional period of building a new democratic polity out of an authoritarian one.

Nevertheless, radical Islam has failed to capture the imagination of the majority of Indonesian Muslims. It is the moderate and tolerant type of religious belief that largely dominates the Muslim

mainstream in Indonesia and has played a significant role in building a civil society and democratic polity in Indonesia and in raising its voice against radical fundamentalism with a clarity and volume quite unlike any parallel in the Arab world. Historically, Muslim intellectuals from other parts of the Islamic world have preceded Indonesian intellectuals in formulation of liberal Islamic themes and perceptions. But whereas in other Muslim communities in the world liberal Islamic thinking has been primarily the occupation of a small number of intellectuals, in Indonesia the voice of liberal Islam has proved itself to be influential and has inspired the entire Islamic discourse in Indonesia. This can be attributed to a number of unique characteristics of Indonesian Muslim society: the majority of about two thirds of Indonesian Muslims who are defined as “*abangan*” or “*syncretists*”, whose traditions are contradictory to those of conservative Arab Islam; a pre-independence tradition of intellectual and organizational pluralism in which neither the courts nor the *‘ulama* exercised a monopoly of power over the moral and intellectual life of the Muslim community; the long era of commitment to the ideology of the Pancasila, which limits the role of Islam to a source for general guidelines for human life and enfranchises non-Muslims as members of a single *Umma* (in a sense of political community) and thus guaranteeing their rights; the acceptance of the concept of *ijtihad* and strong Sufi influences.

These characteristics of Indonesian Islam have generated much speculation regarding the possibility of “grafting” Indonesian Islamic concepts onto Islam in the Middle East and the West, as a means to counter radicalization. However, these efforts have invariably failed. This seems to be due to a variety of reasons:

- a. The natural tendency of the periphery (not only among Muslims) to acknowledge the superiority of the center.
- b. The erosion of knowledge of the religious culture and the Arabic language (in some communities, such as Pakistanis, Indonesians and even North Africans, the language of religion – literary Arabic – is not the “mother tongue”). The “religious illiteracy” among the immigrants raises the status of new immigrants and imported teachers who have a native knowledge of the language. This is also one of the causes for acceptance of Saudi Arabian and Egyptian Imams in communities that are not based on those nationalities. These two countries are widely viewed as being close to the religious sources and hence graduates of their schools are accepted.
- c. The breakdown of social structures in the process of immigration to new countries creates new “composite” communities based on populations from different parts of the home country. In these new communities, the traditional authorities, which existed in each of the original communities, do not have the same hold on the new “composite” community.

Another example of localized Islamic doctrines for co-existence with non-Muslims is India. This case is of particular interest in the light of the fact that Hindus are – by any Islamic criterion – “polytheists” and therefore according to purist attitudes a totally unacceptable category of “infidels” and India has been engaged in hostilities with neighboring Muslim Pakistan and fighting an Islamic oriented uprising in Kashmir for decades. It is therefore interesting that as far back as the founding of India and Pakistan, the main organization of the Indian *‘ulama* – Jam’iyyat-i ‘Ulama-i Hind – supported the Indian National Congress and opposed the Muslim League’s call for Muslim separatism. The concept that was coined at the time – “united nationality” (*muttahida qawmiyyat*) clearly distinguished between the “spiritual *Umma*” of Islam to which all Muslims belong and the racial or territorial Nation in which the Muslims of India are partners with the Hindus. The Islamic justification for this concept was based on the Prophet’s early experience in al-Madina when the “Covenant of al-Madina” (*Ahd al-Umma*) established that all parties to the Covenant are “one nation”. After partition, this ideology was developed to justify opposition to migration to Pakistan on the basis of the Prophet’s life in Mecca before the *hijra*, when faced by the sight of pagan idols, he declared “To you your religion and to me mine (Qur’an 109:6). The conflict between India and Pakistan after partition also forced the leaders of

India's Muslims to clarify their view of Pakistan as a foreign country and to re-write the history of Muslim history in India in a manner which emphasizes the national identity of the Muslims.

Observers of Indian Islam have pointed at various origins for the relative moderation of this large Muslim community. These explanations point at the co-existence between Hinduism and Islam from the early days of Islamic presence in India; the moderate Shafi'i school dominant in India; the intellectual independence of the Indian Muslims, which made them less dependent on religious and intellectual imports from the Arab world; the ratio between the Muslim and Hindi populations, which deters the Muslims from an antagonistic attitude.

Conclusions

Counter-radicalization efforts have been severely handicapped by political correctness and an ideologically motivated search for a "Theory Of Everything" that could serve as an explanation of terrorism in general, without reference to the religious and cultural breeding ground from whence it stems. This approach, I believe is fruitless. A practical approach to countering Islamic terrorism (or terrorism by Muslims performed by them in the name of Islam) must accept that the real motivation is Islam, as those terrorists perceive it. It must also accept that the problem is not "violent extremism" but any ideological worldview that justifies violence against innocents in society – whether the ideology is in a stage of latency or breakout.

One school of thought views "moderate Islamist" fundamentalist movements as authentic representatives of democratic tendencies in their countries and proposes to allow them – or even to aid them – to gain power and to accept that an Islamic paradigm of government can be compatible with western paradigms of democracy. According to this point of view, these Islamist regimes, being "status quo" regimes, would reject radicalism. This belief is a chimera; in the West, democracy and liberalism flourished only after politics was liberated from religion. The process of a "revolutionary" movement becoming sedentary and disengaging itself from its "radical" offshoots is usually slow and gradual – if at all. Furthermore, the rise to power of Islamist movements, on its own encourages the radical branches of the movement.

Countering Islamic radicalism cannot be done either by turning a blind eye to its religious origins or by relying solely on political, economic or military means. The need to make use of religious tools though seems both foreign to Western strategic thought and futile. The "religious" arsenal available to the West is limited. The attempts to deny the historic validity of militant Islamic traditions by reformist re-interpretation of Islam and revisionist reading of Islamic history will never gain sufficient credence in the Muslim world to undermine the traditional reading of Islam. Recommendations for religious action should address ways to emphasize existing orthodox doctrines, which contradict the radical narrative rather than attempt to invent reformist doctrines.

The real war against Islamic radicalism can only be fought within the Muslim house itself and by Muslims. However, the Muslim world – particularly the Arab part of it – suffers from a chronic deficiency of moderate religious and secular leadership. The radicals fill this vacuum with the mainstream religious establishments competing with the radicals by radicalizing their own views. This calls for developing a policy for the crisis of authority. Such a policy can be based on providing incentives and disincentives to strengthen clear-cut moderate positions by existing authorities and encouraging the growth of new authorities with economic, political and religious clout.

However, the need to stem the tide of radicalism within Muslim society cannot wait for reform and should rely on the dormant "tool box" of mainstream orthodox Islam. While reform is a commendable

long-term goal, it appears for the time being, to be a chimera. The very demand for reform is widely perceived in the Muslim world as another form of Western intervention within Islam, now assailing the religion of Islam directly instead of merely corrupting the Muslim society and family. Furthermore, religions are naturally conservative and slow to change, and when they do it is the result of either traumatic historic events or personalities of great authoritative religious leaders. Otherwise, change is usually due to incremental developments, subject to reactionary backlashes.

What is called for at the present stage therefore is not reform, but an unambiguous disengagement on the part of the mainstream of Islam from any justification of terrorism according to the accepted Western definition, and a willingness to clearly demarcate the borders and to set up a firewall between the mainstream and the radicals. What is needed, therefore, is to make use of the dormant “tool box” of mainstream orthodox Islam in order to strike a new balance between the mainstream and the radicals. This “tool box” contains means for de-legitimization of acts of terrorism; it includes *takfir* (heretication) and incrimination of the terrorists in offenses of *hiraba* (destruction) and *fasad* (corruption). By doing so, the legitimacy of support of the terrorist movements would be damaged and the intimate link between the orthodox and the radicals would be severed. For every *fatwa* that promises paradise to those who engage in *jihad*, an authoritative counter-*fatwa* is needed that threatens hellfire for those acts.

Diagnosis of individuals plays an important role in de-radicalization and counter-radicalization efforts of Islamist radicals. Such a diagnosis must not only focus on the worldview that guides the individual and not merely on his willingness to act on them. All the sufficient ideological conditions for crossing the line into actual violence; terrorism is too poorly defined may exist, waiting for the necessary condition of circumstance, opportunity or psychological situation. One approach to this analysis may be the degree of ideological (religious, political, etc) “radicalization” of an individual should be assessed on the basis of his adherence to the elements of ideological rationalization for acts of terrorism, independently of his being already prepared to perform an act of terrorism. Such an individual may be part of a supportive network, which provides the actual terrorists with a sense of social and religious approbation, and when the situation arises, may quickly be recruited for action.

Since authority plays such a pivotal role in radicalization, it is imperative to deal with radical clerics with ties in the West (such as Anwar al-Awlaki who was one of the most effective but not the only one). It must be a clear “line in the sand” between legitimate religious beliefs and those that will not be countenanced, notwithstanding their roots in religious doctrines. This implies legal steps against clerics who declare even conditional or post factum support of acts of terrorism, sanctions on the international level against *jihad*-oriented clerics and barring those which call for violence – however obliquely – from any academic or ecumenical debate or rapprochement and redefining the principle of personal criminal culpability to cover religious leaders for the acts of their flock as a result of their spiritual influence.

Another area worth exploring is the cultivation of research and promulgation of the tools within orthodox Islam, which may be used to mitigate radicalism through interpretations compatible with contemporary circumstances without resorting to reform. These include, inter alia: the methodology of localization of fiqh embodied in the “law of the minorities” school; traditional methods for voiding a text of its general implications by way of the principle that later verses in the Qur’an occasionally “abrogate” earlier ones (*naskh*), or by linking of a specific verse to a “specific” (historic) event (*takhsis*); revival of *ijtihad*, rationalist neo-Mu’tazili doctrines and a focus on *da’wa* and *jadal* as the means for confronting the “infidels” and the “apostates”, interpretation of the Qur’an according to the “reasons for revelation” (*asbab al-nuzul*); interpreting *jihad* as exclusively an act of state.

Governments such as Saudi Arabia and Pakistan are key “exporters” of radicalism and have, to date, not been held accountable for the behavior of religious institutions which are financed by the state and of clerics who are appointed by the state and on its payroll. The declarations of these institutions should be considered as official no less than declarations of other organs of state. Regimes in Muslim

countries have proved that, when it served their own self-interests, they had the means to impose their will on their religious establishments. Only when governments are faced by real damage that is incurred by these institutions, will they be forced to risk confrontation with them and to give up the benefits of a “pressure valve” that the radical declarations of these institutions provide.