National Security Criminal Investigations

Radicalization
A Guide for the Perplexed
June 2009

Royal Canadian   Gendarmerie royale
Mounted Police   du Canada

Canada

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What is Radicalization?

Radicalization is a critical subset of the terrorist threat. The RCMP defines radicalization as the process by which individuals — usually young people — are introduced to an overtly ideological message and belief system that encourages movement from moderate, mainstream beliefs towards extreme views. While radical thinking is by no means problematic in itself, it becomes a threat to national security when Canadian citizens or residents espouse or engage in violence or direct action as a means of promoting political, ideological or religious extremism. Sometimes referred to as "homegrown terrorism," this process of radicalization is more correctly referred to as domestic radicalization leading to terrorist violence.

The nuances of this definition are critical. The English word "radical" comes from the Latin *radis*, or "root." Its connotation (as in the word "radish") is of being buried in the ground, rooted, fundamental. So a radical is a person who wishes to effect fundamental political, economic or social change, or change from the ground up.

Is Radicalization Bad?

As stated in the RCMP definition, radical thinking is not necessarily problematic. Most progress has been an outcome of some form of radicalization and the mindset that accompanies it. Martin Luther King was considered a radical, as were a host of other people that we now view as important and entirely legitimate historical figures, from Moses, Mohammed and Jesus to Gandhi, Nelson Mandela and Gloria Steinem. In some cases, even violent radicals have later been deemed to be acting in the name of causes that were just. John Brown, the 19th century American abolitionist is an example of such an individual.

All of us have views and opinions that others would define as radical, if not extreme. Radical thought and action does not necessarily translate into terrorism. In fact, radicals can play a highly positive role, both in their communities and in the larger political context (although admittedly this role is often only acknowledged after the fact). Again, radical views only become a problem when they are used to promote or condone violence or other forms of extremist behavior, including terrorism.

Radicalization: A Muslim Thing?

In a contemporary context, radicalization is most often discussed with reference to young Muslims who are influenced, to one degree or another, by Islamist thought. Islamism (the practical application of Islamist thought), a term that is NOT a synonym for Islam, is a set of ideologies that holds that Islam is not simply a religion, but also a political system. This system is exemplified by the various Caliphates — political dynasties that combined political with religious hegemony — that ruled the medieval Islamic world. The basic tenets of Islamist thought hold that modern Islam must return to its historic and theological roots, that this "proto-Islam" must become a political unifying factor for Muslims the world over, and that a truly Islamic society must be governed by law derived from traditional Islamic sources.

There are many different proponents of Islamism, and many different schools of Islamist thought. Many of these, like the Muslim Brotherhood, are not terrorists, nor do they necessarily advocate violence (although Hamas, among others, has its ideological roots in the teachings of the Muslim Brotherhood and some senior al Qaeda associates are linked to it). By far the best known and most problematic Islamist group, however, is al Qaeda and all of the groups and individuals that are associated with it. Moreover, most recent radicalization leading to terrorism in Canada, in the United States, in Europe and elsewhere has been driven by al Qaeda, its ideology, or by groups or individuals who are either associated with or influenced by al Qaeda.

Public awareness of radicalization in Canada has largely been determined by the events and personalities associated with the "Toronto 18" and Momin Khawaja cases. In this country, radicalization that is rooted in Islamist ideology is a relatively recent phenomenon, however. Radicalization has always been a part of socio-political reality, even in Canada. It has spanned not only the entire "left-right" political spectrum, from environmental and animal rights activists to neo-Nazis, but a range of ethnic and religious interests as well. From a Canadian perspective, the actions of the FLQ and the "Squamish Five," and the Air India bombing embody the kind of extremist "direct action" that can lie at the end of the radicalization process.

Radicalization can occur due to a multitude of factors and influences. There is no single group that seeks out vulnerable and impressionable young people. Nor is radicalization limited to any single ethnic or interest group. Historically, violent factions of various political ideologies have employed similar recruiting strategies and targeted similar demographics.

The life stories and experiences of a range of historical characters from many different cultures can be understood as manifestations of not only radicalization, but also the violence that can lie at the end of the radicalization continuum. These include Vladimir Lenin, whose single-minded pursuit of revolution was driven, in large measure, by the execution of his beloved older brother, a revolutionary, by Tsarist authorities; Ernesto "Che" Guevara whose radical, and ultimately violent extremist worldview originated in his experiences as a young doctor working in South American leper

colonies; and even Jesse James, whose rampage of banditry and terrorism across the American Midwest was a largely a continuation of the Civil War by other means.

Nevertheless, domestic radicalization associated with violent Islamist extremist ideology is a particular concern for law enforcement and security agencies. Virtually all of the planned or actual terrorist attacks in Western Europe and North America since 9/11 have been carried out by young Muslims. Whatever their national and cultural origins, most were either native-born citizens or long-term residents of the countries they were attacking and most had undergone an identifiable process of radicalization. These attacks include the Theo Van Gogh killing and the "Hofstad Plot" in the Netherlands; the Madrid bombings; the 7/7 bombings and their aftermath, Operation OVERT (the so-called "Heathrow Plot"), the 2007 firebombing of Glasgow Airport and failed terrorist attacks in Central London; and, of course, the "Toronto 18" and Khawaja cases in Canada.

FLQ Manifesto — October 1970

Radicalization in Canada

The extent of radicalization in contemporary Canada is difficult to determine, particularly with regard to radicalization associated with Islamist terrorism. Relatively few academic studies address the problem, although research currently being conducted in Canada by the UK-based DEMOS think tank may help to scope the problem. Law enforcement and security agencies — the most ready source of statistical data — only investigate individuals who are already radicalized to the extent that they are committing or are about to commit criminal offences. Therefore, law enforcement and security datasets may be inherently biased and not reflective of society at large.

Other data sources — both quantitative and qualitative — do shed limited light on the issue however. For example, in a 2006 ENVIRONICS poll of Muslim Canadians, 12% of respondents either somewhat or fully supported the goals of the alleged "Toronto 18" terrorist cell. While this does not necessarily signify that 12% (or 100,000) of the overall Canadian Muslim community has either been radicalized or is sympathetic with radical ideology, it is consistent with similar polls carried out in other Western nations. At the same time, it is important to remember that this poll was carried out in haste, without a meaningful control sample, and in a highly charged political and emotional environment.

CSIS, meanwhile, has stated publicly that it is monitoring "several hundred" national security-related subjects of interest (among whom are radicalized individuals). The UK Security Service (MI5) has noted publicly that it has identified about 2,000 such radicals.

From all of this, it is possible to hypothesize that the radicalization problem is bigger than current investigations show. So too, both the "Toronto 18" and Khawaja cases also serve as indicators that radicalization is very much a Canadian reality and that it has the potential to culminate in violence. The development of meaningful public policy aimed at addressing radicalization will require not only proper metrics, but also understanding and knowledge of at-risk communities and the pressures and dynamics at work within them.

Radicals into Terrorists: Who?

Academics and security experts have spent a great deal of time and energy trying to identify a radical typology and to determine what drives people — especially young people — down the road of radicalization towards terrorism.

Poverty and alienation are popular explanations, but they do not stand up to scrutiny. Domestically-radicalized terrorists do not necessarily exist at the margins of society. For example, all of the eight suspects in the botched June 2007 terrorist attacks in London and at Glasgow's international airport were professionals: physicians, medical research scientists and an engineer. All were residents of the United Kingdom. Moreover, the recent past has shown that many dangerous extremists spring from the ranks of the privileged middle and upper-middle classes. The Hamburg Cell that formed the hard core of the 9/11 conspiracy were all enrolled at German universities; Osama bin Laden has an engineering background; his deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri, is a paediatrician.

This is a historical trend as well: Ulrike Meinhoff, founder and chief ideologue of the German Red Army Faction was a highly educated journalist; George Habash, founder of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (and a Christian, not a Muslim) was a physician, as was Che Guevara. Vladimir Lenin, Leon Trotsky and the rest of the Bolshevik inner circle (with the exception of Josef Stalin) were all well-educated and well-traveled and were extremely sophisticated thinkers.

In the police and security community, we have a tendency to assume that deprivation and alienation are effective predictors of the kind of radicalization that can lead to extremist action. Consequently, we tend to focus attention and resources on the young and on the "underclass." Mature and well-educated individuals are likely to be receptive to much more sophisticated radical messaging than their younger counterparts, however.. More importantly, they have both the intellectual and emotional wherewithal to translate this into meaningful direct action and to take on leadership roles within terrorist cells.

Another popular explanation for the kind of radicalization that leads to terrorism is rooted in the failure of concepts like multiculturalism and integration. This explanation assumes that a group at particularly high risk of crossing the line into terrorist activities is the children of immigrants who find themselves both trapped and marginalized by the conflict between the traditional world of their parents and the often confusing and contradictory cultural messages of modern western society.

While there is some merit to this argument, it also describes a classic immigrant dilemma which rarely translates into terrorist activity. The assumption that domestically radicalized terrorists are somehow "different" is belied by the "Toronto 18" trial. The media repeatedly draw attention to the "ordinariness" of the defendants. This is borne out by the wiretap recordings being played in court, in which defendants communicate in a sort of "hoser-gangsta" patois, talk about how much they love Tim Horton's doughnuts, and exclaim over the wintertime beauty of rural Ontario.

There is a parallel here with the European experience, in which native-born individuals who become radicalized to the point of undertaking terrorist activity are often not superficially different from their peers. For example, in their "martyrdom statements" the North of England accents of the 7/7 bombers make them sound like the Beatles. Moreover, all of the 7/7 bombers had reasonably good educations and meaningful jobs and all regularly crossed ethnic and cultural boundaries in their daily lives. The Glasgow Airport bombers were successful professionals, apparently well-placed in British society. As above, if there is a common factor at play, it is the number of radicals and extremists who emerge from socio-economic classes that, superficially, are most invested in the status quo. If the American Revolution was led by some of the most prominent citizens of the Thirteen Colonies, it should not be surprising that young people who have benefited most from what Canada has to offer might take up radical causes.

"Ordinariness" is a key factor in the domestic radicalization phenomenon. It is what permits apparently integrated, apparently nondescript individuals to become radicalized to the point that they cross the terrorist line, and then to plan and carry out terrorist acts, unnoticed until it is too late. There is no reason that Canadian born terrorists would not like Tim Horton's doughnuts. It would be more surprising if they did not. This duality represents a serious challenge for law enforcement and security agencies that must address and — particularly — anticipate the problem of radicalization.

The other part of this problem is that the very ordinariness of Canadian-born terrorist suspects actually works against the law enforcement and security community when it sets out to educate the public about the problem of radicalization. The fact that young people like the "Toronto 18" defendants are so utterly rooted in Canadian youth culture and the minutiae of daily life in Canada seems to imply that they could not possibly be either aspiring or active terrorists. Taken to its logical extent, this perception can imply that the case itself is not a viable criminal prosecution but rather the organized persecution of a group of hapless teenaged "wannabes."
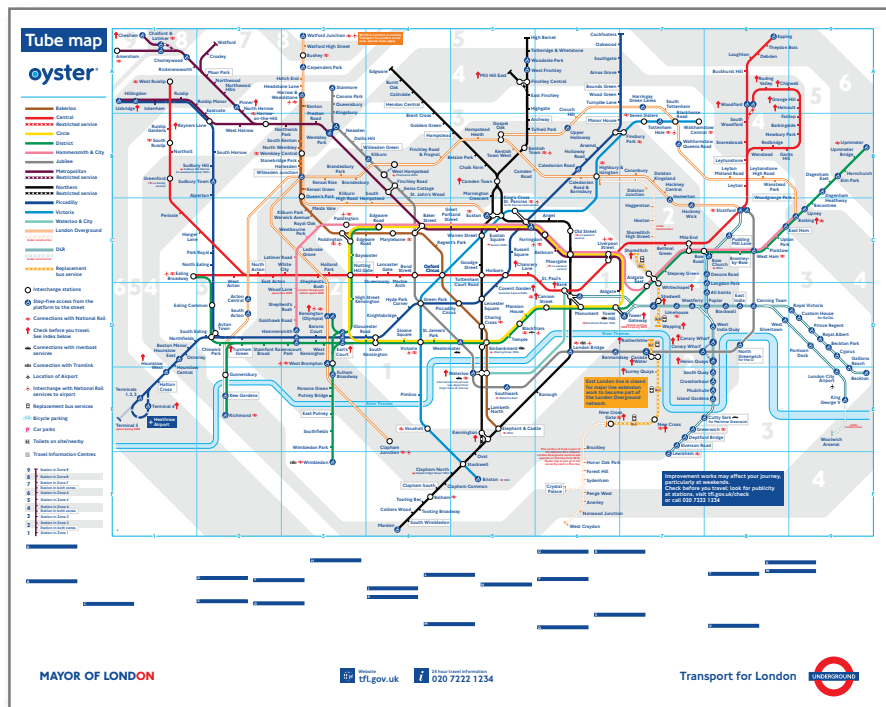
Radicals into Terrorists: Why?

While concepts like "alienation" are not completely irrelevant to the problem, they are not always useful in trying to anticipate or address the problem of radicalization. Ultimately, largely immeasurable social, political and religious motivations may trump mere citizenship. Radicalization remains a phenomenon that is difficult to predict, with little associated typology. Pre-radicalization indicators — if they exist, or are detectable — are often extraordinarily subtle, particularly to a cultural outsider like a police or intelligence officer.

Nevertheless, a look back at some domestic and global examples does identify what seem to be a few common factors, at least in the transformation of young Canadian Muslims into extremists. Family ties, for example, can be critical. Ahmed Said Khadr, father of Omar, inculcated all of his children with Islamist ideology and ensured that they received training in al Qaeda camps in Afghanistan. He also encouraged at least one of them to become a suicide bomber.

The role of family ties can be extended to include a whole range of social networks. Four of the eight accused in Operation Overt lived in the same East London neighbourhood, and the "Toronto 18" conspirators were connected through school and a number of neighbourhood networks. Similarities in background, age and outlook in social and peer group networks of this type often create a synergy that can accelerate the radicalization process, encouraging people to adopt attitudes or to take action as a group that they might not consider as individuals.

Spiritual leaders and mentors with extremist views can also wield a great deal of influence, particularly over young people. Aly Hindy, imam of the Salaheddin Islamic Centre in Toronto, has served as a focal point for Toronto area Islamic radicals, notably the Khadr family and members of the "Toronto 18" conspiracy. Similarly, some converts may find their way to a radical interpretation of Islam due to the influence of an extremist leader or mentor. At least one convert was involved in the "Toronto 18" case. Germaine Lindsay, a Jamaican born convert to Islam was one of the conspirators in the 7/7 bombings in London and Jason (Jamal) Walters, a Dutch-American convert, was a member of the Hofstad Group in the Netherlands.

Travel to "hot zones" is another important factor. A number of Canadian-born extremists have travelled and studied for extensive periods in Saudi Arabia where they have been exposed to Islamist ideology in mosques and theological institutions. Afghanistan and Pakistan are also critical, particularly when sojourns in terrorist training camps or participation in actual combat operations are involved. John Walker Lindh, better known as "the American Taliban" was a convert who had studied in radical madrassas (Islamic seminaries) in Yemen and in Pakistan before joining Taliban fighters in Afghanistan. Similarly, Momin Khawaja spent time in Pakistan while the Khadr brothers cycled through both training camps and Taliban combat operations.

Geopolitical factors — particularly the perceived suffering of the *Ummah* (global community of Muslims) at the hands of the West — are also critical drivers pushing individuals into extremist thought, if not action. The message that the world is fundamentally "at war" with Islam is key to the Islamist "single narrative" — or "one size fits all explanation" — that drives terrorism the world over. This narrative is reinforced by current events — such as the Israel / Palestine issue and the conflict in Afghanistan — which characterize the embattled Muslim communities as small but stalwart Davids beset by a lumbering and brutal Goliath. The romance of this unequal struggle may be especially appealing to young Muslims, who feel both justified and compelled to come to the aid of their brothers and sisters against the powerful forces arrayed against them.

Many ethnic, cultural and religious constituencies in Canada remain deeply concerned about "homeland" issues. Indeed, continued identification with communities and countries of origin remains a component of the Canadian approach to multiculturalism. The Islamist "single narrative" — propagated by Islamist ideologues of every stripe, from Osama Bin Laden to street corner preachers — is fundamentally different however. Not only does it lie at the heart of the Islamist extremist worldview, it also identifies Canada as part of the problem. Key threads in the narrative include Canada's engagement in Afghanistan, its close alliance with both the United States and the United Kingdom and its support of the State of Israel. And Osama Bin Laden and other Islamist ideologues have repeatedly identified Canada as one of the "Crusader nations" that is bent on attacking and destroying Islam.

When combined with purely personal or localized grievances, the "single narrative" provides individuals not only with a means of explaining the world but — just as importantly — with a sense of personal meaning and a cause for which to fight. This combination of worldview and self-justification appears to have driven the "Toronto 18" conspirators. It also was also the determining influence over Momin Khawaja who, after a wholly uneventful childhood and adolescence in suburban Ottawa, became convinced in his early 20s that the United States and its allies were responsible for the devastation of the Muslim world.

Media and RCMP vehicles outside the Ottawa Courthouse during the trial of Momin Khawaja

Sensitive Communities

There is a tendency in the media to portray conversion to Islam as a sort of "fast track" to terrorist action. However, Islam is one of the fastest growing faiths in the world. An estimated 25 per cent of American Muslims are converts and anywhere from 10,000 to 20,000 people convert to Islam each year in the United Kingdom. Most converts to Islam are simply that — average people who have found that Islam speaks to them as a faith.

Nevertheless, converts are a constant in Islamist terrorist plots. About half of the subjects involved in disrupted plots in the United States are converts. Internationally, a number of Islamic leaders have expressed concerns around the susceptibility of the convert community to radicalization, noting that the experience of conversion can create an emotional state that is easy for radicalization agents to manipulate. The life stories of individuals like Germaine Lindsay, Jamal Walters and John Walker Lindh (above) seem to bear this out. Conversion is not necessarily a precursor to extremism, but it cannot be ruled out as a contributing factor in the development of extremist thinking.

Similarly, mosques are often portrayed as hotbeds of ideological proselytizing. This is true in some cases: the Salaheddin Islamic Centre in Toronto and London's Finsbury Park Mosque (once colourfully referred to as "the suicide factory") are obvious examples. Most mosques are like churches and synagogues however, and run by the congregation and their representatives. Imams are dependent upon the goodwill of those congregations for their living. Therefore, even in theologically conservative mosques, extremists and those who otherwise diverge from a fairly narrow definition of what is acceptable tend to get weeded out or ignored.

The real problem may in fact be what is NOT going on or being discussed in the Mosques, particularly with regard to some of the existential and geopolitical issues related to Islam in the larger world. Without clearly delineated guidance around theologically or ideologically acceptable responses to these issues, curious or concerned young people frustrated by lack of answers in legitimate cultural and faith institutions may go looking for those answers elsewhere. It is at this point that they are at risk of being drawn into a "secret world" that is extraordinarily difficult for police and security officials to penetrate. It is in that secret world — increasingly facilitated by the Internet — that they meet the charismatics, the ideologues and the extremists, and where the single narrative becomes all-consuming.

New Challenges

1. The Internet

The American writer Gertrude Stein once observed of her hometown, Oakland, California, that "there is no there, there." This effectively describes not only the Internet, but many terrorist organizations as well. As "networks of networks" with no clearly identifiable center, terrorist groups and the Internet serve as metaphors for each other.

The Internet remains an important terrorist tool, not just for al Qaeda, but for a whole range of extremist organizations which, again, are less often groups than loose associations of networks, in many cases spread across the globe. Without "physical" command and control capacity, terrorist groups must rely on the Internet to raise funds; to plot strategy and tactics; and, perhaps most importantly, to recruit, propagandize and mobilize adherents.

Few individuals have been known to complete the radicalization process via the Internet. Nevertheless, the Internet serves as a highly effective threshold for radicalization, particularly for building the kinds of personal contacts and networks that facilitate the radicalization process. Indeed, the very nature of the Internet makes it an ideal venue for recruitment. It is easily accessible and difficult to monitor and control. It permits speedy and anonymous communications with large numbers of people. And the Internet possesses an immediacy that allows disparate people in different parts of world to come together in an intimate space and to engage in a free (and initially anonymous) exchange of views and ideas.

Immediacy and intimacy is coupled with the ability of specific websites to combine words, images, video footage, sounds and music in a carefully controlled environment. The combination is highly manipulative and, ultimately, far more effective than a single proselytizer, in the same way that an audience will respond more readily to a clever or imaginative commercial than it will to even the best salesman.

Al Qaeda is by no means the only terrorist group using the Internet. Virtually every known terrorist organization has some sort of Web presence. This includes not only well-known Middle East-based groups like Hamas and Hizbollah, but also European entities like ETA and the Irish Republican Army; Sendero Luminoso and the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement in Latin America; the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the Lashkar-e-Taiba in South Asia; and Aum Shinrikio and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in East and Southeast Asia.

Young people are the most receptive audience for extremist messaging over the web. Not only has their intellectual framework largely been shaped by their interaction with the Internet, but they are often struggling with fundamental questions around faith, the future and their place in the world. What extremists are often able to do, is to link such experiences to a culture of embattlement and victimhood; the identification of "enemies"; and the suffering and humiliation of specific ethnic or

Screen grab of on-line video

2. Women

Historically, a great deal of ambiguity has surrounded the role of women in the overall Islamist extremist narrative. Portrayal of women as fighters in extremist propaganda is often intended less to encourage women than it is to shame Muslim men who remain on the sidelines of the struggle. Nevertheless, Islamist extremist groups seem increasingly willing to embrace and include women. Hamas, Hizballah and a number of other organizations increasingly portray women as both fierce and articulate, belying Western stereotypes of Muslim women. Al Qaeda publishes an online women's magazine intended to recruit female fighters and martyrs. Other materials targeting women, especially on the Internet, emphasize their role in terrorist operations and provide specific instruction in a range of practical subjects from small arms and explosives to battlefield medicine.

Increasing numbers of suicide attacks — whether in Iraq, Jordan, Afghanistan and Kashmir — involve women, and women have been actively involved in Chechen terrorist operations like the Moscow Theatre siege and the Beslan school massacre. This suggests that the traditional constraints on women taking part in direct terrorist action are beginning to erode, perhaps indicating a willingness on the part of al Qaeda and its affiliates to take terrorist operations to a new level, utilizing a much broader constituency than in the past. Islamist terrorist activity has primarily been a male preserve, at least at the "sharp end." For this reason, women — and particularly women who are not overtly "Muslim" in appearance — could be significant "stealth" assets in terrorist operations. For example, Muriel Degauque, a Belgian convert, travelled to Iraq in 2005 and died in a suicide attack on a US military patrol.

religious groups — be they Muslim, Basque, Tamil or Irish Catholic — at the hands of those enemies. This culture of embattlement and victimhood is what lies at the heart of the "single narrative" discussed above.

Many specifically Islamist websites capture their audience by initially addressing core existential issues: "What does it mean to be a Muslim in today's world?"; "What is my place in the *ummah* — the larger global community of Muslims?" Once the audience has been "hooked" by these broader questions around Islamic identity and the meaning of a life in Islam, a more overt process of indoctrination begins.

In the Islamist Internet world, such indoctrination is generally built around the "single narrative" that emphasizes specifically "Islamic" problems. These problems are rooted in perceived threats posed by common enemies, such as Israel or "Crusader nations" (the United States and its allies) and the suffering and humiliation of Muslims at the hands of these enemies. When this narrative with its themes of embattlement, persecution and martyrdom is conveyed in combination with images and references that are rooted in youth culture, it has tremendous resonance among young people, particularly young people who are searching for a cause to define their place in the world.

Women are also lending their voices to the Islamist ideological message, often employing a strange inversion of the language of struggle and emancipation. In 2005, Shabina Begum, a British teenager who won a court decision allowing her to wear jilbab (full length outer garment) over her school uniform observed that "Muslim women, from Uzbekistan to Turkey, are feeling the brunt of policies guided by Western governments ... young Muslims, like me, have turned back to their faith after years of being taught that we needed to be liberated from it."

3. "Reds and Greens"

Other vulnerabilities and vectors for radicalization include the global development of linkages between the political left wing ("reds") and Islamist extremists ("greens"). The unifying factor is, to a large extent, opposition to globalization, capitalism and US foreign and security policy, coupled with anti-Israel sentiment and admiration for the purported social activist component of terrorist groups like Hamas and Hizballah. This seemingly counterintuitive discovery of common cause is allowing Islamist groups to cloak themselves in the rhetoric of liberation for oppressed peoples and, more importantly, to participate actively in the broader spectrum of western politics.

While primarily a European issue, manifestations of this "red-green coalition" have surfaced in Canada, most notably at the level of student politics. Concordia University has been repeatedly forced to cancel debate on the Israel-Palestine issue after demonstrations and threats of violence by Muslim and left wing student groups who do not want their views challenged. While this is relatively removed from the mainstream, it is still a fundamental abrogation of constitutional guarantees regarding free speech and association.

Is Radicalization Forever?

Extremes of radical thought and action are not necessarily an end state. There are numerous examples of radicals, extremist thinkers and terrorists who have constructively re-integrated themselves into legitimate politics and society.

Between the 1970s and the late 1980s, the 19th of April Movement, or M-19, was the largest guerrilla group in Colombia after the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC. M-19 carried out a series of spectacular terrorist attacks, including a mass hostage-taking of foreign diplomats in 1980 and an armed assault on the Colombian justice ministry in 1985. In the course of a series of negotiations with the Colombian government, the M-19 leadership and most of its fighters repudiated violence and expressed their desire to change society through participation in legitimate politics. This was more than simple pragmatism. Under the rubric of the M-19 Democratic Alliance, the group became a powerful force in Colombian politics, helped to forge a meaningful Colombian constitution, and assumed the presidency of the Colombian Constituent Assembly. The M-19 Democratic Alliance continues to be influential in various Colombian political coalitions and is a meaningful component of the Colombian political process.

Closer to home, US president Barack Obama's entry into electoral politics was an unsuccessful 2000 run for Congress against Bobby Rush, a Chicago political fixture, a Democratic party stalwart, and a highly respected eight-term Congressman. Rush's career trajectory is fascinating. After serving in the Army, he attended college where he joined the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), a civil rights organization. From the SNCC, he moved to the Black Panther Party and was a founder of its Illinois branch. He ran Black Panther meal programs and free medical clinics in Chicago and was instrumental in forcing the larger medical and research communities to acknowledge the impact of sickle cell anemia on American black communities.

The stories of M-19 and Bobby Rush, while fundamentally different on a number of levels, demonstrate that our understanding of "radicalization" needs to be far more nuanced than it currently is. Again, radical thought does not necessarily translate into terrorism. Radicals can play a highly positive role, both in their communities and in the larger political context. Most importantly, radicalism exists on a sort of sliding continuum and some radicals, even some extremists, may be persuaded to channel their energy and their passion into legitimate politics. The trick, from a security perspective, lies in understanding the different manifestations of the issue and knowing which ones represent a threat and which an opportunity.

A number of countries — including Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Yemen, Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia — are using "de-radicalization" programs as a means of demobilizing violent extremists and their supporters. Most of these de-radicalization programs have been influenced, in part, by the large body of work on de-radicalization and re-integration of former terrorists that has been carried out in Saudi Arabia.

The Saudi de-radicalization program is rooted in the recognition that violent Islamist extremism cannot be defeated by traditional security means alone. Equally essential is discrediting its intellectual roots and defeating the ideological mindset that supports and nurtures political violence. Convicted extremists (a number of whom are Guantanamo returnees) that Saudi authorities judge to be redeemable are subjected to intensive counseling by religious scholars who focus on imparting an understanding of Islamic doctrine around political change and the various nuances of jihad, or struggle. This is coupled with intensive societal re-integration programs, family support and continuing monitoring and post-release aftercare. To date, around 3,000 prisoners have participated in Saudi Arabia's de-radicalization program. Saudi authorities claim a rehabilitation success rate of 80 to 90 per cent, and have re-arrested only 35 individuals for security-related offenses.

The societies and cultures in which such programs have enjoyed (alleged) success are very different from Canada. All practice capital punishment and virtually all of them have been identified as states that routinely use torture as an investigative / interrogation tool. The Saudi de-radicalization program does not resort to torture and is intended partly to counteract the repressive image of the Saudi security services. Nevertheless, implied physical threats may in fact be as influential as de-radicalization programming in persuading extremists to recant.

Saudi authorities are extremely open in admitting that the first priority of their de-radicalization program is the internal security of the Kingdom. They also recognize, however, that if "rehabilitated" terrorists leave the Kingdom and engage in terrorist activities elsewhere, then there will be real consequences for the Kingdom in terms of bleedback and internal and regional stability. It is at precisely this point that Western and Saudi interests converge. This convergence was thrown into sharp relief by the case of Said Ali al-Shihri, an alumnus of both Guantanamo Bay and the Saudi de-radicalization program, who has emerged as the deputy leader of al Qaeda in Yemen and is implicated in the September 2008 bombing of the US Embassy in Sana.

The nominal success of the Saudi program, and the tremendous number of resources that the Saudi government continues to pour into it, at least suggests that counter-radicalization programming (if not "de-radicalization") in the Islamist terrorist context is more than simply a pipe dream. It is also clear from the Saudi experience that successful de-radicalization programming must be based upon meaningful understanding of the ideological and theological foundations of extremist thought. Just as importantly, it must be delivered in a way that is entirely culturally appropriate. From a Western perspective, this means that any form of de-radicalization must be delivered, not by the police, the security services, or any other "official" agency, but rather by affected communities themselves.

What Are We Doing About It?

Radicalization is a tremendously complex issue, with an array of political and social implications, not only globally, but for Canada as well. There are a number of mitigating factors at play, however that combine to make the nature of the radicalization threat different than it is in, say, Europe or the United Kingdom.

Canada is a pluralist society whose approach to immigration is rooted in multiculturalism. Historically, minorities and new arrivals in Canada are able to integrate readily without giving up core religious or cultural practices and beliefs. Equality of economic opportunity is both a principle and a reality of Canadian life. And Canadian immigration policy has helped to build minority communities that are well-educated and highly functioning by most social and economic measures.

This means that the task facing Canadian law enforcement, in parallel with other government initiatives, is not to counter radical messaging that is entrenched in specific communities. Instead, it is to help to build communities that are resilient to radicalization that could lead to terrorist violence through effective support and prevention programming.

Over the past few months, NSCI has worked closely with a working group consisting of a number of other Canadian police agencies, CSIS, DFAIT and Public Safety in preparing a radicalization prevention strategy for the entire Canadian law enforcement community, under the auspices of CACP Counterterrorism and National Security (CTNS) Committee. An initial position paper / business case was accepted by the CTNS Committee in August 2008. Over the fall and winter the working group will proceed by identifying a whole range of best practices related to radicalization and radicalization prevention, both within the RCMP and other agencies, and then standardizing them across the community.

The working group has spent a great deal of time looking at counter-radicalization models in other countries and its members feel confident that Canada is ahead of the radicalization wave, that we can learn from the cases that have already occurred and build that learning into an effective prevention strategy. As above however, proper metrics and meaningful insights into at-risk communities are essential first steps.

Terrorism Here vs. Terrorism There: Do We Have to Choose?

Two of the leading US theorists on terrorism — Bruce Hoffman and Marc Sageman — recently engaged in a highly public debate over the nature of the threat from al Qaeda. In his latest book, *Leaderless Jihad*, Sageman contends that al Qaeda is largely a spent force. He says that the real terrorist threat lies with radicalized individuals and small groups who meet and plot in their own neighborhoods or on the Internet. Hoffman, a respected Georgetown University historian, rebutted Sageman in a review article in *Foreign Affairs*, citing a recent US National Intelligence Estimate warning that "al Qaeda Central" is reconstituting itself in Pakistan.

Sageman's argument is rooted in the concept of domestic radicalization. If he is correct and the real terrorist threat is a domestic one, then the appropriate response lies with good intelligence and law enforcement and effective prosecutions. If Hoffman is right, and a monolithic al Qaeda remains a global threat, then the obvious response is rooted in military and foreign intelligence operations, and in foreign policy.

The problem is that both Sageman and Hoffman are right (or wrong, depending upon one's perception). There are many credible indicators that al Qaeda has indeed successfully reconstituted itself in the security of the Tribal Areas of Western Pakistan and that it is playing a role in, among other things, the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan. Al Qaeda-related and inspired entities are active in Iraq and North and East Africa and the organization itself serves as a beacon to violent extremists all over the globe. So whatever the actual role of al Qaeda Central, the very fact of its continued existence represents a multi-layered threat.

Meanwhile, it is clear that domestic radicalization leading to terrorism continues to be a serious threat, and one that is quite possibly accelerating. The two threats actually complement each other — al Qaeda messaging plays a key role in radicalization, while domestically radicalized individuals (like the 7/7 bombers) often cycle through al Qaeda-run training camps. Indeed, it is sometimes difficult to know where one threat ends and the other begins.

While an "either / or" scenario is tempting, choosing one alternative over the other will almost certainly lead back to the misperceptions of the 1990s — mistakes which resulted not only in 9/11, but also in the Madrid bombings, the Theo Van Gogh killing and the 7/7 bombings, among other things. A blended approach (which supports and includes important initiatives like the CACP / RCMP-led counter-radicalization study) is undoubtedly still the best one.

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