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An Analysis of the Psycho-Social Factors Involved in Jihadist Radicalization Process and Terrorist Violence

1. Introduction

Jihadist terrorism generates a profound debate on how a free and peaceful society should face a threat of these characteristics. The global situation points to this social problem as something structural, which will continue into the future without being solved in the short term.[1] To face it, it is necessary to combine the efforts of a whole society in looking for solutions.

Mankind is facing extreme violence of proportions that are very different from what we have seen historically in parts of the world threatened by terrorism and violent movements. A differentiating element of jihadist terrorism is the act of suicide. It also shares similarities with other forms of extreme violence whose objective is the control and domination of all humanity: theoretically, looking for benefits for society, but actually, causing serious harm to not only non-Muslims but to the Muslim culture in general.

The jihadist radicalization process has not grown spontaneously, or recently. In fact, it has been growing and consolidating for many years, developing its uses, becoming ever more sophisticated to increase its power of attracting new recruits. The messages of terrorist groups occupy an important place in this process. These groups persistently send messages favoring a certain education and instructing their recruits to do everything within the parameters which they dictate. They send seductive messages that appeal to most urgent personal needs, or threatening messages which set out the boundaries of behavior, thought and attitudes which are permitted or allowed: messages generating ambivalence, misleading, excluding, cheating and shrouding, messages that, in addition, invite the use of extreme violence for the attainment of certain objectives that they consider legitimate.[2]

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1 J. Victoroff, *Suicide Terrorism and the Biology of Significance*, "Political Psychology", no. 20, 2009, pp. 397–400.

2 L. Veres, *Imagen, terrorismo y argumentación*, "Revista Iberoamericana de Argumentación", no. 4, 2012, pp. 1–14.

We do not have enough information about psychological and social factors affecting this process, even when we try to isolate the characteristics differentiating a person who is committed to radicalism and violence from those who are not. In fact, the reactions that an individual can reproduce when facing a certain social pressure are very broad. Some of them opt to fight to maintain their freedom, being attacked, while others join the terrorist cause. Therefore, the psychological and social variables must be studied to understand the complexity of the process and to be able to stop it and fight against it. Studying them poses great difficulties and a huge challenge when strategies are established to permit the understanding, prevention and eradication of this social scar.[3]

One of the collateral effects of the problem with Islamic terrorism is the general confusion that is provoked regarding the perception of Muslim culture. It has generated a feeling of hate against Muslims in Europe, increasing the negative perception already present before the jihadist threat.[4] A link between Jihadism and Muslim society has been created, based on ignorance, which has created a general social image far from objective reality. Actually, jihadist terrorism is a minority of the society that it claims to represent, creating an image that mistakenly links a culture with the concept of violence and terrorism. In spite of this unfortunate link, it is no more violent than any other might be.

This article intends to establish the causes and factors related to the jihadist radicalization process, the social and psychological factors and the role played by the different spheres of society and culture, through personal, political and religious socialization, through family, school, social movements, the media and so on. Its goal is to complete an analysis allowing us to draw conclusions to build the necessary strategies to be implemented by peaceful societies intended to fight against Islamic terrorism, and to prevent the radicalization of individuals.

2. Violence and Terrorism

2.1 Aggression and violence

To be able to deepen the understanding of terrorist violence, we first need to ask whether violence is a natural or cultural phenomenon. It is in this debate that the

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3   H.M. Trujillo, *Hacia una mejor comprensión psicológica del terrorismo: reclutamiento, ideología y violencia,* "Revista de Psicología Social", no. 24, 2009, pp. 163–181.

4   Z. Strabac, O. Listhung, *Anti-Muslim prejudice in Europe: a multilevel analysis of survey data from 30 countries,* "Social Science Research", no. 37, 2008, pp. 268–286.

difference between the concepts of violence and aggression becomes particularly relevant.

Aggression is a biological feature that can be found in every living being and that serves to increase the biological efficacy of the species. Therefore, it is not necessarily a negative characteristic; it is acquired through evolution, if we believe in an adaptive response which is a part of the facing strategies present in all human beings.[5]

The World Health Organization defines violence as, "The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation."[6] The definition includes interpersonal violence, suicidal behavior and armed conflicts. It refers not only to perpetrated violence but also to acts intended to generate damage, such as threats or intimidation. It highlights the importance of the consequences not only at the physical level but also at the psychological one: psychical damage, privations, development impairments, which are less visible but highly damaging for the people's wellbeing.

Violence is a perverse configuration of aggressiveness with a destructive character over people; it is a social dysfunction, as it means a loss of its adaptive character. It is useless from a biological point of view and deliberate from a psychological point of view.[7]

We can talk about aggression as something innate, biological, inevitable and able to be molded by culture, and about violence as something human, avoidable, non-biological and cultural. Violence is useless from a biological point of view and the result of the interaction between natural aggression and culture. In this way, violence is molded by different psychological, cultural and social factors.[8]

Violence is specifically human, being a product of culture and socialization.[9] It is an intended behavior destined to obtain domination and control, using force in an explicit or implicit manner, with the aim of obtaining from a person or group

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5   J. Sanmartín, *Agresividad y violencia,* in: *El laberinto de la violencia. Causas, tipos y efectos* (ed.) J. Sanmartín, Ariel, Barcelona 2004, p. 21.

6   World Health Organization, *Violence: a public health priority. Global Consultation on Violence and Health, available at* http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/world_report/en/introduction.pdf, accessed 6 January 2016.

7   E. Echeburúa, P. De Corral, *Raíces psicológicas del fanatismo político,* "Análisis y modificación de conducta", no. 30 (130), 2004, pp. 161–176.

8   P. Imbusch, *The concept of violence*, in: *International Handbook of Violence Research* W. Heitmeyer, J. Hagan (eds.), Kluwer, Netherlands, 2003, pp. 13–39.

9   J. Sanmartín, *La violencia y sus claves*, Ariel, Barcelona 2000.

of people what they do not want to freely consent to. Research has already shown that it is a product or co-occurrence in time of several interrelated factors.[10]

Johan Galtung[11] points out three types of violence:

- Direct violence, which refers to physical and/or verbal violence, which is the most visible type and the one referred to by most people; it is the one where we can identify victims and also killers.
- Structural violence, which is a part of the social structure and its mechanism. It is easy to identify the victims but not the killers, as the origin is not in specific people.
- Cultural violence refers to the group of values, ideas and convictions used to justify or legitimize structural or direct violence, and is the one that gives the perception of normality in its exercise.

Galtung suggests that these three types of violence are intimately related, in the fact that both the structural violence and the cultural violence are detonators for the diverse manifestations of direct violence. This approach has political and analytical consequences. Regarding jihadist terrorism, for instance, it forces us not only to analyze the attacks and their victims, but also to challenge the structural and cultural tendencies sustaining terrorism. In light of this approach, to eradicate jihadist terrorism is to change the educational and the cultural norms which maintain it.

2.2 Terrorist violence

Not all violent acts are acts of terrorism, but all terrorist acts are acts of violence. What makes the difference between terrorist violence and other kinds of violence is generally the intention behind them. Violence is aimed at achieving ideological objectives –religious, ethnical, political – that serve as a support and justification, and that are based on control, impulsiveness and hate.[12]

Speaking of terrorism implies highlighting the existence of two important characteristics, the first one is that it is directed toward people, and the second one, that this violence intends to influence people's perception to incorporate them, by their own will or not, to the terrorist cause through fear and violence.[13]

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10   R. Borum, *Psychology of terrorist,* University of South Florida, Tampa 2004.

11   J. Galtung, *Cultural Violence*, "Journal of Peace Research" no. 27(3), 1990, pp. 291–305.

12   H.M. Trujillo, *Hacia una mejor comprensión psicológica del terrorismo: reclutamiento, ideología y violencia,* "Revista de Psicología Social", no. 24, 2009, pp. 163–181.

13   K. Aulestia, *Historia general del terrorismo*, Aguilar, Madrid 2005.

Jihadist terrorism is a global terrorism having as its target everyone who is not a follower of that particular strain of Islam, including those who follow other tendencies of Islam.

Ideology is a key aspect in understanding terrorist violence, which in the field of psychology becomes a model to explain terrorist behavior and the dichotomy of the moral filter used by terrorists, allowing them to commit atrocities for a "good cause." We consider ideology to be a group of accepted norms following an individual's beliefs, values, principles and purposes,[14] that allow the justification of violent behaviors. In the terrorist's mind, the conviction remains that his actions are justified as a means to obtain what is deemed fair.[15] In studies linking extremist ideology with terrorism,[16] we see that an environment characterized by the extreme radicalization of the ideas is, without doubt, a trigger for terrorism.

Terrorist violence has grown and evolved over the years and now confronts us with a new form of terrorism with very different characteristics to what the world had experienced up to now. Considering this evolution, some authors have referred to "old terrorism" and "new terrorism"[17] applying the first term to the groups in search of political power, independence or nationalism, and the second to the groups having mainly religious motives.

The value given to human life is a key characteristic of jihadist terrorism, compared with other forms assumed by terrorism, in which the terrorist tries to keep his own life. The final objective is to cause as much damage as possible, looking for the greatest glory. It is a battle in what is called holy war against the unbelievers. For them, the Western countries are not only where the unbelievers live but also an unholy land that is not under the protection of their God. This land is yet to be conquered. Generally, terrorist movements claim the rights over other territories. For the Islamic terrorists, the whole world is their territory because it is the territory of their God. It is terrorism with a global perspective, directed against all unbelievers.

In addition, to accomplish their terrorist acts, jihadist groups make use of drugs to have enough courage to carry out violent acts. The use of drugs, together with the process of indoctrination (for example, the de-humanization of the victim, the attribution of the fault to the victim, among others), contributes to the inhibition of those psychological processes, social values and moral brakes

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14 C. J. Drake, *The role of ideology in terrorists' target selection,* "Terrorism and Political Violence" no. 10, 1998, pp. 53–85.

15 F. Alonso-Fernández, *Fanáticos Terroristas*, Masson, Madrid 2002.

16 I. Martín-Baró, *Poder, ideología y violencia,* Trotta, Madrid 2003.

17 A. Spencer, *Questioning the concept of New Terrorism,* "Peace Conflict and Development" no. 8, 2006, pp. 1–33.

that work against such destructiveness and violence.[18] It is a kind of contrived terrorism, with studied and designated targets, which powerfully represents the religious act through death sacrifice that, in addition, offers an example which others can imitate and to adore.

The terrorist investigation, in spite of its growth over the last years, has rarely been evaluated by means of empirical methods, which is why the challenge of expanding scientific methods is now being set up, from a rigorous and systematic perspective, for this social problem.

2.3　Suicidal jihadist terrorism

Suicide terrorism constitutes a new phenomenon different from other forms of violence and terrorism. It is difficult to understand the process of bringing someone to push to an extreme his behavior up to the point of taking his own life as a destructive element to cause the greatest possible harm. It would be easy to refer to a mental illness to explain such a complex phenomenon, but research shows that suicide terrorism corresponds to several complex causes,

Suicide attacks can be defined as a violent, politically motivated acts executed by one or more individuals, in which completing the terrorist act depends on the death of the terrorist carrying it out. These operations are less expensive, and can be easily organized, without having to activate any runaway device. Suicide attacks manage to kill four times more people than other terrorist acts, and they also have a very important impact on the media that guarantees a great deal of attention on the terrorist and his message.[19]

Islamic fundamentalist groups confer a divine character on the act of suicide, considering the dead terrorists as martyrs whose objective was to accomplish an order: jihad (understood as the individual necessary effort to successfully achieve what you intend to do). In this way, they are recognized as victims and obtain eternal life in paradise for this sacrifice. Through religious influence, the individual can find a sense of satisfaction in his death and later recognition, creating an image which favors the preparation process for a suicide attack. From this point of view, socialization, understood as a process for which human beings incorporate

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18　G. LaFree, G. Ackerman, *The Empirical Study of Terrorism: Social and Legal Research*, "The Annual Review of Law and Social Science", no. 5, 2009, pp. 347–374.

19　M. Torres, *El Terrorismo Suicida y sus Desafíos,* available at http://www.upo.es/export/portal/com/bin/portal/upo/profesores/mrtorsor/profesor/1214214328678_suicida_escaneado.pdf, accessed 6 January 2016.

rules, values, attitudes and conduct, contributes to generating a concept of death which favors suicide terrorism.

Its novelty and variety makes it difficult to establish a profile that would allow us to identify those individuals who might respond to extremist organizations' calls to commit suicide attacks. Besides, we could add how difficult it is to use a psychological approach based on hypotheses, as it is not possible to analyze the psychological characteristics of those who commit suicidal terrorist acts precisely because the perpetrators are left dead in the attack. There is a wide variety of variables in terms of age, education, nationality, and gender. The meaning, motives, and causes of suicide attacks remain unclear.[20] They can be related to religion, nationality, ideas or revenge. Intense indoctrination and a repressive social and political system can be the elements that push an individual toward such an extreme conduct.

3. Radicalization and Recruitment as a Psychosocial Process

Radicalization can be defined as an increasing extremity of beliefs, feelings, and behaviors in support of an intergroup conflict and violence,[21] so that individuals are prepared for social conflict, modifying elements that justify intergroup violence and promote commitment and personal sacrifice in defense of a cause deemed just by the radical groups. The violent radicalization process allows certain individuals to become terrorists, led by factors such as injustice (whether perceived or real), social exclusion, religious extremism, social unacceptance or discrimination.[22]

Of course, the radicalization process is driven by the creation of group identities.[23] It is based on cultural and social elements which influence individual ideologies. Erving Goffman's interpretive frames theory offers a good description of how shared meanings are built within each group. Goffman defines an interpretive frame as a set of action-oriented beliefs and meanings. The interpretive

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20 D. Gambetta, *Making sense of suicide missions*, Oxford University, Oxford 2005.

21 C. McCauley, S. Moskalenko, *Mechanisms of Political Radicalization: Pathways Toward Terrorism,* "Terrorism and Political Violence", no. 20, 2008, pp. 415–433.

22 European Commission, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council concerning terrorist recruitment* – Addressing the factors contributing to violent radicalisation, 2005, available at (http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1452973247690&uri=CELEX:52005DC0313), accessed 6 January 2016.

23 E. Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience,* Harper and Row, London 1974.

frames legitimate and inspire social movement activities, provide meaning to participants, and build their personal and collective identity. In this case, the ideological and cultural interpretive frames would be the ideas, traditions, political speeches, language, mental attitudes, symbols, rituals, myths and values. Through them, all individuals joining jihadism progressively delegate their own identity in the name of the supreme mandate led by the group's ideology, reinforcing its radicalization on a daily basis.

The jihadist's ideological radicalization is an initial step to performing terrorist acts. Even though not all radicals are terrorists, we can affirm that all terrorists have gone through a similar process. This process feeds on different psychological and social situations like social alienation, racism or discrimination, identity problems that mix frictions of Muslim and Western cultures, psychological factors such as depression, frustration or family problems. Through the use of sophisticated propaganda systems, the extremists offer a sense of belonging and existential meaning, mixed with a promise of salvation. They also claim their movement to be Islam's purest representation.

When analyzing the attraction and recruitment process, it should also be taken into account that sometimes extremists offer salaries, which, for some youngsters with no future, can be the only option for personal development and subsistence. In this way, the Islamic State offers attractive financial incentives crucial for them to join the jihadist fight.

Places like mosques, prisons or certain neighborhoods can be breeding grounds for terrorist recruitment, especially for those with characteristics more prone to radicalization. It is also true that self-recruiting is increasing due to the Internet and social networks.[24]

4. Analysis of Key Factors Contributing to Jihadist Radicalization according to the Ecological Model

In order to analyze Islamic terrorism one has to determine its etiology and indicators that might be associated with the origin and persistence of the phenomenon. Despite the complexity of determining which are the exact motivations that lead

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24 A. Kirby, *The London Bombers as Self-Starters: A Case Study in Indigenous Radicalization and the Emergence of Autonomous Cliques*, "Studies in Conflict and Terrorism", no. 30, 2007, pp. 415–428.

someone to opt for jihadism, the most common factors accompanying them are identifiable.[25]

Terrorist violence can only be understood through the ecological model, since it offers a multi-causal explanation of the complex phenomenon and points out three different levels: Macrosystem, Exosystem (intermediate), and Microsystem.

The Macrosystem:

The macrosystem implies political, social, economic and even cultural indicators that shape the society to which a future radicalized individual initially belongs. The belief systems, radical ideas and cultural guidelines which justify and support terrorist violence provide the grounds for the acceptance of Islamic terrorism.

Even though this level's influence on radicalism seems obvious and there is a consensus about it, it is not possible to specify precisely which elements would allow us to predict with certainty an individual or collective radicalization.[26] As an example, we can point to the widespread diffusion of jihadist ideology, which is necessary at that level to generate a framework for collective alignment, but which does not completely explain violence on its own.[27]

The Exosystem:

The Exosystem includes the context where social relations take place such as work, family, school, friends, religious forums, influence of radical leaders, and so on. These community referents facilitate or neutralize the emergence of a fundamental reference framework that normalizes, promotes and accelerates the radicalization processes. The actors and structures at this level allow the macro level factors to settle and crystallize in the individual. For example, belonging to a group provides great power to transmit norms and behaviors, and even shapes the individual's self-esteem.[28] At the same time, messages sent by different agents from outside the

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25 J. Horgan, *Psychological Factors Related to Disengaging from Terrorism. Some Prelimi-nary Assumptions and Assertions*, in: *A Future for the Young. Options for Helping Middle Eastern Youth Escape the Trap of Radicalization* Ch. Bernard (ed.), Rand Corporation, Santa Monica 2005, pp. 65–91.

26 J. Jordán, *Procesos de radicalización yihadista en España. Análisis sociopolítico en tres niveles*, "Revista de Psicología Social", no. 24 (2), 2009, pp. 197–216.

27 J. Waller, *Becoming Evil. How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Killing*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2007.

28 O. Roy, *El islam mundializado. Los musulmanes en la era de la globalización*, Bellaterra, Barcelona 2003.

group, for example non-jihadists, exert much less influence. Alonso and Berlel[29] talk about the risk of loss of individual identity in vulnerable subjects, in favor of an increase in group identity. If the estrangement at the macro level is great, the exosystem has more influence in the radicalization process.

Risk factors, such as unemployment, social network sites filled with radical messages, social isolation, exclusion or absence of integrative programs, or even pertaining to homogeneous groups that remain not integrated – for example, Muslim migrants amongst others – can lead to facilitating and increasing radicalization. This level is of crucial importance in the recruitment of subjects as well as in their reintegration. That is why it is necessary to look deeply into it in order to work on the prevention and eradication of terrorism.

The Microsystem:
The microsystem relates to the individual part of a person, that is to say, to all psychological and biological factors and personal history. It also includes the cognitive, behavioral, affective and interactional characteristics, the influence of close relationships to increase the permeability of becoming a radical (for example, through a partner).

There are many myths related to the mental health or illness of terrorists, stating that such acts cannot possibly be perpetrated by mentally healthy people. We cannot establish the terrorists' personality disorders, psychopathy, or mental sickness as a cause of jihadist terrorism, since most of these people are not sick; they are aware of their acts and take full responsibility for them. However, we may talk about a social disease. In spite of the scarce data on this subject and the need to further investigate the psychological indicators, we would be facing fanatical people who have a biased interpretation of the facts, hostile attitudes, and who are convinced that the only way to reach their goals is through the use of violence.[30] This model emphasizes how vulnerable personalities and conductible surroundings explain the development of radicalism.

We cannot talk about a radical prototype nor isolate the combination of variables that guarantee the individual's radicalization; he can be of any age, nationality, social or cultural level. The experience shows that we should add different characteristics to the three levels that together can create triggers of the radical process.

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29 R. Alonso y S. Berbell, *Procesos grupales e intergrupales,* in: *Psicología de los grupos. Teoría y aplicaciones* P. González (ed.), Síntesis, Madrid 1997, pp. 759–810.

30 F. Reinares, *Perfil del terrorista,* in: *El laberinto de la violencia. Causas, tipos y efectos*, J. Sanmartín (ed.), Ariel, Barcelona 2004, pp. 283–290.

5. Prevention of Jihadism Radicalization

Governments now incorporate the fight against terrorism as a priority. Until recently, they have been primarily reactive to terrorist challenges, but now they accept the need to incorporate a proactive vision. It is necessary to review the policies that have been developed in the fight against jihadi terrorism and look for more global ways to bet on prevention. Prevention can be no longer seen as an exclusive prerogative of governments; the whole society has to be involved in the terrorism eradication.

There is no doubt that analyzing more effective prevention strategies implies knowing, revising, and incorporating the political, social, historical and economic factors at an international level, and their influence on jihadist terrorism. Here we will focus on analyzing, from a psychological and social perspective, the basic initiatives – mainly those involving the micro and meso levels of the ecological model – without forgetting that these initiatives have to be put together with the macro level measures that will be addressed in other chapters of this book.

Prevention needs to be addressed at three different levels, which we shall now discuss.

When the conflict has not yet surfaced, it is necessary to run interventions on the population in general, oriented to foster respect, equality, tolerance and non-violence, removing social and cultural obstacles that generate hate and discrimination. This dimension needs to be developed within the culture itself and directed toward other cultures.

Education in values is a key aspect when preventing terrorist violence in our society. To build a society based in equality and respect, it is necessary to work from early schooling through the whole education process. Likewise, we need to remove the mechanisms that promote racist situations and violence, to actively confront them, favoring cognitive, affective and behavioral changes radically opposed to those promoted by terrorism.

The macro strategy to fight terrorism must integrate a perspective on the defense of human rights helping to discover that these problems damage not only the more visible victims but also the whole society. It is advisable to stimulate among the population the capacity to put themselves in someone else's place, the understanding of universal rights and the ability to use such understanding in each and every moral decision, linking such rights with the (also universal) duty to respect them. In that sense, religions and religious leaders must be an example of peace, integration and tolerance, promoting human rights in the world and condemning any violent practice in the name of faith.

The media are a privileged source of information and influence. They have an undeniable capacity to construct reality, transmit ideology and present behavioral models that turn them into a powerful platform to spread symbols, beliefs and values prevailing in our society; they also function as an agent or mediator in the socializing process. The media's role is necessary to offer positive and real models of peaceful coexistence,[31] to transmit values that eradicate religious or ethnic discrimination, to give voice to those with strong and motivating ideas that discourage individuals away from the radicalization process and generate identification alternatives.

Secondary prevention must be addressed to the academic, working, family, social, religious and custodial contexts, and must be focused on intervening in the social problems that may generate discrimination and social exclusion (unemployment, lack of housing, racism, poverty, discrimination), and on psychological and emotional problems (psychological problems and disorders, emotional deficit, self-esteem problems).[32] Both the social and psychological dimensions play an important role in encouraging the radicalization process. From the personal sphere, fostering the construction of one's own positive identity, that allows teenagers to discover what they want to be, and to take adequate decisions that will be put into practice in the future, becomes a watertight barrier against extremist ideologies.

Finally, the third stage is directed to those already affected by radicalization, developing psychological and social intervention processes that enable their social reintegration. This would be without diminishing or replacing any legal sentences for the consequences of their actions. To that end, new intervention models need to be developed to allow the revision of their ideology and the change of their strategies in order to deradicalize them.

6. Conclusion

Jihadist terrorism represents a threat against human security on a global scale, creating the need for joint global intervention. It grows and evolves acquiring singular and unpredictable forms, spreading collective terror and maintaining its goal of causing severe damage to the societies where it appears. In order to eradicate it, it is important to search for efficient, global strategies that do not

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31 O. Ashour, *The De-Radicalization of Jihadists. Transforming Armed Islamist Movements,* Routledge, New York 2009.

32 R. Borum, *Radicalization into Violent Extremism II: A Review of Conceptual Models and Empirical Research*, "Journal of Strategic Security", no. 4, 2011, pp. 37–62.

generate more victims or violence and that take into account that any attempt of eradication will find strong resistance.

Based on its very definition, and as well as its difference to aggression, we can affirm that we are facing extreme violent behaviors, produced and maintained by society and culture, unnecessary for human survival, and whose analysis has to transcend the specific acts of direct violence perpetrated by the terrorists, to go deep into the roots of the structural and cultural violence that justify these acts.

In order to be able to eradicate jihadist terrorism, we need to relate it to other forms of violence and to know the role of different social agents, states and even society, with the aim of eliminating any escalation in what we might call a spiral of violence. To that end, we must incorporate a global peace strategy, introducing non-violent elements as the only way to cut the Gordian knot of violence. We must not forget that the more harm violence provokes, the more complex it becomes to combat it in a peaceful way.

Jihadi terrorist groups use a strong message which is able to create an ideology and transmit values that modify thoughts, feelings and attitudes in some people, transforming them into radicalized individuals who join their violent cause. Their first aim is to stimulate the need to belong to a chosen minority fighting for a supreme goal.

Social sciences play a fundamental role in the study of the processes of radicalization and recruitment, due to the necessity of incorporating a general vision in the analysis. The goal is to provide an answer to the question of how to prevent someone's radicalization. Moreover, it is important to develop a strategy of intervention concerning those who have already become radicalized. It is not possible to know for sure which are the elements that influence the radicalization process, we have no conclusive certainties that allow us to describe, understand, predict and prevent terrorist behavior.

The ecological model applied to terrorism provides an essential global and multi-causal vision of the interactions in individual, family, academic, social and media contexts that any analysis and proposal for action should keep in mind.

Preventing and reducing terrorist violence implies changing the norms and values that tolerate and encourage it, as well as anything reinforcing attitudes prone to radicalization. To reduce the impact of this process, it is necessary to minimize the scope of the extremist socializing agents and, at the same time, to create alternatives resistant to that ideology. The promotion of values incompatible with violence and radicalization – respect, tolerance, empathy, and so on – has to be at the heart of prevention strategies, intervening at every stage of the person's evolution, especially in childhood education, but also including the development

of preventive actions directed at re-educating of adults. Moreover, a clear and powerful message must be spread in order to raise people's awareness and promote more peaceful attitudes.

Once we have become aware of the scale of the problem, there is no other option but to establish a genuine dialogue between cultures and religions, to look for peace and harmony among different beliefs and block any ideology that infringes upon human rights, searching for spaces to build strengths against any kind of discrimination or violence.

The tendency to criminalize Muslim culture as a consequence of its link with jihadist terrorism fosters a culture of hate and discrimination. Official doctrines must emerge and become visible to point the real and accurate interpretation of the sacred texts and provide some distance from extremist interpretations, looking for a greater knowledge, awareness and integration of the different cultural and religious perspectives internally and among cultures. Muslim leaders play an important role in the neutralization of jihadist messages and in the construction of alternatives.

It is necessary to work for the integration of Muslim immigrants' identity to grant them full citizenship access. To that end, we need to analyze the exclusion and social vulnerability they suffer. Even though these factors do not completely explain the terrorist's behavior, they represent a risk factor, in the same way that the process of social inclusion provides a psychological, economic and social balance, contributing to self-esteem, independence and the feeling of being valuable. All these factors are important in terms of protection. Working for real and effective social inclusion through positive actions represents a strong prevention strategy.

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