Radicalization: What does it mean?

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Introduction

A widely accepted viewpoint among terrorism experts and counter-terrorism practitioners is that terrorism depends on the radicalization of its instigators and perpetrators. For example, in a recent issue of the Jamestown Foundation's *Terrorism Monitor*, Pantucci (2008) notes that the U.K. Ministry of Justice and Home Office fear "the potential for high-profile terrorist prisoners to radicalize susceptible imprisoned youths" (p. 6). Similarly, Sageman noted in his expert testimony to the U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs that "the understanding of this process of 'radicalization' is critical to assessing the threat facing the West and should be the basis guiding our interventions to counter it" (June 27, 2007, p. 1). Radicalization, by most accounts, creates the motivational or cognitive preconditions ripe for terrorism. Therefore, understanding and combating radicalization of this sort would appear to be an important prerequisite for effectively combating terrorism.

Some, like Sageman (June 27, 2007), reject that notion that radicalization can aptly be described in terms of a fixed sequence of stages, while others view terrorism as the final stop along a path of radicalization characterized by a fairly orderly series of stages. For instance, Silber and Bhatt (2007), two senior intelligence analysts from the New York Police Department's Intelligence Division, proposed a four-stage model including pre-radicalization, self-identification, indoctrination, and "jihadization" stages, respectively. According to this model, in the pre-radicalization stage, the individual lives an ordinary life and has not yet accepted the radical ideology that will later provide the motivational scaffolding for becoming a terrorist. In the self-identification stage, the individual begins to explore that ideology, and that change tends to be triggered, according to the authors, by "a cognitive opening, or crisis, which shakes one's certitude in previously held beliefs…" (p. 6). In the indoctrination stage, adherence to the radical worldview is intensified, usually with support from like-minded

group members under the direction of an ideological leader. Finally, in the jihadization stage, individuals willingly accept their duties and commit to carrying out their assigned acts of terrorism, or martyrdom from their own perspective. Stage models, such as the one proposed by Silber and Bhatt (2007), essentially represent radicalization as key transition points along a time course leading from the normal life of individuals to their direct involvement in terrorist activity. Such models, however, leave much to explain in terms of the psychological, organizational, and social processes and drivers that lead people into the radicalization process in the first place and then reinforce their continued radicalization to the point of committing acts of terrorism.

Notwithstanding the attention paid to radicalization as a precursor to terrorism—perhaps even a "root cause" of terrorism and socio-political violence—it is widely agreed that, although radicalization increases the potential for such forms of violence, it does not necessitate any of them. For instance, according to a recent Global Futures Forum (GFF) report, "radicalisation is a process, not an end unto itself, and it does not necessarily lead to violence" (2006, p. 3). Simply put, radicalization cannot be a sufficient cause of terrorism because most radicals are not terrorists. This may be why the term *violent radicalization* is often encountered in discourse on terrorism. If violence were indeed necessitated by radicalization, the qualified term would simply be redundant. Prevalent usage of terms such as violent radicalization or militant radicalization would thus seem to suggest that many theorists do not view radicalization as a sufficient cause of terrorism or other forms of violence.

Nor does radicalization appear to be a necessary condition for terrorism, either. If the process of radicalization is regarded primarily as a psycho-social one—as, for example, Silber and Bhatt's (2007) model would seem to suggest—then acts of terrorism that are the product of strategic choice would appear to demonstrate that radicalization is unnecessary for terrorism to occur. I will not repeat here the arguments for the strategic choice perspective,

which Crenshaw (1990) skillfully articulated nearly two decades ago. It remains an open question of how to appropriately characterize the relationship between radicalization and terrorism without falling prey to fallacious forms of argumentation wherein radicalization is seen as the root cause of terrorism and terrorism, in turn, as the proof that radicalization had occurred. If a root cause is neither necessary nor sufficient for the type of effect to be explained, then it is incumbent on theorists to explain in what sense radicalization as a putative cause of terrorism is to be regarded as causal. The notion that radicalization is in some sense a root cause of terrorism presumably has to do with something more than the fact that it derives from the Latin term *radix* meaning “root.”

Even before that relationship can be usefully described, however, terrorism scholars and counter-terrorism practitioners ought to be clear on what *radicalization* means. For all the attention the term has received, there has been meager effort to define it. As Neumann (2008) put it, after 9/11, the term *radicalization* entered the discourse to refer loosely to “what goes on before the bomb goes off” (p. 4). Neumann’s comment was offered in the introductory chapter of a report entitled “Perspectives on Radicalisation and Political Violence,” published by The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR). It is worth noting that no definition of radicalization was provided in the various chapters of that report. Nor was I able to find any reference to the meaning of the term on the ICSR website—and recall what ICSR stands for.

ICSR, however, is certainly not alone. In March 2008, I participated in the NATO Advanced Research Workshop on which the current edited volume is based. The workshop title was “Indigenous Terrorism: Understanding and Addressing the Root Causes of Radicalisation among Groups with an Immigrant Heritage in Europe.” In short, the meeting was about radicalization and terrorism. However, as noted by Reuven Paz, one of the workshop participants, our group of participants had not set out by collectively defining what

we meant by radicalization or even, for that matter, by seeking rough agreement on its core elements. During the workshop, I participated in a breakout session devoted to outlining recommendations for future NATO research and analysis on radicalization. One of my suggestions, echoing Paz's comment, as well as recommendations from a 2007 Danish Institute for International Studies seminar on violent radicalization (Hemmingsen & Andreasen, n.d.), was that more analytical effort be put toward defining what radicalization means, exploring how various writers have used the concept, and how international organizations, such as NATO and the GFF, might work toward a shared understanding of the concept. This chapter represents my own, initial effort in support of that goal.

No NATO Definition

Currently, there is no NATO definition of the term *radical* or any of its derivatives, such as radicalism or radicalization, listed in the 2007 edition of Allied Administrative Publication No 6 (AAP-6), *NATO Glossary of Terms and Definitions (English and French)*. AAP-6 is the NATO reference document of the Military Committee Terminology Standardization Programme (MCTSP) that provides official NATO definitions of terms under NATO Standardization Agreement (STANAG) 3680. The term *radical* or any of its derivatives is also not defined in the *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (2008, March 4), the U.S. Department of Defense's (DOD) counterpart to NATO's AAP-6, drafted to ensure the standardization of military and associated terminology under DOD Directive 5025.12 (August 23, 1989), *Standardization of Military and Associated Terminology*. Future research, perhaps a collaborative effort by NATO partners, could systematically verify whether or not other NATO (or for that matter non-NATO) countries have formulated definitions of these terms. I provide a few examples of some governmental definitions later in this chapter. I turn next, however, to an examination of lexical definitions because under circumstances in which AAP-6 does not define a particular term, NATO

accepts the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (COED) as the basis for defining English terms. In 2007, the relevant version of COED is the eleventh edition (2004, revised 2006), which I take as my entry point.

Lexical Definitions

In fact, COED does not provide a definition of *radicalization*, *radicalism*, or even *radicalize*. It does, however, list these terms as derivatives of *radical*. The relevant adjectival definitions of that latter include "(1) relating to or affecting the fundamental nature of something; ... (3) advocating thorough or complete political or social reform; politically extreme." The relevant noun definition is "(1) an advocate of radical political or social reform" (2006, p. 1184).

The COED adjectival definitions of radical thus emphasize the characteristics of completeness and extremity (namely, definition 3), but also the fundamental nature of the thing in question (namely, definition 1). A reading of the meaning of the term *radical* in the second edition of the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), however, clarifies that the notions of extremity and completeness associated with the term are more recent connotations, whereas the notion of fundamentals, or going to the root nature of a thing, trace back to the earliest usages of the term. Indeed, the earliest quotations including the term *radical* that are listed in OED date back to the end of the14th and beginning of the 15th centuries and refer to "the humour or moisture naturally inherent in all plants and animals, its presence being a necessary condition of their vitality." For example, John Rastell in *A New Boke of Purgatorye* (1530) wrote "The radycall naturall humour of that appell wyll increase whyle it is growynge" (see definition 1. a. of entry "radical, a." in OED, 1989). By the 16th century, the term had come to refer, more generally, to fundamental qualities, inherent in the nature or essence of a thing or person. OED quotes the following example from Richard Hooker published in 1597 in Book V of a book series entitled *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiasticall Politie*: "They intimate the radicall

cause out of which it groweth" (see definition 2. a. of entry "radical, a." in OED, 1989). Nowadays, it would be more common to refer to the "root cause" of the relevant phenomenon.

In the 18th century, the meaning of the term began to change so that it not only referred to fundamental attributes of an entity, but began to also refer more and more often to forces or processes that might act on or change those fundamental qualities. For instance, in 1735, Henry St John, 1st Viscount Bolingbroke wrote in *A Dissertation upon Parties*, "Such a Remedy might have wrought a radical Cure of the Evil, that threatens our Constitution" (see definition 3. a. of entry "radical, a." in OED, 1989). By the end of the 18th century and into the early part of the 19th century, the concept of *radical reform* emerged in English politics to refer to thorough or sweeping political change. For example, in 1830, Gen. Thomas Perronet Thompson wrote in *Exercises, Political and Others*, "The actual agent...will be a radical reform in what is called the commons house of parliament" (see definition 3. b. of entry "radical, a." in OED, 1989).

By the end of the 19th century and into the 20th century, the term referred to "representing or supporting extreme sections of a political party" (see definition 3. d. of entry "radical, a." in OED, 1989); or, more generally, to that which is "characterized by independence of, or departure from, what is usual or traditional; progressive, unorthodox, or revolutionary (in outlook, conception, design, etc.)" (see definition 3. e. of entry "radical, a." in OED, 1989). For instance, in *Radical Man* (1970), Charles Hampden-Turner writes, "While Conservative Man is caused to behave, Radical Man imagines and reasons autonomously" (see definition 3. e. of entry "radical, a." in OED, 1989). Thus, the meaning of radical appears to have evolved from one that emphasizes what is fundamental to one that emphasizes what is extreme, particularly in relation to social or political traditionalisms. For that reason, the terms *moderate* and *radical* are commonly used as antonyms nowadays, as in the pervasive

discourse on moderate and radical Islam. Indeed, the New Oxford Thesaurus of English (2000) lists *moderate* as an antonym of *radical* when the latter takes on the connotation of revolutionary.

Note as well that in the 1993 additions series of OED a new slang definition of radical was added: “At or exceeding the limits of control and safety; hence, as an evaluative term: remarkable, outstanding; amazing, ‘far out’, ‘cool’” (see definition 3. g. of entry “radical, a.” in OED, 1993). The slang usage is believed to have originated in the surfer subculture in the late 1960s and 1970s. Though ostensibly far removed from the present discussion of radicalization in the context of terrorism and socio-political violence, the positive meaning of radical as something “cool” that involves pushing the limits it worth reflecting on further because it may help explain the appeal that the notion of “global jihad” propagated by Al Qaeda and its affiliate organizations has for many Muslim youth. For many Muslim youth, opposing the West, particularly the U.S., may be the epitome of acting cool. Indeed, like the counter-culture of the 1960s and 1970s, the very nature of cool may be defined in terms of opposition to “the establishment.” When that opposition takes the form of terrorism, the extremity of the act itself may prove exhilarating to the perpetrators and, thus, “cool” in the sense conveyed by the surfers who used the term *radical* to refer to their positive evaluation of their surfing experience. When terrorism involves self-sacrifice, the perpetrators are not described by their in-group members as “suicide bombers” but, rather, as heroes or martyrs. Indeed, the term *jihadist,* adopted by many counter-terrorism practitioners and terrorism scholars to refer to radical Islamic (or Islamist) militants, has a positive connotation of holy warrior in Islam. For that reason, some have argued that the West should refrain from using this label and instead challenge it with terms, such as *hirabah*, that emphasize the unholy and sinful nature of such activities (Singer & Noor, 2008; Waller, 2006).

Radicalization as a Relative, Evaluative, and Subjective Concept

The preceding analysis of lexical definitions of the term *radical* clarify that the term is closely associated with the idea of extremism. The modern concept of radicalization would thus appear to support a form of relativist thinking about socio-political events and actors related to the problem of terrorism. To be radical is to be extreme relative to something that is defined or accepted as normative, traditional, or valued as the status quo. The relative notion is important in the present context because it indicates that agreement on what is to be defined as radical may be subject to "perspective effects." That is, what one group may regard as radical forms of thought or behavior may not be seen as radical by the purveyors of those forms of thought and behavior.

Indeed, adversaries may each regard the other's acts and motivating belief systems as extreme, perhaps overly so. In this sense, the attribution of being a radical or radicalized may be intended by the attributer as a negative characterization of the attributee. More specifically, the attributer may use the term *radical* to convey that the attributee poses a source of threat to the attributer's traditional way of life. Adversaries characterized in this manner may not disagree, either. They, too, may see themselves as, or even aspire to be, potent threats to their adversary's way of life. For them, however, this attribution will likely be regarded as a positive one; perhaps as a challenge to what they perceive as corruption, oppression, or the pursuit of a misguided path; and perhaps, as well, as an opportunity to return to what they perceive as the root nature or fundamental qualities of a life worth living.

The more general point I want to make here is that the concept of radicalization is also an evaluative one. Ascriptions of extremism are usually couched in terms of good or bad, virtuosity or evil, or other evaluative dichotomies. For attributers, radicals will tend to be seen as extreme and as a threat to their own way of life. For attributees labeled as radicals or for self-identified radicals, the label may come to represent a virtuous characteristic associated

with attempts to return to a state of socio-political governance in line with their own fundamental values, worldviews, and beliefs. Interestingly, then, the opposing parties may frame the meaning of what it is to be radical in terms of the concept's differing notions: for attributers, radicals are extremists; for attributees, to be radical is to strive for a return to something fundamental, which the status quo implicitly or explicitly challenges, trivializes, or suppresses. The "radical as extremist" perception seems to lend itself to the idea that radicalization is a kind of incubation process for the production of terrorists or other violently-minded individuals. By comparison, the "radical as defender of fundamental values" may just as easily lend itself to the idea that radicalization is a kind of incubation process for the production of freedom fighters, martyrs, and other iconic images of the hero or heroine. Thus, the alternative connotations of *radical* that were evident in our earlier survey of the lexical definitions of the term–one conveying that which is fundamental and the other conveying that which is extreme—seem capable of supporting the narratives that parties on opposing sides of a conflict or adversarial relationship may be motivated to construct.

The relative notion of extremism, including the threat to the existing order posed by extremism, is evident in some governmental attempts to define radicalization. For instance, according to a 2007 report of the Netherlands' General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD), *radicalism* refers to "the active pursuit of and/or support for far-reaching changes in society which may constitute a danger to the continuity of the democratic legal order (aim), possibly by using undemocratic methods (means) which may harm the functioning of that order (effect)" (p. 10). The report goes on to state, "by extension, then, radicalisation is the process of increasing readiness to pursue such changes – possibly by undemocratic means – and/or to encourage others to do so" (2007, p. 10). The AIVD definition highlights both the relative and evaluative aspects of radicalism by defining it in terms of activities or support for activities that threaten a particular, existing, and valued social order (namely, the liberal

democratic system of the West). How one understands the existing order, and how one values the various aspects of that social order, will presumably influence which intentions or activities are regarded as being radicalized.

The AIVD definition, however, also highlights the subjectivist nature of the concept through its emphasis on the perception of possible danger, or threat. The emphasis on perceived threat is also evident in the definition recently offered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark: "Radicalisation is the phenomenon of people embracing opinions, views and ideas that *could* lead to acts of terrorism" (2007, p. 8, my italics). The term *could* in the Danish definition suggests that assignment of the radicalization label to an individual or group requires making assessments about possible harm that the individual or group poses to another party—usually oneself or a group to which one belongs. According to the Dutch and Danish definitions, which link the ascription of radicalization to the perception of threat, observers with differing threat perceptions may legitimately disagree on whether an actor has been radicalized. That is, observers who perceive threat would be correct in calling the actor radical, while observers who do not perceive threat would, likewise, be correct in *not* calling the same actor radical. Thus, in addition to its relative and evaluative aspects, the concept of radicalization also appears to be inherently (even if only tacitly) subjective.

Although the pragmatic threat-related focus of this concept of radicalization may be understandable, the implications of defining radicalization in such a manner for the social scientific study of radicalization as it relates to terrorism and other forms of political violence are unsettling. If radicalization is relegated to the status of a value-laden, subjective concept, it is difficult to see how it could help us truly understand the motivational bases of terrorism and violent behavior. Even among terrorism scholars and counter-terrorism practitioners in the West there is a wide range of viewpoints that would seem to befuddle efforts to agree on which groups or individuals are radicalized, if that ascription were to be tied to subjective

assessments of threat. For instance, by such a definition, the oft-invoked distinction between radical and moderate Islam might break down, if one were also to regard moderate Islam as a threat to liberal forms of democracy.

This sort of argument is precisely what some scholars have proposed. MacEoin (2006), for example, claims that many self-described moderates are sympathetic to the views of their more vocally radical counterparts, but that they practice a form of religious dissimulation called *taqiya* in order to present themselves as moderates to the West. Similarly, Kelsay (2007) points out that moderate Muslims do not necessarily disagree with Islamic militants—they too may view the democracy of the West, with its tolerance of moral relativism and its acceptance of secularism, as wrong, perhaps even dangerous to humanity. By defining radicalization in terms of perceived threat, such arguments encounter a logical breach in which moderates are at the same time radicals (because they pose threat) and the antithesis of radicals (recall that these terms are antonyms). Defining radicalization in terms of perceived threat therefore seems to be a recipe for incoherence and, needless to say, ought to be avoided.

My preliminary examination of the concept leads me to suggest that radicalization is often conceived by those attempting to mitigate its sometimes violent consequences as a form of threat to fundamental aspects of an existing and valued social order. That threat is particularly likely to be identified as a form of radicalization when it, in turn, is perceived as the product of extremist thinking and/or behavior. The threat from extremism labeled *radicalization* is also usually defined as a *process* whereby an originally moderate individual or group of individuals becomes progressively more extreme in their thinking, and possibly their behavior, over time (General Intelligence and Security Service, 2007; Global Futures Forum, 2006). Note that the concept of radicalization does not intrinsically provide an explanation of how that process unfolds or why it begins. The answers to those questions

would require a motivational theory of human thinking and behavior. Thus, scholars and practitioners alike may do well to consider precisely what the notion of radicalization contributes to their current understanding of terrorism and socio-political violence. Is radicalization, then, no more than a catchall phrase or semantic placeholder designed to vaguely capture *what goes on before the bombs go off*?

Radicalization and the Cognitive Plane

The notion of radicalization as a process leading toward increased extremism begs the question “extreme in what manner?” Some definitions answer this question by pointing primarily toward the cognitive plane of attitudes and beliefs. This was evident, for instance, in the Danish definition offered earlier in which radicalization is “the phenomenon of people embracing *opinions*, *views* and *ideas* that could lead to acts of terrorism" (2007, p. 8, my italics). To the extent that potential behavior is identified in the definition, it is done so as a consequence of the cognitions that radicals “embrace.” The Office of the Inspector General of the U.S. Department of Justice provide a definition of radicalization that also focuses on the cognitive plane: “...the process by which inmates who do not invite or plan overt terrorist acts adopt extreme views, including beliefs that violent measures need to be taken for political or religious purposes” (2004, p. 6). Indeed, the latter definition would appear to emphasize the cognitive aspects that define radicalization (namely, extreme views and beliefs that violence may be justified) to the exclusion of overt behavioral aspect (namely, “inmates who do not invite or plan overt terrorist acts...”). The precise intent of that exclusionary clause is unclear. However, it may suggest that the authors conceive of radicalization as predominantly constituting the psychological process whereby attitudes, beliefs, and values are acquired that support the intention to commit acts of violence in the future or that support the perpetration of violent acts by others who claim to be motivated by similar views.

In focusing on the cognitive plane it is important to distinguish between the contents

and the structure of extremist thinking. Both aspects are important, but for different reasons. Analysis of the contents may reveal important information about extremists' beliefs, ideologies, behavioral intentions, strategic objectives, and intended targets of violence. Such information, in turn, may provide useful intelligence for intercepting terrorists and disrupting radicalized groups' plans and activities. Therefore, a deep understanding of the contents of extremists' thinking must be a focus of the intelligence community's efforts to keep track of real and potential adversaries' intent, as well as their capabilities. The focus on content lends itself to a case- or category-specific approach in which the statements of members of a particular group or movement may be monitored.

Keeping track of such statements and the messages they convey can also play an important role in constructing counter-messages aimed at de-radicalizing individuals who are to some degree already radicalized as well as "inoculating" members of socio-cultural groups who are vulnerable to radicalization. Programs to combat extremism through counter-messaging are becoming increasingly popular among NATO countries as awareness that terrorism cannot be adequately controlled through military and law enforcement solutions alone grows stronger. For instance, in May 2008, the U.K. government released a document entitled *Preventing Violent Extremism: A Strategy for Delivery*, which outlines key steps in an influence campaign aimed at combating Muslim extremism, which the government (unsurprisingly) views as its primary threat from extremism nowadays (HM Government, 2008). The document outlines steps that could be taken to (a) undermine extremist ideology and support mainstream voices; (b) disrupt those who promote violent extremism, and strengthen vulnerable institutions; (c) support individuals who are vulnerable to recruitment by violent extremists; (d) increase the capacity of communities to challenge and resist violent extremists; (e) effectively address grievances; and (f) develop understanding, analysis and information, and improve strategic communications. Indeed, the U.K. Home Office is to

announce soon an additional £12.5 million to support new initiatives to prevent the spread of extremism, including plans to offer therapy to members of extremist groups who have not "clearly" committed a crime (Kirkup, June 3, 2008). Whether such efforts prove effective remains to be seen, but they do underscore a change in strategic thinking regarding the problem of terrorism—in short, a greater emphasis on the cognitive plane.

Analysis of the structure of extremist thinking is also important because it offers the prospect of discovering invariant (or, at least, relatively less variable) properties of extremist thinking that support violent behavioral intentions or violent behavior. Such efforts would be needed in order to develop a theory of radicalization that could be applied across a range of historical cases. Behavioral science could play a particularly useful role here, given that practitioners of domestic and international security may be primarily focused on high-risk cases that have already been identified. Structural features of extremist thinking might serve as indicators of terrorist or otherwise violent intent that have yet to capture the attention of practitioners. Efforts to combine such indicators and test their ability to predict behavioral intentions and behavior might provide a basis for developing a measure akin to a "radicalization barometer" one day.

Although space here precludes an extensive discussion of the social-cognitive determinants of extremism, a few candidates are worthy of mention, even if only as hypotheses to be addressed in future research. I should start by noting that none of the factors I am about to mention here are likely to constitute, on their own, either necessary or sufficient causes of extremism. It is more likely that their relationship to extremism—and violent extremism, in particular—is interactive rather than additive. All of the aforementioned factors, however, could very well be examined or gauged for their degree of expression through a combination of content and structural analyses of key figures' writings and speeches.

One candidate for such analysis is the degree to which ideologues and instigators of extremist movements rely on “black-or-white” or “all-or-none” thinking (Mandel, 2002b). A tendency to see one’s own perspective as representing absolute truth and pure virtue, while other perspectives represent falsehoods and/or evils can free one to believe that any sort of action that supports the dominance of that perspective within society is itself a virtuous act. Such tendencies are freed up even more when one’s attitudes and beliefs are attributed to “the word of god.” Today, many of us focus on the hijacking of Islam by extremists for precisely such purposes. But, the state terrorism and genocide of Nazi Germany was also led by a man who described his war against the Jews in terms of its purported messianic function:

> If, with the help of his Marxist creed, the Jew is victorious over the other peoples of the world, his crown will be the funeral wreath of humanity and this planet will, as it did thousands of years ago, move through the ether devoid of men. . . Hence today I believe that I am acting in accordance with the will of the Almighty Creator: by defending myself against the Jew, I am fighting for the work of the Lord. (Hitler, 1992, p. 60)

All-or-none thinking may be most likely to lead to violent extremism when the thinker believes the stakes of the perceived conflict to be all-encompassing and all-important. Under such conditions—namely, those in which victory implies utopia and defeat implies perdition—the ends may come to be viewed as justifying the means, particularly if nonviolent alternatives are perceived to be less effective.

Another set of cognitive factors that support extremism revolve around the extremist’s social perceptions of out-group members—namely, people outside one’s one social-ideological group or “in-group” (Tajfel, 1981). Violence toward a group is facilitated by thinking of its members as being justifiably excluded from the moral considerations one would impart on members of one’s own group. Perceiving a social category of others as being

morally excluded can free individuals to become morally disengaged in their behavioral interactions with members of that social category (Bandura, 1999; Staub, 1990).

The language that members of one group use to refer to others can serve as an indicator of social perceptions that might encourage adversarial intent toward those others. A common linguistic indicator is the use of descriptors that dehumanize out-group members. For instance, in much of the Arab and Islamic world today, children are taught in schools that Jews and Christians are sons of apes and pigs, as stated in the Qu'ran (Timmerman, 2004). Nearly a decade before Hitler rose to power, he described Jews in the following rhetorical terms:

> Was there any form of filth or profligacy, particularly in cultural life, without at least one Jew involved in it? If you cut even cautiously into such an abscess, you found, like a maggot in a rotting body, often dazzled by the sudden light--a kike! (1992, p. 53)

Years later, Nazi propaganda, such as the "documentary" film *der ewige Jude* (the eternal Jew) would depict Jews as bacillus-infected rats (Kershaw, 1987). Theorists and analysts trying to better understand socio-political violence and predict where it is likely to arise ought to move beyond simply seeing such statements as distasteful expressions of extremists and begin tracking whether such linguistic attributes have indicative value. This should be part of modern-day behavioral intelligence analysis but it is still exceedingly rare.

Extremism may also be prompted by emotion-provoking social comparisons that "reveal" that one's social grouping has been intentionally treated unfairly, humiliated, or deprived of what they otherwise deserve. Moreover, the out-group may be seen as benefiting directly by this injustice, prompting feelings of anger and hatred and a desire for revenge. It seems that a facet of extremism is to generalize across entire social groupings. Thus, even if a member of a targeted out-group had nothing personally to do with the injustices perpetrated

on the in-group, the extremist views that individual to blame simply because they belong to the out-group. This facet of extremism would seem to play a key role in the social production of genocidal campaigns aimed at total extermination of a social group. During the 1994 Rwandan genocide, for example, Hutu militias indiscriminately murdered over the course of about 100 days more than half a million Tutsis and thousands of other Hutus who did not join with them in the killing of Tutsis. Although constituting a minority of the population of Rwanda, the Tutsi represented the social elite, a status that prompted feelings of extreme inequity and hatred among the Hutu militias.

The "logic" of extremist hatred is such that would appear to have little or no regard for the just war theory criteria of either proportionality of means or proportionality of ends. To the violent extremist, the means of exacting revenge do not have to fit the magnitude of the crime. Thus, it is okay to murder scores of civilians simply because they are citizens of what is perceived as an evil regime. Nor is there proportionality of ends since murder is justified even if it fails to bring about any objective change in socio-political relations with the adversary. Rather violent extremists are prone (perhaps forced) to rely on the rationalization that their victims "deserve what they get." The statements of the alleged leader of the Toronto 18 terror bomb plot provide a recent example. The alleged leader, whose name has not been released because he was arrested as a minor, instructed his co-conspirator that it is okay to kill Jews because of what they have done in Palestine and "stuff like that.... It's not enough to say they're only my enemy in a certain part of land, they're your enemy everywhere you see them...every single Jew is your enemy" (quoted in Blatchford, June 6, 2008). The extremist appears either incapable or unwilling to perceive heterogeneity among members of social categories that are regarded as adversaries; guilt by association is legitimized; punishment by association, justified. This aspect of extremist thinking seems to capitalize on a rather mundane psychological tendency for people to perceive more variability among members of

their in-group than among out-group members (Quattrone & Jones, 1980). As with the other factors noted, the ostensible logic of revenge characteristic of violent extremist groups can be discerned from careful analysis of their members' statements and ought to be the focus of behavioral intelligence analysis.

Conclusion: Toward a Working Definition of Radicalization

Good definitions require that definientia are not merely synonyms of the definiendum. If radical is synonymous with extreme, as radicalism is with extremism, then where does that leave our attempts to define radicalization? Should radicalization, then, as some recent definitions suggest, be defined in terms of the *process* leading toward radicalism? And, if so, what does this process (or these processes) entail? As I have suggested earlier, the radicalization concept does not supply any details of those processes. Rather it acts as a catchall phrase to refer to "what goes on before the bombs go off" without having to describe what those processes actually entail. In this sense, we ought to be wary of the concept since it seems prone to creating the illusion of understanding rather than genuine understanding. On top of this, as we have seen, the concept is prone to being defined in relative, evaluative, and otherwise subjective terms, which can easily lead to breaches of logical coherence, such as when moderates that pose threats are radicals by definition, but at the same time contrasted from other radicals called radicals by category label.

The question then arises, what should we do with the radicalization concept? My own reading here is that the term does have limited value if defined in such a manner that avoids leading us unintentionally into intellectual quagmires. My recommendation in this regard is that we conceptualize of radicalization as being to extremism as velocity is to position. That is, radicalization is a (positive) change in the degree of extremism expressed by an individual or group. The analogy is imperfect, however, since velocity entails positional change at a constant rate, whereas radicalization would seldom, if ever, represent a constant rate of

increase in extremism over time. It falters in its ability to clearly distinguish velocity from acceleration. Still, the change notion seems more coherent than the process notion. When we speak of a group that is being radicalized, we do not merely mean that it is an extremist group, but rather that it is a group that has become or is becoming more extreme in its outlook or behavior. Of course, one could say that a radicalized group was one that is *in the process* of becoming more extreme. However, as already determined, that statement is mute with respect to the nature of that process. The core meaning of radicalization, therefore, is *increase in* (not process of) extremism. The process assumption is, in effect, no more than the mundane belief that changes occur as a result of underlying causal processes or the interaction of causal forces. It is not that these processes (whatever they might be) are unimportant. Indeed, they are very important, and also important to properly understand. I am simply arguing here that they are not part of the definition of radicalization, and that the definition ought to be intentionally defanged of any such implicature to mitigate the illusion of understanding, which the concept seems otherwise naturally prone to sustaining.

Accordingly, as a working definition, I submit the following:

> Radicalization refers to an increase in and/or reinforcing of extremism in the thinking, sentiments, and/or behavior of individuals and/or groups of individuals.

By offering this definition here, my hope is that it will fuel further discussion on the issue both among NATO members and in other national and international forums, with the longer-term objective being the achievement of *explicit*, *shared* and *principled* understanding of what has clearly become in recent years (and for better or worse) a much-invoked term in terrorism studies and counter-terrorism practice.

The forces or processes that give rise to extremism, of course, still need to be much better understood. That will require multiple lines of inquiry. One line of inquiry, which I have touched on briefly in this chapter, needs to focus on the psychological—namely, the

cognitive, emotive, and motivational—characteristics and processes that support extremism and collective violence (e.g., see Miller, 2004; Newman & Erber, 2002; Stern, 2003). A second line of inquiry might include better understanding the organizational processes and structures that facilitate the recruitment of individuals into radicalized groups (e.g., Sageman, 2004). A third line could focus on a much clearer articulation of the role of instigators and other categories of actor that act as facilitators or catalysts for extremism (e.g., Mandel, 2002a, 2002b; Victoroff, 2005). A fourth line could examine the broader set of socio-cultural factors that may regulate the expression of extremism. A fifth line of inquiry could investigate the characteristics of ideas or memes (Dawkins, 1976), those basic building blocks of culture, which become associated with radical groups and movements and make extremist messages "sticky" or contagious (e.g., Heath & Heath, 2007). Finally, efforts to integrate understanding across these lines of inquiry are needed not only for comprehensive theory building but also to assist policy makers in understanding how best to effectively counter violent extremism with limited resources in a rapidly changing and uncertain world.

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