
Islamist Radicalisation Towards Extreme Violence and Terrorism¹

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Introduction

Violent extremism, radicalisation and terrorism have become an increasing problem and threat in contemporary Europe. European countries and all relevant international organisations (UN, EU, OSCE, and NATO) identified terrorism and related radicalisation as a threat to national and international security. Presently, these countries are shaping or reshaping their policies and programs for monitoring radicalisation, de-radicalisation, and countering terrorism. This has also necessitated an increased scientific attention expressed in an increasing number of studies, books, and articles published in this field.

There is no universal definition of ‘radicalisation’ in the literature and in practice. In this paper, we define it as *a complex process of adopting radical views by individuals and social groups about political or social problems, which can eventually lead to the use of extreme violence in the form of terrorism*. This process is more or less hidden from the general public, but not in its end phase. Radicalisation is a problem predominantly because it may, at its evolutionary end point, lead to terrorism. In contrast, not all radicalisation processes lead to the use of violence for the purpose of achieving specific goals. As pointed out by Veldhuis and Staun (2009), some radicalisations can be linked with non-violent changes of the existing system. This means that we are actually worried more about those kinds of radicalisation where individuals, social groups, or entire societies

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move from the peaceful solving of pressing conflicts to the use of illegal and extreme violence.

Terrorism as the end point of the radicalisation process refers to the use of extreme violence for the purpose of achieving political goals. Key characteristics of terrorist violence are human casualties, destruction, and fear. Most of the time terrorists cannot achieve their extreme goals, so spreading fear is also good enough for their purposes. A key form of terrorism is the terrorist attack, and we can observe several forms of it, such as political murders or assassinations, kidnapping, hijacking of airplanes, ships, buses, etc., arson, bomb attacks (including the use of letter bombs, car bombs, or suicide bomb attacks), attacks on embassies and diplomats, shootings in public places, etc. Radicalisation may also end up in the use of the so-called special or nonconventional terrorism, such as chemical, biological, nuclear, and radiological terrorism. The motivation of terrorist actors in the direction of non-conventional terrorism is increasing due to their wish to perform more visible and influential events. Trends on the use of terrorist violence show increasing brutality, the primacy of innocent civilian targets and victims, connections with military presence in crisis areas, connections with migrations and inter-cultural and inter-religious relations, and a broadening of the spectrum of methods (such as the use of suicide terrorists in Europe, simultaneous attacks, use of vans, attacks on concerts, restaurants, media houses, etc.). The radicalisation end point, however, does not relate only to the execution of terrorist attacks. As Prezelj (2007: p. 81) argued, terrorism includes, besides carrying out attacks, also planning, organizing, and supporting terrorist activities. Additionally, terrorism refers to threats with terrorism as well. This all means that terrorism is actually a very complex security and social problem.

After this explanation of the evolutionary end point of radicalisation, we should also define more precisely the relationship between terrorism and extremism. Terrorism is always an expression of extremism. The latter refers to an ideology of maximising own goals without considering the majority view. It also refers to activities that are far away from the normal persuasions, values, opinions, activities, strategies, etc. All examples of terrorism are a form of political extremism, though not all forms of political extremism are terrorism. Many extremists and even political extremists live in our world, but they are not considered as terrorists because they do not (or intend to) use violence to achieve their political goals. This means that terrorists are to be found among political extremists, but not all such extremists are terrorists. Additionally, several sources point to subjectivity or political nature of the labelling act of someone as extremist (see Bartoli and Coleman, 2003, etc.).

A study of radicalisation is necessary for preventing individuals and groups from pursuing the path towards using violence in solving their (perceived) problems. This paper aims to explain the process of Islamist radicalisation at the conceptual level, present the idea of Jihad, the related misuse of Islamic religious principles, and empirically explore the related propaganda process (especially the use of social media to attract and mobilise potential terrorists). We argue in this paper that the basic element in the radicalisation story is a fight for the hearts and minds of the population. The basic rule of the game is that the actor who attracts more popular support will prevail, and actually be able to define what is normal and what is radical.

This paper is structured in the following way. Firstly, we define the process of Islamist radicalisation, its aims and define one of its key purposes: winning the hearts and minds of the general population to increase support for own goals. Secondly, we present and analyse the misuse of Islamic religious principles in the radicalisation process. In the last part of the paper, we explain the role of communication tools and propaganda in the radicalisation process. In this respect, the paper identifies typical elements of Islamist propaganda (especially used by al-Qaeda and ISIS), the role of social media, and the role of the online magazine *Inspire*. In conclusion, we collect and verify evidence for our argument on winning hearts and minds.

Islamist Radicalisation towards Terrorism and the Struggle for Winning the Hearts and Minds of the Population

The existing literature defines several types of terrorism and related motivations. This implicitly means that we have also several types of radicalisation. These types are different in terms of their goals and end points, but also share some similarities. In this respect, we distinguish among:

- Islamist radicalisation towards the use of violence for the establishment of an Islamic religious state (caliphate),
- Right-wing radicalisation towards the use of violence for establishing a mono-ethnic and mono-religious state (e.g. Blood and Honour, Fuerza Nuova, Sturm 34, Soldiers of Odin),
- Left-wing or anarchistic radicalisation with the use of violence against the existing capitalist systems and its symbols (e.g. Secours Rouge),
- Secessionist or ethno-nationalistic radicalisation towards the use of violence to secede or to increase autonomy (e.g. IRA, ETA), and

- Single-issue radicalisation linked to solving specific problems through the use of violence (e.g. Animal Liberation Front, etc.).

Accordingly, Islamist radicalisation is a religion-related process of radicalisation towards the use of violence for achieving religious or pseudo-religious goals, such as the establishment of an Islamic religious state with the supremacy of Sharia law. Islamist radicalisation and the related terrorism have become the most pressing type of terrorism in Europe since 9/11. As Laquer found out (2004: p. 29), such religious motivation has become prevalent over the previously strongest ideological motivation. After a brief look at the history of radicalisation, we can see that Al-Qaeda has become a supreme organisational and motivational actor with global influence on the Islamist radicalisation process, and that ISIS successfully continued this work on the global level. *The main aim of Islamist radicalisation process has been to increase the number of supporters and members of terrorist or radical groups.* This process has been based on recruiting volunteers for Jihad in present conflict areas (Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, Lebanon, etc.), enabling these volunteers to get into conflict areas and return from there (foreign fighters and returnees), sending them to training camps in various countries (where they learn to shoot, assemble bombs, collect intelligence), etc. The radicalisation process, however, does not lead only to the recruitment of fighters, it also focuses on the recruitment of people for several support roles.

The whole radicalisation process is strongly based on the use of communication tools and propaganda to increase membership, increase broader support, and explain or excuse their violence. Accordingly, the radicals and terrorists increasingly use the internet, publish speeches of imams and other relevant persons, carry out and publish interviews, publish magazines, produce movies and other multimedia materials, promise paradise for jihadists, etc. With ISIS, the radicalisation time has decreased, participation in foreign conflict areas by the so-called foreign fighters has increased and more elaborated communication strategies targeted to various publics have been used.

We need to understand that Islamist radicalisation is a process composed of several phases. It starts with pre-radicalisation or moral outrage, interpretation and self-identification, internalisation or indoctrination, and mobilization by terrorist network or jihadisation (see Sageman, 2008: pp. 71–89). *Islamist terrorist and radical actors need to capture the mind of individuals in this process or, in other words, need to win their hearts and minds.* The more people captured this way, the more support and legitimisation for their actions will exist. The same is true for fight against

terrorism and anti-radicalisation measures (normally carried out by governments). If the government, with its own interpretation of affairs, does not win the hearts and minds of the population, it can never win over terrorists and radicals. This is one of the key elements of the so-called ‘smart counter-terrorism’ (see Prezelj, 2013). The question is why terrorism still exists despite successful counterterrorist operations. Why have dead or captured leaders been replaced by new leaders and new hubs?

Part of the answer lies in the network structure of radical and terrorist groups, which is quite adaptable and resistant to traditional forms of combat and law enforcement. The other part of the answer relates to the support of the people. At this cognitive level (in the world of meaning and feeling), radical terrorist and counter-terrorist narratives and ideologies are competing to win the hearts and minds of the population. These facts have been confirmed by the counter-insurgency literature. For example, Nagl (2005) clearly explained that there are two basic approaches in counter-insurgency: directly annihilating the insurgents (extremists, radicals, and terrorists in our discussion), or indirectly turning the loyalty of the people. The indirect approach (in Mao Tse-Tung’s terms “to separate the fish from the water”) recognizes that while continuing to attack the armed elements of the insurgency, it is also essential to attack the support of the people for the insurgents. Such an indirect approach is rather different from the direct approach, and in the long term is usually more effective. O’Neill (2002) also stressed that several aspects of popular support need to be considered, such as active and passive support, the role of intellectuals and the masses, and various techniques to gain support. Such a fight for the loyalty of the population is essentially political in nature, but is also inseparable from law enforcement and military activities.

This leads us to the need to understand how Islamist radicals try to win the hearts and minds of the population, as well as to increase their membership. We will first look at how they handle religious principles, and then how they use propaganda.

Misuse of Islamic Religious Principles in the Radicalisation Process

Islamist radicalisation and terrorism does not exist without a religious basis. The basis comes from religious texts, and more precisely from specific interpretations of religious texts (see Capan, 2006; Esposito, 2003; Hartevelt Kobrin, 2010). The purpose of this chapter is to explain how individuals move from Islam to jihadi extremism and terrorism, and how they misuse related religious principles and texts.

The story of Islam starts with its founder, Muhammad, who was born around the year 570 into the Quraysh tribe, which controlled the west Arabian town of Mecca. The tribe was known predominantly for trading, mainly because in Mecca there was a sacred stone (displayed in Kaaba), which was a pilgrimage destination (Donner, 2006: pp. 23–24). Around the year 610, Muhammad had his first revelation that he was a new, and the final, prophet of God. This was the start of Islam. Initially, his new beliefs weren't accepted in the tribe, so he migrated to Medina in 622, where he started to acquire followers and became a leader of "an autonomous political community" (Donner, 2006: pp. 24–26). With his new base in Medina, he started to expand his power with a variety of methods (from negotiations, purchase, marriage, to raids and battles). This culminated in 630 when he managed to conquer Mecca, and with this he became the unchallenged political leader of Western Arabia and played the role of a monotheist prophet (Donner, 2006: pp. 27–29).

When Muhammad died in 632, the Muslim community (*Ummah*) was left without a leader (both as political and religious group). They started to collect his teachings and revelations, which resulted in the formation of *Quran* (Gilliot, 2006: pp. 44–45). Additionally, they also preserved the memories of the first-generation Muslims of Muhammad's teachings, deeds, and life; this collection is known as *Hadith*. Based on the *Quran* and *Hadith*, Muslims created their law (*Sharia*) (Gabriel, 2002: pp. 25–26).

One of more important concepts that was formed already in his lifetime is also that of *jihad*:

Jihad as struggle pertains to the difficulty and complexity of living a good life: struggling against the evil in oneself in order to be virtuous and moral, making a serious effort to do good works and to help to reform society. Depending on the circumstances in which one lives, it can also mean fighting injustice and oppression, spreading and defending Islam, and creating a just society through preaching, teaching, and, if necessary, armed struggle or holy war. (Esposito 2003: p. 28)

Knapp defines jihad as a "struggle or striving (in the way of God) or to work for a noble cause with determination; it does not mean holy war" (war in Arabic is *harb* and holy *muqadassa*). Hadith explains jihad as an "armed action," while classical period theologians and jurists saw it as an obligation in a military sense (Knapp, 2003: pp. 82–83).

Later, Islamic scholars defined four different ways how a Muslim is to perform Jihad: by his heart (to combat the Devil inside), his tongue and hands (both through supporting the right cause and correction of wrong),

and by war. Muhammad considered the first way as “the most important type of jihad” (Schwartz-Barcott, 2004: p. 271).

Already during Muhammad’s lifetime the expansion of Islamic rule was becoming more and more aggressive. Gabriel (2002: 31) wrote that “the Quranic revelations in Mecca talk about peace and cooperation with others. But in Medina, Muhammad became a military leader and invader, so the revelations in Medina talk about military power and invasion in the name of Islam (jihad).” This resulted in the belief that Islam has to be spread with military action and not (only) through a just society: “The religious justification made for a jihad to propagate the word of God and the just reign of God’s will for all humanity” (Esposito, 2003: pp. 32–33).

To participate in the jihad, you must be selected by the Imam (or his delegate) and also meet some requirements. The obligation to participate in jihad is defined by Knapp as follows:

Jihad was not generally understood as an obligation of each individual Muslim (known as *fard’ayn*), but as a general requirement of the Muslim community (*fard kifaya*). Only in emergencies, when the Dar al-Islam² comes under unexpected attack, do all Muslims have to participate in jihad. Under normal circumstances, therefore, an individual Muslim need not take part so long as other Muslims carry the burden for all the defending of the realm.” (2003: pp. 83–84)

Furthermore, such military jihad must be waged for “justifiable reasons,” and can also be “invoked in order to justify offensive operations in distant lands, to suppress and punish dissent, secession, and rebellion” (Schwartz-Barcott, 2004: pp. 272–273).

Knapp (2003: p. 83) also specifies that jihad (in general) has a political aim, which is the drive to establish a single, unified Muslim realm, and which justified Islam’s suppression of other faiths and allowed for the creation of a just political and social order.

At the latter time, with the creation of modern states and the inability to perform the military jihad, the goals of a just and fair society (according to the Muslim interpretation) were tried by people to accomplish their goals through political process. This political movement is known as Islamism, which is focused on finding “empowerment and justice” for Muslims. But the political and economic decline led to the formation of several extremist and radical responses from different political

2 Sharia divides world in two hemispheres: dar al-Islam(m) (land of Islam) and dar al-harb (land of war). The first is territory under Muslim control and rule, while the second consists of all the states and communities outside the world of Islam; inhabitants of this world are known as infidels or unbelievers (Schwartz-Barcott, 2004: p. 270).

and ideological camps. Combined with contemporary nationalist, socialist, and secular causes, this radical Islamism led to modern Islamist terrorism. It strives to achieve a just (Muslim) society across the globe by using violent means (Azzam 2006: p. 1121). This is where the misuse of Islam starts in order to excuse the use of illegal violence.

Islamist jihadi terrorism can achieve its goals by basing its ideology and motivation on Islamic religious teachings, or more correctly, on their interpretation of the Quran and Hadith (Capan, 2006; Esposito, 2003; Hartevelt Kobrin, 2010; Taheri 1987; Kocjančič and Prezelj, 2015). According to Brachmann (2009), this is accomplished through three basic treatises of the global jihadist doctrine: 1) Muslims need to fulfill their religious commitment, 2) they should refrain from the modern interpretation of Sharia and return to the original interpretation, and 3) Muslims need to love everything that leads to Allah and combat everything that hinders that.

Several different studies (Halverson, Furlow and Corman 2012; Singh and Perry 2010) clearly showed that *leading jihadists use quotes from the Quran and/or Hadith to justify their terrorist activities*. This is done through manipulation and/or selective usage of Quranic verses.

Halverson, Furlow, and Corman (2012) examined more than 2,000 extremist texts, which were created between 1998 and 2011, and discovered there is a disproportionate use of surahs (chapters) from the later Medinan over the earlier Meccan period. This is mostly because Medinan surahs represent “the onset and completion of military conflict between earliest Muslims and the ‘pagan’ clans of Mecca and their allies.” They were also surprised that Islamist extremists don’t use the most violent or militant verses, but are focused on themes of victimisation, dishonor, and retribution, which show close integration with the rhetorical vision of Islamist extremists.

One notable example of militant verse is the so-called “Sword Verse” (9:5), which states:

And when the forbidden months have passed, kill the idolaters wherever you find them and take them prisoners, and beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them at every place of ambush. But if they repent and observe Prayer and pay the Zakat, then leave their way free. Surely, Allah is Most Forgiving, Merciful.

The Islamist terrorists will predominantly use only the first part of the verse, which calls to the killing and enslavement of unbelievers, while they will omit the second part, which mandates peaceful coexistence (under some terms). Furthermore, jihadist ideologists like to use Quranic

verses that speaks about salvation, the defense of Islam, and striving towards a worldwide Islamist society. This political-religious goal is based on the radicalisation of masses that want to subdue other countries with the ultimate goal of creating the Islamic caliphate. *To accomplish this goal, they deliberately misuse Quranic texts and Sharia law and propagate their vision of “true” Quranic understanding through their propaganda system.* Their propaganda is based on the belief that the Muslim community as a whole is under (constant) attack from non-believers, and the only way to solve this, is to wage war (e. g. terrorism) against Western countries (see Kocjančič and Prezelj, 2015: pp. 311–313).

Role of Islamist Propaganda in the Radicalisation Process

Radicalisation process contains elements of propaganda, but in somewhat specific circumstances. *Winning the hearts and minds of new supporters and even the general population can also be a result of typical propagandistic approaches.* Daugherty and Janowitz (in Malešič et al., 1997: p. 32) described propaganda as “a planned dissemination of news, information, special arguments, and appeals designed to influence the beliefs, thoughts, and actions of a specific group.” Propaganda is actually a multi-layered and complex phenomena, and in this paper we can examine only one of its models. According to Malešič (see Malešič et al., 1997: pp. 39–47), the study model of propaganda consists of elements that are directly connected to propaganda message (such as ideology expressed as nationalism, religion or (re)interpretation of history, routine lies, collective and selective memory loss, classic or hard propaganda, and anti-propaganda), indirectly connected with a propaganda message (such as the use of language, source criticism, iconography, compatibility of visual and textual information, (de)construction of the national memory, and specifying who is “the Other”), while there is also an environmental aspect of the message. The latter consists of the context of propaganda, the public for propaganda, the propagandist, and the structure of the propaganda organisation.

Lakomy (2017: pp. 39–40) perceives Islamist propaganda as sophisticated, well-thought-out threats to stability, and the safety of states. It is a part of psychological warfare aimed towards the Western world, which simultaneously also has to gain support from Islamist groups from this Western world.

The foundations for modern Islamist propaganda were laid by al-Qaeda and ISIS. Islamic propaganda is labelled as modern, where modernity refers to the fact of being predominantly disseminated through the social networks on the Web 2.0. Suitable, recruitable demographic groups

now exist only few clicks away from the propaganda source. This improves the chances for recruitment of new members of terrorist groups in ways previously seen only in case of propaganda by some nation states. ISIS's use of the internet for propaganda purposes reflects a very professional approach, resulting in an increase in the reach of messages, and consequently in the recruitment of new members (worldwide and not only in the Middle East). Dissemination of propagandistic messages through social networks is additionally appealing because of the use of online media and the simplicity of access (Taylor, 2017).

The propaganda strategies of al-Qaeda and ISIS have actually been intertwined. They have many common characteristics. Allison Smith and her colleagues (in Cohen, Kruglanski, Gelfand, Webber and Gunaratna, 2016: p. 144) studied the content of propagandistic material of several violent Islamist extremist groups. They discovered that the main points of propaganda material are based on the *emphasis of in-group righteousness, morality, and civility*. *Al-Qaeda liked to use positive emotion words* in its messages and in the speeches of its leaders (Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri), such as "happy," "joy," "love," etc. Positive emotion words were actually used more frequently than negative emotion words, such as e.g. "awful," "cry," "hate," and anger words (e.g. "kill," etc.) (Pennebaker and Chung, 2007: p. 5). An important element of Al-Qaeda's propaganda material is also violence. Through *violent content*, the group gains access to even wider audiences and realises the group's main objective – gaining new activists, winning hearts and minds among the Muslim population, awakening sympathy in parts of the audience, and terrorizing the enemies – who have to begin to seek surrender. The ideology in propaganda by al-Qaeda is strictly religious, since the group wanted to be a sole representative of global Jihad (Jordan, Torres and Jeep, 2005).

The *religious ideology* of al-Qaeda has performed like a glue, which held together the entire terrorist group, not only on a local scale, but on a global one as well. A strong ideology, which translates through the propaganda of the group, is also needed because of the apparent out-numbering by the majority population. The ideology also serves as a motivational factor, and strict interpretations of Quran are helpful. In the case of al-Qaeda, the ideology has been always internationally oriented and filled with the attempts of contextualising local conflict as parts of global struggles. But this is not enough for speeding up the whole radicalisation process. *Dehumanisation of the enemy* is often portrayed in propagandistic messages, and it became one of the key factors of rapid radicalisation towards violence. This way, the ideology can have a deeper impact, since the enemy

and the victims become symbols, and not humans made out of flesh and blood.

The al-Qaeda propaganda began to flourish when the above identified propagandistic elements were spread to a broad spectrum of internet users all around the globe. The group actually started using the internet for propagandistic dissemination in a similar way as modern states do or could do. Dissemination of messages was quick and global. Literacy barriers, created by the Arab illiteracy, were transcended by the mixture of audio-visual messages (Rabasa et al., 2006: p. 16).

By the year 2006, Al-Qaeda operated more than 4,000 websites used for different purposes, such as attracting new members (beginning of the radicalisation process), communication among the core of the group and its periphery, fundraising, and planning of new and improved attacks, etc. (Rabasa et al., 2006: p. 18). Terrorist groups also used websites for publicly claiming their responsibility for the past attacks. One such website was *revolutionmuslim.com*. This website acted like a hub with links to other social platforms where individuals could start or proceed their online radicalisation. The hub included links to YouTube (links to at least six channels), Facebook, Scribd, PalTalk, Slideshare, and BlipTV. *One of the greatest achievements of this hub, if we can say so, was introduction of “e-zine” or online magazine named Inspire*. To this day, there have been 17 recorded issues of this magazine. The man behind the dissemination of *Inspire*, in its early issues, was Anwar al-Awlaki, sometimes dubbed as: “the bin Laden of the internet.” He was also well known for online sharing of his audio tapes and literature. He was also seeking connections with potential new terrorist members and sympathisers through the comments sections on his blog posts (Klausen, 2016: pp. 31–34).

On the other hand, propaganda by ISIS became much more complex and multi-faceted than the one by al-Qaeda. ISIS also used violence as a theme of its propaganda messages. ISIS actually turned out to be a much more brutal terrorist organisation than al-Qaeda, resulting in even more brutal messages (e.g. more video materials showing decapitations of hostages, shooting of prisoners in front of their freshly dug graves, disfigured bodies of enemies, etc.). *Flames of War*, an ISIS movie from 2014, is a good example of incorporation of all above mentioned factors. The movie shows a symbolic image of the ISIS fighter on the one hand and also a very brutal message to their enemies on the other hand. ISIS fighters are shown as good, moral, and cheerful human beings, who defeat the opposing side in a battle. The lives of these fighters have meaning in an attractive way. These “good” and “moral” men as fighters show no mercy when it comes down to captured prisoners. The movie uses an example of such prisoners

who were punished for their disgraceful acts (i.e. fighting against ISIS). They had to dig their own graves and the movie ends with the prisoners' mass murder, with their bodies falling into shallow graves. Such propaganda tools can have a very strong pull and push effect for potential candidates for radicalisation and Jihadisation, and also strong deterrent effects on all people who disagree with ISIS.

Gartenstein-Ross, Barr and Moreng (2016: p. 15) found three core messages in ISIS propaganda:

- Successful restoration of the caliphate by ISIS, making it the only authentic Islamic state on the globe;
- A message that ISIS is the only legitimate Islamic organisation in the world, from theological, legal, and political points of view, therefore it nullifies existing governments, rival Jihadi organisations, and also political Islamic groups;
- A message that ISIS is more capable and unified than al-Qaeda ever was.

These messages show that a terrorist group leads its propaganda efforts not only against its direct enemies, but also against its Islamic rivals as well. The propaganda is made in a way to attract potential followers and recruits, and to radicalize them further towards the use of violence.

The question in the present information age is also *what role modern social information media plays in the radicalisation process*. Modern social information networks are based on websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking (*Oxford Dictionary*, 2018). Social media represent a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of the Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of any user-generated content. Forms of social media are scattered across not only Facebook and Twitter, but across internet forums, message boards, product-review websites, blogs, open editable contents and websites that share picture and video material. Such examples include Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, YouTube, Wikipedia, Second Life, etc. (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010: p. 61).

All these social media platforms can be used and misused by the terrorist and radical groups, as propagandistic messages can easily be spread to great numbers of recipients. Additionally, as stated by Taylor (2017), propaganda dissemination through the internet, offers anonymity on high levels, as well quick site relocation, which lowers risks of apprehension by law enforcement. Hegghammer (2016: p. 163) identified several potential benefits of internet (mis)usage by Jihadi terrorist groups: speed, cheapness,

globalist character, and the fact it is more expansive than analogue alternatives. Therefore, the internet is a more affordable platform for propaganda distribution, recruitment, fundraising, reconnaissance, and operational coordination than any other existing means. Khosrokhavar (2017: p. 57) added that the internet actually represents “an instrument that amplifies the capacity for violence in radical people or groups by allowing types of communication that forgo rigid structures and face-to-face meetings.” It can even be said that in the today’s society terrorist groups would not exist (at least not on a scale they do) without the use and presence of social media.

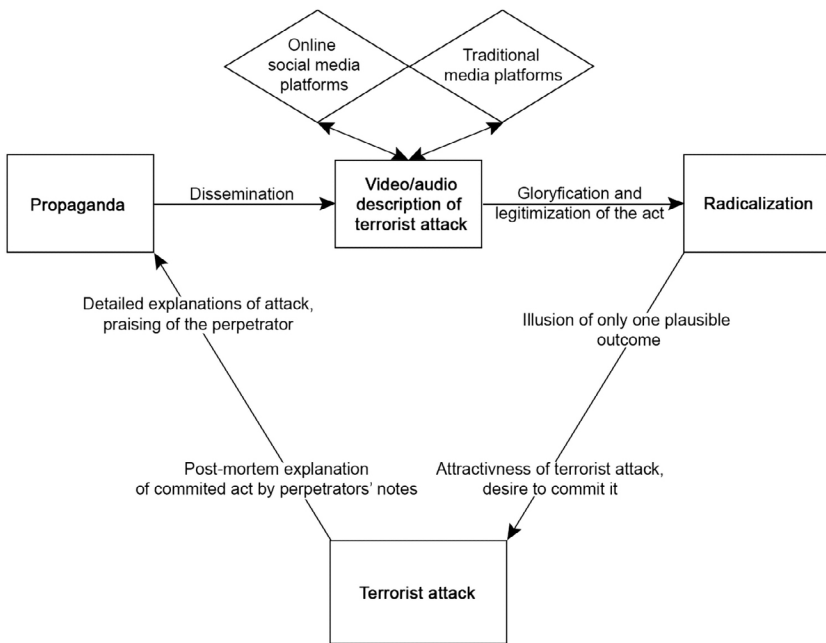


Figure 1: Radicalisation process and propaganda

Example of the Magazine *Inspire*

In this sub-chapter, we present and briefly analyze an example of radicalisation and propaganda tools, called *Inspire*. *Inspire* has been one of the main magazines published by Islamist radicals spread over the internet to large masses in different continents, including to Western Europe. *Inspire* is an English-language magazine published by al-Qaeda of Arab Peninsula (AQAP). ISIS has been publishing a similar online magazine

called *Dabiq*. We also have other magazines published in the past, such as *Jihad Recollections* with a few issues in 2009.

Inspire is an online magazine that is published irregularly. The latest issues are Summer 2017 (17), Autumn 2016 (16), Spring 2016 (15), Autumn 2015 (14), Winter 2014 (13), etc. This means we cannot predict publishing date of new issues of the magazine. But, all new issues will be available on the internet for all interested radicals.

Propagandistic radicalisation moves can be found in all 17 issues of *Inspire* magazine. In the last issue from 2017 (pages 14–16), author Hamza Usama bin Laden gives advice to anyone who intends to carry out a “martyrdom operation.” Below, we added our comments in parentheses to explain broader characteristics of the radicalisation move. In the beginning of the article, the author asks Allah for mercy upon all the great martyrs, who already committed attacks for Ummah (move of glorification of the extreme act, legitimisation by referring to Allah). The article is written in story-like style, full of words like: noble knight, the greatest of virtues, glory, worship, blessed operation, etc. (this creates an attractiveness and desire to be a part of this process). Allah is also dubbed as the greatest of protectors³ for whom, the martyr has to do the best deeds. Only in this way Allah will have a good opinion of the future terrorist (this creates an illusion that there is only one way and nothing else). The future terrorist has to prioritise his targets and the article identifies the following prioritised targets: people who violate “pure” religion of jihadists and/or the prophet, Jews, American crusaders, if unable to find Americans, NATO member states crusaders, and Russians for their interference in matters of Islam (this represents an operationalisation of effort and an attempt to direct the radicalised person). The author stressed that when attacking these targets the terrorist has to convey the message of the “blessed operation” through the media. The intent of the attack must be well known to the masses (this serves to spread the message on its purpose, and also to spread the fear to the broader audience). If a radicalised person follows this advice, the propaganda circle is completed. A person was attracted, motivated and persuaded, directed and his/her act was transmitted to many different publics by various media (multiplication of the impact). Additionally, a successful attack by such a person will likely be documented and consequently serve to create new propagandistic material for new recruits. This is why *Inspire* also reports in detail about some

3 Followed by the lines from Quran: “If Allah is your helper, none can overcome you. And if He forsakes you, who is there after Him who can help you?” [3: 160]

past successful terrorist attacks. These reports include explanation on the why and how these attacks were carried out.

A person that calls himself Sheikh Hamd bin Hamoud Al-Tameemy sums up the target selection in one of the magazines published in 2017. He published it in a part of the magazine called “Ruling of the Lone Jihad” (this part reflects the wish to influence lone wolves, that is people who radicalise by themselves using such literature). He claims, that it is way easier to target the “so-called male civilians” in comparison to military targets. The latter expect own casualties while the former (civilians) do not. He also points out that attacks on civilians will ignite more fear, and that fear will spread among the entire population and not only within the military personnel. The same person described categories of the target civilian population in an issue of *Inspire* from 2016. He divided civilian non-Muslim population in four different categories (the first three categories are protected by Sharia law):

- non-believers who have peace agreements of ceasing fight with Muslims,
- non-Muslims who live under the rule and protection of Islam,
- protected non-Muslims, and
- ‘combatant non-believers’ also dubbed as infidels.

Every Muslim has the “right” to fight these non-believers (the last category above) at any given time and at any given place, claims the author. This was followed by the lines from Quran:

And when the sacred months have passed, then kill the polytheists wherever you find them and capture them and besiege them, and sit in wait for them at every place of ambush. But if they should repent, establish prayer, and give zakah, let them [go] on their way. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful. And fight against the disbelievers collectively as they fight against you collectively.

And additional lines were also included:

And kill them wherever you overtake them and expel them from wherever they have expelled you.

Content of *Inspire* magazine can be distributed in two different pillars. The first pillar consists of articles that sum up the main events since the last issue (official statements and *Inspire* reactions), personal information about terrorists who committed attacks (sometimes dubbed as ‘martyrs’), interviews with influential people in al-Qaeda, guidance about target selection and lifestyle, and specific instructions for homemade IEDs

(improvised explosive devices) and other devices with which one can harm civilians. The second pillar consists of themes that are part of the everyday lives of perpetrators. These are mainly recommendations for future perpetrators (sometimes dubbed as ‘martyrdom seekers’), on how to overcome the fear in Jihad, including the quotes by influential al-Qaeda members to be followed (entitled “Words of Wisdom”), etc.

Specifically, the entire *Inspire* content is divided into several sections.

- Editor’s letter. In the beginning of every issue, the editor, called by the name Yahya Ibrahim, shortly sums up the entire issue. The summary is full of advertising of Jihadi ideas. The language is strongly anti-American⁴, and it advises potential recruits and radicals to carry out attacks in the future;
- The second rubric consists of statements about the US military raids and own operations by the Mujahedeen martyrs. In cases of military operations done by the United States, *Inspire* offers condolences to Muslim brothers and glorifies lost martyrs. Executed terrorist attacks against civilians are praised under the term “blessed operations.” Statements are full of praise, congratulations, and Quran verses, and Arabic poetry. Perpetrators are elevated into heroes, who fulfilled their promises (“*when the heroes were assigned, they acceded to,*” “*they promised and fulfilled,*” “*congratulations to you,*” “*o Ummah of Islam, for this vengeance that has soothed our chests*”).
- The rubric called “*Words of Wisdom.*” In some 100 words, influential al-Qaeda members (dead or alive) are quoted. Usama bin Laden has been quoted in the 17th issue of the magazine, even though he had been killed in a military operation led by the United States in year 2011. Therefore, the cult of personality outlives these main figures of terrorist organisations. His quote addresses future perpetrators and radicals: “*. . . in front of you is a great opportunity to resist this oppression and tyranny that has for decades been upon you. . .*” In some cases quotes from influential people in terrorist world are backed up by lines from Quran as described already above.
- The rubric called “Open Source Jihad.” This part of the magazine gives specific instructions how to build weapons at home, such as IEDs. It also describes how to create damage (mainly to economy)

4 In his letter in the beginning of the issue 15 (spring 2016), the editor has stressed the disruption United States created in the Middle East. He stated that the United States are “exhausting and weakening the Sunni population, so it can not enjoy living a free life under Sharia.” He also claimed that politics of United States is cowardly and “dirty,” because it is unable to confront Muslims directly on the ground. He also claimed that Democrats *are smilingly stabbing Muslims in the back, while the Republicans openly kill them.*

and cause victims (mainly civilians). In the issue number 17, there is a 20-page long instruction on how to assemble a homemade train derailment tool (the entire issue is about public transport, specifically about public railway systems). In their words, this form of weapon distinguishes itself from others because it is:

easy to design; operation is not martyrdom operation, thus it can be repeated; easy to hide your tracks from forensics /.../, causes great impact on the economy; the enemy is confused /.../ new kind of attack; security agencies will be puzzled and confused to find a solution.

Some other issues offer instructions how to build pressure cooker bombs, explosives for home assassinations (parcel bombs, door trap bombs, and magnetic car bombs), timed hand grenades, hidden bombs made with simple kitchen materials, etc.

- As we can see, the radicalisation process stimulated by Inspire magazine is multi-layered. Not only it describes the “How to?” it also describes the “Why?” and “Who?”. Every gruesome act that a future terrorist should commit is supported by verses from the Quran, which in the view of authors and editor adds to the credibility of the article and the whole terrorist action.

Conclusion

This paper argued that the basic point of Islamist radicalisation process is to win the hearts and minds of people. We can confirm this argument and give the following explanation how this is done in the Islamist radicalisation process. We found out that radicalisation is a vital process for a radical or terrorist social group because it enables them to obtain future members, fighters, and supporters. Youngsters are more vulnerable to such a process than older people. Especially critical is the misuse of Islamic religious texts as an excuse or legitimisation to use violence for achieving very narrow political aims. The next stage is the extensive use of propaganda, especially through the internet and social media. The cases of al-Qaeda and ISIS show that the hearts and minds of the population can be won by indiscriminately using attractiveness (carrots) and threats (sticks) in the propaganda process. The main factors of propaganda by terrorist groups that affect radicalisation are selective memory, amplification of certain messages, creation of an illusion of supreme Islamic truth and supreme reality, claiming responsibility for attacks, misuse of religion and specific religious texts, the mobilisation into an attractive and important endeavor, extortion, the dehumanisation of enemies, threats, etc.

Based on this, we can describe Islamist propaganda as the premediated spread of messages to potential targets, sympathisers, members of terrorist organizations, and their enemies through online social platforms and traditional media with the intention of winning the hearts and minds or deterring the enemy. The latter is easily done by showing merciless violence (e.g. beheadings, shooting people in front of cameras, etc.). Additional lessons from the magazine *Inspire* confirm that messages of attraction and messages of violence are simultaneously combined in an Islamic propaganda approach. Each number of this magazine includes messages of glorification of the brave acts, legitimisation using religious quotes, a desire to be a part of a violent Islamist Jihad, the operationalisation of desire to help by identification of potential targets, etc. Messages that there is no other alternative are also involved. The radicalisation approach also takes care about publicizing preparation and execution of attacks, and uses such messages for spreading fear, getting support, and teaching new radicals how to attack. Additionally, Islamist propaganda involves specific instructions how to build explosive devices and other weapons at home. All this is done in combination with Arabic poetry, Quran verses, and instructions how to overcome fear, descriptions of heroic brothers who killed many people, etc.

The question is how to fight such the multi-layered process of radicalisation, especially at the point of our highest vulnerability: youngsters. Schools, families, and social networks play a crucial role here. Families provide children their primary socialisation, where children are taught to distinguish right from wrong. The socialisation of children in schools should also focus on talking about the presently taboo theme – the radicalisation of youngsters. Children should be educated about radicalisation, especially about online radicalisation, and extreme violence, and the same goes for teachers and social workers. The educational system should perceive radicalisation process as a reality. From this standpoint, many workshops and lectures should be held for youngsters, where the consequences of radicalisation process would be shown. More studies with the best and worst practices should be conducted and publicly presented, teachers should be more careful about deviations from normal behavior in classrooms and in public, and the presence of the above analyzed propaganda. We also need more comparative studies on radicalisation and de-radicalisation. The de-radicalisation process should also aim to win the hearts and minds of population, and therefore use all possible media and educational tools to present alternative narratives. Schools should be able to identify early indicators of Islamist or any other radicalisation with groups of kids

or, even more importantly, lonely individuals. This is a difficult task that will require further research in this field.

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