



Factors **of the** **Emergence** **and** **Spread of** **Radicalism** **and** **Terrorism** **in the** **Muslim** **World**

Sayyid Kazem Seyed Bagheri

Associate professor at the research center
of Islamic thinking and culture.
sbagheri86@yahoo

Abstract

Referring to the current literature of radicalism and terrorism, one can find various aspects of it that unfortunately deal with all spheres of public life in thought, politics, society, and economics and have a negative impact on international relations; all these matters show the importance of understanding the roots of radicalism and its rising. The present paper attempts to find the bases, contexts, and factors of radicalism, its rise and formation, especially in the Muslim world. The purpose of this study is to search the intellectual infrastructure and factors of appearance and emergence of radicalism and terrorism, hence the main question of this study is to examine the context, background, factors of radicalization, and the emergence of the idea in the greater Muslim community. Despite all teachings of the Holy Quran, the value of immunity and protection of human lives, what happened to the so-called Muslims that without fear and without any regard for their own lives kill and harm themselves, women, children, and innocent people. In answer to this question, some hypothesis is presented in that the relevant factors can be divided into two parts: theoretical-cum-intellectual and sociological factors. In the section on theoretical-cum-intellectual factors, some factors such as non-comprehensive and wrong analysis of the holy and sacred texts; overcoming of feelings and emotions over reason and rationality, a feeling of injustice and unfairness, despairing from current situation, hence lack of hope for coming up with improvement and reform. Sociologically, some factors such as utilization of extremism as an instrument in foreign relations by certain superpowers, poverty, incorrect foreign relations of some superpowers, and processes of globalization are some important grounds and factors that may lead to radicalism extension in recent decades. This study was conducted according to the sociology of knowledge.

Keywords: radicalism, Islam, non-comprehensive analysis, poverty, injustice, globalization.



Terrorism is a phenomenon that has reached almost all parts of the world in the last part of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century. Unfortunately, many of these countries are in the Muslim world, plus there is much violence in the region. The Muslim world has been suffering from both domestic and international terrorist activities.

Referring to the current literature of radicalism and terrorism, one can find out its various aspects. Unfortunately, it deals with all spheres of public life in thought, politics, society, and economics and leave a negative effect on international relations; all these matters show the importance of understanding the roots of radicalism and its outbreak.

Terrorism is a major violation of one of the most fundamental human rights, the right to live. The idea of the root causes of terrorism suggests that there is some form of relationship between underlying social, economic, political,

and demographic conditions, on the one hand, and terrorist activities, on the other hand. According to this proposition, certain underlying conditions help to explain how, where, and why terrorism occurs.

Generally, the root causes refer to a very broad range of issues that cannot be classified within a single social category. For example, there are the following factors, e.g., poverty, social inequality, exclusion, dispossession, political grievance, oppression, human rights abuse, population explosion, and other demographical elements.

There are many classifications of the fundamental causes of terrorism. For example, the UN has published a short list of conditions that are considered to be conducive to the root causes. There is an additional remark in that the list in question was not comprehensive. It also listed the following conditions: prolonged unresolved conflicts; dehumanization of victims of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations; lack of rule of law and violation of human rights; ethnic, national and religious discrimination; political exclusion, socio-economic marginalization, and lack of good governance.

It follows that it is possible to classify the causes of terrorism and radicalism in some subjects such as political, economic, social roots, ideological-cum-religious roots, and psychological roots. Terrorist activities relate to social, political, economic, religious, and cultural factors that are notoriously complicated. Some scholars focus on the counterintelligence and coercive action against terrorism and radicalization in the Middle East, while others focus on social and educational empowerment to stop radicalization and terrorism recruitment in this region. Therefore, in order to combat terrorism in the Middle East, it is crucial to understand its main causes.

The broad aim is to search into the intellectual infrastructure and factors of appearance and emersion of radicalism and

terrorism. Hence, the main question is to examine the context, background, and factors that lead to the emergence of radicalization in Muslim communities. Despite all teachings of the Holy Quran, the value of security and protection of public lives, one must ask of what must have happened to those Muslims who, without fear and without any regard to their own lives, kill and harm both themselves and women, children and innocent bystanders.

In answer to the question, a hypothesis is put forward that the relevant factors can be divided into two parts: theoretical-cum-intellectual and sociological ones. In the first section that focuses the theoretical-cum-intellectual factors, some of them are non-comprehensive and based on inappropriate analyses of the Islamic sacred texts; overcoming feelings and emotions over reason and rationality; feeling of injustice and unfairness, despairing from current situation and having absolute pessimism for coming up with any improvement and reform. The next section is concerned with its sociological dimensions, with some other factors, e.g., utilization of extremism as an instrument in foreign relations by some superpowers, poverty, incorrect foreign relations, and certain processes of globalization make the bedrock of the events that lead to radicalism in recent decades.

1. Key Concepts

1.1. Radicalism

Radicalism can be defined as the belief that there should be great or extreme social or political change. In the realm of

political science, the term ‘radicalism’ is the belief that a society needs to be changed, and that these changes are only possible through revolutionary means. Most people think of the left-wing politics when they use the term radicalism, although people on both ends of the spectrum can be described as radical. The word ‘radicalism’ comes from the Latin root *radicalis* which means, “of or having roots,” itself derived from *radix* which means ‘root’. Both ‘radical’ and ‘radicalism’ emerged out of the idea that political change must “come from the root,” or the very basic source of society.

Based on the above consideration, it can be said that ‘radicalism’ is an extremist and movement based on the belief that the current affairs of states will not come to an end with reforms, hence there is no other way other than changing things from the origin. As expected, this view does not accept or tolerate any reform.

2.1. Terrorism

Literally, the term is derived from the word ‘terror’. It is used, primarily to refer to violence during peacetime or in the context of war against non-combatants, mostly civilians and neutral military personnel. (Wisnewski, 2008, p. 175) In other words, terrorists kill innocent civilians at random for the purpose of creating terror and for their intended political purposes. As Michael Walzer remarks, “Its purpose is to destroy the moral of a nation or a class, to undercut its solidarity; its method is the random murder of innocent people. Randomness is the crucial feature of terrorist activity.” (Michael Walzer, 1977, p. 197) It is indicated in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* that terrorism refers to the systematic use of violence to create a general climate of fear in a population and thereby to bring about a particular political objective. (Jenkins, 2018, p. 41)

2. Theoretical Framework

This article is organized and based on certain notions in the sociology of knowledge. The sociology of knowledge is concerned with determining whether human participation in social life has any influence on human knowledge, thought, and culture and, if it does, what sort of influence it is. (*Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2019, p. 28) The sociology of knowledge posits that beliefs and thoughts are the products of social interactions and human relationships. The sociology of knowledge examines the social foundations of thought formation and deals with the relationship between human thought and the social context in which it occurs.

The sociology of knowledge is a subfield within the discipline of sociology in which researchers and theorists focus on knowledge and knowing as socially grounded processes, and how knowledge is understood to be a social product. (Nicki Lisa, 2018, p.13)

It follows that the sociology of knowledge deals with the fact that every thought has a social-political context and those social conditions influence the formation of ideas. “Social institutions, like education, family, religion, media, and scientific and medical establishments, play fundamental roles in knowledge production.” (Nicki Lisa, 2018, p.11)

The main propositions of the sociology of knowledge can be summarized in the following statements: (1) knowledge is socially and politically determined; (2) knowledge and the social system are influenced by one another; and (3) the factor and the depth of influencing and its purpose.

It seems that terrorism in the Muslim world and the formation of the Takfiri groups and massacres that have taken place in Muslim nations are owing to the complex issues and unresolved problems in the political and social realms that have affected so many people and groups who think they have no choice but to terrorize and create much agitation.

It seems that the factors of the emergence of extremism can be divided into two sections: intellectual and sociological, which are affected by domestic and international events, some of which are mentioned below.

3. Intellectual Factors

1. 3. Non-comprehensive and wrong analysis of the sacred texts

One of the important and influential points in creating extremism in the Muslim world is a misunderstanding of Islam and its religious texts. There are Muslim scholars who provide a misunderstanding of religious texts so that the capacity for extremism and terror emerges.

Some people may suppose that the most common factor in analyzing terrorism is religion and may consider it as the main cause. However, it is important to understand that its main cause is not religion, but it is non-comprehensive understanding and wrong analysis of the sacred texts, when a commentator refers to the text of the Quran or sunnah, it is vital and essential for him or her to have a comprehensive and complete realization and understanding of them; otherwise, to take and follow certain teachings of the sacred texts and leaving the other will certainly cause misinterpretation and misjudgment. In consequence, some behavior and deeds are not based on the teachings of the very text of the Quran, hence religion does play a significant role, while their partial reading may certainly mislead its believers to commit dangerous and criminal acts.

In the same area, overcoming of feelings and emotions over

reason and rationality are noteworthy, too. Thus some people may assume that everybody can refer to the Quran without having received the required religious trainings. Without enough instructions, they try to fish out an instruction for their own behavior. Clearly, this is the beginning of a great misunderstanding.

That someone thinks that his thought is perfect and he has all the rights at hand or one might think that only he himself understands the Quran, hence nobody else might have the right to criticize him. In such a case, any attempt to coming up with any dialogue will be in vain. This is because dialogue starts where and when none of the parties believe that he is perfect.

For example, Jihadist groups have been formed to change Muslim societies. Instances of such groups include the Organization of the “Muslim Community” or “Al-Takfir wa al-Hijra” (1977) led by Shakri Mustafa (1942 - 1978). Another group expels and excludes almost all Muslims from the realm of Islam simply through misrepresenting the Islamic sacred texts. It sounds obligatory for a Jihadist to fight them. Then Sahleh Sariayh wrote that “Dar al-Harb” is a place where disbelief is in the highest position and the commandment of God is not fulfilled, even though all its inhabitants may be Muslims. (Saleh Seriyeh, *The Treatise of Eliman*, p. 25) In the same vein, Abdul Salam Faraj, an Egyptian Jihadi group member, wrote a book entitled “Jihad, the Forgotten Obligatory” after the Egyptian peace treaty with Israel was concluded and the unjust execution of Muslim religious leaders took place there. Although this book was written in the circumstances of the time and may be a natural response to the Egyptian government’s extremism, he says that it is an obligatory duty upon the Muslim ummah of Islam to change their situation by performing jihad. Generally, these groups expanded the circle of *kufir* and easily attributed other Muslims to disbelief, an idea that simply leads to extremism and to excommunicate other Muslims, so they think that killing them is their duty.

Instead of following the authorities and jurists, members of these groups themselves interpret the sacred texts and understand the Islamic religion on their own. Instead of “Ijtihad”, they follow their own understanding without referring to jurists. That is, they maintain that they refer to the text and comprehend it and do not need anyone else to teach them the basics of the Islamic religion. This leads to disorder in interpretation of the Islamic sacred religious text. In short, in their groups, without already being an expert, any given person understands Islamic teachings in a haphazard way and acts on its own way rather whimsically.

2.3. Despairing from current situation and having no hope for reforms

In every society it is remarkable and notable that the opponents and competitors have hope for reforming and improving the current system. When a political system is not a democratic one, then the opposition may not be in a position to express its ideas and alternative(s) as much as those holding state power, so its actions would not be peaceful and calm.

Democratic institutions and procedures provide for almost all people to counsel and warn about all social affairs. In a peaceful reconciliation of governments, there would be some channels for participation in policy-making. In such a situation, the opponents should be encouraged to join the political game and enter into dialogue that leads to peace. Thus oppositions accept to have a dialogue with the dominant power and have hope to change and reform the government, so they respect the real human rights, the rule of law, and democratic norms.

It must be considered that lack of political inclusiveness in a state may cause individuals to join or create terrorist groups and try to eliminate all its backgrounds.

3. 3. Feeling unfair

One of the most important causes of social anomalies has always been feeling a sense of injustice. Lack of justice often creates many problems that can be the source of other events. Sense of injustice and living in an unjust society are among the most fundamental reasons for revolutions and radical behavior and violence.

Justice is a very important element in every society to increase peace, security, and tranquility. When a Muslim in a Muslim society feels that there are lots of inequality and not only he cannot remove them, but they are on the increase, he would feel that there would not seem to be any democratic ways and no hope to solve them. In consequence, he thinks that there remains no way and no solution but resorting to violence, killing and terror. “Political violence becomes unavoidable in an unequal society in which assets are not distributed fairly among people. Then, the potential rebels can apply violence to overturn the existing political and economic system.” (Boix, 2004, p. 143)

4. Sociological factors

As mentioned in the sociology of knowledge, human behaviors and actions are often influenced by external factors and their surrounding issues. Sociological factors make up just one of the agents that influence the formation of extremism and the emergence of the phenomenon of violence, e.g., the Takfiri movements.

1. 4. Incorrect foreign relations of some superpowers

Adoption of certain wrong strategies in relation with other states especially Muslim countries result in some violence and

killing by terrorists who think that all miseries come from those superpowers' policies. As Pape maintains, suicide terrorism is mainly a response to foreign occupation rather than the product of Islamic fundamentalism. So it has important implications for how the United States and its allies should conduct the war on terrorism. (Pape, 2005, p. 237).

Bertrand Badie in his volume, *Humiliation in International Relations: A Pathology of Contemporary International Systems*, believes that the humiliated in the new world revolt against it and the dominant international relations rules. In international relations, some states often deny the legal status of others, stigmatizing their practices or even their culture. Such acts of deliberate humiliation at the diplomatic level are common occurrences in modern diplomacy. (Bertrand Badie, *Humiliation*, p. 14) Of course, those who are humiliated may resort to extremist reactions against the great powers whom they see them as their cause of misery. Such individuals who feel loneliness, humiliation, and isolation in their region are well prepared to join a movement like ISIS to take revenge.

2. 4. Poverty

Poverty is one of the key factors behind the emergence of extremism, violence, and terror in some countries. The deep gap between the rich and the poor in the present-day world can make people feel violent or oppressed. Hence, sometimes terrorist groups take advantage of the poverty of some citizens and exploit them for their criminal purposes. These organizations employ the poor as terrorist elements and prepare them for killing and causing destruction in society. In a radical reaction, some Muslims think that every method, and scientific procedure even if it is not opposite of sharia, is forbidden and

unjust, hence Boko Haram’s slogan “Western Education is Forbidden” in Nigeria. Burgoon’s remark is noteworthy in that “economic conditions like poverty and income inequality very much matter for terrorism by affecting levels of deprivation, and feelings of injustice, hence political tension. (Burgoon, 2004, p. 34).

Poor societies often make for weak states which may not have the capacity to prevent terrorist activity or recruitment. Poverty is often presented as a basic underlying root cause of terrorism. According to this proposition, poverty of resources, combined with poverty of prospects, choices and respect, help enable terrorism to thrive. (O’Neill, 2002a, p. 173) They also lack the capacity for the types of education program that might reduce support for terrorism. It has thus been argued that states that lack legitimacy and control over the economy and other traditional levers of power provide the space and oxygen for terrorist groups to flourish. (O’Neill, 2002 b, p. 261)

Related to absolute poverty, exclusion, and social inequality can be other sources of conflict when combined with other factors, and also terrorism. (See Ehrlich and Liu, 2002)

Poverty often results from economic injustice. In a society and in a world where most people live in absolute poverty, there is certainly no justice, and the poor community is the bedrock of corruption and extremism. “Poverty and inequality especially when affecting distinct national, religious, cultural, and ethnic groups so called horizontal inequalities is a breeding ground for conflict.” (Klugman, 1999).

At times, these groups have been faced with discrimination in the countries they reside, leading to their more feelings of isolation. They commonly move from poorer countries, particularly Muslim states, to wealthier ones, e.g., certain European countries, to go to school and/or to find work there. However, in their new social contexts, they feel deeply discriminated.

3. 4. Processes of globalization power

Globalization refers to the spread of ideas, customs, institutions, and attitudes originated in one part of the world over the globe. As it is usually in West and other developed countries, some experts believe it otherwise, hence call it ‘Westernization’ or ‘Americanization’. In this way, they regard it as an external threat, rather than as an opportunity for the Muslim world. Therefore, they think that globalization is a threat for Islam, and that it will remove shariah from the everyday thought and actions of Muslims. Human rights, freedom, and democracy are perceived as hidden instruments of power which serve the interests of Western nations and particularly that of America (Najjar, 2005, p. 187). As such, some thinkers hold that globalization is the highest stage of imperialism and a cultural invasion, threatening their cultural heritage and national identity; therefore, they believe that some radical Islamists may view globalization as a new call or invitation (*da'wah*) for elimination of the boundaries between the region of Islam (*Dār al-Islām*) and the region of infidelity (*Dār al-Kufr*). In consequence, they believe that there does not seem to be certain Muslims who would resist and stand against it. (Najjar, 2005, p.189).

While there does not seem to be a certain single cause that explains terrorism, it has been suggested that increasing globalization has contributed to outbreaks of terrorist violence. If globalization has, in fact, played such a role, then higher levels of terrorism will be expected to be associated with higher levels of globalization. Modern terrorism has been a reaction to globalization. (Wilkinson, 2003, p. 124). Globalization is a very complex and unintelligible process. It has lots of spheres in economy, politics, commerce, culture, and social affairs. It involves “the widening, deepening, and speeding up of international connectedness.” (McGrew, 2011, p. 275). It has a very wide range in the life of people, ideas,

economy, culture, and politics.

Globalization by its nature has the potential to undermine traditional religious values in societies. Western secularism has threatened indigenous cultures and local religions exposed to the broader world (see Cronin, 2002/2003, pp. 30-58). The spread of ideas linked to globalization can actually promote rebellions rooted in religion, a reaction to the threat of global homogenization.

Experts hold that globalization is a kind of insecurity for Muslim groups and these groups have clearly responded to this threat. Muslim radicalism remains just one form of reaction to globalization.

Conclusions

The present paper attempts to find out the factors that cause and contribute to radicalism especially in the Muslim world. It was also emphasized that non-comprehensive and inappropriate analysis of sacred texts, hopelessness from the prevalent situation, wrong foreign strategy of some superpowers, poverty, injustice, and globalization are among some of the elements that lead to radicalism in Muslim countries. They have led to radicalism in recent decades.

In the same way, below there are certain important points and suggestions:

1. Muslims have always taken pride and been sensitive about their religion because Islam is not only a faith but also a law, a sharia that manages, guides, and regulates all aspects of their lives, including economic transactions, politics and family affairs and the matters of state. "Islam" (اسلام) is derived from the root سلم (*s-l-m*), which means, among other things, 'peace' and 'calmness' and, as it is in teachings of this religion, Islam is the religion of peace and nobody can kill others even a non-Muslim.

2. To reduce radicalism and extremism, it is the duty and responsibility of democratic governments to educate their own people, to encourage them and to increase democratic solidarity and value among them. Governments should arrange some programs for all citizens to participate in all social affairs in such a situation that they feel they have a real role in activities.

3. The common goal of all Muslim states must be to eradicate poverty, to promote inclusion and social justice, and to solve the problems of their society. Although resorting to force might seem appropriate in certain cases, it creates problems in lots of other cases, for its use can create new dissatisfaction.

4. The Muslim states should come together and put forward a solution and common vision in the face of schism, religious division, regional and global problems, and develop appropriate democratic and peaceful ways.

5. As a cultural movement, Islam rejects the old stagnated view of the world and tries to reach a dynamic view. Therefore, it has its special methods, procedures, systems, and strategy to plan and propose a program for human rights, peaceful relationships, and cooperation with other states and citizens. Muslims should also refer to their sacred texts but via the experts who comprehend the teachings of the Quran and sunnah carefully and professionally. Because of it, the most common view among Muslim scholars and experts of Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) is that a declaration of ex-communication (takfir) can only be made by an established religious authority.

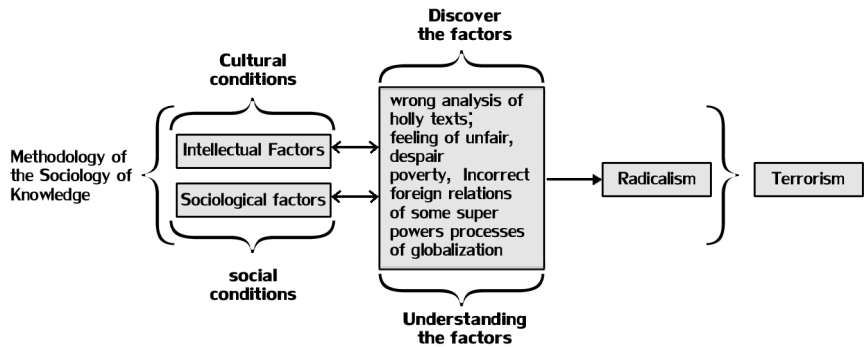
6. It is required of all Muslims to recite the Quran that denounces and forbids the killing of any Muslim or non-Muslim who is not guilty. Allah says:

مَنْ قَتَلَ نَفْسًا بِغَيْرِ نَفْسٍ أَوْ فَسَادٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَكَأَنَّمَا قَتَلَ النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا وَمَنْ
أَحْيَاهَا فَكَأَنَّمَا أَحْيَا النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا

“If anyone slew a person - unless it is for murder or for spreading mischief in the land - it would be as if he slew the

whole people, and if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people.” (The Holy Quran, 5: 32)

Commitment and attention to this verse and God’s attention to the lives of the servants are enough to make Muslims more sensitive to the lives and property of others and not to easily resort to extremist and violent behavior.





Notes

The Holy Quran.

Boix, C. (2004) Political Violence, Paper prepared for the Yale Conference on Order, Conflict and Violence, April 30th-May 1st.

Burgoon. (2004) On Welfare and Terror Social Welfare Policies and Political Economic Roots of Terrorism, ASSR Working paper 04/07 (September), Amsterdam School for Social *Science Research*: <http://www2.fmg.uva.nl/assr/frdocs/wp/downloads/ASSR WP0407>

Cole, Nicki Lisa (2018) "Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge." Thought Co, 22 July, thoughtco.com/sociology-of-knowledge-3026294.

Cronin, Audrey Kurth (2002/2003) "Behind the Curve: Globalization and International Terrorism," *International Security*, Vol. 27, No. 3.

Faraj, Muhammad 'Abd al-Salām (1980) *al-Jihād al-farīdah al-ghā'ibah*, Cairo.

Iqbal, Mohammad (2004) *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. Human Development Foundation.

Jenkins (2018) "Terrorism," in *The Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/terrorism>.

Klugman, J. (1999) *Social and Economic Policies to Prevent Complex Humanitarian Emergencies*, Policy Brief. Washington, DC: UNU/WIDER.

McGrew, Anthony (2011) "The Logics of Economic Globalization," in *John Ravenhill (Ed.)*, *Global Political Economy*, 3rd ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Najjar, Fauzi (2005, Fall) 'The Arabs, Islam and Globalization', *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 12, No. 3.

O'Neill, W. (2002a) Concept Paper "Beyond the Slogans: How Can the UN Respond to Terrorism?", in *Responding to Terrorism: What Role for the United Nations?*, report of a conference organized by the International Peace Academy, New York: International Peace Academy.

O'Neill, W. (2002b) Conference Report, in *Responding to Terrorism: What Role for the United Nations?* report of a conference organized by the International Peace Academy, New York, 25– 26 October 2002, published by International Peace Academy.

Pape, R. (2005) *A Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*, New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks.

Seriyeh, Saleh (1973) *The Treatise of el-Iman*, Cairo.

Walzer, Michael (1977) *Just and Unjust Wars*, New York: *Basic Books*.

Wilkinson, Paul (2003) "Why Modern Terrorism? Differentiating Types and Distinguishing Ideological Motivations," in Charles W. Kegley, Jr. (ed.), *The New Global Terrorism: Characteristics, Causes, Controls*, Upper Saddle River, NJ: *Prentice Hall*.

Wisniewski, J. Jeremy, ed. (2008). *Torture, Terrorism, and the Use of Violence*, Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
“Sociology of Knowledge.” *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Retrieved December 03, 2019 from Encyclopedia.com: <https://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/sociology-knowledge>