Factors of the Emergence and Spread of Radicalism and Terrorism in the Islamic World

Seyed Kazem Seyed Bagheri

Institution of Islamic Culture and Thought (IICT), Qom, I. R. Iran

Referring to the current literature of radicalism and terrorism, we can find a variety of its aspects 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. This writing tries to find the bases, contexts and factors of radicalism rising and its formation, especially in the Muslim world. The purpose of this study is to search the thinking infrastructure and factors of appearance and emersion of radicalism and terrorism, so, the main question of this study is to examine the context, background and factors of radicalization and the emergence of the idea in Islamic community. Despite all teachings of Holly Qur'an, the value of immunity and protection of human lives, what happened to so-called Moslems that without fear and without regard to their own lives kill and harm themselves, women, children and innocent people. In response to the question, this hypothesis presents that Factors can be divided into two parts: theoretical–intellectual and sociological factors, In the section on theoretical–intellectual factors some factors such as non-comprehensive and wrong analysis of holly texts; overcoming feelings and emotions over reason and rationality; feeling of injustice and unfair, despairing from current situation and having no hope to improve and reform, and in sociological section, some factors, such as utilization from extremism as an instrument in foreign relations by some super powers, poverty, incorrect foreign relations of some super powers and processes of globalization, are some important grounds and factors that 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*

Corresponding author: sbaqeri86@gmail.com

Introduction

Terrorism is a phenomenon that has spread to nearly 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 Islamic world and there is a lot of violence in the region. The Islamic world has suffered from both domestic and international terrorist activities.

Referring to the current literature of radicalism and terrorism, we can find variety of 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.

Terrorism is a major violation of one of the most fundamental human rights, the right to life. The idea of root causes of terrorism suggests that there is some form of relationship between underlying social, economic, political, and demographic conditions and terrorist activity. According to this proposition, certain underlying conditions help to explain how, where and why terrorism occurs. Uproot the cause and the problem vanishes.

Generally, root causes refer to a very broad range of issues that cannot be contained within a single social category: for example, factors such as poverty, social inequality and exclusion, dispossession and political grievance, oppression and human rights abuse, population explosion, and demographical factors.

There are many classifications of root causes of terrorism. For example, UN has a short list of conditions considered to be conductive i.e. root causes, reminding explicitly that the list is not exclusive. The list contains 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.

So, it is possible to classify the causes of terrorism and radicalism in some subjects like political roots, economic and social roots, ideological and religious roots and psychological roots. Terrorist activities relate to social, political, economic, religious, and cultural factors are profoundly complex.

Some scholars focus on the counter-intelligence 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 the causes of terrorism. This article is trying to understand some of these roots and factors in Islamic world.

This writing tries to find the bases, contexts and factors of radicalism rising and its formation, especially in the Muslim world. The purpose of this study is to search the thinking infrastructure and factors of appearance and emersion of radicalism and terrorism, so, the main question of this study is to examine the context, background and factors of radicalization and the emergence of the idea in Islamic community. Despite all teachings of Holly Qur'an, the value of immunity and protection of human lives, what happened to so-called Moslems that without fear and without regard to their own lives kill and harm themselves, women, children and innocent people.

In the response to the question, this hypothesis presents that factors can be divided into two parts: theoretical–intellectual and sociological factors. In the section on theoretical–intellectual factors, some of them are non-comprehensive and due to wrong analysis of holly texts; overcoming feelings and emotions over reason and rationality; feeling of injustice and unfair, despairing from current situation and having no hope to improve and reform, and in sociological section, some factors such as utilization from extremism as an instrument in foreign relations by some super powers, poverty, incorrect foreign relations of some super powers and processes of globalization are some important grounds and factors that lead to radicalism extension in recent decades.

1. Expressions of Concepts

1. 1. Radicalism

The belief is that there should be a great or extreme social or political change. In political science, the term radicalism is the belief that society needs to be changed, and that these changes are only possible through revolutionary means. Most people think of left-wing politics when they use the noun radicalism, although people on both ends of the spectrum can be described as radical. The word radicalism comes from the Latin radicalis – "of or having roots", which in turn arose from radix or "root". Both radical and radicalism came out of the idea that political change must "come from the root", or the very basic source of society.

It can be said that radicalism is an extremist and radical movement that believes that the affairs of states will not come to an end with reforms and that there is no other way than to change things from the ground up and make a fundamental revolution. In fact, this school does not accept reform.

1. 2. Terrorism

Literally, the term is derived from the word "terror". It is used, primarily, to refer to violence during peacetime or in context of war against non-combatants, mostly civilians and neutral military personnel (Wisnewski 2008: 175). In other words, terrorists kill innocent civilians, at random, for the purpose of creating terror and for political purposes. As Michael Walzer says: "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" (Walzer 1977: 197). It is written in *Encyclopedia Britannica* that terrorism is a systematic use of violence to create a general climate of fear in a population and thereby to bring about a particular political objective (Jenkins, internet).

2. Theoretical Framework

This article is organized based on 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 (*Sociology of Knowledge*, internet: 28). The sociology of knowledge posits that beliefs and thoughts are the product of social interactions and human relationships. The sociology of knowledge examines the social foundations of thought formation and examines 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, therefore, knowledge is understood to be a social production (Cole, internet).

Thus, 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" (ibid.).

The main propositions of the sociology of knowledge can be summarized in following statements:

1. Knowledge is socially and politically determined.

2. Knowledge and the social system are influenced by one another.

3. The Factor and the depth of influencing and its purpose.

It seems that terrorism in the Islamic world and the formation of the *Takfiri* groups and massacres that have taken place in Islamic countries are due to the complex issues and unresolved problems in the political and social realm that have affected so many people and groups, who think they have no choice but to terrorize and create panic.

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

3. 1. Non-comprehensive and wrong analysis of holly texts

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

Some may suppose and guess that the most common factor in analyzing terrorism is religion and may consider it the main cause, but it is important to understand that the main cause is not religion, but non-comprehensive and wrong analysis of holly texts. When a commentator refers to the text of Qur'an or Sunnah, it is vital and essential to have a comprehensive and complete realization and understanding; otherwise, to take and follow some part of teaching of holly texts and leaving the other, will cause misinterpretation, misjudgment and eventually some behavior and action that is not based on the text of Qur'an. But, some select parts of it, so for terrorism, religion does play a significant role but reading and scanning just some part of it that mislead to a dangerous deed.

In this area, another point is significant, that is the overcoming of feelings and emotions over reason and rationality. Thus, some may assume that everyone can without proficiency, refer to Qur'an and take a recipe and formula for behavior, but it is the first step toward misunderstanding.

That one thinks that his thought is perfect and he has all rights in his hand or one might think that he only understands the Qur'an and no one has the right to criticize him. In this case, any conversation will be closed. Because the conversation starts where neither side think that he is perfect.

For example, Jihadist groups were formed to change Islamic societies, the Organization of the "Muslim Community" or "Al-Takfir and Al-Hijra" (1977) led by Shakri Mustafa (1942–1978), the latter group, by misrepresenting the texts of religion, expels and excludes almost all Muslims from the realm of Islam and, of course, it is an obligatory for Jihadists to fight them. Then Saleh Seriyeh 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 are Muslims (Seriyeh 1973: 25). Continuing along this path, Abdul-Salam Faraj, the Egyptian Jihadi group member, wrote a book called *Jihad, the Forgotten obligatory*, after the Egyptian peace treaty with Israel and the unjust execution of religious leaders 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 on the *Ummah* of Islam, to change their situation by performing jihad (Faraj 1980: 23). Generally, these groups expanded the circle of *Kufr* and easily attributed other Muslims to disbelief, an idea that simply leads to extremism and excommunicating of other Muslims, so they think that killing them is their duty.

Instead of imitating the authorities and jurists, these groups interpret the text and understand religion themselves. Instead of *Ijtihad*, they follow their own understanding without referring to jurists. That is, they say, we refer to the text ourselves and comprehend it and do not need anyone else to realize religion for us. This leads to disorder in Interpretation of the religious text. Everyone, without being an expert, understands religion in any way and acts on its own way.

3. 2. Despairing from current situation and having no hope for reforms

In every society it is remarkable and notable that opponent and competitor have hope for reform and improvement of the system. When a political system is not a democratic one, then the opposition may not be in a position to express its ideas and alternatives as much as those holding state power, so its actions would not be peaceful and calm.

Democratic institutions and procedures make ready for all to counsel and warn about all social affairs. In a peaceful reconciliation of governments, there would be some channels for participation in policymaking. In this situation, the opponent should be encouraged to join the political game and enter into dialogue that leads to peace. So, oppositions accept to have a dialogue with dominated 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 backgrounds of it.

3. 3. Feeling unfair

One of the most important causes of social anomalies has always been the 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, is the most fundamental reason for the revolutions and radical behavior and violent.

Justice is a very important element in every society to increase peace and immunity. When a Muslim in an Islamic society feels there are lots of inequality and cannot remove them, even they are increasing, and if there is no democratic way and no hope to solve them, he thinks that there is no way and no solution but 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: 143).

4. Sociological factors

As mentioned in the sociology of knowledge, human behaviors and actions are often influenced by external factors and the issues those surrounding them. Sociological factors are one of the agents influencing the formation of extremism and the phenomenon of violence and the *Takfiri* movement.

4. 1. Incorrect foreign relations of some super powers

Some wrong strategies in relations with other states especially Islamic countries result in violence and killing by terrorists, thinking that all the misery comes from those super power policies, as Pape notes that 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: 237).

Bertrand Badie, in his book *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 a diplomatic level are common occurrences in modern

diplomacy (Badie 2017: 14) and of course, those who are humiliated, have extreme reactions against the great powers that they see 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.

The perception that the Western global order is in crisis and that Western countries remain indifferent and act two-faced to the humanitarian crises in Islamic countries, is increasing among the leaders and people of Islamic countries. The rising feeling of injustice in the Islamic world is deepening global risks and threats.

4. 2. 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 today's world can make people feel violent or oppressed. So, sometimes terrorist groups, misuse the poverty of some citizens and exploit them for their criminal deeds and interests. These organizations employ the poor as terrorist elements and prepare them for killing and 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, as Boko Haram (Western Education is Forbidden) in Nigeria has issued this manifestations and statement. So, economic conditions like poverty and income inequality very much matter for terrorism by affecting levels of deprivation, feelings of injustice, and hence political tension (Burgoon 2004: 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: 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 terrorists groups to flourish (O'Neill 2002b: 261).

Related to absolute poverty, exclusion and social inequality can be sources of conflict when combined with other factors, and also terrorism.

Poverty is often the result of 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).

Many times these groups face discrimination in the countries they reside, leading to further feelings of isolation. They commonly move from poorer countries, particularly Muslim states in the case of Europe, to wealthier ones to go to school or find work so they deeply feel discrimination.

4. 3. Processes of globalization power

Globalization refers to the spread throughout the globe of ideas, customs, institutions and attitudes originated in one part of the world, as it is usually in the West and its development; some believe and call it Westernization or Americanization so they regard it as an external threat for Islamic world rather than a an opportunity. So, they think that Globalization is a threat for Islam and 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 of America, in particular (Fauzi 2005: 187), so some thinkers think that globalization is "the highest stage of imperialism" and a "cultural invasion" threatening their cultural heritage and national identity. They believe that Radical Islamists view globalization as a new *Da'wah* (call) for elimination of the boundaries between "Dar al-Islam" (domain of Islam) and "Dar al-Kufr" (domain of infidelity). So, Moslems must insist and stand against it (ibid.: 189).

While it is abundantly clear that there is no 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 would be associated with greater levels of globalization. Modern terrorism has been a reaction to globalization (Wilkinson 2003: 124). Globalization is a very complex and unintelligible process. It has a lot of spheres in economy, politics, commerce, culture, and social affairs. It involves "the widening, deepening, and speeding up of international connectedness" (McGrew 2011: 275). It has a very wide range in the life of people, ideas, economy, culture and politics.

Globalization by its very 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 (Kurth Cronin 2002/2003: 30–58). The spread of ideas linked to globalization, can actually promote rebellions rooted in religion, a reaction to the threat of global homogenization.

They think that globalization is a kind of insecurity for Islamic groups and these groups have clearly responded to this threat. Islamic radicalism is one form of reaction to globalization (DeAngelis 2009: 60).

Conclusion

The article tried to find the factors of radicalism rising and its formation, especially in Islamic world. In response, it was emphasized that noncomprehensive and wrong analysis of holly texts, hopelessness within current situations, wrong foreign strategy of some super powers, poverty, injustice and globalization are some important grounds and factors that lead to radicalism in Islamic countries. These are some important grounds and factors that lead to radicalism extension in recent decades.

In continuance, some important points and some suggestions will be mentioned:

1. Muslims have always been proud and 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 life, including economic transactions, politics and family affairs and the matters of state. "Islam" is derived from "silm" which means "peace" and "calm", and as it is in teaching of this religion, Islam is the religion of peace and nobody can kill others, not even non-Muslims.

2. To reduce radicalism and extremism, it is the duty and responsibility of democratic governments to educate their public and to encourage and increase democratic solidarity and values. Governments should arrange a program for all citizens to participate in all social affair in a situation that they feel they have a real role in activities.

3. The common goal of all Islamic states must be to eradicate poverty, to promote inclusion and social justice and to solve problems of their society. The use of force may be appropriate in certain cases but it is also problematic in many cases since its use can create new dissatisfaction and sensitive trouble.

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

5. Islam as a cultural movement rejects the old static view of the universe and tries to reach a dynamic view (Iqbal 2004: 247), so it has its special methods, procedures, systems and strategy to plan and propose a program for human rights, peaceful relationships and activities with other states and citizens. Muslims should refer to their holly texts but that should be done by experts who know and understand the teaching of Qur'an and Sunnah so that they can do it carefully

and proficiently. Because of it, the most common view among Muslim scholars and *Fuqahas* is that a declaration of <u>*takfir*</u> (designation of a Muslim as an apostate) can only be made by an established religious authority and so mainstream Muslim scholars usually oppose recourse to *takfir*, except in rare instances.

6. It is required to mention and all Muslims should repeat that Qur'an, the Islam's sacred text, denounces and forbids the killing of any Muslim or non-Muslim who is not guilty. Allah says: "If any one 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 any one saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people (Qur'an 5: 32).

Commitment and attention to this verse and God's attention to the lives of the servants is enough to make the Muslim person more sensitive to the lives and property of others and not to resort easily to extremist and violent behavior.
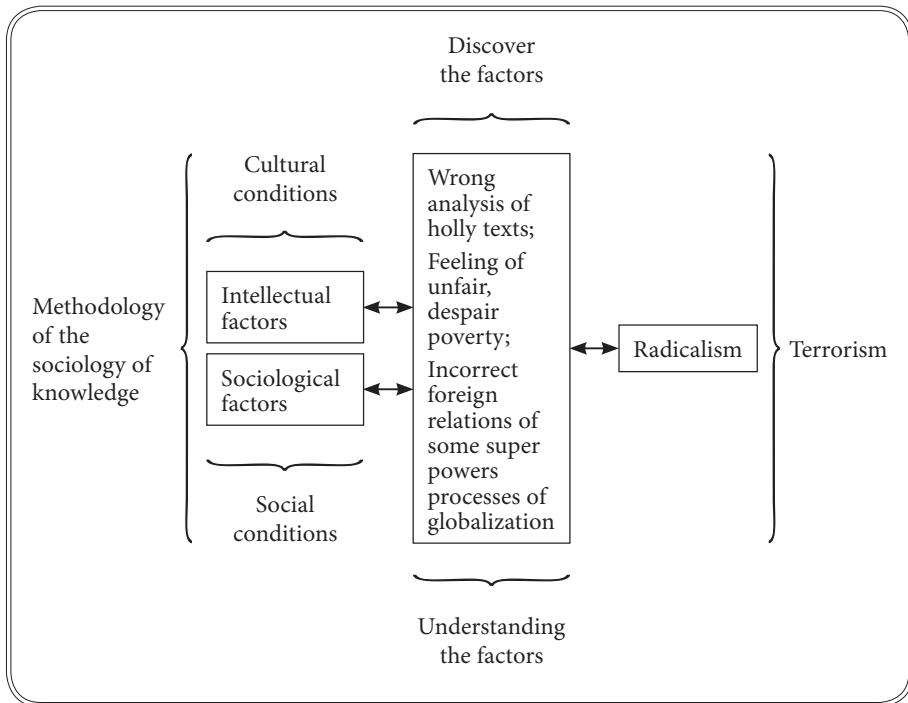
References

Holy Qur'an.

Badie, Bertrand (2017), *Humiliation in International Relations: A Pathology of Contemporary International Systems*, London, Hart Publishing.

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

Burgoon, Brian (2004), "On Welfare and Terror Social Welfare Policies and Political economic Roots of Terrorism", *ASSR Working paper* 04/07 (September), Amsterdam, Amsterdam School for Social Science Research at: http://www2.fmg.uva.nl/assr/frdocs/wp/downloads/ASSRWP0407.

Cole, Nicki Lisa (internet), "Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge", available on: thoughtco.com/sociology-of-knowledge-3026294 (visited on Jul. 22nd 2020).

DeAngelis, Tori (2009), "Understanding terrorism", *Monitor on Psychology* 40 (10).

Faraj, Muhammad Abdal-Salam (1980), *al-Jihad, al-faridat al-gha'ibat*, Cairo.

Fauzi, Najjar (2005), "The Arabs, Islam and Globalization", *Middle East Policy* 12 (3).

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

Jenkins, Philip (internet), "Terrorism", *Encyclopedia Britannica*, available on: https://www.britannica.com/topic/terrorism (visited on November 15th 2019).

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

Kurth Cronin, Audrey (2002/2003), "Behind the Curve: Globalization and International Terrorism", *International Security* 27 (3).

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

O'Neill, William (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, 25–26 October 2002, New York, International Peace Academy.

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

Pape, Robert (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.

"Sociology of Knowledge" (internet), *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, available on: https://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/sociology-knowledge (visited on December 3rd 2019).

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*, NJ: Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River.

Wisnewski, J. Jeremy (ed.) (2008), *Torture, Terrorism, and the Use of Violence*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing.