

Foresight study on the influence of global societal trends on radicalization

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Summary

This foresight research report describes influences that global societal trends may have on radicalization processes in the future. The project was commissioned to F.J.G. van de Linde (Erik van de Linde Innovation Management Consultancy) and professor P. Rademaker (University of Amsterdam) by the Center for Science and Documentation of the Netherlands Ministry of Justice, at the request of the National Coordinator for Counterterrorism.

The research project consisted of three phases: an initial essay, a Delphi study and the analysis and interpretation. The essay provides a brief overview of radicalization in relation to terrorism on one hand, and an inventory of global trends on the other – trends that could be of influence on radicalization processes. Below, some elements of the essay will be highlighted, followed by an overview of the Delphi study and the analysis thereof.

The definition of terrorism. There is a great number of definitions of terrorism in existence. One reason of this is its dynamic character as well as the wide and changing range of goals terrorists have. In The Netherlands, the definition of the national government takes a major place: “Terrorism is defined as threatening, making preparations for or perpetrating, for ideological reasons, acts of serious violence directed at people or other acts intended to cause property damage that could spark social disruption, for the purpose of bringing about social change, creating a climate of fear among the general public, or influencing political decision-making”.

Causes of radicalization that may lead to terrorism. In the literature, professionals describe widely differing perspectives on the root causes of radicalization. Factors that are being mentioned are, among others, social, economic and political situations, poverty en overpopulation, in addition to, or opposed to, ideology and religion. A clear distinction is being made between causes and motives.

Motives: Why does someone radicalize (to become a terrorist)? Motives can change and are hard to describe precisely. Religion and politics are often mixed by jihadists, giving rise to the question whether politics is there to justify religious goals, or vice versa. Psychological motives in radicalization processes are, among others, frustration and a hurt feeling of self value, lack of respect, discrimination, as well as feelings of unfair treatment, the search for identity as well as the desire to

belong to a group. A catalyzing event such as the violent death of a family member may trigger the path to radicalization and eventually to terrorism. Often, terrorists have a more than average education and come from well-to-do societal classes. Also it seems that, increasingly, women become terrorists.

Group dynamics. Groups are important for radicalizing groups to provide logistics support, to frame and focus the terrorist goals and to dehumanize others. Peer pressure as well the influence of a charismatic leader often are important factors that drive the next step in the radicalization process. A warning is in place about the often implicit presumption that radicalization is a stepwise linear process in which terrorism could be the last step in the radicalization process. In fact there is no literature that shows that this is the case.

The Media. Media play an important role in communicating the terrorist act or threat and thus the goals of spreading fear and societal disruption widely. Internet in particular is instrumental in realizing a global terrorist network and providing insight in terrorists goals and methods.

Weapons of mass destruction. The use of WMD may on one hand perhaps not fit ideological motives, on the other hand its use as potential weapon by terrorists cannot be excluded. The chance may be small, the potential risk is enormous.

The terrorist as neighbor. Providing a clear and distinctive profile of a terrorist is difficult. Recent research underlines that in general, a terrorist is just like any other normal person.

The radicalization process. Radicalization processes are complex. Many factors, such as frustration and misfortune play a role and are being highlighted in the scientific literature. Different dimensions are being highlighted, such as religious, political and social dimensions, zooming in for instance on the personal meaning of life, societal injustice, the need to belong to a group, as well as to be accepted and valued. It is also common to describe three phases in radicalization: from militant via activist and violent-activist to terrorist, however again without implying that this is a linear process. In the last phase serious damage is inflicted to persons or objects. Radicalization could possibly be countered by increasing societal trust, political trust, and religious stability.

On the organization. A movement such as Al Quada shows all the signs of a modern terrorist organization: decentralized, with a network structure and a rapid learning attitude. A problem may be that local organizations may claim to have acted on behalf of the entire organization whereas in

reality there is no command structure. Terrorist groups may have ties with criminal networks, although in the case of jihadist groups this has not been shown clearly.

Global societal trends. In the initial essay many trends are described, subdivided into five domains: Demography, raw materials; Politics-institutional; Social-economic; Science and technology; Culture, values. The inventory is based on foresight reports from renowned sources with the preselecting criterion that a trend could have an influence of radicalization processes and subsequent terrorism. The trends served as input for the Delphi study described below.

Goal of the initial essay. The primary goal of the initial essay was to provide a level information basis to the participants in the first Delphi round as well as a common point of reference. In addition, the essay is used as reference in the analysis chapter, thus combining the essay and the results of the Delphi study.

Delphi study. About a dozen specialists participated in three rounds. They scored their views on the influence of trends of radicalization and provided the associated arguments. They also mentioned additional trends.

Analysis and conclusions. The following trends were indicated by the panel as most influential in relation radicalization:

1. **Church and state:** politicizing the Islam, jihadism
2. **Demography:** Population growth, increasing amount of (jobless) youngsters, mass migration
3. **Economy:** income imbalance
4. **Facilities:** tensions as a result of shortages in basic needs of life (water, energy, food, etc)
5. **Governance:** malfunctioning government and lack of trust
6. **Culture:** Clash of civilizations

The increasing hatred against Israel, politicizing the Islam, and the rise of jihadism were indicated by the participants as trends with the highest impact on radicalization and terrorism, despite the fact that the essay refrained from emphasis on such trends. These trends were captured within the overarching theme 'church and state'. Other themes showing similar consensus were 'demography' (megacities, migration, homeless); 'economy' ((youth) unemployment, differences in welfare); Facilities (scarcity of water and food); Governance (malfunction of government and lack of trust therein) and 'culture' (clash of civilizations). The opposite of consensus was found in various themes, for instance in human rights, highly educated women in non-Western countries, and the influence of

science and technology. Some foresaw a possible snowball effect of radicalization and terrorism as a result of differences in respecting human rights between Western and non-Western countries, but others would expect the opposite to occur. Some see the beginnings of radicalization in particularly young men, for instance in Iran and Mexico, who are confronted with an increasing level of emancipation of women, that causes them to be marginalized. However others do not recognize such developments at all. Some consider developments in science and technology as a means that terrorists can use to reach their goal, others also see such developments as a possible cause through mechanisms of provocation. In other words, just like opportunity makes the thief, the technocratic society provokes the growth of radicalization and terrorism – but only in the eyes of few participants.

Because the goal of this foresight study was to provide early warnings of future radicalization while taking global trends as a starting point, it is fruitful to end with a brief inventory of some of such strong associations that only a few participants in the study made between trends and radicalization:

1. **gender problems** : emancipation of women may lead to frustration of men
2. **boy surplus**: Young men that cannot marry nor work may show excessive behavior
3. **climate change** : floods, eco-migration and scarcity of water
4. **opportunity infrastructure**: technocratic society may provoke radical behavior
5. **human rights**: East-West differences may cause tensions

The radar screen of the foresight study showed little echo in the domain of science and technology. Only few see developments in science and technology as a possible cause of or influence on radicalisation.

Although currently the focus is on Islamic radicalization and jihadist terrorism, both in the media as well as in the minds of our participants, this foresight report does provide a warning to keep the minds open for other possible developments. Threats for instance may also come from radical left or right wing groups, and terrorism can also be executed by single issue groups or even individuals, such as environmental activists and the anti-abortion movement.