ROOTS OF VIOLENT RADICALIZATION

The following is based upon:

1. extensive study with former radicals
2. engagement with the research that has been done in the UK and abroad
3. two years of counter terrorism interventions work which has been undertaken with the Police; probation service; community referrals; through the channel process; and other forms of referral
4. observations of the data that have been gathered over the last 10 years, and the 120 plus cases that have led to convictions in the UK
5. discussions with senior Police figures responsible for Channel
6. theoretical studies undertaken by colleagues and researchers looking at psychological constitution in sociopathy

Too many people like to describe radicalization towards violence as a single trajectory - a single process and route to radicalization. People either see this as ideology or theology, or grievances or they see it as a specific theological trajectory i.e. salafist Jihadism (a mixture of what is commonly referred to as the Saudi Arabian brand of Wahabi-Salafi religious dogma which is then taken to a political extreme and seeks to enforce this pre-modern interpretation of Islam by force upon society, and justifies violence in order to achieve this end). Though tempting to use as analytical tools, these views do not accurately portray what is happening “on the ground”

The picture on the ground demonstrates a number of trajectories which are common - these four pathways are the most common routes traversed that lead to violent extremism.

Pathways

1. A belief in a world view where the west is at war with Islam. The selective observation of political issues as grievances, leads to accepting the plausibility of violent ideologies as normal and appropriate to the world. This then sees extremist ideology as the only ideology and a reading of religious texts that are consonant and resonate with the world as it is. These individuals are often not drawn to the theology of Wahhabi jihadism, but to the political project and
activities as being a manifestation of fighting the war against Islam that is being perpetrated by the West. Whether it is the cartoons, the wars in geo-political East, or one of the myriad other examples cited, they are all viewed as examples of this. Acts of terror are seen in the same light; as a response to this war – intellectual, political, and military. The way to engage such people in our experience is not to immediately challenge the theology, but to get them to see the world in a more nuanced manner; the media, parliamentary debate and policy, government decisions, wars etc are all not “for or against” Muslims. If this is done, then the framework of thinking within which the world is viewed is comprehensively changed. This change then necessitates a more nuanced approach to the religious texts, and it begins to make more sense that such an approach should exist. Hence, this route is a mixture of grievances viewed through a specific narrative, and an ideological view of Islam and terrorism.

2. Theological terrorism – there are individuals who have a full-blown belief that Islamist ideology is the only valid political reality that Muslims can accept. They believe terrorism is a form of Jihad to remove governments and their supporters i.e. “The West” from Muslim majority countries or what they would refer to as “Muslim lands”. These are specific, theologically driven aims, and they believe that they have an authentic reading of medieval Islamic scripture. This category of people can only be engaged by people with the relevant theological expertise to demonstrate that the views held are inauthentic and are a heterodox reading of scripture. After first dealing with the specific issue of violence, the underpinning mindset can only be engaged by demonstrating the pluralism within Islam, and the diverse nature of Islamic thought; this is a detailed, and specific theological engagement.

3. There are individuals in the UK of Iraqi, Afghani, and Pakistani origin, who have had grievous experiences. These experiences, often of violence; traumatic loss of family members; “collateral damage” involving our troops; or personal experiences of treatment in the UK, makes these individuals personally susceptible to violent ideology. These individuals are often motivated by a sense of moral indignation. Engaging with such people can be difficult. In our experience it requires: management of the emotions and allowing them to be expressed and justified; allowing the moral reaction and building upon it (i.e. civilians being hurt does not allow civilians being attacked); developing a sense of moral rectitude and re-enforcing this by addressing the theological justifications; and building resilience on human rights, morality, and theological principles over a period of time.
4. Those with mental health problems – whether minor or major – are targets and easily vulnerable. This is why mainstream services identifying such people in partnership with initiatives is so important. Dealing with the arguments, isolating the individuals, placing them in safer spaces, dealing with the causes e.g. the mental health state, are all part of the resolution as well as specialized interventions; mainstream services play a major role.

Institutions
1. Mosques – in my opinion they are not the main source of radical activities nor are they the most likely place within which to find extremist ideologues engaging in activism. But this requires elaboration:
   1. There are some institutions – which a survey would identify quite easily – where all groups are allowed to operate without restriction. A well known example of this is the Regent’s Park Mosque which has always allowed Hizb ut-Tahrir to have regular weekly Arabic and English language circle. Hizb ut-Tahrir are not a violent organization but they are ideological disposed to (a) accepting Jihadist groups and activities as politically and religiously legitimate, but different from their own brand of Islamist theology (b) do accept forms of terrorism that we would consider (i) obviously wrong from a moral perspective (ii) illegal (iii) contradictory to the policy of counter terrorism that we have had in place since the inception of CONTEST e.g. suicide bombing of civilians in Israel and bombings within the civilian population for example. They have also given rise to violent extremist groups in the UK and even in places like India such as the “Milli” off shoot.
   2. There are other institutions which are themselves lead by people who support certain types of terrorist groups. An anecdotal example occurred last Ramadan where a Mosque in the North East, supplicated not merely against Israelis but for God to count their number (i.e. all of them) and kill them. This was an institution run by people close to Hamas ideologically. There are a limited number of such institutions which in truth are Muslim Brotherhood affiliates (Hamas is officially a part of the MB, in their constitution). These places foster not only the ideological and theological extremist views which are close to violence and extremist ideology but are actually places where masses are exposed to such radical views consistently.
   3. Activists who operate from Mosques and within them but are not a part of them. This is something that can only be determined by following known and active groups and individuals with their connections and intelligence; this has been happening to some extent.
   4. Some institutions theology is sympathetic to certain brands of terrorism and extremism – the Taliban and certain factions within Pakistani
Deobandi institutions. I must stress that this is not to say that all or the majority are like this; but historically there have been many places which have housed and given support to Pakistani groups which are religious “vigilantes” (obviously persecuting people who commit religious “crimes” though not illegal activities). From an experiential and “research” perspective this is, of course, not the norm nor the majority of institutions. Actually, the opposite has been shown, though some of this will be liable to dispute and scrutiny.

2. Internet
1. Experts are divided by what they see as Internet radicalization – in my work I have come across certain cases which I would share:
   1. some individuals who already have “cause” or “motivation” and then seek to find information
   2. Those individuals who see it as a place for anonymously spreading their ideology and theology - either through direct one way propaganda, and those who see those forums where “theological/jurisprudential” discussions can take place. Justify and further radicalize those with sympathies, and meet like-minded individuals.
   3. Finding a community to belong to - researchers have stated that this is a common practice with all sorts of deviant behaviours whether suicide pacts, cults etc. Reinforcing the beliefs and worldview and further strengthening such beliefs.
   4. Means of discreet communication and open propaganda - strategic communication through alternative sites e.g. as has been discovered pornographic sites seem to be a route of transferring information and also we have the Inspire Magazine-al-Qaeda's English language online publication attempting to both relate psychologically to a Western audience and give practical tips on how to be a lone wolf terrorist

3. Universities- in my opinion the Universities are the single area where there has been little or no consistent focus whilst at the same time we have more and more extreme voices and views being presented.
   1. Apparently mainstream institutions. We have for example apparently “representative” institutions endorsing preachers who support terrorism e.g. Raed Saleh who recently has been bailed after being arrested for being in the UK in violation of a notice of exclusion that he was given. His website supports and praised Bin Laden as a martyr (shahed) presumably dying in “Jihad”; heads a
group that has explicitly stated that it does not believe in civilians in 
Israel among Jews, and Palestinians taking part in the political 
process are traitors and that Jews in general - thousands of them in 
the US - were behind 9/11 and knew about it and conspired against 
the people, in the official party magazine. This man was defended 
irrespective of the facts - this is not about Israel and Palestine but 
about terrorism and anti-Semitic hatred - they decided that he was a 
good man who should be supported.

2. Violent terrorist supporters and their activists have been operating 
on campus which did not stop out of principle but actually when 
some of these matters became more and more public. One 
institution did not do anything to stop the al-Qaeda Yemen English 
passer who has recently gained notoriety, Anwar Awlaki from 
speaking by live link up and recordings at the University till 
pressure from public discrediting made it necessary.

3. The politicized discourses which prevent an objective analysis taking place - this 
is barrier to seeing what is happening within such institutions. I am not 
suggesting that the majority of University students are embracing extremist 
ideological narratives and considering violence. In fact I would say that only a 
small percentage get involved with any type of political activism and even 
Islamist activism, and only a small percentage will become radicalized. The 
problem is I do not believe that any non-biased non-political analysis is currently 
available that is up to date and current on the issue.

4. Institutionally there are little to no resources invested in this area - how many 
staff members does BIS have related to this and looking into this subject?

5. There has been no objective criterion to differentiate (a) what are the groups and 
institutions that we are engaging with actually take as their political and 
theological stand points? (b) what is an acceptable minimal threshold and how 
do we define it? (c) based upon (a), (b) and the additional evidence that we have 
of effective engagement coupled with a developed perspective on radicalization 
towards violence, have we been developing our policies and activism? The 
current government does wish to do so and has started the process of 
developing the criterion for doing so within the prevent review, though there is 
still much more that needs to be developed.

6. Counter campaigns against the prevalent totalitarian voices need to be facilitated 
if platforms paid for by the University and public bodies, are to allow extreme 
preachers. This is in order to allow and facilitate debate and challenge the 
extreme narratives. Otherwise effectively, it is tax-payers money going to allow 
persons to preach the killing of homosexuals, adulterers, and demonizing Jews in
the name of anti-Israeli government labels, effectively totalitarian fascists given a public platform paid by the public to recruit and proselytize their views in the mistaken name of freedom of speech. This is not about rights of public gathering, free speech and not persecuting people, but rather about using state sponsored privileges to spread fascist ideals in the name of a religion; in this case in the name of Islam.

7. Resources to support not merely criticize Universities need to be put in place – greater number of people, advice, information sharing, developing good practice in vetting and challenging extremists and preventing those advocating violence and terrorism or breaking laws against hate speech are all required.

4. Prisons - there are unique circumstances which for various reasons have been created. Some as a result of normal prison community dynamics i.e. it is a separate society to the rest of society inhabited by people who have established their own criterion outside of the wider society. There is a concentration of people likely to be receptive or “vulnerable”. There are dynamics that have been developed due to general problems such as the gang culture and radical religion compounding together to create very unique types of extremists gangs. These gangs provide primarily safety within prison. But also networks. They reinforce criminal behaviour mentalities through new found religious justifications. Additionally we have had the strange scenario where communities being placed together through religious identity, and these have been including in the past radical hate preachers - inadvertently thereby giving terrorists and those convicted of offences related to terrorism people with whom to interact and propagate their views and theology and political lens - to a group of people who are arguably vulnerable to it. This alongside a complete inability - completely understandable - for the staff to deal with this very unique situation. In conversations with Prison staff, fellow colleagues/interventionists, leading people dealing with post prison probation and community re-assignment the following are key issues have come to the fore:

1. existing tensions are heightened - cultures of racism and prejudice have been addressed over the last few years within prisons but there are still tensions which exist within intra-prison “communities” and those communities and staff
2. lack of awareness of mainstream staff of the theological and ideological realities they are dealing with
3. lack of grounded evidence based training for staff on actual evidence based characteristics and behaviours to be aware of when dealing with such cases - yet there are additional burdens that have been placed on
prison staff in terms of “policing” extremists and terrorists and seeking to look out for their activities and signs of radicalism as opposed to religious conversion - which is a common phenomenon - and gang related extremism/embracing of “religion” and criminality justified in the name of religion.

4. Isolating extremist/terrorist preachers and activists from the wider Muslims populace - how can this be justified? How can it be done? How can interaction be regulated? What lessons can be learned from previous experiences e.g. with the IRA and their direction and engagement with the outside group?

5. What are successful interventions and unsuccessful ones? There are some or rather a few successful interventions which have taken place but not enough of an actuarial sample/data to be able to develop specific understanding though I would outline the following points from the limited number of cases that have taken place that I can build on:

   1. Engage without confrontation initially
   2. understand but not justify positive and negative emotions and motivations
   3. Initially seek to develop a positive basis for interaction and change
   4. challenge the effectively and consequences prior to the theology, as a means to questioning the theological basis of terrorism
   5. develop an alternative theology within their own theological framework and gradually build alternatives as well as criticize extant extreme points of view
   6. Set clear and measurable analysis criterion which are constantly being reviewed and monitored for change over a period of time
   7. Develop through time, positive external foci to build upon

6. The above is the best description that I can give without elaborating into massive details of some apparently successful interventions in a prisons set up. It is not a generic formula that can be replicated - each intervention, whether by prisons, probation's, community based, through the police etc, is different, and the role played by theology is different which will be elaborated further.

Key components for a successful deradicalization approach - again this is based upon our experiences in interventions over the last 2 years and engagement with individual extremists from violent and so-called non-violent backgrounds, and also discussions with other providers and local delivery units that we work with.
The following are key in our view:

1. Initial assessment of all factors: cognitive, behavioural, hygiene, extended environment, mental health, social factors - personal to him, and additional risk factors such as exposure to people etc.
2. A developed analysis and justification for how judgements are made and based should be (a) documented (b) the basis for developing a plan (c) monitoring and assessing and evaluating change and effective engagement (d) evaluating the initial assessment and continuously amending it based upon evidence and reassess plans constantly.
3. A developed understanding of the type of trajectory that the individual has taken and not having a formulaic approach.
4. Understanding key issues related to an individual undertaking violence - pre-requisites that are almost required and manifested in an individual.
5. Not isolating individuals from their human needs and working alongside mainstream services in dealing with the individual.
6. Identifying and addressing key motivations and the associated thought patterns as well as attitudes and perspectives that reinforce them within the individual and addressing them.
7. Adapting styles, upon gaining confidence enough for the individual to even consider what you are saying/questioning, being able to first dismantle the specific emotional drivers, world view, theological bases/claims, context in which they live, separate them if necessary from the source of the radicalization. All of this depends upon the specific trajectory and as we have defined and explained above an outline process of engagement above (see above - Pathways).

The Role of Theology

Much of the discussion again in this regard in my opinion is either based upon external lenses being forced onto the debate; ideological bias - right-wing and Far-Right anti-Islam, left-wing grievance primacy assumptions for motivators and then building analysis accordingly. In my opinion the following needs to be documented thoroughly but can be elaborated upon briefly in the following manner.

1. Understanding of the various strands of theology in two respects (1) where do they stand on a theological map and sectarian and intellectual backgrounds.
2. A very clear calibration of views on a clear legal and criterion - this may sound simplistic but it has not been done in an effective manner; types of violence, which are all classified as illegal violence in the UK, overseas,
When looking at individual motivations - these can be categorized according to the above pathways outlined: the theology either fits into an ideological framework, the world view which presents things from an anti-Islam/anti-Muslim perspective; there are those that hold on to core theological bases for the Islamist justifications; those who have specifically embraced a salafi-jihadi theological perspective.

Accordingly the level of theological input depends upon the above. If the emotional, the intellectual parameters for viewing the world, the Islamist ideological narrative - which is partially theological and partly intellectual - can be effectively addressed, the role of theological reinforcement is not as essential, though arguably it is a resilience factor. In the case of actual engagement with certain theologically motivated salafi-jihadists inspired radicals and radicalization, and also strongly Islamist inspired, there are particular types of calibrated theological engagement.

1. Primary sources and challenging them
2. Claims of theological authenticity and challenging the sources
3. Claims that their views are supported by medieval theological, putative authorities, and demonstrate that these claims are factually untrue - this is different to make a Socratic theological challenge
4. There are other cases where there is little to no theological engagement as the case in certain individuals - particularly those who are people with mental health problems or those with personal experiences that have radicalized them - in one case as an example it was instilling an emotional and intellectual connection with human rights as a universal ethical criterion that can never be rejected.

5. I do believe that there is a precise and specific role in various cases for theological interventions and is necessary but not in all cases and to different extents - which requires a formal and detailed study.

The Role of “non-Violent” radicals

I would challenge the common usage of the distinction that is being made between Violent and non-Violent Islamists. For example the group, the Muslim Brotherhood is often described as a non-violent extremist organization by people in the area. This is factually (not analytically) not true at all, Hamas, the terrorist organization is officially in it's constitution, a part of the Muslim Brotherhood. They undertake actions targeting civilians - this is both illegal, violates all sense of morality, fundamentally in conflict with the objectives as outlined in CONTEST.

These are not minor issues but mean that it is fundamentally impossible to describe them as non-Violent, we may say that they do not support terrorism in the UK, they do support terrorism and illegal extremists violence against UK troops. This is also the case with groups that have received funding previously who have referred to scholars who have justified Jihadist violence in Muslim majority countries, support Jihad against the West - UK, France and the US - when they have the ability to do so and the government of Saudi Arabia or any Muslim majority country- it is at best a containment arguments and not a deradicalization process, and the only difference between such groups and Hizb ut-Tahrir is that the latter are overtly political and not of Saudi-Wahhab theology.

Categorically, these cannot be deradicalization activities; and fail to meet the basic minimal legal and strategic aims or rational necessities as actual deradicalization efforts. This is not to say that these groups are not genuine in their personal belief. They are, but these beliefs themselves are radical, violent and also very, very close to those who support terrorism in the UK too. They are also a part of the ideological and theological ingredients which produce terrorism in the UK.

Proscriptions of violent groups

1. It is understandably and practically necessary as these groups violate legislation which requires their being banned
2. It has been applied inconsistently - many groups and individuals who have also violated the laws yet have not been prosecuted

3. There has been a failure to:
   1. Apply the ban consistently on the same groups - Islam 4 UK and al-Muhajiroun and now Muslims against Crusades - the same group despite the claims of government that it would ban any resurgence of the group with its various names
   2. Instead of merely banning groups individuals should be prosecuted when they violate such laws continuing activities of the banned/proscribed group whilst not being prosecuted
   3. Proscription itself does not deal with the prevalence of the ideas and propaganda of such organizations.
   4. Proscription does not deal with individuals who are undertaking activities towards radicalizing individuals
   5. It does not deal with lone wolf terrorism

All of the above does not invalidate the necessity of proscribing organizations, but it is in some respects a very limited means of effective deradicalization of communities and individuals.

Rashad Ali - CENTRI

**BRIEF OVERVIEW OF CENTRI:**

There has been some good work in the Prevent arena and an increase in the number of experts and organisations that are able to access and work with the Government and communities with a better understanding of how and what causes youngsters to be radicalised to extremism. There is however a need for more to be done in the implementation and evaluation of strategies and projects that are being undertaken and to make them more mainstream.

CENTRI has been formed to bring together world class experts with the experience and ability to assist in this area from the different sects and schools of thought within the British Muslim population.

**CENTRI Founders:**

*Rashad Ali*
*Dawud Masieh*
*Haras Rafiq*
CENTRI delivers evidence-based solutions in counter-extremism. We specialise in issues related to Islam, faith, cultural diversity, and integration. Our services are aimed at:

- National, regional, and local government
- Police and those working in the security sector
- Universities, research institutions, and think-tanks
- Schools and educational establishments
- Media and communications professionals
- Film and documentary makers
- Businesses
- Religious institutions

We:

- Assist policy makers and policy implementers
- Provide specialist advice
- Provide training
- Conduct research
- Deliver interventions
- Facilitate operational practice
- Engage in faith-related dialogue

CENTRI works with other individuals and organisations to facilitate effective project delivery. CENTRI has links to a network of:

- Leading theological thinkers
- Academics
- Researchers
- Former Islamists
- Prevent practitioners and interventionists
The amalgamation of experts allows CENTRI to be in a unique position to have a real impact within all levels of the Prevent arena and help to plug holes in certain gaps that are naturally emerging in the strategy and our experiences and backgrounds inform our perspectives on issues surrounding terrorism, Islamism, and integration.

With academic, theological, and practical de-radicalization expertise and first-hand experience of Islamist extremism we aim to enhance current thinking and practice in counter terrorism, counter extremism, and community cohesion.

Furthermore, there is a vast network of people that are currently working with CENTRI in cyberspace as researchers, activists and bloggers as well a number of leading Think Tanks specialising in this area.

This allows CENTRI to have a wide reach and be able to target vulnerable individuals and organisations at all levels within the community.