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Explaining Homegrown Western Jihadists: The Importance of Western Foreign Policy

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In both the United States and Europe, explanations of homegrown radicalization emphasize the power of Salafi-jihadist ideology and Muslim experiences of discrimination and socioeconomic deprivation in Western countries. Polls of U.S. and European Muslims, and case histories of jihadist plots for attacks in the United States, indicate that another source of homegrown radicalization is Western foreign policy, especially Western interventions in predominantly Muslim countries. Poll results support a two-factor model in which seeing the war on terrorism as a war on Islam is predicted by both perceived discrimination and grievance related to Western foreign policy. Consistent with this model, UK practitioners in counter-radicalization programs find it useful to recognize Muslim grievances related to Western foreign policy in order to argue that violence does not reduce Muslim suffering. These observations indicate that Muslim grievances relating to Western foreign policy are important for understanding and countering support for jihadist violence in Western countries.

Keywords: CVE, deradicalization, discrimination, ideology, Muslim polls, public opinion, Salafi-jihadist, radicalization, terrorism

Jihadists homegrown in Western countries are a problem and a puzzle. Considerable ink has been spilt trying to solve this puzzle. Not all experts tell the same story, but there is a strong tendency toward sociological explanations of jihadists homegrown in the United States and Europe. In this paper I argue that sociological explanations are not enough, that Western foreign policies must be taken into account.

This argument is not new. Many scholars have recognized in general terms that terrorist violence occurs in the context of a dynamic, action-and-reaction conflict between a state and a non-state challenger. Notable among these scholars are Martha Crenshaw, Fathali Moghaddam, Marc Sageman, Tom Pyszczynski, Donatella della Porta, Sophia Moskalenko, and Clark McCauley (see Moskalenko and McCauley 2017a).

Less frequent are government officials pointing to government actions that contribute to political radicalization. Several British security officials have explicitly acknowledged that Western foreign policies are part of the explanation of jihadist terrorism (Hewitt 2017). Here is a salient example

from a former director-general of the United Kingdom's domestic intelligence agency MI5.

[The invasion of Iraq] increased the terrorist threat by convincing more people that Osama Bin Laden's claim that Islam was under attack was correct. It provided an arena for the jihad for which he had called, so that many of his supporters, including British citizens, travelled to Iraq to attack Western forces. It also showed very clearly that foreign and domestic policy are intertwined. Actions overseas have an impact at home. And our involvement in Iraq spurred some young British Muslims to turn to terror. (Manningham-Buller 2011)

Acknowledgement of the role of foreign policy has been less common in the United States, but here is an example from the U.S. National Intelligence Estimate of 2006: "The Iraq conflict has become the cause célèbre for jihadists, breeding a deep resentment of U.S. involvement in the Muslim world and cultivating supporters for the global jihadist movement" (*New York Times* 2006).

Despite many academic and a few government voices pointing to Western foreign policies as a source of Muslim radicalization, jihad is much more often linked with ideology than with grievance. The combination *jihad salafi* produces 4.2 million Google hits. Combining *jihad* with *US invasion of*

Iraq or US invasion of Afghanistan or US support for Israel produces only forty to seventy thousand Google hits—and many of these insist that Muslim grievances are NOT important as a driver of jihadist attacks.

In this paper I maintain that Muslim grievances are indeed important for understanding jihadists homegrown in Western countries. Building on Rik Coolsaet's analysis of homegrown European jihadists that emphasizes contextual over ideological causes, I suggest that the relevant context may include Western foreign policies as well as sociological disadvantage. Poll results show that many Muslims, both in the United States and Europe, see the war on terrorism as a war on Islam and justify suicide terrorism in defense of Islam. John Mueller's case histories point to U.S. foreign policy as the most important incitement to jihadist violence in the United States. Although Olivier Roy contends that European jihadists are not to be believed when they claim Western foreign policies as grievances, I suggest how sociological discrimination and foreign policy grievance can combine in a two-factor model of opinion radicalization. Consistent with this model, counter-radicalization practitioners in the United Kingdom explicitly recognize Muslim grievances about Western foreign policies in order to argue that jihadist violence is ineffective. Similarly Stephanie Dornschneider's comparison of activists and terrorists shows the importance of arguing against violent response to grievance. My conclusion is that programs aimed at Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) need to address Muslim grievances relating to Western foreign policies.

1. Coolsaet's Analysis

A useful review of U.S. and European views of homegrown radicalization has been provided by Rik Coolsaet (2016, 27):

The central position the concept of radicalisation acquired in policy, law enforcement and academia as the holy grail of counterterrorism contributed significantly to the shift in focus from context to individual, as Mark Sedgwick has pointed out [2010], "the concept of radicalisation emphasizes the individual and, to some extent, the ideology and the group, and significantly de-emphasizes the wider circumstances" and the context in which it arises.

Here I do not wish to focus on the problems of the concept of radicalization, about which I have proposed that most of these problems can be resolved by distinguishing between radicalization of opinion and radicalization of action (Moskalenko and McCauley 2017a). Rather I am interested

in the shift in focus from context to individual, the de-emphasis of the wider circumstances, that Coolsaet identifies as occurring in both the U.S. and European views of radicalization.

Coolsaet summarizes the contest between context and ideology as follows:

For some, a wide array of grievances and motivations, ranging from social marginalisation to political exclusion, had to be addressed. For others, ideology was the prime culprit. The latter gradually became the primary prism through which the process of turning an individual into a terrorist was examined – notwithstanding research that indicated the secondary role of ideology and notwithstanding the experience of many frontline prevention workers, who had found that theological or ideological discussions were mostly pointless when dealing with "radicalised" individuals. (Coolsaet 2016, 3)

As Coolsaet sees it, radicalization came to mean accepting ideas of radical Islam, fundamentalist Islam, or jihadist Salafism—these used interchangeably. Ideology won; context lost. Social marginalization and political exclusion were lost in a war of ideas against radical Islam. Residential segregation, educational and occupational discrimination, political polarization against Muslim immigrants—these are 'push' factors for radicalization because these factors raise dissatisfaction with government and lead to identification as Muslims rather than identification as citizens of a Western country.

What does taking context seriously mean for counter-radicalization?

Better schooling, better housing, countering discrimination and racial hatred, job perspectives, addressing vulnerabilities related to mental health or psychological difficulties, etc., have all long since been identified as worthy objectives in their own right to create a more equal and inclusive society. (Coolsaet 2016, 41-42).

Looking at the U.S. approach to radicalization, Coolsaet quotes John Brennan, Assistant to President Obama for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism.

[A]ny comprehensive approach has to also address the upstream factors—the conditions that help fuel violent extremism ... [A]ddressing these upstream factors is ultimately not a military operation but a political, economic, and social campaign to meet the basic needs and legitimate grievances of ordinary people: security for their communities, education for children, a job and income for parents, and a sense of dignity and worth. (Coolsaet 2016, 34)

And here is Coolsaet again with a more recent summary of where Western jihadists come from:

Today's renewed window of opportunity offered by the collapse of ISIS should thus be used to consolidate existing arrangements and, most crucially, to enhance efforts to address the structural drivers of radicalisation and extremism, including so-

cial isolation, marginalisation, and polarisation, that allowed ISIS – and jihadism in general – to mobilise in the first place. (Renard and Coolsaet, Overview and Key Findings, 5)

I agree with Coolsaet and those he quotes that the marginal sociological status of Muslim immigrants, especially in Europe, is an important push toward supporting and even joining in jihadist terrorism. Marginal social status is an important part of the context that is too often ignored in the rush to combat radical ideas among Western Muslims. But I want to argue that sociological problems are only part of the missing context of radicalization. Western policies in predominantly Muslim countries are also important.

To make this argument I will first show that significant numbers of Muslims in both the United States and Europe have grievances with regard to Western policies in Muslim countries. Many see the war on terrorism as a war on Islam and a non-negligible minority see suicide bombing justified in defense of Islam. Then I briefly outline what U.S. jihadist terrorists say are their motives for violence against the West, and examine a study that focuses on motives for violence by comparing Muslim activists with Muslim terrorists. Finally I quote UK counter-radicalization practitioners to show the usefulness of recognizing Western policies in Muslim countries as an important part of the context that supports radicalization to jihadist violence.

2. What Do Polls Tell Us about Extremist Opinions among U.S. Muslims?

In a series of tracking polls with U.S. Muslims, Moskalkenko and McCauley asked “*Do you feel the war on terrorism is a war against Islam? (No, Not sure/Don't know, Yes)*” (Fajmonova, McCauley, and Moskalkenko 2017). Results show a substantial decrease in the percent of U.S. Muslims answering ‘yes’ to this question: from 47 percent in January 2016 to 30 percent in June 2016 and 32 percent in October 2016. The reduction in extremist opinion is good news, but the bad news is that about a third of U.S. Muslims still believe that the war on terrorism is a war on Islam.

Correlational analyses found two predictors of this belief. A three-item index of perceived discrimination against Muslims in the United States showed that respondents perceiving more discrimination were more likely to see a war on Islam. Two items in the discrimination index showed substantial decreases between January and June. *Since the 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris and San Bernardino, have people acted as if*

they are suspicious of you? (Yes 54 percent January 2016, 27 percent June 2016). Since the 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris and San Bernardino, have you been called offensive names? (Yes 73 percent January 2016, 19 percent June 2016).

One foreign policy item was also a significant predictor: *Some people say that U.S. foreign policies are dictated by Jewish interests. How do you feel about this?* Respondents agreeing that U.S. foreign policies are dictated by Jewish interests were more likely to see a war on Islam. This item showed a substantial increase between the January and June polls (*Agree 21 percent January 2016, 43 percent June 2016*).

As already noted, from January to June there was a decrease in the percent seeing a war on Islam (47 percent to 30 percent). Looking at the predictors of seeing a war on Islam, it appears that the (numerically larger) decreases in perceived discrimination compensated for the increase in agreement that Jewish interests dictate U.S. foreign policy, to produce the observed decrease in the percent seeing a war on Islam. Perhaps many U.S. Muslims expected a wave of hostility after the Paris and San Bernardino attacks, and were relieved to think that there must not be a war on Islam when the wave did not appear.

The two predictors, perceiving discrimination against Muslims and agreeing that U.S. foreign policies are dictated by Jewish interests, were not consistently correlated. Taken together the results indicate that there are two sources of U.S. Muslim opinions that there is a war on Islam: perceived discrimination at home and perceived anti-Muslim policies abroad.

The same tracking polls included the following item: *Some people think that suicide bombing and other forms of violence against civilian targets are justified in order to defend Islam from its enemies. Other people believe that, no matter what the reason, this kind of violence is never justified. Do you personally feel that this kind of violence is often justified, sometimes justified, rarely justified, or never justified?*

In January, June, and October 2016, respondents answering *often* or *sometimes justified* accounted for 10, 8, and 9 percent respectively (3, 4, and 1 percent answering *often*). Again, it is good news that only a small minority see suicide bombing against civilians as justified, but it is bad news that

10 percent projects to about one hundred thousand U.S. Muslims.

Fajmonova, McCauley and Moskalenko (2017) did not find useful predictors of justifying suicide bombing. But more recent research found that alienation and depression were related to justifying suicide bombing. Respondents high on alienation (social disconnection) and depression were more likely to justify suicide bombing (Moskalenko and McCauley 2017b). Interestingly, this result parallels findings that suggested a possible profile of lone-wolf terrorists as disconnected and disordered.

3. What Do Polls Tell Us about Extremist Opinions among European Muslims?

The first thing to notice is how few polls of European Muslims exist, at least in the public domain. In his major review of Muslim opinions of al-Qaeda and ISIS, including justification of suicide bombing in defense of Islam, Alex Schmid (2017) found a few poll results for UK Muslims but none for other European countries.

Perhaps the best available data are not recent. In 2006 Pew Research polled Muslims in four European countries. The proportions of Muslims who saw suicide bombing of civilians as often or sometimes justified in defense of Islam were 16 percent in France, 15 percent in UK, 16 percent in Spain, and 7 percent in Germany (Pew Research Center 2006). The lower percentage in Germany may be attributable to the fact that most German Muslim immigrants come from Turkey, which has experienced years of PKK terrorist attacks, including suicide bombing. Pew polls of U.S. Muslims in 2007 and 2011 both found 8 percent justifying suicide bombing in defense of Islam (Pew Research Center 2007, 2011).

The same rank ordering of European countries emerges from a 2014 ICM poll of European Muslims. The proportions of respondents with a favorable view of ISIS were 16 percent in France, 7 percent in UK, and 2 percent in Germany (Grant 2014). It is interesting to note that this poll was paid for by *Russia Today*.

A 2016 ICM poll asked UK Muslims about the importance of various factors “in explaining the radicalization of Muslims in Britain” (ICM Unlimited 2016). The highest percentage of *very important* ratings—22 percent—was for “Western military interventions in Syria, Iraq and other places.” Next was

“poverty, unemployment and lack of economic opportunity,” with 20 percent rating this factor *very important*.

In a 2015–2016 Munster University poll of ethnic Turks in Germany, 20 percent of respondents agreed that “the threat which the West poses to Islam justifies violence” (Pollack et al. 2016). About three million people of Turkish origin live in Germany; 20 percent thus represents over half a million seeing a Western threat to Islam.

Although there have been relatively few polls of Muslims in European countries, the results available suggest that extremist opinions among European Muslims are at least as strong as among U.S. Muslims. Only a small minority support jihadist terrorism – but even 5 percent projects to over one million of Europe’s 26 million Muslims (Pew Research Center 2017). The perception of a Western threat to Islam, and the concern about Western interventions in Iraq and Syria, together indicate that European foreign policies relating to Muslim countries may play a role in the development of radical opinions and radical actions among Western Muslims.

4. What Do U.S. Jihadists Say about their Motivations for Violence?

John Mueller has collated descriptions of all cases of Islamist extremist attacks targeting the United States, from 9/11 through 2017. He includes attempted attacks, disrupted plots to attack, and plots that might have led to an attack. In sixteen years, the total number of cases is 117.

Based on the details of the cases available in the public record, Mueller has assessed the motivations of the actors involved. He discusses the results in his introduction to the cases, in a section titled *Motivations: It’s the Foreign Policy, Stupid*.

There were a few cases in which it could probably be said there was no notable motivation at all (Cases 5, 10, 19). However, in almost all the other cases, the overwhelming driving force was simmering, and more commonly boiling, outrage at American foreign policy—the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in particular and also the country’s support for Israel in the Palestinian conflict. Religion was a key part of the consideration for most, but it was not that they had a burning urge to spread Islam and Sharia law or to establish caliphates. Rather it was the desire to protect the religion against what was commonly seen to be a concentrated war upon it in the Middle East by the United States government and military. (Mueller 2018, 10)

This conclusion fits the summary of the jihadist narrative developed by David Betz (2008, 520) from a review of jihadist texts.

- (1) Islam is under general unjust attack by Western crusaders led by the United States;
- (2) *Jihadis*, whom the West refers to as “terrorists,” are defending against this attack;
- (3) the actions they take in defence of Islam are proportionally just and religiously sanctified; and, therefore
- (4) it is the duty of good Muslims to support these actions.

This is a narrative rather than an ideology; it justifies terrorism, as Mueller notes, without recourse to religious authority or quotations from the Koran. Religion enters the narrative only insofar as caring about what happens to Muslims, caring about Muslims as victims of Western attack, justifies defensive or revenge violence. This narrative is also consistent with Sageman’s characterization of terrorists as self-proclaimed soldiers who engage in violence to defend and avenge their community (see below).

5. Roy’s Analysis and a Re-interpretation

In contrast with Mueller, some analysts believe that Western policies with regard to Muslim countries have little or nothing to do with the motivations of homegrown Western jihadists. Olivier Roy is a prominent example. Here is his summary description of homegrown terrorists in France.

[T]he typical radical is a young second-generation immigrant or convert, very often involved in episodes of petty crime, with practically no religious education, but having a rapid and recent trajectory of conversion/reconversion, more often in the framework of a group of friends or over the internet than in the context of a mosque; the embrace of religion is seldom kept secret (no *taqiyya*, or dissimulation), but rather is exhibited, but it does not necessarily correspond to immersion in religious practice. (Roy 2017, 32)

Like others, Roy uses the prevalence of second-generation immigrants and converts to argue that Islamist radicals lack connection with any Muslim country. But his next step is startling. He argues that radicals are not moved to violence by the suffering of Muslims in Palestine or Afghanistan—because they do not try to go to these countries to fight. Instead they cite the vague and abstract suffering of the ummah—Muslims around the world—and try to join or fight for Islamic State. This observation leads Roy to conclude that it is “the internal causes of radicalization that must be studied” (39). For Roy, a youthful obsession with death is perhaps the most salient internal cause.

In this argument Roy cites his debate with Francois Burgat.

... Francois Burgat’s objection that radicals are motivated by the “suffering” experienced by Muslims who were formerly colonized, or as victims of racism or any other sort of discrimination, U.S. bombardments, drones, Orientalism, and so on, would imply that the revolt is primarily led by victims. But the relationship between radicals and victims is more imaginary than real. Those who perpetrate attacks in Europe are not inhabitants of the Gaza Strip, or Libyans, or Afghans. They are not necessarily the poorest, the most humiliated, or the least integrated. The fact that 25 percent of jihadis are converts shows that the link between radicals and their “people” is also in realm of the imaginary, or at least—as I argue—an imaginary construct. (Roy 2017, 9)

A psychologist would have no difficulty seeing identification with a victim group as a cause of radicalization, even for an individual not personally victimized. Similarly there is no difficulty in seeing identification as a subjective or “imaginary” cause rather than an objective cause. Objective facts do not determine human behavior, perceptions do.

Furthermore, our analysis can do without positing fascination with death. Many young Muslims living in European countries feel the pain of discrimination; even individuals experiencing educational and occupational success can identify with the suffering of other Muslims in Europe. Europeans do not differentiate immigrants from the Maghreb, the Middle East, or South Asia; all are lumped as Muslims. Second-generation and convert Muslims in Europe have weak ties with any Muslim country; if they are not French, Belgian, Dutch or German, who are they? They must be, as they are seen and treated, simply Muslims. Thus it is discrimination in a Western country that leads second-generation and convert Muslims to identify with the ummah rather than with any particular Muslim country.

But the ummah is suffering. Photographs, videos, and stories provide vivid examples of their suffering and humiliation. Roy does not fail to notice this; he points to the popularity of videos such as “Wake Up Ummah” (2017, 45; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=POL8CLBaBNU>). The personal of discrimination becomes the political of avenging the ummah. An individual zero becomes an avenging hero.

This analysis is close to one of Roy’s summary passages, despite his announced intention to focus on “internal causes”:

The engagement in violent action thus has to do with making the connection between a personal revolt, rooted in a feeling of humiliation due to one’s attachment to a virtual “community” of believers, and a metanarrative of returning to the golden age of Islam, a narrative theatricalized according to the codes of a

contemporary aesthetics of violence that turns the youth into a hero. (2017, 73)

Whereas Roy wants to stop at “internal causes,” including perceived discrimination and fascination with death, my alternative is that discrimination at home and Western foreign policies are both contextual factors—not necessarily facts but at least perceptions—that contribute to radicalization.

Discrimination at home is not only a grievance in itself, it pushes toward identification with a global ummah, and the perceived suffering of the ummah in turn produces additional feelings of grievance and outrage. Grievances related to discrimination thus join with grievances related to Western foreign policies to fuel radicalization of both ideas and actions. Identification with the ummah is indeed imaginary, in the sense of Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* (1983), but the power of identification in political conflict is all too real (McCauley 2001).

This two-factor model of radicalization is consistent with U.S. polling results cited earlier that show that both perceived discrimination and perceived Jewish control of U.S. foreign policy are linked with seeing the war on terrorism as a war on Islam. The model is reinforced by polling results showing that Western interventions in the Middle East are seen as the most important explanation of radicalization of UK Muslims, as well as by results showing that a significant minority of Turkish-Germans believe that the Western threat to Islam justifies violence. Also consistent with the model is Mueller’s finding that the predominant motivation of U.S. jihadists is outrage against U.S. foreign policy toward Muslim countries.

It is important to note that the two-factor model offers a very different view of the importance of ideology than that usually represented in concerns about Salafi-jihadist Islam as the source of terrorist attacks (for recent example see Tony Blair Institute for Global Change 2018). Islam as ideology is not important; the Koran and its interpretation are not important. Identification with the sufferings of the Ummah is the key to justifying violence.

6. What Do We Know about the Difference between Muslim Activists and Muslim Terrorists?

A more precise understanding of jihadist motives can be developed from comparison of the motives of Muslim terrorists with the motives of Muslim activists. This crucial question

has seldom been posed empirically. We have many studies of terrorists, often in their own words: interviews with current or former terrorists asking about their motives and their trajectories into terrorism. What is even more useful is to try to distinguish terrorists from activists with the same cause. Some individuals with a political grievance will use violence, while others with the same grievance will use legal or at least non-violent forms of protest and political mobilization. The great advantage of comparing terrorists with activists is the possibility of learning, not how some people are moved to action, but how some people are moved to violent action—terrorism.

From his study of thirty-four campaigns of political violence, from the French Revolution to jihadist terrorism, Sageman derived a model in which a political protest community produces self-proclaimed soldiers who engage in violence to defend and avenge their community (Sageman 2017). The transition from protest to violence occurs, according to Sageman, where the conflict between community and state escalates as both sides increase their use of physical violence and a rhetoric of total war. On both sides, disillusionment with non-violent tactics and moral outrage at enemy violence contribute to the escalation of violence.

This model points to the escalating dynamics of intergroup conflict as the source of intergroup violence (see my introductory paragraphs for others taking a dynamic view). Sageman believes that state escalation of moral rhetoric and violence contributes to the emergence of terrorist violence, and suggests that the state should avoid over-reactions that can turn non-violent activists to terrorism. But his model does not offer much help in explaining why some activists move to terrorism while at the same time and under the same circumstances, other activists remain non-violent actors. Nor does his model help us understand how some individuals move to terrorism without having tried activism.

Here is where a remarkable study can help us: a comparison of activists and terrorists for the same cause. In long interviews, Dornschneider (2016) probed the motives of non-violent Islamist activists of the 1980s (Muslim Brotherhood) and former Islamist terrorists (al-Jama’at al Islamiyya, al-Jihad) in Egypt. She did the same for 1970s left-wing activists (Socialist German Student Union, Kommune 1) and terrorists (Red Army Faction, 2 June Movement) in Germany. Most of Dornschneider’s interviewees were still living in hiding during the period of her research (2009–2010). It is a testimony to

her persistence and her social skills in both Arabic and German that she was able to interview twenty-seven individuals: eight Egyptian activists, seven Egyptian former terrorists, six German activists, and six German former terrorists. Overall Dornschneider presents a double paired comparison: activists vs terrorists for both Egyptian Islamists and German leftists.

The first result of interest is that activists and terrorists both see the state as aggressive and repressive; they have the same grievance. This result argues against a war of ideas that tries to encourage 'moderate' activism by teaching more positive views of the state.

Terrorists are more likely than activists to believe that non-violent action will not change the state, but violence can. Terrorists are also more likely to believe that the state cannot be improved, that it must be transformed. Finally, terrorists are more willing to accept the negative consequences of violence, both the suffering of those they attack and their own suffering as targets of state power.

In contrast, non-violent activists are more likely than terrorists to believe that violence cannot reduce state injustice and oppression, and that violence will bring negative consequences to those who fight the state. Activists are also more likely to believe that state structures are essential to avoid chaos even when the state is abusive, and to believe that those suffering socio-economic deprivation can be helped by activism.

Following Dornschneider, it is interesting to note that socio-economic deprivation under an unjust and repressive state can motivate non-violent activism but does not appear to motivate terrorist violence. This result resonates with research showing that low socio-economic status is not usually related to becoming a terrorist.

But the key message from this research is the potential for using the differences between terrorists and activists to inform programs that try to turn Muslims away from violence and terrorism. Terrorists and activists agree in perceiving state aggression and repression as their major motive and justification for action. They differ in other beliefs. Arguments against terrorism should focus on these beliefs. Against terrorism it can be argued that 1) violence only strengthens the state; 2) improving the state is easier than transforming it; 3) violence brings morally unacceptable suffering to innocents on both sides of a conflict; 4) violence brings chaos to those

who most depend on state structures for support; and 5) nonviolent activism can reduce socio-economic deprivation. Similar arguments have been advanced by Sedgwick (2011), who suggested that arguing against violence is more likely to succeed than arguing against grievances shared by millions of Muslims.

7. An Example of Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) that Uses These Arguments

Between 9/11, 2001, and 2017, there were about 3,500 arrests for terrorism-related offences in the United Kingdom. About 80 percent of these were for international terrorism (jihadist) offenses. Only 646 of these arrests resulted in conviction for a terrorism-related offense. Of those convicted, 186 terrorism or extremism prisoners were still being held in prison as of March 2017 (Dempsey and Allen 2017).

From these figures we learn that 460 individuals imprisoned for terrorism-related offenses after 9/11 have already been released (646 minus 186). A further implication is that most of the offenses were relatively minor, because terrorists convicted of murder or attempted murder get long sentences. So those released were mostly guilty of supporting terrorism in ways that did not include violence (money or other material support, hate speech). After relatively brief periods in prison, then, 460 individuals convicted of terrorism-related offenses—the great majority jihadist-related offenders—became prospects for deradicalization.

Deradicalization of individuals convicted of terrorist offenses in the United Kingdom is in the hands of probation officers, often working with community groups that try to provide support and mentoring for probationers. Sarah Marsden (2017) has interviewed more than thirty of these frontline de-rad workers to learn what they do and what they think works. The results are interview excerpts rather than statistics about success and failure.

As suggested earlier, the radicalizing issue for many probationers is foreign policy. Here is a senior probation officer talking:

Social exclusion, racism, things like that, you know, diversity's a big part of it, foreign policy, perceived injustice, and grievance ... grievance is an important part, foreign policy, it's about the impact factors, that people are seeing Muslim children dying on the TV, these can have big impacts on people. (Marsden 2017, 99)

One notable finding of the interviews is that probation officers and community mentors report some success with interventions that do not directly challenge jihadist ideas. Instead interventions aim for disengagement and desistance by debating not the grievance but the violent response to grievance. Here is a community mentor talking:

... if they want to talk about foreign policy, we'll just join their argument, you know, I think you're right about Afghanistan or Iraq, why should other people go into Afghanistan or Iraq and kill innocent people, they've no right to go there—yes you're right. So then these people start thinking, well hang on we've got the same views, at the end then, when the conversation finishes on that particular subject, what we have both agreed is that, yes, we don't like it what's happening, but what is the action we can take, to stop that from happening? (63)

This kind of intervention may be particularly helpful with individuals who strongly feel the suffering of others. Rather than insist the probationer deny Western victimization of Muslims, or deny that this suffering justifies violence in return, the debate turns on whether violence or support for violence is the most effective response to Muslim grievances.

A probation officer reflects on the limits of the possible in deradicalization:

He's always gonna have strong political beliefs, that's the way he is, and he's got a really strong sense of injustice, but I think what he's learned now, is that he can't channel those in the way he was. (100)

It seems that UK probation officers have discovered some of the arguments against political violence that Dornschneider identified in her interviews. This kind of convergence is always heartening, and the key to the convergence is recognizing the political grievances of Western Muslims that are based in Western foreign policies.

8. Conclusion

As described in this paper, several observations suggest the importance of Western foreign policies for understanding how a very few Western Muslims become involved in jihad in Syria or terrorist violence at home. Many Western Muslims, perhaps about one third, believe that the war on terrorism is a war on Islam. A small minority, perhaps about 10 percent, see suicide bombing against civilians as justified in defense of Islam. UK Muslims believe that Western foreign policies in the Middle East are the most important explanation of Muslim radicalization; one fifth of German Muslims of Turkish origin believe that the Western threat to Islam justifies violence.

It is possible that these broad Muslim perceptions of threat to Islam and justifications of violence in defense of Islam are irrelevant to explaining jihadist terrorism. There are at least a hundred Western Muslims with radical opinions for every one who plans or attempts violent action. Perhaps jihadist terrorists are motivated by something else, perhaps by the Salafi-jihadist ideology that is often cited as source of jihadist threats.

But is this plausible? Who can hope to be a hero without an audience sympathizing with the cause the hero acts for and the actions the hero takes? Could a young Muslim hope to move from zero to hero in jihadist violence if there were no audience perceiving a Western threat to Islam? Could he hope to be a hero if the admiring audience for jihad were only a few Salafi-jihadist Muslims?

It is sobering to realize that we have currently no theory relating the distribution of radical opinions with the distribution of extremist violence. If the percentage of Western Muslims who see the war on terrorism as a war on Islam were cut in half, perhaps from 40 percent to 20 percent, there is as yet no theory to tell us whether jihadist violence by Western Muslims would decline, or stay the same, or even increase.

Perhaps decreasing mass support would reduce terrorist capacity or willingness to use violence, and attacks would decrease. Perhaps decreasing mass support would give terrorists a feeling of now-or-never desperation, and attacks would increase. Perhaps decreasing mass support is irrelevant for committed terrorists, who would continue their attacks unchanged, at least in the short term.

So far as I am aware, there is no research that has tried to evaluate all three possibilities. There is at least one case that supports the idea that decreasing mass radicalization brings a decrease in terrorist attacks. Merari (2010) used polling data to show a new high in Palestinian support for terrorist attacks on Israelis after Ariel Sharon led Israeli police onto the Temple Mount; in parallel, Palestinian suicide attacks on Israelis increased to a new high (Second Intifada). In 2004, after the death of Yassir Arafat, Palestinian support for suicide attacks declined and so did attacks on Israelis.

Is there a causal relation between support for attacks and the number of attacks? The data do not directly support this conclusion, as mass opinion and attacks changed in parallel but opinion change did not lead change in attacks. The closest to causal evidence from Merari is a series of quotes from

Palestinian terrorists in Israeli prisons who said that they would not organize suicide attacks if Palestinians do not support such attacks.

Merari argues that public support for suicide attacks is necessary but not sufficient to support a campaign of such attacks. A community feeling of existential threat, encouragement of suicide attacks by media and authority figures, and an organization that provides the means and opportunity for attack are also necessary (Merari 2010, 183). In support of the latter factor, Merari notes that only four Palestinian suicide terrorists acted on their own “whim,” while the great majority were deployed by a militant organization.

Merari’s three conditions do not explain who, of the many Muslims perceiving existential threat to Islam and authoritative encouragement of violence, will move to violent action. Moskalkenko and McCauley (2017a) have argued that radical opinion and radical action are two separate problems, involving different psychological mechanisms. At the action level, individuals join a militant group for many reasons; in addition to political grievance, these include personal grievance, a slippery slope of slowly increasing commitment, love for an existing militant, status-seeking, new comrades after social disconnection, and escape from life problems.

Four of these reasons can move an individual to violent action without the help of a militant group: political grievance, personal grievance, status-seeking, and escape from life problems. These reasons may be particularly important for homegrown Western jihadists, many of whom perpetrate lone-actor attacks.

Thus there are many factors, at individual, group and mass levels, that can move Western Muslims toward a homegrown terrorist attack. Muslim grievances related to Western foreign policies are not a sufficient explanation of jihadist attacks. But mass-level grievances may still be important, perhaps even necessary as Merari suggests in relation to suicide bombers, for understanding homegrown jihadist attacks in Western countries.

Ignoring the contribution of Western foreign policies to jihadist violence has at least one important cost. We are left with Salafi-jihadi ideology, or perhaps jihadist ideology and anti-Muslim discrimination, as the target for CVE programs. CVE mentors in the United Kingdom have found it useful to acknowledge Western victimization of Muslims in order to argue against violence as a useful response to this victimiza-

tion. This argument is out of reach for those who deny that Western foreign policies are an important part of the justification for jihadist violence.

In sum, polling data show that many Muslims in the United States and Europe perceive a Western war on Islam and justify suicide bombing in defense of Islam. There is good reason to believe that these opinions offer important support for homegrown jihadist attacks in Western countries, and that this support depends both on perceived discrimination at home and outrage at Western policies abroad. Success against homegrown Muslim extremism will require focusing on both factors. Explicit recognition of foreign policy grievances may be particularly useful for CVE programs, offering a double advantage. Recognition avoids difficult arguments against grievances shared by many Muslims, and opens the door to easier arguments against violence targeting innocents—the arguments that distinguish activists from terrorists.

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