The Trouble With Radicalization

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July 2013

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Ever since the term ‘radicalization’ entered the public vocabulary,[1] some academics have devoted their energies to proving that the phenomenon which it seeks to describe does not exist. Andrew Hoskins and Ben O’Loughlin, for example, claim that radicalization is a ‘myth’ promoted by the media and security agencies for the purpose of ‘[anchoring] news agendas ... [and legitimizing] policy responses’.[2] Objectively, they argue, the term’s many variations—such as ‘online radicalization’—‘make little sense’.[3] Frank Furedi pursues a similar line. He argues that assertions of radicalization and governments’ responses to it ‘always [have] a fantasy like character’, and that they have been designed to make the alienation of young Muslims sound like a ‘psychological virus’, distracting attention from ‘the very real cultural divisions that afflict British communities today’.[4] Meanwhile, the University of Aberystwyth is hosting an entire research centre whose title— Centre for the Study of ‘Radicalisation’ and Contemporary Political Violence— suggests that the people involved in it do not believe in the subject they study.[5]

The ‘radicalization deniers’ are missing the point. As this article will show, radicalization is not a myth, but its meaning is ambiguous, and all the major controversies and debates that have sprung from it are linked to the same inherent ambiguity. The principal conceptual fault-line is between notions of radicalization that emphasize extremist beliefs (‘cognitive radicalization’) and those that focus on extremist behaviour (‘behavioural radicalization’). This ambiguity explains the differences between definitions of radicalization; it has driven the scholarly debate; and it provides the backdrop for strikingly different policy approaches. Rather than denying its validity, this article calls on scholars and policy-makers to work harder to understand and embrace a concept which—though ambiguous—is likely to dominate public discourse, research and policy agendas for years to come.

The first section of the article deals with definitions of radicalization. It introduces different ‘end-points’ of radicalization—cognitive and behavioural—and shows how the meaning of radicalization can vary with time and place. The second section looks at the scholarly debate, which has revolved around the relationship between cognition and behaviour. The final section deals with the policy implications of such debates. It

[1] Until the early 2000s, hardly any references to radicalization could be found in the academic literature. The rise to prominence of the term seems to be intimately linked, therefore, with the terrorist attacks of n September 2001. See Peter R. Neumann, ‘Introduction’, in Peter R. Neumann and Jacob Stoil, eds, *Perspectives on radicalisation and political violence* (London: International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, 2008), p. 3.

[2] Andrew Hoskins and Ben O’Loughlin, ‘Media and the myth of radicalization’, *Media, War and Conflict* 2: 2, 2009, p. 107.

[3] Hoskins and O’Loughlin, ‘Media and the myth of radicalization’, p. 109.

[4] Frank Furedi, ‘Muslim alienation in the UK? Blame the Israelis!’, *Spiked,* 9 Feb. 2009, http://www.spiked-0nline.com/index.phpF/site/article/6187/, accessed 14 May 2013.

[5] Centre for the Study of ‘Radicalisation’ and Political Violence (CSRV), University of Aberystwyth: see http://www.aber.ac.uk/en/research/aber-research/research-centres-and-groups/csrv/, accessed 14 May 2013.

delineates the two major paradigms for *countering* radicalization—labelled 'European' and 'Anglo-Saxon'—and shows how they reflect the concept's key ambiguities.

What radicalization?

There is no agreed definition of radicalization. Definitional issues, however, are the principal source of many controversies and misunderstandings that surround radicalization, and it is important, therefore, to explain key distinctions. There are two major areas of contention and ambiguity: one relates to the 'end-points' of radicalization; the other is about context and normative issues.

'End-points'

At the most basic level, radicalization can be defined as the process whereby people become extremists.[6] The first part of this definition—the idea of radicalization as a process—is not particularly controversial. No one who studies radicalization believes that individuals turn into extremists overnight, or that their embrace of extremism is caused by a single influence. Virtually all academic models of radicalization—such as Fathali Moghadam's 'staircase',[7] Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko's 'pyramid',[8] or Zeyno Baran's 'conveyor belt'[9]—conceptualize radicalization as a progression which plays out over a period of time and involves different factors and dynamics. They differ when it comes to length and complexity, but they all subscribe to the idea that 'becoming extremist' is a process, and that studying radicalization is about discovering the nature of that process.

The more ambiguous part of the definition is the concept of extremism, which—according to Roger Scruton—can have several meanings. It may describe *political ideas* that are diametrically opposed to a society's core values, which—in the context of a liberal democracy—can be various forms of racial or religious supremacy, or ideologies that deny basic human rights or democratic principles. Or it can mean the *methods* by which actors seek to realize *any* political aim, namely by 'showing] disregard for

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[6] David Mandel explains the relationship between radicalization and extremism as follows : 'Radicalization is to extremism as velocity is to position. That is, radicalization is a (positive) change in the degree of extremism expressed by an individual or group'. See David R. Mandel, 'Radicalization: what does it mean?', in Thomas Pick, Anne Speckhard and Beatrice Jaunch, eds, *Homegrown terrorism: understanding the root causes of radicalisation among groups with an immigrant heritage in Europe* (Brussels: Institute of Physics Press, 2009), p. ill.

[7] See Fathali M. Moghadam, 'The staircase to terrorism: a psychological exploration', *American Psychologist* 60: 2, 2005, pp. 161–9.

[8] See Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, 'Mechanisms of political radicalization: pathways toward terrorism', *Terrorism and Political Violence 20:* 3, 2008, pp. 415—3 3.

[9] See Zeyno Baran, 'Fighting the war of ideas', *Foreign Affairs* 84: 6, Nov.-Dec. 2005.

the life, liberty, and human rights of others'.[10] There is no agreement, in other words, about the end-state of radicalization.[11] While some consider radicalization to be a purely cognitive phenomenon that culminates in 'radically' different ideas about society and governance, others believe that it ought to be defined by the (often violent or coercive) actions in which those ideas result. As a consequence, many governments and academics draw distinctions between (cognitive) radicalization on the one hand and, on the other, 'violent extremism' (US government),[12] 'action pathways' (Randy Borum)[13] or 'behavioural radicalization' (Lorenzo Vidino).[14]

Many of the definitions of radicalization that are currently used by governments can be distinguished by their emphasis on one or the other interpretation. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police, for example, views radicalization as a purely cognitive phenomenon, consisting of 'the movement of ... individuals from moderate mainstream beliefs to extremist views'.[15] The authors of a US Congressional Research Service report express similar views, arguing that (Al-Qaeda-related) radicalization is 'the process of acquiring ... radical, extremist or jihadist beliefs'.[16] Charles Allen of the US Department of Homeland Security places more emphasis on (violent) action but leaves open the possibility for purely cognitive forms of extremism. Defining radicalization as 'the process of adopting an extremist belief system, including the willingness to use, support, or facilitate violence', his definition considers a whole range of end-points.[17] The British government's definition is the most explicit in connecting radicalization with violent action and, more specifically, terrorism. Stating that radicalization is 'the process by which people come to support terrorism and violent extremism and, in some cases, then to participate in terrorist groups',[18] it maps out a clear trajectory which culminates in the decision to join a terrorist group.

Connected to the discussion about 'end-points' of radicalization is the question of what—if any—relationship exists between (extremist) ideas and (extremist) action.

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[10] Roger Scruton, *The Palgrave Macmillan dictionary of political thought,* 3rd edn (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

[11] See Mandel, 'Radicalization', pp. 101—14.

[12] See e.g. the American government's 'countering violent extremism' strategy paper: The White House, 'Empowering local partners to prevent violent extremism in the United States', Aug. 2011, http://www. whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/empowering_local_partners.pdf, accessed 14 May 2013.

[13] Randy Borum, 'Rethinking radicalization', *Journal of Strategic Security* 4: 4, 2011, p. 2.

[14] Lorenzo Vidino, *Countering radicalization in America: lessons from Europe,* United States Institute for Peace Special Report, Washington DC, Nov. 2010, p. 5.

[15] Royal Canadian Mounted Police, *Radicalization: a guide for the perplexed* (Ottawa, June 2009), p. 1.

[16] Jerome Bjelopera, *American jihadist terrorism: combating a complex threat* (Washington DC: Congressional Research Service, Nov. 2011), p. 2.

[17] See 'Threat of Islamic radicalization to the homeland', written testimony of Charles E. Allen, Assistant Secretary of Intelligence and Analysis, Department of Homeland Security, before the US Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, 14 March 2007, p. 4.

[18] HM Government, *The United Kingdom's strategy for countering international terrorism* (London : Home Office, June 2009), p. 41.

For some, the two are separate phenomena that need to be distinguished from each other. Brian Jenkins, for example, differentiates radicalization—which, he believes, is about 'internalizing a set of beliefs'—from (Al-Qaeda-related) recruitment, which entails 'transforming oneself into a weapon of jihad'.[19] Others are more explicit in tying the two together. As mentioned above, the Department of Homeland Security's definition suggests that an extremist mindset (or 'extremist belief systems') is the precondition for 'the willingness to use, support, or facilitate violence'. It implies, in other words, that terrorists become cognitive extremists first, and then—for whatever reason—decide to pursue their extremist aims by violent means. This seems to make instinctive sense, given that we know terrorists are no more 'crazy', irrational or clinically psychotic than the population at large,[20] and that 'all kinds of action—moderate, angry, very angry and even violent—[are] the product of reasoning'.[21] Yet, as we shall see, it is precisely this assumption which has recently been attacked by researchers who claim that cognitive extremism is just one of many 'pathways' into extremist action, and that not all terrorists are motivated by extremist ideas.

Context and normative issues

The second area of contention relates to context and normative issues. As Mark Sedgwick and others have pointed out, the word 'radical' has no meaning on its own.[22] Its content varies depending on what is seen as 'mainstream' in any given society, section of society or period of time. Different political, cultural and historical contexts, in other words, produce different notions of 'radicalism'. In North Korea, the principle of free speech would be considered radical, whereas in western countries it is a mainstream belief. In the 1980s, the idea of gay marriage used to be seen as radical, if not outrageous, yet nowadays it is those who oppose it, not its supporters, who are portrayed as 'fundamentalists' and 'radicals'. What this means is that labelling people or groups as radical will often—if not always— trigger the question 'radical in relation to what?' The same is true for the process of *becoming* radical: depending on what one considers mainstream or acceptable, the adoption of certain beliefs or behaviours may be seen as radicalization, 'going progressive', 'becoming a born-again believer' or 'returning to the roots'.[23]

[19] Testimony by Brian M. Jenkins, RAND Corporation, presented before the House Homeland Security Committee, Subcommittee on Intelligence, Information Sharing and Terrorism Risk Assessment, 5 April 2007, p. 3.

[20] See Jerrold M. Post, 'Psychology', in Club de Madrid, *Addressing the causes of terrorism* (Madrid, 2005), pp. 7—12.

[21] Rachel Briggs, Catherine Fieschi and Hannah Lownsbrough, *Bringing it home: community-based approaches to counterterrorism* (London: Demos, 2006), p. 42.

[22] Mark Sedgwick, 'The concept of radicalization as a source of confusion', *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22: 4, 2010, pp. 479—94. See also Mandel, 'Radicalization', p. 105.

[23] The word 'radical' stems from the Latin word for root, *radix,* and was—for a considerable period—thought to be an expression for 'going to the roots'. See Mandel, 'Radicalization', p. 102.

As a result of being vague and context-dependent, the word 'radical' is not always associated with extremism, nor does it necessarily imply a 'problem' that needs to be studied and solved. On the contrary, in the United States, for example, not only is being radical no crime, the very idea of 'radicalism' has positive connotations in a nation whose founding principles were seen as radical, even revolutionary, at the time. In the words of the eminent historian Gordon S. Wood, '[The American revolution] was the greatest revolution the world has known, a momentous upheaval that not only fundamentally altered the character of American society but decisively affected the course of subsequent history.'[24] Accordingly, American history books are full of reminders that many of the rights and freedoms now taken for granted were fought for by individuals who were condemned as dangerous 'radicals' by their contemporaries. Those espousing the abolition of slavery 'faced violent mobs and hostile legislators who interfered with their mail and destroyed their presses' ; women campaigning for their right to vote 'were called "hysterical" and ... banned from public speaking' ; the civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr was 'smeared and threatened' by the government.[25] Arguably, this collective experience has taught Americans of all political persuasions that 'radicals' are an essential part of their national story, and that, on many occasions, they have been drivers of 'progressive' change and renewal.

It comes as no surprise, then, that past attempts at 'tackling' radicalization have often been greeted with suspicion, if not hostility, by American libertarians and liberals. Any mention of the word 'radicalization' by politicians or government officials tended to be seen as a politically motivated attack on free speech and constitutionally guaranteed freedoms. Rather than fighting terrorism, so the argument went, government's actual aim—its 'hidden agenda'—was to marginalize and criminalize people whose views were critical of the status quo. The entire concept of radicalization, in other words, was little more than a Trojan horse allowing governments to clamp down on dissent and portray progressive and unconventional views as dangerous. Many of these arguments surfaced during the debate about the Violent Radicalization and Homegrown Terrorism Prevention Act 2007, which passed the US House of Representatives but never made it onto the floor of the Senate. Throughout its passage, the bill prompted angry opposition from liberals, right-wing libertarians and civil rights groups, who described it as 'Orwellian' and 'McCarthyite'.[26] Dennis Kucinich, a leftwing Democratic member of Congress, called it a 'thought crime bill',[27] while Ron Paul, a libertarian Republican,

[24] Gordon S. Wood, *The radicals of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1991), p. 5.

[25] Timothy McCarthy and John McMillian, *The radical reader: a documentary history of the American radical tradition* (New York: Free Press, 2003), pp. 3–4.

[26] See e.g. Peter Erlinder, 'Inherent powers, ignoble history make new idea anything but innocuous', *Pioneer Press,* 20 Dec. 2007; Jeff Knaebel, "'Thought crimes", HR 19 5 5 passed, with 404 votes', LewRockwell.com, 5 Nov. 2007, http://www.lewrockwell.com/knaebel/knaebeln.html, accessed 14 May 2013.

[27] Dennis Kucinich, quoted in 'Kucinich on HR 19 5 5', *Independent,* 3 Dec. 2 00 7.

said its introduction was 'unwise and dangerous'.[28] Ironically, even the John Birch Society, which made its name with paranoid witch-hunts of suspected communists during the Cold War, called for the bill to be struck down, pointing out that several of the Founding Fathers would have been guilty of violent radicalization had the law been enacted in their day.[29]

Many of the arguments will, no doubt, be familiar to anyone who has been involved in debates about defining terrorism.[30] Like terrorism, the term 'radicalization' is considered political, and its frequent use—especially by governments and officials—is believed to serve political agendas rather than describe a social phenomenon that can be studied and dealt with in a dispassionate and objective manner. For many, in other words, radicalization, like terrorism, is in the eye of the beholder: 'one man's radical (or terrorist) is another man's freedom fighter'.[31] In fact, if anything, the trouble with radicalization is even more pronounced, and less easily resolvable, than the difficulties surrounding the definition of terrorism. For, with terrorism, there is an objectively definable core—a violent tactic, sometimes a strategy, which can be distinguished from other means and modes of pursuing violent conflict.[32] Radicalization, by contrast, is inherently context-dependent, and its meaning will always be contested.

The academic argument

Much of the scholarship about radicalization has emerged in the wake of the September n attacks. The topic has become fashionable and the debate has, at times, been vigorous and controversial. Most recently, two prominent scholars—John Horgan and Randy Borum—have attacked not individual authors and works but the very idea of studying cognitive radicalization and its utility for understanding how people become terrorists. Speaking at a symposium on 'Lessons learned since the terrorist attacks of September n, 2001', Horgan argued that the focus on how people adopt extremist beliefs has been a costly and counterproductive failure: 'I am not entirely convinced that we should have allowed [cognitive] radicalization to take center stage. Our preoccupation, if not obsession, with [cognitive] radicalization has actually come at the expense of

[28] Ron Paul, quoted in "'Homegrown terror" act an attack on internet freedom?', AntiWar.com, 7 Dec. 2007, http://www.antiwar.com/paul/?articleid=i2oi5, accessed 14 May 2013.

[29] 'Senate could vote on thought crimes bill soon', John Birch Society, 30 Nov. 2007, http://infolution.wordpress. com/2007/u/3o/law-teachers-oppose-hr-i95 5/, accessed 14 May 2013.

[30] For an overview, see Alex P. Schmid, 'Terrorism: the definitional problem', *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law* 36: 2, 2004, pp. 375—419.

[31] See e.g. Boaz Ganor, 'Is one man's terrorist another man's freedom fighter?', International Institute for Counterterrorism, n.d., http://www.ict.org.il/ResearchPublications/tabid/64/Articlsid/432/Default.aspx, accessed 14 May 2013.

[32] See Peter R. Neumann and M. L. R. Smith, *The strategy of terrorism* (London: Routledge, 2008).

increasing our knowledge and understanding of terrorist behavior.'[33] More specifically, Horgan claimed that academics' emphasis on cognitive radicalization has produced the widely held— yet, in his view, fundamentally flawed—assumption that extremist beliefs are the precursor to violent action: 'We tend to assume a kind of unidirectional relationship. In other words, if you become [a cognitive radical], the chances are you will probably become [a terrorist], given the right sort of circumstances. Prevent someone from being a [cognitive] radical, and then you will prevent someone from becoming a terrorist. And this is the inevitable logic.'[34] Borum has made similar claims. In the winter 2011 issue of the *Journal of Strategic Security,* he warned that '[a] focus on radicalization ... risks implying that radical beliefs are a proxy—or at least a necessary precursor—for terrorism'. He continued, 'We know this not to be true.'[35]

What Horgan and Borum are implying is that there is no inevitable link between (extremist) political beliefs and (violent) political action, and that the two phenomena should therefore be studied separately. In their view, not only will 'there ... always be far more radicals than terrorists',[36] but terrorists do not always hold strong political beliefs. Being a cognitive extremist, in other words, is neither sufficient nor necessary as a condition for becoming a terrorist. In Borum's words, 'many terrorists—even those who lay claim to a "cause"—are not deeply ideological and may not "radicalize" in any traditional sense ... Some terrorists— perhaps even many of them—are not ideologues or deep believers in a nuanced, extremist doctrine.'[37]

The two scholars' conclusion is seductively simple: since cognitive radicalization is just one of many 'possible pathway[s] into terrorism involvement',[38] looking at political ideas—and the process by which people adopt them—is not essential. As Horgan puts it: 'If our ultimate objective is to stem and control the growth of terrorism, a central [and] continuing focus on [cognitive] radicalization may ultimately prove unnecessary.'[39] In Borum's view, scholars need to focus on studying individuals' 'action pathways' into terrorism,[40] not the cognitive extremism that may—or may not—inspire violent political action. In his opinion, 'Conflating the two concepts [will undermine] our ability to effectively counter either of them.'[41]

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[33] John Horgan, remarks at START Symposium, 'Lessons learned since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001', Washington DC, 1 Sept. 2011, http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/TenYearA, accessed 14 May 2013.

[34] Horgan, remarks at START Symposium.

[35] Randy Borum, 'Radicalization into violent extremism I : a review of social science *theories', Journal of Strategic Security* 4: 4, 2011, p. 8.

[36] Horgan, remarks at START Symposium.

[37] Borum, 'Radicalization into violent extremism I', p. 9.

[38] Borum, 'Radicalization into violent extremism I', p. 8.

[39] Horgan, remarks at START Symposium.

[40] Borum, 'Radicalization into violent extremism I', p. 30. Also Borum, 'Rethinking radicalization', p. 2.

[41] Borum, 'Rethinking radicalization', p. 2.

This section of the article provides an examination of these two academics' arguments and concludes that their claims are problematic. It demonstrates that, in practice, it is impossible to separate political beliefs from political action, and that attempting to do so obstructs a holistic understanding of radicalization; that not every 'true believer' is an ideologue, and that ideological sophistication is not, therefore, an appropriate test for the relevance of cognitive radicalization; and that any attempt at understanding individuals' 'action pathways' without looking at the social movements and counter-cultures from which they have emerged is bound to be shallow.

Beliefs and action

For followers of the academic debate about radicalization, many of the claims made by Borum and Horgan are not surprising. No serious academic argues that all—or even most—cognitive extremists will go on to embrace violence. The notion of a 'unidirectional relationship' between beliefs and terrorism may exist in the minds of some right-wing bloggers, but it has never gained traction among members of the scholarly community. None of the widely used models and theories of radicalization suggest that beliefs or ideologies are the sole influence on or explanation for why people turn to terrorism. Indeed, Borum's own review of the radicalization literature does not cover any model, theory or approach that could be classified as mono-causal, nor has he identified any academic study or report that would posit a 'unidirectional relationship' between extremist beliefs and terrorism.[42] At best, therefore, the critique by Horgan and Borum is based on a straw man.

Far more problematic is the two scholars' underlying assertion that political beliefs are overrated in, if not irrelevant to, understanding behavioural radicalization. Instead of calling on researchers to tease out the often subtle and complex interactions between beliefs and non-belief-related factors, they are dividing cognitive and behavioural radicalization into two separate questions—'why' and 'how'— proclaiming that studying the former is an 'obsession' which 'may ultimately prove unnecessary'.[43] Ultimately, therefore, their argument is an attempt to 'depoliticize' political violence, which—if taken seriously—would undermine, not enhance, current efforts at gaining a better understanding of radicalization.

In reality, the role of beliefs and ideology in behavioural radicalization is obvious and well documented.[44] What made Irish Republican Army recruits blow up police stations in Northern Ireland while Tibetans have resisted the 'occupation' of their homeland peacefully needs to be explained, at least in part, with reference to the dif-

[42] Borum, 'Radicalization into violent extremism I', pp. 7–36; Randy Borum, 'Radicalization into violent extremism II: a review of conceptual models and empirical *research', Journal of Strategic Security* 4: 4, 2011, pp. 37–62.

[43] Horgan, remarks at START Symposium.

[44] For definitions of ideology, see John Gerring, 'Ideology: a definitional analysis', *Political Research Quarterly* 50: 4, 1997, pp. 957-94-

ferent ideologies that members of the two nationalist movements have come to accept as true. Similarly, what commands political and 'quietist' Salafists to pursue their faith through peaceful activism (or no activism at all) while jihadist' Salafists have joined terrorist organizations like Al-Qaeda must be understood by looking at, among other factors, the different strands of their belief system and what they say about the circumstances in which using violence is permitted or even obligatory.[45] Indeed, without reference to beliefs, none of these behaviours make any sense. Whereas 'physical force Republicanism' teaches potential recruits that constitutional Irish nationalism is ineffective because the British government will 'not be moved by anything [but armed struggle]',[46] Tibetan separatists regard the use of violence as the ultimate betrayal of their movement's principles. While 'quietist' Salafists demand loyalty even to oppressive 'princes', jihadists are quick to pronounce anyone who fails to adhere to their interpretation of Islam as infidels against whom jihad'—defined, by them, as violent action—is mandatory.[47] Simply put, what makes some individuals resort to political violence while others do not is, in many cases, impossible to understand without looking at the ideological assumptions which they have come to accept and believe in.

It is precisely because of the inherently political nature of politically motivated violence that terrorist groups and their members are defined with reference to their ideology. David Rapoport's 'four waves of modern terrorism'—the anarchist, anti-colonial, new left and religious waves—get their names from the types of belief systems to which they are related.[48] This is not to say that ideology is always the principal reason for people joining terrorist groups, nor does it imply that every single participant in any of those waves has been 'deeply ideological'. But the typology sheds light on the ebbs and flows in radicalization across time and space. Why, for example, did upper-middle-class students from countries like the United States, West Germany and Italy choose to become terrorists in the 1970s but not in the 1950s or 1990s? What makes western Muslims passionate about jihadist groups in far-flung places like Somalia, Syria, Chechnya and Iraq instead of similarly adventurous and violent groups closer to home? In both cases, the answer will have to address the spread of ideologies and belief systems in certain places and at certain times. Indeed, rather than dismissing the study of cognitive radicalization as 'unnecessary', a sophisticated approach would aim to understand why certain belief systems resonate with certain populations, and—correspondingly—what combination of factors explains their lack of resonance and decline.

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[45] See Quintan Wiktorowicz, 'Anatomy of the Salafi movement', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 29: 3, 2006, pp. 207–39.

[46] Gerry Adams, quoted in Brendan O'Brien, *The long war: the IRA and Sinn Fein—1985 to today* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 1993), p. 117.

[47] See Wiktorowicz, 'Anatomy of the Salafi movement'.

[48] David C. Rapoport, 'The four waves of modern terrorism', in Audrey Kurth Cronin and James Ludes, eds, *Attacking terrorism: elements of a grand strategy* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press), pp. 46–73.

To be fair, Borum points out that 'adopting extremist beliefs ... is one possible pathway into terrorism', and he concedes that it could be useful to 'bring out into the open the distinctions among radical extremist [s/c] ideologies'.[49] But he fails to draw the obvious conclusion, namely that researchers need to devote more, not less, attention to understanding the nature and dynamics of extremist belief systems and their relationship with other factors and influences. Instead of promoting a holistic understanding of radicalization, he chooses to maintain the barrier between belief and action, calling on researchers 'to be less focused on *why* people engage in terrorism and more focused on *how* they become involved'.[50]

Activists and ideologues

Like their other claims, the assertion by Horgan and Borum that involvement in terrorism is not always the result of 'deep' cognitive radicalization will come as no surprise to anyone familiar with the academic literature on social movements. As early as 1980, David Snow, Louis Zurcher and Sheldon Ekland-Olson found that most members of political and social groups were recruited through 'preexisting or emergent interpersonal tie[s]'.[51] In 1988, Donatella della Porta highlighted the importance of 'personal linkages, many to close friends or kin, in left-wing terrorist groups in West Germany and Italy.[52] Marc Sageman produced similar findings for members of Al-Qaeda in his 2004 study *Understanding terror networks.*[53] There is nothing new or noteworthy, therefore, in saying that extremist political beliefs are not the only—or even the predominant—variable involved in 'making a terrorist'.

The problematic and, in many respects, misleading part of Borum's argument is the idea that, for political beliefs and cognitive processes to be considered relevant, individuals need to be 'ideologues or deep believers in a nuanced, extremist doctrine'. In Borum's mind, in other words, exposure to political beliefs must lead to ideological sophistication, or else it should be dismissed altogether. In reality, of course, no political organization or movement—be it a political party, singleissue movement or terrorist group—is filled with ideologues.[54] As anyone who has ever been involved in political activism will know, most participants are not intellectuals who have spent months studying their movement's texts; but they often have a good sense of, and commitment to, core principles and ideas, and they are motivated by the group's analysis—however

[49] Borum, 'Radicalization into violent extremism I', pp. 8, 10.

[50] Borum, 'Rethinking radicalization', p. 2 (emphasis added).

[51] David A. Snow, Louis A. Zurcher and Sheldon Ekland-Olson, 'Social networks and social movements: a microstructural approach to differential recruitment', *American Sociological Review* 45: 5, 1980, p. 798.

[52] See Donatella della Porta and Mario Diani, *Social movements: an introduction,* 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), p. 118.

[53] See Marc Sageman, *Understanding terror networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

[54] Della Porta and Diani, *Social movements,* ch. 5.

simplistically expressed—of what is wrong with society, who is to blame, and what needs to be done to fix it.[55] Not every member of Al-Qaeda, for example, will be fluent in the history and evolution of jihadist doctrine, but their involvement in terrorism may nevertheless be driven by a sincere belief in the notion of the 'West at war with Islam' and a genuine sense of obligation towards defending their Muslim 'brothers and sisters'. Not every 'true believer' is automatically an ideologue; and it makes no sense, therefore, to use 'intellectual sophistication' as a test for cognitive radicalization.

As an illustration, consider the four British Muslims who carried out the London transport bombings in July 2005. None of them would have passed Borum's test for cognitive radicalization because their level of ideological sophistication was low, and none has ever been described as an 'ideologue'. Yet Mohammed Khan, the cell's ringleader, was by any account strongly politicized, and had been known as an active promoter of extremist causes for years.[56] Germaine Lindsay, a Jamaican-born convert to Islam, had closely followed one of Britain's most notorious 'hate preachers', Abdullah Al Faisal, whose tapes and recordings he listened to daily long before meeting Khan.[57] Shehzad Tanweer seems to have taken little interest in the nuances of jihadist ideology, but regularly joined Khan at extremist lectures and took part in the production of DVDs that promoted violent jihad.[58] According to Petter Nesser, he was 'an idealist with a social consciousness and a vocation for community work and activism'.[59] Hasib Hussain, the fourth bomber, is in fact the only member of the cell who fits the idea of a 'non-political' terrorist : he appears to have 'stumbled' into the group, and—other than making supportive references to Al-Qaeda at school—displayed no signs of cognitive radicalization.[60]

While it is obvious that factors *other* than cognitive radicalization played an important part in all four of these cases, it seems clear that at least three of the individuals were influenced by political beliefs and ideologies, and therefore that cognitive radicalization cannot be written out of the script entirely. In saying that ideology is overrated unless individuals have become full-blown 'ideologues', the critics of cognitive radicalization are setting the bar too high, and they are likely, therefore, to fail to detect the very nuances and subtleties which, in other contexts, they berate others for ignoring.

[55] Della Porta and Diani, *Social movements,* pp. 74—9. Also Neil J. Smelser, *Thefaces of terrorism: social and psychological dimensions* (Princeton, NJ : Princeton University Press, 2007), pp. 54—89.

[56] See Shiv Malik, 'My brother the bomber', *Prospect,* 20 June 2007.

[57] See 'Profile: Sheikh Abdullah al-Faisal', BBC News, 2 5 May 2007, http://news.bbc.co.Uk/1/hi/uk/6692243. stm, accessed 14 May 2013.

[58] Petter Nesser, 'Joining jihadi terrorist cells in Europe', in Magnus Ranstorp, ed., *Understanding violent radicalisation: terrorist and jihadist networks in Europe* (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 104—6.

[59] Nesser, 'Joining jihadi terrorist cells', p. 105.

[60] Nesser, 'Joining jihadi terrorist cells', pp. 106—7; also 'Profile: Hasib Hussain', BBC News, 2 March 2011, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-12621387, accessed 14 May 2013.

Social movements and terrorist groups

Scholars such as Marc Sageman have long called for a more sophisticated understanding of individuals' 'turn to violence', so that terrorists and others who resort to political violence can be distinguished from those who express their (extremist) convictions by peaceful means.[61] Borum and Horgan share this view but go much further. Not only do they believe, like Sageman, that more attention should be given to the 'turn to violence' ; they claim that scholars' preoccupation with the wider aspects of the problem—the 'bigger issue[s] from which terrorism arises'[62]—has been pursued 'at the expense of increasing our knowledge and understanding of terrorist behavior'.[63] Simply put, from their perspective, looking at the big political, social and contextual issues that surround people's pathways into terrorism is a waste of time which prevents scholars from understanding terrorist behaviour.[64]

The principal flaw in this argument is the notion that terrorism—and the people who perpetrate it—can be isolated from the social and political context in which they emerge. In making their case, Horgan and Borum are repeating the cardinal sin of 'terrorism studies', which tends to lump together groups and individuals in vastly different situations of violent conflict just because they use similar tactics. Yet tactics do not have causes, and terrorism—as Brian Jenkins pointed out—is often no more than 'the thin crust atop a very deep pie'.[65] As a consequence, any explanation of political violence that aims to reconstruct 'action pathways' but fails to examine the 'deep pie' of political and social context is bound to remain shallow.[66] The violence and terrorism of, say, the Ku Klux Klan cannot be explained solely through the 'action pathways' of *other* groups who have engaged in similar tactics. It clearly needs to consider the history and politics of the American South, and also the ideas, context and conditions that have given rise to the Klan in its non-violent incarnations.[67] If anything, the two approaches— behavioural and contextual—are complementary, and it is not helpful, therefore, to say that one is pursued 'at the expense' of the other.

A more helpful approach is social movement theory, for which terrorism 'does not emerge out of a vacuum' but is connected to larger protest movements and counter-

[61] See e.g. Sageman, quoted in 'Winning and losing in the war on terror', San Diego State University, 5 Feb. 2010, http://newscenter.sdsu.edu/sdsu_newscenter/news.aspx?s=7i884, accessed 14 May 2013.

[62] Horgan, remarks at START Symposium.

[63] Horgan, remarks at START Symposium.

[64] Borum, 'Rethinking radicalization', p. 2.

[65] Brian Michael Jenkins, 'Foreword', in Ian O. Lesser, Bruce Hoffman, John Arquilla, David Ronfeldt, Michele Zanini and Brian Michael Jenkins, eds, *Countering the new terrorism* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1999), p. viii.

[66] See Andrew Silke, 'An introduction to terrorism research', in Andrew Silke, ed., *Research on terrorism: trends, achievements andfailures* (London: Frank Cass, 2004), p. 15.

[67] See William W. Zellner, *Countercultures: a sociological analysis* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1995), ch. 2.

cultures.[68] Those movements can be amorphous and fairly unstructured, consisting of many different groups and organizations. Their members' attitude is oppositional and anti-system, though not always consciously 'political'.[69] Most importantly, they all draw on large repertoires of collective action, which may range from entirely peaceful and legal to high-risk, coercive, illegal and occasionally violent tactics.[70] The boundaries are pliable, and so are the identities of the individuals who are involved with one or another kind of tactics.

Take, for example, Germany's former foreign minister, Joschka Fischer, who took part in, organized and spoke at numerous peaceful student demonstrations during the late 1960s and 1970s. He also worked for a left-wing publishing house and bookshop in Frankfurt. At the same time, as a member of the group Revolutionàrer Kampf (Revolutionary Struggle), he participated in numerous street battles, and was pictured beating up a police officer in 1973.[71] He never joined a terrorist organization, but was close friends with several people who did and repeatedly came out in their defence : 'To distance ourselves from the [militants] ', he said in 1976, 'would be to turn against our own.'[72] What Fischer's remarkable story shows is the seamlessness with which members of countercultural social movements move in and out of different kinds of collective action, including high-risk and violent activism. It also illustrates the enormous distortions and misrepresentations that would result from separating out 'action pathways' into terrorism while ignoring the context and dynamics of the wider social movements that have produced them. After all, from a social movement perspective, pamphleteering, street protests, street battles, fire bombings and assassinations may not all *he* the same, but they are *of* the same: they are collective expressions of political ideas.[73]

On paper, Borum's warning against 'conflating' cognitive radicalization and 'action pathways' into terrorism looks like common sense. Yet the messy reality of social movements and countercultures means that those kinds of distinction— however convenient and comforting—are often difficult to maintain. Indeed, this section of the article has provided several reasons to support the argument that a full understanding of why people come to embrace terrorism can only be obtained through a *holistic* understand-

[68] Sageman, quoted in *United States of America* v. *Tarek Mehanna,* 'Revised expert opinion notice', unpublished court document, p. 2. For the fundamentals of this approach, see Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of contention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Sidney Tarrow, *Power in movement: social movements and contentious politics,* 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Quintan Wiktorowicz, 'Introduction', in Quintan Wiktorowicz, ed., *Islamic activism: a social movement theory approach* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), pp. 1–33.

[69] Jeffrey Bale, interview with author, 7 Feb. 2011.

[70] See della Porta and Diani, *Social movements,* ch. 7.

[71] Jochen Kummer, 'Der Fischer und die Frau', *Welt am Sonntag,* 14 Jan. 2001.

[72] Fischer, quoted in Albrecht von Lucke, *68 oder neues Biedermeier: Der Kampf urn die Deutungsmacht* (Berlin: Wagenbach, 2008), p. 28.

[73] Ryan Evans, email conversation with author, 20 March 2012.

ing of both cognitive and behavioural processes: one which, rather than separating one from the other, attempts to makes sense of how ideas and action are related. The next section will show how this argument has played out among policy-makers and politicians.

The political argument

The academic debate about radicalization may seem far removed from the realities of fighting terrorism and preventing extremism. Yet the issues it has thrown up are arguably of much wider and more practical significance than may at first appear. The disagreements over the meaning of radicalization and how it should be understood have come to be reflected in different policy approaches towards *countering* radicalization—each rooted in different assumptions, philosophical traditions and historical experiences. This section delineates the two main traditions and identifies the principal trade-off that appears to be involved in opting for one or the other. It also spells out the risks and tensions inherent in both approaches, which—as will be shown—can lead to unintended consequences that negate the policies' respective aims. The trouble with radicalization, therefore, is not confined to the ivory towers, but poses profound dilemmas for policy-makers who are hoping to prevent terrorism and/or maintain cohesive and democratic societies.

Two approaches

The two policy approaches that are described in the following are ideal types. Labelling them 'Anglo-Saxon and 'European respectively is not meant to provide an accurate description of past or current policies in specific countries or geographical entities. Rather, it refers to the different historical experiences and philosophical traditions in which the two approaches are rooted, and—in doing so—helps to explain the vastly different assumptions, objectives and policy instruments to which they have given rise.

The Anglo-Saxon approach aims to deal with behavioural radicalization, especially acts of terrorism and violence. The threshold for government intervention is individuals' intention to break the law, not their political ideas or motivations. From this perspective, freedom of speech is near absolute, and people's political views—however extreme, anti-democratic, offensive or divisive—are none of the government's business as long as they are expressed peacefully and do not inhibit others' right to do the same. This principle also applies to lifestyles or religious practices, which people should have the right to express free of government interference, manipulation or fear of surveillance. Indeed, followers of the Anglo-Saxon approach will argue that any attempt to change people's (extremist) views or obstruct their freedom of expression would be anti-democratic and misguided, and—if anything—make them *more* willing to resort

to illegal means.[74] In other words, like Horgan and Borum, Anglo-Saxons are keen to separate cognitive radicalization—which they see as legitimate and irrelevant *vis-à-vis* the use of political violence—from pathways into violence and terrorism.

The most obvious source of the Anglo-Saxon approach is a passionate belief in freedom of speech, which—in the United States—is first among the constitution's amendments. Equally important, however, is a strong sense of confidence in the robustness of democratic institutions. Neither Britain nor the United States has any recent historical experience of having their respective constitutional orders overthrown. There may have been 'Red Scares' and moral panics about ethnic minorities, but none that would have prevailed or captured the imagination of anything but a tiny segment of the population.[75] As a result, non-violent extremists are not generally regarded as a political threat whose activities need to be curtailed or countered by the government. On the contrary, Anglo-Saxons are confident that every free society can—and must—tolerate a degree of extremism, and at the same time can be safe in the knowledge that extremists have no chance of taking power as long as they remain non-violent and the governments do not overreact.

In practical terms, since Anglo-Saxons believe counter-radicalization to be mostly about stopping people from breaking the law, they argue that the police should be in charge.[76] From their perspective, counter-radicalization remains part of counter terrorism—albeit one that includes 'softer' and longer-term activities, such as reaching out to communities, creating awareness and placing more emphasis on prevention. Anglo-Saxons, in fact, do not like using the term 'counter-radicalization', which they believe smacks of 'thought police', preferring to talk of 'countering violent extremism'.[77] Their emphasis on illegal behaviour not only helps the authorities to avoid any suspicion of political bias, it also permits the forming of strategic partnerships with cognitive (but strictly non-violent) extremists, who may be seen as credible interlocutors to be 'empowered' against their violent counterparts.[78] It is this practice that contrasts most markedly with the European tradition.

The European approach aims to confront cognitive *and* behavioural radicalization, but places more emphasis on the former. Not only is there a presumption that extremist ideas can lead to extremist violence, extremist ideas on their own are seen

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[74] According to Sageman, for example, countercultural movements that espouse extremist views can 'help liberal democracies evolve into just and fair societies': see Sageman, quoted in *United States of America* v. *Tarek Mehanna,* 'Revised expert opinion notice', p. 2.

[75] See Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig interpretation of history* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1965).

[76] See 'Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Working Group', Homeland Security Advisory Council, Department of Homeland Security, Spring 2010, http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/hsac_cve_working_group_recommendations.pdf, accessed 14 May 2013.

[77] See e.g. 'Fact sheet: the Department of Homeland Security's approach to countering violent extremism', Department of Homeland Security, n.d., http://www.dhs.gov/dhss-approach-countering-violent-extremism, accessed 14 May 2013.

[78] See Shiraz Maher and Martyn Frampton, *Choosing our friends wisely: criteria for engagement with Muslim groups* (London: Policy Exchange, 2009).

as problematic and potentially dangerous. For Europeans, therefore, the threat from extremism goes far beyond individuals breaking the law and engaging in violence; it is political. They strongly believe that, having successfully exploited and manipulated the very freedoms that democracy offers, extremist movements can turn into 'active and aggressive threat[s] towards the constitutional order'.[79] Moreover, in the process of doing so extremist movements divide and polarize societies, and they may succeed in creating a climate of permanent intimidation and fear in which people are unable to enjoy their constitutionally guaranteed freedoms.[80] Terrorism, therefore, is not the only problem caused by extremism, nor does it represent the 'root cause' against which governments' efforts should be directed. Europeans regard terrorism as a symptom, reflecting a wider failure to confront extremist ideas and the people who espouse them.

The origins of the European approach lie in the first half of the twentieth century, which saw many European democracies being challenged and destabilized by extremists from the left and the right. In Italy, Benito Mussolini's Fascists launched their march on Rome and took power in 1922. Germany's National Socialists gained just 2.8 per cent of the vote in 1928, but increased their share to 33.1 per cent four years later and paved the way for Adolf Hitler to become chancellor. For Europeans, this period (and the resulting catastrophes of the Second World War and the Holocaust) demonstrated that—given the right conditions— extremist movements can rapidly become mainstream, attract mass support, gain power through elections and (ultimately) destroy democracy without a single shot being fired. The lesson is that democracy is fragile, and that it needs to be defended long before its enemies break laws or resort to violence. According to the Austrian philosopher Karl Popper:

> If we extend unlimited tolerance even to those who are intolerant, if we are not prepared to defend a tolerant society against the onslaught of the intolerant, then the tolerant will be destroyed, and tolerance with them ... We should therefore claim, in the name of tolerance, the right not to tolerate the intolerant. We should claim that any movement preaching intolerance places itself outside the law, and we should consider incitement to intolerance and persecution as criminal.[81]

The rise of fascism, which Popper had in mind, may no longer be seen as the sole or principal extremist threat. But the historical experience with fascism has come to

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[79] This is the German Constitutional Court's benchmark for banning extremist political parties. See David Charter, 'Fight to ban far-right party begins after it is linked to race murders', *The Times,* 24 March 2012.

[80] According to the Dutch domestic intelligence agency, the threat from extremism includes 'the creation of parallel community structures with forms of self-defined justice and the propagation of anti-democratic behaviour which could result in polarization, inter-ethnic and inter-religious tensions and serious social unrest'. See Algemene Inlichtingenen Veiligheidsdienst (AIVD), *The radical dawa in transition: the rise of Islamic neoradicalism in the Netherlands* (The Hague, 2007), p. 10.

[81] Karl Popper, *The open society and its enemies,* vol. 1 : *The spell of Plato,* 4th edn (London : Routledge, 1995), p. 293.

be deeply ingrained in many European policy-makers' minds and continues to shape their attitude towards contemporary extremism. At the most basic level, it underlies their conviction that radicalization is primarily a political threat, which needs to be confronted as such.

For Europeans, it follows that counter-radicalization cannot be left to law enforcement alone. It may overlap with counterterrorism, but it goes well beyond efforts aimed at stopping terrorist plots and tracking down suspects—however broadly these efforts are conceived. Europeans believe that counter-radicalization is about promoting democracy and citizenship, while challenging the ideas and political grievances that extremists are exploiting in order to win people's hearts and minds. It is a continuous political and civil effort, which needs to draw on the resources of different government departments—not just those charged with security-related matters—and, even more broadly, involve civil society at large. Partnerships with community organizations are welcome, but those community groups cannot themselves be extremist. In the eyes of Europeans, empowering non-violent extremists to defeat the violent ones would be a deeply cynical strategy, contradicting the policy's wider aims and producing adverse results in the longer term.

The trade-off

The two approaches both claim to counter radicalization, yet they are clearly very different and, in some respects, mutually exclusive. Indeed, they are often said to involve a trade-off between short-term counterterrorism and longer-term societal cohesion.[82]

The Anglo-Saxon approach is portrayed as being 'better' at dealing with shortterm security threats. Because of its narrow focus on violence and law-breaking, it allows for resources to be targeted more efficiently. It also enables governments to enter into partnerships with non-violent extremists, who are said to have greater credibility and access to individuals who are vulnerable to being recruited by terrorist groups than genuine moderates—'quietist' Salafists, for example, who reject violence but promote separation from mainstream society.[83] On the other hand, such partnerships are likely to undermine the 'genuine moderates' who are sincere in their commitment to non-violence and democracy but do not reach into extremist countercultures. In helping to promote non-violent extremism, the longer-term consequence of the Anglo-Saxon approach may, therefore, be to foment the very attitudes and structural causes that have given rise to terrorism in the first place. The British government's 2010 Citizenship

[82] See e.g. Lorenzo Vidino, 'Europe's new security dilemma', *Washington Quarterly* 32: 3, Oct. 2009, pp. 61—75, http://csis.org/f1les/publication/twqo9octobervidino.pdf, accessed 14 May 2013.

[83] Vidino, 'Europe's new security dilemma', pp. 66–8 ; also Wiktorowicz, 'Anatomy'.

Survey, for example, found that rejection of communal mixing and distrust of political institutions correlated with higher levels of support for 'violent extremism'.[84]

As a result, followers of the European approach consider the narrow focus on preventing terrorism to be short-sighted and superficial. They argue that their emphasis on promoting democratic values is better suited to dealing with anti-democratic (yet largely non-violent) countercultures, such as the neo-Nazi movement in the former East Germany. The European approach not only tackles subversion and social unrest, it also helps to eliminate the long-term ideological and structural 'breeding grounds' out of which terrorism emerges. The downside is that Europeans have fewer options when it comes to countering terrorism in the short term. Resources are spread more thinly, and officials are limited in their choice of community partners, having ruled out cooperation with the ones that are potentially most powerful in preventing individuals from turning to violence. Furthermore, given that acts of terrorism can be the cause—not just the consequence—of social unrest and community tensions, the Europeans' relative lack of attention to violent behaviour may also (inadvertently) undermine their own long-term objectives.

The problem with this supposed trade-off is the absence of empirical evidence to support it. For example, the notion that non-violent extremists are more effective than others at reaching people who are at risk of being recruited into terrorism is based almost entirely on the experience of Bob Lambert, whose Muslim Contact Unit at the London Metropolitan Police empowered non-violent Salafists and the Muslim Brotherhood against Al-Qaeda.[85] Lambert's counterterrorist successes are beyond doubt, but he offers no control group, and it is impossible, therefore, to know what might have happened had other, similarly 'edgy' but less politically controversial groups been given the same job.[86] The same problem exists with long-term efforts aimed at changing people's ideas. It is notoriously difficult to isolate the impact of such programmes from the many other factors to which individuals are exposed. As a result, even where individuals have moderated their beliefs, it is hard to prove that it was a particular programme or initiative that caused them to do so.[87]

Indeed, even if all the assumptions turned out to be correct, the trade-off is likely to be more complex than has been suggested. Precisely how short-term counterterrorism

[84] Citizenship Survey, cited in HM Government, *Prevent Strategy,* Cm 8092 (London: Home Office, June 2011), p. 18.

[85] See Bob Lambert, *Countering Al-Qaeda in London: police and Muslims in partnership* (London: Hurst, 2011). For a shorter summary of this approach, see Robert Lambert, 'Competing counter-radicalisation models in the UK', in Rick Coolsaet, *ed., Jihadi terrorism and the radicalisation challenge: European and American experiences,* 2nd edn (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 215–26.

[86] Internal UK Home Office surveys seem to suggest that young Muslims in London who were part of Salafi-led programmes have responded primarily to their offers of employment, training and resocialization, which suggests that the religious and/or ideological component, while important, may not have been decisive. Conversation with Home Office official, April 2012.

[87] Horgan points out that many so-called deradicalization programmes, which are aimed at changing beliefs, are 'resistant to evaluation'. See Horgan, remarks at START Symposium.

and long-term societal cohesion are correlated may depend on—and be affected by—many additional factors and circumstances, such as the specific type of extremism, the nature of society and the political environment. Needless to say, finding answers to this question requires research that looks beyond individuals' 'action pathways' into terrorism to examine the complex nexus between belief and behaviour *as a whole.*

Unintended consequences

The risks and contradictions that are inherent in the two approaches are not limited to the trade-off between short-term counterterrorism and longer-term societal cohesion.

For example, a major objection to the Anglo-Saxon approach is that it fosters indifference towards hate speech and coercive (yet non-violent) behaviours. After all, from the Anglo-Saxon perspective, not only should legal and non-violent activities by extremist groups prompt no government response, they are seen as desirable expressions of political activism, because they allow people to 'let off steam', prevent them from becoming terrorists, and—more generally—'help liberal democracies evolve into just and fair societies'.[88] In reality, however, not every counterculture consists of peace-loving hippies, and not every legal or non-violent behaviour is conducive to democracy or helps societies become 'just and fair'. In the late 1990s, for example, neo-Nazi groups in the former East Germany created 'liberated zones' which immigrants were made to leave and where political moderates had to put up with intimidation and pressure. Some of the neo-Nazis' activities involved open threats and violence, but they mostly relied on aggressive speeches, public 'shows of strength', bullying, and other tactics that fell short of law-breaking and the use of physical violence.[89] By focusing on terrorism, violence and law-breaking, the Anglo-Saxon approach conveys the impression that such 'lesser' forms of coercion should be of no concern. It conflates what is *legal* and what is *legitimate*^ and—in doing so—foments a civic culture in which governments and civil societies are more likely to turn a blind eye to hate speech, open expressions of racism and politically motivated intimidation, assuming that—since they are not illegal and do not involve violence—they must therefore be 'okay'.

One of the most damning accusations levelled against the Anglo-Saxon approach is that—contrary to its intentions—it encourages law enforcement to 'manufacture' illegal behaviour. In the United States, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) regularly carries out so-called 'sting operations' in which agents identify cognitive extremists and then 'assist' them in translating their ideas into (prosecutable) actions, typically with the help of undercover agents or paid informants who claim to be members of terrorist organizations and provide encouragement, incentives and material support. Antonio Martinez, for example, had posted various messages in support of 'violent jihad' on

[88] Sageman, quoted in *United States of America* v. *Tarek Mehanna,* 'Revised expert opinion notice', p. 2.

[89] See Burkhard Schroder, *Im Griffder rechten Szene: Ostdeutsche Stadte in Angst* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1997).

his Facebook page, prompting FBI undercover agents to provide him with a fake car bomb (which he tried to set off in December 2010).[90] Similarly, the Newburgh Four, a group of 'smalltime felons' with jihadist sympathies,[91] were promised '$250,000, several luxury cars, and financing for a barbershop' by an FBI informant for their agreement to take part in a terrorist attack.[92] Civil rights organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union have denounced the FBI's methods in these (and many other) cases as 'entrapment'.[93] Yet, from the FBI's perspective, the lack of instruments for dealing with radicalization short of actual terrorist plotting, and the potential risk involved in allowing cognitively radicalized people to roam free, leaves law enforcement with no choice but to 'create' illegal behaviours where none had previously existed.

The weaknesses of the European approach mirror those of the Anglo-Saxon. The principal concern is that it may be used by governments to suppress dissent and harass political opponents. Because cognitive extremism is about ideas, not behaviour, the parameters for who and what should be considered a threat to the constitutional order can be changed and redefined quite easily. What constitutes subversion, in other words, is subject to the same political judgements, preferences and biases that apply to concepts like extremism and radicalization, which means that decision-makers can 'draw the line' in entirely different places. One of the most frequently cited examples is J. Edgar Hoover's FBI. Under Hoover's leadership, the Bureau kept lists of 'disloyal citizens' who were to be detained in a national emergency. It also spied on suspected communists and actively infiltrated and sabotaged civil rights organizations, including Martin Luther King Jr's Southern Christian Leadership Conference.[94] Germany's domestic intelligence services—named Offices for the Protection of the Constitution (Verfassungs-schutz)—have considered anarchists, Turkish nationalists and even Scientologists threats to the constitutional order.[95] The far left Linke party is under Verfassungs-schutz surveillance in conservatively governed German states, but has been part of governing coalitions in left-wing states.[96] Even in unquestionably democratic countries, therefore, the European approach can be too vague and subjective to avoid overreach. Popper's demand 'not to tolerate the intolerant' may be a beautiful sentiment, yet—in the hands of the wrong people—it can be a slippery slope, producing a society that is less tolerant of opposing views and, therefore, less democratic.

[90] Bjelopera, *American jihadist terrorism,* pp. 77—8.

[91] Bjelopera, *American jihadist terrorism,* p. 106.

[92] Center for Human Rights and Global Justice, *Targeted and entrapped: manufacturing the "homegrown threat' in the United States* (New York: NYU School of Law, 2011), p. 21.

[93] See Paul Harris, 'Fake terror plots, paid informants: the tactics of FBI "entrapment" questioned', *Guardian,* 16 Nov. 2011.

[94] See Tim Weiner, *Enemies: a history of the FBI* (New York: Random House, 2012), part III.

[95] For a full overview, see the annual reports of the Verfassungsschutz: Bundesministerium des Innern, *Verfassungsschutzbericht 2010* (Cologne: BfV, 2010), http://www.verfassungsschutz.de/download/SHOW/vsbericht_2010.pdf, accessed 14 May 2013.

[96] See 'Parlamentsgremium billigt Beobachtung von Linken-Abgeordneten', *Die Zeit,* 25 Jan. 2012, www.zeit.de, accessed 14 May 2013.

Conclusion

'Wherever they burn books, they will also, in the end, burn human beings.'[97] What the German poet Heinrich Heine had in mind when he wrote these words was the Spanish Inquisition and the burnings of the Qur'an that preceded the expulsion of Muslims from the Iberian peninsula. Long after Heine died, the Nazis confirmed the veracity of his statement. In fact, among the 25,000 'un-German' books that were burned in central Berlin on 8 May 1933 were Heine's works, including the play *Almansor* that contained this very warning.[98]

Heine, of course, was no social scientist, nor did he attempt to formulate a theory about human behaviour. But he instinctively understood the relationship between political ideas and their real-life consequences. Had someone tried to convince him that political motivation was 'irrelevant' to politically motivated violence, he likely would have shaken his head in disbelief. Yet, as this article has shown, there are academics and policy-makers nowadays who believe that the preoccupation with extremist ideas and belief systems is a misguided 'obsession', and that radicalization into politically motivated violence should be looked at separately from the process of cognitive radicalization.

In reality, of course, it is not about 'either or'. No one disputes the importance of factors *other* than ideology in the process of radicalization. But, whatever the importance of political beliefs *vis-à-vis* group dynamics, social networks, grievances, personal crises and other influences in each case, beliefs and political ideas— however simplistically expressed—are usually part of the mix. Rather than calling for political beliefs to be separated out, the academic critics of cognitive radicalization could have made a powerful case for a better, more holistic understanding of radicalization, which aims to find out how all the different pieces of the puzzle fit together. But they did not. Their idea that 'why' and 'how' people become terrorists are separate and largely unrelated questions, and that the study of one is pursued at the expense of understanding the other, is a fallacy, which prevents researchers from grasping the complex dynamics that are involved in radicalization processes.

Equally problematic is the emphasis on individual 'action pathways' into terrorism. For years, terrorism studies has been condemned—often rightly— for its lack of attention to the political and social circumstances out of which terrorism arises. Yet, instead of broadening the picture, the academic critics of cognitive radicalization want scholars to focus even more narrowly, ignoring the 'deep pie' of context and studying individual terrorists in isolation from the social movements and countercultures that have

[97] In the original German: 'Das war ein Vorspiel nur, dort wo man Bucher verbrennt, verbrennt man auch am Ende Menschen': Heinrich Heine, *Almansor: eine Tragodie* (Berlin: Diimmler, 1821), http://www.heinrich-heine-denkmal.de/heine-texte/almansoroi.shtml, accessed 14 May 2013.

[98] A full list of the books that were burned by the Nazis, or subsequently banned, can be found at 'Verbannte Biicher', http://www.berlin.de/rubrik/hauptstadt/verbannte_buecher/, accessed 14 May 2013.

produced them. Doing so would make sense if terrorism were like ‘ordinary’ crime and terrorists were like ‘ordinary’ murderers. But, regardless of the useful parallels that can be drawn between political and other kinds of violence,[99] terrorism remains a deeply political enterprise which cannot be understood by looking at individuals and their ‘action pathways’ alone.

Policy-makers have struggled with similar questions. Stressing behaviour, legality and violence, the Anglo-Saxon approach towards counter-radicalization is cleaner, clearer and less politically controversial than the European approach. It does not raise complicated questions about freedom of speech, nor does it blur the line between law enforcement and politics. But this clarity is gained at the price of turning a blind eye to non-violent extremists and their efforts to undermine and threaten democracy and societal cohesion. While it may be effective at stopping violence in the short term, the Anglo-Saxon approach is difficult to reconcile with the vision of a robust democracy that stands up for its values. The European approach, however, also has its weaknesses. It can be overly vague and distract governments’ attention from the prevention of violence as their top priority. Most worryingly, it lends itself to overreach, and—in the wrong hands—may be a licence for oppressing dissent.

There are no simple answers, therefore; no silver bullets. Radicalization, extremism and political violence in their various forms and guises will not go away. In fact, there are good reasons to believe that extremism—violent and non-violent—will be a more or less permanent feature of western societies that are undergoing profound social, political and economic transformations.[100] As this article has shown, the process of dealing with this challenge will be difficult and, at times, controversial. If anything, the trouble with radicalization has only just begun.

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[99] See e.g. Scott H. Decker and David Pyrooz, ‘Gangs, terrorism, and radicalization’, *Journal of Strategic Security* 4: 4, 2011, pp. 151–66.

[100] See Peter R. Neumann, *Old and new terrorism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2009).

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July 2013

International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-), Vol. 89, No. 4 (July 2013), pp. 873–893. <www.jstor.org/stable/23479398>
2013 The Author(s). International Affairs © 2013 The Royal Institute of International Affairs.
Published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 9600 Garsington Road, Oxford 0X4 2DQ, UK and 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148, USA.

Oxford University Press

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