



# AtTAHALOF

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**Extremism**

**Cultural, Religious and Political Perspectives**



# At TAHALOF

Fourth Issue, August 2020

## IMCTC Quarterly Magazine



General Directorate of Planning and Coordination

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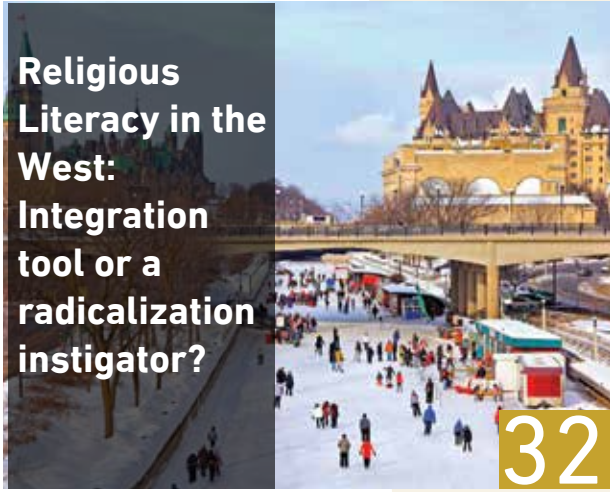
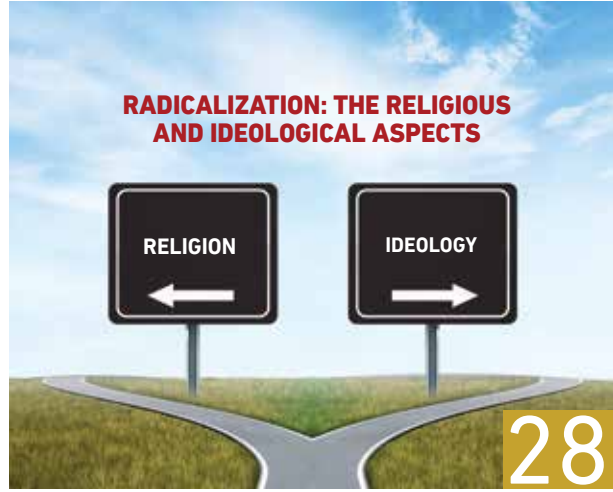
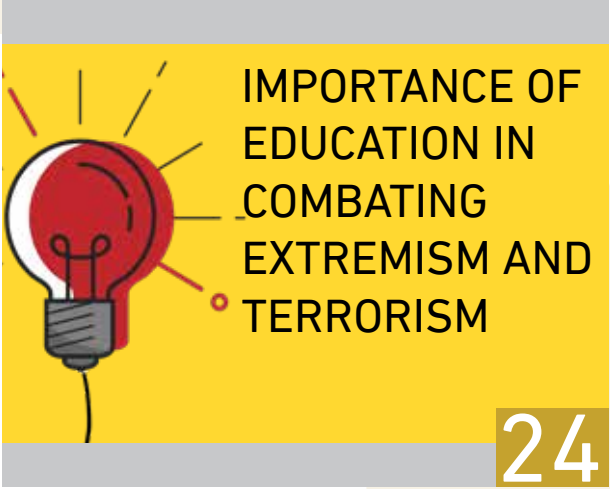
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# MAURITANIAN COUNTERTERRORISM EXPERIENCE

GREAT PATIENCE AND MULTIPLE HORIZONS

■ ABDULLAH OULD MOHAMMADI

“**Terrorism** is something that happens to others” is a mythical catchphrase frequently repeated by the Mauritians in the early 1990s, when the evils of terrorism ballooned and snowballed into a global ghost-like inferno that spreads chaos and fear ubiquitously, threatening the survival and existence of countries and the security of people, and tampering with their stability. The statement was based on geographic, cultural and historical justifications:

■ MAURITANIAN WRITER AND AFRICAN AFFAIRS JOURNALIST



Geographically, Mauritania is far from the conflict areas caused by terrorism in the Middle East, Afghanistan and the Indian subcontinent, even though a few Mauritians joined the fighting in these areas. Culturally and historically, it is clear through the unity of religion and thought of the Mauritanian people, who have remained monotheistic, combined by one ideology and religion. Throughout its history, Mauritania is not home to “murderous identities” that have sprouted up in many countries. In a similar vein, the Mauritanian scholars in their fatwas were more inclined towards reformist positions, avoiding every statement or action leading to bloodshed or murders even in their confrontation with the French colonizers. They believed that Jihad is best practiced with good examples and good words far much better than brandishing weapons at the other.

#### ➤ **TILTING THE BALANCE**

That statement remained a deeply ingrained myth on which decision-makers depend, and was thus adopted by many notables of the country, even with the outbreak of terrorism across the cities of Algeria, with the evils of the scourge of war targeting the hotels of Casablanca and Marrakech, and the rising fumes that silenced and blocked the noses from the World Trade Center. It is then when the “Maghiti’s attack” turned things upside down.

At the beginning of June 2005, Mauritania was suffering from an unstable political situation, as the pillars of the ruling political system were shaken at the impact of a suffocating political crisis; the funds of the late Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi contributed to sowing its root causes, as he funded political movements that were accused at the time of attempting to overthrow the regime.

With the Mauritanian security preoccupied with domestic danger, an army unit was stationed at a border gap less trodden in the depth of the Sahara labyrinths, a few kilometers off the border with Algeria, dozens of soldiers turned a dilapidated ramshackle colonial fortress into a center-point to control the borders, in a remote area where only few of smugglers, traffickers, herdsman and the “Nimadi” tribes who have been hunting deer with their trained hounds for centuries.

One idyllic desert-like autumn evening, the army unit, which was cut off from the world, received a vehicle with Mauritians on board who were reported that they were shepherds left marooned

and their truck broke down; they needed water, fuel, and food. It is customary and an essential part of the Sahara traditions to showcase hospitality to others, the Almoravids – alternatively known as Al-Murabitun – were magnanimous, munificent and generous to their guests at the borders and spared no efforts to act accordingly. They treated them tea and bread, repaired their car and gave them water and food. The men camouflaged and decoyed as shepherds turned out to be a surveillance patrol working for the “Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat” that has been active in Algeria since the 1990s. It has been involved in terrorist attacks and killed thousands of Algerians. Over the course of time, the group decided to expand regionally and pledge allegiance to Al-Qaeda, which was nicknamed later “Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb”. Given the fact that the Mauritanian soldiers are best known for their hospitality, keen to honor and look up to their guests, the reconnaissance battalion seized the opportunity to surreptitiously learn more about the place, combed for the strengths and weaknesses of the military unit defenses and located the communications device led by the army. On the fourth day of June 2005 after dawn prayer, the detachment returned with dozens of fighters who were hiding behind the sand dunes and launched a violent and sudden attack on the military unit; they destroyed the communications apparatus and engaged into a direct confrontation with the “barracks of Maghiti” that confronted the Al-Qaeda fighters with great valor, killing one and injuring several others, but the military unit, consisting of 17 Mauritanian soldiers, was completely destroyed. Maghiti’s attack caused a great shock to the Mauritians, as it refuted the deeply ingrained myth that reads “terrorism is something that happens to others”.

The terrorist attack led to major political and security repercussions, which ended with the fall of the regime of President Muawiya Weld Al-Taya in less than two months.

#### › INEVITABLE CONFRONTATION

The awareness of the Mauritanian government and army at that time fell short, trudging late given the magnitude of the dangers that were terribly growing along the borders of Mali and Algeria. Al-Qaeda made alliances with some of the local population in northern Mali, while its sleeper cells were expanding covertly inside Mauritania to create a larger affiliation that would provide Al-Qaeda battalions in northern Mali with fighters of young Mauritians decoyed and fooled by slogans, such as “jihad” and “support for Islam”, while Al-Qaeda was working on laying the foundations of a “rogue state” amid the desert.

After the fall of Ould Taya’s regime, it became clear that Mauritania was drumming up for a war on terrorism that did not choose the appropriate time or place for it. The lessons the Mauritanian army learnt in the war on terrorism highlighted officers who quickly seized control to confront “Al-Qaeda” readily and courageously spearheaded by President Mohamed Ould Cheikh El-Ghazwani. Terrorist operations in Mauritania continued, targeting new army positions on the border in “Turin” and “Al-Ghalwiyya”, in which dozens of soldiers were killed. A suicide attack targeted the French embassy in Nouakchott, French tourists were killed, clashes took place between security and Al-Qaeda in the heart of Nouakchott and Mauritanian security valiantly thwarted many terrorist attacks.

After 2008, when Mauritania was witnessing a ferociously escalating wave of terrorist attacks, the authorities began developing a national strategy to combat terrorism; the political, secu-

riety and legal leaders, social activists, intellectuals and religious scholars participated in drawing out its features. Against a backdrop of strategic transition, Mauritania made tremendous strides from the “reaction” stage to the “initiative stage” against Al-Qaeda.

#### › COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGY

The Mauritanian strategy looks meticulously into the different dimensions and manifestations of terrorism. It well understands that the phenomenon cannot be confined to one dimension, nor is it wise to look into it from one perspective; rather, it is a complex and labyrinthine phenomenon, the root causes and trends of which are very much similar. The Mauritanian strategy has attempted to bring together the security and development trends, and to put into action diplomacy to realize these goals. Principally, the Mauritanian strategy falls into four equal main axes: legal, security and military, political and diplomatic and cultural and religious.

#### › LEGAL AXIS

This axis seeks to develop a new legal arsenal, which can confront terrorism and dry up its sources of financing, in such a manner as to make the Mauritanian criminal law dance to the tune of this new phenomenon, and keeps pace with developments in international law in this field. Mauritania has reviewed and revisited many laws to be in harmony with the Mauritanian counterterrorism law issued in 2010, and has enacted new laws to fill legal loopholes. To this end and to dry up the sources of terrorist financing, the counterterrorism measures in place have tightened the noose to and clamped down on money laundering funneled to terrorists, who gained millions of dollars from the hostage trade. Mauritania also introduced financial monitoring bodies specialized in following-up, controlling and restricting such financiers, and investigation and prosecution were put





into action against those involved. In the counterterrorism multilateral framework, Mauritania also coordinates with many regional and international bodies and organizations.

#### › SECURITY AND MILITARY AXIS

Security and military actions are the backbone of every national, regional, or international strategy for countering terrorism, whether it is preemptive actions (intelligence action), or aftermath-action (deterrence and attack). The Mauritanian strategy has given priority to intelligence, simply because it is a preemptive action that prevents terrorist attacks, or even the creation of sleeper cells in the country. Mauritania has well used many agencies working in this field such as the General Administration for National Security (DGSN), the General Department for External Security and Documentation (DGSED), and intelligence unit offices of the National Army, the Gendarmerie, the Guard, and the Customs, in addition to the General Road Security Rally (GGSR) which was established specifically to counter terrorism funded by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The Mauritians based their war on Al-Qaeda on “preemptive operations.” The Mauritanian army raided Al-Qaeda strongholds in northern Mali, inflicting heavy losses on them, and the

security successfully attracted the local population on the border-lines, while Al-Qaeda lost many of its allies on the ground.

#### › POLITICAL AND DIPLOMATIC AXIS

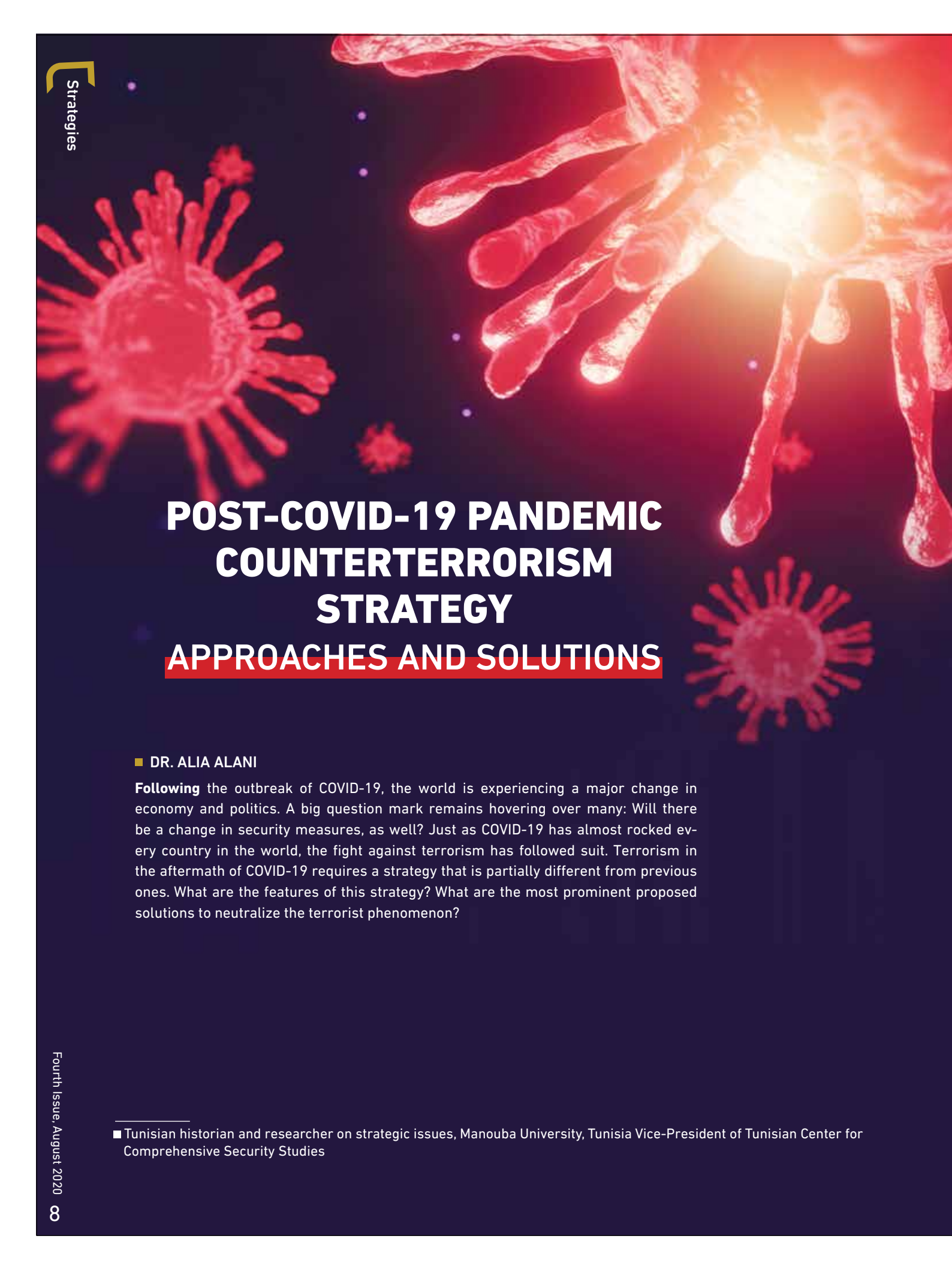
The war that Mauritania was fighting against terrorism was still an unprecedented political consensus in a country that has long sustained a political division and fragmentation of the domestic national front, but the strategy adopted by the country in this war successfully brought this domestic front together.

Mauritania well utilized its diplomacy to counter terrorism, as it was one of the first countries to sound the alarm of terrorism in the corridors of the African Union. Nouakchott hosted in 2014 the first “G5 Sahel” Summit that includes Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Chad and Burkina Faso. Over the last ten years, the level of security and political coordination in the framework of the war on terrorism between Mauritania and the USA, France and the European Union has greatly developed, making Nouakchott the capital of the war on terror in the G5 Sahel.

#### › RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL AXIS

The role of the government was not limited to military force alone; rather, it used the “soft power” of the Mauritanian society. Scholars, jurists, literati, intel-

lectuals, and social notables were motivated and encouraged to work in tandem against the wave of religious militancy. Mauritanian scholars have issued fatwas warning against the ripple effect of strange religious exaggerations on community; scholars and imams met with radical prisoners and walked them through the pathways of moderation in Islam, the dangers of excommunication of Muslims and the permissibility of bloodshed and looting their property and money. In the same vein, the various public sector authorities organized hundreds of productive and seminal conferences and seminars addressed terrorism through analyses and constructive criticism. The Mauritanian counterterrorism strategy has been in action for a long term; it well realizes that the war on terrorism will drag on, simply because terrorism per se is an enemy that adapts to different situations. Proverbially, Diamond Cut Diamond; terrorism should be fought by using the same methods it adopts, with a special focus placed on development and education. Despite the gains made by Mauritania, the danger is still imminent, given the increasing growing influence of Al-Qaeda in the Sahel Region, as ISIS has sneaked and snowballed into the region. ■



# POST-COVID-19 PANDEMIC COUNTERTERRORISM STRATEGY

## APPROACHES AND SOLUTIONS

■ DR. ALIA ALANI

**Following** the outbreak of COVID-19, the world is experiencing a major change in economy and politics. A big question mark remains hovering over many: Will there be a change in security measures, as well? Just as COVID-19 has almost rocked every country in the world, the fight against terrorism has followed suit. Terrorism in the aftermath of COVID-19 requires a strategy that is partially different from previous ones. What are the features of this strategy? What are the most prominent proposed solutions to neutralize the terrorist phenomenon?

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■ Tunisian historian and researcher on strategic issues, Manouba University, Tunisia Vice-President of Tunisian Center for Comprehensive Security Studies



### **TERRORISM AMIDST COVID-19**

The statement released by "ISIS" May 27, 2020, aired with the voice of the ISIS official spokesperson, Abu Hamza Al-Qurashi, confirms that the COVID-19 epidemic is a divine punishment due to the lack of adherence to religious teachings. He urges his supporters to redouble their terrorist operations by stating: "We strongly recommend you to go tough on God's infidel enemies." Despite the military defeat of ISIS, Al-Qaeda and Boko Haram in a number of Arab and African countries, and the demise of the so-called Islamic Caliphate State, they are still insisting on resuming their operations while COVID-19 severely affected the entire people of the world countries; they take advantage of the opportunity provided by quarantine to carry out terrorist operations, and Amiriyya operation in Giza, Egypt, in April 2020 is a case in point, while a terrorist operation in Tunisia, March 2020, within the immediate vicinity of the American embassy is a resounding instance that echoes down for years yet to consider.

Although the countries of East and West Africa witnessed thousands of cases of COVID-19 in March, April and May 2020, the terrorists there did not cut them some slack; just in March and April, 47 terrorist attacks were reported, claiming the lives of 409 people across 14 African countries. This is a glaringly stark message from these terrorist organizations that they can still act as a subversive act of terror. In a documentary tape aired by Al-Arabiya Al-Hadith TV on May 9, 2020, a group of ISIS detainees expressed their dogged determination to engage in terrorist activities once released, to bitterly fight those who disagree with them as infidels in their view. Here, we recall that there were more currents of extremism within ISIS than the official leadership of the organization, such as Hazmiyah. This indicates that the number of suicide bombers is on the rise. Sadly enough, the thousands of children and women of ISIS can snowball and balloon into a real danger to their communities, if this issue is not scientifically, objectively, legally and morally addressed; This is simply because minor children cannot tolerate the errors of their parents. European countries spared no efforts to readily separate European ISIS children from their parents upon their return from hotbeds of fighting and turmoil.

### **POST COVID-19 TERRORIST STRATEGY**

After COVID-19 pandemic fades away and dissipates into nowhere, the terrorist strategy will be based on a number of drivers, the most notorious ones are the following:

- Continued stabbings, intentional vehicular operations to run into people, and the detonation of explosive devices and belts, which we witnessed during the quarantine stage, simply because weapons can no longer be easily funneled to



terrorist organizations.

- Investing in the digital revolution, directing its supporters to train in cyber-attacks, and producing highly-encrypted information applications and software.
- Adopting a new style of polarization aimed at the specialists in the digital field, in addition to a limited number of ordinary supporters. These extremist organizations no longer need a large number of supporters except what is necessary in some limited operations.
- The future reliance of these currents of extremism on a more digital religious speeches than before; it is expected that it will be a digital speech that combines traditional paradigms selectively cherry-picked in a manner that is

consistent with their convictions, and religious scriptures that are used and arbitrarily interpreted into the current reality, professionally directed and produced in a sophisticated fashion of subtle nuances of mellifluous voice, tone and intonation in harmony with the content of the speech, which aims to mobilize and polarize more people, making the audience of poor knowledge and superficial understanding of religion hypnotized, spellbound, captivated and enthralled to sacrifice themselves if necessary to re-establish the so-called caliphate statehood or die if such a chimera remains far-fetched. They believe that the establishment of the so-called caliphate statehood is a

legitimate duty that is achieved by jihad and fighting what they call the non-believers or disbelievers. Punishment is guaranteed, whether in the world or in the hereafter. As for the world, ISIS reminds its supporters that it has managed to establish the so-called caliphate statehood with its geographical area, its financial resources, its army and security, its offices and its jurisdiction from 2014 to 2017. As for the hereafter, the reward is much greater in their view; it is the paradise of immortality, full of amazingly pulchritudinous and nubile women.

- Placing a particular focus on marketing the idea of a virtual caliphate in the next stage in



preparation for the return of the geographic caliphate.

- Continued pledging allegiances to evince more loyalty and obedience to ISIS, and obey submissively the orders of the ISIS leaders, toeing the ISIS line haphazardly.
- Increasing the clandestine cells to outnumber the status before the outbreak of COVID-19, using technology in everything that prepares for terrorist operations.
- Empowering the clandestine cells to put into action as many initiatives as possible based on the place and time favorably selected to carry out terrorist operations without referring to the central command of the organization.
- Developing the intelligence system for these terrorist organizations, depending on several methods, including the penetration of government security and military services.
- Benefiting from the after-effects of COVID-19 at the economic level, especially electronic or digital currencies, such as bitcoin and others (the value of one bitcoin at the end of May 2020 is equal to approximately ten thousand dollars). The use of this currency by terrorists gives them a degree of safety in handling financial transactions.

Experiences have proven that all religious and political currents of special intellectual tendencies make brainwashing and submissive obedience a necessary condition for gradualism across the hierarchy of the organization. The facts have proven that only a small number of the followers of these currents left the organization voluntarily, simply because brainwashing will only be erased by counter-intel-

lectual reviews and reconsiderations that restore the mind to its health, shattering and dispelling doubt and uncertainty. The compelling reason is that because most of them depend on security treatment only. Even the research centers calling for combating religious extremism in the Arab world and Europe have not yet reached the production of a parallel knowledge-based treatment.

#### HOW TO ADDRESS TERRORIST PHENOMENON

There is almost unanimity between the centers of studies and research in the way the terrorist phenomenon is addressed through various horizons and insights. Security-based counterterrorism approaches alone would not pay off; security is critically important but would not act in silos. To this end, we offer a number of proposals in this field:

1. **To carry out a detailed study of the groups belonging to terrorist organizations**, including the social environment in which they live, the level of services available to them in health, education, and work, and the nature of their relationships with their peers in the near and long term.
2. **To attach a great care for the ideological and religious upbringing** that extremists receive; family orientation, especially if the family is known for religious extremism, has a very significant impact on the individual's transition to extremism. By the same token, mingling with a special type of friends in community could also have the effect of espousing extremist ideology.
3. **To produce an informed, digital, religious speech** – not like direct preaching – based on short sentences in audio-visual output

recordings of not more than ten minutes each, dealing with five basic areas: monotheism, jihad, caliphate, allegiance and obedience, and the nature of the relationship between religion and the statehood and between religion and politics. In every video recording, state-of-the-art techniques of sound and image are used, and the text is supported by arguments that combine the religious and social aspect, because these extremists adapt the current reality to the fatwas of the old times in which things were bitterly unbearable. It is known that the alternative digital speech is based on a true reading of the heritage and legacy.

4. In this regard, I propose the establishment of Arab and Islamic committees that start at the local level in every country, and then develop into regional and international committees, to better study religious heritage in accordance with a sound scientific method, and refine them from all visions that contradict the tolerance of religion, and its true goals in justice and security, and the peaceful relationship with the other, for the sake of coexistence and the reconstruction of the entire world, based on the noble verse quoted from the Holy Quran: "We made you peoples and tribes to know each other" [Al-Hujurat, 13]. The committees work within the framework of local, regional and international workshops, publish their results periodically and cooperate with the specialized institutions. In view of the magnitude of this project and its future impact on making peace





and security locally, regionally and internationally, I propose that it has financial and intellectual independence, and it may be under the supervision of the Arab League or the Organization of the Islamic Conference or others.

5. **To dry up the sources of financing** for these militant groups, which necessitates local, regional and international cooperation, simply because recent reports that turned the spotlight on ISIS following the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic revealed that it is still able to find various sources of funding from unknown sources, as well as from the ransom resulting from kidnapping foreigners, human trafficking, as well as trade in contraband and smuggling. To adopt a prison pol-

icy for terrorists, after they are sentenced by placing them in a special prison, away from normal prisoners, to be engaged in rehabilitation programs to avoid returning to any possible extremist actions based on internal reviews. The new program will be developed by a committee of experts in religion, psychology and sociology, as well as criminologists. These prisoners are given special care, while enabling them throughout their imprisonment to learn a profession that they choose and practice once released, while they are closely supported socially and perhaps financially after the end of the punishment.

I believe that society and national and regional states should intensify efforts to rehabilitate extremists with

the help of experts, financial support, and finding the necessary means and mechanisms to implement the aforementioned program. This is meant to save them from themselves, and to save communities and nations from the risks of their operations. If we are remiss of the rehabilitation experience or program, they will outnumber the current total, posing a great threat to security and economy.

In conclusion, terrorism that has snowballed into a transnational phenomenon and has also ballooned into a trans-continental threat will always remain at the top of the agenda of the new world order and poles once COVID-19 fades away (America, China and Russia). The interests of these poles in the reconstruction and international trade do not thrive and prosper if terrorism ever survives. ■

A person wearing a dark hooded garment is shown in a workshop or museum setting. The background features a wooden wall with various tools and objects hanging on it, including a large metal ring and a small animal head. The lighting is dramatic, with strong shadows and highlights.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF EXTREMISM

### ■ Dr. Ghalib Al-Zamil

**Extremism** is a social and ideological phenomenon, deeply ingrained in history and linked up with human marked propensities and everyday life practices. Epistemologically, extremism per se stems from within any bloated ego, which resorts to using power and violence to protect one's own interests or defend one's own existence, seeking to imbue extremist behaviors with ideological and moral justification. Premised on this logic, extremism is not exclusive to one single religion, group, community or culture. Theology spells out the onset of violent manifestations, which humanity is doomed to have experienced; this immorally bizarre yet entirely unacceptable human behavior can be traced back to the Quranic reference made to the incident of Cain and Abel. Extremism first started germinating individually in silos lurking beneath the surface, but later snowballed and ballooned into collective behaviors stoked and fueled by ethnic, racial, political, and religious triggers. Once yoked together with political associations, falling into the clutches of a given regime, a protracted and internecine struggle ensues, flaring up between one extremism that begets another silhouetted counter-extremism, be it an offshoot of a victorious party or breathed into a defeated ideology.

Generally, extremism is a position couched in bias hurled to extremes for an issue, markedly departing from the commonly accepted norms, logic and rationality. The Lexicon of Terrorism Terminology published by IMCTC provides a careful definition of 'extremism', featuring subtle nuances of its denotations and connotations: "Extremism" means exceeding the threshold of moderation and turning a blind eye to temperance, which is an ideological exaggeration that involves aggression over people, both in notions and actions". The said definition traces back a spate of manifestations of extremism observed in historical contexts triggered by political, religious, racial, ethnic and ideological propensities. The most significant highlights of the term will be discussed in the following sections.

■ Researcher and Academic.

## RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM

Religious extremism denotes the intolerance and bigotry of an individual or group fanatical about a religion, ideology or sect. Albeit different in type and form, heavenly or man-made, religions experienced a manifestation of intolerance, which is not necessarily being attributable to religious scriptures or teachings; rather, it simply stems from idiosyncrasies and poor understanding of historical or political contexts, whereby religious speeches are used to achieve different ends. Here are some telling examples of religious extremism:

### • EXTREMIST JEWISH GROUPS

The first extremist group based on Jewish fundamentalism was known as 'Zealots', formed by Judas of Galilee in 66 B.C. The Zealot members, who were called the 'Sicarii', carried sicae – small daggers – concealed and tucked under their cloaks to carry out their assassinations, which initially affected the Roman government employees, while targeting later the adherents of Judaism who were against their beliefs. This group has been infamous for using devilish methods of terrorism and murder; poisoning drinking water, burning down and demolishing homes (arson and vandalism). The assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995 by extremist "Yigal Amir" is perhaps a contemporary telling manifestation of the ideology of the said group, which also committed hideous massacres against the defenseless Palestinian people for decades in cahoots with and hand in glove with extremist religious groups and national gangs.

### • EXTREMIST CHRISTIAN GROUPS

Like all divine religions, Christianity calls for peace, love and mercy; however, different groups have used the teachings of Jesus Christ repeatedly to justify the use of violence! The Romans used methods of violence and intimidation to impose their Christian beliefs. As such, the intentions and actions of the Inquisition, the Crusades and the religious wars that have raged for decades are unambiguously understood. Millions of people have fallen victims to such despicable crimes even among the Christians themselves; a notoriously telling example is targeting Catharism, killing more than 20,000 of its followers at the hands of the Albigensian Crusade, which went too merciless to a fault with the Catholics of the City itself! Lamentably enough, an infamous phrase voiced by the leader of the campaign, papal deputy or nuncio, went viral when he ruthlessly ordered all the townspeople be butchered savagely. When asked how to discriminate between the Catholics and the Cathars of the City! "Slaughter them all, and let the Lord sort them out," came the retort callously.



The Knights Templar is the most infamous Christian extremist group in the Middle Ages. It represented a military elite that practiced criminal acts under the slogan "Protection of Christendom"; while the Ugandan Lord's Army, which was founded in 1986 and aimed to establish a Christian religious system based on the statutory legislation of the Bible, is another contemporary telling example of extremism.

### • EXTREMIST ISLAMIC GROUPS

Extremism driven by Islamic interpretation came into existence at the hands of the Kharijites, who built their ideological extremism on misunderstanding Islam. Driven by their narrowmindedness, such extremists excommunicated those who did not seem to be tuned in with their faith. The Qarmatians known as Qaramita followed suit and veered off and deviated from Islam; they sowed and wreaked terror among people; notoriously enough, they defiled and desecrated Al-Ka'bah Al-Musharrafah, inlaid with the Black Stone, set into the eastern corner, which they brazenly stole and held in ransom away from Mecca. Among other groups that adopted ideological extremism is Mu'tazila, which bulldozed people into adopting this belief, officializing it as the doctrine of the entire country, as they wielded influence on Caliph Ma'mun. More so, the people at the time were put to test; myriads of scholars



who refused to acquiesce to this doctrine were imprisoned and killed, especially for the issue of "Creating the Qur'an".

The Hashshiyyn, an esoteric Ismaili sect, and hard-core Shiite extremists, to whom the English word 'assassin' is etymologically attributable. The sect was led by 'Hassan ibn Al-Sabah', who took Alamut Castle in Persia as his stronghold, relying on intimidation and assassinations using suicide bombers – thus nicknamed in his parlance – to widely propagate his cause, spreading terror into the hearts of the rulers and the princes antagonized, after they assassinated a myriad of ministers, caliphs and sultans.

It can be glaringly felt and sensed that extremism comes in different religious flavors, so to speak. Al-Qaeda and the ISIS organizations are telling examples of disreputable Sunni extremism, following the footpaths of the Kharijites; while, Hezbollah and Al-Houthi militias on the other side of the scale represent the Shiite armed villainous extremist groups. They are an extension of sectarian extremism that has fueled the religious infighting and sectarian strife, rendering themselves as a breeding ground for belligerency.

#### • **BUDDHIST EXTREMISM**

Buddhism is seen as a peaceful religion, nestling into meditation; however, the major incidents of violence stoked in Myanmar and elsewhere have unmasked the flip side of Buddhism as it is imbibed with the deeply ingrained extremist Buddhist nationalism that fueled hate speech and violence, causing widespread genocide against Rohingya Muslims.

#### **POLITICAL EXTREMISM**

Ancient countries sustained the agonies of extremism leading to violence. The era of the Pharaohs was stigmatized with a bloody conflict between the supporters of the priests and their opponents. By the same token, Athens also experienced a departure of the disciples or apostles away from the Greek civilization through cases of violence based on ideological extremism. Likewise, political crime was rife in Rome; the most notorious was the assassination of Emperor Julius Caesar as a result of the conflict with the aristocracy. Pertinacious as such, political extremism has entrenched throughout history up to date; political parties desperately seek to impose their political views and hegemony through the exercise of exclusion and marginalization. It is for these opinionated ideologies that political extremism snowballed into reality.

#### • **NATIONALIST EXTREMISM**

The fanatical nationalist calls that drum up for the interests of one people excluding any other(s), with absolute xeno-

phobia, have strongly acted as a catalyst in contemporary political movements and parties. Extremist and populist nationalist movements in Europe have repeatedly achieved resounding successes and their isolationist discourse has echoed widely, threatening the European model based on modernity and enlightenment; more so, it reinforces social division, stokes violence, and impedes the progress of communities as does extremism.

Strikingly enough, the far-right has successfully metamorphosed from being cross-handed and passive spectators twiddling their thumbs into jostling for the reins of power in the European and American political arena in less than ten years. India is a model for the prevalence of nationalist extremism in the wake of the rise of extremist Hinduist nationalist parties, assuming power over the past few years; hate speech and violence mushroomed increasingly, leading to increased attacks on Indian Muslims. Their approach feeds off religious discrimination, sorting out Muslims, Christians, Sikhs and Buddhists.

#### • **HOLISTIC EXTREMISM**

Communist, Nazi, and Fascist regimes have become a glaringly telling example of ideological extremism indignant at the prevailing social structure. The said regimes deemed people unfit for development; therefore, they went to great lengths to produce a new generation more like machines! With their populations dehumanized, these regimes adopted the principle of sacrificing at least two generations to create an idealistic and supernatural generation. Regrettably, peoples have suffered from the policies of oppression, repression, and ethnic and cultural cleansing for many years.

#### • **ANARCHIST EXTREMISM**

By definition, anarchism means the absolute opposition of statehood; a form of community organization that grants power to a limited group, which the majority is subject to its own decisions, limiting human freedom. Anarchism calls for a horizontal, not hierarchical, organization of the political system. Anarchists resorted to the use of violence and assassination, and the assassination of the Russian Tsar Alexander II in 1881 is a case in point. The assassinations of American President McKinley in 1901 CE and many others are also telling examples.

The bottom line is that extremism represents, in its various types, manifestations, and triggers, a social epidemic that incites hatred across human communities, reducing them to factions, sects, clicks, cabals, coteries, races and propensities, which all collide with one another, attempting to desperately eliminate the other amidst absurd wars. ■

# ISIS FAILURE IN LEBANON

## ■ DR. MONA ALELMI

In 2014, Lebanese Army Commander Jean Kahwaji stated that Syrian extremists intended to use the Syrian Qalamoun region to expand from Syria, where radical groups such as the Islamic State (ISIS) and Jabhat Nusra (JN) of Al-Qaeda affiliates had captured large swaths of the country to connect the Bekaa's Lebanese borders of the Northern Sunni Akkar region.

A similar narrative was circulated by Hezbollah and its allies in Lebanon who portrayed Sunni regions across the country as unruly jihadist strongholds. While up to 2016, both extremist groups were able to organize highly skilled terrorist bombings in Lebanon, they failed to capture territory with the exception of the mountainous borders separating Lebanon from Syria. In its large majority, Lebanon's Sunnis remained impervious to extremist calls, although ISIS and JN appear to have been more successful with refugee populations residing in Lebanon.

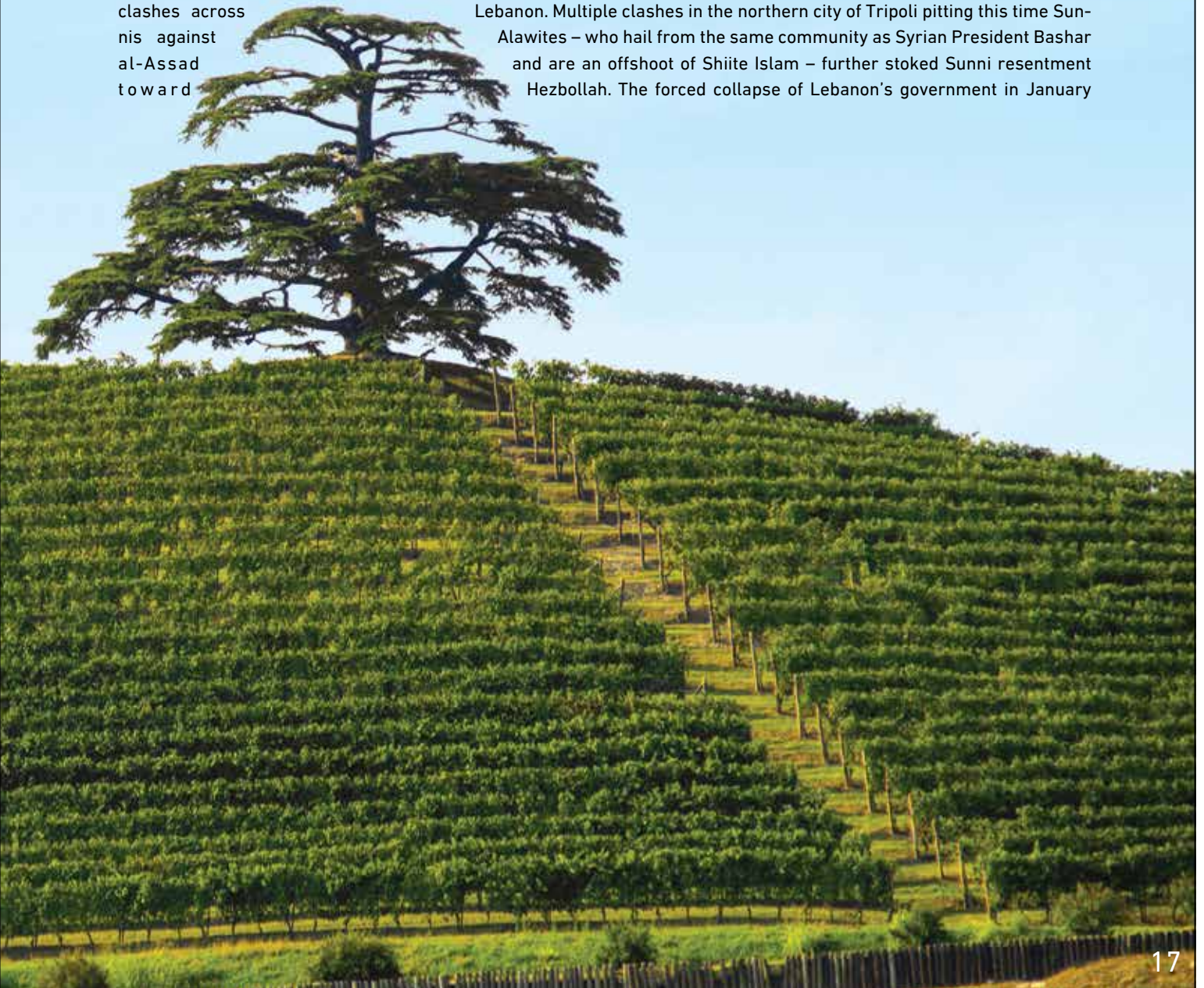
This article looks into the emergence of Lebanon's extremist scene and into its ultimate devolution as well as the implications of the country's recent economic and social collapse on the jihadist scene.

## REVISITING HISTORY

The 1990s witnessed the emergence of new radical organizations in Lebanon's Palestinian camp Ain Helweh in Saida in South Lebanon, namely, Osbat Al-Ansar and Osbat Al-Nour. The former one had ties to Al-Qaeda, fought in Afghanistan and later in Iraq and was accused of assassinating the head of Islamic Afbash in 1995 as well as four judges in Sidon in 1999 before escaping back to Ain Al-Hilweh. On the New Year eve of 2000, a group of veterans from Afghanistan, called Takfeer Wal Hijra, which was comprised of over 200 Islamist militants battled in northern Lebanon with the Lebanese army. The group was headed by Bassam Kanj who focused his recruitment efforts in the poor neighborhoods of Tripoli and in Ain Al-Hilweh.

In 2005, Lebanese sectarian landscape became significantly divided. That year witnessed the assassination of Sunni PM Rafic Hariri, for which Hezbollah members were later charged by the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. Sunnis also pointed their fingers at Hezbollah after several assassinations of important political and security Sunnis personalities. This led to a phase of religious polarization between Sunni and Shiites which was followed by a resurgence in 2007 in jihadist activity when a three month battle erupted between Lebanese soldiers and members of Fatah al-Islam, an organization linked to Al Qaeda and whose first leader, Shaker Al-Absi, held strong ties to Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi and Syrian intelligence.

Later in 2008, fresh confrontation pitted Sunnis against Shiites. That year the anti-Iranian and Syrian March 14 government decided to shut down Hezbollah's private telecommunication network and to remove Airport's security chief, Wafiq Shoucair, over his alleged ties to Hezbollah. The decision was followed with a takeover of Hezbollah of Beirut and by clashes across Lebanon. Multiple clashes in the northern city of Tripoli pitting this time Sunnis against Alawites – who hail from the same community as Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and are an offshoot of Shiite Islam – further stoked Sunni resentment toward Hezbollah. The forced collapse of Lebanon's government in January





2011 followed by the forced exile of PM Hariri, Saad only increased the religious divide.

The emergence of Jihadism on the Lebanese level was combined with the political and religious fragmentation of Lebanese society. It was aggravated by feeling of injustice shared by many among the Sunni community and paved the way for the entry of Syrian extremist groups onto the Lebanese scene with the onset of the Syrian of the revolution, when Hezbollah supported president Bashar Assad, a member of the Alawite community, against a largely Sunni rebellion.

### LEBANESE POLARIZATION AND THE RISE OF EXTREMISM

In 2012, Sheikh Ahmad Assir, a staunch anti-Hezbollah cleric from Sidon, started organizing marches in Beirut, calling on Sunnis to support the Syrian opposition in its fight against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. In Tripoli, Sheikh Salem Rafei also called on his followers to join the rebels fighting in

Syria. "I called for jihad in Syria primarily to contain Hezbollah's intervention in Qusayr," said Rafei to the author at the time. "The party's implication in the Syrian war should be put to a stop as it will draw Lebanon in the conflict by sending fighters to Syria, we force the Lebanese government to take a stand against Hezbollah. We also contain the domestic sedition (conflict between Sunnis and Shiites)," he added. After 2011, Lebanon became the scene of continuous clashes and bombings.

### THE EVOLUTION OF THE LEBANESE JIHAD

In the **first phase** starting in 2012, Lebanese Sunnis focused on fighting Hezbollah in Syria. Hezbollah sent thousands of fighters into Syria. Sources close to the party told the author that between 7,000 to 10,000 members of its militants operated there after 2013. On the other hand, between 800 and 1,000 Sunnis from Lebanon (a figure including refugees as well) went to

fight in Syria, according to Tripoli and Bekaa sheikhs who spoke at the time to the author condition of anonymity. Lebanon was used initially a recruiting and resupply base. This was facilitated by networks put in place by Zahran Alloush [the current leader of Jaysh Al-Islam] and by familial and social relations linking local Tripoli residents with Syrian revolutionaries.

The **second phase** focused on bringing the fight to Hezbollah on its Lebanese home turf by targeting them. In 2013, jihadists attacked members and offices of the organization with explosives and bombed Hezbollah-controlled areas along the Syrian border. JN or its Palestinian sister organization, the Abdallah Azzam Brigades, claimed most of the bombings in Beirut and Tripoli. At the end of June 2013, improvised explosives targeted Hezbollah convoys in the Bekaa Valley. In early July of that year, a booby-trapped car exploded in Bir Al-Abed, wounding 53 people. Other bombings by Abdallah Azzam targeted the Bekaa areas sup-

porting Hezbollah. Starting 2014, ISIS started operating in Lebanon, claiming responsibility for suicide bombings there, and joining forces with the Nusra Front in clashes against Hezbollah on the Syria-Lebanon border.

The **third phase** saw growing enmity between extremists in Lebanon and the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), increasingly perceived as siding with Hezbollah. In 2014, jihadists retaliated by conducting several attacks on the LAF using roadside bombs and gunmen. The last attack against Lebanese soldiers took place in Eرسال, a town lying on the Syria-Lebanon border. Clashes had also taken place between Islamist supporters of Sheikh Ahmad Assir—now in captivity—in the city of Saida in the summer of 2013. Similar clashes erupted between the LAF and Islamist supporters of the Jabhat Nusra and ISIS in over 20 rounds of fighting in Tripoli.

The **fourth phase** saw a regrouping of the Nusra Front and ISIS in Eرسال, in the Qalamoun region bordering Lebanon. Home to over 100,000 Syrian refugees, it served as a staging ground and supply route for rebels in western Syria until last year, when Hezbollah and the Syrian regime blockaded the town. According to an officer from the Lebanese army speaking on condition of anonymity, over a dozen attacks targeted Hezbollah and LAF positions in the Bekaa Valley between 2013 and 2015. During this time, cooperation between ISIS and the Nusra Front grew, only ending in battles with LAF and the capture by the army of the region.

### HOTSPOTS & FLASHPOINTS

Lebanon's extremist bastions were mostly located in areas sharing specific features: they were densely populated, impoverished, neighboring borders, refugee populations or located on fault lines that could be easily manipulated in times of tensions by political groups. Such was the case of Tripoli in North Lebanon: it was a fault line between Alawites who supported the Assad regime and Hezbollah and Sunnis who were aligned with the opposition. The rift between the two Tripoli communities was also decades old, dating back to a 1986 massacre by Syrian forces during which, at least three hundred Tripoli residents were killed. In addition, the city was home to two Palestinian camps, one of which had witnessed the infamous Nahr Bared 2007 battles.

Sidon was another flashpoint: it was home to the Palestinian camp of Ain Helweh, which was home to Osbat Al-Ansar as well as the Abdallah Az-zam Brigades, Fatah al-Islam and Jund Al-Sham, two groups that battled against the Lebanese army in Nahr Bared in 2007. A new generation of jihadists aged between seventeen and twenty-five years old, also emerged the latter with little religious knowledge and were best portrayed by the movement of Chabab Muslim lead by Bilal Badr who appeared to follow JN and ISIS at a later stage. In the Bekaa, it was the border town of Eرسال that became Lebanon longest terror flashpoint with jihadist organizations such as JN and ISIS using the border

area for transit of weapons and booby-trapped cars. As previously mentioned, it was only a 2017 that a combined operation the LAF put an end to jihadist presence in the area.

### THE FAILURE OF JIHAD IN LEBANON

The besieging and defeat of terror groups on the north eastern border of Lebanon with Syria, as well as the arrest and dismantling of networks in Lebanon has borne its fruits with the ending of activity terrorist in Lebanon. Additionally, the cooperation of Palestinian groups, and the collaboration of the old guard Palestinian extremists such as Osbat Ansar with security agencies, has been essential to the crackdown. Security sources attest as well that Lebanese families have also largely cooperated with them providing information on their own relatives, when they saw early signs of radicalization.

Former jihadists who spoke to the author also shared their disillusion with their experience, saying they chose from now to focus on their work and their family. So far, extremism has not been a mainstream experience among Lebanese Sunnis and does not appear to pose such threat in the country's near future. However, given the fresh instability and the economic collapse Lebanon is facing, which will worsen poverty and employment opportunities for the youth; this, if combined once again for some reasons with a sentiment of political injustice at the Sunni level, could trigger a resurgence of fringe extremist activity. ■



# POWER OF INCLUSION IN COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

## ■ Leena Al Olaimy

**Experts** have warned that increased social isolation, boredom, conspiracy theories, and feelings of marginalization during the COVID-19 pandemic, will increase the risk of radicalization among young people. Throughout history, extremist groups have excelled at exploiting and manipulating socio-economic grievances to incite violence. Al-Qa-eda and ISIS have routinely used injustices in Palestine, Syria, Iraq and other countries to solicit support.

■ Social entrepreneur and the award-winning author of "Compassionate Counterterrorism: The Power of Inclusion in Fighting Fundamentalism".



### EXPLOITING WORKING CONDITIONS

More recently, they were quick to enlist the deadly coronavirus as “soldiers of Allah”; capitalizing on simmering tensions and denouncing the capitalistic intoxication of Western leaders, and their callousness towards the wellbeing of the societies they govern. In the wake of international outrage sparked by the killing of African American George Floyd by a white police officer, Al-Qaeda has even positioned itself as championing the oppressed against police brutality and systemic racism. On the other end of the ideological spectrum, white nationalists are scapegoating the Jews for allegedly manufacturing the pandemic to profit from market collapses through insider trading. Whereas, American far-right groups have encouraged their virus-infected members to spray bodily fluids at police officers and Jews, according to FBI intelligence. It is worth noting that in the U.S., the term alt-right first emerged in November 2008, which was also the year of the worst global financial crisis since the Great Depres-

sion of the 1930s.

In the documentary *White Right: Meeting the Enemy*, the filmmaker asked the NSM (an American Neo-Nazi political party) why they had relocated to Detroit. Their response was: “It’s the perfect time to recruit for NSM because of the economic decline.” Similarly, *Journey to Extremism in Africa*, a report published by the United Nations, revealed that 55% of voluntary terrorist recruits express frustration at their economic conditions; 83% feel marginalized and believe that their government only looks after the interests of a few; and more than 75% have zero trust in governance and law enforcement institutions. Accordingly, those who expressed a significantly lower degree of confidence in their governments and in their potential to deliver progress or meaningful change, were the most susceptible to radicalization. In the second quarter of this year, the pandemic will have left nearly 200 million unemployed, proving to be considerably worse than the 2008-9 financial crisis, according to the International

Labour Organization. The World Bank released a recent report revealing that the pandemic represents the deepest global recession since World War Two. While this is sufficiently disruptive for developed and stable nations, fragile states are far more vulnerable. When a government fails to adequately provide for its people, terrorist groups are quick to seize the role of welfare provider. In this hard-to-break social contract, societal dependence provides militant groups with the immunity and license to operate.

In looking to a post-pandemic world, we cannot afford the cost of preventable violence. Terrorism cost the world’s economy US\$33 billion in 2018. This figure did not account for the social ramifications, nor the wider indirect economic impacts on business, investment and the costs associated with security agencies in countering terrorism. As the global community prepares for a new chapter in its fight against terrorism amid—and after—the pandemic, there are prudent, if somewhat unorthodox, lessons worth recalling.

**HEIGHTENED COMPETITION**

For the average fighter, the “caliphate” represents an imagined community constructed over shared grievances and a promise of fulfillment. Militant groups skillfully offer disaffected young outcasts, regardless of their religious ideology, something that they are missing and willing to die for: dignity, opportunity, and belonging.

We don’t seem to recognize that whether we want to or not, we are “competing” with terrorist organizations to fulfill these basic human needs. Rather than narrowly focusing on the professed goal of establishing a caliphate, we should instead focus on their value proposition and provide a more authentic and sustainable version of the socioeconomic inclusion they allege to offer. In fact, it was precisely the disillusionment of foreign trained fighters (FTFs) with on-the-ground realities, and the failure of the so-called Islamic state to deliver on its promises, that many renounced their allegiance to the group and left.

Several studies by multilateral organizations, think-tanks and military

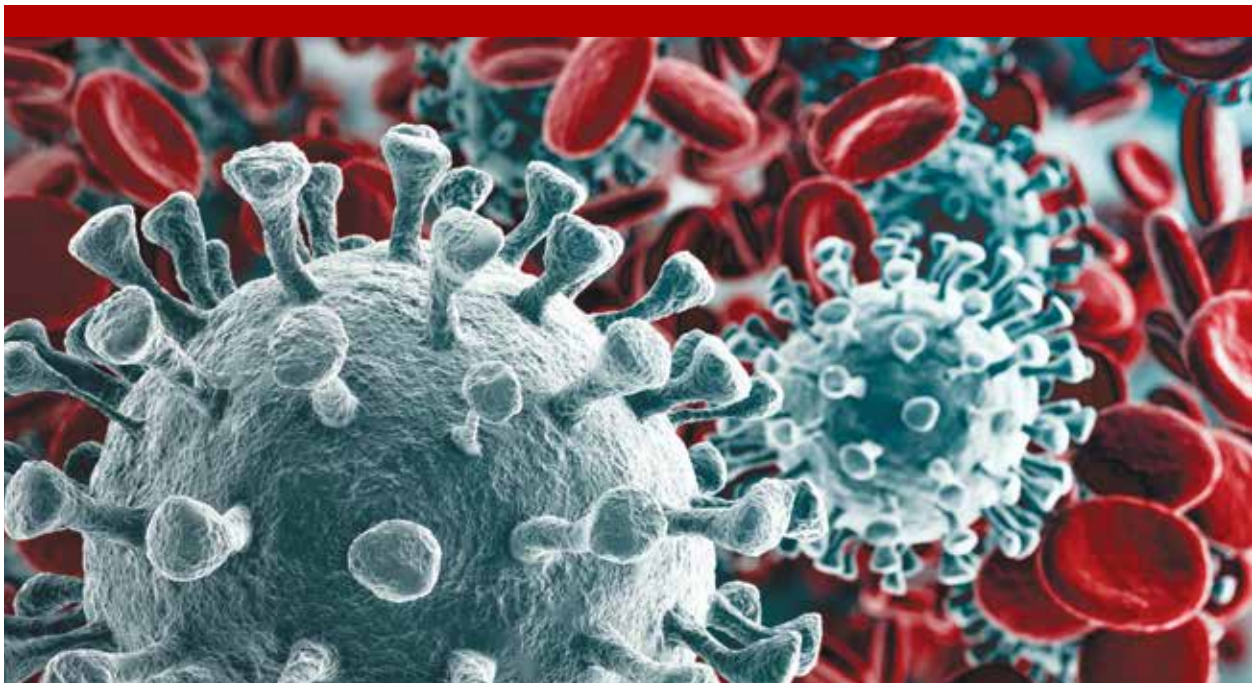
academies have revealed that approximately 65% of FTFs did not have an education beyond high school, and that almost 90% were either unemployed or engaged in low-skilled work. Many earned less than US\$500 a month. In Nigeria, ISIS’s West African ally Boko Haram prospered amidst socioeconomic (and other) inequalities between the underdeveloped and mostly Muslim North, and the relatively better-off and predominantly Christian South. The mere visibility of USAID programs correlated with decreased support for extremist groups, more positive views of the U.S., and the Nigerians’ increased optimism of opportunity and confidence in their government.

**MILITARY INTERVENTIONS AND COUNTERPRODUCTIVE OUTCOMES**

The history of Boko Haram in Nigeria also offers a cautionary tale. Following a “successful” military campaign that weakened the insurgent group in Nigeria, militants dispersed and spread through offshoots into neighboring Niger, Cameroon, and Chad, increas-

ing the number of terrorism-related deaths in those three countries by 157%. Historically, military interventions have led to the demise of just 7% of terrorist organizations since 1968. Despite a \$6 trillion annual investment in counterterrorism, the number of terrorist attacks worldwide per year has increased five-fold since 2001. Meanwhile, peacebuilding organizations remain grossly underfunded—even though socio-economically uplifting programs are the foundation of prevention; in other words: building societies that are resilient to violent extremism.

Western-led military force can also reinforce an “us versus them” narrative, feeding polarization between Muslims and non-Muslims. Groups like ISIS and Al-Qaeda recognize—as proven by research—that discriminating against people who are struggling to culturally assimilate can make them more susceptible to extremism. Nowhere has this polarization been more pronounced than in Western countries with dominant Muslim immigrant communities. Here, the radicalized







are not driven by poverty, but rather by inequality. In France, for instance, a Christian citizen with an African heritage is 2.5 times more likely than a Muslim with the same ethnic background and the same qualifications to get called for a job interview. It is no coincidence that 70% of Western FTFs and 41% of “homegrown jihadists” are immigrants from these subculture communities.

A superficial analysis may lead one to deduce that this is a problem of immigrants. It’s not. This is a problem of marginalized multigenerational diaspora enclaves in pursuit of egalitarian societies and upward socioeconomic mobility. In many cases, their limited connections and integration within mainstream society reinforce an identity crisis.

Young, second-generation cultural castaways are marooned between a Western identity that refuses to fully accept them and a motherland that rejects them. Predictably, they search for identity and belonging elsewhere. After extensively examining the interviews and personal histories of over 2,000 foreign fighters in an Al-Qaeda era-study, U.S. Army Colonel and psy-

chologist John M. Venhaus concluded that recruits were, overwhelmingly, driven by this existential pursuit. Making immigrants feel valued and desegregated—as opposed to making them feel like strangers in their homeland—is critical to neutralizing the appeal of terrorist groups.

#### **SUPREMACY OF INCLUSION**

Recognizing that governments are currently faced with tremendous pressures, we can look to municipalities that have already demonstrated the positive outcomes that inclusive policies can have on discouraging young residents from turning to violent extremism. Mechelen, Belgium, a city between the former ISIS hotbeds of Antwerp and Brussels, is home to 20,000 Muslims—more than Hungary and Slovakia combined. But not one single person from this city was successfully enlisted to join ISIS. Intentional policies of inclusion and opportunity have reached immigrants, who would otherwise face marginalization. Urban renewal and revitalization projects have upgraded rundown neighborhoods melding socioeconomic classes and promoting

class-based integration between immigrants and the affluent.

Young people view themselves as full—rather than second class—citizens and are consequently buoyed by opportunity and hope, making them less susceptible to fraudulent offers from terror networks at home and abroad. Policing is an integral part of community stewardship, as opposed to punitive law enforcement. Mechelen may be an outlier but its model warrants consideration.

Vilvoorde had once provided ISIS with twenty-eight recruits—despite being half Mechelen’s size. In 2014, the Belgian municipality adopted Mechelen’s model. Two years later, the ISIS-bound departures stopped. Mechelen’s Mayor Bart Somers understood that the secret to scaling violent extremist movements is exploiting grievances. As injustices mount—both perceived and real—so do security deficits. Ultimately, while coercive measures represent an important component of safeguarding human security, as former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon noted, “Missiles may kill terrorists. But good governance kills terrorism.” ■

# IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION IN COMBATING EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM



## ■ DR. AMMAR ALI HASSAN

**Education** per se, in its overarching denotation and connotation along with its elitist and populist subtle nuances, comes at the forefront of the means that can best counter terrorism efficiently; which cannot be otherwise achieved through rough and tough methods, rushing into resisting terrorists and cordoning their harm off desultorily; such methods do not undermine the deeply ingrained ideas they are imbibed with, which are one of the most compelling reasons that drive them to perpetrate violence against the government and society.

Education goes beyond merely padding information out and inculcating data into one's mind by rote, or regurgitating the ideas of others as if numbly unaware of how to consciously piece these pieces of information together. Education is rather building one's cognitive, mental and intellectual capacities to look critically into the commonly accepted ideas, while developing one's vision to articulate one's ideas about the self, community and the entire world. It will always be either a central point from which to start understanding and interpreting, expressing opinion and taking a position and making a decision, or a framework as a term of reference. With this in mind, one will not slip into confusion between perceptions and visions, and will not be vulnerable to the invasion of radical and extremist ideologies that conquer an empty mind.





### **THOUGHT TREATMENT**

Terrorism as an action starts with ideas or theoretical concepts that seem coherent and plausible to the mind that does not have the ability to examine, investigate, criticize and analyze, nor a mind that can meditate and look at each matter reflectively and meticulously, and nor an experience that provides one how to mull everything over once heard and seen, making him or her suspicious and doubtful until everything is well settled and certain.

The world of ideas, whether crazily crackpot or deeply rooted, is not the only reason that causes an individual to slip into extremism, as this may be due to mental disorder, or a financial driver that lures and entices such an individual to get involved in whatsoever can achieve protection, or a social support he or she misses, or a pleasure he or she desires, or money he or she looks after, or a social status he or she pines for. These reasons still can consolidate the survival of such an individual among extremists only after stuffing one's head with their ideologies; regardless of the reasons for being involved with extremist and terrorist organizations and groups, the value and the ideological side cannot be denied and brushed aside; rather, it may have the greatest impact on the making of extremism, as evidenced by the fact that the terrorists who falsely attribute themselves to Islam belong to different social classes, various educational backgrounds, different countries, and multiple life experiences; they all are plagued with the same ideology.

For this reason, education always has an important and profound function in confronting extremism, not only extremists, but also combating terrorism and terrorists. This is a very important issue in perceptions and procedures that desultorily rush into confronting violent, organized or sometimes reckless behavior of terrorists in a security or military path-

way that may be urgent in order to repel terrorist attacks, or to nip them in the bud, by collecting information about the target people to be terminated, and raiding them in their strongholds before they carry out their crimes. This is never a definitive solution. There are always the gateways that new extremists get out afresh from the incubators.

### **CULTURE AND ASSOCIATED CONCEPT**

Education is a complex concept that combines literature, arts and a rich body of relevant interdisciplinary human knowledge. Natural sciences are also subsumed under education according to some schools. Education also includes the traditional and folkloric proverbs and sayings, maxims, adages, epics, myths, mental images, and everyday life rituals. If all of these are available displayed in one way or another to the public, an educated person is not the one who picks one piece of information from each and every knowledge center as does a florist when picking one flower from each garden to make a bouquet of flowers, nor does he cherry-pick a snippet from each and every discussion; rather, an educated person is the one who readily welcomes into one's mind all that is seen, heard, felt, understood and received for better interaction, through which he or she develops a vision and makes a position and builds one's own intellectual abilities in criticizing the self and the other.

According to the dictionaries of the Arabic language, 'education' is etymologically derived from 'educate' (verb); 'to acquire an education' means that someone has become intellectually smart and sagacious. In addition to the linguistic denotation couched in semantic subtle nuances, an educated person has a conscious critical mind, and an exquisite taste, which makes him or her immune from a possible invasion of any abnormal ideologies whose owners claim to possess the absolute truth.



Folkloric education (folklore), with its artistic depth, including poetics, novels and music, represents a wall against a great response to extremism, and this is why extremists always encircle and undermine it, describing it as a “pre-history” that boomerangs on them, drumming up for this concept into people’s minds persistently, making such a concept convincingly appealing to people. In some areas controlled by extremist organizations, extremists prevented people from performing and practicing their customs and rituals in joys and sorrows.

By the same token and to the same extent, extremists reject the arts and literature produced by the elite of educated people, literati and intellectuals, unless they are compatible with their perception. Cinema, theater, poetry versification, fictional, narrative and music production is categorically rejected by them, claiming that they are acts that are steeped in and riddled with lies, and are designed to distract people from supplicating to God, or they are manifestations of debauchery. Extremist groups made efforts to produce their art, which fell flat, dry and tasteless, superficially without any meaningful depth, and perfunctorily preaching without observing any aesthetic or stylistic conditions; it is merely a spiritless speech. In addition to criticism and accountability, real education makes diversity, as it is attracted to all that can generate benefits, and thus it is not overwhelmed by one group or derives its power from one source; rather, it is generated by various cognitive and human sources, and calls for this rich diversity.

The third element that characterizes education is the perpetual movement driven by its ability to provoke an internal debate, then heated discussion and regeneration. This also makes extremists in conflict with it, as they tend to stagnant ideologies that constitute a closed system, on which they depend without scrutiny; otherwise, their power becomes too poor to shore up, and their cohesion fades away, let slipping from their hold the most important thing they always seek, which is building an impervious organization based on the principle of (absolute obedience and submissiveness).

### INVINCIBILITY OF EDUCATION

Many extremist and terrorist groups alienate those who offer new, alternative ideas, and covertly believe in the principle of “organizing rather than theorizing”. As long as they edge out intellectuals, not allowing them to join their groups, while antagonizing everyone who has a wealth of literature or art; such groups have not produced in its history any great writer or a talented artist, even if they sought to have their own literary and artistic context, they will practice predominant and overbearing preaching on such people, forcing them to be cuffed by subordination to extremist ideology, making them lose the basics of art and literature and associated freedoms. On the other hand, we feel and sense the extremists’ hostility to education; this is glaringly visible in a statement, whether in their prophetic rhetoric or their publications directed to society, or the books and brochures that develop and even beyond.

Based on the foregoing, it becomes necessary to pose a question mark on the following: How can education in our communities be put into action to act as an impermissible wall against extremism? Ideas need to be firmly established and applied on the ground and embraced by people to be translated through institutions, otherwise, they loom large on the horizon. Therefore, I suggest the following:

1. Building small complexes of education, or enhancing the activity of existing ones, and such complexes will be the center of residential places in order for young people to find them easily within their reach and immediate vicinity.
2. The foregoing requires that reading or extended reading be an essential part of school curricula, starting from the first primary grade and ending at the secondary stage, provided that the teachers are prepared to perform this task.
3. The “Al-Jarn Theater” experience in Egypt can be applied; it was used to confront extremist ideologies, a project that aims to revitalize arts, literature and folklore. When the project was implemented in schools of villages known for the presence of radical Islamic

groups, it was a resounding success, despite the presence of resistance at first from students, claiming that all arts are prohibited. Over time, however, these people started to draw and play music, write poetry, stories and articles, perform plays, and create popular art derived from and reflecting their environment.

4. Attention should be paid to educational product of children. Some members of extremist religious groups have relied on this method to attract children, or accept their ideas and show sympathy for them. Facing them should be in this context, and at this early age, and education-based magazines alone do not pay off in this regard. Rather, writers who write for children should be encouraged along with the publishing houses.
5. Producers of arts and literature should be encouraged and presented as persons worthy of celebration; what they write is an essential pillar in strengthening the (soft power) of the state.
6. It is necessary to organize competitions in creative writing for school students and youth, on specific issues that promote "enlightenment" and raise the importance of religious moderation.

In any case, education should not be treated as necklaces for decoration; rather, it is a means of building the human being, building his and her knowledge, values and directions, and hence the renaissance of society as a whole. Extremism and terrorism should not be treated as a purely security issue; rather, they are based on values and ideologies that are false and incompatible with those adopted by the main social trend; it is imperative to address them ideologically in the short term and the long term, and address them from security and military perspectives as they transform from mere black ideologies to measures and violent actions to impose their perception on people forcibly. ■



# RADICALIZATION: THE RELIGIOUS AND IDEOLOGICAL ASPECTS



■ Dr. Radwan Alsayyed

**Etymologically**, “radicalization” is a term originally translated or calqued from English, which means swerving from and veering off practice and ideology, drifting either right or left, while going beyond what is ideologically, politically, economically or socially common. In addition, western dictionaries and centers attach subtle nuances of religious denotations and connotations to the existing term, which has gained infamous prominence across the Arab, Islamic, cultural, political and religious circles since the 1970s. Radicalization per se now implies the underlying meaning of the term (exaggeration) as substantiated in the Holy Quran and Sunnah ﴿O, People of the Scripture! Do not exaggerate in your religion, and do not say about God except the truth﴾ [The Women: 171]; ﴿Say, “O, People of the Scripture! Do not exaggerate in your religion beyond the truth; and do not follow the opinions of people who went astray before, and misled many, and themselves strayed off the balanced way.﴾ [The Table: 77]. By the same token, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) preaches in his teachings: “Stave off exaggeration! The people whom you outlived perished given their exaggeration in religion”. In the same vein, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) also preaches: “Some of you scare others off”; succinctly, they are those who think that by going too tough on people and on themselves, while remaining obdurate on religious issues, bringing about discomfort and hardship to those who disagree with them upon religious matters they unwittingly believe they do others a power of good; while, they are risibly scaring Muslims off.

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## WHY DID FUNDAMENTALISM OR RADICALIZATION SLIP INTO REALITY?

Radicalization per se was originally an accusation hurled by rulers of the West at their opponents amidst the internal communist or left-wing political opposition; however, after the rise of the right-wing currents in the wake of the First World War, the elected authorities used the term 'radicalization' to stigmatize the right-wing fascist parties and trends to date. However, the Western authorities use different terms to describe issues relating to Islam. Flicking through the ancient scriptures and replaying the dawn of Islam, exaggeration was used to signify two overarching meanings: first, the ideological distortion, by which the Holy Quran referred to the Christians living at the time who used to over-glorify Jesus Christ, Mary (Maryam bint Imrān), Ezra (Uzair) or other blessed personalities to a fault; second, taking acts of worship to extremes, or selectively cherry-picking textual chunks from the holy scriptures

going from extreme to another, generating unbalanced behaviors that deviate from the true religion and veer off its limits, such as those who felt wildly independent of Messenger of God (peace be upon him), taking Islam to extremes; or those who accused Messenger of God (peace be upon him) of being unfair in dividing the spoils. To all such people, Messenger of God (peace be upon him) sends out his timely and clear warnings: "Make things easier, rather than difficult, and delight people rather than scare them off"; "Religion is very easy to understand and practice"; "It is no use going too tough and hard in one's religion". Simply put, exaggeration in the Muslim community at the time of Messenger of God (peace be upon him) was spearheaded in individual cases and did not snowball and balloon into a notorious phe-

nomenon until late at the time of the Rashidun Caliphs. The first manifestation of radicalization or alternatively extremism was a deeply ingrained idea espoused by the first Arab secularists, which laconically means that religion and statehood should not work in tandem in order to establish the modern statehood. Farah Antoun, a Lebanese-born Egyptian citizen, drummed up for this idea in his magazine "Al-Jami'ah" 1902. "Verily, Ibn Khaldūn was true in his statement; 'the defeated conquered is always fond of mimicking the winning conqueror'; you whimsically want to imitate France and the French regime, believing that it removed hierocracy through the French Revolution (1789), and Islam is not home to any priestly apparatus, nor can any country be ruled by priesthood and the rule in Islam is purely civil; the one flipping through the history of Islam understands that no such antagonism ever exists between religion and statehood", came the witty retort by Sheikh Muhammad Abduh, Grand Mufti of Egypt.

As the twentieth century dawned, secularists along with Islamists welcomed the idea that translates: "Anyone





with political power can get hold of everything.” Therefore, the two parties first sought covertly then overtly following the 1930s to reach power. Secularists sought to separate statehood from religion, as a precondition favorable and conducive for the establishment of a modern citizenship statehood and the new Islamist groups in Egypt and elsewhere to gain power to fight colonialism, realize a new citizenship alienated statehood and re-establish the Islamist rule and to implement Sharia and to realize Caliphate-Statehood. The first radicalization we always suffer from is the distortion of our religion, which infamously rife in our religion before it is so in our countries; it is the distortion of religion as highlighted by the Holy Quran and the heavenly religions. To put it succinctly, by ‘the distortion of religion’ I mean politicizing religion, or making it a political and partisan ideology instrumentalized by Hassan Al-Banna, Al-Mawdudi and Qutb. By the same token, Khomeini and Khamenei and their peers use Shiism. They have the guardianship of the jurist, and political Islam groups have the mentor! The other manifestation of exag-

geration highlighted by Prophet’s teachings, which tenaciously cherry-picks and clings onto the surface of the scriptures selectively, turning a blind eye to the underlying meaning intended, causing denial and excommunication and fueling hostility to Muslims and the entire world, has root causes that are different from first manifestation of exaggeration triggered by deviation and distortion. Modernity hand in glove with globalization turned commonly established concepts of humanity upside down, flung out of religions and ethics. The insecurity creeping over the general public in all religions and cultures, including Islam, has brought about radical and revolutionary propensities demonstrated in fashion, food and religious rituals, bulldozing people to adopt new methods to be embedded into the existing traditions. Following the 1970s in the Muslim world, the two types of radicalization converged into one point: the distortion-based radicalization seeking to establish a statehood in the name of religion, and the purgatory radicalization of identity aiming at sabotaging what globalization brought about

across the Muslim world, and when possible it seeks to strike the mastermind of global disbelief. The first radicalization used the other radicalization with two meanings: the sabotage of the modern citizenship statehoods in our countries paves the way for the establishment of the statehood of political Islam on the one hand, and the other meaning is that the identity-based or jihadist radicalization that the whole world is confronting in the name of fighting terrorism will turn the attention of the world to the fact that political Islam and affiliated currents are not violent. Islam has greatly suffered from the two types of fundamentalism or radicalization, bringing about much harm to its beliefs, principles, concepts, values, people, property and funds, and the vision of the world. Two notable schisms took place: an ideological, political, and conceptual schism, and a terrorist schism that nicknamed itself jihadism. Arabs in tandem with other Muslims and the entire world have fought defection and violent and terrorist rebellion. This purgatory militancy will not come to an end; however, given its



ferocity and violence it will not remain a threat to the future of religion and the statehood.

Our scholars and religious and cultural institutions have had no options other than a holistic confrontation with these two murderous types of radicalization. In my research, I have called the two confrontational steps as qualification and rehabilitation. As for qualification, it was represented by criticizing the distorted concepts of religion, jihad, Sharia, faith and disbelief, the statehood and its relations with religions, cultures, variables and the world. In my *The Struggle against Islam* (2004), I explain that "It is a struggle to arrest the core zeitgeist of religion and its audiences across three sides: extremists of both types, international parties and their policies, and the think tanks, polymaths, scholars, subject-matter pundits, clergymen, literati, intelligentsia and the public opinion. Our scholars and institutions are entrusted with five tasks: preserving unity of belief and worship, informed fatwa, renewed religious education, advanced public guidance, and other visions of the world.

These qualifications included research studies, supported by statements, data, documents, conferences, training institutions for imams and teachers, and renewed relations with the world's religions and cultures. There is still a failure in the renewed approach to our youth and audience. Also, scholars and institutions in the Arab world do not have close cooperation and joint programs for meeting, solidarity to learn from best practices, experiences and lessons. I have published a book featuring *Politics of Religion in Times of Change* (2014). The article, *Radicalization Swinging Around Religion and Ideology*, seeks to classify one of the Arab and Muslim intellectuals as extremists; however, they fall into two categories: the group that does not consider scholars and institutions with capabilities in renewal and advancement, and that category still swings into secularism and globalization, and the other category that stands with political Islam (and the majority of these are former communists) once because Islam in the past and the present is oppressed by the conspiring West, and once again because they constitute a "resistance" to the

western colonizers and Israel, even if they return by virtue of the Iranians, the Turks, and the Americans, or playing around in their hands. The two groups really practice ideological radicalization.

Qualifications based on knowledge, insight and management are ongoing, but we are now entering the core of qualification process. Diligence is no longer sufficient. Rather, it is necessary to go through the process of renewal. Paul Ricoeur remarks that religious scriptures have vast interpretative possibilities, and through which we enter into three things: the general moral intentions of religion, the values of mercy, known within the Muslim world and with humanity, and insistence on combating the conversion of religion into a political ideology, in theory and practice.

Three priorities remain for all of us as politicians, scholars and intellectuals to combat extremism: restoring tranquility in religion, rescuing the experience of the citizenship statehood and associated renewal, and redressing the relationship with the world. ■



# RELIGIOUS LITERACY IN THE WEST: INTEGRATION TOOL OR A RADICALIZATION INSTIGATOR?

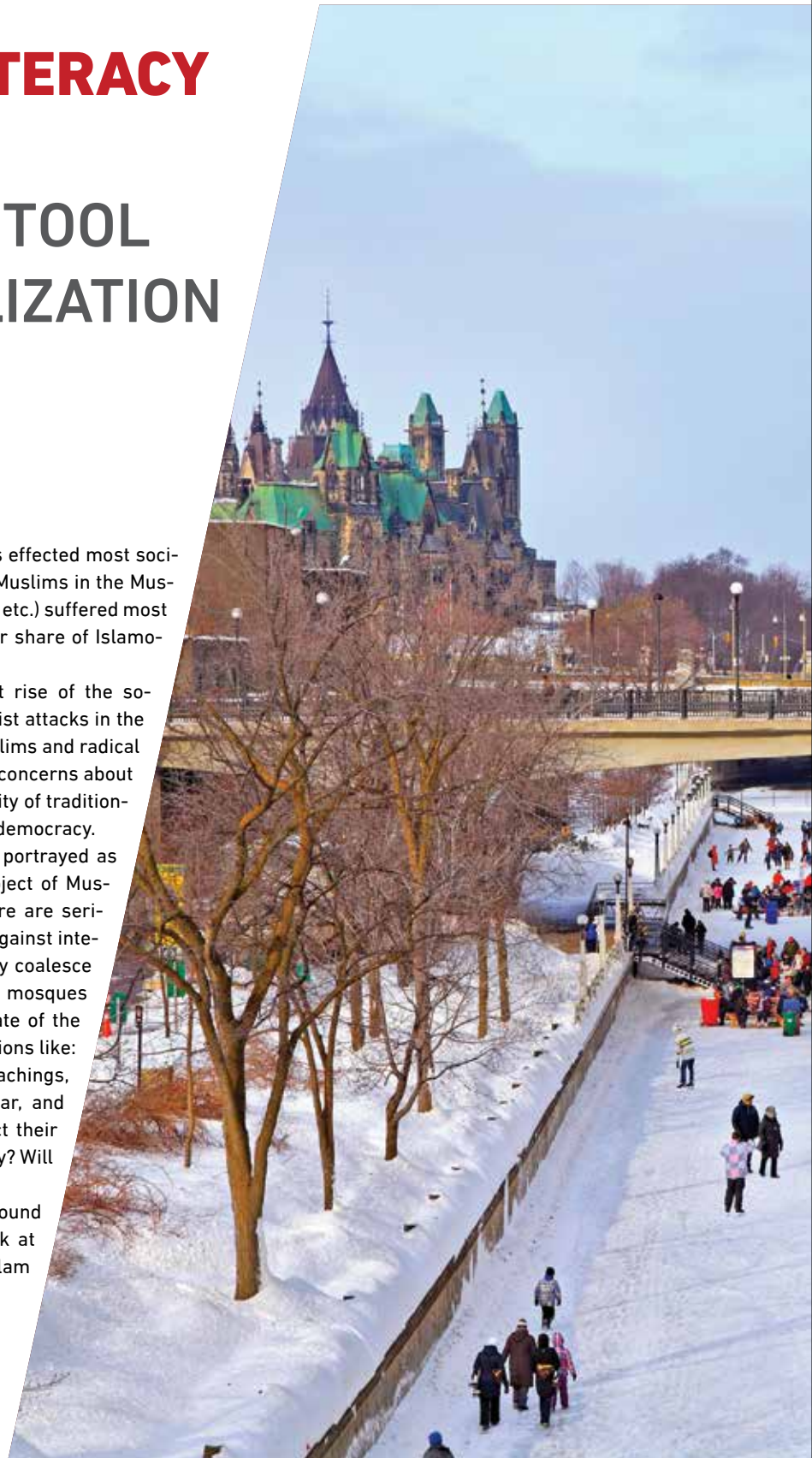
■ Hicham Tiflati, Ph.D

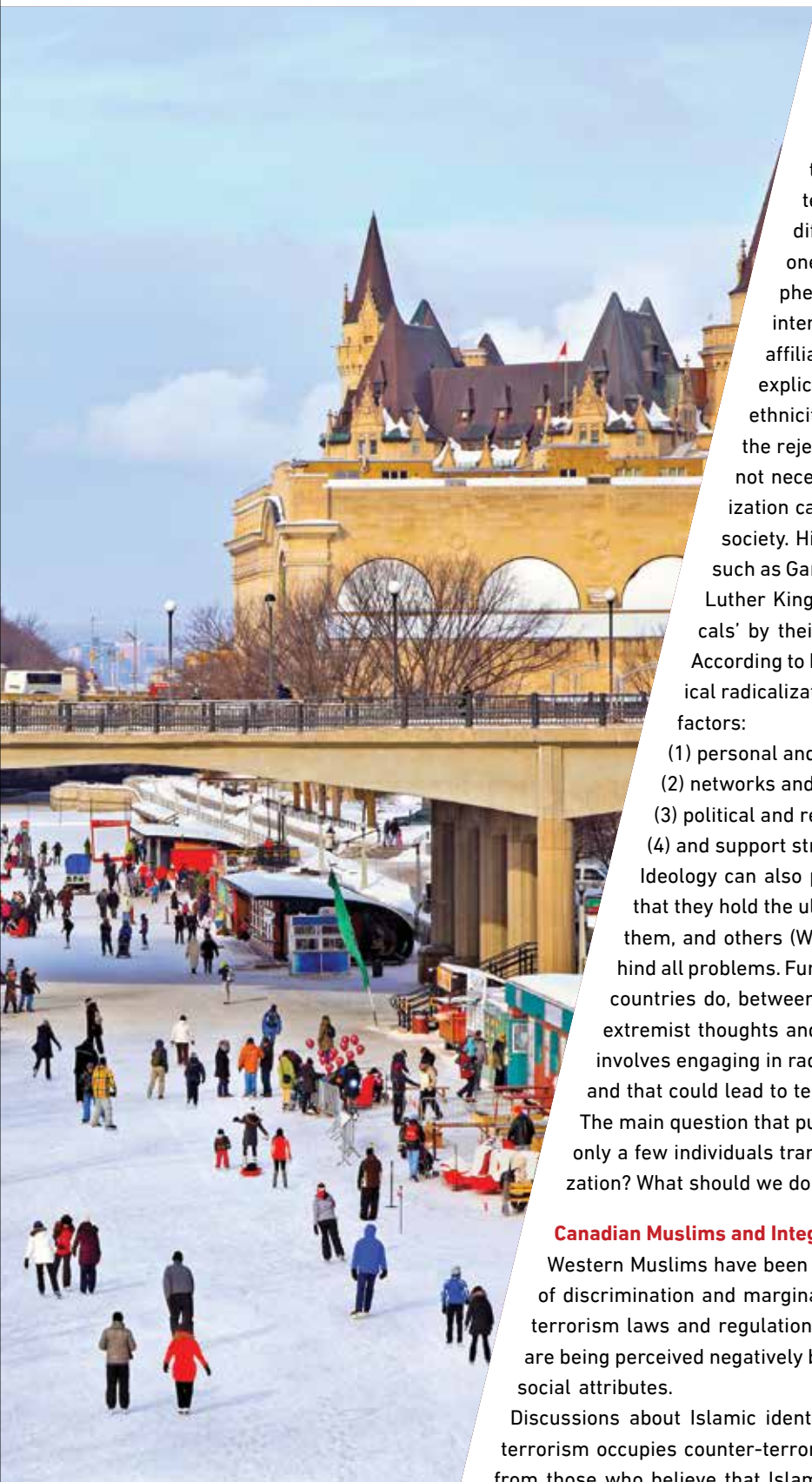
**Terrorism** is a global phenomenon that has effected most societies in the last few decades. Even though Muslims in the Muslim-majority world (Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, etc.) suffered most from terrorism, Western Muslims took their share of Islamophobia, stigmatization, and hostility.

Since September 11th attacks, the recent rise of the so-called Da'esh (ISIS), and the multiple terrorist attacks in the West, concerns have been raised about Muslims and radical Islamic terrorism. In fact, there are serious concerns about Muslims' integration and the (in) compatibility of traditional Islam with Western values and modern democracy. These issues reveal that Muslims are still portrayed as problematic by the West, and that the subject of Muslims' integration remains challenging. There are serious fears in the West that Islam preaches against integration and citizenry. These fears especially coalesce around the teachings of religion classes in mosques and Islamic schools and the internal climate of the Muslim community. Concerns include questions like: If Muslims are loyal to Islam's traditional teachings, will they develop anti-Western, anti-secular, and anti-democracy sentiments? Will this affect their integration and sense of belonging in society? Will it lead to radicalization?

In this article, I examine the ambiguities around radicalization, Islamic education, and I look at the status quo of Canadian Muslims and Islam in Canada.

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### Radicalization and Terrorism

There is no shortage of scholarship on the study of radicalization. Scholars often refer to the process of radicalization as a state of mind or a behaviour that precedes terrorism. Yet, radicalization, extremism, terrorism, fundamentalism, etc. often mean different things to different people. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to preventing these phenomena. Obscurities stem from political interests, cultural backgrounds, and religious affiliations of the beholder. Radicalization is not explicit to a specific religion, nation, ideology or ethnicity. In plain terms, radicalization is simply the rejection of the status quo in a given society. It's not necessarily a problematic thing. In fact, radicalization can be helpful to the positive advancement of society. History books give many examples of heroes such as Gandhi, Malcolm X, Nelson Mandela, and Martin Luther King Jr. who were considered dangerous 'radicals' by their contemporaries.

According to Hafez and Mullins (2015), religious and political radicalization can be instigated by four (push and pull) factors:

- (1) personal and collective grievances;
- (2) networks and interpersonal ties;
- (3) political and religious ideologies;
- (4) and support structures.

Ideology can also play a crucial role in convincing individuals that they hold the ultimate truth, that "the status quo" is against them, and others (West, Secularists, Zionists ...) are always behind all problems. Furthermore, we should differentiate, and most countries do, between "cognitive radicalization" that emphasizes extremist thoughts and ideas, and "behavioral radicalization" that involves engaging in radical activities, whether legal or clandestine, and that could lead to terrorism.

The main question that puzzles terrorism experts is "how and why do only a few individuals transition from cognitive to behavioral radicalization? What should we do to prevent such transition?"

### Canadian Muslims and Integration

Western Muslims have been increasingly marginalized by various forms of discrimination and marginalization, both in the media and by the new terrorism laws and regulations. Muslims, and those who resemble them, are being perceived negatively by virtue of assumed biological, cultural, and social attributes.

Discussions about Islamic identity, radicalization, and the role of Islam in terrorism occupies counter-terrorism research and practice. Positions differ from those who believe that Islam is the solution, those who consider it the



problem, and those who believe that it is only a vehicle through which radicalization occurs. However, civic religious literacy informs us that all religious communities are internally diverse and that each one contributes to the societies they live in, and are influenced by

them as well. For example, we know that Muslims in Canada comprise of Africans, North Africans, Asians, Middle Easterners, Europeans, among others, as well as converts. Their involvement as active citizens is being increasingly framed by positive civic engagement, collaboration with au-

thorities, and counter-radicalization measures. Likewise, these communities are gradually seen as important allies for addressing social problems such as violence, youth disengagement and radicalization. This said, Muslims' belongingness is not a stagnant process; it changes based on local, national (e.g. Islamophobia and terrorism), and global (e.g. the war on terror, ISIS, Trump's ban on Muslims) incidents.

In this sense, we know that Muslims are an integral part of Canada. Belongingness to one's nation is demonstrated via their civic participation and adoption of shared values by most citizens. It is associated with being accepted, acknowledged and appreciated in society. However, marginalization and racism weaken minorities' trust in their governments. Stigmatized and racialized members of society, who experience discrimination based on their race, color or religion, would doubt their status as full citizens.

Furthermore, integration is not exclusively the responsibility of minorities; and it should neither lead to the annihilation of their historically-inherited heritage nor to the negation of the majority's celebrated heritage. There should be a balance between minorities' rights and the majority's claim to 'ownership.'

Questions of Canadianness, as with any other form of national identity and pride, are influenced by the socio-political aspects of globalization and their impact at the national level. Unlike in some European countries (e.g. France and Belgium), where youth radicalization, unemployment, and riots have dominated debates on integration, "minority and cultural rights are legally recognized within the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) and the Canadian Multi-

cultural Act (1985)." This fact is very appreciated by cultural and religious minorities in Canada.

As there is a clear correlation between employment and integration, a common public education does not guarantee allegiance to the state or full sense of belongingness. Economic integration is a precondition for social cohesion. Stated otherwise, economic inclusion can promote positive integration and create a stability nest to prevent radicalization. For instance, those who held jobs matching their academic skills seem to be more integrated into their Western society. Contrariwise, those who are economically downgraded are more aggressive in voicing their feelings of discrimination within their society. Henceforth, this economic integration is by far best suited as an assurance against cultural, social and economic isolation.

### **The Way Out**

Civic religious literacy can prevent radicalization and encourage social cohesion. Civic religious literacy includes content-knowledge about specific religious groups, but it also includes a set of skills and framework to help us understand the diversity in a group across the world, how parts of society can influence an individual's belief and practice, and the predominant perspective in the religious group. This helps us understand how to see individuals in their specific contexts. For instance, some Islamic beliefs, if taken out of context, can provide justification for terrorism, institutionalizing Islamic education can also lead to contextualizing these beliefs to fit their modern framework. There is little evidence of a direct link between radical beliefs and radical actions. In a way, cognitive radicalization is to behavioral radicalization

as anger is to physical aggression. While some intense forms of religiosity might discourage citizenship, integration, and social cohesion, other forms might encourage and internalize these processes as a part of the individual's faith. Religiosity is not a rigid state of being but it evolves, increases, or decreases with time and circumstances. For instance, while many Muslims used to insist that it's not permissible for them to permanently settle in the West because it's a non-Islamic land, most Muslims in the West today have no problem adopting their Western identity and in embracing Western values.

### **What now?**

Most Muslims believe that religious education, despite containing aspects of radical thought, is effective in creating balanced identities and in avoiding violent radicalization. By advocating for religious pride, national pride, reaching out to other communities, and building a shared identity, religious literacy can help promote social integration and coexistence and in preventing radicalization.

A structured Islamic education, either in the West or in Muslim countries, can be effective in constructing balanced identities and in avoiding extremes in a Western society. A good example is Saudi Arabia's 'Soft' approach to terrorism and other initiatives. Extremes can be either passive isolated citizens or radical fanatics. An examination of the lived identities of Canadian Muslims reveals important complexities in the ways in which this population forms and negotiate their status as Muslims and Canadians. Most importantly, a closer look at the 'lived' or 'subjective' aspects of identity formation amongst Muslims defies conventional stereotypes. As such, commonly expressed fears

about the radicalization of Muslim youth or about 'illiberal' religious identities need to be re-examined in light of these complex forces and dynamics. Such a re-examination will reveal that the obstacles to citizenship and social integration are often exaggerated and rooted in unrealistic stereotypes rather than in the actual experiences and perspectives of Muslims.

Most preventive initiatives to radicalization have failed because they misdiagnosed the status quo. Most radicalized youth are not dysfunctional individuals who lost their way in society. In fact, many of them are intelligent and politically literate youth who are trying to fix (what they see as) the wrongs of society. And radicalism seems to offer a fast path to such reform. Our responsivity, as academics, practitioners, and educators, is to offer and provide alternatives that allow for cognitive radicalization and prevent our youth from embracing violent actions.

My final, and realistic, thought is that Western Muslims will remain marginalized and ostracized as long as the conflict with the Muslim world and the West is not resolved, and as long as sensitive issues (i.e. the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the neo-colonization of Muslim countries, Muslim radicalization and terrorism, etc.) persist. Although some global issues are beyond our reach, the team and I at the Centre for Civic Religious Literacy, contribute our work on civic religious literacy to address our local concerns. By promoting an understanding about all religious, spiritual, and non-religious people in Canada, we aim to work with all sectors of society to address the marginalization of Muslims in the Canadian media, laws, and discrimination in employment. ■

# THE RISE OF THE FAR-RIGHT IN EUROPE

## IMMINENT PERIL SNOWBALLING WITH NO MASKS

■ DR. KARIM IFRAK

**The far-right** is a political family shrouded in a relative mystery; this term encompasses many nationalist, fundamentalist, racist, and discriminatory, neo-Fascism, neo-Nazism currents and many other extremist ones. As the term is apparently cloaked in ambiguity, or so it really is, to the extent that it balloons into an insult, the far-right remains focal to the public debate, hence remains a more complex concept than it used to be. In short, it is a complex and varied image of a rapidly changing global phenomenon.

■ CNRS, Paris.



### **POWERFUL RETURN**

The far-right movements in Europe are not characteristically nascent. Rather, they emerged on the scene long before World War I, and remain focal to increased attention. More than seventy million people have been killed by World War II, fueled by Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. Although this duet, so to speak, was crushed militarily by the allies, and the affiliated and associated supporters were forced to remain silent, trudging into the shadows, this did not prevent them from seizing the opportunity to return victoriously to the public and political arena. This has been the case over two decades, as we witness their gradual return, with their voices sprouting up more every day, clearer than before, while increasing in quantity and quality.

This progress became clearer in 2001, which marks the infamous date of the notorious 11/9 Attacks launched by Al-Qaeda, rendering the United States of America agape in shock and lamentably shattered in sorrows, while bringing the world countries to an entire state of terror. However, if criticism of Islam condemned the far-right speeches, this attack which would impact international geopolitics, followed by a whole series of dramatic events, became central to neo-populist speech. On top of these are the following:

1. The financial crisis of 2008, which promoted social inequality.
2. A series of jihadist attacks that occurred across Europe over the past twenty years, accompanied by several waves of migration.
3. The crisis of political representation of elites, and the rejection they sustained for more than a decade.



### INCREASING POPULISM

Populism is the main center of the proliferation of the ideological roots of the far-right, whether its supporters are the protesters against the elites and those calling for democracy, or the advocates of national identity and anti-immigration. Regardless of such considerations, crises remain the raw material that allows them to anchor their existence to reality, whether these crises are economic or social or immigration-related, it is the golden opportunity to blame the government, foreigners or elites. Considering such logic, the goal becomes stating contradictory things, by manipulating feelings and raising the fear of the other.

As such, the rise and spread of the far-right now includes all European powers, be it the National Front in France, the Northern League in Italy, the Alternative Party in Germany (AFD), the Vox Party in Spain, or the Extreme Nationalist Party (JOBBIK)

in Hungary, everyone was surprised that they were making much progress. If the far-right parties that were established in Austria and Italy today are among the most successful for their participation in coalition governments, the same situation can be seen in Finland, Bulgaria, Sweden and Slovakia, in a coalition with a leftist party. As for France, the National Front is still progressing slowly in its presence in the second round of the presidential elections. The first was in 2002 and the second was in 2017. As in France, here is the UK Independence Party (UKIP) achieving high results in Britain by 12% in a few years before the end of 2004 by 16%. The Spanish party, Vox, which exceeded 10%, became the first far-right force able to send representatives to the Spanish Parliament, which had not happened since the end of Franco's dictatorship.

By steadily increasing its popularity with the electorate, these various

parties were able to secure their seats in Brussels; they have become a force credited with a heavy weight in the European Parliament itself that they heavily condemn, especially the German Party (AFD) and the UK (UKIP) that openly demand it to be dismantled, which is a paradox that does not seem to mean at the moment anything for European electorate. This increase in electoral results, if it does not help them out to seize power undisputed and unchallenged, it remains a very clear trend throughout Europe, as these formations weaken more and more the existing governments in Germany, shake the regional powers in Spain, and become the main opposition force in Austria and sometimes even attracting it into entering into government alliances. The far-right in Europe currently includes various aspects, as it is sovereign and populist, and doubtful about and suspicious of Europe as united and is rather hostile to it; is some-



times glaringly racist, anti-Semitic, hates Islam and is xenophobia. It is many-sided and multifaceted, and if it is not represented by an international fascist organization, it has glaringly common features, such as the citizens' preference project, the rejection of immigration and multiculturalism. If 2001 marks its resurrection, the main impetus for it was the so-called "Arab Spring".

### THE FAR-RIGHT

The proliferation of conflicts in the world coupled with the arrival of thousands of immigrants to different European countries has had the effect of fanning the flames of the anti-immigration sentiments fuelled and spearheaded by far-right groups. Malta, which until recently did not have any far-right movement, witnessed the establishment of the Maltese National Movement in 2016. In Cyprus, the stardom of the National Popular Front (ELAM), whose movement is inspired by the highly violent Greek movement called (Golden Dawn) and which harbors mutual security concerns, has risen. This

includes closing borders, controlling foreigners as well as identity-based introversion and the like.

Likewise, in the case of far-right parties, as in Hungary, it is difficult to distinguish between the right and the far-right there. These conservative parties also came to power in Belgium and Poland, as these governments shared anti-European sentiments at best time of the most troubled situations of Europe as united. The new Flemish Alliance (NVA) that successfully defeated the Vlaams Belang Party in the Belgian Parliament joined the group of European Conservatives and Reformists (CRE), which is a new formation that Karl de Gott denounced.

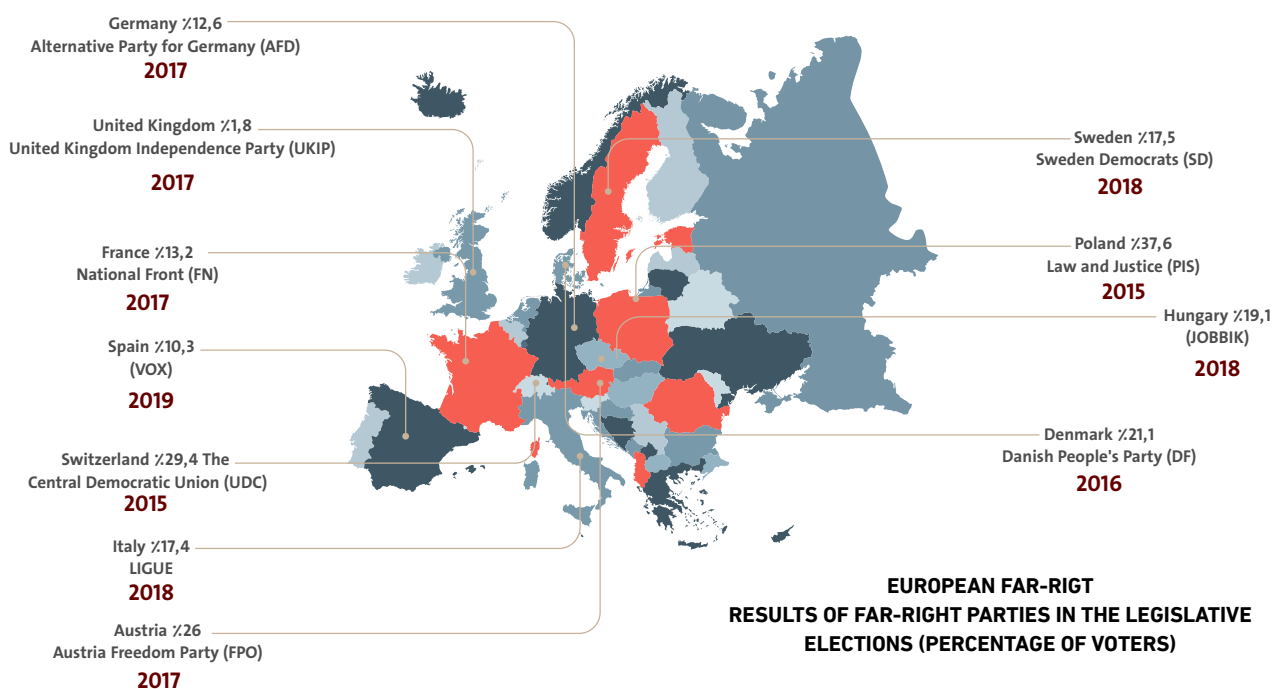
In light of these facts, it appears clearly that the far-right in Europe still has a promising future, as it took advantage of the raging social, political and economic crises in Europe, in addition to the catastrophic events taking place in the immediate vicinity, as well as the increased rate of non-participation in the elections to ensure further progress. However,

it seems it is far-fetched for it to be united, given the internal ideological differences of these parties, the lack of political experience, their fragility, their poor financial capabilities, and the weight of history.

### EXTENSIVE READING

For further information on the topic, a list of extensive reading materials is given below:

- Anaïs Voy-Gillis (2020) The European Union Faces the Nationalism Test, Rocher: Paris.
- Jérôme Jamin (2016). The Far Right in Europe, Bruylant: Brussels.
- Nicholas Gillette (2016). Attempts to Provoke the Far-Right in Europe, University of Brussels.
- Jean-Yves Camus et Nicolas Lebourg (2015). The Far Right in Europe, Le Seuil: Paris.
- Pierre Milza (2002). Europe in a Black Shirt, the Far-Right in Europe from 1945 to the Present Day, Fayard: Paris.■





# INITIATIVE TO PROTECT LEARNERS FROM EXTREMISM

## ■ Editorial Team

**IMCTC**, in concert with educational institutions, has developed a set of strategic objectives to achieve. On top of these strategic objectives is to address the terrorist narratives and ideologies that distort the pure belief of Islam and to highlight the principles and values of Islam calling for moderation, tolerance and coexistence. Equally important, this also includes improving the level of detecting, reducing and preventing from terrorist financing and creating a joint media speech to refute the media propaganda of violent extremist groups, while raising public awareness. Ensuring that the member states stand together on countering terrorism, while strengthening Islamic and humanitarian solidarity across IMCTC is a common strategic objective.

IMCTC launched one of the most important community-based initiatives, driven by the partnership between IMCTC and educational institutions: the initiative of “protecting learners from violent extremism”, aimed at facing the glaringly evident challenges facing societies and to take ideological precautionary actions to protect youth and adults from falling into the clutches of extremism and slipping into terrorist organizations.

### **PRACTICAL OBJECTIVES**

The said initiative is one of the IMCTC initiatives to counter terrorist ideology, and to prevent it from infiltrating into the segments of learners, in partnership with educational institutions to protect youth and adults, while also protect them from being lured into violent and terrorist groups, and spread the values of tolerance, moderation, and coexistence, rejecting hate, extremism and violence. The objectives of the

said initiative are diverse and fall into five main domains:

1. Preventive Objective: It seeks to protect learners from being influenced by extremist ideology and polarization.
2. Educational Objective: It seeks to promote awareness of educational and psychological factors related to extremism and terrorism.
3. Educational Objective; It seeks to enhance the ability of teachers and educational counselors of various dis-

ciplines to spread positive values, and reject violence and extremism among the emerging generations.

4. Skill Objective: It highlights participation with educational institutions in building active educational programs to combat extremism and terrorism.

5. Remedial Objective: It explains how to cooperate with specialists in educational institutions to identify the likelihood of extremism among students, and the best methods to address such practices.

### KEY PRINCIPLES

To achieve the above-mentioned objectives with the highest possible efficiency, the said initiative proposes four principles that should be taken into account when developing and implementing guidelines and training portfolios:

- **Respect for Locality and Sovereignty**

The said initiative takes into account the bedrock principles of IMCTC, including respect for the sovereignty of member countries, their respective laws, taking into account the local culture of countering terrorism across the IMCTC member states, by developing local and regional solutions.

- **Humanization**

Addressing the phenomenon of extremism as a general human phenomenon, and not as a particular religious phenomenon.

- **Objectivity of Remedial Action and Treatment**

Addressing the phenomenon of extremism through theories that are scholarly- and knowledge-based, and not using counter-extremism means to spread extremism among other sects or groups.

- **Spreading Culture of Building**

Spreading the building of a moderation culture in parallel with the interest in the culture of resisting extremism and violence, i.e. the culture of building and not the culture of resisting destruction and employing religion in its constructive context.

The said initiative seeks to protect learners from falling into violent extremism by enhancing immunity and prevention across four important domains: educational environment, the relationship between school and family, educational content, the relationship between the learner and traditional and modern means of communication, comprehensively including the whole gamut of education key factors.

### IN PROGRESS

Some of the deliverables yet to be accomplished include specialized guides to prevent learners from extremism in educational institutions, including for

example, the Guidance Counseling for Educational Leaders, the Guidance for Teachers and Content Makers, and the Guidance for Student Counselors and Activity Facilitators. Such potential publications serve as key references that provide policymakers, decision-makers and higher educational leaders in the IMCTC member countries with the most up-to-date information relating to prevention of extremist ideology.

Principally, this can include the explanation of the concepts relating to violent extremism, terrorism, ideological extremism, religious extremism, hate crimes, fundamentalism, radicalism, the groups most vulnerable to slip into violent extremism, age groups, and the influence of social incubators and demographic factors) in addition to the most important modern theories explaining violent extremism and terrorism, activity of extremist groups in recruitment and polarization, and relevant international experiences.

On top of the agenda of the said initiative is enhancing educational content and curricular and extra-curricular activities that help refute the theses upon which violent extremist ideology is based, and the production of training portfolios for training of trainers (TOT) on the effective methods for building training programs in the required fields.

The training portfolios include preventive programs to counter violent extremism, enhancing educational content with messages of counternarrative against violent extremist speech, and cyber terrorism, which allows the use of state-of-the-art communication technologies. The creation of an active, specialized online portal including training materials and tools of enrichment content in various languages is one of the most important priorities of the said initiative.

### IMPORTANCE OF INITIATIVE

The importance of the said initiative is represented in promoting the strategic objectives of IMCTC; the foregoing initiative is a real and true translation of the strategic objectives of IMCTC, especially in the field of countering terrorism ideologically.

Equally important, this also includes the paramount importance of the initiative that targets a wide and influential group in the communities of the IMCTC member countries, which is the category of employees of educational institutions at the public and private levels, while also achieving strategic cooperation between the IMCTC member countries through a true partnership between the IMCTC and educational institutions. ■

## THE SEVENTH IMCTC SYMPOSIUM ADDRESSES TERRORISM DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC



**IMCTC** held virtually its seventh monthly symposium on Monday 20/07/2020, featuring “The State of Terrorism in Times of Crises and Calamities: The Case of COVID-19” in close cooperation with the Saudi Data and Artificial Intelligence Authority (SDAIA), in which a number of experts from Jordan, Malaysia and Egypt participated. The said symposium was moderated by Dr. Fayez bin Abdullah Al-Shehri, Member of the Saudi Shura Council. Abdel-Fattah Suleiman, Senior Advisor from the Arab Republic of Egypt, addressed the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the activities of terrorist groups and the main military counterterrorism operations in the Middle East and Africa, revisiting such impact in terms of international cooperation and assistance, remarking that: “Terrorist acts in densely populated places had decreased after COVID-19 pandemic broke out; yet, the trajectory of such terrorist acts did not behave the same way in remote and borderline areas”, noting that spending on fighting COVID-19 pandemic has not affected spending on fighting terrorism.

Maj. Gen. Dr. Talal bin Melhem from the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan addressed the self-sufficiency of states and the international disagreements over how and why COVID-19 pandemic has spread like wildfire, and the impact on counterterrorism. Maj. Gen. Melhem also reviewed the circumstances that revived the terrorist organizations, and how they were dealt with according to a strategic vision, after terrorism became transnational and intercontinental. Maj. Gen. Melhem remarked that

“the security and defense strategies across the countries of the world will not experience a recession in addressing terrorism of all manifestations, no matter how many crises these countries face. This approach has become unchangeable, requiring continued confrontation against the threat to international security and stability, which has been glaringly impacting the international interests. In respect of the international disputes and disagreements arising from the *raison d’être* of COVID-19 and associated impact on counterterrorism, the United States of America has openly accused China of not disclosing this pandemic as early as possible; with China refraining from disclosing the onset of COVID-19, it did spread rapidly and widely, causing negative impact on health, economy, society, education and security. Therefore, COVID-19 imposed some precautionary policies and procedures on the whole world; this does not mean stepping back from countering terrorism: they are only temporary actions, especially since international alliances have successfully destroyed the infrastructure of most terrorist organizations. Remarkably, the Global Coalition Against ISIS withdrew its forces from Iraq, and suspended training programs for the Iraqi security forces, giving the organization an opportunity to restructure itself. Terrorist groups exploited COVID-19 pandemic to reinforce their extremist speech, and redeployed their cells in new regions, especially in the Horn of Africa (Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia) and ISIS carried out limited military operations in some regions of the Horn of



Africa this year to revive its activities while the world is already preoccupied with fighting COVID-19 pandemic. Maj. Gen. Talal also pointed out that given COVID-19 pandemic, terrorist organizations have felt more enticed to invest in the digital revolution, direct their supporters to train in the implementation of electronic attacks, produce or use highly encrypted media applications and software and communicate their instructions to carry out terrorist operations fully cloaked in secrecy. This makes it imperative for all countries to prepare national strategies to address all forms of crises, while making their counterterrorism strategies at the forefront of their priorities.

In the same vein, Maj. Gen. Talal called on IMCTC Member Countries to include in their national counterterrorism strategies a special emphasis on counterterrorism in emergency circumstances, crises and natural disasters, along with statutory provisions and legislations that double the penalties for terrorist crimes. This also includes holding training courses for security and counterterrorism teams.

Dr. Sunni Thul-Huda, counterterrorism expert and Professor at the International Islamic University in Malaysia, discussed a set of counterterrorism strategies in light of the repercussions of COVID-19 pandemic, the associated financial depletion and the impact on health risks (14 million cases and 597,583 deaths in 214 countries and territories since December, according to WHO statistics), economic risks (complete closure of institutions and businesses) and social risks (changing work, education and shopping patterns). Dr. Sunni also remarked that the terrorists would build their "business model" on exploiting imbalances and vulnerabilities, and there is no doubt that COVID-19 pandemic has created various weaknesses and challenges that would require strategic solutions, including leadership, governance, cooperation and trust. Leadership is hindered by the people being helpless when it comes to crisis management; leaders do need a correct

view of how events behave and how potential political conflicts need to be well balanced. Key systems and infrastructures are at risk during a pandemic, which all require robust and meticulous governance. Simply put, facing such a pandemic requires the cooperation of a number of ministries and institutions to work in concert while setting the tone. The lack of resources makes people slip into fierce competitions; this means the existing resources need to be wisely reconstituted to better address both terrorism and pandemics under a successful management of security and public health.

Again, Dr. Sunny remarked that terrorists are well aware of how to take full advantage of cyber risks; COVID-19 pandemic has created an information-hungry community that works from home, using applications and software programs not subject to protection and security support. People tend to collect information about the rampant pandemic, e-shopping, e-conferencing and e-learning on a large scale without following strict security and privacy measures or policies. As such, they open up Pandora's Box for terrorists to sneak into such worlds. Against a backdrop of existing and potential threats, it was necessary to rethink the concept of the critical national infrastructure to better accommodate such dire threats and cyberterrorism during COVID-19 pandemic coupled with all manifestations of terrorism. Dr. Sunny provided key features of counterterrorism when epidemics spread, including but not limited to checking and addressing all security vulnerabilities and the fatigue caused to people, the employment of big data and the information technology system, along with risk assessment in light of the interactions between terrorism risks and public health risks.

The symposium was concluded by Maj. Gen. Abdullah bin Saleh Al-Zughaibi, IMCTC Deputy Secretary-General, stressing that IMCTC symposia enrich counterterrorism policies and bring together those who have successful experiences and practices. ■

# VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM CONVERGE AND DIVERGE

**Ashour Ibrahim Aljuhani**

**The current** issue of At-Tahalof magazine features extremism across all manifestations and contexts – religious, ideological and cultural – with the aim of examining the strength of this complex phenomenon in its transformations. Simply put, not each and every manifestation of extremism begets violence or terrorism. It stands to reason that some attitudes that go to extremes may be considered manifestations of extremism. But, on the other hand, there is no manifestation of terrorism that does not stem from religious, ideological, ethnic or national extremism.

Extremism and terrorism denote different meanings reflecting different environments, societies and groups. By the same token, extremists or terrorists do not follow a single approach; therefore, counter-extremism and counter-terrorism policies should not follow a one-size-fits-all prescribed approach.

Although terrorist acts are not merely a product of extremism, understanding the relationship between them is key to successfully countering violent extremism and preventing extremists from committing acts of violence. Terrorism may be triggered by mere ideologies, which seem coherent and palatable for someone unable to examine, criticize and deconstruct; however, ideologies, whether rushed or established, are not the only catalyst that makes an individual fall into the clutches of terrorism. The issue is more complicated than the linear course that most researchers and experts envisage for analyzing the relationship between the two terms of extremism and terrorism, as this path is governed by four factors: personal and collective grievances, whether real or delusional, networks and interpersonal relationships, political and religious convictions and incubating environments.

We are not here tackling a question related to terminology and concepts.; rather, we are addressing an issue closely related to feasible methods to implement a clear-cut, sustainable and efficient action plan to prevent and combat violent extremism, which requires dividing the efforts into three separate yet related categories: preventing, combating and rehabilitating or integrating. They are similar to three-step public health models that include preventing exposure, looking for signs of infection and addressing disease when cropping up.

Dear reader,

We hope this issue will live up to your expectations, making the featured articles an added value to you, while catering for any seminal ideas to be fully understood by mindful thinkers, who take them to a higher stage. We are always gearing up to hone your creative ideas to perfection! ■

# AtTAHALOF

IMCTC Quarterly Magazine

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