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## Sources of Terrorism & Rational Counters

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## TRENDS CVE Panel # 2

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## INTRODUCTION

The conceptual quest to identify and counter the factors that generate violent extremism – or terrorism – is at least a century-old. It has evolved through a period of anarchist terrorism in the late 1800s and early 1900s, a phase of state-sponsored extremism in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, an upturn in anti-colonial separatist terrorism and the spread Marxist-inspired violent extremism in the post-World War II era, and onto the dominant concerns over religiously-motivated extremism and violence at the turn of the century.

The latest, religiously-motivated wave of extremist violence throughout the world has generated an enormous amount of new research and writing on the topic of countering extremism and terrorism. Too often this research has narrowly identified salient features of the particular local conditions facing contemporary religious extremist groups that turn to violence and terror – inaccurately assessing this latest wave of terrorism as a new psychological or organizational phenomenon. [Crenshaw, 2006] A smaller but significant cluster of research has taken a broader time-phase approach, conducting comparative analysis of a number of historical cases in order to understand the shared commonalities among groups and individuals

who have chosen extreme violence and terror as their preferred method for the pursuit of political, economic or religious aims.

Among those in this category are a group of scholars known as rational choice theorists. Rational choice scholars seek to understand how a choice to extreme violence and destruction can be a logical one in a world where copious opportunities for constructive activities such as education, barter, trade and self-improvement seem far more appealing. Rational choice research into terrorism moves beyond the assumption that the terrorist choice to extreme violence represents some kind of psychopathy or insanity. Rational choice theorists study terrorism with an understanding that terrorist acts usually emanate from a rational, calculated and conscious decision. Using tools applied from economics, applied mathematics, game theory and the construct of bounded rationality, rational choice scholars help policymakers understand that although abominable, terrorist acts do often represent the most practical and inexpensive means for disempowered groups to force political or social change on far more powerful institutions and regimes. [Sandler & Enders, 2004]

In this paper I will cull major insights from rational choice scholars about the nature and counters to terrorists describing the value of their insights in three cases of 'successful' violent extremist groups where religion was not a primary terrorist inspiration and that occurred outside of the Muslim world: in Spain, in Ireland and in Sri Lanka. I will then use these insights to help characterize and understand the purported 'success' of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), or Da'esh, as well as to advance some of the enduring factors that can best counter it.

### **FRAMING TERRORISM, VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND 'SUCCESS'**

Terrorism has a longstanding pedigree and a debated, but relatively accepted, definition. Terrorism is: ***The use of violence to obtain political or social objectives through intimidation of a large audience beyond that of the immediate victims.*** [Sandler & Enders, 2004] Terrorism requires individual and a group dedication to expansive violence and rejection of the notion that alternative forms of conflict resolution are acceptable. Terrorism requires perpetrator rejection of the notion that there are illegitimate targets – no innocent bystanders

and no noncombatants in the struggle – in the perpetration of violence to secure the objectives.

Violent extremism is a term that has evolved over the past decade in western states and particularly the United States. Governments there have wrestled in public with the distinction between those choosing to prioritize extreme violence in pursuit of their aims due to the influence of international terrorist groups and ideals or due to mainly domestic grievances. Particularly in the United States, new combinations of federal, local and international police and intelligence agencies led to development of a somewhat broader category of analysis and legal authorities – beyond that of countering terrorists to one defined as countering violent extremism (CVE). [US GAO-13-7, 2012]

The United States Department of Homeland Security defines violent extremists as, “...individuals who support or commit ideologically-motivated violence to further political goals.” [US DHS, 2014] It has also gone to the point of defining a homegrown violent extremist (HVE) as different from a domestic terrorist because the HVE is not inspired by, and does not take direction from, a foreign terrorist group or other foreign power. Thus in the United States a HVE is,

A person of any citizenship who has lived or operated primarily in the United States or its territories who advocates, is engaged in, or is preparing to engage in ideologically-motivated terrorist activities (including providing material support to terrorism) in furtherance of political or social objectives promoted by a terrorist organization, but who is acting independently of direction by a terrorist organization.

This distinction is noteworthy, but without great significance for the discussion at hand. Whether called terrorists or violent extremist groups, the main factors underpinning the success among these groups –irrespective of religious, ethnic or political motivations – are relatively similar.

But what is ‘successful’ terrorism? Historical study of terrorist groups reveals that they only infrequently attain their ultimate aims. A vast majority fail to achieve the stated group objectives. [Abrahms, 2006] The few that have succeeded in attaining ultimate aims were frequently supported by external states. [Lutz & Lutz, 2009] Some terrorist groups have been

able to use terrorism to achieve at least some of their aims against target governments. The key to terrorist group prospects for attainment of interim aims is highly correlated with longevity. The longer a terrorist organization survives, the more likely it is to attain a portion of its overarching aims. It is unclear what the precise causal mechanism is in this process. In some sense, the alteration of extremist aims or “settling” for a lesser outcome can be considered a win for the target state as much as a win for the terrorist group. To be successful in attainment of even interim aims, terrorism requires an “image of success.” [Crenshaw, 2003] In turn, that image is most impacted by the length of time a terrorist group survives and the number of its violent activities that rise to the top of public consciousness without generating complete revulsion. Thus, it is the *durability* the terrorist group and the relative intensity of its violence, its *perniciousness*, that establish ‘success.’ Consequently, these two measures inform this paper’s understanding of a successful terrorist group.

## **BACKGROUND CONDITIONS FOR TERRORISM AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM**

Since at least 2001, there has been a growing perception that most terrorism around the world is generated by religious extremists, especially Muslim extremists. The perception is not true. Data published by Europol for terrorist activity in Europe during 2007-2010 demonstrated that 99.6% of terrorist events were perpetrated by non-Muslim extremists, with left-wing extremists and ethnic separatists accounting for over 91% of terrorist acts. [TE-SAT, 2011] Similarly, US FBI records from 1980-2005 revealed that only 6% of terrorist activity in the United States originated from Islamic extremists, with far more acts of terror emanating from left-wing extremists and from ethnic Latino outfits. [Terrorism, 2002-2005; 2006] These patterns are similar for the rest of the world.

Consequently, the rational choice study of terrorism rightfully considers a wider set of groups and outfits than those most associated with violent Islam. Among the examples of non-religious, *durable* and *pernicious* (e.g.: successful) extremist groups of the past half-century, three stand out as strong cases for analysis of terrorism patterns for rational choice assessment: the Basque separatists in Spain, the Republican Army in the United Kingdom, the

Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka. After a brief history of these terrorist groups, this paper will use them to demonstrate the most critical factors for terrorism and violent extremism.

In Spain, the Basque terrorist organization arose from the ethnic isolation and



persecution of Basque culture and language in the forty year reign of Francisco Franco. The sense of alienation and isolation sparked a terrorist group, the ETA, conceived by Basque university students organized in backroom hostels along the Spanish-French border in the 1950s. The ETA narrative anchored on the notion that only

violence against the government and unenlightened fellow Spanish citizens could end Basque persecution and inspire autonomy and acceptance – either from independence or total cultural recognition from Madrid. ETA violence has killed over 1,000 people, been responsible for hundreds of kidnappings and led to the incarceration of 700 ETA members in the past 50 years.

The Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) arose in December 1969 as a violent extremist splinter of the Northern Ireland Catholic civil rights campaign – a campaign that turned violent with in-street rioting between Catholics and Protestants and the subsequent introduction of the British Army and de facto martial law. Organized in Catholic organization backrooms and trained along the intra-Ireland border, PIRA violence evolved on a narrative of historic oppression by London and despair of no Northern Irish representative institutions to safeguard Irish Catholic values and traditions. PIRA leaders



embarked on a “Long War” program of terrorist bombings, assassinations and sectarian across Lynch – TRENDS Research and Analyses CVE Paper December 17, 2014

Northern Ireland and the British mainland in order to force British troops to depart and to create an independent Northern Ireland fully respecting and protecting Catholic Irish culture and values. Over 30 years of activity, the PIRA – along with its parallel political-paramilitary organization the IRA – killed over 1,700 people wounding thousands more.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) or Tamil Tigers emerged in 1975 as an armed, violence-focused organization from a number of smaller groups fighting for Tamil ethnic minority rights in Sinhalese-dominated Sri Lanka. Combining conventional insurgent tactics



with a new and intense form of terrorist violence, the Tigers grew from a narrative of despair in the minority Tamil ethnic community – a community that had seen its culture, language and way of life systematically diminished and repressed by a Sinhalese ethnic majority over a thirty year period beginning in 1948, the year after Sri Lanka’s independence from Great Britain. Organized in ethnic Tamil homelands of northern Sri Lanka and in the nearby Indian province of Tamil Nadu, the Tigers arose from a shared perspective that only violence could shake the foundations of a closed-culture Sinhalese government into

granting Tamil Eelam its independence. Honed into an industrial-scale terrorist organization by its ego-maniacal leader, Vellupiali Prabhakaran, the Tamil Tigers pioneered the tactics of mass suicide bombings, female terrorist cohorts and a successful assassination of an international political leader – Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi of India. Over a 35-year struggle, all forms of

Tamil Tigers violence killed an estimated 80,000 Sri Lankans and wounded hundreds of thousands of others.

Rational choice analysts acknowledge the many elements necessary to generate a durable and pernicious terrorist group. However, the critical background conditions for a successful terrorism enterprise are three – and are clearly present in the three non-religious terrorist groups just defined.

First, there must be an overarching narrative in favor of grand and indiscriminate violence as *the necessary* tool for affecting political or cultural change. This narrative can be religiously-based, but it is just as likely to have roots in ethnic, political or economic frames of reference. Irrespective of root source, the narratives that underpin terrorism are those that combine powerful understandings of sub-group alienation from its current environment, intense and seemingly intractable grievances with the status quo, and a theory of transformation to a vastly improved condition that requires dramatic violent action. The narrative most often stems from an environment of hopelessness and feeling of lack of inclusion – political inclusion, cultural inclusion, ethnic inclusion, economic inclusion or religious inclusion. As seen in Spain, Ireland and Sri Lanka, this narrative can evolve from a variety of locations including pubs and bar rooms, isolated work camps, university campuses, churches or mosques.

Second, there must be a narrative transmission mechanism and fighter recruiting, transit and training capability. Sympathetic nearby countries are important elements in these support structures. So too is a supportive diaspora. Spanish ETA leaders benefited from French antipathy toward Francisco Franco's Spain. For decades, ETA leaders organized in southern French cities like Navarro and found safe haven in the mountainous border region. ETA access to French rail and airline hubs also facilitated message promulgation and recruiting with wider diaspora audiences. PIRA leaders and cadre transited the Republic of Ireland, capitalizing on sympathies there. PIRA also used the inter-Irish border for transportation of weapons and material as well as for training safe-haven. PIRA organizers successfully used Irish shipping and airline hubs as fighter and equipment conduits. The LTTE exploited ethnic Tamil

sympathies in the nearby Indian province of Tamil Nadu reportedly to the point of attaining provincial police tactical training and armament support in the early 1980s. The Tamil Nadu port of Chennai and its regional airports also were critical points as a LTTE narrative conduit and for the transit of munitions and manpower to support Tamil Tiger operations.

Finally, there must be a multi-faceted group financing mechanism. Durable and pernicious terrorist outfits benefit from local resource predation or kidnapping and extortion for a period, but not over the long haul. Longstanding terrorist operations rely upon a broader range of licit and illicit funding mechanisms. They must attract outside contributions through cash couriers, direct charitable contributions or the skimming of a portion of such contributions, establishment of front companies and businesses capable of money laundering, or exploitation of “off grid” banking and currency exchange arrangements like hawala-transferred funds. As with fighter and narrative networks, an accessible and engaged diaspora is critical for tenable terrorist groups. Spanish ETA longevity has been sustained by funding from extortion, kidnappings, and the operation of front companies across Spain and in southern France. PIRA (and the IRA) were robustly funded by an expansive and engaged Irish émigré diaspora from affluent sympathizers in North America, Western Europe and Australasia. LTTE developed a complex international financial network including laundered money from stocks, real estate markets, restaurants and grocery stores in global grocery stores. It skimmed money from human trafficking to the United Kingdom and parts of Western Europe. It taxed and siphoned money from NGO and aid organization entities. LTTE also attracted worldwide investment from a highly sympathetic and active Tamil diaspora. As seen in al Qaeda as well, each of these durable terrorist organizations generated a regional-to-international financing framework that could withstand periods of intense local pressure on licit and illicit local funding sources.

## **INDIVIDUAL MOTIVATIONS TO TERRORISM**

Behaviorists, psychologists and economists study human nature and contributed to the rational choice understanding of an individual’s choice to participate in terrorism. All agree that a higher-order human need is that for belonging and kinship. Behaviorists refer to this as an affiliative instinct. Economists observe that the affiliative instinct is one that can be

manipulated into a process known as “fictive kinship.” [Hersheifer, 1998] In fictive kinship, a nominally believable but often false premise for generating an “in group” to stand against an “out group” takes hold. Most often the process of fictive kinship generates benign or neutral results. But malign outcomes are possible and rational choice scholars tell us that groups prone toward terrorism emanate in precisely such a manner.

Extremist and terrorist precursor group leaders supply an appealing understanding of commonality based upon wants, desires, language, skin color, socio-economic status or a vision of the hereafter (supernaturalism). Group members are consumers of an emotional “good” in short supply in their daily condition – the want, desire and need to overcome political or social alienation, to have an outlet for insatiable material, intellectual and spiritual wants, to be given a crucible into which they might vest irrepressible hopes. They demand hope with a visionary narrative for attainment of enfranchisement in this life and the next.

Extremist and terrorist group leaders commonly generate (or exploit) their group dynamic by increasing isolation and alienation from their host society and polity. Sometimes with state support but more often with benefit of a blind-eye from the host state, these groups become separated from and in perpetual tension with the society. These groups act and behave in a club-like manner, providing mutual aid and a sense of belonging among group members, but simultaneously building norms and expectations of unquestioning member loyalty, deep and lasting commitment to anything asked by the group, and a norm toward self-sacrifice that can easily transcend the boundary between peaceful self-sacrifice to extreme violence and even self-destruction on behalf of the group ideology. [Iannaccone & Berman, 2006; Berman, 2009]

Extremist groups resort to violent methods when there is strong belief by membership that there is no divisibility between near-term goals and the ultimate group aim. Violent extremist groups conclude that moderate tactics will only produce outcomes well short of the ultimate policy goals and choose more violent methods, including suicide terrorism, in a belief that aims can only be achieved by a shock to the system. In this dynamic, groups view the costs

of failure from spectacular violence to be less no worse than the costs of the status quo or of a more moderate tactic. [Wintrobe, 2006]

Thus individual alienation is associated with a choice to extremism and violence. This alienation can be ethnic, political, social, economic or religious.

Importantly, several rational choice studies demonstrate that poverty and low levels of education ARE NOT positively correlated with an individual choice of extremism and terrorism. [Kreuger & Maleckova, 2003; Fair et. al., 2013] Statistical analysis reveals that poverty has no strong association with an individual's choice to terrorism – positively or negatively. Education levels display a unique relationship with terrorism. Lower levels are not correlated with a greater choice for terrorism. But higher levels of education combined with an absence of positive (or enhanced) economic and/or political opportunities from that education IS positively correlated with an individual's choice to become a leader in a terrorist organization. In a curious sort of way therefore, the choice for terrorism by an extremist leader often can be seen as a choice to an alternative form of political engagement, for just as higher education levels are positively correlated with political participation in liberal western democracies, higher education levels are positively correlated with extremist leaders in illiberal democracies and authoritarian states.

### **LOCAL CONDITIONS & DURABLE, PERNICIOUS TERRORISM**

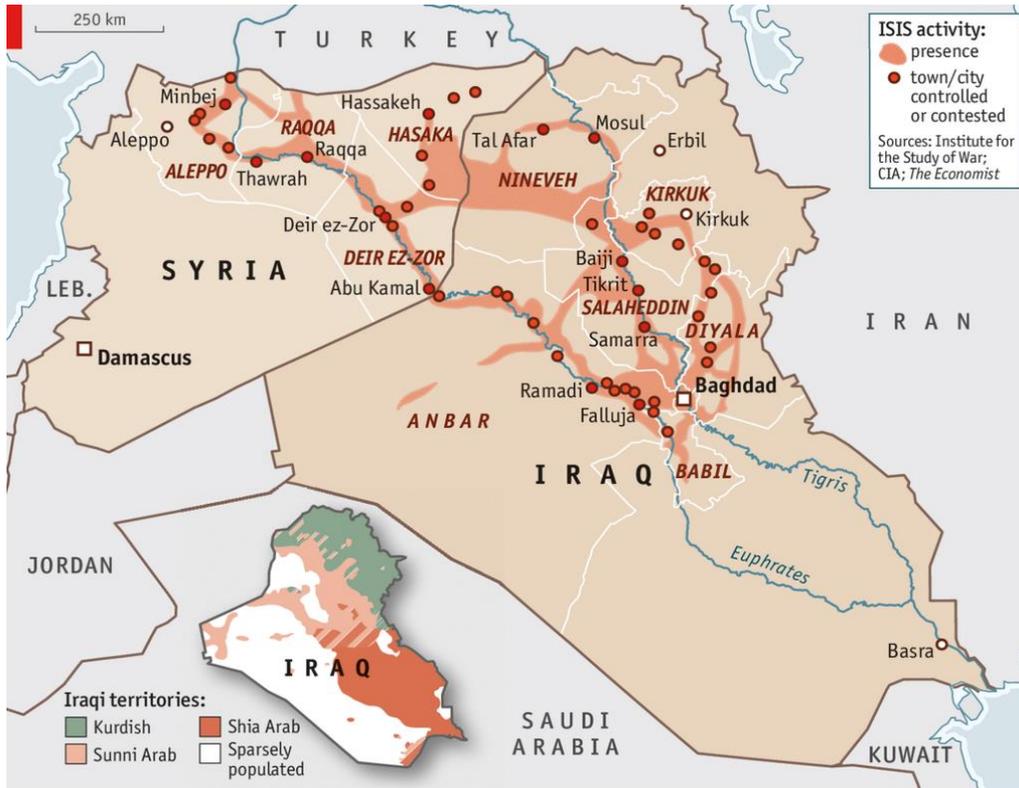
A historically leavened understanding of durable and pernicious terrorist groups – 'successful' ones – demonstrates that local conditions are important. In the three cases sketched above, the ETA, PIRA and LTTE took root in the soil of marginalized ethnic and religious subgroups that were already involved in forms of civil disobedience and armed resistance paramount to insurgency or civil war. These terrorist entities splintered from the less violent forms of political participation and resistance, drawing upon a radical ideological narrative that elevated indiscriminate violence as the sole means to attain a more perfect reality. ETA, PIRA and LTTE cadres exploited individual feelings of despair developing a cult-like organizational framework in ethnically alienated areas. Group cadres established norms that demanded individual loyalty in the face of extreme hardship and self-sacrifice in the

perpetration of violence – to the point of almost certain group member death. Sustained by material and financial support provided from cross-border and diversified external sources, these violent extremist groups each resonated as virile and fearsome terrorist entities for more than three decades.

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), or Da'esh, has but three years of history as a violent extremist organization yet its star has burned brightly in the terrorism pantheon. An exceptional number of contemporary terrorist experts have characterized ISIS as unique – and a terrorist phenom without precedent. But these deserve scrutiny. An assessment of Da'esh against the insights from past 'successful' terrorist groups reveals that ISIS has arisen from a set of factors familiar to past terrorist groups. Some of its characteristics precisely parallel those found in durable terrorist groups. Other critical characteristics of successful terrorist groups are far less established in ISIS than in groups like LTTE or al Qaeda, suggesting that its durability is an open question.

The local conditions responsible for ISIS' ascent are familiar to rational choice analysts of historic terrorist groups. Incubated by the decades of extreme oppression of Sunni ethnic groups in Syria by an Alawite dictatorship that accelerated into mass atrocity as a civil war erupted there in the Spring of 2011 and the simultaneous alienation of Sunni tribes in western Iraq by an increasingly illiberal and sectarian leadership in Baghdad, ISIS' Salafi jihadist narrative became increasingly attractive in Sunni communities on both sides of the border. Dominated by images of systematic and centuries-old oppression of Sunni Muslims by non-Sunnis, this narrative promised that only an extremely violent jihad could liberate proper Sunnis for life in pure and idealist sharia law caliphate. A ready-made cadre for this violence existed in the form of former al Qaeda of the Land of the Two Rivers, or al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) including its leader from 2010, Abu Baqr al-Baghdadi.

ISIS expanded into a hotbed of un-satiated Iraqi Sunni grievances in an illiberal democracy of Iraq led by sectarian Shi'a Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. [Rayburn, 2014] At the same time ISIS expanded its financial, fighter recruitment and material support framework in the ungoverned spaces of Syria proliferated by the civil war. In both places, Sunni political



Economist.com/graphicdetail

participation and options for interim aims realized through a non-violent process appeared hopeless. ISIS expanded its framework of sub-group Sunni kinship organized around a narrative of Sunni persecution and the need to provide for its own sub-group needs by whatever means possible. The norms of Sunni sub-community loyalty and self-sacrifice regardless of the costs set the conditions for investment of a wider Salafi jihadist narrative. It also set the conditions for a “welcoming” of other outsiders with a similar belief in self-sacrifice and violent extremism in pursuit of wider ambitious and unseparated causes – these include the ideological constants of the Salafi jihadist narrative incubated in Muslim nations where political enfranchisement and economic opportunity are severely constrained: (1) constant Sunni victimization at the hands of regional Shia’s and the west; (2) a Sunni moral obligation to purify the *umma* by demanding a new more pious (and oppressed) personal life and violent form of organization fight on behalf

of Muslims everywhere; (3) the commitment to violent action as the only way to assure gains – for no other political or social processes offered empowerment. In each of these aspects, the ISIS ascent exhibited the broader characteristics associated with past ‘successful’ terrorist groups.

ISIS’ short-to-mid-term prospects as a terrorist organization have most to do with the social and political conditions in Syria and especially Iraq. The longer it takes Iraq’s new Shi’a leadership to redress Sunni tribal alienation and feelings of exclusion from the national political and economic processes, the longer the ISIS narrative will resonate and its prospects for a durable presence increase. Indiscriminate ISIS violence against fellow Sunnis in Iraq could help accelerate a process of redress with Baghdad, but Iraq’s Shi’a leaders cannot count on that prospect to alleviate their clear requirement to change. At the same time, the spiraling civil war in Syria will provide ISIS with cross-border access to funds, fighters and munitions well into the future. The unique factor of an adjacent civil war will enhance the prospect for ISIS safe-haven even should reconciliation processes in Iraq move at an unexpectedly rapid pace.

At the same time, there are elements of ISIS circumstance that set it at odds with the historic models for durability and intensity as a terrorist organization.

First, ISIS relies to an exceptional degree for its financial support on local sources of funding. Its predation of oil and gas in Syria and Iraq has been a mainstay of its prodigious early funding success. It has also seized assets from local banks and businesses, indulging in kidnapping for ransom, extortion and graft. These sources of revenue are necessary, but insufficient. Historically durable terrorist groups extend and expand local activities into activities that extend to a supportive diaspora within the region and globally. It remains to be seen if ISIS can establish reliable and robust financial networks beyond Syria and Iraq. Early reports of financial support from traditional Salafi jihadist support groups in the Arab Gulf have been followed by more significant recent reports that these sources are not yet reliable – under pressure from regional governments to eschew ISIS and confronting demands from its traditional Salafi jihadist beneficiary, al Qaeda, an ISIS competitor, but cut off.

Second, ISIS has pursued recruiting, resourcing and publicity in a highly atypical model. This model has generated an exceptionally high profile in global media and in the global Salafi jihadist community. It is clear that a flow of foreign fighters and jihadist adventurers have been attracted to ISIS by its approach. But the atypical ISIS approach has simultaneously generated alienation and backlash in key regional and global communities. In a manner never witnessed with respect to al Qaeda, Sunni Arab governments have universally condemned ISIS for its reckless violence and put rigorous limitations on all governmental and non-governmental entity engagements contact with it. ISIS' has declared itself autonomous from and in opposition to al Qaeda's longstanding leadership of the Salafi jihadist community. This brazen stand has attracted short-term attention at the risk of long-term viability. Large blocks of the global Sunni Muslim diaspora have become alarmed by ISIS. Al Qaeda has engaged branded ISIS heretical to the wider movement, warning longtime supporters to eschew ISIS and dispatching affiliated Salafi-jihadist leaders to confront ISIS in Syria and Iraq. Across these and other dimensions of terrorist interaction and support, ISIS has generated opponents and anti-bodies at an unprecedented rate.

ISIS' future as a durable terrorist organization is at best uncertain. But the ideological narrative that underwrites ISIS, al Qaeda and a score of other local and regional terrorist organizations, Salafi jihadism, remains durable. As it remains – grounded in the sense of political and economic alienation and isolation felt by hundreds of Sunni Muslim sub-communities in an array of Muslim countries – the narrative of Salafi jihadism is certain to inspire and support more virulent terrorist groups.

## **POLICY IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNTERING TERRORISM**

The rational choice understanding of main conditions for successful terrorism suggest several points for policy focus by governments looking to limit the preconditions for violent extremism.

First and foremost, systematic alienation of subgroups, whether economic, political, cultural or ethnic, is a critical background condition for terrorism. Governments that better promote policies of inclusion generate pluralist institutions and encourage a civil society that

values diversity and minority representation do best at inhibiting the backdrop for violent extremist narratives.

Next, governments best curb the spread and resonance of any extremist ideologies that do develop by taking several vital steps. They must remain alert to the development of exclusionary groups or sects framed around extremist narratives, especially those that pursue isolation from society and that aspire to exclusive provision of basic goods and services for its members and to the exclusion of others. Governments must aspire to be the basic service providers for all state citizens and be seen as enhancing licit political and economic opportunities for members in all sub-state groups. Should exclusionary groups with violent credos and insular funding patterns gain life, then governments must work rapidly to arrest the independent funding and commit to a swift and stern security response toward any group attempting to militarize its own cadre.

An appreciation of these critical means to curb the preconditions for terrorism generates an important implication about government form and function. There are many forms of governance in the world. Rational choice theorists tell us that each form of governance seeks to sustain power and assure support (or at least the acquiescence) of a strong majority of its polity using a combination of three main tools: inclusive political participation by the people, the transfer of public goods and services to the people, or political repression of the people.

Democracies emphasize inclusive political participation and the provision of public goods and services to secure popular loyalty, generally eschewing political repression and minimizing coercion as a tool to secure power. **Liberal democracies** place an exceptionally high value on political participation and the inclusion of minority viewpoints and protection of minority rights, aiming toward the effective provision of public goods but erring on the side of universal political participation and individual liberties for all as the means to sustain popular approval. **Illiberal democracies** are unable or unwilling to assimilate a broad degree of popular participation. Often, illiberal democracies have the trappings of political participation – elections, legislatures, press outlets, etc. However, they feature serious limitations to inclusive

participation including, but not limited to: legal or de facto exclusion of voting rights for certain groups, little or no protection of minority access to public office, prohibitions on freedom of speech or tolerance of repression of speech by some groups over others, and a weak commitment to freedom of the press. They have democratic processes but not a deep commitment to wide inclusiveness and protection of all citizens from coercive forces originating with the state, with religion or within the wider society. [Zakaria, 1997]

Dictatorships – the other major form of governance identified in rational choice literature – don't value political participation. They differentiate from one another in how they choose to secure power by a combination of providing public services and patronage to secure public loyalty with the sinews political repression that limit public disagreement or dissent. **Traditional dictatorships**, including the variants known as traditional autocracies or military dictatorships principally exchange public services and patronage for individual loyalty and support. Traditional dictatorships maximize in-group financial and positional power at the expense of out-groups, buying off the out-groups to the extent possible and repressing dissent that cannot be bought-off. Legislative and judiciary institutions exist to sustain the dictators, not to incorporate minority views or minority rights. Occasionally, traditional dictators may allow the political participation of minority groups but rarely do so in cases where such participation leads to a direct challenge to the power elites. **Totalitarian dictatorships** maximize power over the population by perfection of the apparatus of repression. Loyalty is not to be won-over, but is demanded and enforced. Allegiance in a totalitarian state is secured by denial of personal and political freedoms, including those related to the press and the legal process. Security agencies are strong and unconstrained in their abilities to charge and impose sanctions for disobedience or disloyalty. [Wintrobe, 1990]

Rational choice theorists find traditional dictatorships and illiberal democracies to be most vulnerable to the incubation of violent extremism and terrorism.

Compared to functioning liberal democracies and strong totalitarian states, authoritarian governments exhibit the weaknesses that incubate club-like sects that often choose extreme violence or terror. [Wintrobe, 2006] Liberal democracies are better able to

satiated at least some of the extremist demands for political, social or economic inclusion. This allows for some separation between long-term goals and interim aims, unbundling goals that otherwise might seem impossible to attain without resort to unbridled violence as a principal recourse.

On the other side of the governance spectrum, strong totalitarian regimes co-opt social cohesion in a brutal process of forced inclusion and smother the prospect for sub-group or sect organization with an ominous police and security service oppression. Radical narratives suffocate for lack of political space and would-be organizers of extremist subgroups are under constant duress. Grievances and alienation are present but without room for incubation. Terrorists and extremists find the costs to operate far too high in a strong totalitarian regime seeking to exit rather than remain.

In the murky middle one finds the traditional dictatorship form of government – in its authoritarian guise or as a military dictatorship – and the illiberal democracy. These governance structures are extremely disadvantaged in trying to deter terrorism and violent extremism. Traditional dictatorships are insufficiently ruthless to systemically repress sub-group organization into club-like outfits that germinate terrorist groups. They also lack credible political processes to accommodate small to moderate change in an effort to sub-divide radical long-term aims from acceptable short-term gains by those subgroups feeling societal alienation. Illiberal democracies lack the commitment to political participation and minority inclusion to co-opt alienated groups vulnerable to radicalization. At the same time, illiberal democracies have limited security and intelligence capability to ferret-out alienated subgroups before these generate functional terrorist precursor sects or active terrorist cells.

There are many useful implications from rational choice study of terrorism and violent extremism, but two stand out for consideration by governments of the Middle East and the Gulf states. First, it is dangerous to allow the development of cliquish groups or cult-like organizations in alienated, disoriented or highly agitated sub-groups. These groups often serve as the precursors of durable and pernicious terrorist outfits – generating a radicalized narrative, transmitting that narrative to alienated and sympathetic subgroups in the country, then

fundraising and recruiting for terrorist acts in the name of the group's cause. National law enforcement and intelligence structures must remain vigilant in detecting such groups and cults – whether they be ethnically-based, socio-economically-based, or religiously-based. Once identified, these outfits must be disrupted and then dismantled as a top priority.

It is even more important to organize national governance in a way that inhibits the growth of ethnic, economic or religious subgroups with unsatiated grievances and a belief that there is no room for them in the political process. Here, the governments of the Middle East and the Gulf States remain at high risk. The Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index in 2012 found that all of the states in the Middle East were either authoritarian (traditional dictatorships) or illiberal democracies. [Democracy Index, 2013] As movement toward a more repressive totalitarian regime structure cuts against international norms, rational choice analysis indicates that all Arabian Gulf states would do best at reducing their vulnerabilities to persistent and durable terrorist groups by reforming toward a much more liberal political framework. More open and inclusive electoral processes, greater pluralism in political participation, greater attention to universal civil liberties, more inclusiveness in political culture, and better provision of government services are necessary in each of the states in the Middle East to arrest the precursors of alienation and exclusion that underwrite the processes of radicalization toward violent extremism and terrorism. This is a longer process than the mere adaptation of elections and declaring democracy at hand – something that has been seen in the Middle East in various forms beginning in 2011. [Hamid, 2014] But it is this longer path toward political inclusion and the institutional protection of minority rights and entitlements that ultimately will reduce the risks posed by the kinds of alienated and desperate sub-groups most easily seduced by the allure of violence and terror.

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