THE CHALLENGE OF
RADICALISM & VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN OIC COUNTRIES

The rise of radical and violent extremist groups and the atrocities they have committed in many parts of the globe in general and OIC countries in particular coupled with the negative and sometimes devastating human, social and economic consequences of their acts has pushed the subject of radicalism and violent extremism to the very top of the agenda of the OIC countries and the international society alike. At the same time, it has become crystal clear that hard security measure alone will not suffice to confront radicalism and violent extremism. The truth is that we cannot counter and defeat what we don't understand. This fact highlights the need for a thorough understanding of the issues revolving around radicalism and violent extremism. Such understanding is crucial if the efforts to defeat radicalism and violent extremism are to succeed

Radicalism has evolved over time and the world has experienced different waves of radicalism. The previous radical and violent extremist movements tended to use the ideological and nationalistic motivations, but in the current wave religious narratives became the most important element. This fact affects OIC countries the most and as a result OIC countries became the main theatre of this wave. The analysis of narratives used by the current radical and violent extremist groups shows that socio-economic, political and personal grievances are effectively used to sway public opinion, disseminate messages, gain new recruits, and elicit sympathy. These narratives are mostly combined with distinctive terms rooted in issues of political instability, socio-economic stagnation, civic strife, and, in some cases, war. Values of solidarity and loyalty are also common in the narratives of current radical and violent extremist groups. Similarly, a narrative of duty and responsibility is clearly visible and is being used to reinforce and maintain a deep seated sense of responsibility toward the cause. DAESH use of images from "*Call of Duty*" video game is just one example. In the current wave, martyrdom has been presented as the ultimate act of redemptive self-sacrifice. Particularly, in the tactics of Al Qaida and DAESH the concept of martyrdom often carries particularly powerful emotional narratives of self-sacrifice and regeneration, purity and determination, afterlife and redemption. DAESH slogan which appears in its publication *"You only die once, why not make it martyrdom*" exemplifies this tactic In addition, the abusive interpretations of specific religious terms can be underlined as another source of current radicals and violent extremist's discourses. Radicals and violent extremist groups misuse Islamic terms to legitimate their action. They do so by weaving together historical symbols, deeply-held beliefs, core grievances, and strategic objectives—to advance their agenda in the wider Islamic world.

Here, a clear distinction between Islam and terrorism must be drawn when talking about and/or defining current radical and violent extremism waves. This is especially true since the analysis of narratives utilised by current radicals and violet extremist organisations demonstrate that Islamic terms have been intrumentalised as the fundamental tenets of the discourses.

Understanding the root causes of radicalism is essential if the efforts to confront radicalism and violent extremism are to succeed. However, radicalism is not a simple reality, it is multidimensional and its causes are varied and intertwined, thus a reductionist approach fails to account for the complexity of the issue. In the OIC countries, however, certain root causes come to the fore. Chief among these root causes is the youth bulge combined with youth unemployment. The share of youth population to the total population in OIC countries is the highest in the world (Figure 1). A relationship exists between youth unemployment on the one hand and violence and terrorism on the other. Youth who cannot find decent jobs may not be able to get married and may end up excluded from the economy and society alike. This causes tremendous frustration to youth and without the

availability of conduits to channel this frustration a portion of those youth end up being driven down the path of radicalism and violent extremism believing that it is the only solution to induce change.

Socio economic conditions also contribute to the problem of radicalism. Although the socio economic condition in the OIC Arab Group - a group of high significance for the study of radicalism and violent extremism – are positive when compared to other country groups, they fail to satisfy the high expectations of the people of the region thus causing people to feel relative deprivation. The feelings of relative deprivation exuberates the problem of radicalism and violent extremism in the OIC Arab Group countries.

Figure 1: Share of Youth Population (15-24 years old)

Source: SESRIC Staff Calculations based on the UN World Population Prospects: The 2015 Revision
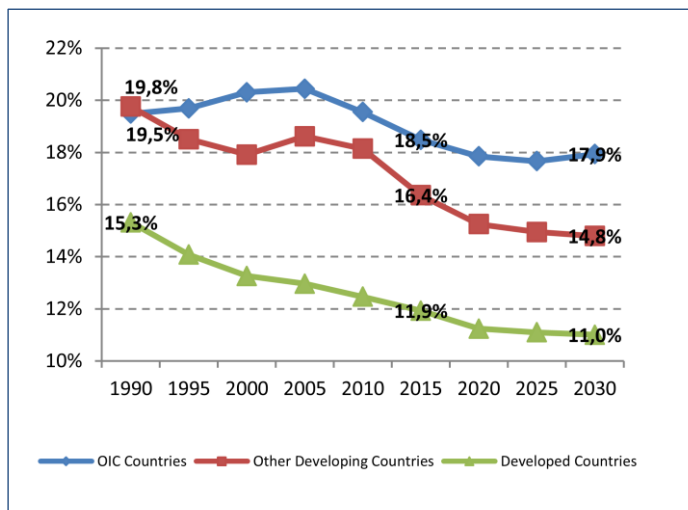
Some of the root causes of radicalism and violent extremism in OIC countries can be traced to the states themselves. One of the root causes related to states is government ineffectiveness in providing public services – such as health and education - to their populations. This leaves a gap that is then filled by radical and violent extremist groups. By filling the gap left by states and by providing services to the population, radical and violent extremist groups gain a footing in society and gain some degree of legitimacy in the eyes of some of the population they serve. This, in turn, provides radical and violent extremist groups with an audience to propagate their radical views and ideology and a pool of potential recruits. Another root cause of radicalism and violent extremism that is related to states is corruption. Perception of state corruption leads to the erosion of state legitimacy in the eye of the population and increases ordinary citizens' opportunity and willingness to engage in radical activities and violence. Also perceptions of state corruption provide radical and violent extremist groups with a line of attack frequently used in their propaganda.

Terrorist attacks have had severe economic impacts on OIC countries, and these attacks have been definitely detrimental as they create an environment of deep uncertainty and imperfect information. This limits investor and consumer confidence and results in reduced private sector investment and household spending. Investors consider the increasing violence as worrisome sign of overall deterioration in the business environment and weaker national governments, and may respond with major change in their investment decisions.
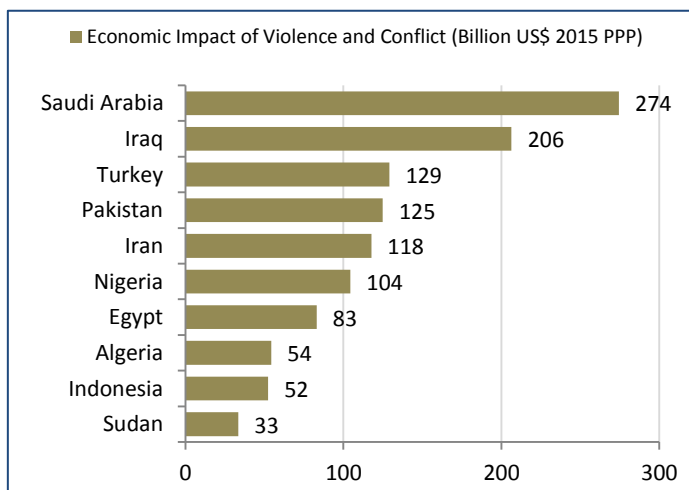
Terrorist activities have had grave economic consequences for a number of OIC countries, reaching alarming rates as Figure 3 clearly shows. However, it is important to point out that some economic sectors are more vulnerable to terrorist attacks than other. The tourism sector is generally the most heavily affected sector in an economy by terrorist attacks. The tourism sector

Figure 3: Economic Impact of Violence and Conflict in OIC Countries (2015)

Source: IEP (2016).

can be affected from terror acts through several channels. The loss of tourism revenue is the first one. This is due to reduced number of tourist arrivals as well as reduction in prices to attract more tourists and additional expenses related to advertising aimed at restoring the image of the travel destination. The sector can also be affected from the destruction of infrastructure, which will require additional resources to recover. Also, reduced capital and investment flows from outside and increased borrowing costs may deter the reconstruction works in the affected areas. Given the considerable impacts of terrorism in the tourism sector, OIC governments will need to allocate a larger share of resources for new security measures.

The devastating impacts of terrorism have not been confined to the economy. Costs to societies are no less severe. Accordingly, there is a need to shed some light on the social effects of terrorism in OIC countries, especially in the socio-psychological, political and cultural domains. These categories by no means exhaust the spectrum of social effects of terrorism; yet, they provide policymakers a starting point and a benchmark to make further projections.

Terrorism is associated particularly with increased rates of psychological distress, traumatic stress-related symptoms, and posttraumatic stress disorder. Terrorism results in severe health outcomes for adolescents and children, and as such, impacts public and population health in a substantial way. Terrorism becoming an important determinant of public mental health puts forward a pressing need to precisely identify the channels through which terrorism affects adolescents and children and to develop preventive and rehabilitative strategies accordingly.

In the political arena, terrorism leads to a vicious circle of violence; terrorism leads to harsher responses and harsher responses in turn aggravate terrorist activity. Also terrorism triggers xenophobia, discrimination, and social polarization; in addition, terrorism has adverse effects on the sensitive balance between civil rights and security. Such impacts in OIC countries disturb the political environment; in transitioning democracies, it hinders and delays consolidation of democracy, while in established democracies, terrorism undermines democratic achievements and processes.

To deal with the social impacts of radicalism and violent extremism policy makers in OIC member state should pay equal attention to economic and social costs of terrorism; while social costs may not be as easily measurable and recognizable in the short term, they have longer and more complex implications and replacement of social costs are in most cases impossible.

Deradicalisation programs stand as one of the tools to tackle the challenge of radicalism and violent extremism. The progressive pathway an individual takes towards violent extremism starts with disillusionment and culminates in carrying out acts of violence as illustrated in Figure 4. For the purpose of maximum effectiveness in de-radicalisation approaches, models should identify stages of radicalisation where de-radicalisation programs have the most potential to succeed.

Amidst the variation between approaches to de-radicalisation, an established guiding principle is the significance of social relations in reinforcing or defining held values. In this context, re-education or theological reinterpretation find more success when directed towards families, as opposed to individuals. This is perhaps even more relevant to OIC member countries where the socializing and guiding role of the family unit is more significant than in the West. As such, any approach to de-radicalisation that does not account for the potential inherent in co-opting family structures would be limited severely in effectiveness and sustainability.

For most criminal or politically motivated violent extremists, the turning point of de-radicalisation comes in a moment of disillusion or disenfranchisement usually as a result of excessive violence or actions not in line with their alleged ideals. This has critical implications for the necessary adaptive nature of de-radicalisation programs for targeted subjects and in outreach interventions.
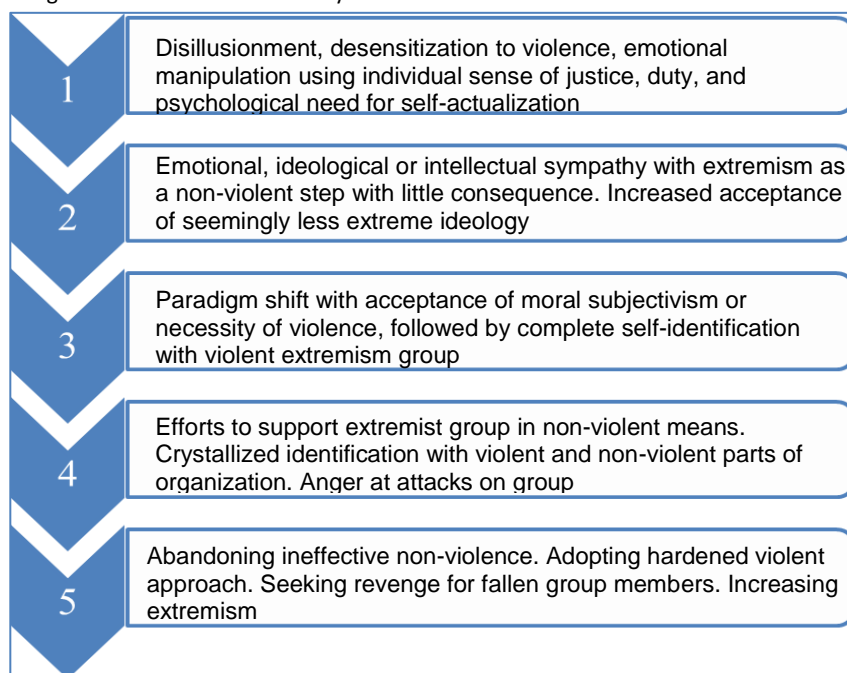
Here it cannot be emphasised enough that hard security measure will not suffice. Radicalism and violent

Figure 4: Radicalization Pathway to Violent Extremism

1 — Disillusionment, desensitization to violence, emotional manipulation using individual sense of justice, duty, and psychological need for self-actualization

2 — Emotional, ideological or intellectual sympathy with extremism as a non-violent step with little consequence. Increased acceptance of seemingly less extreme ideology

3 — Paradigm shift with acceptance of moral subjectivism or necessity of violence, followed by complete self-identification with violent extremism group

4 — Efforts to support extremist group in non-violent means. Crystallized identification with violent and non-violent parts of organization. Anger at attacks on group

5 — Abandoning ineffective non-violence. Adopting hardened violent approach. Seeking revenge for fallen group members. Increasing extremism

extremism have roots such as: relative deprivation, government ineffectiveness in providing services to the population and perceptions of state corruption. Understanding the root causes of radicalism and violent extremism and reducing - or even better - eliminating these root causes is essential if the efforts to counter radicalism and terrorism are to succeed. Additionally, countering violent extremism requires the availability of channels for citizen engagement, if only to develop public engagement and civic responsibility. In the absence of this, violence and extremism become more attractive as a medium for change.

Comprehensive counter-radicalization must address the educational curricula. Educational curriculum require thorough vetting and review to ensure healthy educational and to identify ideological narratives that may serve as base points for radicalization in the future. A healthy emphasis is also needed on instilling curricula with the spirit of critical thinking and independent inquiry, so as to counteract the demagogic, simplified appeals to emotion and group-thinking often used by radicalising agents.

Moreover, when taking the challenge into a broader context, there is a definite need for dynamic disengagement and de-radicalisation models that adapt not only to targeted ideologies, but to individuals themselves. This in turn necessitates comprehensive studied counterterrorism approaches that balance psychometric, security and socio-cultural considerations. Finally, given the role of violent extremism in undermining state legitimacy and in drawing essential resources away from other fields of necessary investment, a half-hearted effort at eliminating violent extremism and radicalism only risks a prolonged, more cost-intensive effort given longer counter-terrorism campaign times.