

Chapter 7 – PATHWAYS TO JIHAD: RADICALISATION AND THE CASE OF PAKISTAN

Laila Bokhari

Research Fellow, Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI)
NORWAY

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Both in the academic and policy worlds increased attention is put on the need to understand the underlying grievances and processes of radicalisation that may lead to violent extremism and terrorism. This is true both on a local and global scale. In addition, both national governments and multi-lateral organisations are attempting to come up with programmes to counter radicalisation. More research is needed to understand these processes so as to design good programmes. Furthermore, the understanding of radicalisation and de-radicalisation must be holistic, in that there will be a need for multi-disciplinary approaches. By understanding the processes at play, one can also understand the multiple motivations factors one is up against.

The following text aims to address some of the issues relevant to radicalisation in that it may lead to violent extremism and terrorism. This work is based on both the author's own research and on findings by colleagues within the field of radicalisation and conflict, and sets the background for an ongoing discussion of the issues at stake. The findings are based on field research mostly in Muslim majority countries or in Europe among Muslim populations. A major part of the research conducted by the author is based on fieldwork in Pakistan. This text concludes by trying to identify some practical steps forward which may guide policy recommendations.

7.2 DEFINING RADICALISATION

As with violent extremism and terrorism, radicalisation has been seen as a difficult concept to define. It opens up a whole range of debates and sensitivities. The way we use and explain terms is important. Being sensitive enough, so as not to stigmatise, and specific enough to guarantee academic nuances, is important. However, for practical usefulness, and in order to try to identify those vulnerable to radicalisation and/or violent extremism it becomes essential to try to define what we mean. One definition of radicalisation is that it is the process through which *individuals* and *groups* become increasingly more radical. The word “radical” is, however, debatable. How do we distinguish between ideas that are radical in the sense that they may lead to violent behaviour, and ideas that are seen as merely healthy deviations from the mainstream or conventional thought? Importantly, “healthy radical views” may lead to positive change and development of a system and/or a society. We want to live in pluralistic societies, with debates and different voices. However, radical and extreme views may also lead down a negative path to intolerance, hatred and violence – and thus be damaging for any society. It therefore becomes important to see vulnerable populations as those capable of expressing needs, grievances and frustration leading to being attracted to, and involved in, violent extremism. The challenge becomes to pick up on those vulnerabilities and grievances before they lead to negative expressions in the form of hate-related crime or violence. Ideally, what a society would want is that such expressions of vulnerabilities and grievances be expressed through available non-violent channels.

A definition suggested in a country assessment tool on countering radicalisation developed by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs sees radicalisation as “*the phenomenon of people embracing opinions, views and ideas that could lead to acts of terrorism*”. The emphasis is here put on the fact that we are not necessarily talking of a criminal act *yet* (unless one criminalises ‘hate-speech’ because of its link to

inciting violence). Even if difficult to “measure” and define, it is important to separate between peaceful and violent radicalisation and extremism. It is not wide-open “radicalisation” that is the problem, rather it is that which will lead to violence. The challenge arises in identifying the very vulnerabilities that may lead people or groups down this path.

The social psychologist Fathali Moghaddam speaks of radicalisation as “a staircase to terrorism”: it is the narrow path that an individual may follow towards a life of terrorism with the terrorist act being the uppermost and final step. Seeing radicalisation as a process is important, yet one also has to avoid regarding all radicals as suspects, and thus capable of becoming violent.

7.2.1 Features of Radicalisation

When speaking of radicalisation we see it as a process, or rather: *many processes*. There may be several entry and exit points – and importantly, not all lead to violence and also: the exit points may not be similar to the entry points. There are also examples of disengagement processes at play – exits or de-radicalisation processes which are helpful to look at.

Human beings do not exist in a vacuum. Their decisions are shaped by the social, economic, cultural and political environment in which they operate. Mapping what one may call the ‘enabling environment’ in which radical opinions and views, political violence and terrorism become attractive can be as critical to understanding the process of radicalisation as it is to analyse individual histories and group processes. In fact, the study of terrorism and political violence has benefited enormously from a multi-disciplinary approach, and the same is true for research into the phenomenon of radicalisation. It therefore becomes important to look at the local, regional, national and even global context that we operate in.

There are no simple explanations for radicalisation. Researchers agree that radicalisation is caused by a complex array of factors that varies from place to place, from situation to situation. Increasingly it is seen that while aspects vary from place to place there may be *some* generic factors we can analyse further. We will look at some of these below. Assessing vulnerability to radicalisation entails being open to address a number of factors that may lead to grievances. However, in this chapter, it is ultimately vulnerabilities that *may* lead to violent expressions that we are interested in – and looking to try and prevent.

Youth are an especially receptive group of people to new ideas and influences. They have demands and wishes – and are receptive to role models – positive and negative ones. There have been several attempts to “profile” those whom we see as potential terrorists. As the cadre of people arrested and sentenced increases, it is, however, seen that it is difficult to identify any clear “target groups”. The demographics of those being arrested are so diverse that many counter-terrorism officials and analysts say they have given up trying to predict what sorts of people are most likely to become terrorists. Age, sex, ethnicity, education and economic status have become more and more irrelevant. But still there are some indications. A recently completed Dutch study of 242 Islamic radicals convicted or accused of planning terrorist attacks in Europe from 2001 to 2006 found that most were *men of Arab descent who had been born and raised in Europe and came from lower or middle-class backgrounds. They ranged in age from 16 to 59 at the time of their arrests; the average was 27 years old. About one in four had a criminal record.* One guiding principle for terrorist groups is, however, always to maintain the psychological edge and the upper hand by doing things that are surprising to the enemy. This is why in many areas we have seen younger and younger people being recruited as suicide bombers and women becoming attractive as recruits, yet this is still rare. Similar research was done by Marc Sageman of more than 400 militant jihadists around the world. He writes:

“Most people think that terrorism comes from poverty, broken families, ignorance, immaturity, lack of family or occupational responsibilities, weak minds susceptible to brainwashing – the sociopath, the criminals, the religious fanatic, or, in this country, some believe they’re just plain evil. Taking these perceived root causes in turn, three quarters of my sample came from the upper or middle

class. The vast majority – 90 percent – came from caring, intact families. Sixty-three percent had gone to college, as compared with the 5 – 6 percent that's usual for the third world. These are the best and brightest young people of their societies in many ways.”

While young women are seen to be increasingly targeted as potential recruits to terrorist movements, and we have recently seen examples of female suicide bombers in the Palestinian context, in Iraq and Kashmir, the majority of the recruits are still young men, mainly 18 – 34 years old. It is, however, seen that recruits in many parts of the world are becoming increasingly younger.

Few terrorists seem to be poor; on the contrary, terrorists themselves seem to be well-educated and middle class. It is perhaps not wise to confuse the possible causes of terror with the identity of terrorists. To quote Karin von Hippel, “While terrorists themselves may not be poor and uneducated, we do have evidence that they tend to use the plight of the poor as one justification for committing violence and for broadening their appeal.” Therefore, we know that poverty and inequality are both used as a pretext for terror – and may recruit sympathizers – and in some cases “*canon-fodder*”.

The above factors clearly show that it is difficult to design “one-size-fit-all” programmes. Counter terrorism programmes should therefore be designed according to distinct needs and requirements (and often parts of countries will need to be treated differently from other parts). While there will be factors that we can identify that may be generic, it is, however, important to see that each situation has its unique characteristics, background and dynamics. Particularities in a specific country or region must be kept in mind (demographics, unemployment rates, etc.). Importantly also, there may be factors which are linked or interconnected. Taking a broad view of what factors may lead to radicalisation therefore becomes important.

As will be discussed below, and exemplified with the Pakistan case, we see that there may be a multiplicity of causal pathways producing radicalisation. Similarly, despite the image Moghaddam suggests through his reference to a “*narrow path*”, radicalisation processes do not follow a fixed linear trajectory. There may be situations that can cause sudden turn-arounds, fast-forwards or other shifts in the process. One such factor may be *closeness to a latent or an active conflict*. Another is the *level and acceptance of violence* in any given society.

It is recognised that there may be a multiplicity of causal pathways producing radicalisation, and it is agreed that countering terrorism – yes, even preventing radicalisation – may begin with the de-legitimisation of extremist messages. Changing a narrative – the way a truth is shaped, formed and expressed – may here be an essential ingredient in a counter-radicalisation strategy.

7.2.2 Steps to Radicalisation

In the following we will try identify some of the steps we see that may lead a young person down a road to further radicalisation. The aim will of course be to hope to stop the process of radicalisation before a person becomes pushed and/or pulled into accepting and legitimising violent ideas and promoting violent behaviour.

7.2.2.1 One: Underlying Grievances

What factors and circumstances generate frustration and grievances? These are often defined as *structural factors in a society* – factors which are grave enough for a large number of people to become frustrated or feel anger or apathy. The underlying factors may be real or perceived, but are factors that may lead to conflict, feelings of alienation, humiliation, and discrimination. It is in this context we can see that underlying issues such as the level of poverty and the lack of “*democracy*” become important. While there is not seen to be any direct correlation between poverty and terrorism, poverty – or relative and *perceived poverty* – is often used as a factor relevant as an underlying grievance – a factor that may be used by others

to explain the need for violence – a call for justice as a result of *perceived or real injustices*. General (long-term) frustration over national or global politics or historical events are also factors that may be underlying conflicts in society, as well as leading to feelings of humiliation – or apathy. Humiliation and apathy may go hand-in-hand, with violence as a way out of apathy. Events such as ongoing “atrocities against Muslims globally” and “corruption and occupation” may thus lead to feelings of humiliation and in turn apathy. We can divide the structural grievances into four components that will be issues to address and may inform a programme design:

A political dimension – key concerns are issues of governance, political systems, representation, the rule of law, power-sharing and conflict-management – *do people feel represented? Do they trust their leadership?*

A security dimension – key concerns are issues of conflict and violence and the role of the security sector (police, army, intelligence, etc.) – *do people feel secure? Do they feel secure for their children’s future?*

A socio-economic dimension – key concerns are issues of welfare and livelihood, including employment opportunities and access to social services and education – *are people employed? Under-employed? Can people realise their dreams, expectations?*

A cultural and religious dimension – key concerns are issues of religious observance, traditional forms of culture, external cultural influences, and public debate on religion and culture – *can people voice their opinions? Feelings of humiliation? Can people practice religion as they want? Are religious leaders representing them?*

7.2.2.2 Two: Triggering Events and Circumstances

While many may feel injustice, anger and frustration, not all turn to violence. A next step is to analyse *what makes a frustrated person violent??* The role of the surrounding environment here becomes important – who are the peers, friends, leaders, role-models? Are there individuals or groups who are able to frame certain claims activists make on behalf of their audiences (media, elites, sympathetic allies and potential recruits)? The importance of communication – and of instigators – cannot be understated. Many speak of a moral awakening, “a crisis” of moral shocks, but they will have to be made aware of how to ‘operationalise’ this frustration and awareness. These ‘shocks’ may be the images of “suffering” by victims or the use of “victim symbols” from Kashmir, Palestine, Chechnya, etc. As such there may be certain events in the local, regional or global picture that can provoke a person to action.

The “religious call” here becomes a factor. Often we see leaders using religious symbols, arguments and interpretations to explain certain factors, or to motivate for action. This is powerful, and if no one questions this logic it is often seen as a “truth”. Religious leaders in some societies enjoy immense power, their word and role therefore becomes important – both in potential radicalisation and in avoiding such radicalisation. Importantly it is often believed that a sense of unfairness and injustice has given rise to victimisation, fueling grievances in the Muslim world which may further be framed in religious terms. Religion is rarely the cause per se of terrorism and political violence but rather it may provide the narrative and language, the sentiments and emotions, through which political conflicts are expressed. Importantly it may also create a ‘following’ and a community of sympathisers.

Unemployment and under-employment are often seen as a key factor to radicalisation. Not only can it feel humiliating to go for long periods unemployed, also it may create apathy and a yearning to be taken seriously. Involvement in militant organisations may be an option for engagement and usefulness. Radicalisation may therefore also be a result of a lack of other career options. Again, an issue may also be violent behaviour as a way out of apathy.

7.2.2.3 Three: Operational Factors

Finally, what makes a radical person pick up and justify violence? These may be factors in the surroundings of the person – but importantly there need to be certain factors that “operationalise the triggers” – that may push a person further into an organisation – or that make a person actually seek out a movement. With youth this is especially seen as a vulnerable factor – as youth often go in search of groups, movements, other young people “to belong to”, to listen to or to be heard.

There are a few factors which here become important: Group dynamics in social movements can be extremely strong. We see here processes of socialisation at play, many join in with friends, or follow family members into a path or community. This may create strong in-group/out-group feelings – the creation of a distinct collective identity – through the use of “noms de guerre” (special pseudonyms), group affiliation, training, “brothering”. Group boundaries are also solidified and become less permeable.

In some societies – or within certain groups of society – glorification of violence and “martyrdom” worshipping have become parts of life. This may be within sub-groups of society or movements. A group may take on rituals glorifying terrorism that can lead to a distancing from the rest of society and legitimising violence. These rituals – such as those experienced at training camps, educational propaganda programmes and through cleansing rituals, are seen to include a process in which evil is made to look good or members are lead to believe that what they are doing is “necessary evil”.

A further factor may be the way groups can bring about moral exclusion through processes in which people dehumanize the enemy others, and/or dissociate themselves from the wider society or from certain moral issues.

7.3 CAUSES OF TERRORISM

There is quite a bit of academic literature on the subject of what causes terrorism, i.e., the underlying causes that may lead to violent extremism. The following section is taken from a study conducted at the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI) based on research from various areas around the world. The section above on identifying features of radicalisation and the following section on causes of terrorism may together create a basis for working out possible policy options. Some findings in the following sections are informed by a recent United Nations study on Radicalisation and Extremism that may lead to Terrorism (UN Global Strategy on Counter Terrorism – Working Group on Radicalisation and Extremism that may lead to Terrorism). Further discussion of this work follows below.

Some agreed-upon factors which may be relevant to radicalisation and identifying vulnerable youth in a societal context are as follows:

“Relative deprivation and inequality: Widespread perceptions of deprivation and inequality, especially among culturally defined groups, serve as the basic condition for participation in collective civil violence. Terrorism may be part of this violence.

Terrorism by spoilers: Peace processes based on negotiated settlements are frequently accompanied by increased levels of terrorism by rejectionist groups.

The contagion theory: The occurrence of terrorism in one country often leads directly or indirectly to more terrorism in neighbouring countries. Terrorists learn from one another, and new tactics are usually quickly emulated. Spill-over occurs in a variety of ways.

Terrorism and mass media: Paradigmatic shifts in modern mass media appear to influence patterns of terrorism, by enhancing its agenda-setting function, increasing its lethality, and by expanding its transnational character.

Rapid modernisation makes societies more exposed to ideological terrorism. Societal changes associated with modernisation create new and unprecedented conditions for terrorism such as a multitude of targets, mobility, communications, anonymity, and audiences. Socially disruptive modernisation may also produce propitious conditions for terrorism, especially when it relies heavily on the export of natural resources, causes widespread social inequalities and environmental damage, and creates mixed market-clientalist (often very corrupt) societies.

Poverty, weak states, and insurgencies: Poor societies with weak state structures are much more exposed to civil wars than wealthy countries. Economic growth and development undercut the economics of armed insurgencies. Economic growth and prosperity also contribute to lower levels of transnational terrorism.

Democratisation: States in democratic transition are more exposed to armed conflict and terrorism than democracies and autocracies. Because of pervasive state control, totalitarian regimes rarely experience terrorism. States with high scores on measures of human rights standards and democracy are less exposed to domestic ideological terrorism. Levels of transnational terrorism also seem to be highest in semi-authoritarian states, especially when undergoing a democratisation process.

Political regime and legitimacy: Terrorism is closely linked to a set of core legitimacy problems. Lack of continuity of the political system and a lack of integration of political fringes, tend to encourage ideological terrorism. Ethnic diversity increases the potential for ethnic terrorism. A high density of trade union membership in a population has tended to contribute to a lower level of domestic ideological terrorism.

The ecology of terrorism: Technological developments offer new and more efficient means and weapons for terrorist groups, but also increase the counter-terrorist capabilities of states. Transnational organised crime and terrorism are partly inter-linked phenomena, and growth in transnational organised crime may contribute to increased levels of terrorism.

Hegemony in the international system: An international state system characterised by strong hegemonic power(s) is more exposed to international terrorism than a more multi-polar system. High levels of bipolar conflict in world politics invite the use of state-sponsored terrorism as a means of war by proxy. A strongly unipolar world order or a world empire system, on the other hand, will experience high levels of transnational anti-systemic 'anti-colonial' terrorism.

Economic and cultural globalisation: Economic globalisation has mixed impacts on transnational terrorism, depending on how globalisation is measured. Cultural globalisation, measured by the rate of INGOs, tends to cause higher levels of transnational terrorism, especially against US targets.

The proliferation of weak and collapsed states seems to have a facilitating influence on terrorism. Failed or collapsed states, caused by civil wars, underdevelopment, corrupt elites, etc., may contribute to international terrorism in a variety of ways.

Ongoing and past wars: While terrorism in some cases is an armed conflict in its own right, terrorist motivations are often rooted in ongoing or past wars in one way or another. Armed conflicts also have various facilitating influences on transnational terrorism.”

These are all factors that may help explain the context within which radicalisation may occur. Below we will look at Pakistan to help exemplify some of the above.

7.4 THE CASE OF PAKISTAN

Research has been conducted by the author in Pakistan in the period 2005 – 2009. The field work explores both individual and group levels of radicalisation and violent extremism in Pakistan. Key questions are:

What processes and dynamics make individuals join radical movements, what is their reasoning, what happens, how and why? Further: What is the context in which groups and individuals become radicalised? On one of the research trips to Pakistan, interviews were held with former militants of the group *Lashkar-e-Tayyiba*. One of the interviewees said: “My only struggle, my only jihad today, is to spread the message that the real struggle is not with a weapon in hand, but to teach the real words of the Holy Qur’ān.” However, some see this very differently. Some are convinced that: “My struggle, my jihad, is to tell you, my sister, the right way.” Jihad is seen as a legitimate struggle with all means necessary: “We all have our jihad – it depends what you are chosen for – but if the cause is for God – all means may be necessary”. The individual voices within a landscape can help explain what factors and interpretations are in play, and the climate in which one operates.

The research conducted concentrates on in-depth interviews within radical Islamist circles in Pakistan. The aim is to gain a better understanding of what the different factors for joining a violent jihad may be. What are the motivations, and what makes violent jihad a legitimate approach for some people? Importantly, here we are looking at *violent* radical Islamists. At some point during the interviewed person’s life he or she has had the conviction that picking up a weapon, whether it be him/herself, or others, is the right way of jihad. Today, some have changed their minds, while others are in the “formation process” – *the process of radicalisation*. Some are – or have been – leaders, some motivators, some “connectors” and some “foot-soldiers”.

The political setting in Pakistan is vital to understanding the rise of jihadi groups in the country. Historically, Pakistan served as the key channel for the transmission of resources to the Mujahidin resistance during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Its *madrassas* have nurtured the backbone of what was to become the Taliban, and from the mid-1990s until 2001 Pakistan supported the Taliban regime. Some claim this is an ongoing phenomenon. Pakistan also struggles with severe Shiite-Sunni sectarian conflicts, and it is heavily affected by the ongoing Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan, especially the border regions where the popular sympathy for the Taliban is high. Finally, Pakistan has its conflict with India over the issue of Kashmir. Since its birth in 1947 Pakistan has had a constant struggle with itself about how being an Islamic state should influence its own identity as a state and its policies. Today, Pakistan finds itself at the forefront in the US-led “Global War on Terror” as a close ally to the USA, which, in turn, has deepened cleavages in the Pakistani political landscape – aggravated in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in recent months.

Much of the academic work undertaken on radical Islamism and terrorism in Pakistan has focused on the historical and political context, the groups’ infrastructure, ideology, development and choice of targets. With this ongoing study the aim is to explore “the individual and group levels” of Pakistani jihadism through interviews with individuals and to have them tell their “stories”. What processes and dynamics make individuals join radical movements, what is their reasoning, what happens, how and why?

The processes of socialisation and education have been seen by many as being crucial. Leaders, trainers and educators may have a certain amount of influence on the individual. The interviews conducted are both with *leaders* who may see their roles as being to legitimise, convince and educate, and also with *individual* men and women who have taken part in some way or other in the struggle.

There are some characteristics which should be underlined with regard to the cases. Historically, there has been a relatively high degree of social acceptance for “jihad” (as defined by the jihadi groups) in Pakistani society. The country’s history with Afghanistan, the jihadist politics of President Zia ul-Haq and the centrality of Kashmir in its policies, may offer some explanation for this fact. The recent shift with the Musharraf-led and more recent Government being a close ally to “the greatest Satan” (i.e., USA) is, arguably, uniting the opposition and the religious groups – emphasising the acceptance of a need to “have your voice heard”. However, the definition of legitimate means in jihad is quite different and is explored in the interviews.

When asked, “Where you find your legitimacy and justification for your chosen path?” Some go back to their childhoods, their family ties and societal settings; others say it is the meeting with religion which provides them with a fundamental cause. For some of the mothers of the martyrs, religion gives them a strong sense of justification and a glorification of their sons as martyrs. Most of the people I have met readily share their argument for acceptance. However, others have come to violent jihad as a way to seek adventure or to prove their manhood. Answering the question as to whom one is doing it for, surprisingly the answer is a mix of “my country”, “my parents” and “my religion”. This reveals a sense of *mixed motivations for different purposes*.

As has been seen above, there are theoretically various ways of trying to understand or to look at factors that may motivate someone to partake in terrorism. Research shows that one may divide causes into two general categories: First, *underlying reasons*; grievances that give rise to terrorism, which may include political, historical injustices, alienation and humiliation. These can be seen more as structural challenges, including lack of democratic institutions, foreign occupation, corrupt regimes, unresolved conflicts, discrimination and atrocities against fellow Muslims. Secondly, there may be “happenings” that cause a sudden moral awakening – a sudden sense of anger and revenge – or a feeling of injustice.

Quintan Wiktorowicz calls this “*a crisis that produces a cognitive opening ... that shakes previously accepted beliefs and renders individuals more receptive to possible alternative views and perspectives*”. These factors may include a financial (sudden unemployment or no possibility of social mobility), socio-cultural (humiliations, racism, cultural weakness), political (marginalisation, torture, discrimination, corruption) or personal (death or family-tragedy, victim of a criminal activity) crisis. Although Wiktorowicz’s empirical research is focused on Europe, his theoretical framework is useful in understanding what may be factors at an individual level. Marc Sageman discusses in his work on understanding terror networks the importance of social networks – both at the levels of family and friends. Jessica Stern has, through her interviews with religious terrorists, asked questions as to why some people respond to grievances by joining religious terrorist groups. She also asks the question, as does Wiktorowicz, as to why some remain “free-riders” while others participate more actively. It was not uncommon, on the streets in Pakistan, to hear critical questions asked about the Musharraf Government – and the “Mush-Bush-Israel-India alliance” – including questions that imply sympathy for the Taliban or al Qaeda. But what makes some people give up their “ordinary” lives and choose to join extreme religious groups? Furthermore, what explains the interest that some people show for these movements, and how do they get in touch with them? Similarly, how are they convinced that this interpretation of Islam is the right one?

Motivations can be found at *different* levels and are often *mixed*: religious, political, financial, cultural or socio-psychological. In most of the cases we have found various motives, often alternating. That is, some people point to the corruption of the Government, “the biggest Satan of them all America”, charismatic leaders who convince them, and *also* to religion as a way of legitimising an activity. These are the more external factors. Then there is a different layer which is more personal: the person’s background and personal experiences.

One of the main questions in the research has been: What is *jihad* for you, and why is jihad seen as a duty? The ways the interviewees have reasoned have differed. Some have begun by talking about their background, their family stories, their educational background and the people who were important to them in their lives. However, the religious imperative is in most cases an underlying factor, which in different contexts is used either as a true motivation, explained as “the luggage of a Mujahid” by sympathizers of Maulana Masaud Azhar or as “Islam’s neglected duty”, by a former member of *Hizb-ul-Mujahidin*. For some, though, the religious motive seems to come after the political imperative, more as an attempt to legitimise a conviction.

Some have explained jihad as “the tax that Muslims must pay for gaining authority on Earth. The imperative to pay a price for Heaven, for the commodity of Allah is dear, very dear.” Others have

pointed to the “moral obligation of jihad” as being equally important as the duties of prayer and charity within Islam, but that “only a very few are lucky to be the *chosen*”. One former jihadist clearly stated that he joined for fear of being punished in the after-life, while another, according to his mother (and in letters from him to his mother) wanted his family to earn respect and honour in this life. Desire for adventure and the glamour of belonging to a militant group have also been instrumental reasons. As one interviewee, a former jihadist, said: “to be in the Military was my greatest dream, when I failed the test to enter the Pakistani Army, I found somewhere else to prove my manhood. Guns and violence were appealing. And I thought I would come back and be cheered as a hero – for my country, my people and my religion”.

Networks have been important factors for some in explaining how they became involved in certain activities. Family ties, for example, daughters, sons or cousins of political figures, and friendship ties are also, for some, seen as bringing them into contact with terrorist activity.

The process of recruitment to radical Islamist organisations has been a key point of discussion. The interviews have shown that recruitment to jihad occurs both in a top-down and a bottom-up pattern – that is, there have been both push and pull factors, often operating at the same time: the people interviewed claim their personal conviction, but emphasise the importance of someone introducing them to the “possibilities”.

The individuals met and interviewed for this study all have different backgrounds and ways of interpreting their current situations. This is partly due to them being in very different situations at the moment. The various mothers of martyrs view their situation differently as some of them today live under the protection of a religious party (e.g., *Jamaat-i-Islami*) while others have not received the same honour and pride that was promised their sons. Likewise, two men with similar stories of fighting in both Kashmir and Afghanistan, at about the same time, have today two different outlooks on life. One is ready for “another cause worthy to fight a jihad and die for” – and mentions the possibility of Iraq – while the other says he has lost ten years of his life and his jihad today is to work in his car repair shop and to tell young people not to waste their lives nor to listen to manipulative religious leaders who are only working for their own interests and agendas.

The sample of interviews shows unique individual stories. They are different people, with different stories and all represent different ways of explaining their definition, understanding and motivation for jihad. By sitting over long periods of time with the individuals, many in their own familiar settings, one can come to learn a lot about the roles that psychology, group dynamics and the importance of socialising – and external factors, such as friends, role models, leaders – play in shaping various actors. One of the things the research has aimed to identify, is the question of at what point do the various people make the *link* to violent jihad – or terrorism. How do they explain this *meeting* – and how do *they themselves* explain the different factors which have come to play in this struggle?

“We all have our jihad – it only depends what you are chosen for”, one *Jamat-ud-Dawa* leader explains. He continues: “The power of what can be done for God has been sanctioned by the divine mandate or conceived in the mind of God”. “This is why it is difficult for secularists to understand”, he says. The challenge in conducting these kinds of interviews is in meeting the “other” in their cognitive world. How much empathy can you feel – and how much is needed to be able to portray a picture of the cases as they themselves want to be portrayed? Through the interviews we have attempted in coming a step closer to an understanding of the people and the mental and social processes that occur in the course of being introduced to radical groups. Behind most decisions and acts there are individual stories. The aim of the project has been to come closer to these –and may in turn teach us lessons to understand and identify the questions at stake.

7.5 CONCLUSIONS

7.5.1 In Search of Programmes and Policy Options

Vulnerability to radicalisation is an important yet difficult area of study. The challenge lies in trying to identify those who *may* be pushed or pulled towards radicalism, and the question remains: who is particularly susceptible to radical ideologies? Research shows that there is no clear profile as to who may become radicalised – some patterns may however be identified. It is essential to avoid stereotypes and generalisations that may cause further radicalisation by contributing to feelings of victimisation.

Possible indicators may include:

- Perceptions of marginalisation, exclusion or discrimination (levels of disaffection in society).
- Inability to affect political changes through legitimate and peaceful means (political representation, having a voice). This contributes to a feeling of powerlessness.
- Harsh treatment by the security services (self or family members).
- Unemployment and lack of opportunities for work and education.
- Religious or ethnic persecution (representation, places of worship).
- A generational gap / generational conflicts (estranged youth, possible areas for youth participation).
- Lack of access to social services (general society) results in a feeling of being locked in.
- A sense of alienation, which is rarely related to their socio-economic circumstances (political, cultural).
- Alienation: radicals tend to act outside traditional community bonds, such as family, mosques and other associations (how to engage those who do not get involved in groups, etc.).
- The group effect: the process of radicalisation may take place in the framework of small groups of friends who possibly knew one another before and may have had a common place of meeting or been part of a network of petty delinquency (levels of crime in society/neighbourhood).

Possible entry points for a study of radicalisation may thus include the following issues:

- What is the composition of current radical groups? Background, firmly anchored or an alien body in society? farmers, urban youth, students? (developing a demographic profile) – identifying role models and leaders of such groups.
- Emerging radicals – finding the vulnerable – identifying those groups in society that are *frustrated, disaffected and disillusioned* – and how they involve themselves in society.

Practical Steps and Policy Options

As part of the UN Global Strategy on Counter Terrorism a working group on radicalisation and extremism that may lead to terrorism has conducted a study of member-states policies in the area. A recent report identified eleven key strategic issues (or types of programmes) which one can draw experiences from both in terms of preventing radicalisation ('counter-radicalisation') and 'de-radicalisation'. These include:

- Engaging and working with civil society.
- Prison programmes (e.g., working with juveniles).
- Education programmes.
- Promoting an alliance of civilisations and inter-cultural dialogue.

- Tackling economic and social inequalities.
- Global programmes to counter radicalisation (as part of development aid).
- The Internet.
- Legislative reforms.
- Rehabilitation programmes.
- Developing and disseminating information (awareness campaigns).
- Training and qualifying agencies involved in implementing counter-radicalisation policies.

There are quite a few factors and policy options we here see repeating themselves. The report provides an overview of non-coercive counter-radicalisation policies and programmes implemented by countries around the world. They involve a whole array of actors and require a cross-departmental approach to many of the issues. The approaches also demonstrate that radicalisation processes are complex and multi-faceted and may follow different dynamics in different places. The report has also shown, however, that even though no one theory can explain all forms of terrorism and no one approach can address all the conditions that may lead to it, some common understanding and policies have begun to emerge. The above list is an indication of this.

Importantly, as has been seen by the above-mentioned cross-country survey conducted by the United Nations, increased attention is being given in a wide variety of states to non-coercive approaches to violent extremism that aims to prevent disaffected individuals to violence in the first place: “This reverses a previous reliance on “hard approaches” and highlights a growing recognition among many states that military and other suppressive approaches alone are insufficient, and in some cases may even be counter-productive”. Below are a few recommendations which may help shape or lay out policy.

Short-Term Policy Measures

- Increased efforts to identify and render harmless potential “radicalisation-entrepreneurs” by either prosecuting them, or guiding them to find more constructive ways to act out their activism.
- De-legitimization of extremist messages – this requires identifying where such messages are spread from – opinion makers, radical clerics, youth leaders, etc. Finding ways of hampering the proliferation of violent extremist messages on the Internet, maybe through increasing “positive” messages as a counter-balance.
- Identifying “radical voices”. An important target group are charismatic “gate keepers” such as radical clerics, “jihad veterans” (people who have returned back from Iraq for instance in the Yemen context – and Guantanamo returnees), and leaders in militant milieus who play a vital recruitment role.
- Prevent the establishment of facilities and sanctuaries (empty, negative, secretive meeting places. in which radicals can spread their violent messages, their violent ideology, indoctrinate new members and socialize them into a violent extremist (“jihadist”) worldview. Develop healthy meeting places for discussion, activity and learning – sports, vocational training, languages, media training, etc.
- The development of youth leadership programmes: many of the target group interviews focus on the need for skills and training – vocational training, leadership skills, political management skills, administration skills, i.e., develop “cultures” of positive exchanges and learning centres.

Awareness-Raising Programmes

- Many of the target groups focus on the need for places to learn and discuss issues at stake for youth – *meeting places* for discussion, places to “eliminate negative feelings”, have outlets for opinions, media training, key concerns are often seen to be: corrupt leaders, lack of democracy, lack of places to be heard, apathy.
- *Awareness campaigns* – sending positive messages through media, TV, internet – make youth create the message to be sent out, media training, journalism skills with the goal to create awareness and ownership of their own futures.

There is a lot that could be done to counteract the spread of radicalisation – a main feature however lies in isolating the violent actors, but involving mainstream society in an effort to build a healthy environment for debate and increased awareness of the issues that may cause grievances and lead to frustration and disaffected populations in our societies.