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Addressing Extremism and Violence: The Importance of Terminology

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1. Introduction

In recent years, the expression "violent extremism" (VE) has invaded the literature of both peace and security agencies all over the world, from the office of the UN Secretary-General to the smallest civil society organization (CSO) in remote areas of the globe. It has become *the* topic. "Countering/combatting violent extremism" (CVE) or "preventing violent extremism" (PVE) is becoming a must in most peace building programs. Yet, the fast-growing interest in this topic belies the fundamental problem of the lack of a clear and broadly accepted definition of the VE concept[i] and questions about its (geo)political justifications. Some observers argue that this is a new politically correct formula for launching a second wave of the "war on terror", after the first one that followed 9/11 had reached its term[ii], or see in this approach some elements that recall the colonial counter insurgency (COIN) strategy[1].

The aim of this paper is to provide some elements that will hopefully contribute to a more accurate definition of the terms used in the context of extremism and violence, to attempt a descriptive model of the extremization process that encompasses the various paths leading to violence, and to discuss the various approaches to de-extremization. Contrary to the claim of some proponents of hard security approaches, explaining extremism and terrorism is not equivalent to justifying such phenomena. Understanding the process of extremization is a necessity for all those responsible for peace and security because it enables them to deal with it more effectively. Since "violent extremism" is often used to refer to Islamic contexts, which is in itself problematic, there will be some focus on the Islamic perspective in this paper.

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[i] Georgia Holmer from the US Institute of Peace observes that "in the same way that the legal and policy definitions of terrorism vary across U.S. agencies and international organizations—and reflect the mandate, scope, and role of those entities in countering it—the term violent extremism means different things in different contexts." (*Countering Violent Extremism: A Peacebuilding Perspective*. United States Institute of Peace. Special Report 336. Washington DC September 2013)

[ii] This approach initiated in 2001 is now widely reckoned to be ineffective, counterproductive, a generator of more extremism and violence. Often, the "war on terror" rhetoric is used indiscriminately in Western countries, and as a weapon against political opponents by authoritarian regimes in the Muslim world. The negative impact of the "war on terror" legislations on civil societies, particularly on faith-based humanitarian organisations, is real.

2. Defining the terms

In its resolution 2178[2], the UN Security Council "condemns violent extremism, which can be conducive to terrorism" without defining this concept. In addition, the UN seems to use "violent extremism" and "violent radicalization" interchangeably[i], and this is also quite frequent in academic, political, diplomatic and media circles. Moreover, in his *Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism* the UNSG explicitly stated that "this Plan of Action pursues a practical approach to preventing violent extremism, without venturing to address questions of definition."[3] According to the UNSG, "definitions of 'terrorism' and 'violent extremism' are the prerogative of Member States and must be consistent with their obligations under international law, in particular international human rights law."[4] This is quite problematic if there is an intent and a will to give this concept a legal meaning; it opens the door wide to abuses in the use of this term, since many authoritarian regimes across the world welcome this ambiguity, just as they did with the notion of terrorism, using it loosely and largely in their quest for full control of the political space, international human rights law being the last of their priorities.

The aim of this section is to shed some light on the fundamental differences between extremism, radicalism and violence and how they may relate to each other.

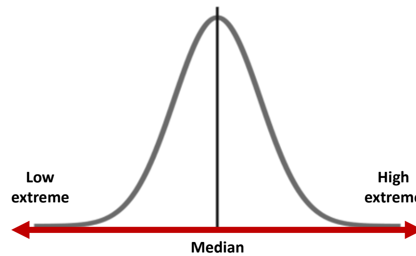
2.1. Extremism

The concept of extremism has a variety of commonly accepted meanings.[ii] It cannot be considered a "standalone" concept and has to be defined relative to a commonly agreed reference (a convention). In natural and social sciences, a *normal* distribution, best suited for real-value random variables, is represented graphically by a bell curve with a

[i] Both expressions "countering violent extremism" and "countering violent radicalization" are use in UNSC Resolution 2178 (2014) to convey the same meaning.

[ii] In his *Dictionary of Political Thought* Roger Scruton describes "extremism" as a vague term, which can mean: (1) Taking a political idea to its limits, regardless of 'unfortunate' repercussions, impracticalities, arguments, and feelings to the contrary, and with the intention not only to confront, but also to eliminate, opposition; (2) Intolerance towards all views other than one's own; (3) Adoption of means to political ends which disregard accepted standards of conduct, in particular which show disregard for the life, liberty and human rights of others." (Roger Scruton. *A Dictionary of Political Thought*. Pan Reference & The Macmillan Press. London 1982.)

maximum at the mean (or the mode or median for standard distributions) and a minimum at the two tails which indicate the high (positive) and the low (negative) extremes relative to the median value.



The bulk of the distribution (majority) is around the median, and both extremes are options or alternatives for a small part of the distribution (minority). The bell curve may represent a range of attitudes among a population. The following table shows some examples.

Low extreme	Median	High extreme
Negligence	Moderation	Exorbitance
Cowardice	Courage	Temerity
Stinginess	Generosity	Squandering

Within a community, a country or a civilization, the extreme may be viewed as a divergence or shift from the norm accepted by the majority. Therefore, what is extreme depends on the context in which the norm is established. For example, according to Peter Neumann of the *International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence*, "extremism can be used to refer to political ideologies that oppose a society's core values and principles. In the context of liberal democracies this could be applied to any ideology that advocates racial or religious supremacy and/or opposes the core principles of democracy and universal human rights."[5]

In the context of this paper, the median used as a reference relates to norms set within the framework of national, international, community, or religious law. The "high extreme" represents excess and transgression of the norm (e.g. terrorism). The "low extreme" is characterized by resignation from public action (e.g. mass emigration). The "median" is about acting without either transgression or resignation. High and low extremes form an inseparable pair; their manifestations are devastating for society.

Political extremism (far left and far right) refers to opinions and behaviours of people who favor extreme political changes, while religious extremism is about excess in interpreting religious texts and in practising religion.

Extremism may be an attribute of an individual, a group or a state: individual extremism, group extremism, state extremism.

2.2. Radicalism

Radicalism is related to "radical" which derives from the Latin *radix* meaning root. In his *Radicalism Handbook*, John Button defines a radical as anyone "going *to the roots* of an issue, examining it thoroughly, questioning everything, and leaving no stone unturned in the quest for respect and justice."[6]

Political radicalism refers to the opinions and behavior of people who advocate political changes *at the root*. In *A Dictionary of Political Thought*, Roger Scruton defines "the radical [a]s one who wishes to take his political ideas to their roots."[7] The radicals follow the ideal[i] of changing the status quo, not by small reforms, but through the establishment of a new political reality[ii]. Throughout history, they have been the main drivers of social change. In the conclusions of a *Panel Meeting on De-radicalization or the Roll-back of Violent Extremism*, held in Geneva on 23 June 2016, the participants agreed that:

> "There should be nothing wrong with 'radicalism'. It is the mindset to return to the root of an issue to understand it better and draw the right inspiration from it. […] Radicalism can also call into question a fossilized system of government that needs to be done away with in different parts of the world. In fact, the Enlightenment Movement of the 18th century was seen as radical in its days. Radical parties may take over the government to introduce reforms. Sometimes the takeover is peaceful, and sometimes it is not. It tends to be the more violent the more the outgoing authorities or autocracies hang on to power."[8]

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[i] In a letter to his friend Alphonse de Lamartine, 19th century French novelist and poet Victor Hugo wrote: "If radical means the ideal, then yes I am a radical".

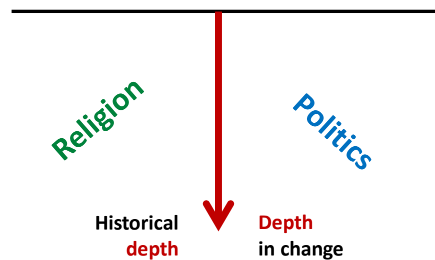
[ii] David Robertson's *Penguin Dictionary of Politics* defines a radical as "anyone who advocates far reaching fundamental change in a political system. Literally, a radical is one who proposes to attack some political or social problem by going deep into the socio-economic fabric to get at the fundamental or root cause and alter this basic social weakness. As such it can be contrasted with a more 'symptomatic' policy cure".

Religious radicalism is about returning *to the root*, i.e. to an understanding and a practice of religion that comply with the religious sources as interpreted and lived by the early believers. It is therefore about orthodoxy and orthopraxy.

For instance, Christian radicalism is defined by American theologian Ched Myers as the "re-orientation towards the root truths of Christian discipleship through personal reflection and action"[9]. For David Galston, Academic Director at Westar Institute, "the history of Christian radicalism is the history of theologians or theological movements attempting to get back to the root of the gospel despite and often against the institutional tradition of the church."[10]

Similarly, Islamic radicalism may be defined as the willingness to follow the interpretation of the Islamic foundational texts (Qur'ān and Sunna) made by the companions of the Prophet and their early followers. This is the exact meaning of Salafism.[i]

Extremism and radicalism pertain therefore to two different dimensions. The former is about the extent of "laterality" (how far from the median), the latter is about the degree of depth (how close to the root); religious radicals are in a quest for historical depth and closeness to the original message; political radicals for a depth in change.



2.3. Violence

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines violence as "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation."[11] In its *World*

[i] *As-Salaf as-Salih*, meaning literally the righteous predecessors. Salafism is a quest for pristine authentic Islam and an endeavour to purify the Islamic creed and to clean the practices of worship. For a more detailed study of Salafism see Abbas Aroua. *The Salafiscape in the wake of the 'Arab Spring'*. Cordoba Foundation of Geneva (2014). Available online at: https://www.cordoue.ch/publications-mega/research-papers/463-the-salafiscape-in-the-wake-of-the-arab-spring.

Report on Violence and Health (WRVH),[12] the WHO presents "a typology of violence that distinguishes four modes in which violence may be inflicted: physical; sexual; and psychological attack; and deprivation."[13] The general definition of violence is divided into three sub-types according to the victim-perpetrator relationship: (1) self-directed violence; (2) interpersonal violence; and (3) collective violence.[i]

In conflictology and peace studies, according to Fisher et al. violence consists of "actions, words, attitudes, structures or systems that cause physical, psychological, social or environmental damage and/or prevent people from reaching their full human potential."[14] This definition is derived from Galtung's theory considering that "violence is present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations."[15] Galtung enumerates various forms of violence: intended or not intended, manifest or latent, direct/personal (committed by an actor), indirect/structural or built into the structure (unjust, unequal and unrepresentative social structures) and cultural[16] (aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence, exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science such as logic and mathematics) that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence.

Violence may be motivated by political/social or ideological/religious considerations.

If we consider manifest direct violence that may take the form of armed struggle, the position with respect to this kind of violence is usually based on three parameters: legitimacy, lawfulness and effectiveness.

While pure pacifists consider that violence is not legitimate under any circumstances and is morally or ethically unacceptable, there is a widespread belief (religious or non-religious) that violence may be

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[i] *Self-directed* violence refers to violence in which the perpetrator and the victim are the same individual and is subdivided into self-abuse and suicide. *Interpersonal* violence refers to violence between individuals, and is subdivided into family and intimate partner violence and community violence. The former category includes child maltreatment; intimate partner violence; and elder abuse, while the latter is broken down into acquaintance and stranger violence and includes youth violence; assault by strangers; violence related to property crimes; and violence in workplaces and other institutions. *Collective* violence refers to violence committed by larger groups of individuals and can be subdivided into social, political and economic violence. (WHO *World report on violence and health*)

legitimate in certain situations (self-defence, resistance to occupation, defence of others, etc.).

There are various dispositions in law that make violence lawful and legal in situations of aggression or oppression. At the international level, Chapter VII of the UN Charter concerns "action with respect to threats to the peace, breaches of the peace, and acts of aggression". Article 42 of the chapter indicates that "such action may include demonstrations, blockade, and other operations by air, sea, or land forces". In the past, Chapter VII formed the legal basis for many military interventions or sanctions of regimes all over the world. The UN General Assembly, in its 28th session (1973), reaffirmed in resolution 3070 "the inalienable right of all people under colonial and foreign domination and alien subjugation to self-determination, freedom and independence" and "the legitimacy of the peoples' struggle for liberation from colonial and foreign domination and alien subjugation by all available means, including armed struggle."[17] Article 35 of the French *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* of 1793 acknowledges that "when the government violates the rights of the people, insurrection is for the people and for each portion of the people the most sacred of rights and the most indispensable of duties." The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* of 10 December 1948 recognizes implicitly the right to rebel against tyranny and oppression when it states in the preamble that "it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law".

Religious law also recognizes the lawfulness of violence in certain situations (e.g. just war theory in Christianity, armed jihād in Islam). But recourse to arms is considered a negative undertaking and authorized as a last resort only under certain conditions. The legality of such violence is determined by its *justification*: it must aim towards a just end and there must be no other means to achieve this end (*jus ad bellum* = the right to go to war), and its *optimization*: i.e. to maximize the benefit and minimize the harm (*jus in bello* = right conduct in war). This implies compliance with international humanitarian law (IHL) and/or religious laws of war (RLW) that provide a code of conduct which enjoins proportionality, avoidance of non-combatants, ban of non-discriminating weapons[i], etc.

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[i] Today's war practices do not comply with the principle of discrimination. Not only non-conventional weaponry, be it atomic, biological or chemical, but also some "conventional" arms such as strategic bombers, drones and long-range missiles kill massively and indiscriminately. For

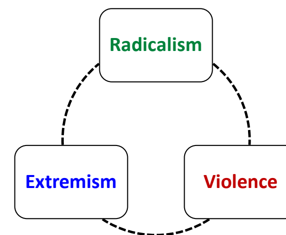
The justification and optimization principles, when combined, mean "doing the right thing and doing it right". They may be translated in the following formula: as low occurrence and as low harm as reasonably achievable.

Lawful violence may be of high intensity. Extreme violence is not about intensity but the degree by which it diverges from IHL and/or RLW.

Most advocates of strategic non-violence do not contest the legitimacy and legality of violence, but they do not believe in its effectiveness.

2.4. The radicalism-extremism-violence nexus

It is important to understand the distinction between radicalism, extremism and violence and the links between them, not only for reasons of intellectual rigor, but, above all, to guarantee effective action against extreme violence and terrorism.



Radicalism and extremism are quite distinct as shown in the previous sections. In the Islamic context, a radical who becomes extremist ceases immediately to be radical, because all Muslims and *a fortiori* those who claim to be radical Muslims, are enjoined to avoid *ghulu* (extremism). In fact, Muslim radicals are valuable allies in dealing with Muslim extremists; they are already doing so on the ground. Radical (Salafi) scholars and radical violent groups are at the fore-front in Syria, Iraq and elsewhere to fight extremist violent groups, and they suffer the excesses of such groups. The *Adl wal Ihsan* in Morocco is labelled as a radical movement; it contributes however effectively in preventing the youth from leaning to extremism and resorting to violence. Therefore, putting radicals in the extremist camp leads to a waste of resources.

Moreover, radicals and extremists are not necessarily violent. Some radicals advocate non-violence, others non-extreme violence that respects the law. Similarly, some extremists do not engage in violence, while others are attracted by extreme violence.

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that reason, modern war using indiscriminate weapons and practices must be banned and criminalized.

From what has preceded, we are in the presence of the six categories shown in the following table.

	Radicalism	Extremism	Violence
Political	PR	PE	PV
Religious	RR	RE	RV

These categories cover attitudes and behaviors and refer to different dimensions in thought and action: motivation, distance from the origin or source of inspiration, depth of action, deviation from the commonly accepted norm, and means of action. But there can be intersections between them: radicalism and violence, extremism and violence, radicalism and extremism, and between the political and the religious spheres if the political action is religiously inspired.

Furthermore, in the three-dimensional space defined by the concepts of radicalism (R), extremism (E) and violence (V) twelve theoretical possibilities[i] are worth exploring, each term being used as a noun or as an adjective (object or attribute, qualified or qualifier). The practical relevance of each of these theoretical possibilities depends on the context.

2.4.1. Radicalism and extremism

Associating radicalism to extremism, and the frequent conflation of the two notions by political, security, and military elites, as well as the media, is not something new. This conceptual confusion is highlighted by John Button in his *Radicalism Handbook* when discussing how radicalism was approached in the 20th century: "By about mid-century the establishment had so convinced itself of the synonymity of 'radical' and 'extreme' that it came to believe that any form of extremism or fundamentalism could safely be termed 'radical'."[18] For the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a radical is an "advocate of any thorough political or social change; one who belongs to the extreme section of a political party." For the *Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought*, radicalism is "a tendency to press political

[i] 1) non-violent non-extreme radicalism, 2) non-violent extreme radicalism, 3) non-extreme violent radicalism, 4) extreme violent radicalism, 5) non-violent non-radical extremism, 6) non-violent radical extremism, 7) non-radical violent extremism, 8) radical violent extremism, 9) non-radical non-extreme violence, 10) non-radical extreme violence, 11) non-extreme radical violence, 12) extreme radical violence.

views and actions towards the extreme". For John Button "such definitions serve to underline the official view of radicalism as a threat".

It is worth mentioning that in recent history a radical figure like Martin Luther King Jr., labelled as an extremist by the establishment, reacted by accepting, rhetorically, this attribute:

> "I have not said to my people: 'Get rid of your discontent.' Rather, I have tried to say that this normal and healthy discontent can be channelled into the creative outlet of nonviolent direct action. And now this approach is being termed extremist. But though I was initially disappointed at being categorized as an extremist, as I continued to think about the matter I gradually gained a measure of satisfaction from the label. Was not Jesus an extremist for love? [...] Was not Amos an extremist for justice? [...] Was not Paul an extremist for the Christian gospel? [...] Was not Martin Luther an extremist [...] and John Bunyan [...] and Abraham Lincoln [...] and Thomas Jefferson? [...] So the question is not whether we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists we will be. Will we be extremists for hate or for love? Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice or for the extension of justice?"[19]

In the Islamic context, extremism and radicalism cannot be associated together. Indeed, the prophet and his early followers, whom the Muslim radicals (Salafis) are supposed to emulate, complied with the Quranic verse that bans excess and extremism in interpreting and practising religion: "Do not commit *ghulu* in your religion."[20] Several translations of this verse have been attempted: "Do not exceed the limits in your religion." (Hilali and Khan), "Do not go to extremes in your religion beyond the truth" (Shakir), and "Do not be unduly immoderate in your religion" (Wahiduddin Khan).[21] The Arabic notion condemned in this Qurānic verse is *ghulu*[i]; it describes the attitude of leaning towards the extreme (*extremitude*).

Another Qurānic verse proposes an alternative to *ghulu*. That is *wasatiya* which denotes leaning towards the median (*medianitude*). This verse runs as follows: "Thus have We made you *ummatan wasatan* (a community of the 'golden mean'[ii])."[22] The Arabic notion of "*wasat*" has also been translated by other scholars as temperate, midmost, middle way, justly balanced, moderate, or medium community.[23] For the

[i] The closest translation of the term is the French word *surenchère*, since *ghulu* comes from the same root as *ghāli* meaning dear.

[ii] Translation of Sayyid Abul Ala Maududi (available online at tanzil.net). "*Le juste milieu*" in French, "*die goldene Mitte*" in German.

prophet, "being *wasati*" means being just and fair. It implies fairness, while the extremes lead to biased positions driven by passions and emotions, not by reason. *Ghulu* stems from the fact that some early believers sought to exceed what was required of them. *Wasatiya* enjoins them not to go beyond what is required in matters of religion and to be balanced.

It is not surprising to see that in the UK, in the wake of the 7/7 attacks on civilians travelling on the London public transport system, a Muslim NGO was established in 2005 under the name the "Radical Middle Way (RMW)"[24] ("middle way" referring here to *wasatiya*) which is by no means an oxymoron. RMW aims "to promote a mainstream, moderate understanding of Islam to which young people can relate", "to give its audiences the tools to combat exclusion and violence, and encourage positive civic action", "to foster more open, engaged and cohesive communities".

For those who address the Islamic context, using the two concepts of *ghulu* and *wasatiya* is a better approach to preventing extremism. These two notions speak louder to the Muslim extremists than the notions of "extremism" and "radicalism".

Radical groups may become extremist, but radicalism is not a prerequisite (*passage obligé*) to extremism. Algerian Islamic Armed Groups (GIA), Global Al Qaeda and ISIS are good examples of the shift from radicalism to extremism. At its inception a violent radical group attracts various profiles of political and religious radicals: youth and students in particular, academics, religious scholars, men and women who have suffered injustice, or have witnessed others suffering injustice, and who all desire to fight for justice. With time, other profiles join in: various types of extremists, people seeking adventures, new converts, new practitioners of religion, thugs, thieves and criminal gangs, intelligence and military infiltrating agents, etc.

Extremism and radicalism must therefore be decoupled in the mind and the discourse. To use them without differentiation is to mix two distinct phenomena. De-radicalization should not be used as a synonym of de-extremization.

2.4.2. Radicalism and violence

Historical and contemporary examples show that radicalism, be it political or religious, may be expressed either in a violent or in a nonviolent way.

In the Christian context, a broad range of literature on the topic of Christian radicalism (radical Christianity, radical discipleship) can be found[i]. In the collective work edited by Christiane Timmerman et al., *Faith-based Radicalism: Christianity, Islam and Judaism between Constructive Activism and Destructive Fanaticism*,[25] examples of nonviolent Christian radicalism (Martin Luther King, Jr., Toyohiko Kagawa, Leo Tolstoy, Gerrard Winstanley, William Blake and Gustavo Gutiérrez) as well as violent Christian radicalism (the Münster Rebellion, Thomas Müntzer and Camilo Torres Restrepo) are given. Many leading figures who fought for the rights of the poor in Europe, and the peasantry in particular, or who adopted the theology of liberation in Latin America, are categorized as Christian violent radicals. Movements such as the Amish community or the Ecône consecrations are considered as non-violent.

As regards the Islamic tradition, a number of authors dedicate their research work to Islamic radicalism (Salafism),[26] and some of them have attempted typologies of this Islamic current, distinguishing between non-violent groups such as scholarly salafis (*salafiya ilmiya*) or activist salafis (*salafiya harakiya*), and violent groups such as jihādi salafis (*salafiya jihādiya*).[27]

2.4.3. Extremism and violence

Extremism may also be expressed either in a violent or in a nonviolent way. Not all extremists in the West take the violent path of Norwegian Anders Behring Breivik, who in July 2011 shot people indiscriminately on Utøya Island killing 77 and injuring 151 others. In fact, most of them express their extremist views without the use of violence. In the Islamic context, the *takfirī*[ii] extremist current is made up of two groups: the first considers society as a community of unbelievers, and therefore chooses

[i] The World Heritage Encyclopaedia offers a selection of thirty essays on this topic extending from the early work of William Withington, Christian Radicalism (1836), to the recent contribution of Mark Van Steenwyk, *The Unkingdom of God: Embracing the Subversive Power of Repentance* (2013). See: gutenberg.us/articles/eng/Radical_Christianity

[ii] *Takfiris* excommunicate easily some of their fellow Muslims, based on a literalist extremist interpretation of religious texts.

to withdraw from it and live in isolated places (nonviolent); the second group engages in violence against society. Similarly, some Christian extremist groups, in Africa for example, are "relying on an interpretation of the Bible, often citing Old Testament and New Testament scriptures to justify violence and killing,"[28] such as the Uganda's Lord's Resistance Army whose leaders "are indicted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) because of using child soldiers and committing numerous crimes against humanity, including massacres, abductions, mutilation, torture, rape, and forced child labor as soldiers, porters and sex slaves,"[29] or some Christian militias in Central Africa Republic. But many Christian groups with extremist views do not resort to violence.

A topical question is "should violent and non-violent extremism be approached in the same way?" In his contribution *Violent and Non-Violent Extremism: Two Sides of the Same Coin?* published in 2014 by The Hague International Centre for Counter Terrorism, Alex P. Schmid argues that,

> "in terms of counter-terrorism policies, preventing violent extremism is not enough; rather all extremism – Islamist and other – ought to be prevented, given the bloody track record of extremism in power in the twentieth century and beyond. Rather than distinguishing between non-violent and violent extremists, we should distinguish between extremists and non-extremists and support the latter against Islamists at home and abroad. Governments should challenge and resist all extremism, whether it is violent or not, whether it is Islamist or not."[30]

In his speech at the 2014 UN General Assembly, David Cameron stated that "we must stop the so called non-violent extremists from inciting hatred and intolerance in our schools, our universities and yes, even our prisons. [...] We shouldn't stand by and just allow any form of non-violent extremism."[31] In 2015, when in Birmingham he outlined plans for his Counter Extremism Bill he said: "So this is how I believe we can win the struggle of our generation. Countering the extremist ideology by standing up and promoting our shared British values. Taking on extremism in all its forms – both violent and non-violent."[32]

The decision to include non-violent extremists in the groups targeted by the government prompted a huge debate in the UK and many saw in it a way of silencing dissent and undermining the foundations of democracy. The Christian Institute published in 2016 a *Little Book of Non-violent Extremists*[33] that portrayed a dozen historical western characters who were persecuted but who "turn[ed] out to be heroic

people of global significance". In a contribution titled *Why criminalising non-violent extremism won't prevent terrorism*, Daniel Kirkpatrick believes that "what this push for new legislation targets is not the criminal behaviour of violence, but the ideology behind it. This is based on the problematic assumption that criminalising the motivations behind an action can prevent it from happening: but my research suggests that the opposite may well be the case."[34] He illustrates his position with the example of the Northern Ireland conflict where "Sinn Féin was censored, as were many advocating their political ideology. This led to a silencing of the political debate. Those challenging the violence of the IRA, but advocating for their goals – a united Ireland – were frequently labelled as terrorist sympathisers. […] But criminalising non-violent forms of expression undermines dialogue – a crucial component of resolving conflict in all forms."[35]

3. The process of extremization

3.1. Why do they hate us?

Hate is at the heart of *extremitude* (the attitude of leaning towards the extreme). It is the incentive to "divorce" the agreed norm and to transgress it. In fact, extreme violence is often associated with hatred and it is understandable to hear, after a terrorist attack in Europe and America, the question: Why do they hate us?

For some, attempting an answer to this question is indecent, because they consider that explaining is justifying and excusing. In his answer to a question posed by a French senator on 26 November 2015, concerning the November 13 attacks in Paris, French Prime Minister Valls declared that "to explain [these acts] is already excusing them to a degree."[36]

For others, the acts of extreme violence and terror are so difficult to comprehend that they resort to the bestialization and demonization of the perpetrator. His/her human quality is taken away. The "psychologizing" response often explains extremely violent acts by the mental instability of the perpetrator portrayed as "insane", "mad" or in a sickly "quest for celebrity". This approach is sometimes stretched to a degree where the perpetrator is described as a beast.

Another response often shown by mainstream political and security elites, intellectuals and media, is culturalist, explaining extremism and

violence by the rejection of the other for what s/he is. How many times have we read or heard in the media that "the project of Daesh aims at the extinction of our civilization", "the attacks are against our values", "they target our way of life", "they hate us for what we are"?

In France, for example, this was blatant in the aftermath of the Paris attacks on 13 November 2015. Addressing the Parliament at the Versailles Palace on 16 November 2015, three days after the attacks, French president François Hollande opened his speech by stating that "the acts committed [...] constitute an aggression against our country, against its values, its youth, against its way of life. They are the work of a jihadist army, the Daech group who are fighting us because France is a country of freedom, because we are the homeland of human rights."[37] Marc Trévidic, the French magistrate dedicated to fighting terrorism, explained to the readers of *Mediapart* that "the terrorists hate our way of life, our diversity and our relationship to secularism,"[38] while French historian Jean-Pierre Filiu, a specialist in Middle Eastern affairs, professor at Sciences Po, added on the waves of *France Inter* radio: "Once and for all, they must be regarded for they are, i.e. barbarians, outsiders who do not define themselves in relation to us for what we do but for who we are."[39] This assessment is shared by French Prime minister Manuel Valls who addressed the National Assembly – while deliberating on 19 November 2015 on legislating for the state of emergency – with these words: "Friday [13 Nov 2015] the terrorists did not choose their targets at random. They hit a youth enamored of life, aspiring to emancipation through knowledge, the sense of differences, culture, music, the momentum (*élan*) towards others. Make no mistake: terrorism has hit France, not for what it does – in Iraq, in Syria or in the Sahel – but for what it is."[40] After the Brussels terrorist attacks on 22 March 2016, Italian president Sergio Matterella declared: "The target of fundamentalist terrorism is the culture of freedom and democracy."[41]

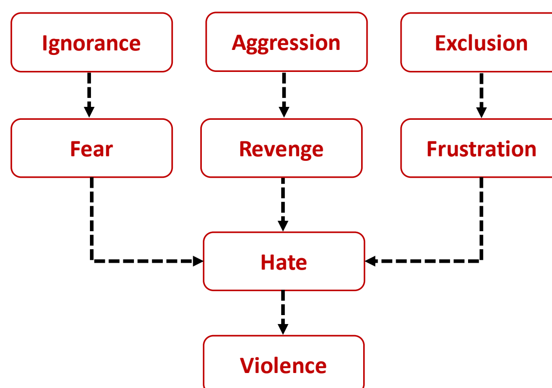
This kind of response is challenged and more and more voices are asking: "Do they really hate us for what we are?"[42] American physician, peace activist and environmentalist Dahlia Wasfi, for example, does not share this view. For her, "they don't hate us because of our freedoms; they hate us because every day we are funding and committing crimes against humanity."[43] The explanation of extremism and violence by reductionist theories such as a clash of civilizations, a confrontation between two worldviews and two sets of values, one enlightened and the other obscurantist, or as a religious war led by medieval fanatics against

modernity, is being rejected by a number of authors who consider it not only erroneous but dangerous as well.

In French academic circles, three explanatory frameworks are in competition. They differ in the emphasis they put on psychological, social, cultural, religious and political factors. While Gilles Kepel's thesis of "radicalization of Islam"[44] fits within the culturalist approach, Olivier Roy and Alain Bertho offer the opposite thesis of "islamization of radicalism"[45] focusing on generational "nihilism". A third alternative thesis is proposed by François Burgat[46] underlining the political factors, in particular the unhealthy (post)colonial and current relations between the West and the Muslim world.

3.2. The three-lane highway to hate and violence

"Ignorance leads to fear, fear leads to hate, and hate leads to violence. This is the equation"[i]. This formula attributed to Córdoban polymath Ibn Rushd (Averroes, 1126–1198) elucidates to some extent the question "why do they hate us?" But, in addition to the pathway described by Ibn Rushd, two others lead to hate and violence, through exclusion and frustration or through aggression and revenge, as shown in the following diagram.



Ignorance and exclusion are manifestations of structural violence, while aggression is direct violence. The three of them are not exclusive

[i] This level of awareness certainly favoured the convivence and the peaceful interaction between the various communities in Andalusia.

and these pathways may be combined. Domestic oppression is a combination of aggression and exclusion. Islamic-Western tensions are related to a combination of ignorance and aggression. The ignorance-exclusion-aggression nexus constitutes a 3-lane highway to hate and violence. Nothing new: violence begets violence.

A considerable amount of literature has been written on how exclusion and aggression function as drivers of extremism and violence. In the report of the High-level Group established by the UN Secretary-General, composed of twenty prominent leaders in the fields of politics, academia, civil society, international finance, and media from all regions of the world, to guide the work of the Alliance of Civilizations in "assessing the forces that contribute to extremism, and recommending collective action to counter these forces", it is stated that "poverty leads to despair, a sense of injustice, and alienation that, when combined with political grievances, can foster extremism."[47] It also addresses the political dimension of the phenomenon of extremism: the historical narratives and the current relations between societies of Western and Muslim countries, including issues like colonialism, the partition of Palestine in 1947, the military interventions in Afghanistan (1979) and Iraq (2003), the perception of Western double standards, as well as "the persistent discrimination, humiliation, or marginalization based on ethnic, religious, or other identity markers".

The Report of the UN Secretary-General concerning the global *Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism* acknowledges that violent extremism "does not arise from a vacuum. Narratives of grievance, actual or perceived injustice, promised empowerment and sweeping change become attractive where human rights are being violated, good governance is being ignored and aspirations are being crushed."[48] In this report, the conditions conducive to violent extremism are listed: lack of socioeconomic opportunities, marginalization and discrimination, poor governance, violation of human rights and the rule of law, prolonged and unresolved conflicts. According to the UNSG,

> "we must refocus our priorities, strengthen our application of justice, and rebuild the social compact between the governing and governed. We need to pay attention to why individuals are attracted to violent extremist groups. I am convinced that the creation of open, equitable, inclusive and pluralist societies, based on the full respect of human rights and with economic opportunities for all, represents the most tangible and meaningful alternative

> to violent extremism and the most promising strategy for rendering it unattractive."[49]

In the Arab world, for example, Arab peoples have been living for decades under the shadow of illegitimate, repressive and corrupt dictatorship. Instead of meeting their main mission of securing basic needs to their citizens, particularly food, peace and security, Arab leaders have behaved rather like gangs with the aims of controlling political power and monopolizing their nations' wealth. To this end, they have used the armed forces and co-opted religious and secular elites to implement the processes of dictatorship and corruption. This has led to a high degree of structural violence, expressed in the Maghreb by the Arabic word *hogra*, which refers to a sense of injustice and a feeling of humiliation.

To this structural violence, Arab societies, particularly the youth, reacted for a long time either in a passive way or violently. Again an Arabic word is used in the Maghreb to express this type of reaction: *harga*, which means burning. This word was first coined by the Maghreban youth who flee North Africa for a better life in Europe, and cross the Mediterranean Sea in precarious boats. If they do not perish at sea, when they reach the European coast they immediately burn their IDs to avoid identification and extradition to their home countries. But *harga* may also be used to describe a broader category of passive or violent reactions to structural violence. It is about rupture, bond-breaking, link-burning. *Harga* may refer to one of the following attitudes and behaviours:

– *Quitting the social and political sphere*: retreat, citizen resignation;

– *Quitting the civilian sphere*: armed resistance;

– *Quitting the country*: various forms of emigration, brain drain, boat people; and ultimately

– *Quitting life*: various forms of suicide, self-immolation (the literal meaning of *harga*).

The following Table presents the manifestations of the various steps of an extremization process related to the Arab world.

Phase	Examples of manifestations
Exclusion (injustice, structural violence) ⬇	Unmet basic needs – Violated human rights – No decent life – Social marginalization (no social consideration) – Rapid, unequal, disproportionate and ostentatious wealth grabbed by the few – Unemployment – Large-scale man-made poverty – Social ostracism – Political marginalization – Electoral fraud – Coercion and repression
Frustration ⬇	Despair – Alienation – Sense of humiliation – Grievances – Build-up of revenge – Feeling of dispossession – Hopelessness – Corrosion of social solidarity – Retreat from society – Loneliness – Forced corruption
Hate ⬇	Lack of empathy – Lack of self-esteem – Anger
Extremism	*Low Extreme / Resignation (non-violent):* Retreat from social life – Drug addiction – Mass emigration *High Extreme / Transgression (violent):* Self-directed violence, various forms of suicide including self-immolation – Violence targeting others including terrorism

3.3. Extremization by empathy

The individual does not need necessarily to be the victim of aggression and/or exclusion. S/he can be sensitive to that which affects others. This is about human empathy, the quest for justice, dignity and recognition for self and for others, and sharing the suffering of others.

Recruits of violent groups are not exclusively from dispossessed social strata. Usama Bin Laden, for example, was not from a lower Saudi social class, but from a rich family[i], and many of the foreign fighters joining Al Qaeda or ISIS do not belong to the deprived; they may come from the upper classes of European societies.

The Muslim youth in Africa, Asia and Europe are less extremized by the speeches they listen to in the mosque than by the flow of violent images coming from Syria, Iraq and Yemen through satellite TV

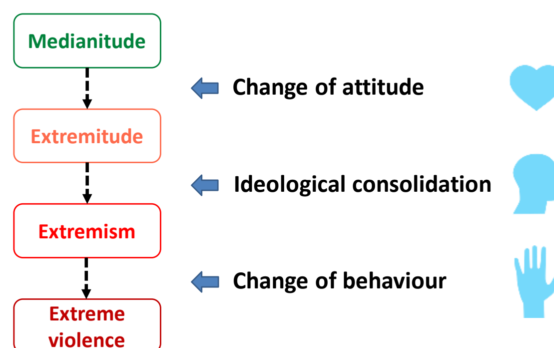
[i] Initially the claim of Bin Laden was political. He stood against the presence of the US military base in his country.

channels and social media, filtered through Western newsrooms, showing all day long the shredded bodies of children bombarded by indiscriminate barrel bombs or targeted by drones. It is possible to ban violent games, but it is far more difficult to outlaw the media that reveal widespread injustice and the violent reality of the world.

3.4. The three-step extremization process

Extremism is an acquired feature. *On ne nait pas extrémiste, on le devient*. It transcends gender, age, ethnicity, religion, and social status. Everybody has some degree of "extremability" and can become extremist if certain external and internal conditions are met.

Extremization may be viewed as a three-step process. It starts (step 1) with an attitude change, a gradual shift from a state of *medianitude* to a state of *extremitude*. This is followed (step 2) by the construction of an ideological or religious framework to support the attitude. *Extremitude* becomes extremism. This consolidation phase is used to articulate, justify, rationalize the change in attitude. This may lead, but not necessarily, to a behavioral change and extremism may end up (step 3) in the use of extreme violence.



The shift in attitude is triggered and driven by external factors: (geo)political, economic, social, cultural, and catalyzed by internal (psychological) factors. The former may be referred to as *root causes* and the latter as *aggravating conditions*; all of them being *push factors*[i]. There is

[i] In the Muslim world, multiple external factors are behind the emergence of extremism and violence: political, economic and cultural hegemony, double standards and unequal treatment, military interventions, spread of weaponry, counter insurgency tactics, etc. In fact, the situation

also the *facilitating environment* that may attract individuals to extreme violence such as the propaganda of armed groups, the dissemination of extremist ideology in conventional media and social networks, the financial incentives, the recognition, validation and the sense of belonging and worth within a group, etc. However, these *pull factors* would not be operative in the absence of the root causes and/or the aggravating conditions.

Any approach to extremism and violence limited to one of these factors is necessarily ineffective and often counterproductive.

In secular matters, *medianitude* is about complying with the norms and the laws accepted by the majority. In religious matters, it is about complying with the foundational texts of religion as interpreted by a broad set of knowledgeable and credible religious scholars, representing hence a mainstream comprehension. When an individual does not believe anymore in the fairness of the accepted laws and/or the effectiveness of mainstream religious prescriptions, s/he starts to reject them, to be attracted by the extremes and to adopt selective and excessive interpretation of the religious texts. Often the process starts with skepticism and doubt and the individual is engaged in a swinging motion between the two attitudes (like a pendulum). S/he moves from the stable position (*medianitude*) to the unstable position (*extremitude*) and an external stimulus is necessary to deliver the amount of emotional energy required.

The individual can resist this solicitation and the attraction to the extremes if s/he has sufficient internal resources: high moral standards and solid spiritual assets. From the results of their online survey conducted in Québec in 2016, which covered 1894 students, Cécile Rousseau et al. observed that "religiosity is a protective factor against the support for violent radicalization, in addition to moderating the effect of difficult life events."[50] This observation is supported by several scholars[51] from the Arab world who believe that youth are more immunized against extremism when they have been well educated in religion.

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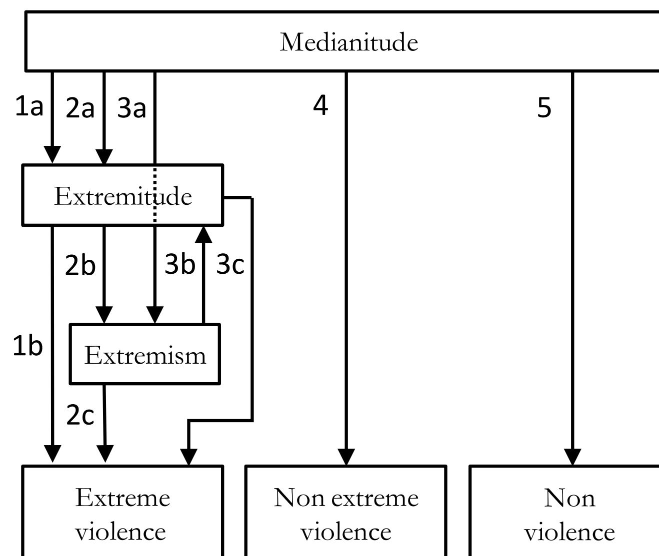
in the Muslim world is characterised by an intense popular widespread anger, with the feeling that the honour and sanctities of Muslims are being trampled on. There is also the feeling that Muslim countries are being constantly attacked by Western powers, either directly or indirectly through the support of repressive and corrupt regimes that prevent the emergence of real democracies in the region. These external push factors contribute to feeding armed groups with more and more recruits not necessarily from disadvantaged segments of society, sometimes even from higher social classes.

Mauritania and Tunisia are given as examples. In Tunisia, where the religious education is relatively poor due to the secularization policies adopted since independence, there is a high attraction of youth to extremist groups such as ISIS, whereas in Mauritania, where religious education is strong, the youth are less attracted by extremist groups.

The response of an individual is determined by the action of a filter shaped by his/her life experience and his/her tolerance threshold. Two individuals subject to ignorance, aggression or exclusion may react very differently[i].

The following diagram shows various possible pathways towards non-violence or non-extreme violence, and to extremism and violence.



A few comments on the five possibilities:

Pathway 1: For individuals more emotional than rational, ideological/religious consolidation is not a necessary step to extreme violence. Referring a wide range of scholarly research, notably to the

[i] According to Georgia Holmer from the US Institute of Peace, "there is no way to determine whether an individual in certain circumstances, with a certain disposition, with certain relationships, and exposed to certain ideas will end up engaged in violence. It is only possible to gauge vulnerability to this likelihood." (Georgia Holmer. Countering Violent Extremism: A Peacebuilding Perspective. United States Institute of Peace. Special Report 336. Washington DC September 2013. Available online at: https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR336-Countering%20Violent%20Extremism-A%20Peacebuilding%20Perspective.pdf)

work of Randy Borum[52], Georgia Holmer explains how "underscoring [a] more nuanced concept of radicalization is an acknowledgment that there is not a direct causal relationship between radical ideas and extremist violence. Some scholars even posit that not all violent extremists are radical in their belief system, in that some have only a superficial adherence to the ideology believed to 'inspire' the violent acts."[53]

Pathway 2: For individuals more rational than emotional, ideological consolidation is essential for rationalizing the extremist attitude, for justifying the use of violence, and for articulating and expressing emotions and producing a rhetoric[i]. It also serves as a cement to assure group cohesion.

Pathway 3: Extremist ideology does not operate effectively on an individual who has not undergone a change of attitude. Without *extremitude*, extremism remains in an abstract non-operative state. A religious or ideological text has little effect in a non-favorable social and political context[ii].

Pathways 4 and 5: The individual is immunized against the temptation of a change in attitude and resists falling into *extremitude* and extremism. S/he responds to the aggression or exclusion against him/herself or against others either by non-extreme violent lawful means (Pathway 4), or by non-violent means with a firm belief that this is the most effective, legitimate and lawful way to effect a positive change (Pathway 5).

The challenge of any de-extremization strategy is to reduce the probability of pathways 1 to 3 and, simultaneously, to increase the probability of pathways 4 or 5.

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[i] Violent extremist groups in the Arab/Muslim often make a selective use and an extremist interpretation of the Islamic foundational texts. They resort to a religious rhetoric because they do not master the political language, due to the impoverishment of political culture in the Arab/Muslim world after decades of occupation and tyranny. They prefer formulating their grievances and discontent and expressing their claims in a mastered religious language that is rich in vocabulary relating to justice and fairness.

[ii] In a research conducted by Abbas Barzegar, et al. on Civic Approaches to Confronting Violent Extremism, the authors said that "surveyed stakeholders overwhelmingly agreed that there exists no causal, predictive link between ideology and violence. Rather, practitioners have found that causes of violence were non-linear and complex, grounded in various psychological, social, and political forces." (Abbas Barzegar, Shawn Powers and Nagham El Karhili. Civic Approaches to Confronting Violent Extremism: Sector Recommendations and Best Practices. Georgia State University. September 2016. Available online at: http://tcv.gsu.edu/files/2016/09/Civic-Approaches-Sept-8-2016-Digital-Release.pdf)

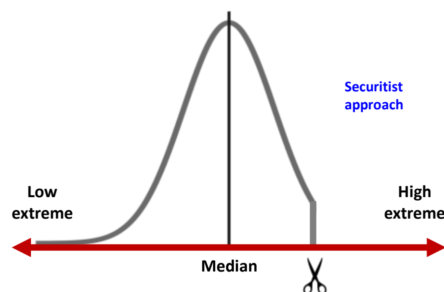
4. Approaches to de-extremization

The launch of the global *Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism* by the UNSG in December 2015 prompted the development all over the world of many *National Action Plans* (NAPs) on the same topic. These national plans are supposed to be inspired by the global action plan; in reality many authoritarian regimes across the word used this opportunity to recycle in the NAPs their liberticidal anti-terror legislations causing blatant violations of human rights. According to Hervé Gonsolin, independent consultant on peace and security, "there are some 40 de-radicalization programs throughout the world and they are all different. […] Some of them are suspected of being a disguised means of reorienting submission of Jihadists towards goals which are more consistent with the interests of the established governments."[54]

Most religious institutions and state-sponsored research centres working on "disengagement and de-radicalization" (DDR) or "countering violent extremism" (CVE) are perceived by the target groups as being controlled by, or at least too close to, governments and therefore rejected. But there is more and more involvement of the CSOs and particularly those working in the field of conflict transformation (the peace-building community) in de-extremization, and a number of publications have been issued in recent years to present alternatives to the hard security approach to de-extremization, such as: *A Man's World? Exploring the Roles of Women in Counter Terrorism and Violent Extremism,*[55] *Measures to prevent radicalization: The current situation in Switzerland,*[56] *De-radicalization or the Roll-back of Violent Extremism,*[57] *Civic Approaches to Confronting Violent Extremism: Sector Recommendations and Best Practices,*[58] *Fostering Social Resilience Against Extremism,*[59] *A Decade Lost: Rethinking Radicalization and Extremism,*[60] *Countering Violent Extremism: A Peacebuilding Perspective.*[61]

4.1. The securitism-jihādism trap

One way of addressing extremization is to amputate the bell curve distribution of its high extreme. This is the doctrine of undifferentiated eradication, the pure and hard security approach or *securitism*. This approach has,



in the past couple of decades, shown its limits. It is ineffective, even counterproductive[62]. Expressions like "destroy the group" are an illusion. An individual can be killed, an organization can be temporarily defeated militarily, but if the root causes of extremization are not removed, the organization will regenerate, or even worse another more violent one will arise from its ashes.

Moreover, this approach tends to enhance and expand the low extreme of resignation, falsely presented as a form of resilience[i], which often contributes to maintaining an unjust social and political status quo. This, in turn, will necessarily regenerate the high extreme.

Securitism is to security what jihādism is to jihād: a corrupted form. Securitism is nothing other than the mirror image of Jihādism. They feed each other.

Security, like peace, may be considered as a basic need and a fundamental human right. Securitism is an ideology based on the belief that hard security is the only way to address extreme violence and terrorism and bring peace. It often focuses on maintaining an unfair status quo, emphasizing state security, ignoring human security, and often securitism ends up in gross human rights violations, state violent extremism and state terrorism.

Jihād, considered by all Muslims a religious obligation, may be defined as an effort, of any kind (of the heart, the tongue or the hand) that is permissible, made in the way of God (intention), in order to fight against (goal): (1) all forms of evil inside oneself (greater jihād); (2) all forms of injustice outside oneself (smaller jihād). Jihādism is an ideology based on the belief that armed jihād is the only way to address external aggression and/or internal oppression, and that armed jihād is an end

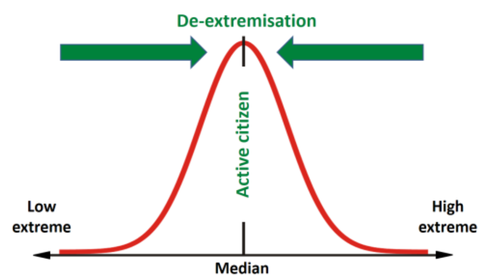
[i] In the physical sciences, resilience is "the property of a material that enables it to resume its original shape or position after being bent, stretched, or compressed" (American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language). It is related to "the amount of potential energy stored in an elastic material when deformed" (Collins English Dictionary). In order to recover its original shape, the material has to release the stored energy. The more resilient the material is, the smoother the energy transfer will be. In the case of less resilient materials, the energy transfer will cause a breakdown, which may be violent. Exclusion and frustration act like physical laws; they impart to an individual or a group of individuals an amount of emotional energy that must be evacuated at some point. The absence of a space for freedom to allow a smooth energy transfer will lead to an explosion or breakdown. A resilient community is not the one that resorts to resignation and accepts exclusion and injustice; it is an inclusive one whose members play an active role and enjoy freedom, basic needs and fundamental human rights.

not a means. Often jihādism ends up in gross human rights violations and in individual or group terrorism.

Both jihādism and securitism preach violence. Jihādism is a form of extremism that transgresses Islamic law; securitism is a form of extremism that transgresses international law. Both fall into the excessive use of violence, outside the law. Both commit crimes against innocent civilians: Jihādism when it kills innocent people through acts of terrorism, and securitism when it kills civilians by drones and through "guilt by association" and collective punishment. Ultimately, securitism fails to defeat group violent extremism just as jihādism fails to defeat state violent extremism.

4.2. An alternative approach

Another more constructive way of addressing extremization is through *medianization*, i.e. to bring the extremist individuals and groups (from both the high and the low extremes) back to the median position and to the role of nonviolent active citizens.



A successful strategy of de-extremization recognizes that behind (extreme) violence there is an underlying "unhealed trauma and/or unresolved conflict", to use a Galtunian expression. This approach aims at transforming the conflict between the extremist (individual/group) and the community (local, national, international), by mending the relationship between the conflicting parties, not by eliminating one of them.

A successful strategy of de-extremization must be home grown, sensitive to the local context. An African PVE expert warned against importing Western approaches in dealing with violent groups in the Arab world and the Sahel regions. He believes that "for Westerners these groups are foreign entities representing a threat for their security and hence must be eliminated. For us, they are our children who have gone astray. They must be considered as part of the social fabric to be re-integrated. Our duty is to bring them back to the straight path. We should also reflect on how Westerners deal with their violent right-wing movements."[63]

Empathy is therefore a keyword. The extremist individuals/groups must be viewed as human beings to convert, not abstract entities to eradicate. De-humanizing and demonizing extremists is a hard security recipe aimed at building a consensus on the necessity of eliminating an evil. Empathy prescribes reaching out to these actors, listening to their grievances, acknowledging their suffering and the truth content in their discourse, as well as the legitimate part of their goals, and in the end salvaging as many of them as possible, because they are also victims.

A successful strategy of de-extremization must address the three steps of the extremization process and not focus exclusively on the last step leading to violence. To prevent extremism and violence is to address the hearts, the minds and the hands, and to deal with the causes, the arguments and the acts.

A) The change of attitude

The drivers of hate and the root causes of violence, summarized by the triad of injustice "ignorance-aggression-exclusion" must be addressed.

Ignorance is reduced by promoting encounters which foster the knowledge of the other, deconstruct stereotypes, and build confidence. This leads to mutual recognition and respect and to envisaging a better convivence, i.e. not only a passive cohabitation but a positive interaction. Encounter cannot be envisaged with the rise of *identitism* – a corrupt form of the identity need – closed and constructed by opposition to other identities.

Aggression is reduced by promoting fairer international and national relations based on the power of law, not the law of power. This is a global collective effort, involving not only the elites but the whole civil societies.

Exclusion is reduced by promoting inclusive participation[i] in building the society and the state, by fighting marginalization at every level and giving space for people to express their goals peacefully.

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[i] In 2011, the "Arab Spring" brought hope and enthusiasm to large segments of Arab societies, in particular to both extremes of the Salafi spectrum: the quietist and jihādi, and some of them moved quickly to the median position as "political activists", because they saw the virtue of non-violent change and political participation. About twenty Salafi political parties were founded since 2011 in Mauritania, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Yemen. Conversely, whenever there is a blow to the democratic process in the Arab world (a military intervention for instance), this acts as a centrifugal force that drives some Salafis away from the median participative stand. It

B) The ideological consolidation

To deal with the ideological/religious consolidation of *extremitude* in Islamic contexts, an investment must be made in education (formal and non-formal) and the media (mainstream and alternative). The concept of *wasatiya* must be promoted as an alternative to *ghulu* both among children and within and around extremist youth groups. This type of constructive discourse must be carried by influential scholars, often radicals, with recognized knowledge and independence, through credible vectors and channels. Any investment in non-credible scholars, who might be very well-known and respected in official circles, is a waste of resources, leading to non-effective, even counterproductive results.

C) The change of behavior

Preventive and repressive security measures are legitimate and necessary to prevent and counter extreme violence. These measures must be lawful, fair and respectful of human rights and dignity. Government agencies that fail to uphold these principles and practise indiscriminate collective punishment, unlawful targeted assassinations, and punish not only acts but also ideas, thoughts and intentions, do not provide security to their societies; rather, they use state violent extremism and ultimately fail to end the individual and group violent extremism they are supposed to fight. On the contrary, they contribute to its regeneration and sustainability.

Change in extremist violent behavior requires the dissemination, by credible vectors, of the basic provisions of international humanitarian

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either pulls them backward to the traditional posture, validating their belief that politics only lead to division and *fitna*, or pushes them forward to violent action, validating their belief that politics is ineffective in the Arab/Muslim world. The January 1992 coup in Algeria after the victory of the Islamic Salvation Front in the general elections, the strangulation of Gaza following the victory of Hamas in the 2006 general elections, and the 3 July 2013 coup in Egypt to oust an elected president and to dissolve an elected parliament, all followed by the counterterror rhetoric and the 'war on terror' waged against the victims of military interventionism, led to the birth of Salafi armed groups in Algeria in the 1990s, in Gaza in the late 2000s, and in Egypt after 2013. The attraction of the Arab youth by ISIS is not unrelated to the recent blow to the democratization process initiated by the "Arab Spring". See: Alistair Davison, Lakhdar Ghettas, Halim Grabus, Florence Laufer. *Promoting Constructive Political Participation of New Faith-Based Political Actors in the Arab Region*. Cordoba Foundation of Geneva, 2016. Available at: https://www.cordoue.ch/publications-mega/workshop-reports/519-promoting-constructive-political-participation-of-new-faith-based-political-actors-in-the-arab-region

law (IHL) and the religious law of war (RLW), among the armed groups, and also the promotion of the culture of nonviolence, by appropriate means adapted to the local context. The youth must be encouraged to use strategic nonviolence for social/political change and made aware of the effectiveness of this method in situations of power asymmetry.

5. Conclusion

The Muslim world has witnessed a steady increase in the intensity and scale of extremism and violence. For almost three decades, Al Qaeda was the emblem of this phenomenon, but the last decade has seen the rise of Boko Haram in Nigeria and Al Shabab in the Horn of Africa and the emergence of ISIS in Iraq, Syria and beyond, with an even higher level of atrocities committed by these armed groups. Violence is obviously a destabilizing factor in countries where it takes place and in the region as a whole. Fighting and, most importantly, preventing extremism and violence is therefore a duty of all states and must involve all segments of society. Any national strategy in this field should be homegrown and adapted to the local social and cultural context.

In the fight against violence and extremism, the use of the proper terminology is of significant importance. It is central, for intellectual rigour and for effective action, to distinguish between extremism, radicalism and violence and to understand how they relate to each other. It is also important to be aware of the various pathways to hate and violence and to understand the process of extremization in all its complexity. This is a pre-requisite to the design of any de-extremization program that seeks to make a real impact. Hard security approaches have shown their limits in the last couple of decades. It is time to invest in conflict transformation and to adopt holistic approaches that address all the steps of the extremization process and all the push and pull factors leading to violence, including the root causes, the aggravating conditions and the facilitating environment.

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