Radicalization in Friction: Why Osama is Not Dead

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Radicalization in Friction: Why Osama is Not Dead

Clark McCauley
Rachel C. Hale Professor of Sciences & Mathematics and Co-Director of the Solomon Asch Center for the Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict, Bryn Mawr College

Sophia Moskalenko
Research Associate, Solomon Asch Center for the Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict, Bryn Mawr College

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What is political radicalization?

- Change in beliefs, feelings, and actions toward increased support of one side of inter-group conflict
  - *e.g.* U.S after 9/11

**FOCUS HERE IS ACTION!**

**EVIDENCE FROM CASE HISTORIES**
Individual-level mechanisms of radicalization

1. **Personal grievance** (Chechen Black Widows)
2. **Group grievance** “lone-wolf terrorists”
   (Ted Kaczynski, Mohammed Reza Taheri-azar)
3. **Slippery slope** (“Jihadist Next Door” Omar Hammami)
4. **Love** (Red Army Fraction, Brigade Rosse)
5. **Risk and Status** (Abu-Musab al-Zarqawi)
6. **Unfreezing** (9/11 bombers)
   (Fear -- Colombia, Iraq, jail)
Group-level mechanisms of radicalization

7. Group Polarization (Weather Underground)

8. Group Competition
   vs. state (condensation: Weather from SDS)
   vs. non-state groups (“outbidding”: PFLP to jihad)
   vs. faction within group (fission: IRA)

9. Group Isolation/Threat (underground group, cult, squad in combat)
Mass-level mechanisms of radicalization

10. *Jujitsu Politics* (Al Qaeda vs. U.S.)

11. *Hatred* (Neo-Nazis)

12. *Martyrdom* (Sayyid Qutb)
Conclusion

• Mechanisms are not mutually exclusive, but nested and likely synergistic
• The list of mechanisms is likely not exhaustive
• Future research may shed light on relative frequency and strength of mechanisms among known radicals/terrorists vs. activists vs. apolitical

Sophia Moskalenko
smoskale@gmail.com
Implications 1

• No profile of radicalization
• No conveyor belt to terrorism
• Osama bin Laden (Chapter 14)

9 of 12 mechanisms at work
Conflict over time made charismatic leader of
gawky youth who couldn’t lead 8 ducks across a
to road (Prince Bindar bin Sultan)
Conflict over time can make new bin Ladens?
Implications 2

• Also mechanisms of activism and social movement mobilization?

• What do terrorists want? Fear and coercion? Group over cause? Lone-wolf actors?
Where is religion and ideology in our story?

Twelve mechanisms, only two (group grievance, hate) connect with religion (Umma as international identity group, good vs evil)

=> Seven reasons to doubt that Religion (Radical Islam) Produces Terrorism (Jihadis)
#7

Psychology research shows weak link between ideas and actions
Koran is indefinite about violence: every religion has texts that can support violence and other texts that can support peace.
#5

Most Salafis/Wahabbists do not support jihadist violence
#4

Polls show that 99% of those who justify suicide bombing (5-10% U.S. and U.K. Muslims) never engage in violence
#3

No examples of radicalization by reading the Koran (or Bible?)
#2

Numerous examples of radicalization by watching videos of victim Muslims
#1

(Part of) USG doesn’t believe ideology drives political violence
"Modern insurgencies are often more complex matrices of irregular actors with widely different goals. At least some of the principal actors will be motivated by a form of ideology (or at least will claim to be), but ideology will not necessarily extend across the whole insurgent network."

USG Counterinsurgency Guide (2009)
Conclusion: Religion as rationalization

• Humans don’t kill other humans without a reason to tell self and others
• Religion/ideology is important as rationalization and appeal for mass support
• Alternative reasons: ethnicity/nation, working class, reciprocity rule

EXCEPT LONE WOLF?
How to look for radicalization: Circumstances and symptoms

Example: Individual Level
Seven mechanisms
Circumstances/situations and emotional reactions raising likelihood of political radicalization
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mechanism</th>
<th>Circumstances</th>
<th>Symptoms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal grievance</td>
<td>Harm to self/loved ones</td>
<td>Anger/revenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group grievance</td>
<td>Perceived harm to group/cause</td>
<td>Outrage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love</td>
<td>Radical friends/family</td>
<td>Concern/worry for loved one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>Threat from gangs, militants, police, prison</td>
<td>Fear, anxiety, avoidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk and Status</td>
<td>History of violence, arson, arrests</td>
<td>Easily bored, arrogant, into guns/bombs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slippery Slope</td>
<td>Repeated exposure to violence</td>
<td>Gradual emotional detachment from violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfreezing</td>
<td>Recent loss of job, family/friends; relocation</td>
<td>Loneliness, seeking new friends</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion

Mechanisms of radicalization may be useful in looking for indicators of radicalization
Email: cmccaule@brynmawr.edu

_Friction: How radicalization happens to them and us._
Oxford, 2011