

## The Psychology of Radicalization and Deradicalization: How Significance Quest Impacts Violent Extremism

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*We present a model of radicalization and deradicalization based on the notion that the quest for personal significance constitutes a major motivational force that may push individuals toward violent extremism. Radicalization is defined as the process of supporting or engaging in activities deemed (by others) as in violation of important social norms (e.g., the killing of civilians). In these terms, radicalization (1) is a matter of degree (in which mere attitudinal support for violence reflects a lower degree of radicalization than actual engagement in violence); (2) represents a subjective judgment proffered by those for whom the violated norms seem important but not by those who have devalued or suppressed the norms in question.*

*Our radicalization/deradicalization model contains three crucial components: (1) the motivational component (the quest for personal significance) that defines a goal to which one may be committed, (2) the ideological component that in addition identifies the means of violence as appropriate for this goal's pursuit, and (3) the social process of networking and group dynamics through which the individual comes to share in the violence-justifying ideology and proceeds to implement it as a means of significance gain. We present empirical evidence consistent with our model's assumptions and discuss its implications for policies of preventing radicalization and effecting deradicalization.*

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**KEY WORDS:** radicalization, deradicalization, significance quest, violent extremism, goal systems

### *The War on Terror*

Among the defining characteristics of the twenty-first century's first decade has been the specter of terrorism that threatens world stability and security. The attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in the United States, as well as subsequent attacks in Bali, London, and Madrid, attracted major media attention; yet the problem of terrorism is considerably broader, as hundreds of terrorist groups around the globe (442 according to the most recent approximation; National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, 2012) practice their lethal trade on a nearly daily basis. Following the tragic events of 9/11, President George W. Bush declared a global war on terror. As of this writing, this war is in its twelfth year with no end in sight; already, it has claimed many billions of dollars and hundreds of thousands of lives, the large majority of which were the lives of innocent civilians, mostly Muslims.

Undoubtedly, the determined struggle against terror by the United States and its allies has bore impressive fruit: elimination or arrests of major Al Qaeda leaders, dismantlement of the organization's logistical infrastructures, disabling of its financial networks, etc. Despite these notable achievements, however, experts disagree as to whether we are safer now than on the eve of 9/11, and Islamic extremism seems far from subsiding. Skeptics point out that radicalization seems on the rise in the Middle East, Asia, and Africa. There is growing danger that the Arab Spring is turning into a deadly winter, as the waves of democracy meet the rocks of fanaticism.

Donald Rumsfeld's (2004) question is as relevant today as on the day he posed it: "Is the Muslim world turning out terrorists faster than the United States can kill or capture them?"<sup>1</sup> Alarming, the answer could be affirmative. No matter how many terrorist leaders are killed or captured, scores of others seem willing and ready to take their place. Like the mythical hydra that could grow multiple heads in place of those that were chopped off, so Al Qaeda and its affiliates seem able to spring branches around the globe in response to strikes by the United States and its allies that deal it defeats. Increasingly, it appears that killing or capture is unlikely to end terrorism, and Governor Romney may have hit the nail on the head when he pronounced that "We cannot kill our way out of this mess." If not killing, then what, however? Many feel that the real challenge at this point is to prevent and/or reverse *radicalization*. How can this feat be accomplished?

In the pages that follow, we present a theoretical, empirically supported analysis of radicalization into violence. We begin with a general conception of radicalization of which radicalization to violence is a special case. We subsequently outline a theory of violent radicalization based on the notion of the quest for significance (Kruglanski, Chen, Dechesne, Fishman, & Orehek, 2009; Kruglanski et al., 2013) and present empirical evidence for this theory. The concluding discussion considers personality, cultural, and situational variables as possible contributing factors to radicalization and the challenge of translating our theoretical understanding of radicalization into policy and practice.

### *Radicalization as Counterfinality*

It may be helpful to first clarify what the term "radicalization" means and how it can be defined. Radicalization implies a movement in the direction of *supporting* or *enacting* radical behavior; which begs the question of how radical behavior is defined? Taking a bottom-up approach, consider behaviors one would describe as radical: Terrorism certainly comes to mind but so do a host of other behaviors such as substance abuse, severe crime, eating disorders, self-immolation, suicide, and so on. What all these have in common is that they run counter to common norms or concerns: While serving a given end, they undermine other goals that matter to most people. Therefore, one might label such behaviors as *counterfinal*: Anorexic behavior may serve the goal of a svelte figure, but it

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-224\\_162-2042311.html](http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-224_162-2042311.html)

does so at the cost of severe health consequences. Drug addiction may induce a pleasurable elation while destroying one's ability to function productively and cope with the challenges of everyday life. The suicide bomber may believe that his or her actions serve a noble cause, yet they also run afoul of the survival instinct and of the numerous human goals that require staying alive. Though our counterfinality concept applies to all kinds of extreme behavior, this chapter addresses a specific kind of radicalization that threatens to progress to violence.

### *Radicalization and Focal Goal Commitment*

Why would anyone in their right mind (and hardly anyone believes, nowadays, that all extremists are insane) commit acts that so clearly violate such basic concerns as health or survival. We submit that the reason is a disproportionate commitment to ends served by the extreme behavior that prompts a devaluation or a forceful suppression of alternative considerations (Shah, Friedman, & Kruglanski, 2002). Illustrative of such exclusive commitment is a statement of a Black Tamil Tiger, member of the suicide cadre of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam that we (MH) interviewed recently in North Eastern Sri Lanka:

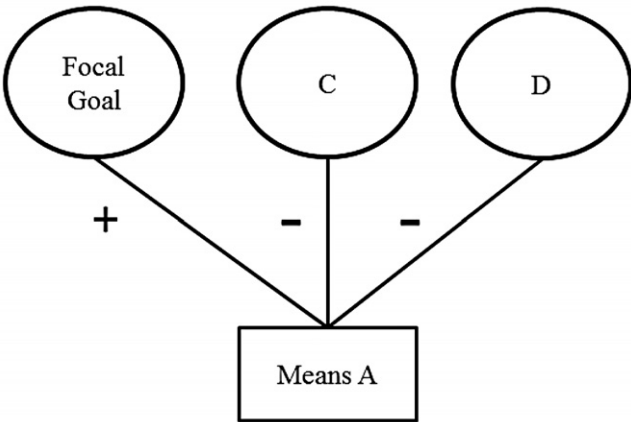
"Family and relationships are forgotten in that place. There was no place for love . . . That means a passion and loyalty to that group, to those in charge, to those who sacrificed their lives for the group. Then I came to a stage where I had no love for myself. I had no value for my life. I was ready to give myself fully, even to destroy myself, in order to destroy another person."

The counterfinality view of radicalization has two important implications. One of these concerns degrees of radicalization, the other—the subjectivity of radicalization judgments. We discuss them in turn.

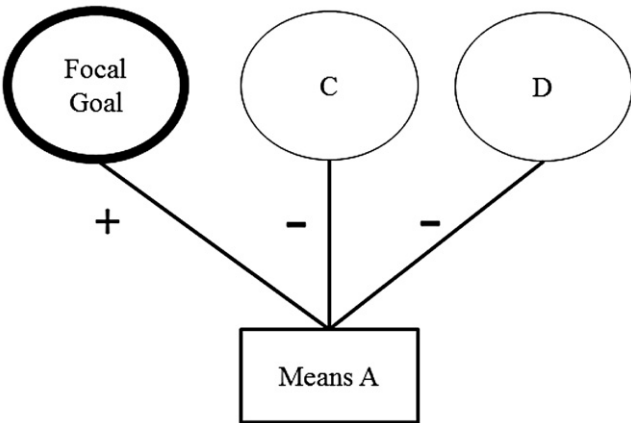
### *Degrees of Radicalization*

One may define *degrees of radicalization* as the *extent of imbalance* between the focal goal served by the extreme behavior and other common ends that people have. A person who merely supports the idea of terrorism while going about her/his everyday business (hence attending to the panoply of her/his other goals) is thus said to be less radicalized than a person who actually joins a terrorist organization. In turn, a noncombatant member of a terrorist organization, an office clerk, a cook, or computer expert whose life in the organization allows various alternative pursuits is less radicalized than a fighter who actually takes up arms and actively risks life and limb for the cause; in these terms, the most extremely radicalized individual is the suicide bomber ready to sacrifice all for the cause, as exemplified by the Black Tamil Tiger's statement above.

This portrayal of *radicalization* in terms of its degrees echoes the pyramid model of participation in terrorism (e.g., McCauley & Moscalenko, 2011) wherein the many passive supporters of terrorism represent the wide base of the pyramid, and as one moves toward its apex, there are fewer and fewer individuals prepared to subdue their alternative concerns to a single-minded pursuit of the focal goal. Our notion of degrees of radicalization also addresses Sageman's (2004, 2008) crucial question of *specificity*: Why is it that of an entire population seemingly in the same objective circumstances (e.g., of occupation by a foreign force) only relatively few are actively engaged in the fight? From the present perspective, the reason could well be that only few individuals are sufficiently committed to the focal goal so as to devalue or banish from mind common alternative concerns representing basic human needs (such as health or survival). Why they are so committed and how their commitment develops are issues addressed in subsequent portions of our article.



**Figure 1A.** Goals-means configuration for less radicalized individuals. The focal goal and the alternative goals operate under similar goal commitment (positive sign = instrumentality, negative sign = counterfinality).



**Figure 1B.** Goals-means configuration for highly radicalized individuals. The alternative goals are devalued due to strong focal goal commitment (goal represented with a thicker contour).

Figure 1 (a and b) schematically depicts our *counterfinality model* of radicalism (CFMR) as well as illustrating its derivative notion of *radicalization degrees*. Specifically, “means A” that serves the “focal goal F” is counterfinal in that it undermines the commonly held “goals C and D.” For a *less radicalized* individual, depicted in Figure 1a, these latter goals loom large relative to the focal goal suggesting that the individual in question is unlikely to devalue or relinquish them. In Figure 1b, however, the focal goal is more dominant, and the alternative goals are devalued (indicated by their fainter outline) suggesting a higher degree of imbalance between the focal and the alternative goals, and hence, of radicalization.

*Eye of the Beholder: On Subjectivity of Radicalism Perceptions*

The counterfinality portrayal of radicalism also explains why it is difficult to agree on whether a given behavior is or is not radical (Schmid, Jongman, & Horowitz, 1988): Labeling a behavior as

radical implies that one views the ends sacrificed by the radicalized individual (e.g., observing the sanctity of human lives) as of essential importance, rendering their relinquishment in adopting the counterfinal means irrational and unacceptable.

The radicalized individual is hardly likely to share that perception, however; hence they are unlikely to concede their irrationality or extremism. Killing members of an out-group may seem justifiable to the radicalized person in light of her or his cause's subjective importance, but it may hardly seem so to members of the victimized group. Additionally, dehumanization and delegitimization of out-group members (Bandura, 1988; Bar-Tal, 1990, 2011), implies that killing them does not actually constitute encroachment on the killing prohibition that applies to humans. That is partly the reason why "one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter" and why perceptions of someone's radicalism/extremism are in the "eye of the beholder."

### *Terrorists' Motivation as the Quest for Personal Significance*

What then is that "focal goal" to which the political radicals, the terrorist foot soldiers, the leaders, and, above all, the suicide bombers are so committed? A plethora of terrorist goals have been listed in the literature (such as honor, vengeance, religion, loyalty to the leader, perks in the afterlife, even feminism). All these may be valid descriptions of specific cases. But underlying them, there seems to exist a more general motivating force that we have called the *quest for significance*. The quest for significance is the fundamental desire to matter, to be someone, to have respect (Kruglanski et al., 2009; Kruglanski et al., 2013). Psychological theorists have long realized that this quest constitutes a major, universal, human motivation variously labeled as the need for *esteem*, *achievement*, *meaning*, *competence*, *control*, and so on (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Fiske, 2010; Frankl, 2000; Higgins, 2012; Maslow, 1943; White, 1959).

From that perspective, the various specific motivations mentioned in the terrorism literature (Bloom, 2004; Gambetta, 2005; Stern, 2004) are *special cases* of the significance quest. Consider feminism, for example. In the context of terrorism, feminism refers to the motivation to prove that women matter; that they are as worthy as are men, as committed to the cause, and as willing to undertake sacrifices on its behalf; in short, as deserving of significance.

Alternatively, take loyalty to the leader often mentioned as a motivation for terrorism. In our conversations with detained members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and with Sri Lankan intelligence officers tasked with the interrogation of captured Black Tamil Tigers, members of the elite squads of LTTE's suicide bombers, it turned out that the love of Villupilai Prabhakaran, the all-powerful leader of the LTTE, often was the major motivation underlying the cadres' readiness to die for the cause.<sup>2</sup> Psychologically speaking, such love and worship of the leader translates into the quest for his or her approval which endows him with the ultimate authority in matters of personal significance.<sup>3</sup>

For a final example, consider *revenge*, the desire to reciprocate harm against those who have caused harm to oneself or one's group. Beyond any material costs that deliberate harm from another entails, it constitutes an unwelcome invasion into one's life that renders one powerless, reduces one's esteem in the eyes of self and others, and hence is humiliating and significance reducing.<sup>4</sup> Revenge

<sup>2</sup> Establishment of an Independent Tamil State in the North Eastern part of the Sri Lankan island.

<sup>3</sup> It has been reported that before each suicidal mission, the Black Tamil Tiger tasked with its implementation was granted the honor of dining with Prabhakaran, or one of his major lieutenants, clearly representing a major significance-bestowing event.

<sup>4</sup> Pape (2005) argued that suicide attacks are generally attributable to the presence on one's soil of foreign occupation. Whereas scholars (e.g., Kiras, 2007) have questioned the exclusive place of foreign occupation as a motivator of suicidal bombings, from the present perspective, there is no doubt that occupation, the presence of foreign check points in one's own land, searches in the middle of the night, and so on can be highly humiliating and in this sense significance reducing.

levels the playing field and restores the balance of power by dealing a humiliating blow to one's enemy, responsible for one's humiliation, thus redeeming one's lost significance. In summary, the seeming heterogeneity of motives underlying engagement in terrorism boils down to a major underlying motivation—the quest for personal significance.

### The Radicalization Process

The radicalization process unfolds over time. Generally speaking, it requires the presence of three ingredients: (1) arousal of the *goal of significance*, that is, activation of the significance quest, (2) identification of terrorism/violence as the appropriate *means to significance*, (3) *commitment shift* to the goal of significance and away from other motivational concerns resulting in that goal's *dominance* and the relative devaluation of alternative goals incompatible with terrorism. In what follows, we discuss these ingredients at some length.

#### *Awaking the Significance Quest*

The goal of significance needs to be activated for it to induce behavior. We do not invariably seek significance; occasionally we invest our energies in alternative pursuits related to comfort, survival, or health, for example (Kruglanski et al., 2013). Activation of the significance quest can happen in one of three major ways: (1) through a *loss of significance* or humiliation of some sort, corresponding to the psychological construct of *deprivation*; (2) through an anticipated (or threatened) significance *loss*, corresponding to the psychological construct of *avoidance*, and (3) through an opportunity for *significance gain*, representing the psychological construct of *incentive*.

#### *Significance Loss*

**Individually based.** Significance loss can happen due to *individual* or *group* humiliation and can be due to conflict-related or unrelated matters. Individual humiliation unrelated to the conflict is illustrated by Palestinian women who volunteered for suicide missions after they had suffered some kind of stigma in their lives (due to infertility, divorce, or an extramarital affair); similarly, a young boy who blew himself up at one of the Israeli check points had been diagnosed with HIV Aids (Pedahzur, 2005). All these individuals suffered from a significance loss that they were apparently motivated to eradicate through volunteering for a socially venerated cause.

Or consider the Tsarnaev brothers, Dzhokhar and Tamerlan, the likely suspects in the Boston Marathon bombing of April, 2013. While not all is known about their specific circumstances, it already appears that at least the older brother, Tamerlan, was poorly assimilated (with no American friends by his own accounting); his family was on welfare; his parents were on the verge of divorce; he was unemployed and supported by his wife; he was a college dropout (ostensibly in order to pursue a boxing career); and he was locked in a feud with his successful uncles, Alvi and Ruslan, who referred to the Boston Tsarnaevs as “losers.” It seems plausible to suggest that Tamerlan suffered a considerable loss of significance in those circumstances and that in response, he entertained dreams of glory (e.g., as an Olympic boxer?) whose realization appeared possible by becoming a hero or a martyr according to the extremist ideology that he adopted.

Often enough, individual humiliation is a direct consequence of violent conflict with some out-group, and it could arise out of personal losses perpetrated by the enemy. This characterization applies, for example, to the Chechen “black widows” who were rendered powerless and thus demeaned and humiliated by having their significant other wrested from them by the Russian forces (Speckhard & Akhmedova, 2005; Speckhard & Paz, 2012). A similar dynamic applies to some



Palestinian terrorists. Hanadi Jaradat, a 29-year-old lawyer from Jenin, a town in the West Bank, blew herself up (on October 4, 2003) in the Maxim restaurant in Haifa, causing the death of 21 people (Jews and Arabs), and the wounding of 51 others. When she was 21, in 1997, her fiancé was killed by the Israel Defense Forces, and in 2003, her cousin Saleh and her beloved brother Fadi were similarly killed. In an interview with a Jordanian daily, *Al Arab al-Yum* Hanadi foreswore revenge: “Your blood will not have been shed in vain,” she is reported to have said “The murderer will yet pay the price and we will not be the only ones who are crying.”

Individual significance loss can be the result of general, economic, social, and political conditions prevailing in a given state: internecine conflict, instability, insecurity, and the failure of the government to supply order. Such conditions could introduce a state of *anomie* (Durkheim, 1893), the sense that the state is failing to provide the means for its citizens to attain their goals. This could foster a feeling of helplessness and personal insignificance, arousing a significance quest potentially taken advantage of by a terrorist movement.

**Socially based significance loss.** Often, experience of significance loss relates to one’s social identity that is disrespected by others. This type of loss may be acutely felt by Muslim immigrants to Europe who encounter widespread disrespect, if not rabid “Islamophobia” on the part of native populations in their host countries (Kruglanski, Crenshaw, Post, & Victoroff, 2008; Sageman, 2004). The humiliation of one’s group and the trampling of its sacred values (Atran, 2010) may engender a considerable significance loss felt by all members of the group (e.g., all Muslims); this is often skillfully exploited by the terror propagandists of Al Qaeda and its affiliates. Consider the following excerpt from one of Al Qaeda’s most eloquent communicators, the late Yahia Al Libi (killed in 2012):

“Jihad in Algeria today is YOUR hope with permission from Allah in redemption from the hell of the unjust ruling regimes whose prisons are congested with YOUR youths and children if not with YOUR women; [regime] which thrust its armies, police, and intelligence to oppress YOU, for which they opened the doors to punish YOU. . . . So join YOUR efforts to theirs, add YOUR energies to theirs . . . and know that their victory is YOUR victory. . . . Their salvation is YOUR salvation.”

### *Avoidance of Significance Loss*

Mere *threat* of significance loss can motivate actions intended to prevent it. As a striking, example consider the Japanese Kamikaze of World War II. Their letters to their loved ones (see Ohnuki-Tierney, 2006) indicate that they did not want to die, nor did they expect heavenly rewards for their suicidal missions. Yet had they refused the mission, unbearable shame and humiliation would have befallen them and their families, and it is such avoidance of significance loss that apparently motivated them to fly to their death.

### **Opportunity for Significance Gain**

Often, pursuit of violence and terrorism seem to afford an individual an *opportunity* for a considerable significance gain, a place in history, and the status of a hero or a martyr in the eyes of one’s group. In this connection, Sprinzak (2001) wrote about “Megalomaniacal hyper terrorists,” the likes of Muhammad Atta, Bin Laden, Ramzi Yussuf, Ayman Zawahiri, and others of “greater than life” stature in the terrorist community. According to Sprinzak, these individuals engaged in terrorism primarily because they saw in it an opportunity for tremendous significance gain as a reward for their engagement. A different example of the opportunity for significance gain is what Post (2006) has called the “breeding in the bone” of suicide bombers; this concept refers to the inculcation in

children in kindergartens, summer camps of the Palestinian Hamas, or in the “Imam al-Mahdi scouts” of the Lebanese Hizballah of the notion that they should all strive to become Shahids and that this will bring them untold glory and significance.

### *Ideology*

Goal activation alone is insufficient for behavior to occur. Additionally, it is incumbent to identify a *means* to that goal (Kruglanski et al, 2002). Typically, such means is suggested by a *terrorism-justifying ideology* that instructs individuals what must be done to attain significance. An ideology is a collective belief system to which group members subscribe. When the group is under (real or imagined) threat, the ideology defines the group’s defense as the preeminent task (Zartman & Anstey, 2012) rewarded by glory and veneration. The group’s continued existence and well-being are typically among the most *sacred values* to the group members (Atran, 2010); protection of these values by all means possible is individuals’ utmost duty rewarded by the group’s respect and recognition.

Ideology is relevant to radicalization because it identifies radical activity (such as violence and terrorism) as the *means* of choice to the goal of personal significance. This function of *means suggestion* appears central to any terrorism-justifying ideology regardless of its specific content, whether it be ethno-nationalist ideology, socialist ideology, or religious ideology.

### *Does Ideology Matter?*

Occasionally, scholars have disputed the role of ideology as a motivating factor in terrorism. Well known in this regard is Sageman’s (2004) assertion that “social bonds play a more important role in the emergence of the global Salafi jihad than ideology” (p. 178). From the present perspective, however, ideology and bonds are not mutually exclusive. In fact, both are of crucial importance in that it is social bonds of some sort that bring individuals in contact with ideology: Ideology constitutes a shared reality (Hardin & Higgins, 1996) to which members of a social network commonly subscribe. The network does not function in an ideological vacuum; it is bonded by a common worldview that in the case of terrorist networks ultimately grants license to violence.

Despite his stated misgivings, Sageman himself (2004, 2008) seems quite cognizant that ideology matters. Thus, he opines (2004) that “Ideology. . .played a central role in sustaining commitment to . . . [the extremist] version of Islam” (p. 117). Moreover, he elaborates on the process whereby such sustainment happens, specifically: “past biographical experiences are interpreted in accordance with the new faith and provide vivid proof of its superiority. In this ongoing process, new events are made to fit with the new ideology. Social support and interpretation also help this process” (pp. 117–118).

The importance of ideological beliefs is implicit also in Sageman’s (2008) subsequent work on “Leaderless Jihad.” Thus, in depicting the radicalization process, Sageman describes how alienated and frustrated Muslims find camaraderie and social support in a mosque where other Muslims assemble. It is specifically where teachings at the mosque are of the extremist kind that radicalization might happen. Specifically, a friendship group may be created around the extremist ideas emanating from the Imam’s preaching. Because radical values may be out of step with the majority of Muslims in the community, the friendship group coalescing around radicalism may be increasingly isolated from the community at large. Thus,

With the gradual intensity of interaction within the group and the progressive distance from former ties, they [members of the group] changed their *values*. From secular people they



became more religious. From material rewards, they began to value spiritual rewards, including eventually otherworldly rewards. From the pursuit of short term opportunities, they turned to a long term *vision of the world*. (pp. 86–87; emphasis added)

### *Elements of a Terrorism-justifying Ideology*

Typically, a terrorism-justifying ideology contains three essential ingredients: There is the element of *grievance* (injustice, harm) believed to have been suffered by one's group (religious, national, ethnic, etc.); there is a *culprit* presumed responsible for the perpetrated grievance (e.g., the United States, Israel, Christians, Crusaders, Jews), and there is a *morally warranted* and *effective* (hence, significance promoting) *method* of removing the dishonor created by the injustice, namely terrorism, for which the implementer is accorded reverence and appreciation from the group. The terrorism-justifying "ideology" need not be more complicated than that. Yet, upholding some such belief schema is essential because terrorists' actions (as all human actions) have rhyme and reason in the actor's eyes, even if others may disagree and consider those unacceptable and irrational.

### *Moral Warrants for Terrorism*

A major challenge to terrorist ideologies are the injunctions against violence toward innocents, the quintessential killing prohibition ("Thou shall not kill!") common to most of world's cultures and religions. In response, terrorist ideologies are designed to justify the mayhem on moral grounds. Typically, this is accomplished through *semantics* and through *rhetoric*. The semantic approach involves language that delegitimizes the targets of one's violence (Bandura, 1999; Bar-Tal, 1990), often by denying them human properties and portraying them as disgusting inhuman creatures (e.g., cockroaches, rats, pigs, or apes) that do not merit the consideration extended to people (Castano & Giner-Sorolla, 2006; Haslam, 2006).

The *rhetorical* approach involves setting premises that imply either the *necessity* of violence against a specific target or the *allowability* of violence under specific circumstances. The necessity of violence is premised on the notion that the enemy's responsibility for harm (to one's group) is *fixed* rather than *malleable* and stems from the target's essential nature (Dweck & Ehlinger, 2006; Halperin, Russell, Dweck & Gross, 2011; Medin, 1989; Yzerbyt, Rocher & Schadron, 1997). Such presupposition portrays destruction of the enemy as an exclusive method of defense against the inevitable evil that he or she is bound to perpetrate.

The *allowability* premise draws on the argument that at times of war, killing enemy combatants is legitimate, and the distinction between combatants and civilians is unsustainable because civilians are potential combatants (they could be recruited or conscripted, thus becoming combatants in effect); furthermore, civilians are said to bear the responsibility for their government's activities; in this sense, they aren't neutral or innocent, hence they constitute legitimate targets for attacks (Ganor, 2002). Both the semantic and the rhetoric justifications of terrorism aim at portraying it as a morally justifiable and noble, hence conferring considerable significance on its practitioners.

### *Effectiveness-Based Justifications*

To warrant a sense of personal significance and the admiration of members of one's group—one's actions must have a fair chance of success. Abject failure only makes matters worse and only deepens the humiliation. Accordingly, terrorist propagandists have typically spun glamorous success narratives for their audiences that spelled the effectiveness of violent struggle and of the inevitability of the adversary's demise. A well-known narrative, articulated by the Russian Anarchists of the late nineteenth century and echoed by the leftist terrorists of the 1970s and 1980s, was that terrorism would reveal the state's impotence and provoke it to excessive, morally unacceptable countermeasures, unmasking its hypocrisy and paving the way to a revolution.

A similar logic underlies Carlos Marighella's minimanual for the urban guerilla, adopted by urban militants in Europe and South America. A different rationale for the efficacy of terrorism, grounded in the presumed weakness and degeneracy of the West (Buruma & Margalit, 2004), was articulated by Sayyed Hassan Nasserallah, the leader of the Hizballah in his "spider web" theory about the misleading appearance, but hardly the reality, of Western (Israeli) potency. A similar justification was offered by Osama bin Laden, who in a 2003 sermon stated:

America is a great power possessed of tremendous military might and a wide-ranging economy, but all this is built on an unstable foundation which can be targeted, with special attention to its obvious weak spots. If America is hit in one hundredth of these weak spots, it will stumble, wither away and relinquish world leadership." (reported by Ignatius, 2005, p. A21)

In summary, a terrorism-justifying ideology constitutes a crucial belief system that justifies violence against the group's detractors and portrays it as an effective and morally praiseworthy way of making a supreme contribution to one's community; in this sense, ideology is the belief system whereby terrorism and violence would earn one veneration in the eyes of others, hence fostering a gratifying feeling of social significance attained through one's actions.

### *Terrorism-Justifying Ideologies Versus General Value Systems*

It is important to distinguish between a terrorism-justifying ideology and a general value system that individuals may subscribe to. The two may be rather unrelated. Even if a given cultural value system might appear strange, cruel, and abhorrent to proponents of a different morality, it should not be mistaken for support for terrorism. For instance, the Taliban may espouse a world view that Westerners find abhorrent, including (what we might consider) excessively cruel physical punishment (a stoning punishment for adultery, chopping off of hands for theft), denial of education for women, and other nondemocratic practices based on literal and extremist interpretations of the Qu'ran. Yet none of these strictures implicates the elements of *grievance*, *culprit*, and *method* that comprise the cornerstones of a terrorism-justifying ideology. Western policy makers might straddle the horns of a moral dilemma of whether to promote a Western-style democracy worldwide (as George W. Bush has attempted) or adopt a position of cultural relativism and abstain from attempts to influence the value systems of foreign societies; yet this particular dilemma does not relate to issues of counterterrorism and deradicalization in any clear or direct sense of these terms.

### *Pro-Social Ideologies*

Our discussion implies that when one's quest for significance is aroused, the individual may support self-sacrifice, martyrdom, and violence in order to gain significance in accordance with a violence-justifying ideology that the individual subscribes to. Clearly, not all ideologies are violence promoting. In fact, some ideologies are emphatically positive and prosocial. They affirm that to gain significance one needs to be kind, tolerant, and empathic.

Thus, it is not the quest for significance *as such* that drives violence. In fact, an ideology may inspire individuals to perform benevolent and unselfish acts.<sup>8</sup> Work carried out under the auspices of the Terror Management Theory suggests that when one's *mortality* is made *salient* (known as the MS manipulation), threatening fundamental insignificance that death or nonexistence connotes, priming individuals with *positive values* increases the likelihood of prosocial, rather than violently antisocial

behavior. In an early experiment on this topic, having participants affirm their belief in the value of tolerance eliminated the effect of MS on the derogation of dissimilar others (Greenberg, Simon, Pyszczynski, Solomon, & Chatel, 1992).

More recently, Rothschild, Abdollahi, and Pyszczynski (2009) found in a Christian American sample that although a high level of fundamentalism was generally associated with greater support for military force, exposure to Jesus' compassionate teachings (e.g., embodied in dictums such as "Love your neighbor as yourself") plus an MS manipulation led fundamentalists to drop their support for violence to a level equivalent to that of less fundamentalist Christians. Similarly, for Shiite Muslims in Iran, death reminders generally led to more aggressive anti-Western attitudes. However, priming them with compassionate verses from the Koran ("Do goodness to others because Allah loves those who do good") redirected the response to MS and led to reduced hostility against the United States.

In other words, where the quest for significance is awakened, whether a prosocial or antisocial behavior is enacted should depend on the ideology that identifies the means to significance. Producing a shift from a terrorism-warranting ideology to one that identifies alternative routes to significance thus seems essential to eliminating violence.

### In a Gist: Toward a Counterfinitality Theory of Radicalization

Radicalization and its determinants are schematically depicted in Figure 2. The left of this figure depicts individual significance loss and its possible sources including stigma, personal failure, (e.g.,

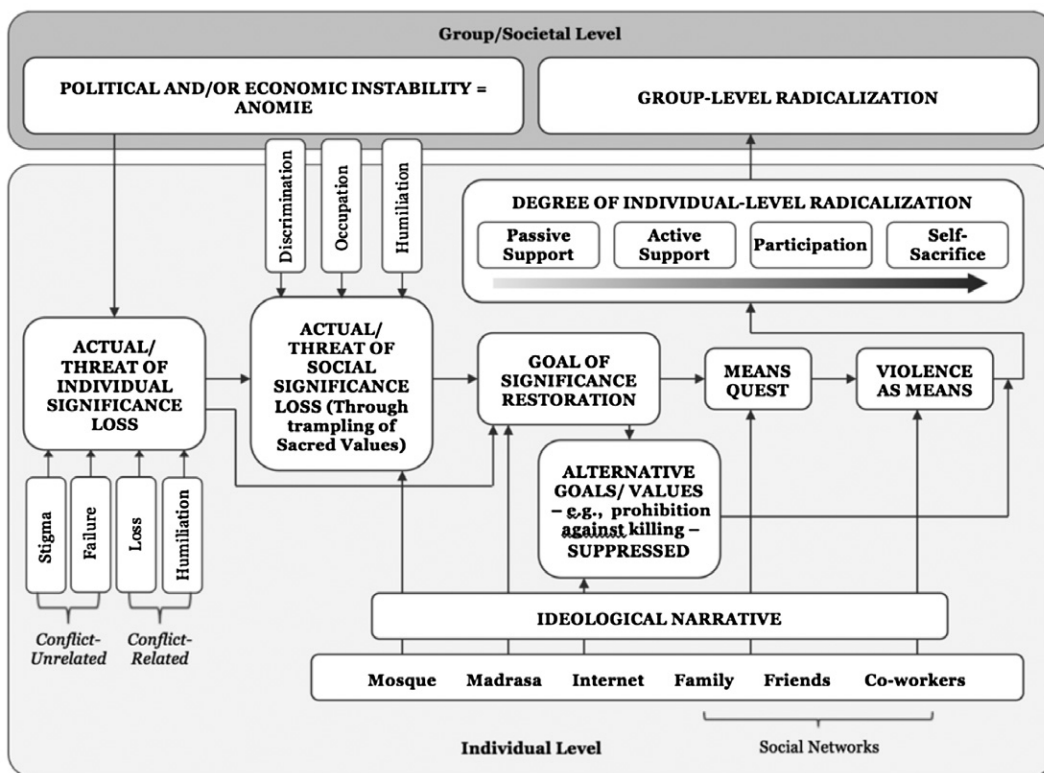


Figure 2. A significance-quest model of radicalization.

of loved ones, property or position), and humiliation (e.g., through insults or torture) as well as political, economic, and social *anomie* (Durkheim, 1889), wherein the individual feels a lack of means to pursue her or his ends—resulting in a sense of reduced significance. According to the present theory, individual significance loss induces the goal of significance restoration and is one of the two sources of attunement to the ideological narrative concerning the social significance loss prompted additionally by collective discrimination (e.g., Islamophobia), foreign occupation (Pape, 2005), and collective humiliation (e.g., via a blasphemous depiction of one's religious icons (e.g., as in the Danish cartoons of the prophet Muhammad). As shown in the central section of Figure 2, loss of significance, whether individual or social in origin, is tied to the means of significance gain/restoration that at times of intergroup conflict may be identified as violent struggle (and possibly terrorism) against the group's nemeses. The bottom part of Figure 2 represents the impact of ideology that fuels the perception of social significance loss (e.g., by framing historical events in terms of a harm perpetrated by a culprit against one's group and identifying violence against the culprit as a warranted method of response to the presumptive grievance).

Crucially, the goal of significance restoration, if of sufficient magnitude, results in suppression and/or devaluation of alternative goals, values, or concerns (such as killing prohibition, concern for individual rights, etc.). In turn, the degree to which those alternative concerns are banished from mind determines the *degree of radicalization* depicted at the upper right part of the figure. A relatively low degree of radicalization represents the case wherein the alternative concerns remained relatively active and the individual persisted in their pursuit even as he or she passively cared about the goal of significance restoration. The individual's degree of radicalization is assumed to increase proportionately to a growing commitment to the latter goal and the concomitant fading of alternative concerns shown in the central portion of Figure 2.

### Pathways to Radicalization

As discussed above, our model of individual radicalization consists of three major ingredients: the *motivational* element (the quest for personal significance) defining the *goal* of one's activity; the *ideology*, that is, a belief system identifying the *means* to that goal (i.e., the way of gaining significance); and the *social process* (networking, group dynamics) serving as the vehicle whereby the individual comes in contact with the ideology.

The road to radicalization begins with arousal of the quest for significance, which motivates search for or attention to the means of significance. These are found in the collective ideology of one's group that also identifies the grievance or loss of group significance in need of redressing. If such ideology identifies violence and terrorism as the justifiable means to significance, individuals may support and commit to terrorism and violence.

Individuals may encounter these ingredients in different temporal orders defining *distinct pathways* to terrorism. In some cases, the terrorism-justifying ideology may be highly salient in the individual's informational ecology, and the push to embrace it may originate in a personal significance loss that (as discussed earlier) might or might not be related to conflict with the purported enemy of one's group. In other cases, the social contact may come first (Weinberg & Eubank, 2006) and only after having joined a given social network would one be exposed to the beliefs that its members share, including the ideology warranting their support for violence.

In a yet different instance, the individual may encounter the terrorism-justifying ideology through various communication media, (e.g., at an internet chat room or by exposure to extremist sermons by charismatic clerics). From the present perspective, the specific order of events or the specific pathway to violence is largely irrelevant to the strength of the individual's commitment to the cause or the degree of her or his radicalization. The latter depends, instead, on the degree of significance loss ultimately experienced by the person, the individual's readiness to completely

commit to the goal of significance restoration, and perceived avenues to that goal through violent or nonviolent means.<sup>5</sup>

Our theory thus suggests that the quest for significance once aroused directs individuals' attention to the collective ideology that tells them how significance can be gained. Experienced loss of significance prompts individuals to orient to their group or execute a "collectivistic shift" (Kruglanski et al., 2009, 2013) in search for a way of significance restoration. Mere identification as a group member is empowering (Swann, Gomez, Dovidio, Hart, & Jetten, 2010). However, group membership can be demanding as well, and it may require significant sacrifices on the group's behalf.

In particular, where the shared reality of one's group—its core beliefs—highlights a grievance suffered by the group by the hands of alleged perpetrators, it is often coupled with advocacy of strikes against the enemy as a way of redressing the presumed injustice; dealing the enemy a humiliating loss thus "levels the playing field" as it were and removes the stain of lost significance that one's group has suffered. Several recent studies investigated various aspects of our significance quest theory. They are described briefly below.

### Empirical Evidence for Significance Quest Theory

#### *Life Failures and Collectivism*

A study examined the notion that loss of significance (due to personal failure) invites a collectivistic shift, that is, greater orientation toward one's group and its norms and values. In an internet survey of 12 Arab countries, Pakistan, and Indonesia carried out by Maryland's START center (National Center for the Study of Terrorism and the Response to Terrorism), participants reporting *lower life success*, hence presumably suffering significance loss, tended more strongly to self-identify as *members of collectivities* (nation or religion) rather than as individuals (Kruglanski, Gelfand, & Gunaratna, 2012). This does not mean that religion/nationalism and failure are generally correlated, nor that religious/nationalistic individuals are generally those who fail in life. What it does suggest is that people whose lives do not appear to be going well, and who therefore experience insignificance, are disposed to embrace an ideology (whether it be a nationalistic, social, or religious ideology) that promises significance if only one followed its dictates. Evidence that individuals whose sense of personal control has been wanting turn to God as an indirect way of control restoration has been adduced by Kay, Shepherd, Blatz, Chua, and Galinsky (2010).

Evidence consistent with the notion that lowering personal significance promotes a collectivistic orientation was obtained also in several experimental studies at the University of Maryland laboratories (Kruglanski & Orehek, 2011). In one experiment, participants wrote an essay describing their personal failure or their personal success experience. Subsequently, their national identification as Americans was assessed. As expected, participants in the failure condition reported significantly stronger identification as Americans than participants in the success condition consistent with the notion of a collectivistic shift under a lowered sense of personal significance.

In another experiment, participants were given positive (success) or negative (failure) feedback concerning their performance on a task (of remote associations), and their interdependent self-construal was assessed via a scale (Singelis, 1994). As predicted, participants in the negative-feedback

<sup>5</sup> Whether and how quickly an individual will commit to the ideologically suggested goals will depend on a host of situational and individual difference factors. Among the situational factors, one could count the charisma of the propagandist advocating the radical ideas, the (correlated) degree of consensus that those ideas command, cultural sensitivity to rejection and insults (e.g., a degree to which the culture is a "culture of honor"), collectivism (i.e., sensitivity to significance loss suffered by the group), and so on. Among individual factors prompting commitment to ideologically identified goals one could count the need for cognitive closure, (Kruglanski, 2004), locomotion orientation, dependency (Merari, 2010), conformism, rejection sensitivity, aggressiveness, et cetera.

condition professed a more interdependent self-construal than participants in the positive-feedback condition.

In a follow-up study, participants wrote about a time in their lives when they attained an important personal goal, defining a success condition, or a time when they failed to attain such a goal. As in the prior experiment, participants then completed self-report measures of *independent* and *interdependent* self-construal (Singelis, 1994). Consistent with the previous results, participants in the failure condition scored significantly higher on the *interdependence* scale as well as lower on the *independence* scale than those in the success condition.

Yet another study investigated whether after failure, participants would prefer to work in a group rather than alone. To test this prediction, participants first engaged in a video game on the computer. They were told that their performance on this task had been demonstrated to be a reliable predictor of their intelligence and future life success. The video game was rigged so that participants were randomly assigned to either succeed or fail. Subsequently, participants were informed that they would engage in another task that offered them a chance to win a reward (a chocolate bar). They were told that they had the option of working alone on this task or working in a group. Participants in the success condition were significantly more likely to prefer to work alone (vs. in a group) than participants in the failure condition. It seems, then, that failure not only shifts the individuals' mindset from an independent way of thinking to an interdependent way of thinking, but it also fuels efforts to engage in collective action.

### *Collectivist Empowerment and Readiness for Sacrifice*

#### *Empowerment*

Self-identification as a member of a social group larger than oneself can have a buffering effect against life's failures and increase one's sense of personal power and significance. Consistent with this notion is the considerable evidence that activating or making salient one's collective identity reduces one's *fear of death* that according to terror management theorists (Greenberg et al., 1994; Arndt, Greenberg, Solomon, Pyszczynski, & Simon, 1997), as well as philosophers like Ernest Becker (1962) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762/1968), may represent anxiety about nonexistence—arguably the ultimate insignificance! In one relevant study (Orehek, Sasota, Kruglanski, Ridgeway, & Dechesne, 2011, Study 1), participants circled either singular first-person pronouns (i.e., I, me, my) or collective pronouns (i.e., we, us, ours). In prior research (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Oyserman & Lee, 2008), this manipulation effectively instilled in participants individualistic versus collectivistic orientations, respectively. Consistent with the empowerment hypothesis, we found that participants exposed to the collectivistic priming scored lower on a scale of death anxiety (Templer, 1970).

Another study (Orehek et al., 2011, Study 2) used a joystick methodology (Fishbach & Shah, 2006) to implicitly assess participants' attitudes toward death as a function of their exposure to individualistic versus collectivistic priming. Previous research has established that the speed of pulling the joystick toward oneself is proportionate to one's approach tendency to a given stimulus, whereas the speed of pushing the joystick away from oneself is proportionate to individuals' avoidance tendency. We found that under collectivistic (vs. individualistic) priming, participants pulled the joystick faster toward themselves and pushed it away more slowly in response to death-related words, indicating a stronger approach, and/or lesser avoidance of death, as predicted by the empowerment effect hypothesized in our theory. Identical results obtained where a different manipulation of collective versus individualistic identity was used, specifically requesting participants to think of what made them similar to their family and friends (known to induce an interdependent or collectivistic orientation) or about what made them different from their family and friends (known to induce an individualistic orientation; cf. Orehek et al., 2011, Study 4; Trafimow, Triandis, & Goto 1991, Experiment 1).



In another conceptual replication (Orehek et al., 2011, Study 5), a yet different operationalization of self-construal was employed. Participants read a story about a Samaritan warrior. In the independent condition, the warrior was interested in personal reward and prestige. In the interdependent condition, he was interested instead in loyalty to the group. In the no-prime condition, participants were not presented with reading materials of any sort. It was found that whereas participants in the independent and control conditions didn't significantly differ—those in the interdependent (and in this sense collectively minded) condition exhibited a significantly lower death anxiety (Templer, 1970).

### *Sacrifice*

Having one's collective identity activated may not only result in a sense of empowerment and a reduced fear of death but also in greater readiness to undertake risks and sacrifices on behalf of one's group. In a study by Orehek and colleagues (2011, Study 5), participants primed with plural versus singular pronouns expressed a greater readiness to sacrifice their lives (throw themselves in front of a trolley to save others in a hypothetical scenario) for fellow group members, though not for strangers.

Convergent evidence consistent with these findings comes from research by Swann and his colleagues (2010); in several studies by these authors individuals who were more (vs. less) "fused" with their group were more willing to sacrifice themselves (in a trolley scenario) for the group, more strongly endorsed the idea of fighting for the group, donated more money for a group's cause, and put more effort in performance on the group behalf.

The readiness to fight and make sacrifices on the group's behalf assumes a support for such a fight to begin with. In internet surveys conducted by Maryland's START center in 12 Arab countries, Indonesia, and Pakistan and in representative face-to-face research in Egypt, Morocco, Indonesia, and Pakistan, we found that individuals who self-identified in a collectivistic manner (as members of their religion or their nation) rather than as individuals tended more to support the killing of American civilians (Kruglanski et al., 2012).

### *Significance Loss and Support for Violence*

If personal loss of significance invites a collectivistic shift—which in conditions of intergroup conflict may encourage individuals to fight against the group's enemies—suffering a loss of significance should augment the tendency to fight (Zartman & Anstey, 2012). Several of our findings support that idea. In a recent survey we conducted with detained former members of the Sri Lankan terrorist organization, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (or LTTE), we found that (1) the degree to which they felt anger in the last few weeks, (2) the degree to which they felt shame in the last few weeks, and (3) the frequency of their recently feeling insignificant were all significantly correlated with engaging in violent actions and supporting violent struggle against the Sinhalese majority. These findings suggest that a loss of significance may in the right circumstances prompt support for violence on one's group's behalf.

A loss of significance may happen in diverse ways. One circumstance in which a considerable significance loss may occur, particularly pertinent to young unmarried men in a traditional culture, is when they entertain (what to them are) "sinful" thoughts on forbidden matters. If our theory is correct, arousal of such thoughts may ultimately encourage support for sacrifice and martyrdom for one's group, designed to restore their sense of significance. Recently, we carried out an experimental study that tested this idea experimentally (Bélanger & Kruglanski, 2012). Religious participants exposed to sexual stimuli (scantily dressed women in a Victoria's Secret ad) were assumed to arouse forbidden thoughts and hence sexual guilt. We first assessed intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity via an appropriate scale (Allport & Ross, 1967). Participants then looked at sexual stimuli or neutral stimuli, and we measured their sexual guilt via the revised Mosher (1998) Sexual Guilt Inventory. We also assessed their support for martyrdom for an (undefined) social cause, including items such as

“Under the right circumstances, I would sacrifice my life for an important cause” and “I would be willing to renounce all my personal wealth for a highly important cause.” Intrinsically religious participants who were exposed to sexual stimuli reported a more pronounced sexual guilt. What is more intriguing, they also admitted to a greater readiness to self-sacrifice for a cause. Finally, in the sexual stimuli condition, the relation between intrinsic religiosity and support for self-sacrifice was mediated by sexual guilt (our proxy of significance loss), consistent with our theory.

### **Deradicalization: Back to Moderation**

The wave of radicalization rising in various parts of the globe and the clear and present dangers it poses to world’s security and stability renders counterradicalization and deradicalization a global imperative that is poignant as well as pressing. This raises a number of fundamental questions concerning the nature of deradicalization, the process of deradicalizing, and the relation between radicalization and deradicalization. In the next section, we address these issues from the present theoretical perspective.

#### *Radicalization Versus Deradicalization*

Discussions of deradicalization often consider its relation to radicalization. Is it the opposite of radicalization, and if not, how do the two differ? From the present perspective, the answers depend on the level of analysis one adopts in comparing radicalization and deradicalization. At an abstract level, radicalization and deradicalization are indeed mirror images of each other, and the processes that promote deradicalization reverse those that promote radicalization. Because these processes can have a number of antecedents, however, it is possible to highlight some antecedents while considering radicalization and others while considering deradicalization, which would contribute to the perception of their dissimilarity. Consider some examples.

As argued above, radicalization reflects (1) a high-level commitment to the ideologically suggested *goal* (e.g., liberating one’s land from occupation, bringing about the return of the caliphate) and to violence as a *means* to its attainment, coupled with (2) a reduced commitment to alternative goals and values. Its obverse, deradicalization, represents (1) a restoration of the latter concerns and/or (2) a reduction of commitment to the focal, ideological goal, or to the recommended means (of violence and terrorism) to that goal. For instance, one may grow disenchanted with one’s leaders’ and comrades’ conduct and begin to doubt that the organization’s activities (the means) indeed serve the lofty ideological objectives they were alleged to serve.

#### *Relinquishment of the Violent Means*

Reduced commitment to the violent means was revealed in our conversations with Nur, a former major lieutenant in the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) in Southern Philippines, and now a deradicalized individual collaborating with the governmental authorities. On Nur’s account, he became disaffected with the group’s routine kidnapping for ransom of innocent civilians; such disenchantment, coupled with a longing for his family and a missing of his professional activities, finally precipitated his defection from the ASG. In other words, the ASG activities no longer seemed a viable means to personal significance, while the goals of family life and professional development reasserted their importance after years of suppression and neglect.

Consider as well the following statement by a former member of the Basque ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna),<sup>5</sup> interviewed by Reinares (2011):

During the first months after I was incarcerated, I spent all my time systematically reading up on the Gospels. . . . I gradually began to realize I was hearing and responding to the actual words of Jesus of Nazareth. . . . Thanks to His grace, I underwent a profound and

sincere *conversion*. [It] required my *sincere repentance* for . . . past behavior, especially activities relating to my prior militancy in ETA (p. 800; italics added)

For this individual then, violence lost its appeal as a means of significance gain because of its newly realized moral unacceptability.

The argument that violent jihad is morally unacceptable constitutes a mainstay of the several deradicalization programs aimed at detained terrorism suspects in Muslim nations or countries with significant Muslim populations (Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Singapore, Indonesia, and Iraq). These programs, typically directed by governmental agencies, aim to persuade the detainees, members of extremist Islamic organizations (such as the Jemmah Islamiyah, Al Qaeda, Abu Sayaa Group, and others), that violence against unarmed civilians is contrary to the teachings of Islam and is explicitly prohibited by the Qur'an. This message is generally delivered by Islamic clerics who engage the detainees in a religious dialogue concerning the prohibition (vs. permission) of violence against civilians.

Successful deradicalization occurred in Egypt, for example, where two major terrorist organizations, *Gammah Islamiyah* (the Islamic Group, or IG) in 1997 (whose leaders published no less than 25 volumes of exhortations to their followers to abandon violence), and more recently, in 2007, the *al Jihad* (AJ), a terror organization whose one-time leader was Ayman al Zawahiri (the current leader of Al Qaeda; for discussion see Kruglanski et al., 2012). The former Emir (commander) of the Al Jihad group (AJ) of Egypt (1987–93), Sayid Immam Al Sherif (Dr. Fadl), authored a volume titled *Document for Guiding Jihad in Egypt and the World*. Along with other Al Jihad leaders, Al Sherif then conducted a tour of prisons to convince the organizations members to denounce violence.

Thus, the (moral) argument that violence is unacceptable on religious grounds can delegitimize it as a means of significance gain. However, even if one did not reject violence *on moral grounds*, one might relinquish it on grounds of ineffectiveness for advancing the group's goals, and bound for failure, hence, unlikely to bestow glory or significance on anyone. Consider the following statements by a former ETA member after the Spanish parliament in the Fall of 1979 ratified a *Statute of Autonomy for the Basques (Euskadi)* and allowed free elections to the Basque parliament:

Some others will insist that the primary goal ever since we first decided to take up the armed struggle was total independence [as opposed to mere autonomy]. . . . Anyway, no matter how you look at it, independence is not something that was ever going to be achieved by a handful of kill-happy morons, and believe me, because I got to know them well, you're not going to get very far at all, not far at all, down that path." (cited in Reinares, 2011, p. 782)

The notion that terrorism and violence are ineffective as a means to victory and hence to significance gain denies terrorists' claims that it is effective and productive. Indeed, the proponents of terrorism and its ideologues were at pains to provide elaborate rationales for the efficacy of terrorism. A well-known rationale, offered by the Russian Anarchists of the late nineteenth century, was that terrorism would reveal the state's impotence and provoke it to excessive countermeasures contrary to its stated values, thereby unmasking its hypocrisy and paving the way to a revolution. A different rationale for the efficacy of terrorism, grounded in the presumed weakness and degeneracy of the West, was articulated by Sayyed Hassan Nasserallah in his "spider web" theory about the mere appearance, but not the reality, of Western (Israeli) potency. A similar justification was offered by Osama Bin Laden who in a 2003 sermon stated:

America is a great power possessed of tremendous military might and a wide-ranging economy, but all this is built on an unstable foundation which can be targeted, with special

attention to its obvious weak spots. If America is hit in one hundredth of these weak spots, it will stumble, wither away and relinquish world leadership.<sup>6</sup>

In summary, whereas radicalization may be based on arguments that violence is justifiable and that it will bring one honor and significance, deradicalization may occur if one came to regard one's radical *means* as morally unacceptable, ineffective or both, and hence unlikely to promote one's significance.

### *Fulfillment of the Significance Goal*

Occasionally, deradicalization may require the perception that one's significance goal was attained through one's actions and that one can now turn to other concerns. An erstwhile ETA<sup>7</sup> member remarked: "Look, though, my way of thinking about the armed struggle hasn't changed in the least. But I'd done my fair share, I'd given three years of my life to them as a militant, always at the expense of my personal life" (Reinares, 2011, p. 798). Another former ETA member put it more bluntly:

You say to yourself shit, man . . . I better get myself a life, because time is running out. . . . it's a matter of being that much older, and in my case, specifically of wanting to get married. . . . You are going on 40 years old, you're going to get married next year and you say to yourself well, shit, man I mean at this stage of the game to go packing a piece.. that would be a bit . . . because you just got to . . . shit . . . well, we've all got to live a bit . . . (p. 796)

### *The Case for Unrelatedness*

Whereas the foregoing arguments portray radicalization and deradicalization as opposites, focusing on their distinct antecedents may yield the impression that they are unrelated. Consider the presumed causes of disengagement from violence, identified by Horgan (2010, p. 280):

- 1) The development of negative sentiments as a result of experiencing negative qualities associated with sustained, focused membership (e.g., pressure, anxiety, the gradual dismantling of the fantasy or illusion that served to lure the recruit in the first place etc.) and as a result,
- 2) A change in priorities aimed to regain something that the member feels is lacking, or existed before membership, often as a result of self-questioning, but mostly following prolonged social/psychological investment as a member from which little return appears evident);
- 3) A sense of growing disillusionment with the avenues being pursued or some quality of them (e.g., with the political aims or with operational tactics and the attitudes underpinning them).

On the surface, all these appear quite unrelated to conditions that may foster radicalization such as entering a terrorist network through connections with family and friends or exposure to an inflammatory rhetoric delivered by a fiery propagandist on the internet. Yet, upon a closer look, it would be apparent that: (1) the conditions for disengagement, like the negative affective states of stress and anxiety and the sense that something is lacking in one's life, reflect the *resurfacing of alternative concerns* (e.g., for psychological comfort and tranquility) that were suppressed in the course of radicalization, and the disillusionment with the avenues being pursued represents the reversal of enthusiasm about those avenues and the conviction that they are morally acceptable and effective.

Furthermore, (2) social networking and influence are likely involved in both radicalization and deradicalization. Thus, in the same way that radicalization reflects falling under the influence of

<sup>6</sup> Cited in David Ignatius. "Winning a battle of wills." *The Washington Post* (13 July, 2005), p. A21.

<sup>7</sup> Euskadi Ta Askatasuna, the Basque ethno-nationalist "Homeland and Freedom" party, used terrorist tactics in many of its operations.

social networks of which one has become a member, deradicalization may reflect a weakening of such influence and falling outside its sphere. For instance, several of the cases of leaving the ETA organization discussed by Reinares (2011) refer to individuals' separation from their comrades and leaders while in prison.

At a deeper level then, *deradicalization* does constitute a reversal of *radicalization*: Radicalization reflects increased commitment to the ideological quest for significance and to the violent means of its pursuit, coupled with reduced commitment to alternative, incompatible pursuits. Deradicalization constitutes a decreased commitment to the ideological goal, accompanied by a resurgence of alternative pursuits and objectives.

### *Deradicalization Versus Disengagement*

Recent discussions of deradicalization have often referred to its distinction from disengagement introduced in a recent volume by Bjørge and Horgan (2009). According to this view, disengagement denotes the discontinuation of active participation in violence whereas *deradicalization* denotes a *belief system* that supports violence. The two are different in that disengagement may simply stem from incapacity to carry out acts of violence, due to, for example, injuries sustained in prior bouts of fighting or from a role change within an organization from that of an active fighter to the planner of attacks, neither of which implies a reduction in radical attitudes.

From the present perspective, radicalization refers to personal commitment to violence as a most effective means of attaining significance. By personal commitment to violence, we mean the carrying out of activities that have a direct and explicit link to violence. That includes actual participation in shooting, setting and detonation of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and blowing oneself up in an act of self-sacrifice for the cause. But it also includes the training of others as suicide bombers, the construction of explosive devices, the planning of lethal plots, and so on. According to this conception then, a role change within the organization from active participation in shoot outs or detonation of devices to the planning of attacks or the manufacture of bombs does not qualify as a disengagement or as a reduction of radicalism. What does so qualify is the growing recognition that violence is either morally wrong or ineffective as a means of significance attainment or (to a lesser degree) that though it may be an appropriate for others, it is no longer so for oneself. Disengagement in the latter sense is tantamount to deradicalization and in effect constitutes the core of deradicalization. Indeed, the major thrust of the various deradicalization programs described subsequently was precisely to delegitimize violence and condemn it morally. We turn to this topic next.

### *Practicing Deradicalization*

As noted earlier, in recent years, several states instituted deradicalization programs in detention facilities holding terrorism suspects. Such programs have been implemented in Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Singapore, Iraq, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia. A thorough review of these programs is beyond the present scope (for reviews see, e.g., El-Said & Harrington, 2010; Rubin, Gunaratna, & Gerard, 2011). Generally, these deradicalization efforts have recruited the assistance of psychologists and other social scientists and have based their practices on sound behavioral principles. In most cases, however, their effectiveness has not undergone independent scrutiny and its degree is largely a matter of opinion (Burke, 2013; Rabasa, Pettyjohn, Ghez, & Boucek, 2013).

### *Explicit and Implicit Deradicalization*

It is possible to distinguish between *explicit* deradicalization attempts aimed directly at detainees' terrorism justifying ideologies and *implicit* attempts that eschew ideological confrontations

and focus on detainees' needs and emotions. The former, explicit, approaches aim to delegitimize the use of violence, whereas the latter introduce alternative means to significance and/or alternative goals compatible with those means. It might be said that whereas the direct confrontational approaches address the detainees' *minds* the indirect, motivational approaches are aimed at their *hearts*.

In several well-known programs in Muslim states (Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Yemen, Indonesia) or states with a considerable Muslim minority (Singapore), explicit deradicalization attempts were carried out by moderate Muslim clerics who engaged the detainees in a theological dialogue about what they portrayed as a correct interpretation of Qu'ran that does not condone violence against nonbelievers and views jihad as primarily an internal struggle for goodness and virtue rather than a violent fight against infidels.

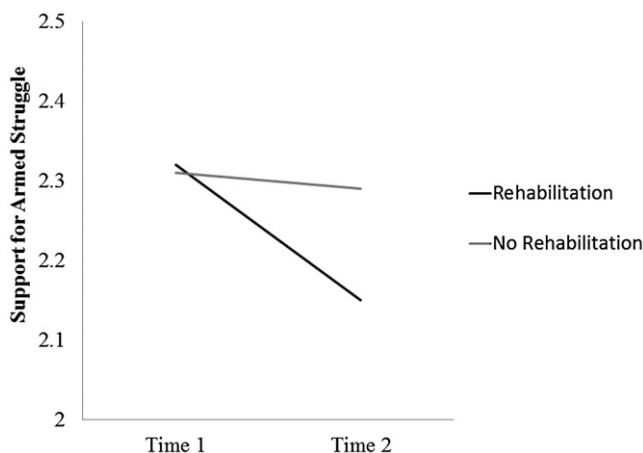
Implicit deradicalization attempts involved vocational education courses in which the possibility of reintegrating into society, thus regaining a sense of personal significance in a harmonious (vs. extremist) way compatible with multiple concerns. Involving the *detainees' families* in the rehabilitation process represents another implicit way of activating nonideological concerns incompatible with violent sacrifice for a cause. In the deradicalization program in Iraq headed by Major General Douglas Stone, families were able to conduct weakly visitations in which they were permitted brief physical contact with their incarcerated relatives (primarily hugs and kisses with children and wives) and in which the detainees could share with their family members whatever money they had earned though paid works in the detention facility.

#### *Sri Lanka Deradicalization Program*

Unlike the deradicalization programs in the Muslim countries that contained a key element of a religious counternarrative in favor of moderation and against extremism, the Sri Lankan program contained no religious elements. After all, the LTTE terrorists were not motivated by a religious, but rather by an ethno-nationalist, ideology: establishment of an independent Tamil State on the Island. That distinction aside, the Sri Lankan program contained a number of elements that seem appropriate from the psychological perspective: (1) it separated the leaders from the followers thus breaking the collectivistic group reality dominated by the extremist ideology; (2) it contained a strong individualistic focus involving spiritual activities like art and yoga; most importantly, (3) it contained a strong vocational education element that provided the detainees (referred to non-offensively as *beneficiaries*) with alternative, nonviolent means of gaining significance and reintegrating into the society.

We tested these beneficiaries early on upon their incarceration and approximately nine months into the program. We also had a control group at one of the facilities, matched on many relevant characteristics to the deradicalization group, yet whose members did not receive the deradicalization program. Figure 3 reports a preliminary analysis based on a small portion of the detainee population tested at the same times as the control group. As can be seen, the group that received the deradicalization program changed over time in the positive direction, and their support for violent struggle against the Sinhalese significantly decreased. However, the control group that did not receive the deradicalization program did not change over time in their attitudes toward violence. This provides initial evidence that the Sri Lankan deradicalization program may have been effective. Of course, the attitude change that the deradicalization program seems to have effected might not last. Whether it does last or does not should depend on the kind of influence that the beneficiaries fall under upon their resettlement into their communities. In the same way that persons can radicalize and deradicalize, they can also deradicalize. Follow-up research is needed to evaluate what happens upon the detainees' release, and we are engaged in such research at the present time.





**Figure 3.** Support for armed struggle as a function of time and rehabilitation.

### Conclusion

Radicalization that progresses to violent extremism is one of the world's most serious threats these days that in conjunction with advanced technologies (e.g., cyber-technologies, CBRN), should they fall into terrorists' hands, could cause untold physical and psychological suffering to millions of people. Prevention of specific attacks is the indispensable function of the military, the police, and the intelligence services. In the short term, their activities are essential and irreplaceable. However, in the long term, they are unlikely to constitute the solution to the problem of political violence. They are tactical rather than strategic, and they do not address, and often they exacerbate, the radicalization problem by adding insult to injury and providing grist to the mill of extremist propaganda.

Even though specific instances of radicalization may often seem shocking and incomprehensible, the process of radicalization isn't particularly mysterious. To be sure, there isn't a "silver bullet" that accounts for terrorism, and no single factor can singly explain the phenomenon. Psychologists, economists, and others have despaired by now of finding a specific personality profile or a situational condition (e.g., poverty, political oppression, lack of sufficient education) that explains terrorism. It would be, nonetheless, a mistake to conclude that these factors are irrelevant to terrorism and political violence. In fact, under specific conditions, they could represent significant *contributing factors* (Kruglanski & Fishman, 2006) that make terrorism more likely.

Despite the "perceptual" variability in radicalization instances, it is useful to conceptualize radicalization comprehensively, namely as an interactive process that represents the convergence of three elements: The *goal* which as we have argued is the quest for personal significance, the ideology that advocates the *means* of terrorism and violence as the path to significance, and the social process of networking and group dynamics through which adoption of the goal and the means is carried out.

Personality, culture, or situational factors could impact any and all of these categories and, thereby, contribute to radicalization or deradicalization. For instance, the need for cognitive closure (Kruglanski, 2004) or the trait of dependency (Merari, 2010) could contribute to conformity and the tendency to go along with the group consensus; in turn, this could well increase some individuals' (those who are particularly high on need for closure or the trait of dependency) tendency to adopt the consensual ends and means that their group supports. Furthermore, rejection sensitivity (Downey, Mougios, Ayduk, London, & Shoda, 2004) could contribute to the tendency to be offended and hence experience significance loss, as too could a culture that places high value on 'honor' (Gelfand et al., 2011; Nisbet & Cohen, 1996).

The interplay of *motivation*, *ideology*, and the *social process* is strikingly illustrated by the case of the Tsarnaev brothers suspected of having perpetrated the Boston Marathon bombing in April of 2013. The older brother, Tamerlan, was apparently quite ambitious<sup>8</sup> and at the same time quite frustrated in light of his and his parents' failed assimilation (the successful uncle Ruslan referred to the Boston Tsarnaevs as "losers"). Out of work and supported by his wife, his father's family on welfare, his mother accused of shoplifting, his boxing career in shambles—he must have felt rather *insignificant* and without future prospects. At some point along the way, he realized that a way to significance can lead through a radical Islamist *ideology*. It is unclear whether he actively sought out such ideology or whether the initiative came from elsewhere. As a Chechen youth growing up in Dagestan, extremist ideas were likely familiar to him anyway.

Tamerlan's ideological persuasion was probably facilitated by his social networking with active Islamic extremists, William Plotnikov the Canadian convert to Islam, and Mahmoud Mansoor Nidal, recruiter for the Chechen guerillas. Possibly, his mother, Zubeidat, who hated the "infidels" and believed that the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center was carried out by U.S. and Israeli secret services, also contributed to Tamerlan's radicalization. Finally, his younger brother, Djokhar, who admired Tamerlan, was apparently part of the social network responsible (in various parts) for plotting and executing the Boston Marathon bombing. It is also of interest that in parallel to his radicalization Tamerlan appears to have abandoned and suppressed alternative concerns, his studies, his boxing, and his music. Rather, he appeared more and more committed to one thing only: his fundamentalist interpretation of his religion and its justification of violence. In short, Tamerlan's path to violence fits well with the present model of radicalization depicted in Figure 2 above.

### Coda

*Understanding* radicalization is not the same as actually *preventing* or *reversing* it, but it could represent an important first step in these directions. We believe that the model presented in the preceding pages offers a viable theoretical and empirically supported understanding of the progression to extremism. What is needed now is translation of the abstract theoretical understanding into concrete policies: This requires first and foremost creative solutions and secondly the resolve, patience, and appropriate resources for implementing them.

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<sup>8</sup> Attested to, among others, by his love of flashy clothes and his hopes to box at the Olympics.

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