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# Introduction

Dr. Omneya Ayad

Our world today faces a wave of organized terrorism which targets to radicalize the youth in order to achieve its political agenda and to fulfill its personal obsession of power. Religion sometimes is accused of playing an essential role in the process of radicalization. In this edition, we will explore the level of accuracy of this statement along with probing deeper into the mindset of the terrorist so as to discover the underlying reasons and ulterior motives which led him down the path of terrorism. This edition also highlights the essentiality of the psychological factors and the character traits which constitute the bedrock for polarizing young individuals to tread the path of extremism.

# Inside the Mind of a **TERRORIST:** What Lies Beneath?

With the rising challenge of extremism and terrorism in today's world, there is an increasing demand to understand the psychology of violence of extremists and terrorists. The common view of terrorists as mentally ill is a generalization which was proven untrue. Therefore it is necessary to dig deep into the psychological make-up of terrorists in order to understand the hidden features and motivations which turn them to violence and extremism. This interview was conducted with

**Dr. Muhammad al-Mahdi,**  
Professor of psychology at Azhar University.



**How does an extremist turn to a terrorist?**

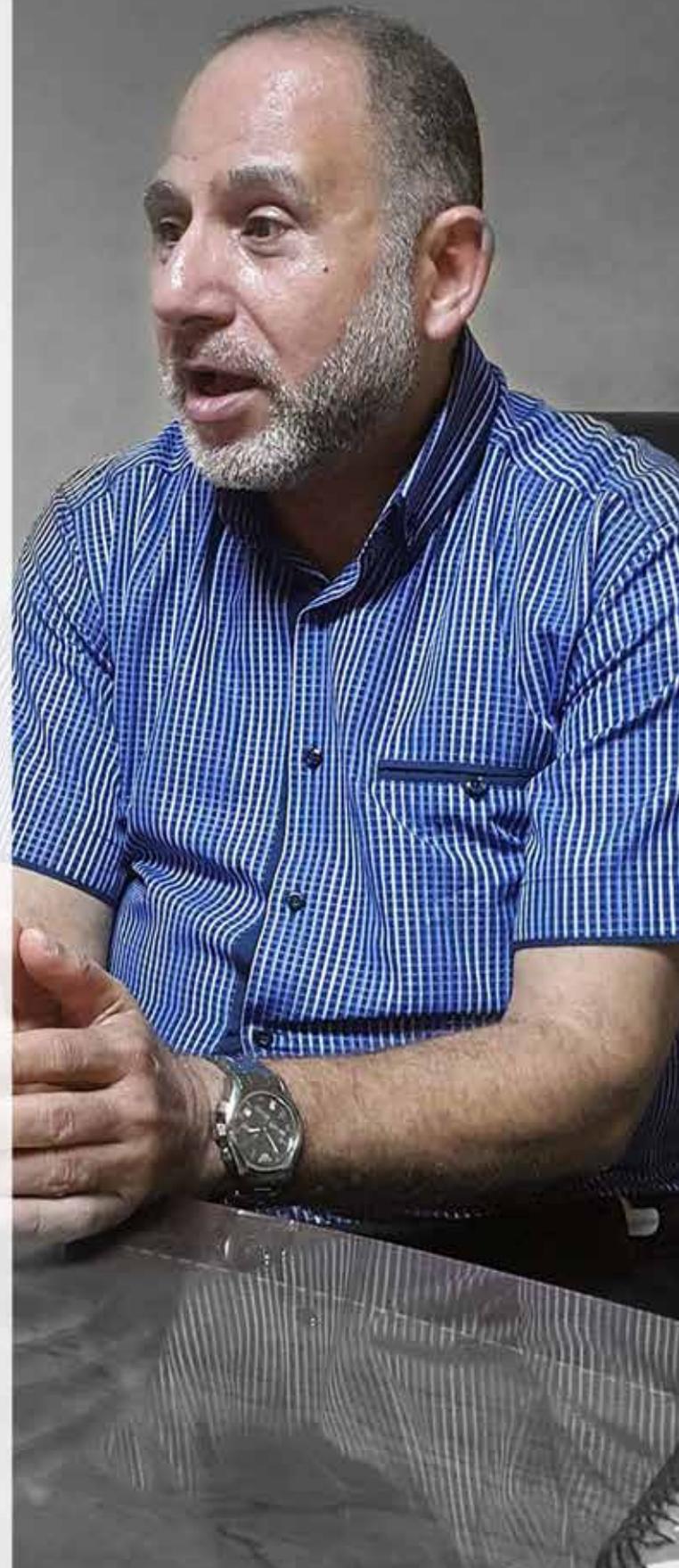
To study the psychology of extremists, we have three elements that we need to address: individual, group, society. The problem in dealing with the phenomenon of extremism or terrorism is that we only confine it to the action of the extremist and the reaction of the police to suppress such extremist acts without paying much attention to other factors. This leads to limiting our reaction to the work of the police who usually responds with harsh force inciting even more violence and psychologically enhancing the extremists' violent behavior. In other words, the endless circle of violence gets bigger by time. Therefore we always warn against resorting only to forceful measures to suppress these extremist and terrorist groups while ignoring other factors that could help in breaking this circle of violence.

**Do you mean the necessity of combating thoughts with counter thoughts and not with violence?**

Yes, this is very important. A lot of experts in the field of violence, extremism and countering terrorism believe that extremism in and of itself is not a crime. This means a person might adopt an extremist ideology no matter how extreme it could be without posing any danger to others. But if such extremist thoughts took a violent turn through putting them into actions targeting individuals or societies, only then it becomes a crime. A lot of governments fall into the mistake of treating extremists as terrorists and thus the circle of violence widens. The extremist finds himself being stigmatized as a terrorist and thus finds no other option but to become one.

**What are the characteristics which lead a person to extremism?**

One of the leading characteristics is personal frustration such as failing to score any successes or achieve any tangible goals. This frustration breeds a feeling of worthlessness and low self-esteem which turns into anger from his surrounding circumstances whether personal or societal. This frustration either comes as a result of failing to turn his wishes and dreams to a concrete reality or feeling that the society forms an obstacle preventing his thoughts and ideas to come true. At this stage, he develops a sense of injustice committed against him.



Another major characteristic of the extremist is his constant feeling of isolation and loneliness and thus gradually start to feel like a stranger to his family and the society at large. He senses that he is constantly out of place and thus develops a feeling of dis-belonging to his family and the society in which he lives and such feeling leads automatically to develop an urgent need to belong to another group among whom he would feel secured, accompanied and thus finally a sense of belonging thrives. Exclusive belonging to only a certain group has fatal consequences as it leads to desensitize the self from empathy towards others. Thus it facilitates for the extremist to harm and kill others towards whom he does not have any compassion or sympathy.

The extremist mentality is also characterized with dichotomous thinking with people and thoughts being placed in sharp divisions with no lines of intersection or room for negotiations. It is rather filled with a lot of abstracts which do not accept further thinking. Thus the extremist mentality is not flexible to accept other opinions or entertain different views. Even if he opened his mind to listen to others, he would only do that in order to prepare a defense for his own argument. Thus he is always in a state of defense and constant doubt of the other.

A third major characteristic is that the extremist is someone who is really scared of death and in psychology there is a rule that when someone is very afraid of something, his reaction would be in total opposition to it. The terrorist is afraid that he might be killed by one of his opponents and he counters this fear by convincing himself that he and his opponent are at equal distance from death as they both will get killed. In this way the terrorist solves the issue of fearing death and therefore we see how a lot of them when they go to suicidal operations are in a state of calmness and serenity because the struggle of fearing death is finally resolved.

### **Is this some kind of a defensive technique?**

Indeed, individuals in general have both death and life instincts. That being said, life instinct is more dominant over the death one in people who are mentally and psychologically sound and stable. Therefore, people generally are driven by the instinct of staying a live to build better future for themselves and the people they love, to start making families and friendships and to love and be loved in return. As for death instinct, it is the one with which the individual is driven without being fully aware of it. For example, the one who drives at high speed, the one who takes drugs, the one who smokes cigarettes, the one who is at enmity with others are all driven by the instinct of death.

### **Is the terrorist or extremist individual psychologically ill?**

The idea of identifying terrorists and extremists with various psychological illnesses is not fundamentally true. On the contrary a lot of the extremists who were involved in terrorist acts were found void of any psychological disturbances. What was rather found is personality disorder which leads some individuals to have a potentiality towards extremism or terrorism. Some of the major personality disorders are the following:

- Paranoia which is characterized with symptoms such as superiority, excessive domination, doubt, ill thinking of others. These characteristics if combined in one person, he becomes the leader of the terrorist group as he has a sense of grandeur and an obsessive desire of control.
- Borderline personality: which is characterized with extreme shifts in thoughts, feelings and relationships.
- Hysterical personality: a character fond of making stunts and shows in order to grab the attention of others.
- Antisocial personality: a rebellious character who always goes against the rules and laws of the state and does not admit its authority. He does not have any regrets and is adamant on pursuing his goals regardless of the consequences. He is inclined towards joining extremist or gang groups.
- Negative dependent personality: this character always needs constant help and assistance and thus presents the perfect member in the herd who can be blindly led and unconditionally obey. Although he is not courageous by nature, once orders are given to him, he surrenders his will totally under the command of the leader.

### **What are the main features of the psychology of foreign fighters which leads them to join these terrorist groups?**

There are some main features of the psychology of the foreign fighters such as:

- Identification with those who are oppressed and persecuted. Thus they feel it is necessary to assist those who suffer from the global powers through living with them and sharing their suffering.
- Curiosity is another major feature as some of the youth are intrigued to discover for themselves the level of accuracy of what they hear about regarding these terrorist groups.
- Love of adventure is also a feature as some youth are driven by the rush of adrenaline in their blood.
- Religious belonging is an important feature as some youth feel affiliated with these groups as they share a common religion.
- Racism at home is a major factor as some of the second and third generations who were born to immigrant parents still feel as a second class citizen and this sense of injustice leads them to become a group of strangers in their own societies and thus seek other groups to whom they can belong and feel home.

### **What is the psychological make-up of the terrorist who kill in cold blood?**

The main feature of such personality is losing the sense of empathy due to his feeling of being a stranger and lonely. Another feature is dehumanization of others and thus the terrorist turns the human being from a subject to an object which can be easily destroyed and killed.

### **You have mentioned that individuals are only one of three elements to understand the psychology of extremists and terrorists, what about the second element?**

The second element is the extremist and terrorist groups which have conflictual religiosity- a key concept in explaining the behavior of terrorist groups. The human spirit is guided by the laws of love and conflict. The laws of love are the origin of values such as mercy, tolerance, amenity, giving, forgiveness, and generosity among many other positive values. When it comes to the laws of conflict, it is the stem root of hatred, wrath, anger, enmity, revenge among many other meanings which revolve around the concept of conflict and fighting. Thus the human spirit has an equal capacity for both love and conflict. Unfortunately, the seeds for both of these two laws are

are sown very early in human being's spirit to an extent that some psychologists believe that these laws are formed during the very first year of the child's life through his relationship with his mother. If the mother of the child showers him with love and care, comforts him whenever the need rises and attend to his affairs, he will grow up with a positive and caring attitude for both the individuals and the society in which he grows up. The mother for the child presents his small world and once he feels safe and secure, this positive outlook is automatically reflected on his perspective towards the bigger world. Now if the mother is the total opposite in terms of not caring for the child and not giving him the love and the attention needed or if the child was not wanted or was the outcome of a failed marriage, he will grow up in a state of hatred and enmity to the world and encounter others with a violent and threatening attitude. He will also perceive that the only presiding law in the world is the law of power and control.

This initial seed of conflict or love forms the initial experience of the child in interacting with the world and programs the mind in shaping any presented ideologies through love or conflict. Therefore, any religious, social or political ideas received by the mind are either perceived through the lens of love or conflict. For example if the religious ideas sent to the person were perceived through the spectacle of love, we find that the person is a religious person with a loving and caring character who is a devout worshipper and of a kind nature in his dealings with people. We also observe that even during quoting religious texts, he would choose texts which promote tolerance, love, forgiveness and cooperation.

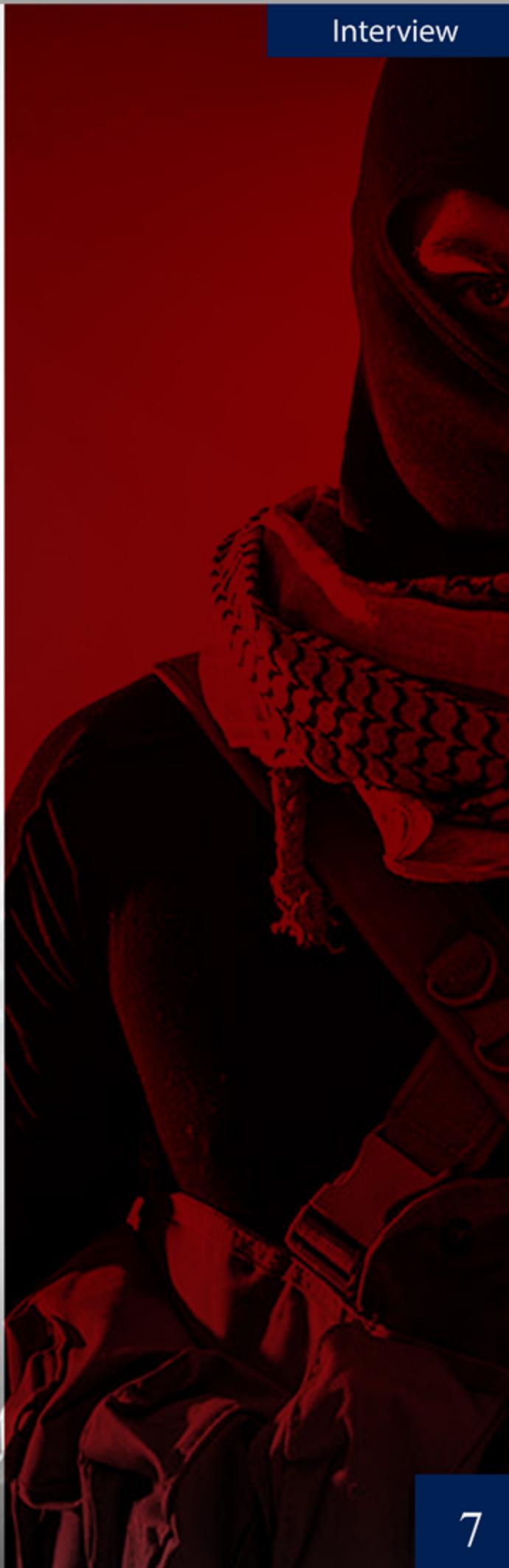
As for the person who perceives religious ideas through the lens of conflict, we find his character to be stiff and his treatment of the subject of religion is from a conflictual perspective full of struggle and enmity. His state of mind towards religion is focused on the continuous battle between truth and falsehood and thus he selects and decontextualizes the fighting verses which address wars and punishments. This textual selection reflects his violent and imbalanced nature which disregards the fact that even the verses which explain the rules of wars and the conditions for applying certain punishments are always accompanied with rules on mercy and compassion.

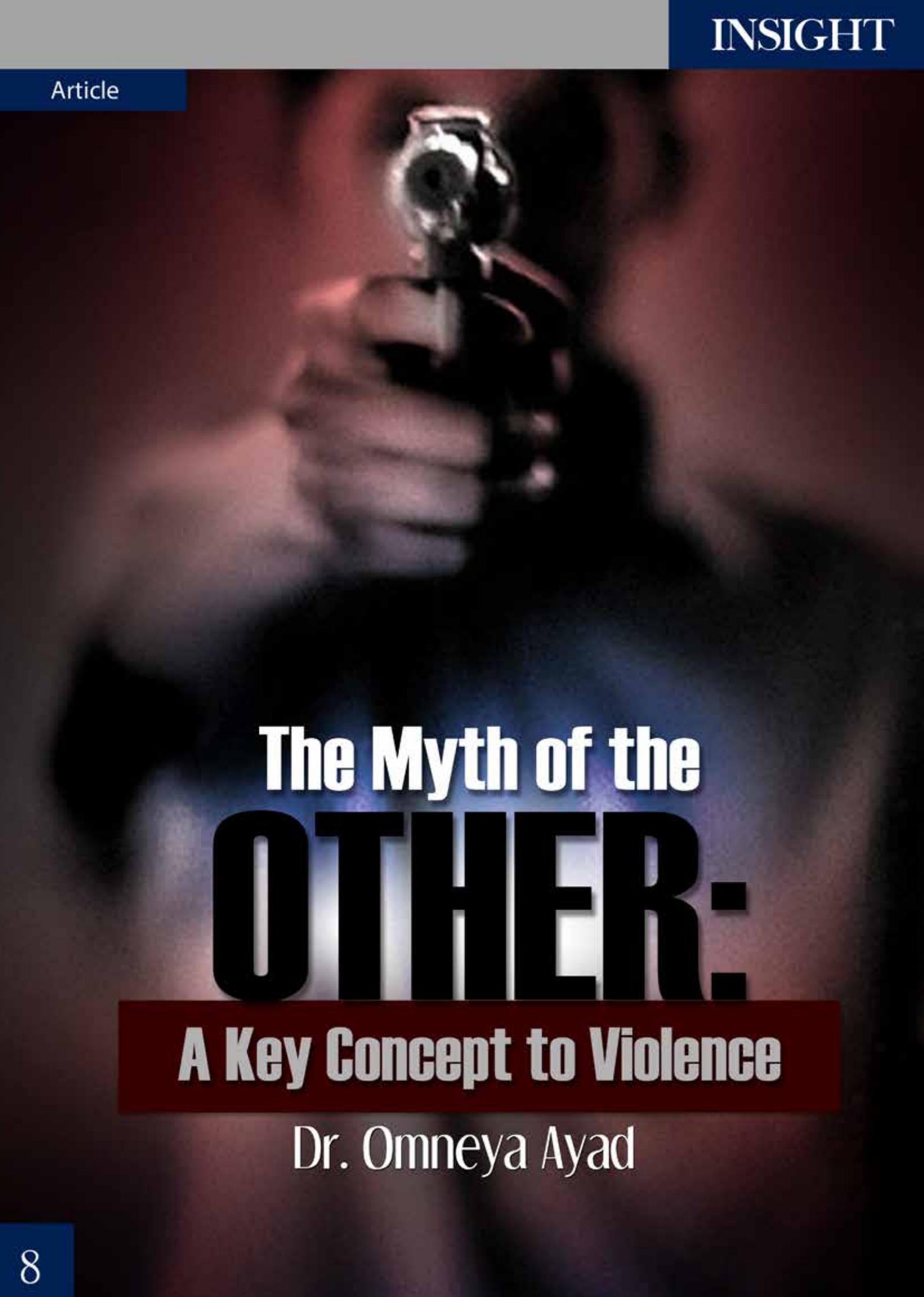
### **What are the main features of the terrorist and extremist groups?**

- A sense of belonging which is a highly needed natural feeling that the person who chooses to join these terrorist groups lacks.
- A feeling of protection and security.
- An ideology on the meaning of life and the purpose of existence.
- Fueling constant conflicts with one's family and the society at large and thus the circle of violence increases.
- Ideological superiority according to which these groups believe that they are always right and their interpretation of the religious texts is the only accurate version.
- Treating others with racism and conceit. Looking down on others facilitates committing violence against them.
- Constant feeling of victimhood and accordingly these groups always feel that persecution and injustice are committed against them.

### **What is the state's role in fighting both extremism and terrorism?**

The common mistake that most governments make regarding the extremist personality is that the state criminalizes him for having extreme ideas and thus automatically places him in a direct opposition to the authorities. Dealing with extremism through only security measures is very costly in terms of lives and money. Also it increases the circle of violence and thus leads to violations of human rights which has a high political cost. Extremist ideas should be combated with counteracting ideas not with violence. The extremist groups are hopeless in making any effective changes through peaceful means and thus feels that using power is the answer.





**The Myth of the  
OTHER:**

**A Key Concept to Violence**

Dr. Omneya Ayad

The world today is plagued with all kinds of atrocities ranging from bloody wars and horrendous terrorism which unfortunately sometimes committed under the name of religion. Throughout history religion in totality has been subjected to an abuse by few minorities which lost contact with their humanity and were blindly dedicated to their own pity personal gains beyond which they simply failed to acknowledge any values. These people along history had common features of hatred and hostility towards those who do not share their ideological beliefs or dare to show their rejection to the illusions and fallacies which these terrorist groups miserably aim to achieve. The purpose of this article is to uncover one of the main common features shared by all terrorists regardless of their religious affiliation. Identifying oneself only according to one identity while looking down with eyes of enmity on those who do not share his specific identity is an essential factor in making up the psychology of violence in the mind of terrorists.

One of the sources of inciting hatred- which if exploited leads easily to terrorism- is labelling each other with titles most of which are merely stereotypes. In fact, labelling is mostly designed to condemn people who are of a different religion or ethnicity by calling them "the other".

I kept thinking of the phrase "the other" and how it is used in our contemporary world so frequently among politicians, chiefly by former president George Bush Jr for his "war on terror" propaganda. His words addressing the Iraqi people kept echoing in my ears, "You are either with us or with them". I miserably failed to understand how thousands of Iraqi civilians who were shot dead could possibly be the enemy. Then I realized that this labelling is only the tip of the iceberg beneath which lies a harsh theory which was well

promoted and unfortunately well received by some politicians. The clash of civilizations theory and the remaking of the world order was introduced by Samuel Huntington who simply with a stroke of a pen divided the world merely into civilizations. "The Western civilization" versus "the Islamic civilization" and the "the Hindus civilization" versus "the Buddhist civilization" and boldly claimed that no relationship can exist among them, but severe competition and mutual enmity.

Though many voices were raised to reject as false that civilizations clash in the first place, they blindly fell into the trap of accepting the fact that the only valid classification of people is based on civilizations. The fatal fallacy in this classification is the daring assumption that the religious identity is the only identity that people have and it is the only way of how we should perceive ourselves and others. This means that we are forcing people into these closed concrete boxes of one dimensional thought and put horse blinders on the many other possible multiple identities that people have. For example, there can be someone who has Pakistani heritage, comes from Bengali descendants, was born in India and was raised in the United States, Muslim, a big fan of soccer, eminent university professor, supports women's rights, environmentalist, vegetarian, and an activist for world peace and he finds no contradiction whatsoever in managing all these identities.

This means that a person can have many affiliations to several different groups and the religious affiliation is only one of many. Therefore, it would be extremely unreasonable to narrow down all these identities and perceive a certain person only as a Muslim disregarding any other possible ways that he can be perceived as. The confinement of a person into only one identity that he has to belong to, deprives him of his right to have multiple affiliations which would result in shaping several identities, and is an outrageous crime against humanity.

The danger of promoting one single identity that people should adhere to and be identified with, is that one fail to see any further than your own identity let alone perceiving any kind of common grounds between you and people who have different identities. You find yourself locked up in the poisonous notion that your identity is far superior than others therefore you enclose yourself in to your little cocoon with people who share your identity and who represent your one and only comfort zone.

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This simply results in distancing yourself further away from people of different identities. As the distance grows further, your ability to entertain the idea of seeing any potential identities that might intersect with others becomes minimal. This eventually infuses futile hatred towards anybody who is different from you. Things get worse, if this dominant identity takes a violent form or leans towards bloody confrontations with others. Especially if this, one identity, was nourished in you by proper education and empowered by planned strategies and acute tactics, the instinctive feelings of compassion and empathy towards other people which are naturally embedded in you can be easily silenced.

According to Huntington's definition of the "Islamic civilization", we would have to start identifying people according to their religion only. So if an act of terrorism occurred, then it was done by a Muslim regardless if he was Indian, American, Arab or European. Since when do we target a whole religion and place it as the enemy? How can we have rampage on religions like that? When there are more than 2.5 billion Muslims around the world, how logical would it be to smear them all by an act of a few? Unfortunately, the smearing does not stop at the religious affiliation level, but it goes deeper to one's ethnicity and geographical background. These prejudices are practiced by Arab Muslims for example against non-Arab Muslims. Same goes for non-Muslims who discriminate against Muslims.

The fatal perception of any person as one sided led to terrible consequences in the history of the world. The Jews in Europe were isolated, but they thought that after the French revolution and with the declaration of human rights summed up in "freedom, equality and fraternity", they could finally see the light at the end of the tunnel which would save them from their disintegrated life in their ghettos. Consequently, Jewish leaders started a movement called "HASKALAH" which is a call for integration in the European societies but the Jews did not succeed in engaging themselves in their communities so the end result was that the Jews decided they can't live with others and they needed to have their own land. This was the start of another call to immigrate to Palestine and make it their homeland. The idea of basing an entire identity on religion to the extent of establishing a new homeland only for the people of a certain religion is fatal as it hinders them from seeing any other possible associations with others who are not Jews.

The 16th century brilliant Shakespearean play "the Merchant of Venice" summarizes the dangerous consequences of seeing no other identities but the religious one. Shylock, a Jewish creditor and money lender, was living in a Christian society which he resented. When he was asked to dine with Antonio, the wealthy Christian merchant who borrowed money from Shylock, he adamantly refused, explaining that while he will do business with Antonio, walk, buy, sell and talk with him, he will not drink, dine or pray with him (Lines 32-40). Shylock punished his Christian opponent, Antonio, when he failed to repay him the debt by asking for a literal pound of his flesh. Shylock's request was brutal, yet he adamantly refused all the pleas for mercy. When he was asked what benefit this piece of flesh will offer, he said, "If it will feed nothing else, it will feed my revenge".

This vengeful answer reveals the horrendous consequences of being filled up with only one identity, which is the Jewish identity, to the extent that he could not see any other common identities that he might share with others in the Christian society that he lived in. Therefore, the shocking news of Israeli soldiers who were bragging about their horrific atrocities on Gaza by wearing T-shirts printed with pictures of a Palestinian pregnant woman, titled "one shot two kills", is a plain example of how confining oneself to one identity infuses hatred towards others. With accurate training and education, it can reach a level with which one fails to see others as human beings who have the basic right to live.

The same line of thinking was ironically used by Hitler in 1920 when he thought of his Aryan race as superior. He actually described his obsession for Aryan superiority in his famous book "Mein Kampf" by saying that he used Swastikas as a symbol of his struggle for



the victory of Aryan man. Surprisingly enough, the Jewish claim of being "the chosen people", is the driving force behind replicating on the Palestinians the same racism that they once suffered in Nazi Germany.

Also further back in history in the 15th Century, the Incas Empire was the largest and the most sophisticated to be found in the new world but not for long. As soon as the Spaniards invaded Latin America, the quick destruction followed. Pizarro, the Spanish leader, brutally wiped out the whole Incas civilization because the Incas king refused to convert to Christianity and to give in to the Spanish invasion.

The same was done by the Crusaders in the 12th century when they claimed that they were going to the Middle East to save Palestine. They took up arms under the banner of "the cross" claiming to establish the Christian flag over Jerusalem. So they ended up killing more than 70,000 Muslim civilians in cold blood.

Also the Christian White English and French human hunters were enslaving people in Africa and shipping them as animals in confined cages to work as slaves in their farms back in their home countries. Ironically, in the beginning of the 17th century, the Spanish law allowed the shipment of "Idle" Africans to Latin America to be forced to work in the mines there.

Moreover, the discovery of the new world in 1492 C.E. led to the wiping out of the Indians, the original inhabitants of America. Also the Ku Klux Klan established in 1866, where White men wearing masks, dressed in white cardboard hats and draped white sheets, called for the superiority of whites over blacks in the US and claimed it was in the name of Christ. The American policy of segregation between blacks and whites that lasted for decades is a smear in the face of the history. Thinking of the white race as the superior race had dreadful consequences. When white people are favored to sit in the front of the bus whereas blacks are forced to sit in the back, when black slaves are forced to convert to Christianity by their white masters, when black children have no right to go to school with the whites, and when black workers are underpaid because they have the wrong skin color, this is called racism. The sign that was hanging on the door of restaurants and diners saying "no dogs, Jews or blacks" is an indication of how far one identity can go in excluding anybody who does not fit into their racist classification.

We can't forget to mention the apartheid system in South Africa where the dominant whites treated the blacks with a despicable sense of inferiority. The education system practiced in black schools was intended to prepare blacks for lives as a laboring class.

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When you find yourself being perceived according to a certain identity be it a man who is black equals a slave, be it a Muslim with a beard equals terrorist, be it a woman with a veil equals oppressed, you try hard to push back refuting being labelled according to these pre designed stereotypes.

When Shylock was forced by the Christian judges to convert to Christianity, he cleverly reminded his audience that regardless of his religious affiliation which may differ from the people of Venice, yet he is a human being. And he went on saying "Hath not a Jew eyes; hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions; fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer that a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die?" (act III, Scene i, line 63). So this is usually what labelled people do. They remind others that they all still have a common identity which is that they are all humans. So the danger of cornering people in to one affiliation by setting sharp lines between different civilizations is not only heinous but false. The history of world's civilizations is a standing witness on how the beneficial integration among different civilizations has helped immensely in the development of humanity.

For example, the Western classical books especially in ancient Greek time would not have survived unless for the efforts of the Muslims in translating them in to Arabic and then they were translated in to Latin right before the European Renaissance. So where does that leave us? Should we say that we are all the same and there are no differences among us all whatsoever? Obviously not, because this will only turn us to copycats. Difference is what actually enriches the human life and adds a new flavour to it. But what endangers it, is failing to see different people as anything but enemies. What threatens it, is to draw sharp lines of classifications where no intersections are even possible. What erodes it, is inciting hatred towards certain groups based on racist ideologies and erroneous beliefs.

We need to realize that though we don't have the same skin colour, we don't share the same nationality and we don't embrace the same religion, we do still have much more in common than what can possibly divide us apart. Maybe what we lack is the courage to think outside the box and break through these concrete borders which limit our abilities to reach out for others. We need to allow our multiple identities to find its way to intersect with others. Striving to release the voice of humanity suppressed inside of us and trying to win over the roaring voices of separation and division is our way to regain back our lost humanity.





**The**  
**PSYCHOLOGY of**  
**TERRORISM:**  
**Where Does Religion Fit?**

Terrorism is largely defined as a politically motivated violence used to coerce societies and governments. As for terrorists who claim an association with the Islamic ideology, it was found that being a committed Muslim or even adopting Islam is not an essential criteria for recruitment. Although some experts consider religion in general as an essential element in radicalization, recent studies and facts on the ground prove that the role of religion is overstated and that terrorist groups often display their causes in religious and cultural terms in order to gain public support, conceal their ulterior motives and to silence their opposition. For example, studies show that there is no connection between suicide terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism or any other religion. An analysis of 153 suicide attacks was carried out between 1980 and 2003 and it was concluded that most cases stem from political motivation not a religious one. In addition, experts of religious terrorism argue that this phenomenon has strong geopolitical roots and not purely religious ones. For example a study was conducted on the educational background of 80 terrorists who associated themselves with Islam and who performed terrorist acts against Westerners, and it was concluded that the majority of the terrorists had college education in subjects like engineering. Only over 10 percent attended Muslim religious schools. This means that having a strong background in Islamic studies as a pre-requisite for joining terrorist groups is hardly a visible element let alone being a condition for the process of radicalization to start. In fact it was proven that less than 20 percent of Islamist extremists have had a religious primary or secondary education. This small percentage goes totally against the view that Islamist extremism is the result of systematic brainwashing by teachers in religious education. This means there are other important contributing factors in the psychological make-up of these individuals which facilitate the process of radicalization.

Statistics have shown that one of the main criteria for recruiting members for terrorist groups is to have mental disturbances or personality disorder. A sample of 140 Dutch individual who either became foreign fighters or was adamant to travel abroad and join terrorist groups was taken and were subjected to psychological analysis. The results showed that 6 % of them had diagnosed personality disorders and 20% showed undiagnosed mental health issues such as autism spectrum, narcissistic, schizophrenia, post-traumatic stress, and psychotic disorders. It was also proven that the prevalence of mental health issues is

highly more evident in lone-actor terrorists than group based ones. In an earlier study, it was found that lone-actor terrorists were 13.5 times more likely to have a mental disorder than group-based terrorists. Suicide bombers obtained significantly more diagnoses of Avoidant-Dependent Personality Disorder (60% vs. 17%), depressive symptoms (53% vs. 8%) and more readily displayed suicidal tendencies (40% vs. 0%). The organizers of suicide bombings scored higher in emotional instability and impulsivity than suicide bombers. Such information provides us with an insight into the different roles that are assigned to individuals (lone-actor/ suicide bomber/ leader/ non-suicide member) according to their psychological make up and mental state.

It is also worth noting that those who have obvious episodes of mental health problems and utter the phrase "Allahu Akbar" while committing an act of violence, might very well not be inspired by or associated with ISIS but they simply use this phrase because it is a recognized one during committing violent acts. These cases are usually dismissed as non-terrorist acts but in many cases the media is not keen to report the individual's intention of committing acts of violence and whether it was motivated by ISIS or not.

The psychological disturbances and the mental health issues suffered by the radicalized recruited individuals in terrorist groups like ISIS is only one important part of the story of radicalization. There are other factors which play an essential role in the process of recruiting these individuals and preparing them down the path of violence. A mix of personal problems being intensified with ideological beliefs which form the drive to radicalization or ideological beliefs at the stem root being incited by personal issues which led to engaging into violence are both seen as valid. The sequence of influences which led to radicalization could vary from one person to another. What is rather certain is that acts of violence depends on the vulnerability of the targets and the individual's ability to attack from both psychological and technical capability standpoint. As we have mentioned the role of psychological and mental influences is essentially important in carrying out acts of violence as adopting extreme ideologies is facilitated by delusional thinking.

Studies conducted on those who commit terrorist acts in their own home countries showed that they are young

individuals who are socially alienated and with little education and no employment. As for terrorists who travelled to the west, 70% joined the cause of “jihad” in a country that they did not grow up in and were highly intellectual. The terrorist or the extremist leaders are usually older in age with a charismatic influential character.

Experts have suggested that there are some common personality traits among terrorists in general such as having a disturbed relationship with their own identities. Other significant abnormal personal traits is low self-esteem, inferiority complex, lack of empowerment, absence of empathy and loneliness with paranoid tendencies and a preoccupation with power. Feelings of humiliation has been highlighted as mental cruelty and one of the traumatic experiences which extends suffering from the physical realm to the psychological one. Humiliation is considered as a major threat to one’s identity because his self-image as an individual worthy of belonging to a certain group is destroyed. The key factor in having a good self-image is based on being in a safe environment where interdependency with other human beings in the community is secured. Therefore, once humiliation takes place the safety net and the bond between him and his surrounding is harshly severed. The natural result of this trauma is isolation from the group along with losing one’s identity. Also the individual develops paranoid tendencies and faces difficulty in trusting others. Thus the person disassociates himself emotionally from others and even from his own emotions as he refuses to be in a vulnerable situation where he could get hurt once again. Shutting down the emotional system could also be the result of social rejection and exclusion from the group. The individual’s loss of the bond with others and dis-belonging to a group is very painful and leads to a loss of control and self-regulation as well as feeling emotionally numb and detached. The effect of social exclusion is severe as it begets the same response following the experience of being subjected to physical pain. A feeling of injustice develops which is the root for anger and seeking revenge. Once the individual reaches a stage of seeking revenge, a process of moral disengagement occurs as he needs to justify for himself the reason for killing others. One of the famous reasons quoted is that killing is done for keeping one’s personal safety which is threatened by others. The emotional state of extremists and terrorists is usually a mix up of anger, frustration, fear, disgust, disappointment and hatred towards all those who disagree with them whether Muslims

or non-Muslims.

Another major feature of the terrorist’s way of thinking is that it is simplistic, primitive and unsophisticated. They tend to see the world through dualistic thinking and rigid division of right and wrong, black and white, rich and poor. Their analytical skills are very basic due to poor educational background that is based on memorization rather than critical thinking. They are unable to entertain different views and they are always rejecting other viewpoints and dismiss them as false and heretical. They aim to spread their unilateral political views by force and whoever disagrees with them is simply an infidel. Their reaction to the world is based on their subjective interpretation rather than the objective reality.

Experts believe that individuals before committing terrorist acts go into a mental state similar to hypnosis where they actually relinquish reality and suspend their intellectual faculty. Other studies showed that some of the recruits of terrorist groups are not behind in education, they are rather well-educated, highly motivated individuals who rigidly believe in a cause and devote themselves to it. They are engaged in terrorist acts to provide them with a sense of self-actualization, fulfillment and direction to their lives. Another cause for joining terrorist groups is the sense of adventure and excitement and the feeling of empowerment by belonging to a group of friends who share the same goal. Also personal issues play an essential role in recruitment. For example a feeling of dissatisfaction which results from one’s inability to hold a stable job, having a failed marriage, addiction, financial difficulties, lack of a sense of orientation and direction. Another reason for dissatisfaction is victimhood. They usually think of themselves as victims of injustice with no hope for success through peaceful means as they are ruled by ungodly rulers and thus it is incumbent upon them as “good Muslims” to correct this corrupted situation and remove injustice.

It is also interesting to note how these individual character traits can mold to form the psychology of the terrorist group. The bond between the members of a terrorist group occur when they replace their own ego ideal with the person of the leader. Therefore, all members are able to identify with each other and a common bond is created- an important factor in group formation. Also following blindly the orders of the leader and identifying one’s self with

him relieves the conscience from the consequences of these commands and eliminate personal moral judgments. Most members are characterized with low intellectual level and thus are easily swayed by a charismatic leader. Charisma as an essential characteristic of the leader's personality was heavily emphasized and exhaustively researched. The powerful influence resulting from a charismatic leader turns a mediocre idea to the level of a great vision. Charismatic leaders are largely psychologically paranoid and thus they attract loyal disciples but no friends through the power of absolute conviction.

Terrorist groups like ISIS base themselves on a collective sense of victimization due to the illegitimate actions of the West and the global Western power which led to the exploitation and devastation of many Islamic countries. The feeling of powerlessness and hopelessness in making any significant changes to counteract the Western hegemony leads these groups to resort to violence as the last hope for change. These young individuals carry the pain of humiliation and the trauma which they were subjected to. For example, many young Muslims reported the mistreatment that they were subjected to in French prisons and also among British Muslims they are those who still feel that they are treated as a second class citizen. This perception of the self as a victim living in an inhospitable society and thus unwelcome and sometime repressed is a prevalent feeling among many Muslim youth of the second and third generations living in poor districts and suburbs in Europe. The danger of absolute victimization is that it legitimizes the use of absolute violence which turns from a personal urge for revenge to a collective group seeking violence as a means of change. The lack of recognition for Muslims as a first class citizen and being culturally stigmatized and economically excluded incites such groups to use forceful means to earn the long awaited recognition and respect according to them.

In conclusion, the process of radicalization is not simply based on one dominant factor to the exclusion of others but rather is a mix of personal, psychological, economic, political, social and religious factors which all contribute to creating an extremist mindset. Therefore, highlighting religion as the major element in the recruitment of members to join terrorist groups is overstated and a superficial way to perceive the complex reality of radicalization and terrorism.



# INSIGHT

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