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GUIDE TO THE DRIVERS OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM

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ACRONYMS

AQIM	al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
AQAP	Al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula
CT	counter-terrorism
CE	counter-extremism
DFLP	Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine
DOS	Department of State
DOD	Department of Defense
DRS	Département de Renseignement et de Sécurité
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
ETA	Basque Homeland and Freedom (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna)
FARC	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia
ELN	National Liberation Army
GIA	Armed Islamic Group, Algeria
GICM	Moroccan Islamic Combating Group (Groupe Islamique Combattant Marocain)
GSPC	Salafi Group for Preaching and Combat
IDF	Israeli Defense Force
IIPB	Islamic International Peacekeeping Brigade
IRA	Irish Republican Army
ISI	Inter-Services Intelligence, Pakistan
Ji	Jemaah Islamiyyah
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
SJ	Salafi jihadist or Salafi jihadism
PFLP	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine
PCP	Palestinian Communist Party
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USG	United States Government
TSJ	Transnational Salafi jihadist
VE	Violent Extremism
VIE	Violent Islamist Extremism

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction and Approach: This publication explores the drivers of violent extremism (VE), with special reference to the Muslim world in the past three decades. This publication’s primary objectives are to summarize what we know, and what we do not know, about the drivers of violent Islamist extremism (VIE)¹; to pinpoint recurrent drivers across a wide variety of countries, so as to clue the analyst confronted with a particular situation to some of the potentially relevant dynamics and factors; and to identify some of the most common misconceptions or pitfalls in the study of VIE, so as to avoid potentially counter-productive approaches when designing development assistance programs with a counter-extremism component. This Guide does not discuss programmatic implications -- which, for reasons of space, will be developed in a separate, stand-alone document.

The Guide developed out of a comprehensive literature review. While it did not involve significant new data collection, it endeavored to take into account existing data in books, articles, surveys and policy reports. Much of what is known about VIE is based on the experience of countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). South Asia also represents a significant source of relevant information. By contrast, much less is known about VIE in sub-Saharan Africa -- which, in comparison to the MENA and South Asia regions, has been relatively sheltered from it. Inevitably, therefore, this document reflects the imbalance that exists in sources and expertise. In addition, some countries are able to produce dependable information about the identity of violent extremists active in their midst, while others are not. Consequently, it is difficult to infer from existing data reliable generalizations (across countries and regions) about the profile of the populations drawn to VIE. For instance, Israeli, Palestinian and Western sources contain a wealth of information about the socioeconomic, professional and educational background of suicide bombers active in the Israeli-Palestinian theater. That information has tended to suggest that the suicide bombers in question have not been poor individuals with little education. However, researchers are hard pressed to find a similarly rich data pool about the background of suicide bombers in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Part One: Part One of the Guide highlights the limitations of explanations of VE that rely too heavily on a search for broad, society-wide, macro-level “root causes.” The primary empirical and logical problems associated with such explanations can be summarized as follows. First, the populations that experience these alleged “root causes” are very large -- and yet, typically, only a very small fraction of them turn to violence. In other words, the vast majority of those affected by the underlying conditions to which VE often is ascribed do not, in fact, resort to violence -- and it is not clear at all that the few among them who do are motivated primarily by the conditions in question.

Second, it is very difficult to generalize, across regions, countries, and time periods, about the “underlying conditions” that give rise to VE organizations, since those organizations have emerged in radically different social, political and economic environments. If one focuses on social and economic conditions alone, one must note that VE has manifested itself in a wide variety of socioeconomic settings, from impoverished societies to advanced industrialized countries.

¹ “Islamist” in “violent Islamist extremism” (VIE) refers to the fact that VE organizations active in the Muslim world frequently invoke concepts or symbols from Islamic texts, practices, or history, in order to articulate their political agenda and justify their actions. “Islamist” -- and not “Islamic” -- is used in order to underscore that the VE in question is not inherent to Islam, but entails the manipulation of Islamic referents by political actors. Similar exploitations of religious imagery and traditions can be found in other cultures.

Third, when assessing the extent to which social and economic conditions drive VE, it is critical to note that a direct, explicit concern with issues of poverty, unemployment, service delivery and economic opportunities does not appear to be the primary preoccupation of many violent extremist (VE) organizations. If it were, these organizations and their leaders typically would have a lot more to say about those issues than they actually do.

In fact, when we look at the rhetoric of many of these movements, we are struck by the lack of references to underlying social and economic conditions. The spokespersons for these movements typically appear to be more concerned with issues of identity, existential threats, perceived humiliation, cultural domination and oppression. They are not driven, as many social and economic root causes explanations often suggest, by resentment at their inability, or the inability of their communities, to take advantage of what globalization and modernity have to offer, but by a rejection of modernity, and a fundamental hostility toward globalization, post-enlightenment values, and secular humanism. They abhor the spiritual void, unrestrained individualism, moral relativism, materialism, and hedonism that they see as intrinsic to modernity and globalization.

Fourth, an emphasis on the so-called “root causes” of VE usually overstates the role of push factors (those characteristics of the societal environment that are alleged to push vulnerable individuals onto the path of violence). By the same token, they often underestimate the potentially critical role played by such pull factors as the appeal of a particular leader, self-appointed imam or inspirational figure, or the material, emotional or spiritual benefits which affiliation with a group may confer.

Fifth, and more generally, explanations framed in terms of root causes under-estimate the role of human agency. Contextual factors do matter; they may create grievances and opportunities for violence; but the grievances and opportunities in question may not actually lead to violence in the absence of political entrepreneurs, ideologues, and/or organizations that can frame and channel the relevant grievances in violent directions, and that can make the most of the opportunities for violence with which a particular setting presents them.

Finally, much of the first part of the document is spent exploring systematically four sets of often inter-related drivers to which “underlying conditions” or “root causes” explanations do not do justice:

1. One driver consists of personal relationships, social bonds and group dynamics.
2. A second set of factors relates to the impact of strongly-held ideas and deeply felt convictions. If we want to understand and account for the appeal of many VE movements, we need to acknowledge at the outset the power of ideas, and the special resonance of some of those ideas in particular historical and cultural contexts. We need to recognize that many VE are moved primarily by an unshakable belief in the superiority of certain values; by a perceived obligation to carry out God’s command; or by an abiding commitment to destroy a system they view as evil and/or oppressive. In other words, variables located in the realm of identity, faith, and spirituality matter a great deal. The quest for dignity, recognition and respect (not only for oneself, but also for one’s community and one’s culture) and the perception that one is being denied all of that at both a collective and personal levels often is a critical driver of VE. That is particularly true in societies in which the sense of collective humiliation on the one hand, and the sense of direct, immediate threat to personal honor and integrity are closely intertwined.
3. A third set of variables typically underplayed by “root causes explanations” concerns historical legacies of foreign domination, oppression, subjugation, and interference (particularly in societies which, unlike ours, have very long memories). These legacies make it easier for “victimization narratives” to take hold. These narratives evoke powerful feelings and emotions for a variety of reasons. For one, foreign domination has had a profoundly debilitating impact not only on the politics and the economies of the countries involved, but, equally importantly, on their collective self-confidence and self-respect. For

another, there is a perception that the West has yet truly to make amends for that history. Finally and most importantly, there is a strong perception that current events represent a continuation of these much older historical patterns of foreign oppression, domination, and/or interference. A very important part of the appeal of the “Salafi jihadist² (SJ) worldview” stems from its ability to blend past and present victimization into a single, simple, even simplistic, but internally coherent narrative. In that narrative, the memory of past oppressions provides the primary lens through which current forms of victimization are being apprehended; in turn, current oppression (real or perceived) plays a key role in nurturing the memory of past wrongs inflicted on entire societies and cultures.

4. A fourth (and closely related) driver typically underplayed by “root causes” explanations has to do with the perception that the international system is fundamentally unjust; that it functions as a key mechanism through which Muslims are oppressed and their culture de-valued; that it relegates and condemns Muslim societies to a subordinate and humiliating position in global affairs; and that it helps account for the lack of control that Muslims have over both their personal lives and collective destinies.

And so, just as past and present victimization are presented as the two sides of a single reality, so do local and global grievances. In such a context, even where local grievances are paramount, they are viewed as merely local manifestations of greater global dysfunctions. Such perceptions enable actors in local struggles to believe that they are sustained in their efforts by a global momentum, and that they take part in a much broader struggle, an epic, that unfolds at the level of the entire planet. This can be tremendously empowering – sometimes exhilarating – and it plays a key role in enhancing commitment to the cause.

Part Two: Part One of the paper having underscored the dangers of over-emphasizing the causal role of broad, society-wide social and economic variables, Part Two endeavors to circumscribe or delineate more carefully the part that these variables usually play. The document’s basic argument is that these variables do come into play, but that they typically do so (a) indirectly and (b) in combination with other variables that have to be identified, and that will vary from one setting to another. We feel that it is precisely on the exact nature of those indirect connections, and on the particular combinations of variables that produce VE, that a great deal more attention needs to be placed if we are to avoid the reductionist and misleading nature of arguments that draw too direct a line of causation from underlying social and economic conditions on the one hand, to VE on the other.

For instance, economic development may matter first and foremost not so much because it reduces economic and social grievances, but for two reasons: 1) it has been shown to increase the ability to sustain a democratic system that protects civil liberties and political rights; and 2) there is strong empirical evidence to suggest that countries that protect civil liberties and political rights are less likely to produce VE. Along similar lines, poverty may matter first and foremost not directly (because it creates grievances related to poverty), but indirectly, because it undermines a state’s capacity to monitor borders, control illicit activities, and prevent corruption of police and security officials (all of which can be exploited by VIE, as the examples of Yemen, Pakistan and the Sahel suggest).

Social marginality may also operate as a powerful driver not so much directly (because individuals resent being socially excluded) but indirectly in several ways such as: 1) it may result in young people having too much time on their hands (boredom and idleness may be significant drivers of VE among the youth); and 2) it may feed into the search for adventure and fame with the Transnational Salafi jihadist (TSJ) movement (e.g., al-Qaeda) has been able to tap.

Part Two also draws on very recent empirical research conducted under the auspices of the World Bank in order to delineate the link between poverty and VE, in ways that avoid simplistic causation arguments such as “poverty breeds terrorism,” but that also do justice to poverty’s role as a driver. One of the more

² See the definition in annex A.

interesting finding the Guide discusses in this regard is that while individual terrorists tend to be better off than the average citizen in the societies to which they belong, impoverished countries also tend to generate far more terrorism than wealthier ones. The empirical relationship between poverty and terrorism, then, is strikingly different at the macro, country-wide level and the micro, individual level. Thus to recognize that, historically, most terrorists have not themselves been poor but have been predominantly well-educated individuals from middle- or upper-middle class backgrounds, should not detract from recognizing that national poverty increases a country's propensity to produce terrorism, and that it does so in ways that are statistically significant.

Another related finding is that if low-, middle-, and high-income countries are considered together, per capita income does not correlate with terrorism. However, if low-income countries are examined by themselves, we find that increases in per capita income diminish vulnerability to terrorism. This suggests that at least in the longer term economic development can reduce vulnerability to VE.

Part Three: Part Three of the Guide zeroes in on political drivers. There are seven drivers deserve special attention – either because there is actual empirical support for them, or because they feature prominently among the political drivers usually invoked by analysts. The **first political driver** is the denial of basic political rights and civil liberties. As mentioned earlier, there is fairly robust empirical evidence to suggest that the countries producing terrorists are characterized first and foremost by severe restrictions on civil liberties. Controlling for other variables, the more exclusionary the political system, the more unresponsive it is to citizens' demands, the more it denies them basic civil liberties, the greater the vulnerability to VE.

The **second key political driver** consists of harsh and brutal rule that entails gross violations of human rights. Governments that routinely victimize their citizens may be particularly vulnerable to generating VE, especially when they are not so weak that they can be displaced through classical insurgency tactics, guerilla warfare or rebellions, and when they are strong enough to prevent terrorism (even strong, brutal governments may be able to prevent terrorism in the short run, while sowing the seeds of it in the long run).

For many violent extremists, particularly the leaders and the ideologues, exposure to harsh government repression, and particularly torture in prison, was a significant factor in their radicalization. Brutal, degrading treatment at the hands of the police, the security forces, or an occupying power; the desire to avenge someone who was tortured, disappeared, or died as collateral damage in a military operation; and/or repeated victimization of citizens by the state are significant factors.

Exposure to harsh and indiscriminate government repression not only may push individuals into VE organizations, but it also enhances the likelihood of community support and complicity for the actions of those organizations, the violence of which can be seen as a form of revenge for the violence done to the community by those in power. In fact, that is precisely why VE leaders seek through their actions to prompt governments into over-reacting: such over-reaction supports their recruitment efforts; creates community support and enables them to present their violence as a form of reciprocal (and therefore legitimate) brutality. Research by Freedom House also suggests that regimes that are particularly brutal and arbitrary not only tend to generate more terrorists, but that they tend to generate terrorists that are more lethal than their counterparts from less repressive states.

Repressive political contexts that deny opportunities for political action and organizing in the open, and through legal channels, also tend to encourage the opposition to structure itself into secretive cells that operate underground. They fuel a fear of informants, of infiltration by government agents, and of decimation of the group by the security forces. That type of environment and structuring of the political opposition, in turn, often foster political reflexes and outlooks that are conducive to extremism. They feed into conspiratorial mentalities, put a premium on secrecy and discipline, and encourage oppositional movements to insist that their members abide by a strict ideological and behavioral code.

Finally, as the example of Algeria during the 1990s demonstrates, VE and the most repressive components of an authoritarian regime ironically sometimes need one another to maintain their power positions and legitimize their respective actions. Hardliners in the state apparatus need the violence of VE to justify opposing any opening of the political system, and to nurture the fears of both softliners and moderates in society that such an opening would benefit radical forces, not democracy. For their part, VE need government repression to justify their own actions and to continue to be able to recruit and operate.

The *third political driver* we examined was widespread corruption and perceived impunity for well-connected elites. Corruption may feed VE in direct ways – for instance by creating widespread anger and a profound sense of moral outrage and injustice. More indirectly, corruption may facilitate the operations of VE organizations – for instance by allowing for the bribing of local officials who then turn a blind eye to the activities of those organizations; because it may make it easier for those organizations to establish sanctuaries, engage in illicit activities, or penetrate the private sector; or because communities put off by pervasive corruption and impunity may become complicit or at least more tolerant of the activities of some VE groups.

Alternatively, corruption may prompt some individuals increasingly to withdraw from a society they deem to be hopelessly corrupt; those individuals may start reaching out to others like them, which, in turn, can turn into the formation of cliques that become increasingly secluded from mainstream society. That situation has been shown sometimes to operate as a vector for radicalization of both beliefs and behavior.

A *fourth political driver* often invoked is the presence of poorly governed and ungoverned areas. Here, while we recognized that under certain conditions poorly governed spaces may allow extremists to establish sanctuaries or safe havens, and while we provided some supportive evidence to that effect, we also expressed significant skepticism that extremists really seek or need ungoverned spaces. Extremists may find weak states more attractive than failed or even failing states. In addition, VE organizations certainly have shown that they can operate in environments that are either well governed or relatively well governed (e.g., London 2005 and 2007). VE organizations also sometimes can turn a relatively well-governed area (or an area that could be well governed) into a base of operation. They may do so, in part, because of government complicity, as in Pakistan’s FATA (i.e., when a government decides that leaving an area poorly governed serves its strategic interests, or when local power holders do not have an interest in improving governance). Alternatively, VE may undermine the government’s presence and influence in a particular area, or clear government forces from that area altogether, as the Armed Islamic Group did in Algeria during the 1990s.

The *fifth political driver* relates to the presence of protracted, violent local conflicts. Such conflicts may enable VE organizations to advance their agendas in a variety of ways. Debilitating internal struggles can create chaos, incapacitate government institutions, or create a power vacuum that VE organizations can exploit. Local conflicts, as in Afghanistan, Bosnia or Chechnya, can operate as magnets for extremists elsewhere. They also simply may attract volunteers who, initially, are not extremists but join the fight merely out of a perceived duty to act in solidarity with other Muslims whom they view to be under attack. These volunteers may end up constituting a pool of potential recruits for VE operatives already active in these conflict zones. They may radicalize one another through the personal bonds they forge while under fire, and these bonds progressively may pull them into the orbit of the global jihad.

Those engaged in local conflicts on the one hand, and global jihadists on the other, also may join efforts in what amounts to a marriage of convenience. Global jihadist may try to expand their support base across regions and countries by seeking to portray themselves as the champions of one of the parties involved. They may try to graft the jihad onto conflicts that are driven by local dynamics, about which they, in reality, tend not to care, except to the extent that it enables them to advance their global agenda. As for local actors, they may see a variety of benefits in hitching their bandwagon to the global jihad. Doing so may enable them to gain access to financial and logistical support; it may add legitimacy and a sense of

moral or political purpose to their cause; and it may provide them with an overarching ideological framework which they lack.

Still, it is critical to note that, thus far, efforts by TSJ organizations to graft the global jihad onto local struggles have tended to fail after a few years, and that, for reasons which the document explores, in all the main cases involved, from Bosnia to Iraq, the local population eventually turned against the global jihadists.

The *sixth political driver* relate to the presence of repressive regimes that are widely viewed by their populations as illegitimate and bankrupt (politically, economically, and militarily). This factor may be coupled with the absence of a genuine mainstream, legal opposition which is viewed by society as providing a credible alternative to those regimes. Such an opposition may be lacking because it has been decimated by the regime; has been co-opted by it; or it is inherently weak due to internal divisions, poor leadership, and lack of resources.

The *seventh and last political driver* concerns the provision of previous support to VE movements by governments that once relied on those movements to serve their short-term political or strategic interests, but that subsequently lost control over the forces that they unleashed in the process. Pakistan is perhaps the best current example of this. Some VE groups that target a given state were once proxies of that same state, and, without the support they enjoyed from it at a time, they might not have become as effective as they are today.

Part Four: This section of the Guide examines the individuals who tend to be pulled into VE groups. Since the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the socioeconomic and educational profile of Salafi Jihadists has experienced significant changes. Individuals who are from poor or even destitute backgrounds play a far more prominent role among them than was the case for individuals who joined the global jihad in the 1980s or 1990s; those individuals tended to come predominantly from upper middle and middle class backgrounds. The new generation tends to be far less educated (few have completed high school, and many dropped out from the school system with little more than rudimentary literacy) than was the case previously. Unlike their predecessors, who often grew up in well-integrated middle class neighborhoods, they often come from forbidding, disheveled peri-urban areas characterized by high levels of social fragmentation, isolation, and anomie. Social marginality and exclusion feature far more prominently in the profile of that generation than used to be the case. They are more prone than earlier generations of SJs to have been involved in petty crime and illicit activities (smuggling, drug dealing, theft) prior to their involvement in the global jihad. In some cases those activities appear to have provided a gateway to that involvement.

In making these generalizations, some caveats are required. First, the empirical evidence remains limited and somewhat anecdotal. Second, from Saudi Arabia to Morocco, and from Western Europe to Indonesia, SJs tend to come from increasingly diverse socioeconomic backgrounds (by contrast with earlier generations, which tended to be far more homogeneous). Third, the TSJ movement remains a fast-moving target. Consequently, profiles are likely to continue to change, sometimes dramatically, and over a short period of time. That is likely to be particularly true in countries where social and political upheavals may provide the TSJ movement with opportunities to penetrate new constituencies. Fourth, we probably should expect a rise in the number of groups that display a mixture of socioeconomic profiles: for instance, fairly well-educated individuals (high-school graduates and above) of middle or lower-middle class backgrounds, cooperating in the planning or execution of VE activities with far more underprivileged, socially marginal recruits, with little formal education (in other words, a make-up reminiscent of the cell that planned and executed the March 2004 Madrid train attacks).

Some analysts have pointed to the growing heterogeneity in the socioeconomic backgrounds of SJs and other VEs to suggest that, from both an analytical and counter-extremism perspective, trying to identify at-

risk or vulnerable populations is, at best, a meaningless exercise, and, more likely, a counterproductive one. They suggest that the entire focus should be on how individuals are pulled into VE -- not why they join, or who they tend to be. This Guide takes a different position. The fact that it is not possible to generalize about the profile of populations susceptible to VE across countries, regions and time periods does not mean that it is impossible to detect such a profile for a particular country at a given historical juncture. That does not mean that a clear-cut profile will always emerge from the evidence, but when it does, it is important to take note. From a programmatic perspective, and faced with limited resources, it is critical to target the communities, populations, settings, or institutions that appear to be producing a disproportionate percentage of extremists.

Part Five: This section zeroes in on five main types of motivations that operate at the individual level. These individual-level motivations range from the desire to avenge a loved one or to follow a friend on the path of jihad all the way to being subjected to societal pressure, intimidation or coercion. In the real world, of course, individual behavior reflects mixed motivations. Individuals can be driven by both very concrete, narrow grievances and much broader ideological fervor. Ideological commitment need not exclude the search for economic advantage. Individuals may join VE organizations in part because of religious zeal, in part because such organizations provide them with emotional and psycho-sociological support, in part because of the sense of brotherhood and camaraderie that these organizations foster, and in part because they also satisfy young people's quest for thrills and a sense of adventure.

Still, we believe that -- again, for purposes of both analysis and counter extremism programming -- it is critical when one is faced with a particular case to be able to separate, or disentangle, those motivations that are critical, from those that appear to be less decisive. Building on that working assumption, the document emphasizes the need to distinguish in particular between two main sets of motivations, and between the very different kinds of VE organizations usually associated with them (understanding that, in both cases, we are dealing with ideal types or polar ends on a continuum, and that some organizations might not even fit neatly on that continuum).

Organizations of the first type have fairly clearly circumscribed grievances, and are primarily, though typically not exclusively, driven by those grievances. The grievances in question typically are "territorialized," in the sense that they are tied to a particular piece of land that the organizations in question view seek to liberate. There is a very strong nationalist dimension to these organizations, which view the conflict in which they are engaged as geographically circumscribed. These organizations use violence primarily as a strategic or tactical weapon, as a means to achieve their primarily territorial objectives.

Side by side with engaging in violence, many of these organizations also involve themselves in social activities and sometimes the political process. They may have a "political" wing as well as a "military" one. They may compete in elections, seek to lobby the government and officials, and engage in a variety of charitable, social and cultural activities at the grassroots level. In all those respects, they work within the system, play according to its rules. Because they often provide vital services, and enjoy a broad-based support and legitimacy that does not derive exclusively (and sometimes not even primarily) from their use of violence, these organizations tend to be embedded in society.

From a counter-extremism perspective, these organizations present both challenges and opportunities. The opportunities stem mostly from the fact that the grievances and demands of those organizations typically are not open-ended; they are limited to a particular territory, and it is possible to envision satisfying at least some of them in ways that do not entail total capitulation by the other side. The challenge, however, is that it is much harder to contain the influence of such organizations than is the case for transnational VIE organizations (such as al-Qaeda cells) that operate on the fringes of society, are devoid of mass following, and that, instead of being embedded in society, typically are super-imposed upon it, or artificially grafted onto it.

Transnational VIE (or TSJ) organizations, in fact, provide the second ideal type, and on every single dimension mentioned, earlier, they are strikingly different -- and thus call for different responses -- from the primarily grievance-driven, territorially-based, and instrumentally-oriented VE organizations described. Their goals -- restoring the Caliphate, or fighting back against modernity -- are ill-defined, grandiose, and cannot possibly be accomplished short of destroying the world as we know it, and/or annihilation of the other side. Their enemies -- “Jewish-Christian crusaders,” “unbelief” -- are ill-defined as well. These organizations are largely indifferent to particular local struggles, and to the territories upon which these struggles are waged -- even as they seek to harness these struggles for recruitment purposes and in order to advance their global agenda. Their members tend to have a completely skewed view of the world. They do not take part in the legal political process, do not provide services (or do a poor job at it), and tend to be cut off from mainstream society. Most importantly, these organizations -- which often display cult-like, millenarian or messianic features -- tend to view violence very much as an end. They are more prone to believe in violence’s redemptive virtues, to view it as a religious obligation, as a necessary means of cleansing society, and more prone to being addicted to it.

Part Six: This section zeroes in not on who join, or why they do, but how they join. The literature and available evidence consistently point to the key role which personal relationships, social networks and group dynamics in play in accounting for why people become formally or loosely affiliated with VE groups; how they become radicalized through those groups; how they sustain commitment to the cause, often in the face of overwhelming odds; and how and why they justify to themselves engaging in acts which they previously might have denounced as morally unacceptable. The Guide underscores the key role that group dynamics have been shown to play in the lifting of previous moral inhibitions on the use of violence, in one’s ability to disregard the moral standards into which one had been socialized.

The personal relationships in question may be ties to close relatives, for instance, or longstanding friendships going all the way back to childhood among several individuals who grew up in the same neighborhood, played soccer together, and attended the same school. In the process, they developed a sense of mutual commitment and obligation toward one another. In those conditions, it sometimes only takes one or two of them to drift into VE for the others to follow. Bonds also can be forged between, on the one hand, an inspiring, charismatic self-proclaimed shaykh, and, on the other hand, an impressionable, vulnerable individual who is looking for guidance, certainties, and role models or mentors that he can respect and try to emulate. The bottom line, though, is that when all is said and done, personal relationships often end up being far more decisive in shaping radical behavior than the so-called “underlying conditions” or “root causes,” ideological convictions, grievances, or any alleged “psychological predispositions” toward violence.

The notion of “recruitment” to SJ extremism has always been somewhat misleading and is becoming more so. More often than not, individuals are not formally recruited but tend to drift into VE groups through personal relationships with individuals already involved in the global jihad. There is a clear trend toward self-recruitment -- self-recruitment referring to a process by which individuals enlist themselves into the jihad (as opposed to being directly recruited by others). They self-recruit through connections they establish on their own initiative, reaching out to others with similar worldviews, and doing so either in person or, increasingly, via the internet. They may end up carrying out attacks on their own, or with a handful of like-minded peers, but with only minimal specific external guidance.

There appears to be a trend toward the shortening of the time frame separating merely being vulnerable to the appeal of VE all the way to the actual perpetration of a terrorist act. We found much anecdotal evidence -- from Western Europe to Pakistan and the Middle East -- to suggest that, in many cases, these phases are being compressed. Individuals are accepting violent worldviews, enlisting in extremist groups or cells and turning themselves into human bombs over an extremely short period of time. They are moving from fairly westernized lifestyles and reasonable integration into society to carrying out an attack in a matter of months.

Conclusion: The single most important point that the reader should take away from this Guide is that VE must be seen in context. There can be no general theory about why and how the turn to VE occurs, because the answer to that question will vary from one setting to another. A detailed and nuanced understanding of the context, therefore, represents the first step toward the development of adequate policy responses to stem the flow of volunteers into VE organizations, deter community support for those organizations, and/or create an environment that makes it harder on them to operate.

While analyses of VE movements should place the latter in their context, it is important to avoid deterministic explanations. No context prompts automatic and predictable responses by the actors affected by it. In other words, while context matters, so do the assessments of the environment by those individuals and organizations that resort to VE. VE being a human endeavor, there is no avoiding the role of personalities and individual predispositions, chance encounters, miscalculations, or the misreading of particular situation. Since VE typically results from the confluence of several factors and dynamics, mono-causal explanations of it should be viewed with particular skepticism. That conclusion, combined with the overarching importance of context, suggests that, from a programmatic perspective, there is no “magic bullet” for the many challenges posed by VE.

It is difficult to generalize not merely about the drivers of, and pathways into, VE, but about VE in general. For instance, the radicalization of Palestinians in Gaza, Shiites in Lebanon, second-generation Muslim immigrants in Western Europe, Chechens in Russia, or Pashtuns in Pakistan’s tribal areas, are all driven by different combinations of factors. For each of the examples just provided, the dynamics and variables underpinning the turn to VE have also varied over time.

When examining a particular case, analysts should remain attuned to these “risk factors” and “risk processes.” They should remember, furthermore, that the relative importance of these factors and dynamics -- and, most importantly, the manner in which they combine to produce VE -- will vary from one setting to another, as well as over time. There also will be important distinctions to be made depending on whether one is concerned primarily about the involvement of individuals into VE activities; about community support for, or tolerance of, activities by VE organizations; or about the emergence of an environment conducive to the operations of such organizations. Analysts, therefore, need to be specific about what exactly is being explained. It is essential that they separate those drivers that are critical from those that are less so, and that they identify how the most salient drivers relate to one another in ways that prompt individuals to join VE organizations, create a complicit society, and/or foster an enabling environment. Following these guidelines should enhance significantly the likelihood of effective policy responses to the challenges posed by VE.

INTRODUCTION

1. This publication explores the drivers of violent extremism (VE), with special reference to the Muslim world in the past three decades. It identifies and discusses those variables and dynamics that repeatedly have been shown to underpin contemporary manifestations of VE in countries with predominantly Muslim populations.

a. “Islamist” in “violent Islamist extremism” (VIE) refers to the fact that VE organizations active in the Muslim world frequently invoke concepts or symbols from Islamic texts and practices, or particular events in Islamic history, in order to articulate their political agenda and justify their actions. “Islamist” -- and not “Islamic” -- is used in order to underscore that the VE in question is not inherent to Islam, but entails the manipulation of Islamic referents by political actors. Similar exploitations of religious imagery and traditions can be found in other cultures.

b. While VE in a predominantly Islamic context occasionally presents distinctive characteristics, it is not so singular that it should be studied *sui generis*. Instead, as the following sections will demonstrate, our understanding of VIE can be significantly enhanced by drawing on the accumulated research on VE in other societies and cultures. Since we are dealing with human behavior, similar logics and dynamics often play themselves out across regions and time periods. To mention but one example, the prominent role which social networks, personal relationships, and group dynamics will be shown to play in VIE is also a feature that has been highlighted by students of left-wing terrorism in Italy during the 1970s.³ Hence, this document deliberately seeks to walk the fine line between recognizing the importance of culture, and not exaggerating it. On the one hand, it acknowledges the critical impact of certain historical and cultural legacies, and it underscores the need to be sensitive to them if one is to understand the resonance of some VE ideas in at least some Muslim societies. On the other hand, it aims to avoid the trap of assuming that culture provides the most reliable clue to people’s politics, including why they may accept or reject VE ideas and behavior.

c. Much of what is known about VIE is based on the experience of countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. South Asia (particularly Pakistan, Afghanistan, and India) also represents a significant source of relevant information. By contrast, much less is known about VIE in sub-Saharan Africa -- which, compared to the MENA and South Asia regions, has been relatively sheltered from it. Inevitably, therefore, this document reflects the imbalance that exists in sources and expertise. Still, a deliberate effort was made to tap into relevant material bearing on East Africa and the Sahel region, including by drawing on key findings from pilot studies conducted in 2008 under USAID’s auspices in both Kenya and Mauritania.

2. The remainder of this introduction proceeds in three Steps:

Section A provides additional information regarding this publication’s scope and objectives -- i.e., it underscores what the reader can expect to find in it, but also what lies beyond its purview. It also includes some background on the process, activities, and consultations that led to this document.

Section B draws the reader’s attention to a few critical methodological considerations and data limitations regarding the study of VE. It amounts to a “cautionary note” that should inform the way in which analysts and policy-makers alike approach the available information.

Section C outlines the organization of the document, and provides the reader with a roadmap to it.

³ See for instance della Porta 1995a.

A. Focus, Scope, and Genesis of the Document

1. This publication's primary objectives can be summarized as follows:

a. To summarize what we know, and what we do not know, about the drivers of VIE, particularly of the Salafi jihadist (SJ) variety.⁴

b. To highlight some of the limitations inherent to this particular field of research.

c. To pinpoint recurrent drivers across a wide variety of countries, so as to clue the analyst confronted with a particular situation to some of the potentially relevant dynamics and factors.

d. To identify some of the most common misconceptions or pitfalls in the study of VIE, so as to avoid potentially misleading or counter-productive approaches when designing development assistance programs with a counter-extremism component.

2. Before embarking on this document, the reader also should understand what it is **not** about:

a. It does not discuss programmatic implications -- which, for reasons of space, will be developed in a separate, stand-alone document. Still, many programmatic implications are implicit in the findings presented in the paper and will be easily divined by readers.

b. This publication does not explore processes related to disengagement (individuals leaving VE groups) or de-radicalization (individuals abandoning the VE beliefs they previously had held). It concentrates exclusively on why and how individuals "get into VE" -- not on the conditions under which they might abandon earlier VE convictions, and/or walk away from VE behavior.

c. Most importantly perhaps, this document does not aim to propose a single framework that would claim to account for the emergence and/or development of VE movements across societies and time periods. While an analysis of the available evidence points to certain factors and processes that enhance vulnerability to VE, a "general theory" of VE is not possible. Instead, any given VE movement or set of manifestations of VE must be viewed as the product of a particular combination of variables and dynamics, at work at a certain historical juncture, in a specific setting, and shaped by both local conditions and global dynamics. As analysts shift their gaze from one country to another (or, within a given setting, one period to another), they should expect that the risk factors and processes analyzed below will be more or less salient and relevant, and that the manner in which they combine to produce VE will vary as well.

3. This publication builds on research, fieldwork, and several rounds of consultations in Washington D.C. as well as abroad since July 2007, all conducted under the auspices of USAID's Africa Bureau. It is informed, in part, by the comments that staff from USAID, the Department of State (DOS), and the Department of Defense (DOD) made on an earlier report (and related briefings) that evaluated key assumptions regarding the factors that can facilitate recruitment into, or community support for, terrorist movements.⁵ It also integrates the results of several workshops held in Washington, D.C.; pilot studies in

⁴ See Appendix A for a definition of SJ.

⁵ See *Development, Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism: Exploring Hypotheses Related to Factors Contributing to Support for Terrorism* (September 2007). This report came with two companion pieces. The first critically examined key terms (e.g., "extremism," "Salafism," "Salafi Jihadism") that are commonly used by those focused on counter-terrorism in the USG. The second companion piece consisted of a generic Results Framework for programming at the intersection of development assistance and extremism drivers. See *Extremism, Terrorism, Counter Terrorism and Development Assistance: Working Definitions and Comparisons of Key Terms* (August 2007) and *Africa Bureau - Counter Terrorism and Development Assistance Programming: The Results Frameworks* (December 2007). All the reports mentioned in this footnote were produced for USAID by MSI in 2007.

Mauritania and Kenya; and presentations to both counter-terrorism (CT) officials and contractors charged with the implementation of USAID programs with a counter-extremism (CE) dimension.

Most importantly, this publication benefited from a January 2009 peer review of an earlier draft of this document,⁶ and from comments that were offered shortly thereafter in the course of several briefings held in Washington D.C. with USG staff concerned with VE. Finally, the document occasionally draws on related research that went into drafting a youth assessment module and an extremism assessment framework.⁷

B. Data Limitations and Other Methodological Considerations

1. Sample Biases

This document developed out of a comprehensive literature review. While it did not involve new data collection (except in the form of the brief pilot studies in Kenya and Mauritania), it endeavored to take into account the many sets of existing data contained in the books, articles, and policy reports that were consulted. Some of the limitations inherent to those data sets -- and to the difficulties of drawing meaningful generalizations from them -- must be underscored.

The discussion that follows highlights only a few of the biases introduced by the nature of the available information.⁸ It does so to draw attention to the some of the obstacles that confront analysts in this field, and, more specifically, to invite, on the part of the reader, a proper degree of caution regarding the frequently excessive claims (relative to the evidence marshaled to back them up) found in the literature.

a. Some countries are able to produce precise and dependable information about the identity of violent extremists active in their midst, while others are not. Consequently, it is difficult to infer from existing data reliable generalizations (across countries and regions) about the profile of the populations drawn to VE. For instance, Israeli, Palestinian and Western sources contain a wealth of information about the socioeconomic, professional and educational background of suicide bombers active in the Israeli-Palestinian theater. That information has tended to suggest that the suicide bombers in question have not been poor individuals with little education. However, one is hard pressed to find a similarly rich data pool about the background of suicide bombers in Afghanistan and Pakistan. This phenomenon introduces an important bias in what we know about the profile of suicide bombers, since available studies tend to exclude areas (Afghanistan, Pakistan) for which comparatively poorer and far less educated individuals may be playing a more prominent role (as suggested by anecdotal evidence).

b. Available data about members of VE organizations, or about those who have engaged in attacks, tell us little about the background of individuals drawn to VE. That is, in part, because most people with intent and/or motivation do not act; in part because a lot of individuals holding VE views may be unable to link up with VE organizations; and, in part, because those organizations “select for quality,” and turn down many poorly prepared volunteers.⁹ Therefore, the profile of members or attackers does not necessarily shed light on the profile of the populations that are susceptible or vulnerable to VE -- i.e., those with intent,

⁶ The authors thank the reviewers for their detailed and helpful feedback. Reviewers included Christine Fair (Rand Corporation), Mohamed Hafez (Naval Postgraduate School), André Le Sage (National Defense University), and William Zartman (School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University).

⁷ *Conducting an Extremism or Terrorism Assessment: An Analytical Framework for Strategy and Program Development* (June 2008, prepared by Guilain Denoeux with Lynn Carter) and *Youth and Extremism Assessment Module* (September 2008, prepared by Guilain Denoeux and Lynn Carter). Both documents were produced for USAID by MSI.

⁸ This discussion owes much to comments by Christine Fair.

⁹ See for instance Bueno de Mesquita 2005.

who have not acted, but might act under different conditions (for example, if they could reach out to VE organizations, or if those organizations were to relax their screening criteria). In other words, available data about suicide bombers tell us little about the profile of the populations that may be ready to strap on an explosive belt, but that (at least temporarily) fail to make contact with a gatekeeper, or cannot make it past him/her. More often than not, it may be that while individuals with low ability or little education are among those most likely to volunteer to join VE organizations, actual members tend to be neither poor nor lacking in education, since organizations screen volunteers and, from the relatively large pool of those who seek membership, they select only the most competent and skilled individuals.

c. Along similar lines, there are limits as to what one can infer from the available data regarding the identity of suicide bombers (either those who succeeded in carrying out an attack, or those who got cold feet at the last minute and subsequently were arrested). The background of such individuals may tell us very little about that of the operatives, organizers or “gatekeepers” who recruited them, and who may be far more sophisticated, skilled and educated. The identity of suicide bombers even may yield little information about the background of rank-and-file members in general. That may be the case, for instance, because those who ended up as suicide bombers initially were recruited for more general purposes; however, because they did not display particularly valuable qualities, they came to be seen by the leadership as “expendable.” Hence, they were selected for operations that did not require highly skilled individuals.¹⁰

2. Drivers and Levels of Analysis

General discussions of “drivers of VE” tend to conflate several levels of analysis that may need to be disaggregated.

a. To begin with, analysts should differentiate between the forces that drive the turn to VE at the level of, respectively, the individual, a particular group, a specific community, or society at large. For instance, individuals may be pulled into VE organizations primarily because of a desire to avenge the loss of loved ones, or because of the emotional and psychological benefits they derive from membership in (or loose affiliation with) those organizations. By contrast, the organizations in question may be embracing violence because of their perceived need to protect or increase their respective “political market share” in an increasingly radicalized society. Hence, groups that previously had eschewed violent tactics now may be resorting to them in an effort to establish or retain grassroots credibility.¹¹

Meanwhile, a community may be radicalized faster and more thoroughly than others because it is subjected to higher levels of repression or victimization. For its part, society as a whole may be increasingly susceptible to violence for altogether different reasons (e.g., because of the failure of a promising political opening, as in Algeria in 1992, or as a result of the breakdown in a peace process, as in Palestine in the mid-to-late 1990s).

To complicate matters even more, these various levels often are inter-related. Thus, it is important to consider the extent to which radicalization at any level is affected by drivers operating at another level. For instance, community-wide grievances may be the leading factor shaping individual motivations (to engage in VE). Conversely, certain organizations may be the prime engine of society-wide radicalization. We know, for instance, that societal support for VE is rarely purely a grassroots phenomenon; instead, it frequently is carefully cultivated by specific organizations that are keen to create, within society at large, a

¹⁰ See Pedahzur 2005.

¹¹ For instance, Mia Bloom (2004) showed such a process of “outbidding” to be at work in Palestine following the outbreak of the second intifada in September 2000. Secular organizations such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) began to use suicide bombings -- a tactic from which they had refrained until then -- in an effort to compete with the militant Islamist groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

culture that is supportive of their views and actions. Ideas of “self-sacrifice” and “martyrdom” may be gaining ground with the public because they are carefully nurtured by organizations. These organizations may be able to tap into notions of community honor, dignity, and self-respect, and/or into nationalist feelings, in order to legitimize the resort to violent tactics. In the process, they may be able to alter previous societal norms (for instance regarding the moral and ethical inadmissibility of suicide bombings) in a way that radically transforms the manner in which the public looks at certain tactics. Thus, an action such as suicide bombing may be turned from a sin into a virtue, and from a shameful deed into a demonstration of bravery and selflessness.¹²

b. Along similar lines, analysts examining a given organization may uncover different drivers depending on whether they are focusing on ideologues, leaders, financiers, senior operatives, cadres, rank-and-file members, or sympathizers.

- For genuine ideologues, ideas indeed may be critical.
- For leaders, personal ambition or frustrated aspirations may be more important.
- Some senior operatives may have been pulled into the organization because they were part of a group of friends who radicalized one another, because they were thoroughly alienated from their environment, and/or because the organization provided them with an avenue for using their skills in a way that also satisfied their quest for adventure, thrills, and fame.
- By contrast, many rank-and-file members may have drifted to the organization primarily in search of a sense of camaraderie or brotherhood.
- Meanwhile, sympathizers may support the organization primarily because they identify with the cause promoted by leaders and ideologues.

c. From a related but different perspective, it may be critical to differentiate between three (frequently overlapping, but nonetheless separate) categories of “drivers”:

- Drivers of recruitment into (or loose affiliation with) VE organizations (i.e., factors and dynamics that tend to push or pull individuals into the orbit of VE groups or movements).
- Drivers of community support for VE (i.e., variables and processes that foster community complicity in, or tolerance of, activities by VE organizations).
- Drivers that create an enabling environment (i.e., factors that make it easier for VE movements to operate -- including, but not limited to, those that create a complicit community).

The reasons why specific individuals (or organizations) resort to violence may be drastically different from those that account for community support for, or tolerance of, activities by VE organization. For instance, individuals may have been radicalized by personal experiences (e.g., torture or other sorts of abuses), or because they were drawn into VE organizations as a result of their pre-existing personal relationships with members of such organizations. For their part, organizations may turn to -- or away from -- VE largely as a result of strategic considerations about the costs and benefits of resorting to violent tactics. As for community support or tolerance, it may be largely a function of resentment at being ignored by the state, intimidation or coercion by VE organizations, or anger at the “cultures of impunity” fostered by local officials. And, as noted above, those community-specific reasons may have little to do with those that contribute to society-wide radicalization.

¹² See for instance Pedahzur (2005) on Hizballah, Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

C. Organization of the Document

The document is divided into six parts that build on each other:

Part One highlights the limitations of explanations of VE that rely too heavily on a search for broad, macro-level “root causes.” Because this publication is intended primarily for development practitioners, and because it focuses on the nexus of development assistance and counter-extremism programming, it underscores, in particular, the shortcomings of arguments that draw too direct a line of causation from “underlying social and economic conditions” to VE.

Part One having cast doubt on the excessive claims that are made all too frequently on behalf of social and economic factors, **Part Two** turns to a more nuanced and circumscribed evaluation of the relationship between those factors and the propensity for VE.

Part Three discusses seven political drivers that deserve attention; several of these drivers are often inter-related and mutually reinforcing.

Part Four outlines the main historical trends and patterns in the socioeconomic and educational backgrounds of individuals drawn to VE; it notes the rapidly evolving and increasingly elusive “profile” of militants attracted to Salafi jihadist (SJ) movements and ideologies; and it explores the notions of “at-risk” or “vulnerable” populations – reflecting, specifically, on their utility for development practitioners and CE officials alike, particularly in light of recent writings on the subject.

Part Five reflects on the motivations that may prompt individuals to join, remain in, or provide tacit or explicit support for VE groups. It pinpoints five main categories of motivations:¹³

- Fairly circumscribed and specific political (especially territorial), economic and social grievances;
- Much broader ideological (especially religious) objectives;
- The search for economic gain;
- Motivations that relate to an individual’s personal background (e.g., the desire to avenge a loved one).
- Intimidation or coercion by peers or the community.

Building on the identification of these different types of motivations, Part Five suggests key criteria that might be applied to particular VE organizations or movements, and that may yield some insights into these movements, while also facilitating the identification of counter-extremism programming options toward them.

Part Six zeroes in on the specific social processes and groups dynamics that drive recruitment – and, increasingly, self-recruitment – into VIE organizations.

Part Seven offers a conclusion.

In short, Parts One through Three concentrate on what we know about the extent to which, and the specific ways in which, the overall socioeconomic and political context can create an environment that facilitates the formation and/or operations of violent extremist groups. Part Four zeroes in on who tend to be pulled

¹³ These motivations should be approached as “ideal-types,” since they are not mutually exclusive, and since many real-life motivations will cut across some of the distinctions that they imply.

into such groups, Part Five on individual-level motivations that may account for why they do so, and Part Six on the how they join or “self-recruit.” The respective merits and drawbacks of focusing on the “who?,” the “why?,” or the “how?” parts of the equation receive particular attention.

Inevitably, there is a degree of overlap between those six parts. That, however, is not necessarily a liability, since it provides the reader with ways of approaching the same key issues from somewhat different, but related, angles. Most importantly, it is hoped that, when taken as a whole, this publication provides the reader with a thorough, analytically sound and empirically grounded understanding of the main drivers behind contemporary VIE –one that reflects the best and most up-to-date scholarly and policy-oriented thinking on the subject.

Annex A presents definitions for key terms such as Salafism, Salafi jihadism, Tablighis, and Takfiris.

Annex B provides a select bibliography of sources for this paper.

PART ONE: LIMITATIONS OF “ROOT CAUSES” AND “UNDERLYING CONDITIONS” EXPLANATIONS OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Explanations of why individuals resort to violent extremism or terrorism frequently stress the “root causes,” “structural factors,” or “underlying conditions” that allegedly drive this phenomenon. Among these “underlying conditions,” in turn, social and economic ones (e.g., large-scale poverty and unemployment, inadequate government services, and insufficient economic opportunities) often receive a disproportionate level of attention. Although perhaps to a lesser extent, political factors (such as bad governance, government repression, and/or the existence of ill-governed or poorly governed areas) also frequently loom large in “root causes” explanations. What typically is downplayed, particularly in the development-assistance community, are other types of “underlying conditions,” such as those that revolve around cultural and ideological issues. Implicit in this perspective – and in the stated or implied rationale behind many development interventions aimed at countering VE – is a belief that development assistance can help reduce vulnerability to terrorism or VE by mitigating the macro-level economic and political “root causes” of these phenomena.

While there is a degree of truth to this perspective, its limitations and potential dangers first must be underscored. The remainder of Part One will do so in three steps.

Section A will begin by examining some generic empirical and logical problems related to “underlying conditions” explanations in general.

Section B will highlight a few additional limitations of “underlying conditions” explanations that emphasize in particular social and economic “roots causes.”

Sections C through E will zero in on three sets of particularly critical, inter-related variables to which “underlying conditions” explanations typically do not do justice: the part played by ideas, beliefs and issues of identity or faith; historical legacies, and the narratives of victimization and existential threat often associated with them; and the very significant contributions which the global or regional context can make to VE.

A. Generic Shortcomings of “Underlying Conditions” Explanations

1. Logical and Empirical Discrepancies

a. By definition, the populations that experience “underlying conditions” are very large – and yet, typically, only a very small fraction of them turn to violence. Put differently, most of those affected by the underlying conditions to which VE often is ascribed do not, in fact, resort to violence – and it frequently is unclear that those among them who do are motivated primarily by the conditions in question.

b. It also is very difficult to generalize about the “underlying conditions” that give rise to extremist or terrorist organizations, since those organizations have emerged in radically different political and socioeconomic environments, historical contexts, and time-periods. Recent as well as older history shows decisively that violent extremist groups can flourish under radically different political, economic, social and cultural conditions. The most active terrorist groups of the past forty years certainly support this claim. One would be hard-pressed to find clear similarities and patterns across the underlying conditions against which the following entities have developed:

- The Irish Republican Army (IRA) in Northern Ireland from the 1920s onward.
- The Basque Homeland and Freedom (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna, or ETA) in Spain since the 1960s.
- The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the PFLP-General Command from the late 1960s onward.
- The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and National Liberation Army (ELN) in Colombia since the 1960s.
- The Red Brigades in Italy and the Red Army Faction (“Baader-Meinhof Gang”) in West Germany, both during the 1970s.
- The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) since the 1980s.
- Hamas in Palestine since the late 1980s.
- The Red Army during the 1970s and Aum Shinrikyo during the 1990s in Japan.
- Al-Qaeda since the late 1990s.
- Shamil Basayev’s Islamic International Peacekeeping Brigade (IIPB) in Chechnya in the late 1990s-early 2000s.
- The Lashkar-e-Taiba since the 1980s and Jaish-e-Muhammad since 1994 in Pakistan.
- The various Islamic terrorist organizations in post-1992 Algeria, from the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) through the Salafi Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC, renamed AQIM, or al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb since January 2007).

2. Downplaying “Pull Factors”?

Emphasizing “root causes” runs the risk of overstating “push factors” (those characteristics of the societal environment that allegedly help thrust vulnerable individuals onto the path of violence), while prompting the analyst to under-estimate the potentially critical role played by such “pull factors” as:

- a. The appeal of a particular leader, “guru” or self-appointed imam.
- b. The resonance of certain ideas that reach deep into a society’s culture or history, that evoke powerful imagery and symbols, and that often remain thoroughly embedded in the fabric of daily life.¹⁴
- c. The many and diverse rewards which membership in a group or movement, and participation in its activities, may confer. Such potential benefits include: access to material resources; social status and respect from peers; self-esteem; a feeling of brotherhood; thrills and a sense of adventure; the prospect of achieving glory and fame; or the sense of personal empowerment that individuals and groups that long have viewed themselves as victimized and marginalized can derive from the feeling that they are making history. In short, affiliation with extremist movements can provide material rewards, as well as emotional and spiritual benefits the importance of which should not be glossed over.

¹⁴ This point is developed further below.

- d. The desire to emulate a perceived “hero” or “icon” of “resistance against oppression.” The urge to conceive of oneself as a righteous avenger, and to project that image of oneself to others, may be particularly strong where feelings of personal and/or collective humiliation run high. A related variable may be the aspiration to follow in the footsteps of a friend or relative who was “martyred” or “fell to the cause.”¹⁵

One critical pull factor which empirical evidence suggests often trumps all alleged push factors combined consists of the social networks and personal relationships that often pull individuals into violent extremist organizations, and the group dynamics that subsequently keep them there and radicalize them.¹⁶ This point will be developed at greater length at several junctures below (especially in Parts Four and Six).

3. Under-estimating the Role of Human Agency?

When trying to account for the decision to resort to violence, explanations of VE that revolve around “structural conditions” typically under-estimate the role played by human agency in general, and tactical or strategic considerations in particular.

- a. Even to the extent that contextual factors may enhance a society’s vulnerability to VE, the grievances and opportunities involved may not create significant risks in the absence of organizations, ideologues, or political entrepreneurs that can frame and channel the relevant grievances in violent directions, and that can make the most of the “opportunities for violence” with which a particular setting presents them.
- b. Violent extremists do not react as automatons to a particular set of social, political, and economic circumstances. They often choose terrorist tactics over other forms of confrontation with the state based on their own assessment of the comparative costs and benefits associated with various strategies. While the decision to resort to terrorism certainly is affected by the context in which extremists operate, what ultimately is decisive is the extremists’ own assessment of the constraints and opportunities which that situation creates for them, and of the extent to which, given that context, terrorist tactics represent an effective path to reach their goals. Several analyses of suicide terrorism, for instance, have emphasized (indeed, probably over-stated) the importance of such considerations.¹⁷ Suicide terrorism can be used as a “strategic weapon” against a far more powerful enemy with which one is engaged in a struggle over territory; against rival organizations which one may seek to “outbid;”¹⁸ or as a way of spoiling efforts at compromise by moderate organizations with which one competes for popular support.

¹⁵ A study of the background of Saudi militants involved in the wave of terrorist attacks that shook the kingdom in 2003-04 notes that “[many had gone] or tried to go to Afghanistan to follow in the footsteps of a brother or a friend who had gone before them. Others went because their brother had fallen in combat in Afghanistan and they wanted to die a martyr so that they could be with their dead brother in heaven” (Hegghammer 2006: 49).

¹⁶ See for instance Sageman 2004 and 2008; Atran 2008; Hegghammer 2006.

¹⁷ See Pape 2005; Bloom 2005.

¹⁸ Mia Bloom (2005) provides the example of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). Throughout the 1990s, the PFLP’s popularity had been declining very significantly in Palestinian circles –until, in 2001, it began to rely on suicide attacks and invoke the language of martyrdom and jihad. It did so after it became aware of the appeal of such tactics and concepts in the wake of the radicalization of Palestinian public opinion produced by the second intifada and the particularly harsh initial Israeli reaction to it. By embracing martyrdom, jihad, and suicide attacks, the PFLP was seeking (with some success) to compete with Hamas and Islamic Jihad on their own turf.

4. Programming-related Limitations of “Underlying Conditions” Explanations

From a programmatic perspective, and particularly given funding constraints, explanations based on structural factors are not particularly helpful or practical. Typically, efforts to bring about significant reductions in such alleged “root causes” as high unemployment, pervasive poverty, systematic political exclusion, endemic corruption, and a lack of political and economic opportunities (to name but a few) will require large-scale investments, carried out through hard-to-implement and expensive programs sustained over long periods of time (assuming, which many analysts will question, that development assistance can provide a significant lever to bring about systemic improvements in those areas). Yet, in the end, even if they can better “underlying conditions” for a majority of the population, such programs still may fail to alter significantly the perceptions, worldviews, grievances and motivations of that small subset of individuals who are inclined to violence.

B. The “Social and Economic Root Causes” of Violent Extremism and Terrorism: Additional Cautionary Notes

The limitations of “underlying conditions” explanations in general certainly apply to those analyses of VE that emphasize “social and economic root causes” in particular. But with regard to the latter, two additional points may be noted.

1. Politically motivated violence has flourished in a wide variety of socioeconomic settings, from impoverished societies to advanced industrialized countries with high standards of living. Pew survey data (2002) from fourteen countries with Muslim majorities or large Muslim minorities suggest that the state of a country’s economy was not related to support for terrorism among that country’s citizens. At the macro-level, wealth does not inoculate against VE, and better economic conditions do not necessarily reduce public endorsement of terrorist tactics. The empirical evidence suggests that one should tread very carefully when seeking to infer from basic a country’s basic social and economic attributes any implications regarding that country’s vulnerability to VE – even though very recent empirical research, discussed below, has produced some important conclusions in this area.

2. A direct, explicit concern with issues of poverty, unemployment, service delivery, and economic opportunities does not appear to be the central preoccupation of many violent extremist organizations. If it were, these organizations and their leaders typically would have a lot more to say about those issues than they actually do. In looking at the rhetoric of many of these movements, in fact, one is struck by the paucity of references to the “underling socioeconomic conditions” which so many analysts describe as the main drivers behind them. Many of the spokespersons for these movements instead appear to be concerned with issues of identity, existential threats, and cultural domination or oppression. As discussed above, adequate programming will require that these considerations be given the recognition they deserve as critical drivers of VE.

C. Ideas, Beliefs, Identity and Faith

The contributions of strongly-held ideas and deeply-felt convictions to extremist movements can be observed at three levels:

- Creating the inspiration, motivation, and/or mechanisms for joining, and staying in, those groups.
- Providing moral justifications for resorting to violence.
- Facilitating organizational coherence and capacity.

1. Motivations

Social scientists and policy-makers alike repeatedly have underestimated the power of ideologies and deeply felt convictions as the primary motivations behind numerous forms of VE. Self-interest, narrow grievances, the search for power or wealth, or the desire to advance a particular political agenda certainly motivate many violent extremists. Others, however, are moved primarily by grand ideas and an unshakable belief in the inherent superiority of certain values. Unless one recognizes the power of these values – the passions, emotions, and deep feelings of loyalty and commitment they evoke – one will fail to grasp what truly drives numerous militants into violent extremist groups.

In many cases, what brings violent extremists together is their shared dedication to a particular vision of how society ought to be organized, and/or their strong questioning of the foundations upon which their societies are presently organized. That is true of many Salafi jihadist (SJ) groups today, just as it was true – in radically different contexts, and on the basis of entirely different worldviews – of the left-wing radical groups of the 1970s in West Germany (the Red Army Faction or Baader-Meinhoff Gang), Italy (the Red Brigades) and Japan (the Japanese Red Army).

The critical role played by firmly held beliefs must be considered if one is to account for the strength of the commitment displayed by members of many violent extremist groups; their persistence in the face of overwhelming odds (or, at least, despite clear military superiority by the opposing side); their frequent realization that they are unlikely to see the objectives they pursue achieved during their lifetime; as well as their readiness to undergo tremendous suffering and deprivation for the cause they embrace. In other words, their propensity to continue to fight – despite the realization that they will not live to see the realization of the objectives for which they are ready to sacrifice their existence – is greatly enhanced by adherence to transcendental values that trump self-interest, Realpolitik, or cost-benefit calculations.

2. Moral Justifications for Violence

Values and beliefs also matter to the extent that they can provide moral justifications for violence. The perceived presence of a compelling moral imperative often is required for individuals to convince themselves that it is acceptable – indeed, as they view it, necessary – to resort to cruelty toward others. Merely focusing on the presumed pressures or incentives created by the social, economic and political environment in which violent extremists operate does not suffice if one is to account for this phenomenon. Both longstanding and more recently forged norms and worldviews must be taken into consideration as well.

a. Violent extremists often are driven, in part, by culture-based and culture-specific perceptions of what is fair and unfair, just and unjust; they are moved by implicit understandings of when deprivations constitute an integral part of life and, therefore, merely have to be endured and when, instead, they amount to violations of some basic moral compact between rulers and ruled, and, thus, provide a legitimate ground for violence. Three key points, therefore, need to be underscored.

- First, perceptions of whether or not “underlying conditions” justify the resort to violence often are far more decisive than those conditions themselves.
- Second, these perceptions do not develop in a vacuum; instead, they are strongly influenced by the prevailing cultural and ideological setting in which they emerge. That setting, in turn, is shaped by both longstanding traditions and norms, and by the impact of today’s global culture.
- Third, even when violence appears to be used primarily as a strategic or tactical weapon in the pursuit of political or economic objectives, resort to it may be greatly facilitated by firm adherence to certain principles that one regards as inviolable: honor, duty to comrades or ancestors, the

obligation to uphold the moral integrity of one's community, or the importance of defending that community's dignity in the face of persistent assaults on it. Such values often are such an intrinsic part of who people are, how they think of themselves, and how they approach the world that they often trump considerations of pure self-interest in shaping behavior.¹⁹

b. In recent years, social scientists have provided useful correctives to simplistic notions that individuals driven to VE usually do so because of mere ideological fervor or religious zeal. They rightly have pointed to the fact that religion or ideology may be merely a cover for struggles that, in fact, are driven by competition over resources and/or power. They justifiably have highlighted the role of grievances, greed, contextual socioeconomic and political factors, and group dynamics in driving many manifestations of VE. Yet, in the process, some of those analysts have gone too far in downplaying the role of cherished ideas and beliefs in creating the readiness to kill and die. As Roy noted (2008: 146), for instance, "when Mohammed Bouyeri assassinated film-maker Theo Van Gogh in Amsterdam in November 2004, the message he left made no mention of the presence of Dutch troops in Afghanistan and Iraq, but only of Van Gogh's 'blasphemy' with regard to Islam." More generally, one certainly must acknowledge that the violence which Salafi jihadists have directed at the US has been prompted, in part, by "worldly" grievances (US policies in the Muslim world),²⁰ as well as by tactical and strategic considerations. At the same time, however, one also must recognize that, at least for most Salafi jihadists, the rage at the US also has been driven by such cultural factors as the perception that the US embodies a secular order rooted in individualism, materialism, and moral relativism, and that it displays all the perceived evils and violations of God's commands that such an order is seen as making possible.

c. The contributions that religious convictions, in particular, can make to VE deserve some elaboration. Mark Juergensmeyer (2008) has conducted the most up-to-date, relevant to contemporary global issues, and comprehensive (e.g., across religions and time periods) examination of this phenomenon. One of his most interesting conclusions relates to the additional layer of complexity which religion can add to even conflicts that are primarily about competition over territory, power and/or resources. In such contests, religion may not be the "root cause" of discontent; instead, it initially may be primarily a way through which grievances are expressed and individuals mobilized. But, as Juergensmeyer documents with examples drawn from Central through Southeast Asia, from North Africa to the Middle East, and from Europe to the United States, the injection of religious imagery and symbols into worldly struggles can transform these struggles into religious wars. In other words, the invoking of concepts or events drawn from ancient religious traditions – even if it is done merely in order to convey or legitimize contemporary demands – may turn religion into a powerful driver of its own. When contests are "religionized" (i.e., cast in a religious frame of reference), "what was primarily a worldly struggle takes on the aura of sacred conflict" and "this creates a whole new set of problems" (Juergensmeyer, 2008: 253).

For one, when a conflict takes on religious connotations, it tends to escalate and become more protracted, because it is turned into dispute over absolutes (right versus wrong, truth versus untruth, good versus evil); by definition, there can be little negotiation or compromise over such sacred values. Conciliation may be harder to achieve for two additional reasons. First, once actors view themselves as "God's soldiers," they may believe that divine intervention ultimately will enable them to prevail. Second, since, as Juergensmeyer puts it (2008: 255), "the timeline of sacred struggle is vast, perhaps even eternal," those who fight may not hold any expectation that the struggle can be resolved during their lifetime – indeed, they may view this idea with great skepticism.

¹⁹ See for instance Atran and Axelrod 2008; Atran 2008.

²⁰ For instance, military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, support for authoritarian regimes and Israel, and perceived insensitivity to the plight of Palestinians.

More directly relevant to the present section, the insertion of religion can provide added justifications for violence in several, inter-related ways that are skillfully identified by Juergensmeyer:

- Because the language of warfare is “endemic to religions.”²¹
- Because religion makes it easier to demonize enemies by viewing and/or portraying them as agents of satanic powers.
- Once they view themselves as God’s soldiers, individuals may feel that they have divine sanction to kill.

d. From a somewhat different perspective, one should note that, within typically large populations of disaffected or alienated individuals, only a much smaller number are ready to use violence. The prevailing social, political and economic environment is not what sets that smaller group apart from the larger population of which it is a component; presumably, after all, that environment is experienced by all. Instead, what distinguishes violent extremists from the rest are, to a significant extent at least, the values they embrace, the quest for an intense and exacting form of spirituality that often animates them, as well as the broader worldviews and convictions they have in common, and which typically portray violence as a logical and acceptable form of retribution for the deprivation they feel they are made to endure. Significantly, after analyzing and holding discussions with a broad variety of terrorists across different religious traditions, Jessica Stern underscores the single most important trait which they all share: “All of them describe themselves as responding to a spiritual calling and many report a kind of spiritual high or addiction related to its fulfillment.”²² Mark Juergensmeyer echoes this view when he comments that “in talking with many of the supporters of these cultures of violence, I was struck with the intensity of their quests for a deeper level of spirituality than that offered by the superficial values of the modern world.”²³ That is not to say that violent extremists always are driven primarily or exclusively by ideology and values; it is merely to acknowledge that some of them are, and that worldviews and norms often feature in the mix of motivations that prompt even others to act.

e. No examination of the role that ideas play as a critical driver behind many extremist and terrorist movements would be complete without comprehending these movements’ anti-modernist and anti-liberal agenda. This particular point nicely ties into this document’s emphasis on the dangers of over-emphasizing the role of “underlying social and economic conditions” as drivers of VE. Overstating the part those conditions play often leads one to assume that an inability to reap the benefits of globalization and modernity represents a primary motivating force behind the resort to terrorism. In reality, however, in the past three decades a disproportionate number of violent extremist organizations have rejected modernity altogether. They have done so explicitly and unconditionally, pointing to, for instance, what they view as modernity’s lack of spiritual content and its ethical poverty. The violence in which they have engaged has been intended, in part, to display, in an intentionally spectacular and dramatic fashion, their contempt for, and complete repudiation of, post-enlightenment values and secular humanism. They have portrayed these values as an unacceptable quest for a Godless universe. They also have blamed modernity for the ascent of

²¹ “Religious symbols and historical narratives are steeped in blood. The brutal martyrdom of Hussain in Shi’ite Islam, the crucifixion of Jesus in Christianity, the sacrifice of Guru Tegh Bahadur in Sikhism, the bloody conquests detailed in the Hebrew Bible, the terrible battles celebrated in the Hindu epics, and the military engagements described in the Sinhalese Buddhist Pali Chronicles – all these episodes indicate that in virtually every religious tradition images of violence occupy a central place” (Juergensmeyer 2008: 213). Later, the author adds that “even though virtually all religions preach the virtues of nonviolence, it is their ability to sanction violence that gives them political power” (2008: 217).

²² Jessica Stern, *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill* (HarperCollins, 2004), 281.

²³ Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (University of California Press, 2001), 222.

unbridled individualism and hedonism, and for the triumph of materialism and moral relativism. In those circumstances, VE should not be viewed as the enraged response of individuals who feel betrayed at having been promised the benefits of modernity – only to be subsequently denied them. The resort to violence, instead, should be understood as an effort to roll back modernity by fighting its symbols and manifestations. To many violent extremists, modernity is not something to be aspired to; it is a threat around which a wall must be built or a looming danger that must be confronted head-on. Religious extremists, in particular, tend to view modernity as encroaching on sacred values; they regard it as an all-powerful force that, if left to its own devices, inevitably and irremediably will destroy the integrity of their societies and cultures.

f. The above discussion once again underscores the importance of spirituality in driving and sustaining membership in many radical violent organizations. From the perspective of numerous such groups, modernity is fundamentally unfulfilling. It fails to infuse life with a sense of meaning and purpose. As a result, as will be discussed at greater length below, countless violent extremists have “fallen upon violence” almost accidentally, as they were looking for spiritual purpose – and, ironically, for clear, moral standards of behavior. In a confusing world that presents individuals with an ever-expanding and bewildering array of personal options, they were searching for certainties, truths, and clear rules upon which to anchor behavior. Unfortunately, as a result of both psychological and group dynamics processes described in other parts of this document, that quest often ended in their embrace of radical anti-liberal, anti-modernist violent ideologies.

3. Organizational Facilitation

Ideas also can represent an important driver to the extent that they often are embedded in, and supported by, organizational structures and networks (e.g., mosques, churches, monasteries, seminaries, yeshivas, informal religious discussion groups, and voluntary associations). Those institutions, in turn, can contribute to VE in several respects:

- They may play a key role in sustaining and disseminating “cultures of violence.”
- They allow for reaching out to broader communities of sympathizers (which, in turn, may provide shelter, food, funds, and a pool of additional recruits).
- They can mobilize idealistic and skilled individuals whose energy, resources and dedication could not be harnessed by appealing only to their material interests.
- They can provide many of the logistical and organizational instruments necessary for violent forms of collective action.

Indeed, the prominent role of ideology often reflects the very organizational challenges associated with building, maintaining, and sustaining a terrorist organization. As Keefer and Loayza (2008a: 6) have noted, “unlike, for example, trench warfare, terrorism requires individual initiative and the exercise of judgment. Close monitoring by terrorist leaders of their ‘employees’ is not possible. Ideological commitment helps solve part of this contracting problem.”

D. Historical Legacies and Narratives of Victimization And Existential Threat

One manifestation of the role of ideas and beliefs that deserves to be treated separately because it repeatedly has shaped so profoundly the outlook of extremist movements, as well as their ability to recruit, is the perception of collective victimization and personal humiliation. Where it can be detected, such a perception typically reflects colonial histories, as well as other forms of repeated foreign interference,

manipulation and oppression. Such legacies usually continue to have a powerful impact on public attitudes. They may even provide the primary prism through which individuals assess current events – particularly when those developments may easily be interpreted as mere manifestations of these older patterns.²⁴

Across the Islamic world in particular, there is a widely shared perception, at both the elite and grassroots levels, that Muslims have been consistent victims of sustained Western attacks, from the crusades and the colonial era through more recent events in Palestine, Bosnia, and Chechnya. Millions of people believe that the West remains bent on occupying their land, controlling their resources, subjugating them, and manipulating their leaders and countries to serve Western interests. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are viewed as only the most recent manifestations of such longstanding schemes. Many Muslims feel very strongly not only that the West never made serious amends for the past suffering and oppression it inflicted on them, but that it is currently engaged in a renewed effort to victimize and oppress them, as well as to denigrate and demonize their most cherished values and beliefs. Against this background, violence is seen not only as a form of retribution for past wrongs, but as a necessary defense by individuals who feel that they are fighting for the very survival of a culture under siege.

It is hard to overstate the resonance of this narrative of victimization, particularly in light of recent events that easily can be portrayed as vindicating it, and as suggesting that the longstanding forces underlying it are still very much at play. Nor is it difficult to understand how this narrative represents a powerful asset for extremists. The appeal and credibility of this narrative stem, in part, from its internal coherence and logic: past and present victimization blend into a single, old but still unfolding drama, with past oppression making current one more tangible and deeply felt, and vice versa. Meanwhile, collective humiliation and the sense of a direct threat to personal honor and integrity are inherently connected, and mutually reinforcing as well. The tremendous power of these processes and relationships – rooted, as they are, in history, current events as well as individual and group psychology – would appear to overshadow many “underlying socioeconomic conditions” in their importance.

Empirical support for the claims made above can be found, for instance, in Juergensmeyer’s detailed exploration of the “cultures of violence” that he identified in a broad variety of Christian, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh contexts. A core characteristic of these cultures is “the perception that [the communities involved] are already under attack – are being violated – and that their acts are therefore simply responses to the violence they have experienced.”²⁵ Christine Fair and Bryan Shepherd, for their part, conclude their research on fourteen Muslim countries by noting that “a perceived threat to Islam is the largest correlate of support for terrorism.”²⁶ This finding is echoed by Bueno de Mesquita, who adds that “it is the perception of a particular threat – one from the United States – that drives the correlation between threat perception and support for terrorism.”²⁷

E. International Variables and “Glocal” Grievances

“Underlying conditions” explanations are usually framed primarily in terms of “internal” or “domestic” “root causes.” They tend to approach VE as if it played itself out within countries that are largely self-

²⁴ One might think here, for instance, of the foreign occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan; the land seizures, daily humiliations and manufactured humanitarian emergencies in Palestine; the detention of Muslims who have yet to be charged with a crime in Guantanamo; the deliberate humiliation of Iraqi prisoners at the Abu Ghraib prison; and the perception of the “war on terror” as a “war on Islam.”

²⁵ Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, 217.

²⁶ Christine Fair and Bryan Shepherd, “Research Note: Who Supports Terrorism? Insights from Fourteen Muslim Countries,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 29, No. 2, December/January 2006.

²⁷ Ethan Bueno de Mesquita, “Correlates of Public Support for Terrorism in the Muslim World,” United States Institute of Peace, Working Paper, May 17, 2007, 20.

contained. That, of course, is not the case – particularly in today’s world. Societies operate within broader regional and international systems that generate grievances, as well as opportunities for, and constraints on, the use of violence. Violent extremists, for instance, may be able to harness critical support from foreign patrons or among Diaspora communities. The critical impact of such global forces is not usually given its due in explanations that narrowly focus on “root causes” and “underlying conditions.”

Frustration or rage produced by the workings of the international system, the fears or anxieties that that system creates, or the sense of desperation and urgency fostered by international trends, all have proven to be powerful drivers of violence, as the extensive scholarship on this topic has shown. Many violent extremist or terrorist organizations do not see themselves as rooted in, and confined to, a particular territory; instead, their grievances as well as ambitions are universal in nature. They may see themselves as fighting against “global domination,” for instance. Particularly in the era of satellite television and the internet, they may be prompted into action not primarily by developments taking place in their homeland, but, instead, by events unfolding thousands of miles away (e.g., a Pakistani observing the bloodshed in Palestine, or an Indonesian Muslim incensed by Russian human rights abuses in Chechnya). Violent extremists also may emerge as extremists not in their country of origin, but after traveling and residing overseas. For instance, in his initial (2004) study of the first two generations of global jihadists (from the 1980s through 2002), Marc Sageman found that 70 percent of the terrorists in his sample had joined the jihad in foreign lands (e.g., Afghanistan or Europe), not in their country of birth. Roy (2008: 142) echoes this view when he notes that most of al-Qaeda’s radicals are thoroughly “de-territorialized” in the sense that “most of the time, their country of birth, the place of radicalization, and the place of action are not the same.”

Insofar as grievances are concerned, many recent extremist and terrorist organizations, transnational as well as more geographically circumscribed, have been buttressed by the perception of an “unjust” or “oppressive” international system. That system may be denounced as economically exploitative, or as undermining sacred values and traditions. It may be viewed as operating through powerful institutions that secretly seek to impose alien beliefs – and, more generally, a new order – on vulnerable populations. Or it may be portrayed as working to the advantage of a tiny “foreign” minority that conspires against the interest of the majority. The bitterness, fears, and sense of urgency that typically accompany such views have fed recruits into such diverse organizations as al-Qaeda, Christian militia groups in the United States, and Aum Sinrikyo in Japan, to name but a few.

Sometimes, these beliefs are elevated to the conviction that the entire world has gone awry, and that symptoms of catastrophic global disorder can be found all around oneself (Juergensmeyer 2000 and 2008). When looking at the “hopelessness” and “despair” that “underlying conditions” allegedly promote, it is important to take these factors far more seriously than “root causes” explanations typically do. The grievances, anger or apprehension that feed into VE frequently stem from processes that originate in regional or global trends, and in the manner in which those processes affect individual and collective perceptions and lives.

Frequently, the workings of the international system are blamed for a loss of control over both personal lives and collective destinies. Indeed, such perceived loss of control generates an enhanced need for self- and collective empowerment which violent organizations have been shown particularly apt at satisfying. The belief that one is engaged in an on-going, brutal war being waged at the level of the planet as a whole, and that the outcome of that struggle will determine whether one’s sacred beliefs and traditions survive, has been a powerful motivation for joining violent extremist movements. It also has been critical to the ability of individuals to convince themselves of the righteous nature of their cause, and of the legitimacy of resorting to violence in order to defend it. If the entire world already is viewed as enmeshed in a violent fight – and one in which the other side already has used violence against one’s co-religionists, kin, and/or ethnic brethren – then it becomes easier to lose previous moral inhibitions on the resort to violence. Instead,

in such a context, violence may be viewed not only as necessary, but also as giving moral meaning to one's combat.

As Juergensmeyer has shown, religion is particularly well-suited to such perceived confrontations, waged at the level of the entire planet, between the forces of good and the forces of evil. That, indeed, may be part of the reason why so many of the deadliest terrorist organizations that have appeared in recent decades have been connected to religion. Global confrontations taking place for the sake of cherished ideas and values, and unfolding across time periods and geographic boundaries, are almost "made for" religious imagery. The power of religion, in this context, lies, in its ability to provide a comprehensive and internally logical intellectual framework through which to make sense of these worldly battles, and view them as manifestations of far more important forces.

Finally, it is critical to consider the impact, on both individuals and societies, of the sense of impotence created by the relative weakness of so many Muslim countries in the international system. At the grassroots level, that situation is the source of enormous resentment, much of which is targeted at governments that are blamed for their repeated and multiple failures (economic, political, and/or military) in the international arena. It was no accident that the 1967 war marked the beginning of the ascent of modern radical Islamic movements in the Middle East, and that it arguably was the single most important factor in the initial development of those movements – even in Muslim countries that were not directly involved in the conflict.

More recently, the perception of global injustice in general, and of a worldwide victimization of fellow Muslims in particular, has fueled the flames of extremism across the Islamic world. Particularly when they are consistent with one's personal experience of victimization and injustice, and/or with local conditions of oppression and discrimination, such perceptions provide a bottomless pool of passions and emotions into which extremist violent movements can tap. Against this backdrop, Salafi jihadism rightly has been described as a "glocal" phenomenon: one in which global and local grievances mesh, mutually reinforce one another, and are presented as the two sides of a single reality: the existence of a fundamentally unjust, oppressive and un-godly order that must be destroyed. Even where local sources of grievances are paramount, they often are perceived by many Muslims, or portrayed by radical ideologues, as mere local manifestations of greater global dysfunctions. And while the local struggles through which the jihad manifests itself may be driven primarily by local dynamics, the actors involved in those battles may view them as being sustained by a global momentum, and part of a much broader epic unfolding at the level of the entire planet.

Most importantly perhaps, individuals seek a measure of dignity, recognition and influence not only for themselves, but also for the countries in which they live, and for the communities (local and transnational) to which they belong, or with which they identify. They want their beliefs and values to be respected, and their opinions taken into account by those institutions, countries and leaders that, together, determine how the international system operates. Governments that fail to satisfy those needs, that consistently experience military defeats or political powerlessness on the international scene, and that consistently relegate their countries to a subordinate position in global political, economic and cultural affairs, are bound to generate tremendous resentment, frustration, anger. They likely will prompt, among counter-elites as much as at the grassroots level, widespread desires to remedy this situation – including through the resort to violence. Any effort to understand the powerful forces that truly drive violent extremist movements in today's world must take these international variables into consideration. They should be viewed as being among the foremost "underlying conditions" that drive VE.

PART TWO: TOWARD A MORE SOPHISTICATED UNDERSTANDING OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIOECONOMIC CONDITIONS AND VULNERABILITY TO VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Part One underscored the limitations of explanations that establish too direct a connection between “underlying social and economic conditions” on the one hand, and VE on the other. It ruled out some of the excessive claims frequently made on behalf of “socioeconomic root causes,” and discussed key additional variables that must be considered. With this analysis in mind, it becomes possible to paint a more complex picture of the actual relationships involved.

A. Delineating the Link between Poverty and Terrorism: Key Conclusions from Recent Empirical Research

1. Several empirically rich and analytically sophisticated studies in a recent volume edited by World Bank economists Philip Keefer and Norman Loayza contain important and insightful conclusions regarding the connections between poverty and terrorism.²⁸ One such finding is that while individual terrorists tend to be better off than the average citizen in the societies to which they belong, impoverished countries tend to generate more terrorism than wealthier ones. Thus, the empirical relationship between poverty and terrorism is strikingly different at the macro- (country-wide) and at the micro (individual) level.

Consequently, a focus on individual poverty – specifically, on the fact that, historically, most terrorists have not been themselves poor, but, instead, have been predominantly well-educated individuals from middle- and upper-middle class backgrounds²⁹ – should not detract from recognizing that national poverty increases a country’s propensity to be a source of terrorism, and that it does so in ways that are statistically significant.³⁰ Thus, for instance, when Alan Krueger notes that “among those who have seriously and impartially studied the issue, there is not much question that poverty has little to do with terrorism,” he fails to draw needed attention to fact that the relationship between terrorism and poverty plays itself out strikingly differently at the micro (individual) and macro (country-wide) levels.³¹

2. At the macro-level, furthermore, the failure to examine poor countries separately from rich ones may generate highly misleading conclusions regarding the empirical relationship between poverty and terrorism. If low-, middle-, and high-income countries are considered all together, poverty does not correlate with terrorism. However, after analyzing high-income countries separately from low-income ones, Blomberg and Hess conclude that increases in per capita income diminish vulnerability to terrorism in low-income countries (i.e., make these countries less likely to be a source of transnational terrorism, or to experience

²⁸ Philip Keefer and Norman Loayza (eds). 2008a. *Terrorism, Economic Development, and Political Openness*. Cambridge, 2008a.

²⁹ See Part Four for elaboration and illustrations of this point.

³⁰ Keefer and Loayza speculate that this finding may reflect the impact of the political environment on both terrorist recruitment and economic development: a closed and repressive political system may facilitate terrorist recruitment while at the same time deterring foreign investment and entrepreneurial activity in ways that significantly undermine a country’s economy (Keefer and Loayza, 2008b: 7).

³¹ Alan B. Krueger, *What Makes a Terrorist*. Princeton, 2007, 3.

domestic terrorist attacks), while the opposite holds true for high-income countries.³² When both groups of countries are considered together, the effects end up canceling themselves out – a situation that may hide the role which economic development (by increasing average incomes) may play in reducing the threat of terrorism in, or by, poorer countries. After concentrating on countries that are sources of transnational terrorism, Blomberg and Hess observe that the poorer the source country, the greater its propensity to generate terrorism.³³ Zeroing in on the 1990-2000 period, Alan Krueger and David Laitin provide conclusive empirical evidence to show that “terrorists are more likely to come from low-income countries with low GDP growth.”³⁴

3. Both historical and more recent trends would seem to suggest that rising (and frustrated) expectations are a far more frequent source of extremism than mere economic deprivation. More often than not, discontent arises not so much from the system’s inability to deliver goods, services, and adequate standards of living, but from its inability to keep up with the expectations of, in particular, the educated, upwardly mobile and achievement-oriented elites that emerge in the process of modernization and economic development.

Of course, it is inherently difficult to generate the kind of reliable empirical data that can provide compelling, “hard” evidence for arguments framed in terms of “relative deprivation.” After all, it is much easier to define relative deprivation as “a gap between what one gets and what one considers one’s due,” than it is to determine accurately what individuals consider their due, what they actually get, and how both ought to be measured. Still, there is much anecdotal evidence to suggest that relative deprivation and frustrated expectations (not only for economic benefits, but also for political power and/or social status) can be important drivers of VE. That may be particularly true with respect to youth whose aspirations have risen significantly (in part because they are more aware of global trends than earlier generations were), but whose expectations cannot be satisfied due to one or several of the following factors: sluggish economies; educational curricula that are not consistent with the needs of the labor market and the global economy; and political or societal discrimination.

Those most likely to experience relative deprivation on a significant scale include youth who attended or completed high school; university students and graduates with grim economic prospects; and youth who, coming from disadvantaged or modest economic backgrounds, lack the social connections that often remain so critical to economic and political success in developing countries. The profound anger created by the sense of having been misled, betrayed, and denied (by ruling elites as well as by society at large) a fair opportunity to build a decent future for themselves increasingly may be a cross-class phenomenon that affects middle-class and under-privileged youth alike. After all, most youth in developing countries have acquired more education, and have far broader horizons, than their parents. As a result, they also have built up higher expectations about the future. Consequently, relative deprivation may be more widespread among youth than was true in earlier eras, and it increasingly may be cutting across differences based on class and level of educational attainment.

³² Blomberg, S. Block and Gregory D. Hess. 2008a. “From (No) Butter to Guns? Understanding the Economic Role in Transnational Terrorism.” In Philip Keefer and Norman Loayza (eds), *Terrorism, Economic Development, and Political Openness*, 83-115.

³³ Blomberg and Hess. 2008b. “The Lexus and the Olive Branch: Globalization, Democratization and Terrorism.” In Philip Keefer and Norman Loayza (eds), *Terrorism, Economic Development, and Political Openness*, 135.

³⁴ Krueger, Alan B. and David D. Laitin. 2008. “Kto Kogo?: A Cross-Country Study of the Origins and Targets of Terrorism.” In Philip Keefer and Norman Loayza (eds), *Terrorism, Economic Development, and Political Openness*, 161.

B. The Indirect Effects of Social and Economic Conditions on Violent Extremism and Terrorism

The most important ways in which “underlying social and economic conditions” drive VE are usually indirect – understanding that, in this context, “indirect” certainly should not be equated with “inconsequential.” Socioeconomic “root causes” often do play a role, but typically they do so through, and in combination with, other causal factors that have to be identified. In fact, it is precisely on the exact nature of those indirect connections that a great deal more scholarly and policy-oriented research should concentrate. Much can be done, for instance, to improve our understanding of how contextual features, ideological and cultural variables, and particular types of individual and group dynamics can intersect to facilitate recruitment by (or self-recruitment into) extremist groups. To map this potentially rich new field of inquiry, four illustrations are provided.

1. Inadequate Public-Services Delivery and Extremism

The anger created by very poor or quasi-inexistent public services delivery may be due not so much to the lack of services per se, but to how it can be interpreted as a total abandonment of responsibility by the state. The difference is significant since, in the latter case, acute deficiencies in service-delivery matter first and foremost because they create, or feed into, a much broader crisis of the state’s legitimacy and moral authority. How that scenario can play itself out was explored in a USAID-commissioned paper on the drivers of SJ violence in Morocco.³⁵ The analysis focused in particular on why all those who since May 2003 have carried out suicide attacks inside Morocco have hailed from the country’s worst shantytowns, especially in the Greater Casablanca area. Part of the argument presented revolved around the truly abject and sordid environment that characterizes the relevant peri-urban areas in the kingdom: lack of running water, electricity, and sewers; appalling sanitary conditions (as reflected in the stench that emanates from alleyways in which foul water, mud and garbage coexist); rampant crime, drug trafficking, and deviant behavior; illegally constructed “housing” that consist of mere pieces of tin, cardboard, and planks precariously assembled together; and, most importantly, a pervasive sense of loneliness, isolation, utter despair and hopelessness. An important by-product of this environment, the analysis claimed, was the feeling it promotes of total rejection, abandonment and betrayal – by the state, by political and economic elites more generally, and even by the rest of society. It is not hard for residents of those slums to conclude that it is not only the Moroccan state, but Moroccan society itself, that has turned its back and given up on them. Mainstream Moroccan society is viewed as having abdicated any form of commitment or responsibility toward areas – and the populations within them – which most Moroccans prefer not to see. That perception, in turn, may be a significant force in driving some youth to engage in particularly indiscriminate forms of violence that includes not only state officials, but civilians as well. What is critical here is not social exclusion only, or social exclusion per se, but the message of denial of humanity, individuality, and dignity which extreme forms of social exclusion appear to convey to those who are its victims.

Those same considerations may also explain the pull exercised by *takfiri*³⁶ doctrine – the systematic rejection of state and society alike, and the justifying of violence against both, on the ground that they consist of apostates. Embrace of this extremist ideology of rejection only mirrors the rejection felt by those who espouse it. The perceived indifference of state officials, and of the Moroccan population at large, toward the cruel fate of the inhabitants of the shantytowns – indeed, the perception that both state and society have been complicit in allowing that situation to persist – may lead some of those slums’ residents to view violence merely as a form of “reciprocal brutality.” Thus, the inhumanity they exhibit can be

³⁵ See Guilain Denoeux, “Some Reflections on the Drivers of Salafi Jihadi Violence in Morocco.” Produced for USAID by MSI, July 2008.

³⁶ See the definition in Annex A.

viewed as a response (unjustifiable as it may be) to the degrading conditions they have endured. By the same token, their callous disregard for human life may be understood as a reaction to the ruthlessness which they feel has been shown toward them. Treated as social outcasts, they, in turn, look upon both state and society as pariahs. *Takfiri* thought, one should note, provides a uniquely appropriate vehicle to articulate and give “ideological depth” to such an outlook.³⁷

From this perspective as well, it becomes possible to view a most inhumane act – suicide bombing – as a form of performance, the main purpose of which, ironically, may be to have one’s very humanity acknowledged by an audience, which is also the target of the violence, and which the perpetrator may have come to conclude has shown only utter disinterest in his wretched, sub-human existence. Here, we are reminded of Mark Juergensmeyer’s claim that acts of religious terrorism often are “symbolic statements aimed at providing a sense of empowerment to desperate communities.”³⁸ In this context, therefore, instead of analyzing suicide bombing as a tactical “weapon of the weak” in a situation of a-symmetric warfare (which remains the most widely accepted interpretation of this phenomenon among students of it), one should view it as a desperate cry for recognition and validation by individuals who have concluded, consciously or not, that it is impossible for them to be heard in any other manner. What the perpetrator may be saying, in effect, is:

Through this act, which appears to make no sense, I am forcing you [decision-makers, intellectuals, journalists and pundits who will have to explain to others why I did what I did] to acknowledge that I was here. I did exist. You will have to recognize what you did to me. You will have to come to terms with the fact that it was your ignorance of my very being, and your denying me the opportunity to live with a modicum of humanity, that gave me no choice but to kill myself. I defy you: make sense of this, comprehend what I did, and why I did it – especially since I left no final will or written explanation of my act. You figure it out.

In short, individuals who are led to believe there is no dignity in life may conclude that there is more dignity in a dramatic act of self-immolation aimed at shaming society for having created that situation. To the most powerless, theatrical physical obliteration of the self in the public square may be intended to disgrace those who have allowed the dehumanization of large segments of society to proceed apace, while paradoxically also representing a form of self-assertion. The annihilation of the self thus becomes a way of affirming one’s very existence and identity against those who have seemed bent to deny it for so long. A similar logic, as will be suggested below, may apply to suicide bombings carried out in situations of military occupations.

2. Weak Governance

Poverty may also function as an indirect driver because it undermines a state’s capacity to monitor borders, control illicit activities, and prevent corruption of police and security officials (all of which can be exploited by VIE, as the examples of Yemen, Pakistan and the Sahel suggest).

3. Social Exclusion and Extremism

Social isolation and marginality may feed VE not so much because of the generic resentment it can create, but because it can contribute to the pull exercised by violent extremist rhetoric and organizations, or may make young individuals more susceptible to the lures of violent behavior in general.

a. For instance, as suggested above, youth affected by social isolation and marginalization may become particularly vulnerable to *takfiri* ideology, which rejects mainstream society as impure, and calls

³⁷ See Selma Belaala, “Morocco: Slums Breed Jihad,” *Le Monde Diplomatique*, November 2004.

³⁸ Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), xi.

for its cleansing through violence. By condemning society as hopelessly corrupt and as having turned its back on God, *takfiri* ideology turns alienation from that society from a stigma to a badge of honor. It makes it possible for the individual to “take control” of his marginality by presenting it a matter of choice. In that respect, it may restore a degree of self-esteem. By calling upon young Muslims to take up the cause of global jihad, it is also tremendously empowering, enabling those left behind by modernity and globalization to feel that they belong to a self-professed vanguard in a worldwide liberation struggle.

b. Pervasive social marginality and unemployment also mean that large numbers of young people have too much time on their hands. In that context, several factors can come together to feed among youth a culture that helps funnel volunteers into terrorist organizations: the quest for adventure and fame – and, or least, for outlets from dreary lives; the propensity, associated with teenage hood, to engage in open defiance of authority figures; the yearning for self-affirmation and social recognition by peers and the broader community; and the search for means of avenging real and perceived wrongs done to oneself and/or to close relatives or friends. In societies that also feature bad governance, heavy-handed repression, and widespread impunity, the more a young person’s daily life is filled with free time, the greater the impact of the factors described above, and the greater their propensity to result in violence.

In general, it is difficult to over-estimate the extent to which boredom significantly enhances youth vulnerability to extremist ideas and activities.³⁹ Unemployment and monotony can make young people easy preys for SJ ideologies and networks. Idle youth may be drawn to the fiery sermons of local radical preachers; they may spend much of their day surfing SJ websites,⁴⁰ or watching Arab satellite television stations where images of Muslims being victimized are recurrent.

c. Idleness and un- or under-employment also may make youth far more receptive to the salaries and other material benefits which violent organizations often provide. It facilitates involvement in smuggling, trafficking, or extortion networks that either are directly tied to violent extremist networks, or may pave the way for entry into them.

d. The path from marginality to VE also may go through the weakening of traditional checks on deviant behavior. Across the Middle East and North Africa, for instance, the massive and haphazard urbanization of the past 40 years has shattered centuries-old mechanisms of social regulation (those once associated with the nomadic or rural lifestyle, or those that used to exist in tightly integrated urban quarters). As shown in a May 2008 USAID-commissioned field assessment of Mauritania, youth susceptibility to the lures of SJ organizations increases where family-, clan- and ethnic-based structures that used to constrain anti-social or violent behavior have frayed or disappeared;⁴¹ where the state has shown itself unable to create alternative mechanisms of social regulation;⁴² and where former avenues of

³⁹ Sageman, 2008.

⁴⁰ In May 2008, a Mauritanian journalist who covered the trials of violent extremists in his country, and is familiar with their personal journeys, observed to Zeric Smith and this author during an interview conducted in Nouakchott that “for all of [those involved], the internet and the search for adventure played an essential role.”

⁴¹ In Mauritania (as, presumably, in many other settings), the breakdown of tribal, ethnic and clan-based structures of social control appears to have compounded the already significant negative impact of high divorce rates. Those rates have resulted in extremely poor – indeed, sometimes inexistent – parenting. Consequently, the authority and regulation mechanisms associated with the family have broken down; the number of street children and children from separated parents has been on the rise; and juvenile delinquency has spread. As a prominent Mauritanian sociologist the USAID team interviewed put it, “parents no longer know what their children are doing; children no longer report to their parents.” This crisis of authority within the family, he stressed, represented a radical break with the situation that existed when he grew up. Another interviewee referred to the household (*le foyer*) as “one of the weakest links in the society and culture today.” Family authority also seemed to be declining in Garissa district in Kenya.

⁴² In many settings, one significant variable linking social exclusion, bad governance, and violent extremism has been the failure of the post-colonial state to integrate into mainstream society first- and second-generation immigrants to

sociability have faded away. With regard to this latter point, during his discussion with the USAID assessment team, a Mauritanian sociologist revealingly spoke at length about the devastating impact of the “disappearance of public space,” and of the lack of community- and family-based opportunities for young individuals to engage in positive forms of social interaction. He noted the “*recul de la joie*” (the “receding” or “retreat” of easy-going forms of social interaction, and the decay of the avenues that made such interaction possible). He also contrasted this phenomenon with the youth’s rising exposure to highly politicized, emotional images and discourses coming from the outside, and to the bland, austere and dry Salafi Islam imported from the Gulf states. The combination of these two trends, he felt, was a main driver behind the growth of extremist ideas.

This Mauritanian sociologist’s comments echo field research in Garissa district of Kenya and in the squalid shantytowns of the Greater Casablanca area. Perhaps the most striking feature of the Casablanca slums is the pervasive sense of loneliness and anomie that emanates from them. These areas feature no community centers, no public buildings, no schools, no cafés and restaurants, no movie theaters, and no other arenas for social interaction among the youth – indeed, no genuine public space and attendant forms of social activity.⁴³ Since they have no real “streets” to speak of, they deprive youth of even this very basic venue for “hanging out” together. Except for the peddling of goods and various forms of trafficking, they provide no meaningful types of economic activity; shops, markets, small-scale manufacturing, or crafts are strikingly absent from them. The inhabitants of those slums live in such a state of economic precariousness that even the nuclear family has broken down. Parents and children often are connected to each other by only the shakiest of ties: parents do not know what their children are doing, and children pay little attention to what their parents say or want.⁴⁴ More generally, the residents of these dilapidated areas live in isolation from one another, as well as from the rest of society (a situation aggravated by the lack of public transportation to other parts of the city, and by the unwillingness of most taxi drivers even to venture into what they see as “danger zones”). The acute social atomization that characterizes these slums stands in sharp contrast with the reasonably high social cohesion, and the persistence of traditional forms of social solidarity, that typically still can be found in the old *medina* or in working class districts that are located in, or on the outskirts of, the cities.⁴⁵

The stark, forbidding and genuinely anti-social environment that has been described provides fertile soil for the spread of SJ ideas in several key respects:

- As was noted in the Mauritanian case, it has rendered largely inoperative traditional mechanisms of social control.
- High levels of insecurity, crime, alcoholism, and drug addiction have created a “market niche” for Salafi jihadi groups that enforce a strict moral order.
- The total absence in the shantytowns of anything resembling the close social bonds and sense of intimacy and community that used to characterize the *derb* (the traditional Moroccan street or neighborhood) have turned the internet into “the new *derb*” – a space for socialization, and a way

the cities, to establish its legitimacy and authority with regard to those populations, inspire a modicum of respect among them, and deter illegal behavior by them. As a result, many youth with fragile ties to modern society have slipped through its cracks, felt abandoned by it, and, in some cases, turned against it.

⁴³ See for instance Selma Belaala, “Morocco: Slums Breed Jihad,” *Le Monde Diplomatique*, November 2004.

⁴⁴ This problem was remarked upon by adults and youth in the northeastern Kenya CE assessment as well. In addition, there were almost no constructive outlets for youth, who suffered from very high levels of unemployment and had far too much free time on their hands. (“Garissa Youth Assessment” conducted by MSI and EDC for USAID, November 2008).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

of accessing, and becoming part of, “substitute communities.” Unfortunately, one such community, the SJ one, has proven to be particularly adept at using the internet as a tool for recruitment and communication.

e. Social isolation and marginality also may trigger a search for identity, meaning and purpose, which can lead to increased religiosity; that quest, in turn, can open the door to joining violent religious extremist organizations. Of course, only a fraction of those experiencing a spiritual or religious awakening will become susceptible to violent extremist rhetoric – but some will, as has been well documented with regard to the *tablighi* movement (originally a missionary current emphasizing strict piety and religious observance, usually combined with separation from mainstream society). In Western Europe, for instance, many of the second-generation immigrants (or converts) who gravitate toward al-Qaeda-type or al-Qaeda-affiliated groups began doing so after becoming “born-again Muslims.” Their non-violent phase was relatively brief, and paved the way to an embrace of views emphasizing the need for violent action. For instance, through its *al-Muhajirun* network, the London-based *Hizb ut-Tahir* pietist movement in the past decade often has acted as a conduit for the recruitment of born-again Muslims into violent extremist endeavors.⁴⁶

f. Most importantly perhaps, the primary impact of social marginality on radicalization appears to be through the personal relationships, networks and group dynamics that often develop, or solidify, in response to these phenomena. In some cases, social isolation prompts individuals to drift into pre-existing extremist groups, usually via prior personal relationships with members of such groups. More often, it leads them to seek out like-minded individuals, who share their deep disaffection from, and hostility to, the society around them. In the process, cliques are formed which, over time, often become the primary venue through which individuals are radicalized. The communities that emerge in response to social marginalization may be virtual as much as physical. Individuals thoroughly estranged from their social environment may look for “ideological soul-mates” in internet chat rooms or on websites. Those virtual spaces, in turn, may become the primary medium through which socially alienated individuals are exposed to violent discourses, and are provided with a conceptual framework that allows them to account for their alienation.

3. Economic Development, Democracy and Vulnerability to Terrorism

Another way in which “underlying social and economic conditions” impact vulnerability to VE relates to the relationship between those

Economic Development and Democratization

The democratization literature has shown that while democratic transitions can take place in countries characterized by low levels of economic development, prospects for democratic consolidation are much greater in countries with higher per capita incomes and higher rates of economic growth. Adam Przeworski and Fernando Limongi (1997) have conducted the most compelling empirical research on this issue. More recently, Ian Shapiro (2007) has underscored the strong empirical relationship between, on the one hand, economic development in general, and per capita income in particular, and, on the other hand, the likelihood of democratic survival. For his part, Fareed Zakaria (2003 and 2008) has observed that, once the threshold of \$6,000 to \$7,000 per capita income is crossed, it becomes much easier for democracy to survive, and that the connection between per capita income and the life expectancy of a democracy holds true going far back in history. In his 2003 volume, he noted (pp. 69-70): “Of course some poor countries have become democracies. But when countries become democratic at low levels of development, their democracy usually dies ... Once rich, democracies become immortal. Thirty-two democratic regimes have existed at incomes above roughly \$9,000 for a combined total of 736 years. Not one has died. By contrast, of the 69 democratic regimes that were poorer, 39 failed – a death rate of 56 percent.” Of course, there are exceptions to the rule. India has been able to maintain a democratic system despite its poverty. For its part, Saudi Arabia has provided its citizens with relatively high standards of living, despite its largely autocratic political system. Such countries are, however, outliers – and, in both cases, their deviation from the norm can be explained by the impact of critical variables that easily can be identified (e.g., historical legacies in the case of India, and oil with regard to Saudi Arabia).

⁴⁶ Olivier Roy, *The Politics of Chaos in the Middle East*. New York, 2008.

conditions and prospects for sustaining a democratic system of government. Democracies certainly are not immune to terrorism. Yet, there is general empirical support for the contention that the more solid, better-established democracies are less prone to generating violent extremists, and more effective at dealing with terrorism over the long run. For one, they are less likely to resort to “across-the-board” repression that, even when it alleviates the violence in the short run, usually compounds it in the long run (including by increasing the flow of recruits to violent extremist movements). Since, as a rule, crossing a certain threshold of economic development (and per capita income) is critical to the ability of a democratic system to maintain itself over time, economic development can be viewed as lessening vulnerability to terrorism. It should be underscored, however, that what is involved is an indirect relationship that plays itself out over a long period of time. In short, economic development does not offer a quick fix for VE.

4. Poverty, Cultural Resentment, and Extremism

Another indirect effect of poverty on extremism may be through the cultural resentment it can foster, a line of inquiry that has not received the attention it probably deserves. Widespread poverty and economic under-development undermine a society’s ability to shape world events. It also may feed into the perception that one’s culture or civilization has fallen behind. For some, such a diagnostic will lead to the conclusion that that civilization or culture needs to revisit certain long-held ideas or beliefs, so that it can meet the challenge of the modern world. Others, however, will blame lack of international influence on what they describe as the profound inequities and fundamental moral flaws of the present world order. That conclusion, in turn, may contribute to the conviction that that world order must be destroyed, and that those who most closely embody it and dominate it must be attacked.

Some of these processes may be at work across much of the Islamic world today, particularly where widespread poverty, low international standing, and large youth bulges coexist. The previously discussed perceived subordinate position of the Muslim world in the international arena – and, specifically, the belief shared by millions of young Muslims that their societies and culture do not enjoy the level of global influence and recognition that they should – feeds into a pool of resentment that is felt very deeply, at both the collective and the individual levels. In trying to account for the lures of violent extremist ideologies and organization, and for the emotions and passions they tap into, the importance of such factors should not be discounted.

PART THREE: POLITICAL DRIVERS

Certain types of political environments may be more prone than others to generate VE. Conducting an examination of the relevant scholarship and policy-oriented research from this perspective suggests that the following seven factors deserve particular consideration:

- A.** Denial of basic political rights (“political exclusion”) and civil liberties.
- B.** Highly repressive regimes that engage in gross violations of human rights.
- C.** Endemic corruption and impunity for well-connected elites.
- D.** The presence of safe havens, poorly-governed or ungoverned areas.
- E.** Pre-existing, protracted and violent local conflicts that can be exploited by violent extremist organizations seeking to advance their own agendas.
- F.** State sponsorship of VE groups.
- G.** Discredited regimes with weak or non-existent oppositions.

These variables do not represent an exhaustive list, but the literature on VE reveals that they often play a prominent role. The more of these variables at work in a given political context, the more that context can be described as “enabling” VE. Thus, while it is true that VE can manifest itself in very different political settings, the factors identified above appear to warrant special examination.

Of course, these drivers rarely operate in isolation from each other. Harsh government repression and systemic political exclusion usually go hand-in-hand. Resentment at pervasive impunity for well-connected elites may compound the rage created by gross violation of human rights. One or several of these political drivers also may be closely intertwined with some of the social and economic drivers discussed earlier. For instance, corruption may sap state capacity by undermining the government’s ability to confront the social exclusion which, as discussed above, often fuels VE.

By the same token, the salience of a given driver (e.g., a particular set of beliefs) may be mostly a function of other drivers (e.g., contextual ones). For instance, a violent ideology may resonate more in certain environments than in others, because of differences in some of the key political and economic attributes of the different settings involved. In that regard, the contribution of ideology to VE may be viewed mostly as derivative. But, at least for some individuals, the environment in question will be apprehended primarily through pre-existing ideological orientations. Those views will emphasize some of this environment’s features, and downplay or distort others – thus creating a disjunction between the actual environment and the way it is perceived. In that respect, the contribution of “underlying conditions” to VE may be viewed, in part, as a function of ideological convictions – not the other way around.

Thus, when evaluating a particular country, the analyst should:

- Identify those features of the socioeconomic and political environment that appear to be particularly salient drivers. This step will entail differentiating between those drivers that are critical, and those that are less so (or that operate mostly because – and through – the more significant drivers).

- Pinpoint the ways in which the primary drivers relate to one another, especially in a manner that compounds their respective effects.

A. Denial of Political Rights and Civil Liberties

“Political exclusion,” or the denial of political rights, refers to a lack of legal avenues for expressing political demands and grievances, and for participating in political processes more generally. It describes a situation in which individuals are deprived from the ability to affect policy decisions, including through free and fair elections. Civil liberties, for their part, include freedom of expression, of the press, of association, and of religion. As Krueger has noted, both logically and empirically, it typically is difficult to disentangle political right and civil liberties from each other.⁴⁷ For one, progress in one area tends to correlate and facilitate advances in the other.

1. The systematic denial of opportunities for influencing decision-making at the level of the community and/or the state, or for reforming regimes perceived to be corrupt and/or unjust, has been shown to operate as a significant driver of VE. Exclusionary regimes sometimes feed the belief that violence represents the only viable option for bringing about genuine political change. Anger or frustration at being denied the opportunity to affect the decisions that shape one’s life can be a potent force in pushing individuals toward violent means of political action.

Recent research has uncovered compelling empirical evidence to demonstrate that, at the macro-level, political exclusion and denial of civil liberties represent an important risk factor. Alan Krueger has shown that the countries from which terrorists tend to stem are characterized first and foremost by restriction on civil liberties,⁴⁸ and that “countries with fewer civil liberties were more likely to be source countries for foreign insurgents in Iraq.”⁴⁹ He notes that political rights also matter, though his data suggest that civil liberties may be “slightly more important.”⁵⁰

Krueger also proposes that civil liberties and political rights matter in that they may represent the critical link between economic development on the one hand, and vulnerability to terrorism on the other. In other words, he speculates that the primary impact of economic conditions on terrorism may be indirect, through civil liberties and political rights. That is, in part, because “wealthier countries are more likely to protect their residents’ civil liberties and political freedoms, so extremists in these countries might be less inclined to turn to terrorism to pursue their agendas.”⁵¹ Thus, Krueger proposes that “if favorable economic circumstances operate in any way to reduce terrorism, it is by raising the likelihood that a country can sustain civil liberties and political rights.” Even then, however, Krueger is quick to add the important caveat that “there are many examples of countries with low living standards that provide their citizens with civil liberties and political rights, and enough examples of rich countries (like Saudi Arabia) that restrict civil liberties and political rights, to make it clear that raising living standards is not by itself sufficient for reducing the risks of terrorism.”⁵²

In joint research with David Laitin, Krueger also has demonstrated that if one controls for civil liberties, poorer countries do not generate more terrorism than richer ones (in other words, the key factor driving terrorism within poor countries is the lack of civil liberties often found in them). From this perspective, therefore, the state of civil liberties – not poverty – represents the decisive macro-variable shaping a

⁴⁷ Alan B. Krueger, *What Makes a Terrorist*, Princeton, 2007, p. 78.

⁴⁸ Krueger, 79.

⁴⁹ Krueger, 86.

⁵⁰ Krueger, 78.

⁵¹ Krueger, 89-90.

⁵² Krueger, 7.

country's vulnerability to terrorism. Krueger and Laitin also provide empirical evidence to demonstrate that closed political systems that are unresponsive to citizens' demands enhance vulnerability to VE.⁵³ For their part, Blomberg and Hess have shown that, among countries that already are sources of terrorism (both domestic and transnational), democratic development and greater openness to the outside world (measured by closer integration into the global economy) diminish the propensity of those countries to generate terrorism. Most countries that have undemocratic political systems and are poorly integrated into the global economy tend to be "net exporters of terrorism," as Blomberg and Hess put it. That is, they are far more often the source of terrorist activities directed at other countries than they are the target of terrorism from other sources.⁵⁴

2. The relationship between political rights and civil liberties on the one hand, and terrorism on the other, also has been subjected to careful empirical examination by Freedom House. The results of this investigation are worth quoting at some length.

Between 1999 and 2003, 70 percent of all deaths from terrorism were caused by terrorists and terrorist groups originating in Not Free societies, while only 8 percent of all fatalities were generated by terrorists and terror movements with origins in Free societies. Moreover, terrorists from dictatorial and repressive societies that brutalize their inhabitants are themselves significantly more brutal than terrorists born and acculturated in democratic societies [as measured by the number of persons killed per attack] ... Even if we exclude 9/11's fatalities, terrorists from closed societies are over twice as lethal as their counterparts from less repressive states. All terrorism is morally reprehensible and odious, but this difference in degree must be better understood. No society and no political system can guarantee that it will not produce terrorists, just as no society can guarantee that it will not generate violent criminals. Still, as the data in this study indicate, stable democracies generate fewer and less lethal terrorists and terrorist movements than tyrannies. In order to successfully wage a war of ideas against such a lethal enemy, the human benefits of greater political, civil, and economic freedom must be consistently encouraged.⁵⁵

3. One should note, finally, that the violence fed by political exclusion is particularly likely to express itself in a religious idiom, and through religious organizations, wherever secular opposition groups are weak (often because they were, or remain, suppressed by the state), and where government repression has left religious discourse, mosques, and religious associations as the primary channels through which to organize and mobilize dissent. Unfortunately, as will be shown later, the injection of religious imagery and symbols into opposition activities, and the expression of those activities through religious venues may significantly enhance the propensity for violence; by "absolutizing" conflicts, as Mark Juergensmeyer put it, religion typically makes them far more protracted, far less amenable to compromise, and far more likely to be waged by individuals and organizations that have convinced themselves of the legitimacy of resorting to violence.⁵⁶

4. While the research summarized thus far does suggest that, globally, denial of political rights and civil liberties represents an important driver behind VE, this finding does not necessarily hold true in all cases, all the time. That there should be exceptions to the pattern – countries that generate terrorism despite the political rights and civil liberties they guarantee – should be expected.⁵⁷ Key relevant factors here include:

⁵³ Krueger and Laitin, 2008.

⁵⁴ Blomberg and Hess, 2008b, 133.

⁵⁵ Adrian Karatnycky, "Civic Power and Electoral Politics." Freedom House report, 2005, 9.

⁵⁶ Mark Juergensmeyer, *Global Rebellion: Religious Challenges to the Secular State, from Christian Militias to Al-Qaeda*, 2008.

⁵⁷ Examples would include: the July 2005 London bombings and the failed July 2007 attacks in the UK; ETA terrorism in Spain; the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing in the US; the Aum Shinrikyo's sarin gas attacks in the Tokyo

a. Terrorist groups can exploit protections of civil liberties for purposes of recruitment, indoctrination, and political organization. The level of threat is probably mostly a function of two variables: the ability of a democratic system to provide for coherent, consistent, and effective policy-making, and the strength of its detection and monitoring mechanisms. For instance, cabinet instability (caused by deep ideological or policy disagreements, a highly fragmented electorate, and political institutions that do not mitigate these phenomena) may sap the capacity of a democratically elected government to ensure that violent extremists do not take undue advantage of civil liberties and political rights. As a rule, the greater the level of political polarization and the less effective the political system is at processing political and societal demands and at converting them into public policy, the more difficult it will be for that system to cope with terrorists threats (e.g., Italy during the 1970s).

b. Guaranteed political rights (through the presence of fair elections) will do nothing to deter terrorist groups that know full well that their agendas would never receive the support of a significant portion of the electorate. For such groups, political rights do not represent a way to gain power, while the defense of civil liberties is not an objective they would pursue once in power.⁵⁸

c. Where extremist movements enjoy a degree of active or passive support by significant segments of the population, fragile coalition governments may display a tenuous commitment to fighting violent groups. That will be particularly true if and when those governments' ability to remain in office depends on the backing of a faction that features direct or indirect links to organizations that condone or engage in violence. Put differently, where there is "soft" popular support for the agenda and tactics of violent organizations, and where democratically selected governments enjoy razor-thin majorities, those governments may display less political will to fight terrorism than the more autocratic governments they may have replaced. In an op-ed piece written in the immediate aftermath of the second Bali bombing, Scott Atran suggested that this basic logic was at work in post-Suharto Indonesia, when he noted that "the country's minority-led democratic government, whose very survival requires the support of Islamist parties that range from the militant to the mainstream, has spent the period between the two Bali attacks (December 2002 and October 2005) waffling in its response to terrorism for fear of alienating these Muslim parties and a largely anti-American populace."⁵⁹

B. Government Repression and Gross Violations of Human Rights

1. An examination of the profile of those involved in VE suggests that, for a disproportionate number of them, exposure to harsh government repression was a significant factor in their radicalization. In particular, subjection to torture can feed a burning desire for revenge, as well as a broader belief that violence (targeted and/or indiscriminate) may be necessary to "purify" a fundamentally immoral order. Two prominent examples, Sayyid Qutb, the father of modern jihadism, and Ayman al-Zawahiri, al-Qaeda's second-in-command and its most influential ideologue, spent years in Egyptian jails. The abuses to which they were subjected at that time are believed to have shaped their outlook in very significant ways, particularly in terms of convincing them of the fundamentally evil and cruel nature of the modern secular Arab state. Qutb, for instance, spent nine years in jail, and it was there that he fine-tuned his key ideas. And, as Lawrence Wright reminds us, "stories [of his] suffering in prison have formed a kind of Passion Play for Islamic fundamentalists."⁶⁰ Montassir al-Zayyat, Zawahiri's biographer, maintains that it was "the traumatic experience suffered by Zawahiri in prison [that] transformed him from being a relatively

subways in 1995; actions by the "Baader-Meinhof Gang" in West Germany, by the Red Brigades in Italy, and by the Red Army in Japan during the 1970s. To this day, Western Europe, where civil liberties are protected, remains a major breeding ground for Salafi Jihadi terrorism.

⁵⁸ Gregory F. Gause, "Can Democracy Stop Terrorism?" *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2005.

⁵⁹ Scott Atran, "In Indonesia, Democracy Isn't Enough." *New York Times*, October 5, 2005.

⁶⁰ Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), 33.

moderate force in [the extremist group] al-Jihad into a violent and implacable extremist.”⁶¹ When Zawahiri was released in 1984, after having been brutally tortured in prison, he displayed “an overwhelming desire for revenge, which was characteristic” of those who had been abused in prison.⁶² Along similar lines, an analysis of the biographies of Saudi militants who joined “Al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP),” which claimed responsibility for the terrorist campaign that rocked the kingdom from May 2003 through 2005, notes that a “striking number” of AQAP militants had spent time in prison before 2003, and that “most of [them] said they were subjected to physical and/or psychological torture.”⁶³ The author adds that jihadist literature emanating from Saudi Arabia is replete with accounts of brutal and humiliating treatment in Saudi prisons.⁶⁴

Over two decades ago already, in his seminal study of radical Islam, Emmanuel Sivan observed that “the prison experience was to be, in effect, crucial in the making of most of the other New Radicals as well.”⁶⁵ The brutality that regimes displayed at the time toward members of the Muslim Brotherhood, their disregard for procedural rules, and the degradation to which incarcerated Islamists were subjected were all decisive in solidifying the militants’ belief that the existing sociopolitical order had to be destroyed, and that no compromise could be found with existing regimes. More recently, Lawrence Wright went one step further when he proposed the following:

“One line of thinking proposes that America’s tragedy on September 11 was born in the prisons of Egypt. Human-rights advocates in Cairo argue that torture created an appetite for revenge, first in Sayyid Qutb and later in his acolytes, including al-Zawahiri. The main target of the prisoners’ wrath was the secular Egyptian government, but a powerful current of anger was also directed toward the West, which they saw as an enabling force behind the repressive regime. They held the West responsible for corrupting and humiliating Islamic society. Indeed, the theme of humiliation, which is the essence of torture, is important to understanding the radical Islamists’ rage. Egypt’s prisons became a factory for producing militants whose need for retribution – they called it justice – was all-consuming.”⁶⁶

More generally, governments that engage in gross human rights violations are particularly prone to pushing individuals into terrorist groups. Terrorist leaders know this full well, and their resort to terrorist tactics is precisely intended to prompt governments into over-reacting. Indiscriminate government repression radicalizes individuals, while enabling terrorist ideologues to present their actions as a form of reciprocal violence. Both effects support terrorist organizations’ recruitment efforts.

Brutal treatment at the hands of security forces or the police also may radicalize individuals indirectly – for instance when a close relative or friend has been the victim of torture, “disappearance,” or “targeted killing.” The desire to avenge others can be as powerful as the drive to exact revenge for oneself. Consequently, the greater the level of society-wide repression, and the more indiscriminate it is, the likelier it becomes that a significant number of individuals will be motivated by a desire to inflict great pain on those who represent the state.

2. Direct exposure to repression at home also may enhance susceptibility to, and empathy for, the suffering of Muslims elsewhere. Put differently, the greater and the more intense the exposure to

⁶¹ Wright, 61.

⁶² Wright, 67. It did not help that Zawahiri had cracked under torture, revealing the identity of his friends, and that he was forced to carry the guilt associated with those events for the rest of his life.

⁶³ Hegghammer, 46.

⁶⁴ Hegghammer, endnote 42, 57.

⁶⁵ Emmanuel Sivan, *Radical Islam: Medieval Theology and Modern Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 25-26.

⁶⁶ Wright, 61.

victimization at home, the more the perceived slaughter of Muslims around the globe will tend to resonate on a deep, personal level. This process undoubtedly has facilitated the spread of SJ ideas. Global narratives built around ideas of “Muslim blood coming cheap” and “Muslims being under siege” will gain traction far more easily where daily personal and community experiences seem to vindicate such worldviews.

3. Concepts deeply rooted in Muslim doctrine and theology can play a role as well. For one, victimization of citizens and gross abuses of authority by officials may play into the hands of violent Islamic organizations that emphasize “just rule” – understood as rule according to sacred law, involving strict and consistent implementation of the same *sharia*-based standards to officials and citizens alike. In Islamic thought, after all, issues of justice, fairness, and equal treatment under the law loom larger than those related to freedom of choice and popular sovereignty. From a political perspective, Islamic doctrine is preoccupied mostly with preventing despotic, capricious and arbitrary government, and with ensuring that those in power will seek to promote the well-being of the community (as opposed to advancing their own interests). Consequently, highly repressive, unaccountable and unchecked government may provide extremist organizations that wrap themselves in the mantle of Islam with ways of legitimizing their violence.

4. As Mohammed Hafez has shown in the context of the Muslim world, highly repressive political contexts also are conducive to the structuring of political opposition into “exclusive” cells that operate underground, encourage secrecy and conspiratorial mentalities, isolate their members from the broader society, demand strict ideological and behavioral conformity and rigorously separate “insiders” from “outsiders.”⁶⁷ Such features tend to promote extremism. The fear of informers and government infiltrators, combined with the constant threat of decimation by the authorities, puts a premium on discipline and on adhering to an exacting standard of conduct. Those same conditions also facilitate the spread of radical, anti-system ideologies that portray the world in Manichean terms (faith versus impiety, truth versus falsehood, right versus wrong), and deny the possibility of neutrality in what is presented as an existential battle of cosmic significance. Civilians then can be portrayed as legitimate targets, on the ground that they do not side with the “struggling vanguard,” and are complicit in the perpetuation of an iniquitous, evil system.

5. The repressive wing of a regime and violent extremists also may need each other to survive, and feed on each other.⁶⁸ Hardliners in the regime may rely on violent radicals to thwart any potential “pact” or “bargain” between softliners (reform-oriented segments of the state apparatus) and moderate components of the opposition. Such a pact might pave the way to a more liberal, democratically oriented polity that might undermine the vested interests and/or strong convictions of hardliners. Thus, since hardliners may need violent extremists to act as “spoilers,” the more repressive the regime, and/or the stronger that regime’s repressive wing, the more likely it may be to tolerate – if not encourage and try to manipulate and regulate from behind the scenes – limited and “controlled” manifestations of VE.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Mohammed M. Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel: Repression and Resistance in the Islamic World*, Boulder, 2003.

⁶⁸ The following discussion draws on Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reform in Eastern Europe and Latin America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

⁶⁹ From the hardliners’ perspective, violence by radicals will achieve three inter-related goals:

- create doubts among moderates that they would stand to benefit from a transition to a more liberal regime (they, instead, may fear that radicals might turn out to be the primary beneficiaries of such a transformation).
- diminish the incentives of soft liners to reach out to the moderate segments of the opposition and strike a “democratic bargain” with them. (Softliners only will engage in such a pact if they can be re-assured that opposition moderates can control radicals, and that both softliners and moderates, not radicals, will benefit from efforts at transitioning toward a more liberal regime).
- legitimize the hardliners’ refusal to open up the political system, their continued repression, and their opposition to any rapprochement with moderate segments of the opposition.

Indeed, there is significant evidence that this perverse logic was at work during Algeria's radical Islamist insurgency between 1992 and 1997. The Armed Islamic Group (GIA) and the Security and Intelligence Department (the security and intelligence arm of the state dominated by military intelligence officers)⁷⁰ were, in fact, closely connected to each other – to the point that to this day some analysts argue that the GIA was a creation of the regime's most hardline elements.

For the DRS, keen to deflect any attention from the mafia economy [from which many military officers derived enormous benefits], the GIA was a necessary scapegoat, keeping the status quo going by justifying Algeria's draconian system. The DRS took every opportunity for extravagant hyperbole, holding up the GIA as a diabolical menace for Algeria and the world, whilst simultaneously infiltrating and manipulating these groups. On the other side, the GIA groups wanted to perpetuate the conflict because, in an impoverished society, it became a means to personal enrichment. Both sides, therefore had a vested interest in quashing anybody preaching reconciliation.⁷¹

6. The extent to which an oppressive, abusive regime enhances vulnerability to terrorism also may be a function of state strength (the latter being defined as the effectiveness of the state's coercive and administrative apparatus). Where the state is oppressive but weak, a direct assault upon it may have a reasonable chance of succeeding. Such a prospect presumably enhances challengers' incentives to resort to traditional guerilla tactics or civil war – particularly where the terrain is conducive to even small bands of insurgents being able to inflict significant casualties on army units, the police, or security forces.⁷² By contrast, if the state's coercive and administrative apparatus is too strong to be brought down through conventional warfare – that is, if a popular rebellion or insurgency is unlikely to succeed – then the temptation to resort to terrorist tactics presumably increases. Challengers may view such tactics as the most viable way of progressively sapping state will and capacity, through a long and protracted war of attrition. The purpose of that war may be to undermine domestic and international confidence in the regime by exposing its inability to protect its population; prompt it to over-react in a way that will fuel radicalization, facilitate terrorist recruitment, and lead to international criticism of it; devastate key economic sectors (such as tourism), reduce foreign direct investment, and undermine business confidence more generally; isolate the country internationally; and cut it off from its global support networks. Indeed, there is evidence that such calculations featured prominently in the strategy underlying the radical Islamist insurgencies that raged in both Algeria and Egypt between 1992 and 1997.

⁷⁰ DRS stands for *Département de Renseignement et de Sécurité*.

⁷¹ Martin Evans and John Phillips, *Algeria: Anger of the Dispossessed*, New Haven, 2007, 224.

⁷² As Ballentine has noted, "the opportunity structure for rebellion is ... deeply influenced by the relative strength of the state being challenged. In general, the weaker the state, the lower the opportunity costs born by challengers, and the better the prospects of successful insurgency. In Kosovo, Nepal, the DRC, and Sierra Leone, the outbreak of rebellion occurred at moments when both the legitimacy of the state and its military capacity were severely diminished, whether by broad geopolitical shifts, the direction of military assets to conflicts elsewhere, or internally generated corruption and decay that impaired both regime credibility and the coherence and discipline of state militaries in their capacity to fend off challengers. In both Sierra Leone and the DRC, state militaries were in such an advanced state of internal decay that they proved incapable of mounting a credible defense of the state. In the latter case, mass defections of Zairian soldiers allowed Laurent Kabila to take Kinshasa virtually unopposed." He adds that the limited reach of state authority and capacity in remote or border regions may provide insurgents with an opportunity to build bases which they may use to expand progressively the area under their control, before being able to launch a full-fledged final assault on the regime (as Mao did in China during the 1940s). Karen Ballentine. "Beyond Greed and Grievance: Reconsidering the Economic Dynamic of Armed Conflict." In Karen Ballentine and Jake Sherman, eds., *The Political Economy of Armed Conflict: Beyond Greed and Grievance*, (Boulder: Lynne Reiner, 2003), 265.

In short, repressive regimes with weakly developed coercive capacities may be more vulnerable to civil war than to terrorism. In contrast, oppressive states that are strong enough to withstand conventional guerilla tactics create greater incentives for insurgent to resort to terrorism.⁷³

7. Political oppression and gross violations of human rights (the driver developed in this section) and denial of political rights and civil liberties (the variable analyzed previously) frequently occur simultaneously; in practice, they may be difficult to disentangle from one another. Repressive regimes by definition deny political rights and civil liberties, while governments that violate political rights and civil liberties may be particularly oppressive and abusive of human rights. Nowhere are those connections in greater evidence than in countries that are subjected to brutal military occupations. Because of the empirical relationship between foreign occupation and some of the most horrific form of terrorism – suicide bombings – this phenomenon calls for some elaboration.

In their explanations of suicide bombings, scholars such as Pape, Bloom, Hafez, Hoffman, and Harrison all have emphasized the decisive role of foreign occupation. Pape, in particular, views foreign occupation as the single most important cause of suicide terrorism. The core of his argument is that “every group mounting a suicide campaign over the past two decades [his data set goes from 1980 to 2003] has had as a major objective – or its central objective – coercing a foreign state that has military forces in what the terrorists see as their homeland to take those forces out.”⁷⁴ This largely mono-causal explanation for suicide terrorism may not be as valid in the post-2001 era as it was in earlier periods.⁷⁵ Still, the linkage between foreign occupation and suicide terrorism does apply to many cases, and needs to be examined in some detail, considering the close connection between foreign occupations and the political repression and violations that have been examined in this section. A useful starting point in this regard is Mark Harrison’s claim that “suicide terrorism has arisen in the context of injuries done to communities by expulsion, expropriation, or occupation.”⁷⁶

What needs to be underscored are the psycho-sociological processes and the individual calculations that can be triggered by prolonged and brutal occupations, and the ways in which they may feed suicide terrorism. While there is little that development practitioners can do to alleviate these conditions, those are the conditions within which many such practitioners work; consequently, in a document aimed at shedding light on the drivers of VE, it is critical that they be explored at some length. In addition, while the perspectives on suicide terrorism that are offered below emphasize different variables, and different ways in which these variables relate to one another, they all underscore the central importance to suicide terrorism of the political oppression and repression which inevitably accompany foreign occupations.

a. Brutal occupations may promote a determination to avenge, through radical methods, what is viewed as both a personal and national humiliation. Interviews with the families and friends suicide bombers left behind consistently suggest that they viewed their final act, in part, as a dramatic form of self-sacrifice and courage. The intent, in part, was to redeem one’s and one’s community’s honor, and to make up for the guilt associated with having failed to prevent and then resist occupation in earlier periods. One is reminded, here, of Franz Fanon’s famous analysis of the psychological effects of those victimized by colonialism. Almost half-a century ago, Fanon noted the ability of violence to operate as a catharsis to subjugation when he noted: “At the level of the individual, violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority

⁷³ For speculation along those lines, as well as empirical evidence that state strength tends to be correlated with terrorism, see Laitin and Shapiro, 2008: 212-213.

⁷⁴ Robert Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House), 21.

⁷⁵ Scott Atran, “The Moral Logic and Growth of Suicide Terrorism.” *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (Spring): 127-147.

⁷⁶ Mark Harrison, “An Economist Looks at Suicide Terrorism.” *World Economics*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (July-September 2006), 2.

complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect.”⁷⁷ The broader importance of understanding violence, in some contexts, as an attempt by victimized populations to exact revenge on those who have long humiliated them on a day-to-day basis, will be picked up later in this section when the case of the Algerian insurgency of the 1990s is discussed.

b. More recently, Mark Harrison has offered new insights into understanding suicide terrorism under conditions of occupation.⁷⁸ While his model views rational, cost-benefit calculations as an important component in the decision to resort to suicide terrorism, it also recognizes the centrality of identity as a driver of human behavior. In that regard, Harrison (an economist by profession) provides a mixed economic-psychological perspective on suicide terrorism. Specifically, his model underscores the ties that bind four sets of phenomena:

- The universal process by which a young person searches for, or tries affirm, his or her identity, and seeks self-esteem as well as respect from both his/her peers and the broader community.
- The more unusual situation by which such dynamics are playing themselves out in a particularly oppressive environment, i.e., a foreign occupation.
- The presence of a militant/terrorist faction that stands ready to exploit the young person’s quest for identity and his/her rage at the occupation.
- A community that is willing to condone, if not celebrate, suicide bombings as acts of heroism, courage, and self-sacrifice.

In this context, suicide bombing may result from "the ability of a terrorist faction to exploit the crisis of a young person growing up in an oppressive society."⁷⁹ Under the brutal and humiliating conditions created by the occupation, a young person's yet-to-be-fully established sense of identity may be constantly threatened and/or damaged. In fact, the very logic of the occupation may make it impossible to achieve a modicum of dignity, a sense of self-worth, and a genuine individual identity. When such conditions prevail, the individual may be willing to consider giving up his/her life. That may be particularly true if death is perceived as a means of creating for oneself a new, "warrior-martyr" identity that will be recognized and celebrated as such by the community.

Against this backdrop, suicide bombing may become the avenue through which one can trade life for identity – specifically, a life which constantly devalues one’s sense of self, in exchange for the kind of identity to which one aspires, and that will be affirmed through the act of martyrdom. As Harrison notes, while the terrorist faction does not create the young person’s predisposition to die, it is critical to converting it into action. First, it is responsible for the logistics of the attack. Second, under the implicit contract concluded with the suicide bomber, the terrorist faction is expected to identify publicly the attacker as a martyr, ensure that the community recognizes him/her as such, and celebrate his/her death accordingly. Finally, where the occupying force systematically punishes the families of suicide attackers, the terrorist faction also is expected to compensate his/her family, and facilitate broader community support for relatives left behind (such prior guarantees, implicit or explicit, may be critical to the bomber’s readiness to carry out the attack in the first place).⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Grove Press, 2004). Originally published in French in 1961 at *Les Damnés de la Terre*.

⁷⁸ Harrison, 1-15.

⁷⁹ Harrison, 2.

⁸⁰ Harrison (2006: 12) wisely circumscribes the role of financial assistance to the suicide bomber’s family, especially in light of the exaggerated claims that have been made on this phenomenon’s behalf. He notes that money “clearly

c. Suicide bombings also provide an outlet for the cumulative traumas and psychological toll exacted by the daily indignities and hardships associated with the occupation (land confiscation, beatings and other forms of mistreatment, home demolitions, curfews, roadblocks, “closures,” checkpoints, etc.). For instance, studies carried out during the first Palestinian intifada against Israel (December 1987-September 1993) showed that a majority of Palestinian children had witnessed their fathers being humiliated or beaten by Israeli soldiers.⁸¹ The long-term cultural and cross-generational impact of such a situation merits consideration.

d. Suicide attacks may stem from a desire to avenge loved ones killed in circumstances related to the occupation. For instance, there is significant evidence that many Palestinians who carried out suicide attacks during the second intifada had been injured or arrested by the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) previously, and/or had a relative (often a brother) who had been killed by the IDF.⁸² The example of Chechnya’s “black widows” (female suicide bombers whose husbands or brothers died fighting for Chechnya’s independence) also comes to mind.⁸³ Feelings of moral obligation to kin, peers, and fellow citizens who fell as “martyrs” often appear to play a prominent role in the mix of motivations that drive suicide bombers.

e. As mentioned earlier, harsh military occupations can turn suicide bombing into a weapon of choice for the much weaker party. By transforming themselves into human bombs, individuals may seek to compensate for the overwhelming dominance of the other side in the conventional military realm. When conventional means of warfare do not offer a viable path to reach one’s goals, and when some come to view the dehumanizing tactics used by the other side as legitimizing one’s resort to the most horrific forms of violence, suicide bombing may become a particularly appealing tactic. It is a devastatingly effective weapon against which a far superior enemy cannot really protect itself – and in that regard it creates great despondency and demoralization among the enemy’s ranks; it is cheap (the average cost of a suicide attack in Israel at the height of the second intifada was estimated at about \$200); it typically involves a significant imbalance between the number of casualties suffered by the enemy (potentially very high) and those incurred by one’s side (only the suicide bomber); and it draws far greater public attention than any other form of attack, precisely because of its gruesome nature.

f. Most importantly perhaps, occupation plays a key role in feeding into the “culture of martyrdom” which is central to accounting for why individuals volunteer for suicide attacks.⁸⁴ The brutalizing and dehumanizing consequences of military occupations, and the individual as well as collective traumas they typically generate, feed into community support for suicide actions – which, in turn, makes it much easier for individuals to convince themselves of the legitimacy and utility of this tactic. As Harrison has noted,

cannot be a prime motive for one who is about to die; rather, it underpins the community’s endorsement of suicide terrorism by giving material support to the social honor associated with martyrdom.”

⁸¹ Eyad El Sarraj. “Suicide Bombers: Dignity, Despair and the Need for Hope.” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, XXXI, No. 4 (2002): 72.

⁸² Boaz Ganor, “Suicide Terrorism: An Overview.” Herzlia, Israel: International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism, 2000. Sean Yom and Basel Saleh, “Palestinian Suicide Bombers: A Statistical Analysis.” Unpublished paper, 2004, available at <http://www.ecaar.org/Newsletter/Nov04/saleh.htm>. Robert J. Brym and Bader Araj. 2006. “Suicide Bombing as Strategy and Interaction: The Case of the Second Intifada.” *Social Forces*, Vol. 84, No. 4 (2006): 1969-1986.

⁸³ Mia Bloom, *Dying to Kill: The Global Phenomenon of Suicide Terror*, New York, 2005.

⁸⁴ See Brooks, David. 2002. “The Culture of Martyrdom.” *The Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. 289, No. 6 (June). Mohammed Hafez, 2006. *Manufacturing Human Bombs: The Making of Palestinian Suicide Bombers*. Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press. Mohammed Hafez, 2007. *Suicide Bombers in Iraq: The Strategy and Ideology of Martyrdom*. Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press.

perpetrators of suicide terrorism would not be as common if they did not enjoy widespread community endorsement for their actions.⁸⁵

8. Scholars and policy-makers alike ought to pay more attention to the nexus of historical legacies, cultural traditions, psychological processes, and contemporary “macro-level” economic, social and political forces that originate in both the domestic and the international arenas. Those variables sometimes can come together to fuel a predisposition to view (and in some cases even celebrate) violence as a rightful and even necessary mechanism for redressing local and global injustices. Relevant variables may include:

- Repeated victimization of citizens by the state, or sustained exposure to brutality and bloodshed.
- Local traditions that idealize “folk heroes,” who are presented as embodying the true values and spirit of the community, and who stand up to evil power-holders in ways that entail brutal displays of violence. In the public imagination, that violence may represent a means through which the community exacts revenge for the wrongs done to it by the powerful and/or the wealthy (both political rage and an element of class hatred usually are involved).
- A long and particularly grueling period in history (e.g., Algeria’s struggle for independence from the French from 1954 through 1962) in which the resort to violence was viewed not only as a means to a political end, but also as psychologically liberating (in this case, as a form of catharsis for the violence inflicted by colonialism). The impact of such a legacy may be compounded when, as was the case in Algeria, the violence in question subsequently was glorified and celebrated, in both official history and popular culture, even though it entailed large-scale atrocities against innocent civilians.

In countries that feature large, restless and idle young populations enraged by a combination of political and economic grievances, and searching for ways to assert their identity and manhood, the impact of the kind of history and traditions outlined above may be significant. It may be further compounded by the youth’s sustained bombardment with violent images drawn primarily from Western-made movies (and the various electronic devices now associated with them). Significantly, in many of those movies, righteous avengers who spring from the community engage in an orgy of bloodletting directed at power holders who long have victimized local populations, and/or at villains responsible for harm done to loved ones.

Algeria, again, provides an interesting manifestation of how those diverse elements (indeed, some of the key drivers this document has emphasized thus far) can merge together to create a powerful cocktail of violence that is, all at once, a genuinely youth culture, a truly indigenous culture (in that it is in sync with longstanding, well celebrated values), and a culture that is deeply shaped by global trends. One of the most effective examinations of the kinds of processes that can be involved, here, is a recent analysis of the apparently mindless violence that tore Algeria apart during the 1990s. It is worth quoting at length, since the logic it captures has parallels elsewhere, and certainly should inform thinking about counter-extremism:

At a fundamental level, [violence] was about the assertion of power. Each armed group was a male brotherhood and the realization by its members that they had the capacity to invert traditional relationships and inspire fear in the regime was liberating. Through bloodshed, these young men felt a surge of energy. By killing, they were telling the regime that they, the dispossessed, could no longer be kept in a state of subjugation. The product of rage, rejection and injustice, theirs was a mirror violence [... This] is why so much of the early violence was directed against local police officers. In explicitly targeting the men who had hitherto humiliated them on a day-to-day basis, they were enjoying the satisfaction of revenge. The violence was cathartic, which explains why so much of the bloodshed had a strong ritualistic aspect. By kidnapping, gagging and verbally abusing

⁸⁵ Harrison, 13.

police officers in broad daylight before finally killing them, the armed groups were displaying their manhood. The very intensity of the violence was framed by the preceding years of non-existence. Dispensing with boredom and emptiness, these young men were now furiously alive. Through bloodshed they were telling the world that they were no longer outsiders.⁸⁶

In a related and insightful analysis, the authors highlight how the persona and behavior of the young, self-proclaimed “emirs” of the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) were shaped by a mixture of indigenous traditions about the “honourable outlaw;” youth defiance, self-assertion, and quest for social recognition and status; hatred at authority figures and institutions that had long victimized them; and the impact of modern, global culture and trends.

9. Finally, harsh repression at home also can push into the transnational arena radical Islamists whose agendas originally were driven by local concerns and dynamics. Having failed to defeat the “near enemy” (their own governments), these radical Islamists often have redirected their energies into confronting the “far-away enemy” (the US government), in part because of their assessment of the US’s key role in propping up authoritarian regimes at home. After all, the anger of Ayman al-Zawahiri (and that of his associates in Islamic Jihad) originally was focused on the Egyptian government; it was only subsequently that Zawahiri and many of his colleagues assumed leading roles in the transnational Salafi jihadist (TSJ) movement. More broadly, it is no coincidence that many of the operatives that came to provide the core of the al-Qaeda network originated from particularly repressive and exclusionary political environments (Egypt, Saudi Arabia, post-1992 Algeria).

GIA Emirs

“Through violence the GIA emirs became cult figures, the terror equivalent of the 1982 World Cup team or Cheb Khaled [a popular Rai singer]. Usually dressed in Levi 501s and Italian shoes, with their hair gelled back, their macho swagger made them into folkloric heroes with nicknames like Yacine ‘Napoli’, Lyes ‘L’égorgueur’ (throat-cutter) and Hocine ‘Flicha’ (arrow – a reference to the speed at which he could kill a policeman and run away). Indeed, such was the notoriety of ‘Flicha’, captured and executed in 1998, that he was lionized in a football [soccer] terrace song directed against the police where the chant ‘Flicha’s coming after you’ built up into a deafening crescendo intermingled with doglike baying.” (Evans and Phillips, 2007)

C. Endemic Corruption and Impunity for Well-Connected Elites

A review of the literature suggests four main possible types of linkages (some of which are not mutually exclusive) between corruption/impunity on the one hand, and the propensity for VE on the other. But before those linkages are presented, a few words of caution are in order.

1. Cautionary Notes

Widespread corruption and impunity do not always feed VE. Instead they may prompt civic disengagement and political apathy. The populations affected by corruption and impunity may view these phenomena as an inescapable part of life, and be resigned to them. Alternatively, individuals may be resentful of nepotism, cronyism, and favoritism, but they also may reject violence as a justifiable response to those problems. Where that is an option, they may seek to fight corruption and impunity through involvement in relevant NGOs and/or by engaging in the political process and by supporting parties (including moderate Islamist ones) that emphasize such themes in their platforms. That is why, as discussed earlier, the extent to which corruption/impunity represents a significant driver is influenced, to a very large extent, by the degree to which some other key political drivers are at play as well. For one, the absence of

⁸⁶ Martin Evans and John Phillips, *Algeria: Anger of the Dispossessed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 189.

legal avenues for holding officials accountable, or at least for making headway in this area, presumably enhances corruption's propensity to be a significant driver of VE.

2. From Corruption to Violence through Moral Outrage

a. Instead of triggering merely civic disengagement or disaffection, corruption may elicit a profound sense of moral outrage and deeply felt anger that, in turn, may provide a powerful motivation for supporting or engaging in VE. There is significant anecdotal evidence to suggest that, across the Muslim world today, violent extremist movements are able to tap into the anger that widespread corruption and pervasive impunity create. For one, VE leaders consistently emphasize such themes, while seeking to present themselves, in contrast, as embodiments of integrity, moral rectitude, and commitment to principle. Presumably, those who speak on behalf of violent extremist agendas would not dwell so heavily on corruption-related issues if they were not aware of the resonance of those themes among those whom they seek to pull into their movements. Along related lines, Bin Laden's appeal to young Muslims has been rooted, in large part, to the perception of him as a disinterested, upright and principled figure, willing to sacrifice the tremendous wealth into which he was born in order to defend, from caves and other hideouts, the ideals he believes in.

b. Violence triggered by resentment at corruption and impunity may take different forms such as:

- It may target specific individuals or constituencies viewed as emblematic of the prevailing corruption.
- It may be directed at government officials or institutions blamed for their own ethical shortcomings, or for being unwilling or unable (or both) to confront corruption.
- It may express itself through various forms of "lashing out" at a society viewed, itself, as irremediably corrupt, and, therefore, complicit in the perpetuation of fundamental injustices.
- It may be directed at forces (e.g., the West, the US) that are viewed as propping up a corrupt system and as partly responsible for the system's perceived moral decay.

3. From Corruption to Violent Extremism through Withdrawal

As discussed earlier, individuals put off by pervasive corruption and impunity initially simply may opt for various forms of "withdrawal" from formal political and civic processes. Over time, however, loss of faith in, and growing contempt for, a political system and society deemed to be corrupt may translate into varying degrees of mental and/or physical break with one's immediate environment, including sometimes family. At the macro-level, it may result in greater levels of social anomie and fragmentation. Such developments may go hand in hand with a surge of interest in spirituality and religion, which, for some individuals, will take the form of stricter adherence to religious dogma. Again, such dynamics need not imply a radicalization of political beliefs, and, even less so, an inclination toward VE. Nonetheless, the record suggests that when individuals withdraw from a society they denounce as corrupt, and when they begin to congregate with like-minded individuals in small cliques or cells, the processes of group seclusion from mainstream society, and increasingly intense personal interactions among the members of the group, may lead to radicalization of both viewpoints and behavior. The group as a whole, and its members individually, may drift toward ever more extreme attitudes. Physical separation from a society denounced as "un-Islamic" may lead individuals to persuade each other to accept violence as a legitimate way of purifying that society, or of bringing about the overthrow of a political order deemed to be responsible for the "contamination" or "corruption" of social life. When individuals and groups adopt such views, they become ready to reach out (typically through a gatekeeper) to terrorist or other violent extremist networks.

4. Corruption, Criminal Activity, and Penetration of Society by Violent Extremist Groups

From an entirely different perspective, corruption may drive VE not so much because of the anger it feeds, or because of the group dynamics it may trigger, but because it creates an environment that facilitate the operations of VE organizations. For instance, the ease with which local officials can be bribed may enable these groups to establish sanctuaries, or to engage in illicit activities (smuggling, trafficking, extortion and racketeering) that enable them to recruit, organize, and fund their activities. In general, the more corrupt the environment, the easier it becomes for violent extremists to develop a foothold in the community, to infiltrate themselves in private-sector activity, and/or to develop connections to organized crime – all of which can enhance significantly their recruitment and organizing efforts. It should be underscored, in this regard, that in the past five years at least, Jihadist ties with organized crime appear to have increased significantly.

5. Indirect Linkages from Corruption/Impunity to Violent Extremism

Corruption also can contribute more indirectly, but significantly, to creating or maintaining the environment in which disaffection and VE can flourish. Certainly, for instance, by acting as a powerful deterrent on both domestic and foreign private investment, and, thereby, by thwarting job creation, corruption may contribute to several of the following phenomena:

- Enhance disaffection among unemployed, restless youth – particularly in disadvantaged, marginalized communities that exist on the fringes or periphery of the modern economy;
- Create a situation by which some of these youth with too much time on their hands end up using some of that time to make a connection (physical or virtual) with violent extremist movements that may satisfy their search for glory, adventure, excitement, meaning, and/or revenge at a system that seems to have turned its back on them;
- Radicalize upwardly mobile, reasonably well educated youth angered at the lack of economic opportunities consistent with their raised expectations;
- Feed widespread social exclusion and marginalization, which, for reasons analyzed earlier, can foster VE.

In addition, the more corrupt government institutions and personnel are, the more public resources are being diverted for private gain, and the more communities feel that their needs are not being addressed, the more likely it becomes that:

- The communities involved will turn a blind eye to, and offer at least tacit support for, groups, violent or not, that are opposed to the government, and that operate in their midst.
- These communities will welcome material support (in the form of jobs and/or services) that these groups can provide.
- They will become vulnerable to the draw of extremist leaders and organizations whose appeal stems, in part, from the fact that they come across as untainted by corruption. One of the critical factors that, in the mid-1990s, enabled the Taliban to take control of most of Afghanistan was the fact that they appeared to be un-corrupt. This was in sharp contrast to the warlords and the government officials who, for years, had preyed on, and exploited, the population. It was the Taliban’s promise, and the significant extent to which they were able to deliver, “government by law” (and, in the process, restore a degree of order and physical security for the country’s inhabitants) that was the key to their political rise. In similar ways, in Somalia, the Union of Islamic Courts’ ability to garner substantial support initially owed much to its reining in rapacious,

corrupt warlords, and providing an exhausted public with a modicum of security and justice after many years of war.

D. Poorly Governed or Ungoverned Areas

1. Ungoverned or poorly governed spaces (e.g., Pakistan’s Tribal Agencies) may enable violent extremists to establish sanctuaries or safe havens. At the very least, they may provide room within which violent groups can operate more easily. While VE organizations have shown that they can plan and/or orchestrate attacks in countries where the quality of governance is relatively high (e.g., France in the mid-1990s, Spain in 2004, or the UK in 2005 and 2007), their operations and freedom to maneuver in those countries are significantly hindered by effective detection and monitoring mechanisms. That is not the case where government institutions are generally ineffective or non-functioning.

2. Poorly governed spaces also may create passive or active support for violent extremists among communities that feel ignored by the government. At the very least, it may promote a readiness by those communities to let extremists operate in their midst. As discussed earlier with regard to Morocco and the appeal of *takfiri* ideologies, the feeling of being abandoned by the authorities may feed outlooks conducive to VE.

3. Types of areas with a potential to serve as a safe haven, or where the presence and/or effectiveness of state institutions may be so limited as to make it easier for violent extremist groups to operate, include peri-urban slums; border regions; places mired in violent conflict and/or criminality (see section below); and remote, isolated, or desert regions with low population density.

4. For analytical as well as programmatic purposes, it is important to determine whether the existence of safe havens or poorly governed spaces is due primarily to low state capacity (e.g., lack of resources and/or personnel), lack of political will (or even complicity) by some senior officials, or both. Particular attention also should be paid to the state’s ability to deny violent extremist organizations access to critical conflict resources, especially weapons; funding (from both domestic and foreign sources); manpower; and control of lucrative economic activities (e.g., through smuggling networks or money laundering operations).

5. The contribution of ungoverned or poorly governed spaces to violent extremism should not be overstated. To begin with, there is no systematic, cross-regional empirical support either to support or undermine the contention that “vulnerable spaces” (understood as areas in which there is less government presence, and/or in which the government provides fewer services, or services of lower quality) positively correlates with support for terrorism, or the strength of terrorist organizations. In addition, from a rational-actor perspective, it is not clear that terrorist organizations always should be more inclined to seek to develop a presence in vulnerable spaces, or whether such environments are necessarily more conducive to the ability of those organizations to operate and recruit. It is true that, in the past fifteen years, a handful of failed or failing states (Sudan, Afghanistan, and Somalia) have provided sanctuaries for terrorist organizations. As noted earlier, Madrid in March 2004, London in July 2005, and London and Glasgow in July 2007 hardly were “ungoverned spaces.” And as Peter Bergen has observed regarding 9/11 and the often-invoked role of Afghanistan as a failed state in making those events possible, “much of the 9/11 plot took shape in Hamburg, where most of the pilots and secondary planners of the attack became more radical than they had been while living in their home countries. Although Afghanistan was critical to the rise of al-Qaeda, it was the experience that the plotters acquired in the west that made them both more militant and better equipped to carry out the attack.”⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Peter Bergen, “What were the causes of 9/11?” *Prospect Magazine*, No. 126 (September 2006).

In short, it is not clear that terrorists really seek, or need, ungoverned spaces and failed states. In fact, as Ken Menkhaus has pointed out,⁸⁸ they need access to communication and information facilities, as well as to other resources (such as skilled manpower and banks) that a failed or failing state typically cannot provide. Some failed states or ungoverned places – particularly those that are ravaged by destructive internal conflicts – also may place particular obstacles in the path of violent extremists, who may be at the mercy of rapacious warlords, for instance. In places such as Afghanistan and Somalia, VE groups may find their work as impeded by clan, tribal or ethnic hostilities as international NGO workers do. These divisions and conflicts make it much harder to rally Muslims under the banner of the global jihad.

Such considerations have prompted some scholars to argue that VE organizations are more likely to be more drawn to weak states – states of “intermediate strength” – than to failed, collapsed or even failing states. For example, terrorists might prefer a weak state such as Mali or Kenya, which provides the infrastructure required for their operations, to a failed state such as Somalia – and Somalia might not have had the appeal it did to some terrorist organizations had it not been for the presence of Kenya next door. As one of the participants in a USIP workshop on terrorism in the Horn of Africa noted: “At least in Kenya, phone and money machines work.”⁸⁹ If this reasoning holds true, the middle of the Sahara (e.g., Chad, Niger) would not be places in which terrorists would want to “park” significant operations – at least not to any significant extent or period of time. Such regions are too geographically isolated, and they offer too few of the services that terrorists need. That said, the smuggling routes that run through the Sahara may remain attractive to extremist groups – such as al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) – that increasingly seek out illicit activities to generate resources.

E. Protracted, Violent Local Conflicts

1. Protracted, violent local conflicts – driven by a contest over territory, by secessionist demands, by competition over wealth and power, by communal rivalries, or by a combination of some of these factors – can create significant opportunities for violent extremist organizations.

a. As discussed above, in some cases those organizations may take advantage of the chaos or lack of functioning state that debilitating internal struggles can create.

b. Local flashpoints also may inspire Muslims in other countries to join the fight. Often, these volunteers will do so not because they buy into the agenda of global jihadists, but, instead, out of a sense of solidarity with, and duty to, other Muslims under attack. But as volunteers moved merely by a desire to defend their fellow oppressed Muslim brethren pour into particular conflict zones, they provide a pool of potential recruits for global jihadists already active in those locations, and keen to take advantage of the influx of such newcomers. This process, for instance, was observed in Bosnia during the 1990s. There, Arab volunteers from Algeria to Egypt, and from Western Europe to Yemen, made contacts with battle-hardened global jihadist operatives; through the personal bonds that were forged while under fire, they were pulled into the orbit of the global jihad. Later, they often reappeared as frontline global jihadists in other theaters, from Chechnya to Iraq.

c. While intervening in a local struggle, global jihadists may seek to expand their support base by portraying themselves as the champions of one of the parties involved – even though, in reality, they typically are indifferent to the particular claims and objectives of those local actors. In their eyes, local struggles matter only to the extent that they can contribute to the global jihad (e.g., by providing bases of

⁸⁸ Ken Menkhaus, “Constraints and Opportunities in Ungoverned Spaces: The Horn of Africa” in *Denial of Sanctuary: Understanding Terrorist Safe Havens*, edited by Michael Innes, 2007.

⁸⁹ Quoted in “Terrorism in the Horn of Africa,” USIP Special Report, No. 113, January 2004.

operation; by galvanizing Muslims elsewhere; by helping create a global momentum that will sustain the quest for apocalyptic goals or the establishment of a Caliphate).⁹⁰

2. Certainly, over the past fifteen years, transnational terrorists affiliated with al-Qaeda have made a deliberate attempt to co-opt local conflicts and weave local and transnational agendas together. Even though, for reasons explored more systematically below, their efforts ultimately failed in Bosnia, Aceh, and other conflict zones, at first, they often met with some success. In Iraq, al-Qaeda was able to graft itself onto an insurgency initially led by former Baathists, military officers, and tribal leaders. In Chechnya, groups initially driven by a nationalist desire to seek independence from the Russian Federation progressively were infiltrated by radical Islamists; over time, their outlook, objectives and behavior increasingly came to reflect those external influences.

3. The attempt at merging local struggles and the global jihad usually represents a marriage of convenience. As noted above, global jihadists seek to hijack local conflicts in order to further their own transnational agenda. But local actors, too – at least in an early phase – may see an interest in hitching their bandwagon to a global violent extremist cause or organization. They may do so primarily for one or both of the following reasons:

a. To secure access to the financial and logistical support that transnational terrorist organizations can provide (e.g., weapons, logistical assistance, manpower, intelligence, or control of valuable communication or transportation facilities).

b. To add legitimacy and moral purpose to their cause, or to provide them with an overarching ideological framework and a clearer sense of direction. Olivier Roy recently underscored the importance of that point with regard to such different organizations as Jemaah Islamiyyah in Indonesia and AQIM in Algeria (and the northern Sahel).⁹¹ Al-Qaeda certainly attempted to use those organizations for its own ends, but it is important to note that the opposite process also was at work; in fact, AQIM sought out al-Qaeda more than al-Qaeda tried to hijack its cause. The reason, Roy observes, is not that such groups “need al-Qaeda in order to recruit or operate. If they have rallied to it, it is precisely because they have had difficulty in defining or achieving a local objective (an Islamic state for example); they become globalized, therefore, by default.”⁹²

4. Finally, it is critical to note that, thus far, efforts to graft the global jihad onto local struggles have tended to fail after a few years. In all the main cases that come to mind, the local population eventually turned against the global jihadists (even where, initially, segments of that population had welcome them). Among the main, inter-related reasons for this outcome (which has critical implications for counter-terrorism programming), the following ones stand out:

a. Global jihadists typically never were able to escape their status as outsiders, and the resentment of the local population toward them progressively escalated. They rarely understood local dynamics and traditions, and, when they did, they often proved to be contemptuous of them. Their interference with local customs (e.g., qat chewing in Somalia and kite flying in Afghanistan) sometimes built up strong antipathy toward them.

⁹⁰ As Devji puts it, “the particular sites of these struggles are themselves unimportant, their territories being subordinated to a larger and even metaphysical struggle for which they have become merely instrumental. Indeed, by moving between Bosnia and Afghanistan, Chechnya and Iraq, the jihad displays its fundamental indifference to these territories.” Faisal Devji, *Landscapes of Jihad: Militancy, Morality, Modernity*. Ithaca, 2005, p. 27.

⁹¹ In January 2007, the Salafi Group for Combat and Preaching (GSPC), which a decade earlier had broken out of the GIA (over the latter’s indiscriminate massacres of civilians), decided to rename itself AQIM, in yet another manifestation of the recognition given to the al-Qaeda brand name.

⁹² Olivier Roy, 152.

b. Their indifference to local grievances and interests became apparent, as did their inability to provide local populations with services.

c. Even when they sided with a particular faction in a local struggle, they often found themselves unable to transcend the tribal, clan-based, and other primordial identities that created deep fissures within that faction. In other words, the persistence of strong primordial identities became both an asset and a liability for global jihadists: while it created entry points for them, it also made it difficult to create a cohesive bloc that could be integrated into the global jihad.

d. Most importantly, they overplayed their hands and, in particular, they engaged in indiscriminate violence and committed atrocities against other Muslims that alienated large parts of the population.

F. STATE SPONSORSHIP

1. That state agents and institutions feature among the primary targets of VE entities is generally well understood. Less commonly recognized, however, is the extent to which many contemporary VE movements -- including, but not only, in the Muslim world -- benefited, at least in their early stages, from the support or at least complicity of host governments or foreign states, seeking to harness these movements in the pursuit of domestic political objectives or broader strategic interests. Subsequently, however, organizations that had benefited from state complicity of largesse often turned against their initial benefactors, as happened, for instance, in Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, and even to some extent Palestine. State officials or agencies that had sought to manipulate VE elements lost control over them, and the “blowback” often haunted (and continues to haunt) entire countries for decades.

That is not to say that the VE movements in question can be reduced to “creations” or “inventions” of host governments or foreign states. It is, instead, to underscore that some of these movements might not have appeared had they not benefited (among other factors) from state support (domestic and/or foreign). Other such VE movements would have emerged irrespective of state encouragement; yet, they might not have become as effective without the overt or more discreet backing of some segments of the state apparatus, or without the financial, logistical, and military support from foreign states. In Egypt during the 1970s, for instance, the governor of Assiut, Muhammad Uthman Isma`il, provided such protection to local Islamists, particularly those active on the university’s campus, that he came to be known as the “Godfather of *the Jama`at al-Islamiyya*,” the group that would be responsible for much Islamist violence in the 1980s and 1990s.

2. In many relevant instances, states did not support VE groups per se; instead, they nurtured more amorphous and heterogeneous movements within which radical elements were active. Over time, these more radical groups and individuals frequently became increasingly autonomous and assertive. They separated themselves from the broader social movement of which they initially were merely a component, and began to strike at the state -- and, often, at those within society at large whom they came to define as their enemies. In Pakistan, for instance, as discussed further below, many VIE groups that in recent years have targeted Pakistani officials, politicians, and institutions were once proxies of the Pakistani government, and used by it both domestically and in the broader region. Similarly, during the 1980s, the Afghan mujahideen (“holy warriors”) were able to resist the Soviet occupation thanks to the funding, logistical support, intelligence and weapons that they received through an arrangement that involved Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and the United States (with Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence acting primarily as a conduit for the delivery of Saudi funding and American weapons). During the 1990s, many of those same mujahideen groups became a source of militants determined to strike at the US and/or Saudi Arabia (from 2002 onward, many also turned against the Pakistani government).

3. Side by side with the “political space” they granted to a broad variety of Islamist groups, many Muslim regimes from the 1970s onward also began to tolerate, and sometimes they even deliberately

encouraged, a progressive “Islamization” of public discourse and public life. They typically did so for a variety of reasons: to combat the influence of militant secular movements (see below); to harness new bases of legitimacy in the wake of the discrediting of the secular foundations upon which they had sought to anchor their rule in the immediate post-independence era; or to keep up with the growing resonance of religious ideas and endeavors at the grassroots level. Be that as it may, the gradual Islamization of public life to which these regimes contributed created an environment that made it easier for VIE groups to recruit and operate.

4. The scenarios summarized above broadly played themselves out in a variety of settings from the 1970s through the 1990s. Egypt provides a case in point. During the 1970s, President Sadat’s policy of releasing former members of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) from jail, and his providing them with increasing freedom to maneuver, benefited the wide variety of currents that were represented inside the MB -- including radical ones. Particularly detrimental in this regard was Sadat’s implicit reliance on Islamist groups to combat the influence of leftist and pan-Arab elements on university campuses in general, and within student associations in particular. That policy was critical to the ability of Islamists to establish power bases in universities. As Egypt moved into the 1980s, its government also endeavored to co-opt Islamic rhetoric, in an effort to contain the (different) political challenges represented by both “mainstream” and “radical” Islamists. That approach, and the tolerance which the Mubarak regime showed toward the spread of fairly strict (“neo-Salafi”) religious views throughout society, are frequently blamed for having contributed to anti-Coptic violence and growing religious intolerance.

Likewise, in Indonesia, the Islamization of political discourse during the rule of President Suharto (1966-1998) fostered communal tensions and radical Islamist movements. Pakistan provides an even more dramatic illustration of the same processes. Beginning with the administration of General Zia ul-Haq (1977-88), the Pakistani state strove to appease and co-opt religious parties, Muslim clerics and Islamist intellectuals. It Islamized law and infused its discourse with Islamic vocabulary and symbols. It turned a blind eye to, indeed even encouraged, connections between Islamist groups and the military-intelligence apparatus. It granted "mainstream Islamist parties" and "religious intellectuals" unprecedented freedom of operation. It encouraged the proliferation of religious schools, partially in an effort to make up for the inability of the public-education system to respond to the demand emanating from poor families. Like other regimes in the Muslim world, it began to rely on a variety of grassroots religious groups and organizations to assume part of the burden for social-services delivery. In addition, it allowed Islamists into the higher echelons of the civil service, the military and intelligence agencies. Most importantly, as discussed further below, it used extremist Islamist groups as instruments of its foreign policy in both Afghanistan and Indian-controlled Kashmir.

That policy ultimately came back to haunt President Musharraf, who himself had longstanding connections to some Islamists, and seized power in October 1999 with the blessing of many of them. After all, the 1999 coup that brought down the elected civilian government of Nawaz Sharif received the enthusiastic support of the country's main Islamist parties, and it was orchestrated and carried out by the military high command, in which pro-Islamist elements were influential. In the wake of both 9/11 and the December 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament by the VE Pakistani group *Lashkar-e Taiba* (LeT), Musharraf was forced to crack down on VIE groups. By then, however, it already had become clear that the Pakistani government’s previous complacency and politically expedient policies toward violent Islamist activists could no longer be sustained. They had bred religious extremism at all levels of society, fueled increasingly bloody sectarian clashes between the country's Shiite and Sunni populations, empowered radical elements, and, more generally, were threatening to destabilize the country.

5. Regimes, or well-placed individuals within them, initially may support VE groups (or more amorphous tendencies within which such groups are active) for one of the following reasons. These reasons are not mutually exclusive; indeed, several of them frequently are at work (and, when that is the case, VE groups enjoy particularly wide room within which to maneuver).

a. Ideological or Personal Affinity

Certain ministers, senior military or intelligence officers, or other officials (for instance, the governor of a particular region) may feel a degree of identification with the ideology of VIE organizations, or share some of these organizations' objectives. They also may be connected to violent extremists through family ties, tribal or clan-based affiliations, or other forms of personal relationships that generate a sense of mutual obligation and commitment (including the perception that it is one's moral obligation to use one's influence to provide protection to violent extremists).

b. Domestic Political Maneuvering

Senior decision-makers also may provide tacit or explicit support to VE groups -- or to broader, more amorphous political tendencies within which such groups are active -- in order to counter-balance perceived domestic political threats. In the MENA region, for instance, from the 1950s onward, several Islamist movements and actors were encouraged -- sometimes discreetly, and sometimes more openly so -- as a counterweight to a variety of leftist and militant pan-Arab nationalist forces. Individuals affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, or activists with similar ideological inclinations, were given some freedom to organize and publicize their ideas. In some cases, they even were allowed to entrench themselves within segments of the state apparatus (e.g., in the ministry of education), and they used those positions to disseminate their views, reward their supporters, and gradually expand their influence in society at large. In several instances as well, a three-way de facto alliance was concluded that brought together senior power holders, leaders of the religious establishment, and activists with Islamist sympathies. This alliance was rarely free of tensions and conflicts, but it often survived the test of time because of those three actors' perceived shared interests in containing leftist or pan-Arab influences.

A case in point during the early 1970s was President Sadat's policy of releasing from jail members of the Muslim Brotherhood who had been incarcerated under his predecessor. As mentioned above, that policy was driven, to a significant extent, by Sadat's attempt to use religion as a counterweight to Nasserite and leftist influence -- and in particular by his desire to neutralize such influences within the student body.

Along similar lines, from the late 1970s onward, the Israeli government provided various forms of encouragement to what eventually became Hamas in 1987. The policy reflected a desire to build up a counterweight to the secular PLO, and to undermine support for Yasir Arafat among the Palestinians. In this instance as well, particular emphasis was placed on university campuses, and it was in that context that the Islamic University of Gaza progressively emerged as a source of Islamically-inclined activists, who later on would form the cadres of Hamas. By discreetly nurturing what it hoped would become a conservative religious alternative to the dominant Palestinian political organizations at the time -- Fatah, the Palestinian Communist Party (PCP), and the PLO's leftist factions, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) -- the Israeli government was engaged in classical efforts to "divide-and-rule."

Once again, the point is not that Hamas was a "creation" of the Israeli government -- it was primarily, instead, a product of profound political and socioeconomic transformations affecting the Palestinian population at large, and it also reflected the emergence of a new generation of activists of generally lower socioeconomic background within the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. Still, there is no denying Israel's direct and indirect roles in the rising influence of Islamically-inclined activists in the West Bank and Gaza during the 1980s. Had they not enjoyed the blessing of Tel Aviv, those activists would not have been able to organize, engage in a broad variety of educational, social and welfare activities (especially in refugee camps and poor urban areas), hold rallies, publish, and even have their own radio station (all benefits that Israel denied to Fatah, the PCP, and smaller left-wing nationalist movements bent on challenging the Israeli occupation). In 1973 and 1976, respectively, the Israeli government allowed the emergence of "charitable" organizations, such as the Islamic Center (*al-Mujamma` al-Islami*) and the

Islamic Association (*al-Jam`iyyat al-Islamiyya*). Both were created by Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, who would establish Hamas in 1987, and remain its spiritual leaders until his assassination by Israel in March 2004. Both also quickly became the dominant force in student elections at the Islamic University of Gaza, which by the mid-1980s had grown into the largest university in the occupied territories, with some 4,500 students.

From 1977 onward, the Likud government of then-Prime Minister Menachem Begin stepped up Israel's discreet support for Islamic activists. In 1981, it made no effort to prevent the establishment of the Young Women's Islamic Association (*al-Jam`iyyat al-Shabbat al-Muslimat*), which subsequently would become the primary source of support for Hamas among women. Nor did it try to stop the flow of funds from Saudi Arabia and the smaller Gulf states to Yassin and his associates. More generally, as one of the most authoritative sources on Hamas has shown, "while nationalists were deported or imprisoned, Brotherhood activist could act with relative impunity. State funds were channeled into mosques and religious schools, and the Brotherhood's institutions found few obstacles in their way."⁹³ When in 1981 Israel created the so-called "Village Leagues" on the West Bank, in a blatant attempt to promote an alternative leadership to the PLO there, it actively encouraged the involvement of Yassin and his followers in those "leagues" (which consisted of local councils of Palestinians handpicked by the Israeli occupation authorities).

INDIA AND SIKH MILITANCY

India in the early 1980s provides yet another illustration of the unintended consequences of support for militant groups by a government seeking to neutralize domestic political threats. In 1980-81, then-Prime Minister Indira Gandhi faced a serious political challenge from the militant Akali Dal movement, which wanted to create an independent state (to be called Khalistan) for Sikhs. At that time, the Akali Dal was the leading force among Sikh activists, and it played a dominant role in the government of Punjab. Together with her younger son, Sanjay, many other key leaders of the Congress Party, and the President of India, Indira Gandhi tried to harness Sikh cleric Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, who at the time was just emerging on the national scene, to undermine support for the Akali Dal. Even though Bhindranwale had incited sectarian violence in 1978 and had been implicated in at least one prominent murder in 1980, the government in New Delhi hoped that his Dal Khalsa (Group of the Pure) movement could emerge as a counterweight to the Akali Dal, and create further divisions among Sikhs, especially in the Punjab.

Instead, the Indian government's support for Bhindranwale gave added momentum to radical Sikh militancy which New Delhi soon found itself unable to control. In 1981, Bhindranwale again was implicated in the murder of one of his critics. By then, he was operating largely autonomously. He had made common cause with the *Akali Dal*, taken over the leadership of their Khalistan movement, and had become a force to reckon with in the Punjab. When the Indian government belatedly sought to rein in him, he turned against it, orchestrating attacks on Hindus in the process. By 1983, Indira Gandhi felt compelled to suspend the Punjab government, and announced that the province would be ruled directly from New Delhi. Bhindranwale's response was to set up an alternative government inside the Sikhs' most sacred shrine, the Golden Temple in Amritsar. By then, Bhindranwale had "switched" state sponsors, and was receiving arms, ammunitions, and logistical support from Pakistan's ISI, which was seeking to create chaos in Punjab, and destabilize India more generally.

After several months of deadlocked negotiations, in June 1984 Indira Gandhi finally sent the Indian Army inside the Golden Temple, in an operation code-named Blue Star. During the two-day protracted battle that followed, Bhindranwale was killed -- as were two thousand others, including many innocent worshippers. The extensive damage to the Golden Temple, the loss of hundreds of innocent Sikhs' lives, and pictures of India soldiers stomping on the Sikhs' holiest ground created enormous anger and outrage within the Sikh community, not only in India but within the Sikh Diaspora. It ultimately led to the assassination of Gandhi by two of her Sikh bodyguards on October 31, 1984. More generally, it fueled violent extremist currents among Sikhs, especially in the form of the International Sikh Youth Federation (ISYF), which ironically operates primarily out of Lahore, and has forged strong ties to the VE Pakistani group Lashkar-e Taiba (on which more below) and Pakistan's ISI.

⁹³ Jeroen Gunning, *Hamas in Politics: Democracy, Religion, Violence*, New York, 2008, pp. 33-34.

c. Strategic Regional and International Objectives

The past three decades also offer numerous examples of VIE groups which, in their initial stages at least, were carefully nurtured by foreign states that sought to use them as instrument of their foreign policies. In fact, that has been true of the major VIE groups currently active in Southwest Asia. In the past several years, many of these groups have been striking at governments that once provided them with the very support that was critical to their emergence and development.

The Afghan resistance to the Soviet occupation during the 1980s was the incubator for most of these movements. As discussed above, US funding, weapons and logistical support for the mujahideen (prompted by Washington's desire to deal a humiliating blow to Moscow) benefited groups that subsequently turned their efforts against the United States. Saudi policies, too, ultimately backfired on Riyadh. During the 1980s, the Saudi government funded the mujahideen to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars a year, in an attempt to export its Wahhabi views and ensure its ability to influence events in a country, Afghanistan, which the Saudis viewed as critical to their security. Fear of Iranian influence in Afghanistan was a particularly significant driver of Saudi policies; partially as a result, the kingdom concentrated on supporting radical Sunni militants hostile to Shiite-dominated organizations and/or Iran. In the early-to-mid 1990s, when it supported the emergence of the Taliban movement (the leadership of which was dominated by pro-Wahhabi Pashtuns), Saudi Arabia hoped to ensure an Afghan government friendly to Riyadh. In the end, however, the Taliban regime sheltered al-Qaeda (which by then was irremediably hostile to the Saudi regime and determined to bring it down), and, in 1998, it turned down Riyadh's request to hand over Ben Laden to the Saudi authorities.

The story of Pakistan's efforts to harness VIE groups to do its bidding in both Afghanistan and India-controlled Kashmir provides an even more dramatic (and still on-going) example of blowback. In fact, most of the VE groups that have targeted the Pakistani state in recent years were once proxies of it. *Lashkar-e Taiba* (LeT), formed in 1986, was enlisted first to promote Pakistani interests in Afghanistan. It operated openly, had recruitment centers in cities and towns across the country, and its leadership had close ties to the Pakistani security establishment. With financial and military support from the ISI, it funneled volunteers to participate in the Afghan jihad. When the latter came to an end in 1989, LeT's activities were re-directed to Indian-controlled Kashmir, where LeT guerrillas fought alongside Pakistani soldiers in 1999. It was not until 9/11, the highlighting of links between LeT and al-Qaeda by Western intelligence agencies, US pressure on Musharraf to crack down on the organization, and LeT's attack on the Indian Parliament in December 2001 that the Musharraf regime finally banned the group and arrested hundreds of its militants. Even then, the Pakistani government did not break all ties to LeT. For one, it allowed *Jamat-ud-Dawa* (JUD), LeT's sister and "more respectable" organization, to continue to operate. Many LeT facilities were simply converted into JUD offices, and many of its cadres "repackaged themselves" from "mujahideen" into "social workers" (affiliated with JUD). Meanwhile, just as JUD continued publicly to deny any ties to LeT, it in practice operated as a cover for recruitment and activities by the latter, which also shifted many of its camps and operations away from large urban centers and into Pakistani tribal areas.

When in 2004 the Musharraf regime decided to wind down the Kashmiri jihad, many LeT cadres, especially younger ones, refused to accept that decision. By then, they had developed closer links to Al-Qaeda and/or the Pakistani or Afghani Taliban active in Pakistan's tribal areas, and they stepped up their involvement in the global jihad against the U.S. Many participated in operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, and/or orchestrated attacks against Pakistani officials. Some undoubtedly were involved in the November 2008 Mumbai terrorist attacks in India. Thus, within a few short years, LeT was profoundly transformed. A group that initially had been fighting as a state proxy within a fairly delineated theater (Kashmir-Afghanistan) became a far more autonomous organization, escaping the control of its earlier sponsor (though it may retain ties to "rogue" or former agents of the ISI), and with far greater regional ambitions.

This evolution epitomizes many of the points made in this section regarding the frequently unintended but critical role of state sponsorship in the genesis and development of VIE.

G. DISCREDITED GOVERNMENTS AND MISSING OR COOPTED LEGAL OPPOSITIONS

The combination of a thoroughly discredited government and a missing, “tamed” or co-opted legal opposition appears to be particularly conducive to the development of VE. Populations that view the existing order as bankrupt, and that do not believe that they can change or reform the political system through peaceful, legal means, provide an audience that is particularly susceptible to the message of VE organizations.

1. Illegitimate and Bankrupt Governments

If one focuses on the contemporary Muslim world, and in particular at those Muslim societies that have been particularly affected by VIE, it is possible to pinpoint the main sources of the “discredit,” “illegitimacy” or “bankruptcy” that afflict the governments in question, and to which the paragraph above alludes. Specifically, it appears that, in the eyes of their populations, the governments involved have failed miserably across the following three core areas.

a. In the social and economic sphere, they have fallen very short of delivering on their developmental promises. They have not provided adequate economic opportunities for their citizens. Through their macro-economic, fiscal and regulatory policies, they have failed to create the kind of environment required to generate enough jobs to absorb new entrants into the labor force. They have not offered their populations the education necessary to succeed in the global marketplace. They have proven unable or unwilling (or both) to control pervasive mismanagement and corruption in the allocation of scarce public resources. And they have failed to meet the needs of their populations for basic social services.

b. In the political sphere, they have displayed a propensity for repression and the capricious and arbitrary exercise of power. They have not delivered impartial justice, and have failed to ensure respect for basic political rights and civil liberties. They have not established mechanisms through which office holders can be held accountable. They have not put in place the institutions that can provide for effective and transparent administration and popular input into the decision-making process.

c. In the diplomatic, military, and international spheres, these governments have suffered humiliating military defeats; their respective voices have not carried much weight in international fora; and they consistently have proven unable to prevent, or bring to an end to, the victimization or demonization of Muslims around the globe. In other words, they have failed to supply some of the most fundamental political goods associated with statehood: physical security for citizens, a feeling of collective dignity, and a sense that one’s culture and civilization is granted proper respect on the international scene. The rhetoric of VIE organizations suggests that these failures may be the greatest source of the perceived “illegitimacy” and “bankruptcy” mentioned above. The sense that governments in Muslim countries have been impotent (specifically, that they have been unable to prevent the shedding of Muslim blood; to repeal actual or perceived foreign invasions in the cultural, political or military realms; and to ensure adequate respect for Muslim values and Islamic culture), and the widespread belief that the impotence in question is inherently tied to these governments’ humiliating readiness to comply with Western agendas, has been a critical driver of VIE. In the words of leading Arab commentator Rami Khouri, “the most potent intersection of radicalizing vectors is between an Arab citizen’s mistreatment by his or her own government, and seeing

other Muslims assaulted, mistreated, jailed and killed in their own homes by American, Israeli, or other foreign armies.”⁹⁴

(1) Insofar as military defeats are concerned, it is no accident that, beginning with Egypt, the development of radical Islam in the MENA region occurred in the wake of the 1967 defeat. The trouncing of several Arab armies on the battlefield of the six-day war, and the striking blow that it dealt to the legitimacy of the so-called “secular Arab nationalist regimes,” provided the context within which radical Islamist alternatives to these discredited regimes began to gain ground.

(2) With regard to the victimization and humiliation of Muslims, one of the most recurrent themes in the VIE narratives of the past thirty years involves shamefully ineffectual Muslim governments repeatedly failing to stand up to forces hostile to Muslims and/or Islam. From the perspective of radical Islamist ideologues, therefore, what is at stake is not merely the “war on Islam” -- it is also the failure of Muslim governments to resist that onslaught. Moreover, these governments are viewed as unable and/or unwilling to keep hostile forces at bay because of two congenital, intertwined flaws: they are not based on genuinely Islamic foundations, and they are led by individuals who are subservient to Western interests. As VIE voices portray it, this combination of impotence and collusion -- by governments that are Muslim in name only -- lies at the root of the ills that have befallen Islam and Muslims in the modern world.

3. Missing or co-opted legal oppositions

The likelihood that bankrupt and illegitimate regimes will generate VE is greatly enhanced when a legal opposition viewed as providing a credible alternative to those regimes is missing. Such an opposition may be lacking because the regime will not tolerate it (or decimated it). Alternatively, a legal opposition officially might exist, but it may be ineffectual due to one or several of the following factors:

- It is riddled with internal divisions and suffers from poor leadership and/or a lack of resources.
- It is thoroughly co-opted by the regime, or sufficiently penetrated by it to be easily manipulated;
- It operates within a set of formal and informal rules that do not allow it to exercise actual influence on decision-making processes, and to provide a mechanism for the representation of grassroots interests.

When a legal opposition is missing, or when it is so weak, manipulated, co-opted, or “boxed in” as to be seriously lacking in credibility and grassroots support, there will be a much greater temptation to resort to violent means to bring down bankrupt and illegitimate regimes. Put differently, left with a choice between, on the one hand, political apathy and withdrawal from formal political processes, and, on the other hand, participation in a game widely viewed as rigged, some individuals will opt for a third option: involvement in violent avenues and organizations that they have come to view as the only way of bringing down a thoroughly discredited order.

⁹⁴ Rami Khouri, “How to Fight Terrorists,” *The Daily Star* (Beirut, Lebanon), June 16, 2008.

PART FOUR: EXTREMIST PROFILES AND “AT-RISK POPULATIONS”: HISTORICAL TRENDS, RECENT PATTERNS, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT PRACTITIONERS

Both the scholarly literature and policy-oriented research have paid much attention to whether or not there is a distinctive “terrorist profile,” and to the related issue – critical to development practitioners – of whether seeking to identify “at-risk” or “vulnerable” populations is a productive endeavor. Some of the questions involved have been answered decisively, based on available empirical evidence; others remain the subject of much controversy, largely because one can reach very different conclusions depending on the data samples one selects. The current state of research suggests the following conclusions, which are developed below:

A. There is no single “terrorist personality.”

B. Until recently at least, most terrorists have shared some basic attributes in terms of socioeconomic background and educational achievement. These similarities have tended to cut across cultures, regions of the world and time periods

C. The socioeconomic and educational profile of that particular sub-set of violent extremists represented by Salafi jihadists has experienced significant changes since 2003. The trend toward increasing diversity in the socioeconomic background of global jihadists is likely to intensify in the years ahead.

D. While violent extremists do not share a single profile across countries and time periods, they may do so in a specific country and at a particular historical juncture. That situation has important analytical and programmatic implications for development practitioners.

A. The Elusive Search for a “Terrorist Personality”

Terrorists and other violent extremists do not exhibit common psychological attributes. They do not share a psychopathology. Analyses of the personal backgrounds of even those who have engaged in the most gruesome form of terrorism – suicide bombing – typically reveal strikingly normal lives, and no prior evidence of psychological dysfunctions. The readiness to kill for the sake of a particular political and/or agenda – and sometimes to sacrifice oneself in the process – cannot be predicted through potential insights into the psychology or personal history of those who commit these acts.

To be sure, as discussed earlier, some violent extremists have suffered similar traumatic experiences (e.g., personal victimization by security forces, or the loss of a loved one at the hands of those who ultimately are the target of the terrorist acts), but most have not. Some suicide bombers have acted, at least in part, in order to avenge the death of a loved one, or in an effort to reciprocate for pain inflicted on their communities. For others, however, the mere quest for martyrdom appears to have played a far more important role. Some were driven by messianic dreams and apocalyptic visions of mankind’s redemption (and by the perceived need for violence to bring it about). Others used violence mostly, if not exclusively, in order to secure territorial concessions, or for the sake of some other “worldly” tactical or strategic objectives. Some violent extremists have come from broken homes, in which neglect and/or domestic violence was routine, but others grew up in tightly knit, loving families. Some came from destitute neighborhoods marked by high divorce rates, poor or inexistent parenting, and a lack of exposure to positive role models. Others, however, came from environments in which none of those social ills could be

detected. Some violent extremists had very troubled upbringings and prior involvement with illegal activities, while others had unexceptional childhoods, remarkable only for their ordinariness. Some were shy and reserved, others very outgoing. Some were known as loners, others had many friends. Some always seemed to have a chip on their shoulders, while others were known for their positive outlook on life. Some had a prior history of mental and/or physical dissociation from society, but most did not. Some seemed to have suffered from a chronic existential crisis, while others, previously un-preoccupied with issues of identity and purpose in life, rather suddenly experienced a spiritual or political “awakening” and search for meaning that ultimately ended in violence.

The most detailed study of the personalities of the 9/11 hijackers, pieced together by journalist Terry McDermott, demonstrates how different those individuals were. Indeed, this example may serve as further validation of a previous consensus among most scholars that terrorists do not share a single psychological profile. For instance, McDermott describes Hani Hanjour (the pilot of the plane that smashed into the Pentagon) as “meek and quiet,” while he portrays Ziad al-Jarrah (who flew the plane that crashed in Pennsylvania) as an outgoing, happily married person. Mohammed Atta (who was at the command of the first plane to hit the World Trade Center) was, by all accounts, a restless and nervous person. By contrast, Marwan al-Shehhi, the pilot of the second plane, comes across as withdrawn and stern when he first arrived in Germany, before he developed into an “easygoing, robust, hail-fellow-well-met young man who loved to sing and laugh.”⁹⁵

All of this does not suggest that psychology – and, especially, psycho-sociology – do not have much to contribute to our understanding of VE – but it means that, to the extent they do, it is primarily through the insights they provide into small-group psychological dynamics, “groupthink” processes, and the sense of commitment and moral obligation to peers and friends that typically develop through prolonged and intense inter-personal interactions.

B. Socioeconomic and Educational Profiles of Violent Extremists: Historical Trends and Patterns

Global analyses of terrorism across regions and time periods demonstrate the deeply misleading – yet still all-too-common – view of violent extremists as being predominantly poor and uneducated. The empirical record suggests that:

- The correlation between income and educational levels on the one hand, and vulnerability to terrorism on the other is weak; and
- To the extent that such a correlation exists, higher levels of education and/or income tend to make individuals more susceptible to supporting, or being involved in, terrorism.⁹⁶

Certainly, the cadres of violent extremist movements – and, specifically, the architects of the most spectacular and deadliest terrorist attacks – have come from fairly privileged backgrounds. Though there are a few partial exceptions to this pattern (e.g., the IRA, ETA, and neo-Nazi groups in the United States), terrorism (especially at the level of leaders and key activists) traditionally has been an overwhelmingly

⁹⁵ Terry McDermott, *Perfect Soldiers: The 9/11 Hijackers – Who They Were, Why They Did It*, New York, 2005.

⁹⁶ Alan B. Krueger, *What Makes a Terrorist*. Princeton, 2007. Alan B. Krueger and David D. Laitin, “Kto Kogo?: A Cross-Country Study of the Origins and Targets of Terrorism.” In Philip Keefer and Norman Loayza (eds), *Terrorism, Economic Development, and Political Openness*, 2008, 148-173. David D. Laitin and Jacob N. Shapiro. 2008. “The Political, Economic and Organizational Source of Terrorism.” In Philip Keefer and Norman Loayza (eds), *Terrorism, Economic Development, and Political Openness*, 2008, 209-232.

middle class, and, in several cases (e.g., West Germany and Italy during the 1970s), even an upper-middle class endeavor.

By the same token, terrorists traditionally have been highly educated individuals – though variations do exist based on the overall ideological orientation of the groups involved (i.e., with the exception of violent Jewish extremists in Israel, far-left terrorists have tended to be better educated than their counterparts on the extreme right). Disgruntled, well-educated “counter-elites” that are thoroughly alienated from their surrounding society have played a leadership role in violent extremist movements across regions and time periods, from late nineteenth century Russian anarchists and Marxists to the transnational global Salafi jihadists of the 1990s, and from the Weather Underground in the US in 1970-71 to Aum Shinrikyo in Japan during the 1990s. To mention a few other recent examples:

- Most of the leaders of the Baader-Meinhof Gang in West Germany and the Red Brigades in Italy during the 1970s were university students or graduates (from well-educated middle and upper-middle class families). Baader was the son of a historian and Meinhoff the daughter of an art historian, while young college professors formed the core of the leadership of the Red Brigades (Richardson, 2006: 46).
- In Peru, Shining Path found the universities to be a fertile recruiting ground. Its leaders were overwhelmingly young academics, and Abimael Guzman himself was a professor of philosophy. Efraim Morote Best, the rector of the university at Ayacucho, in the central Peruvian Andes, where Guzman taught, was one of Shining Path’s main ideologues.
- Studies into the background of the first generation of Islamic radicals across the Middle East, during the 1970s and 1980s, consistently showed that most were university students or recent graduates – primarily in scientific and technical disciplines.⁹⁷
- Ever since the 1970s, Israel’s various ultra-Zionist, violent religious extremist organizations – *Gush Emunim* (“Bloc of the Faithful”), *Kach* (founded by Meir Kahane), and Temple Mount Faithful – have been shown to recruit predominantly among highly educated professionals with well-paid, high status jobs.⁹⁸
- Those al-Qaeda members who planned and/or carried out attacks against the United States through 9/11 were university graduates. Marc Sageman found that 63% of them had completed at least one year of university education (as compared with the average for the Third World, which hovers around 6%); one-third held a university degree; and 9% had a post-graduate degree. Among those members who were part of the central staff of al-Qaeda through the 1990s, 20% held a doctorate.⁹⁹
- All the masterminds of five of the worst anti-Western terrorist attacks in recent years – the World Trade Center bombing in February 1993, the bombings of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in August 1998, the September 11 attacks, the Bali nightclub bombings in 2002, and the London bombings on July 7, 2005 – had university degrees. If one examines the entire sample of

⁹⁷ Saad Eddin Ibrahim, “Anatomy of Egypt’s Militant Islamic Groups,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 12, 1980: 425-53. Gilles Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt: The Prophet and Pharaoh*, Berkeley, 1986.

⁹⁸ See Robert Friedman, *Zealots for Zion: Inside Israel’s West Bank Movement*, New York, 1992. Gershon Gorenberg, *End of Days: Fundamentalism and the Struggle for Temple Mount*, New York, 2002. Mark Juergensmeyer, *Global Rebellion: Religious Challenges to the Secular State, from Christian Militias to Al-Qaeda*, Berkeley, 2008. Ehud Sprinzak, *Brother Against Brother: Violence and Extremism in Israeli Politics from Altalena to the Rabin Assassination*, New York, 1999. See also the books and articles of Ian S. Lustick.

⁹⁹ Sageman, 2004.

the 79 terrorists responsible for those attacks, “more than half of the group [had] attended a university, making them as well educated as the average American: whereas 54 of the terrorists were found to have had some college education or to have graduated from university, only 52 percent of Americans can claim similar academic credentials.”¹⁰⁰

Empirically, it also is revealing that a relatively sudden and massive expansion of higher-education opportunities frequently precedes surges in violent extremist activity. The rapid and spectacular growth of higher education in Western Europe and North America during the 1960s does fit this pattern, as the examples of West Germany and Italy most vividly demonstrate. But the same process has been at work across the developing world, including among Muslim countries, in the past three decades. In Egypt, for instance, the tremendous expansion of university education during the 1960s and 1970s contributed to emergence of radical, violent Islamic groups that, after all, first appeared and developed on university campuses. Similar patterns have played themselves across the Islamic world – from Pakistan to the West Bank and Gaza. Universities in northern Nigeria also have been hot-beds of violent extremist thought.

If instead of examining only activists and leaders, one focuses on broader involvement with, or community support for, terrorist activities – or for groups that, at specific junctures, have engaged in such activities – conclusions identical to those above still hold. For instance, in a survey of 6,000 Muslims from 14 countries, the poorest respondents tended to be the *least* sympathetic to terrorism.¹⁰¹ Studies also consistently have shown that members and supporters of Hizballah in Lebanon and Hamas in Palestine tend to have a higher socioeconomic and educational profile than their fellow citizens.¹⁰² Krueger and Malecková studied the biographies of 129 deceased Hizballah “martyrs,” and, more broadly, they compared the standard profile of a Hizballah member to that of the average Lebanese.

The Link between Higher Education and Violent Extremism

The dynamics that underlie the relationship between the expansion of higher education and surges in violent/terrorist activity are varied and complex. To the extent that the pull exercised by ideas is central to most violent extremist movements' capacity to recruit, well-educated individuals are a natural source of supply of members for these movements. Sluggish economies and a disconnect between the educational curriculum and the needs of the labor market also make it harder for highly-educated individuals to secure jobs that provide them with the self-esteem, material compensation, as well as social respect and status to which they may feel entitled. In short, frustrated expectations may play a key role in the radicalization of university graduates with poor employment prospects. On the “demand-side,” it is easy to understand why terrorist organizations would put a premium on trying to recruit high achievers driven by ideas. The very challenges associated with building, operating, and sustaining a terrorist organization, evading detection by law enforcement and security agencies, securing needed resources, making sure that individuals will remain committed to the cause despite the many obstacles in their way and the costs they will incur, and carrying out logistically complicated attacks make it critical for the organization to be able to draw on a pool of skilled and driven individuals. It is why some of the better organized and more effective terrorist groups are highly selective. As one Hamas leader told a U.N. relief worker in the West Bank and Gaza Strip during the late 1990s, “Our biggest problem is the hordes of young men who beat on our doors, clamoring to be sent on suicide missions. It is difficult to select only a few” (Hassan 2001: 36). Along similar lines, Sageman underscores that al-Qaeda never really engaged in “recruiting” per se, but that it, instead, let individuals reach out to it to, in effect, “apply” to the organization. He then highlights how selective al-Qaeda actually was, at least during the 1990s, when it turned down numerous volunteers or diverted them to conflict zones of lesser importance.

¹⁰⁰ Peter Bergen and Swati Pandey, “The Madrasa Scapegoat,” *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 29, 2006: 118.

¹⁰¹ Christine Fair and Husain Haqqani, “Think Again: Islamist Terrorism.” *Foreign Policy*, January 2006.

¹⁰² Many analysts and commentators have objected to the description of Hizballah as a “terrorist” organization, noting that the overwhelming majority of its actions have not involved the deliberate targeting of civilians for political purposes, but have been directed at occupying forces or foreign troops deployed on Lebanese soil. Still, it is noteworthy that Hizballah introduced the practice of suicide bombings to the Middle East. Its most famous attack took place in October 1983, when a Shiite suicide bomber affiliated with the organization slammed a truck into the U.S. Marines Barracks in Beirut, killing 241 American servicemen. Subsequently, Hizballah resorted to suicide missions through 1999, overwhelmingly against Israeli troops occupying southern Lebanon.

They noted that the poverty rate was slightly lower among Hizballah members than in the population at large, and that Hizballah militants killed during attacks were significantly better educated than the average Lebanese. Specifically, in their sample, 50 percent of those engaged in what they described as a terrorist act had received an education beyond the secondary school level, as opposed to 15 percent for the general population.¹⁰³ Considering that, during the period under consideration, both income and educational levels for Shiites as a whole remained lower than for the average Lebanese citizen, these data provide added evidence that, within a given population, perpetrators of violent extremist activities tend to be better off and more educated than the norm.

Similar conclusions apply to Hamas, for which a larger body of evidence exists, since there is fairly detailed data and analysis of Palestinian terrorists attacks in Israel and the occupied territories from 1987 (beginning of the first intifada) to 2002 (nearly two years into the second intifada). Findings from that research suggest that Palestinians who carried out suicide bomb attacks during that period were less likely to come from impoverished families, and more likely to have complete high school and attended college, than was true of the general Palestinian population (even after one controls for age and region of residence). Detailed examinations of the personal trajectories of individual Palestinian suicide bombers are consistent with those results. For instance, from 1996 to 1999, Nasra Hassan, an international relief worker, interviewed nearly two hundred and fifty Palestinians who belonged to one of the following categories: they had volunteered for a suicide mission but had been unable to complete it; they were relatives of dead bombers; or they were the men who had trained and prepared volunteers for an attack. Summarizing the profile of suicide bombers that emerged from her interviews, Hassan emphasizes that “none of [them] were uneducated, desperately poor, simple-minded, or depressed. Many were middle class and, unless they were fugitives, held paying jobs... Two were the sons of millionaires.”¹⁰⁴

Claude Berrebi’s more detailed analysis of the background of 48 suicide bombers affiliated with Hamas and Islamic Jihad confirm Hassan’s conclusions. Only 14 percent of those suicide bombers came from families below the poverty line, while approximately 32 percent of the population of the West Bank and Gaza lived below that threshold. Similarly, nearly 60 percent of the suicide bombers had graduated from high school, as opposed to fewer than 15 percent for the general population.¹⁰⁵ Studies of broader Palestinian support for suicide attacks confirm those findings. For instance, three surveys (conducted in, respectively, 1999, 2001 and 2005) of Palestinian public opinion in the West Bank and Gaza showed that income and education levels were “modestly, but positively correlated with support.”¹⁰⁶

C. The Evolving Socioeconomic and Educational Profiles of Salafi jihadists

If, instead of examining violent extremists in general, one focuses on those of the SJ variety, one critical finding emerges from recent field research: since about 2003, evidence suggests a very significant lowering of the socioeconomic and educational background of the (increasingly self-recruited and self-radicalized) individuals who either have claimed allegiance to al-Qaeda, or generally have been analyzed as part of the TSJ movement. More generally, the profile of individuals loosely affiliated with the TSJ movement is changing rapidly, in line with the mutations undergone by that movement itself. To place these conclusions in their proper historical perspective, it is helpful to consider Marc Sageman’s argument that the TSJ

¹⁰³ Alan B. Krueger and Jitka Malecková, "Education, Poverty and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection?" *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Vol. 17, 2003: 119-144.

¹⁰⁴ Nasra Hassan, "An Arsenal of Believers." *The New Yorker*, November 19, 2001, 36.

¹⁰⁵ Claude Berrebi, "The Causes and Consequences of Terrorism." Doctoral dissertation, Department of Economics, Princeton University, 2004.

¹⁰⁶ Scott Atran, 2008.

movement has played itself out in three successive waves, and that the socioeconomic profile of its militants has evolved accordingly.¹⁰⁷

1. The Old Guard

The first wave unfolded during the 1980s. Sageman refers to the global jihadists of that era as “the old guard”:

- They traveled to, and many fought the Soviets in, Afghanistan.
- They came to form the core of what Sageman refers to as “Al-Qaeda Central” (i.e., al-Qaeda as a hierarchically-structured and centrally-controlled organization, as opposed to the broader, more amorphous and fluid social movement into which al-Qaeda later evolved).
- Many knew each other personally, and were intensely loyal to one another (sometimes because marriage relationships came to reinforce the strong bonds they already had forged while fighting together).
- The most senior among them became Bin Laden’s key advisers and operatives.

The old guard hailed from predominantly upper and middle class backgrounds. It also represents, by far, the best-educated wave; over 60 percent in Sageman’s sample had completed college, and many among them held doctoral degrees.¹⁰⁸

2. The Middle Generation

The second wave of global jihadists consists of those who joined in the bandwagon of the TSJ movement during the 1990s. They were inspired by what they viewed as the “achievements” of the old guard (including, as they saw it, defeating a superpower in Afghanistan). They also were fired up by what they came to perceive as a worldwide war on Islam. In many cases as well, as discussed earlier, they were “in search of thrills, fame, and glory ... wanted to impress their friends ... [and take part in] a group adventure”¹⁰⁹ Following Bin Laden’s return to Afghanistan in 1996, many underwent training in the al-Qaeda camps, and, from there, they were dispatched to fight in Bosnia, Chechnya and Kashmir. The second wave came to an end in the Fall of 2001, following the US attack on Afghanistan and the destruction of the safe haven (and training camps) which Al-Qaeda had established there. Sageman suggests that the socioeconomic background of members of this second wave was predominantly middle class. Most of them at least had begun college, though many dropped out – often in order to join the TSJ movement.¹¹⁰ There does appear to have been significant regional variations; for instance, second-wave members in Indonesia (as reflected in the profile of *Jemaah Islamiyyah* militants) appear to have come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and to have been less well educated.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Sageman, op cit, 2008, 48-50.

¹⁰⁸ Sageman, 2008, 58.

¹⁰⁹ Sageman, 2008, 70.

¹¹⁰ Sageman, 2008, 58.

¹¹¹ Atran (2008) has analyzed the background of all known militants involved in attacks which *Jemaah Islamiyyah* (JI) operatives carried out between 1999 and the second Bali bombing in 2005 (his sample, therefore, straddles Sageman’s second and third waves). He found out that “of about 180 people implicated in JI attacks, 78 percent worked in unskilled jobs, and only 23 percent had education beyond high school.”

3. The New Generation: Overall Profile

The third wave of global jihadists began with the invasion of Iraq in March 2003, and is still unfolding. There is much evidence to suggest that, within this new generation of Salafi jihadists, much poorer, far less educated, and more socially marginal individuals play a far more active role than was the case for the previous two waves.¹¹² Few have completed high school – indeed, many dropped out from the school system with little more than very rudimentary literacy skills. Within that third wave, those who have carried out some of the most spectacular attacks associated with the TSJ movement of the past several years have not hailed predominantly from the relatively well-integrated middle-class neighborhoods from which first- and second waves were recruited; instead, they have come from far more forbidding, destitute quarters characterized by high levels of social fragmentation and isolation. Partially as a by-product of those characteristics, the new wave of SJ terrorists tends to have far more limited horizons than its predecessors; few of its members ever have traveled abroad – indeed, many have spent their entire lives in the same peri-urban area. Finally, there also is evidence that the new generation of global jihadists is more prone to having been involved in petty crime and illicit activities (e.g., smuggling, drug dealing, theft, extortion, and racketeering) unrelated to the global jihad before it became involved with SJ organizations. Though the generalizations above are based on still limited data, the evidence to support them includes the following.

a. While there is no single profile of Moroccan youth prone to embrace SJ ideas, the vast majority of those among them who have carried out suicide attacks inside the kingdom since May 2003 have hailed from the squalid shantytowns of the Greater Casablanca area. These particularly impoverished and often illiterate youth do not seem to have been motivated by a clear agenda.¹¹³

b. Field research carried out in Mauritania in May 2008 provided useful information on the background of the at-risk population in that country. Interviews of experts, as well as biographical data on those arrested for involvement in violent extremist activities, showed that the vast majority of those attracted to SJ ideas were young (15-25 year old), second-generation urban dwellers, living in the peri-urban areas of Nouakchott. Though they were not among the poorest inhabitants of the capital's more dilapidated neighborhoods, they were of very modest socioeconomic background. While most had completed primary school and had spent some years in the second-school system, only a handful among them had completed high school.¹¹⁴

c. The generally lower socioeconomic and educational background of the new generation of global jihadists also can be observed in Saudi Arabia, as reflected in the biographies of Saudi militants who took part in the terrorist campaign that began in the kingdom in May 2003, and continued through 2004 (before the movement was neutralized, at least temporarily, by the Saudi authorities' forceful crackdown on it). Analysis by independent experts as well as two studies conducted (in, respectively, 2003 and 2007) by the Saudi Ministry of Interior reveal that a majority of those involved were from middle class or lower middle class backgrounds.¹¹⁵ Most of them only had a high school education or less; many had begun to study at a university, but subsequently had dropped out. At the time they joined the TSJ movement, they either were

¹¹² Atran, 2008; Sageman, 2008.

¹¹³ For elaboration, see Guilain Denoeux, "Some Reflections on the Drivers of Salafi Jihadi Violence in Morocco." Prepared for USAID by MSI, July 2008.

¹¹⁴ For elaboration, see Guilain Denoeux and Zeric Smith, "Mauritania Pilot – CT and Development." Prepared for USAID/AFR and MSI, May 30, 2008.

¹¹⁵ By contrast, Saudi members of the first and even second waves came from fairly privileged socioeconomic backgrounds (and most of them planned or carried out attacks while living overseas).

unemployed or moving frequently from one job to another. Interestingly, there were hardly any engineers, doctors or economists in the sample, and very few seemed overqualified for the jobs they held.¹¹⁶

4. The New Generation: Elaboration and Caveats

a. The overall profile, sketched above, of the new (post-2003) generation of SJ underscores the growing relevance of social marginality and isolation as a driver behind SJ. By and large, first- and second-wave militants were “marginal” only in the sense that they progressively had cut themselves off from their original environment.¹¹⁷ They appear gradually to have felt out of place in, and estranged from, the society in which they lived; that was how they came to drift into groups which, themselves, became increasingly secluded from mainstream society. Still, most of the individuals in question originally came from well-integrated neighborhoods, communities, and families. That generally is not the case for many within the new generation of global jihadists – whether they live in the Muslim Diaspora of Western Europe, in North Africa, the Middle East, or elsewhere. In short, social exclusion looms as a more significant driver than it used to be – whether it is because it fuels rage toward, and a propensity to lash out at, “the system;” because it promotes a tendency to become involved in illicit activities and networks which, in turn, often provides the gateway into VE; and/or because it feeds into the search for adventure and fame (or, at the very least, for an escape from one’s bleak and dreary conditions) into which the TSJ movement has been able to tap.

b. Within the new generation of global jihadists, that particular segment which consists of second-generation Muslim immigrants to Western Europe presents at least two distinctive features. First, by virtue of where it lives, it generally is at least slightly better off materially than its counterparts in North Africa, the Middle East, and Southwest Asia.¹¹⁸ The Muslim Diaspora component of the new generation is even more distinctive with regard to the prominent role of converts in it. In the Netherlands, the so-called Hofstad group (with which Mohammed Bouyeri, the murderer of Dutch filmmaker Theo Van Gogh, was affiliated) included many converts. Muriel Degauque, believed to be the first European Muslim woman to carry out a suicide attack (on US troops, in Baqubah, Iraq, in 2004), grew up in what by all accounts was a supportive, loving Catholic family, near the factory town of Charleroi in Belgium.¹¹⁹ He notes that, strikingly, “there are more converts in Al-Qaeda operating in the West than there are individuals of Middle Eastern origin in the strict sense (i.e., excluding North Africa).” He adds that “in nearly all the A-Qaeda and affiliated cells operating outside the Middle East there are a large number of converts who often occupy key positions (which is a unique case in the annals of radical Islamic movements). From 10 to 25% of activists are converts.”¹²⁰ The largest source of religious conversions, in turn, appears to be European women who marry Muslim immigrants or second-generation members of Europe’s Muslim Diaspora.¹²¹

¹¹⁶ Hegghammer, 2006; Atran, 2008.

¹¹⁷ In several cases, that included the mosque where they originally might have met and prayed, but which they came to denounce as part of the “un-Islamic” environment in which they lived.

¹¹⁸ This characteristic suggests that relative deprivation and issues related to perceived discrimination in the labor market may represent a more significant driver for that component of the TSJ movement.

¹¹⁹ Roy, 2008, 148-9.

¹²⁰ Roy, 2008, 146.

¹²¹ As an insightful analysis of the personal trajectory of Muriel Degauque noted, “while a vast majority of those conversions are pro forma gestures for moderately religious in-laws, a small but growing number are women who willingly adopt the conservative comportment of their fundamentalist husbands. Most of those [...] are motivated by spiritual quests or are attracted to what they regard as an exotic culture. But for some, conversion is a political act, not unlike the women who joined the ranks of South American Marxist rebels in the 1960s and 1970s [the Palestinian women radicals of the same period also fit that profile].” The author quotes experts on European female converts who observe that “they are people rebelling against a society to which they feel they don’t belong” and that “they are

c. The profile of the new generation of global jihadists should be approached with great caution. The TSJ movement remains a fast-moving target. Consequently, rapid changes in the constraints and opportunities that that movement faces (both worldwide and in specific countries) will continue to shape and reshape its social base. Profiles already have changed significantly over relatively short periods of time, and they are likely to continue to do so. More generally, in light of recent history and current dynamics, it seems reasonable to expect the following trends:

- Increasing diversity, overall, in the socioeconomic background of global jihadists (by contrast with the first and second waves, which tended to be far more homogenous). That phenomenon should take the form of significant differences both between various regions and countries, and within specific countries, and within particular local wings of an increasingly amorphous TSJ movement.¹²²
- The likelihood of dramatic shifts in the socioeconomic background of violent extremists will be higher in those countries that experience the most significant transformations in political and economic conditions. For instance, as discussed earlier, studies of Palestinian suicide bombers have shown that a majority of them during the 1990s and early 2000s were middle class, better educated than the average Palestinian, and that many held paying jobs. However, rage at the grassroots level is likely to spread to an ever widening array of constituencies as a result of the following developments: further deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Gaza and the West Bank; the continued fragmentation of political and social institutions; growing lawlessness, clan-based violence and chaos; the broader erosion of the very fabric of Palestinian society; persisting bitterness at the economic strangulation of Palestine and at the punishing of an entire people for the electoral choices they made in a free and fair election in January 2006; and continued unwillingness or inability of the international community address adequately the unfolding human tragedies. Certainly, the cumulative impact of these and other trends may be to enhance many Palestinians' vulnerability to the appeal and rhetoric of TSJ organizations, and to provide al-Qaeda with an opportunity to establish bases in Gaza and the West Bank – as happened in Lebanon, in the Palestinian camps of Nahr al-Barid and `Ayn al-Hilwe.¹²³
- One also should expect a rise in the number of groups that involve a “duality” of socioeconomic profiles: fairly well-educated individuals (high-school graduates and above) of middle- or lower-middle class backgrounds, cooperating in the planning and execution of terrorist acts with far more underprivileged, socially marginalized recruits, with little formal education. In other words, we may see more cases similar to that of the cell responsible for the March 2004 train attacks in Madrid. That cell, indeed, featured an eclectic mix of profiles. The “ideologue” in the group – Tunisian Sarhane Fakhret, who had moved to Madrid to pursue a doctorate in economics that he never finished – fits the profile of “first wave” members of the TSJ network. In background and outlook, however, other cell members were far more characteristic of the “third wave.” They

people searching through a religion like Islam for a sense of solidarity.” See Craig S. Smith, “Raised as Catholic in Belgium, She Died as a Muslim Bomber,” *The New York Times*, December 6, 2004.

¹²² Consider, for instance, the Moroccan example. As discussed earlier, all those responsible for suicide bombings inside Morocco from May 2003 through 2008 shared a few basic characteristics: they were generally impoverished, relatively uneducated, and from shantytowns in the Greater Casablanca area. They do not seem to have been motivated by a clear political or religious agenda, and there is no indication that they ever regarded themselves as part of the local wing of a “Muslim vanguard” engaged in a worldwide struggle. By contrast, a majority of those Moroccans who, after 2004, made their way to Iraq and died there in suicide attacks against Shiites or US and Iraqi forces came instead overwhelmingly from Tetouan, did not hail from the poorest sections of Moroccan society, often had completed high school and, in several cases, had at least some university training.

¹²³ Roy, 2008, 155.

consisted primarily of poorly educated individuals who had grown up together in the overcrowded and disheveled Mezwak neighborhood of Tetouan. One of them, Jamal Ahmidan (nicknamed “El Chino,” i.e., the Chinaman) was a former small-time drug dealer and addict. It appears that individuals from impoverished backgrounds in Mezwak, who were connected to one another by friendship and family ties, were able to bond with Fakhret and his group of friends over shared grievances (foremost among which was the US occupation of Iraq and Spain’s contribution to the “coalition” there). A similar sense of disaffection and alienation, a related outlook on the world, and, most importantly, a common desire to “do something” about the grievances they shared, enabled these disparate individuals to overcome the considerable class and educational differences between them, and to motivate each other into orchestrating the deadliest terrorist attack between 9/11 and the November 2008 Mumbai attacks.

D. Debating the Concepts of “At-Risk” or “Vulnerable” Populations: Implications for Development Practitioners

Recent research has questioned the very wisdom and utility of seeking to pinpoint “at-risk” or “vulnerable” populations, arguing that any attempt at outlining the socioeconomic profile of populations susceptible to VE represents both an intellectual and a programmatic dead-end – and that, in fact, it can end up being a very counter-productive endeavor.¹²⁴ That argument should not be dismissed lightly, as it seeks to harness much relevant empirical evidence and rests on analytically sound propositions that are examined below. Yet, as also will be shown, it can be pushed too far – throwing the proverbial baby out with the bathwater – and may deprive development practitioners of an approach and a tool which, when used wisely and where/when it is appropriate, can prove critical to good programming.

1. Processes, Not Profiles?

a. The most compelling reason for dismissing generic efforts at identifying “vulnerable populations” relates to the great diversity in the psychological and socioeconomic profile of violent extremists in general. As discussed earlier, there is no distinctive terrorist psychological profile. As for the socioeconomic environments from which violent extremists stem, they vary greatly. Some violent extremists have come from extremely privileged backgrounds, most from middle class families, while others, still, have been poor; some have held doctoral degrees, many have been university graduates, but some also have had little formal education; some were once well integrated into mainstream society, while others long were known as “drifters” or “misfits;” some came from cohesive, supportive families, while others had a far more troubled upbringing; some suffered deep personal traumas that may have played a role in their subsequent turn to violence, but many did not; most have been unmarried young males, but many also have been married, often with children; some had no prior involvement in criminal activities, while others did; many had a secular upbringing, others came from backgrounds in which religion played a more prominent role; some were culturally uprooted and living abroad when they were radicalized, others rarely, if at all, had ventured beyond the confines of the town or neighborhood in which they had grown up; until recently, most suicide bombers were secular in origin,¹²⁵ but in the past several years individuals driven, in part at least, by religious fervor and bound up in a “culture of martyrdom” have played a more prominent role in suicide bombings.¹²⁶ The list goes on.

The diversity of psychological and socioeconomic backgrounds that characterizes violent extremists in general applies to those in the Muslim world in particular. As discussed above, since the US invasion of Iraq in March 2003, the socioeconomic profile of recruits to violent Islamic extremist groups has expanded

¹²⁴ see for instance Horgan 2008.

¹²⁵ Robert Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*, New York, 2005.

¹²⁶ For example, see Mohammed Hafez, 2007.

and diversified very significantly. Far less educated, often impoverished individuals, both employed and unemployed, have played a visible role in those groups. Many are too young to have gone to college, while numerous others have dropped out of school. Their horizons are much narrower than those of their predecessors. Consequently, it has become very difficult – and, indeed, probably not very meaningful – to generalize about the socioeconomic and educational background, the life circumstances and outlook, or the grievances and motivations, of those who join violent groups that profess an Islamic ideology.

b. Since, when violent extremists are considered as a group, there is so little in their psychological and socioeconomic background to tie them together, some authors have concluded that trying to identify vulnerable populations makes little empirical and logical sense. They argue, instead, that a far more fruitful line of inquiry involves concentrating on the processes, mechanisms, and group dynamics through which individuals are recruited, “self-recruited,” and/or radicalized (in both their beliefs and behavior).

John Horgan (2008), for instance, contends that it is far more productive to try to understand the “how?” (how individuals drift, or become pulled into, VE) than the why? (why do they become violent extremists?). By the same token, he suggests that the elusive search for the root causes of VE should give way to efforts to detect routes to extremism, and that instead of trying to identify profiles, terrorism experts ought to concentrate on the pathways to violence. The differences in the approaches involved are significant. If the core question is phrased as a search for “why?” the tendency will be to look for the “underlying conditions” that presumably push individuals into VE, and efforts typically also will be made to identify a profile of “vulnerable populations.” Horgan and others argue that, in light of the great diversity in the profiles of violent extremists, and considering the broad array of environments from which they come, the “why approach” leads to an impasse – for both scholars and CE experts. They suggest, instead, that reflecting on the processes and group dynamics through which individuals turn to VE has proven to be a far more compelling and rewarding approach.

Scott Atran echoes this view when, in his analysis of SJ (or *takfiri*) groups, he notes that focusing on the very broad, “macro-level” political and socioeconomic context within which these groups emerge is generally less helpful than closing in on the specific “scenes” or backdrops where they are forged.¹²⁷ Such “scenes” may be “standard,” longstanding physical ones, such as a particular neighborhood, university campus, school (or graduating class), mosque, group of buddies, soccer team, café and barbershop; or, increasingly, they may be virtual ones, such as online chat rooms. But in both cases, as developed at greater length in another section of this document, they are the critical spaces where the personal bonds and sense of mutual obligation and brotherhood are built that are essential to creating and/or solidifying commitment to violent extremist causes.

In support of such views, one should note that while VE has emerged and sometimes flourished in widely different socioeconomic and political environments, and while the profile of extremists varies significantly across regions and time periods, social networks and group dynamics consistently play a critical role in recruitment, self-recruitment and radicalization. From the Muslim Diaspora in Western Europe to the Middle East, and from North Africa to Indonesia, individuals usually become radicalized within small groups of friends, and through pre-existing personal relationships based on kinship, friendship, and, more and more often, the sense of camaraderie and brotherhood that can develop through the internet. In his new book, for instance, Marc Sageman (2008) underscores that post-2003 terror networks in the Muslim world appear to rely as heavily on friendship, kinship, or, increasingly, a sense of personal connection and loyalty developed through the internet as the two previous “waves” of global jihadists he had analyzed in an earlier volume (2004). It is, therefore, on such personal bonds and group dynamics (what makes them possible, and how they might be derailed or redirected) that the analyst ought to focus.

¹²⁷ Atran, 2008.

2. On the Proper Use of the “At-Risk” or “Vulnerable” Populations Concepts

The previous observations notwithstanding, development practitioners and counter-terrorism analysts alike should not reject the concept of “vulnerable” or “at-risk” populations out-of-hand, especially when they focus *on a specific case*. The fact that it is not possible to generalize about the profile of populations susceptible to VE across countries, regions, and time periods does not mean that one cannot detect such a profile for a particular country, location or movement at a given historical juncture. Of course, all the relevant caveats apply, including:

- One should not assume that a clear-cut profile necessarily will emerge from the evidence (indeed, in many cases, that will not be the case).
- In countries where extremist groups are not particularly active or are just emerging, there will be too few extremists to make profiling a meaningful exercise. It is critical that the analyst not generalize from too small a sample of terrorists or violent incidents.
- Profiles can change quickly.
- The background of members of a given movement in a particular country or region may be very different from the background of militants in that same movement in other locations.

Still, early on in the analysis of a particular country, the analyst should seek to determine whether or not one or several sub-sets of the overall population appear to be particularly susceptible to involvement in violent extremist activities. That this may be the case should not be assumed, but it should not be ruled out either. Given that resources for assessment, design and programming are limited, it is useful, when appropriate, to target the communities, institutions, and settings that appear to be producing a disproportionate percentage (relative to the overall population) of violent extremists. One way to pinpoint the at-risk population is to gain a broad sense of extremist groups operating in the country, to examine the profiles of those who have been recruited, or who appear to support violent extremists, and to determine whether or not there are commonalities among them. Relevant questions will include:

- What are the most common characteristics (if any) of those being recruited: age range; gender; socio-economic status; level of education; employment patterns; ethnic, clan, tribal or religious affiliation; residence and geographical origins?¹²⁸
- Is there evidence to suggest that many younger recruits went through similar types of “formative” or “core” experiences before turning to violence?¹²⁹
- Are there general pathways to radicalization and extremism which many young people share? If so, it will be useful to “map” such typical trajectories?

¹²⁸ For instance, do violent extremists tend to hail predominantly from certain types of areas, differentiating in particular between urban, rural, and peri-urban? If so, what is there about those areas that may account for why individuals from them are disproportionately represented among violent extremists?

¹²⁹ For instance, failure in school; lengthy periods of unemployment; time spent in prison; prior involvement in criminal or illicit activities; having been a direct victim of government repression and arbitrariness, or having a close relative who went through such an experience.

PART FIVE – UNDERSTANDING INDIVIDUAL MOVIVATIONS

1. Reflecting on the motivations that may prompt individuals to join or support violent extremist groups represents a critical step, both in the investigation of such groups, and in the development of appropriate policy responses to the challenges they pose. Inevitably, an examination of such individual motivations overlaps with the analysis, conducted in Parts One through Three, of broader, macro-level socioeconomic and political drivers. Where such overlap exists, it will be noted below, and the discussion will be adjusted accordingly. But there is value added to approaching drivers from the perspective of the individual, since such an approach provides additional insights into why someone may become involved in violent extremist groups, or may provide direct or indirect backing to them.

2. For analytical purposes, as well as in the interest of parsimony, individual motivations may be grouped into five main categories.

- a. Reasonably circumscribed, concrete and specific political, economic and social grievances;
- b. Much broader ideological (especially religious) objectives;
- c. The search for economic gain, or the pull exercised by prior involvement in illicit economic activities;
- d. Personal factors (e.g., the desire to avenge a loved one, or to follow a friend or relative on the path of jihad).
- e. Intimidation or coercion by peers or the community.

3. This typology of individual motivations is presented with an understanding that the following, critical caveats apply:

- a. Not all possible motivations fall into one of these five categories. Still, most do, and, for instance, for the purposes of an extremism assessment, the typology above should be able to capture the most relevant motivational factors.
- b. Actual motivations may cut across several of these categories, which should be approached as “ideal-types,” and are not mutually exclusive. For instance, an ideology can provide a tool for articulating and legitimizing fairly specific, concrete grievances. Indeed, some ideologies are built almost entirely around “grievance narratives” (i.e., a group’s worldview, and the manner in which it projects itself to others, may revolve predominantly around claims of perceived discrimination or mistreatment at the hands of other groups). Certainly, ideologies often gain traction, in part, because they offer an interpretative framework for grievances.¹³⁰ Still, for purposes of both analysis and programming, whenever possible it is useful to separate those instances where VE is fueled by fairly well-delineated grievances (particularly grievances over which it is possible to envision a compromise) from those situations where it is driven, instead, by much broader, more “absolutist” ideological arguments, especially those cast in religious terms.
- c. In real life as well, individual behavior typically reflects mixed motivations. Thus, for instance, strong commitment to an ideology need not exclude the search for economic advantage. Similarly,

¹³⁰ In the process, they typically amplify those grievances as well.

it often is difficult to separate personal factors from both deeply felt grievances and the appeal of a particular ideology. As discussed earlier, ideologies may resonate with particular individuals or communities because they are consistent with these individuals' or communities' own experiences (e.g., of discrimination, social exclusion, or oppression), and/or because they emphasize certain themes (e.g., social justice) that are central to the grievances that these individuals and communities may harbor toward "the system." It also is useful to consider the case of "lone-wolf avengers" -- i.e., individuals who engage in terrorist activities on their own, without explicit orders, and without the support or guidance of an organization. Such individuals typically are moved by both the appeal of a particular ideology or worldview, and by personal factors (e.g., they typically have a "chip" on their shoulder, feel easily slighted, and, due to their own history, they feel tremendous resentment and anger toward particular officials or institutions).¹³¹ Nonetheless, while we need to recognize that, in most situations, mixed motivations will be at play, for both analytical and programmatic purposes it is important to be able to separate those motivations that are critical from those that are less decisive.

A. Concrete, Specific Grievances

1. Some VE organizations or movements bring together individuals driven primarily by clearly delineated political, economic, and/or social grievances. In many instances, these grievances are "territorialized" -- i.e., they are tied to a particular piece of land that the organizations in question seek to "liberate." Fighting back against perceived or real foreign occupation represents the core objective of those organizations, which view the struggle within which they are engaged as geographically circumscribed. They concentrate their operations on a particular territory, and generally do not aim to bring conflict or violence to other arenas and theaters. By the same token, the identity of those whom they view as "the enemy" is usually well defined as well.

2. While not all grievances lend themselves to resolution, many do. Indeed, whenever grievances appear to play a leading role in individual motivations, whether or not they are solvable represents an important question for the analyst.

3. Where specific grievances are prominent, violence tends to be used primarily as a means. Even though, over time, militants may become addicted to violence -- and, as a result, the distinction between means and end may become blurred -- at least initially violence is intended to serve a specific political objective; there is a strategic or tactical rationale for resorting to it.¹³²

4. Side by side with engaging in violence, VE organizations that are driven primarily by narrow grievances also frequently involve themselves in social activities and the political process (at least where that is an option available to them).¹³³ They may have a "political" wing as well as a "military" one --

¹³¹ On "lone-wolf avengers," see Jessica Stern, *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill*, New York, 2003.

¹³² The line separating "violence as a means" and "violence as an end" may become blurred over time. The use of violence to achieve a specific political agenda, and as part of a limited territorial struggle, may end up creating a "culture of violence" that becomes a driver of its own. The dynamics at work in suicide terrorism may provide the most dramatic illustration of this process. David Brooks (2002), for instance, has highlighted the vicious effects of the self-perpetuating sub-culture of martyrdom that can be triggered by the "routinization" of suicide attacks. In his words, "suicide bombing is the crack cocaine of warfare. It doesn't just inflict death and terror on its victims; it intoxicates the people who sponsor it. It unleashes the deepest and most addictive human passions -- the thirst for vengeance, the desire for religious purity, the longing for earthly glory and eternal salvation. Suicide bombing isn't just a tactic in a larger war; it overwhelms the political goals it is meant to serve. It creates its own logic and transforms the culture of those who employ it."

¹³³ Hamas and Hizballah stand out as particularly salient illustrations of this phenomenon.

which is why they tend to be found in states, nor non-state entities such as Palestine, that do not have a complete monopoly over the use of violence. They may compete in elections, lobby the government, and cultivate ties to elected representatives, government officials, and key politicians. They may seek access to representative bodies, at both the local and national levels, in order to advance their agenda, obtain at least partial redress for some of the concrete local demands that drive them, and in an effort to place “their people” in positions of influence throughout the political and governmental systems. They also may be seeking to win followers, and/or live up to their own sense of religious or moral obligation, through an elaborate network of welfare, educational and health projects. Such endeavors provide large segments of the population with vital services that help alleviate poor service delivery by government agencies typically strapped for funds and riddled with incompetence and corruption.

In all those respects, the organizations in question generally operate within the confines of “the system” and play according to its rules. As a result, some of them may be deeply embedded in society, and are not adequately described merely as “terrorist” organizations. They also constitute a wide-ranging social and political movement, the popular legitimacy of which does not derive exclusively (and, in some cases, not even primarily) from the use of violence or “resistance” activities. From that perspective, they pose far more complex challenges for those seeking to contain their influence than terrorist organizations (such as al-Qaeda affiliated cells) that operate on the fringes of society, are devoid of mass following, are disconnected from local realities, and prey on populations far more often than they provide tangible support to them.

5. When VE organizations are fueled largely by specific grievances, the latter often fall in two main categories:

- Grievances that stem from political, economic and social dynamics that are, for the most part, indigenous to the country being examined. One may refer to those grievances as “homegrown” or “domestic.”
- Grievances that originate primarily in the regional and international system – and, more specifically, in the way in which that system impacts the country being analyzed. For lack of a better word, one may refer to those grievances as “foreign-stimulated.” As a rule, “foreign-stimulated grievances” tend to be harder to address. That is, in part, because they involve more players and more complicated dynamics over which domestic actors usually have little leverage. It is also because -- at least in the context of the modern Muslim world -- they often entail broader, more diffuse perceptions of existential cultural threats, or a profound dissatisfaction with global injustices and inequities.

6. Inevitably, real-life grievances often straddle the line between “homegrown” and “foreign-stimulated,” and contain elements of both categories. As noted earlier, grievances are increasingly “glocal.” In fact, the contribution of grievances to violent extremism is likely to increase whenever the anger created by regional and international dynamics appears to vindicate (and vice versa) perceived or real local injustices. Still, for analytical as well as programmatic purposes, it is helpful to seek to determine whether the homegrown dimensions of actual grievances take precedence over their foreign sources, or vice versa.

7. Previous parts of this document analyzed the main relevant possible types of “homegrown grievances,” from social exclusion to government repression, and from unmet expectations to systemic corruption and impunity. Foreign-stimulated grievances were identified as well, but, for the purposes of this section, it may be relevant to note that those grievances fall mostly in two main categories.

a. The first consists of the perception of an existential threat to Islam (as a religion or culture), and/or to Muslims (as societies and peoples). This threat typically is viewed as emanating primarily from the West in general, and from the US in particular. It usually entails the perception that the West and/or the

US are fundamentally hostile to Islam and Muslims; that they are bent on the domination and subjugation of Muslim countries and peoples; on exploiting their resources; on denigrating their faith; and/or on deriding or vilifying their most sacred religious beliefs and figures. The sense of urgency implied in such perceptions may prompt those who harbor them to conclude that the imminence and scope of the danger provides legitimate ground – indeed, even a moral imperative – for resorting to violence. That violence, in turn, may be directed at US and other Western targets; at organizations and individuals that are viewed as subservient to, and complicit with, the US or other western powers; and/or at civilians who fail openly to side with those ready to act in defense of the *umma*. Individuals susceptible to the “on-going-war-against-Islam” narrative also typically believe that the use of violence today represents an acceptable form of retribution for historical wrongs and earlier attacks against Islam.

b. A second type of foreign-stimulated grievances consists of a conviction that the international system is fundamentally hostile to Muslim societies and peoples; that it relegates Muslim societies to a subordinate position in international affairs; and that the way in which it operates largely accounts for Muslims’ loss of control over both their personal lives and collective destinies.

Of course, the belief in an existential threat to Islam and Muslims, and the resentment at an international system deemed to be oppressive and discriminatory, often overlap with, and feed into, one another (just as is the case for past and on-going victimization; personal and collective humiliation; or local and global grievances). For one, the view that domination or subjugation of Muslims is built into the current international system is likely to reinforce the belief that Islam itself is under existential attack. Consequently, in most situations where one of the two types of foreign-stimulated grievances analyzed here is at work, the other one also will be found to be operative.

B. Broad Ideological (Especially Religious) Appeals

1. Instead of being motivated primarily by narrow, concrete and fairly specific grievances, individuals may be driven, instead, by a much broader ideological fervor, and/or by religious convictions. Of course, as discussed earlier, ideology and grievances are far from being incompatible. Even the distinction between clearly delineated grievances (such as territorial ones) and wider ideological commitments can break down. For instance, many members of the original Irish Republican Army (IRA) were both fervent nationalists and dedicated socialists, who were determined to spread an extreme form of socialism to all of Ireland.¹³⁴ By the same token, a very specific grievance (e.g., opposition to abortion) may be rooted in a much broader worldview (one that, in the case of those who bomb abortion clinics, may entail the belief that violence is divinely sanctioned). In this and other instances of “single-issue terrorism,” the distinction between “broad ideology” and “narrow grievance” breaks down. As noted earlier as well, some VE organizations (and the individuals within them) will be driven by a mix of concrete and fairly narrow grievances on the one hand, and much broader ideological, especially religious, fervor on the other. Finally, for any given organization, the relative importance of “grievance” and “ideology” may vary depending on whether one is focusing on leaders or rank-and-file members. For instance, the pull of ideology may be stronger within the leadership and among cadres, while rank-and-file members, and even more so those who sympathize with the organization, may rally behind it primarily because they view it as a vehicle to redress certain grievances and achieve specific objectives.

2. These important caveats notwithstanding, in many other cases it will be useful to distinguish between VE organizations that are fueled mainly by fairly clearly delineated and narrow grievances, and those driven primarily by much broader ideological appeals. With this in mind, and to simplify a more

¹³⁴ Other members of the IRA were simply, first and foremost, nationalists. They saw the conflict in which they were engaged as a fundamentally territorial one, and they used violence to achieve the fairly narrow, clearly defined objective of “national liberation” We are grateful to Bill Zartman for drawing our attention to this example.

complex reality, one may use the shorthand “ideologically driven” to refer to VE organizations characterized by the following traits:

- a. Their goals (e.g., restoring the Caliphate, or fighting back against modernity) are hazy and/or grandiose, and seem completely disconnected from any sense of reality or the possible.
- b. Their enemies are vaguely defined as well; they may be described, for instance, as “Jewish-Christian crusaders,” “*kufir*” (unbelief), “falsehood,” or “*jahiliyya*.”¹³⁵
- c. While these organizations may invoke specific grievances or disputes (as Bin Laden did when he called for a withdrawal of US military forces from Saudi Arabia) or particular causes (the Palestinian issue), they do so only to gain traction with broader segments of the population, which they know they could not possibly win over on the basis of their actual platform. Consequently, resolving the geographically circumscribed conflicts and satisfying the specific grievances that these organizations invoke in order to justify their actions would not put an end to their violence (just as the US decision to withdraw its military forces from Saudi Arabia did not bring an end to Al-Qaeda terrorism).
- d. Members of ideology-driven organizations often have a completely skewed view of the world – which generally is not true of their counterparts in mostly grievance-based organizations. Whether or not one agrees with the objectives and methods of VE organizations that pursue fairly clearly delineated objectives, the followers of most such organizations frequently display unexceptional viewpoints on a whole range of critical issues. They may hold extreme opinions regarding the particular conflict in which they are engaged, but, otherwise, their outlook tends not to be strikingly different from those of their fellow citizens. That, however, is not true of purely ideology-driven organizations. Far more so than mostly grievance-based groups, these organizations are prone to display cult-like, millenarian or messianic features, and their members tend to have opinions that are far out of the mainstream on virtually every single critical issue. In part for that reason, ideology-driven organizations do not usually take part in the legal political process, which they typically reject in its entirety. Nor are they involved in any significant way in providing social services to the population. Far from being embedded in the societies within which they operate, they tend to be “external” to, or “super-imposed” on, them. As a result, they can derive no popular support or legitimacy from activities in the mainstream political and social arenas; the legitimacy they can muster is tied entirely to their vision of the world and the extent to which it resonates with the public. Consequently as well, they tend to enjoy a much narrower base of support than grievance-based organizations, and operate on the fringes of society or underground.
- e. Unlike most VE organizations that are fueled primarily by clearly circumscribed grievances, ideology-driven organizations tend to be “de-territorialized” -- i.e., their agenda is not tied to a particular piece of land and to the conflicts associated with it. Though one can find exceptions (e.g., the above-mentioned example of some early Irish nationalists with strong socialist convictions), VE organizations in which ideological fervor plays an important role often lack interest in particular local struggles; as discussed earlier, they care about those conflicts only to the extent that the latter can help them advance their global agenda.
- f. As noted above as well, grievance-based organizations generally resort to violence as a strategic or tactical weapon, as they pursue clear, limited, and at least theoretically attainable political objectives (such as putting an end to what is viewed as foreign occupation). By contrast,

¹³⁵ *Jahiliyya* refers to the state of “ignorance” which, in Islam, is viewed as having characterized Arabia prior to Prophet Muhammad’s revelations. Salafi jihadists and other radical Islamists often denounce their respective societies as having “reverted” to a “state of *jahiliyya*.”

ideologically motivated groups frequently see violence as far more intrinsic to their very existence and core objectives. Their members often believe in violence's redemptive virtues, and are more prone to be addicted to it. Thus, for instance, they may view violence as part and parcel of a religious obligation to be engaged in a never-ending struggle against errant beliefs and practices; as an integral component of a timeless cosmic battle between good and evil, truth and falsehood, belief and heresy; as a requirement for securing personal salvation, helping atone for one's sins, and reaping the spiritual benefits of martyrdom; as a means of purifying oneself and cleansing society from its impurities; or as a way of bringing about the apocalypse.

3. From a programmatic perspective, the distinction between primarily grievance-based and mainly ideologically driven extremism is particularly consequential. For one, no matter the considerable challenges they pose, most forms of grievance-based extremism may be easier to try to address than their ideologically-driven counterparts. When and where clearly defined grievances can be satisfied through concessions, it may prove possible to defuse the forces that drive that violent extremism. By contrast, ideologically-driven terrorism typically cannot be dealt with through a negotiation process – particularly, as in the case of al-Qaeda, when the ideology posits grandiose goals that can only be reached through the surrender of the opponent and/or the destruction of society as we know it. Furthermore, having determined that one is in the presence of a primarily grievance-based form of violent extremism, the programmatic implications are generally straightforward: can those grievances be successfully remedied, and, if so, how? Ideologically-driven extremism is not only far more difficult to address, but, to the extent one can do so, it calls for different types of responses.

4. The role of broad ideological appeals as a motivation for joining VE groups easily can be overstated. Individuals tend to become affiliated with such groups primarily because of other considerations (e.g., fairly specific political grievances, or pre-existing personal relationships to individuals who already find themselves in a radical milieu). But once individuals are pulled into a VE environment, ideology can develop into a far more significant force. That is, in part, because displays of commitment to the cause becomes one of the main vehicles through which individuals can reinforce and demonstrate their sense of mutual obligation to one another. In short, even when ideological fervor plays a critical role, it typically does so subsequent to individuals already having been “pulled in.” As a rule, ideology's primary role may not be to attract individuals to VE organizations in the first place, but, in the wake of intense social interaction, to deepen and solidify individual commitments to those organizations.

C. Grievance, Ideology, Territory and Relation to the Community: Identifying Particular Types of VE Organizations

1. The previous two sections suggest that concrete VE organizations may be better understood by seeking to place them along three different, but related, continua.

a. The first continuum would help focus on the extent to which these organizations (and the individuals within them) are driven by specific grievances and negotiable goals, as opposed to very broad ideological (especially religious) appeals and non-negotiable demands. The more a given organization appears to be motivated fairly narrow grievances, and the more it is pursuing objectives that at least are clearly defined and theoretically attainable, the closer it is to one end of that continuum. By contrast, if it is fueled primarily by ideological fervor and absolutist goals that are all encompassing, nebulous (and subject to frequent changes), and/or if these goals do not lend themselves to negotiations and compromise, the closer it is to the other end of that same continuum.

b. The second continuum would examine VE organizations from the perspective of the theater(s) in which they believe their struggle is being waged, and within which they operate. Near one end of the continuum, one would find “territorialized” organizations that tend to articulate “local” or “nationalist”

demands, and/or seek to achieve control over a particular territory (which they may claim as their own and view as being occupied). Close to the other end of the continuum, one would find “de-territorialized” VE organizations that see themselves as being engaged in a global, worldwide struggle that knows no frontiers.

c. The third continuum would distinguish among VE organizations according to the extent to which they are embedded in the communities they claim to represent. Whether or not such organizations actively seek, and do enjoy, broad-based support from the local population is important for both analytical and CT purposes.

2. As noted earlier, there is a significant degree of overlap between these three continua. For instance, VE organizations that are largely grievance-based are often “territorialized” as well (territorial demands represent a primary type of grievance). By contrast, VE organizations that are driven by broad ideological appeals and/or religious fervor are rarely attached to a particular territory, and they tend to view their struggle as a global one. They display a greater propensity to be “transnational” in nature, and they often aim to bring violence to an ever-expanding number of theaters of operation. Meanwhile, organizations that are embedded in the community often are territorialized ones as well (by definition, since they seek and receive the support of a given local community), while organizations driven by global agendas are often super-imposed on, and alien to, the communities within which they operate.

Still, one should note that the degree of congruence between the three dimensions discussed above (ideology/grievance, territorialized/de-territorialized, and embedded/disconnected) is rarely complete. VE organizations driven primarily by narrow, specific grievances are not necessarily solidly embedded in their environment, while more ideologically oriented ones may benefit from strong ties to their respective communities. Similarly, organizations such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Palestine, or the Shia militias in Iraq are primarily grievance-based, territorialized, and embedded in society, and they have fairly clear objectives. Yet, they also combine local political demands with Islamist ideology, and have developed external connections that, in some cases, have become stronger over time, and have given their struggles a “regional,” if not global, dimension that previously was not as pronounced as it has become.

D. The Search for Economic Gain, or the Pull from Prior Involvement in Illegal Economic Activities

1. The search for economic gain is rarely the primary – let alone the only – motivation behind an individual’s decision to join a violent extremist group. However, especially in poor countries, it can be part of the mix of factors that play a role both in prompting individuals to become affiliated with such groups, and, even more so, in keeping them there after they have joined. For instance, there is evidence that in Pakistan the salaries paid to militants have helped jihadi groups retain members.¹³⁶ Similarly, in post-2003 Iraq, several reports pointed to the existence of a pool of “insurgents-for-hire” – young men pushed by desperate economic conditions into volunteering to join the insurgency.¹³⁷ Over time, furthermore, economic considerations can become more pronounced in shaping the behavior of a violent extremist organization: the role played by ideological fervor, religious convictions, or deeply felt grievances may recede, while the search for economic gain assumes a more prominent part. When that transformation happens, involvement in crime, smuggling, or trafficking no longer represents merely a means for violent extremists to fund their activities; it, instead, becomes a driving force of its own behind their actions.

2. From a different angle, a study of the background and personal trajectories followed by some violent extremists (especially of the radical Islamist type) reveals that prior involvement in illicit activities

¹³⁶ See Jessica Stern, 285.

¹³⁷ See for instance Amit R. Paley, “Iraqis Joining Insurgency Less for Cause than for Cash,” *Washington Post*, November 20, 2007, p. A01.

sometimes predates – and, in several key respects, appears to pave the way for – subsequent involvement in violent extremist groups. In certain contexts, criminal or greed-motivated behavior seems to create a situation that makes individuals receptive to the rhetoric or agenda of violent extremist groups. Alternatively, it may facilitate tactical alliances or marriages of convenience with them. In those instances, what began merely as a search for economic gain ends up operating as a bridge to involvement, direct or indirect, with violent extremism. The path from criminality to violent extremism, particularly of the radical Islamic type, may take four main forms:

- a. In some cases, turning to a particularly strict interpretation of Islam may be viewed as a way to atone for one’s past, to make up for a life of crime, and to put oneself solidly back on the straight path. It can be seen as a conduit to redemption, and as an effort to achieve spiritual salvation. Such considerations, for instance, appear to have played a key role for at least one of the masterminds of the March 2004 train bombings in Madrid.¹³⁸
- b. Paradoxically, embracing intolerant and extremist religious views also may be a means of justifying – to oneself as much to others – continued involvement in criminal activities. For instance, the USAID extremism assessment conducted in Mauritania in May 2008 revealed that self-appointed preachers were known to have issued *fatwas* to the effect that dealing in drugs is not only permissible (as long as it does not involve Muslims consuming the drugs), but that it even should be encouraged when the profits are used to support jihad. Several analysts on the ground argued that such moral validation of criminal behavior represents an important source of the appeal of radical preachers to idle youth involved in drug dealing. These youth, it was pointed out, often are eager to have their behavior legitimated by figures viewed as carrying moral authority. Anecdotal evidence suggests that similar situations exist elsewhere.
- c. A third possible connection between criminality and violent extremism (and one that certainly is not limited to the Muslim world) lies in the mutual interests that stem from operating in a common geographical space. In northern Morocco, for instance, drug barons have drawn on the same pool of unemployed or under-employed restless young men as some radical Islamist organizations have. By itself, that situation creates a certain convergence of interest as well as occasional sharing of resources. The disaffected young men in question know that, historically, the state has turned its back on their region (a situation which King Mohamed VI has taken bold steps to reverse). The long-accumulated resentment that comes with that historical legacy – as well as the bitterness created by more recent developments, such as Morocco’s decision to cooperate with the US in the “war on terror” – help make the very same discontented and socially marginalized young men who are engaged in the drug trade also receptive to the ideas propagated by SJ groups and preachers.

Violent extremists and those who control drug smuggling networks may find that they share certain critical interests, including avoiding detection by the security forces, and, more broadly, being able to circumvent state institutions. Over time, efforts to coordinate operations, and cooperation in the area of logistics, may give rise to ideological affinities as well. More generally, petty thieves, smugglers and racketeers on the one hand, and violent extremists on the other, may be brought together by their common desire to see state capacity undermined – the former because a weak state gives them a relatively free rein to operate, and the latter not only for that same reason, but also because a weak state that cannot deliver basic public goods the population is much easier to de-legitimize.¹³⁹ One should note, finally, that the process by which criminals and violent

¹³⁸ See for instance Andrea Elliott, “Where Boys Grow Up to Be Jihadis,” *The New York Times*, November 25, 2007.

¹³⁹ However, the analyst should bear in mind that, in some cases, turf wars and struggles over the use of existing illicit networks may create discord – as opposed to cooperation and affinities – between traffickers and violent extremists. Furthermore, when those engaged in criminal activities benefit from the complicity of members of the security forces

extremists may develop ties to one another does not necessarily reflect intent by either party; instead, it simply may stem from the fact that, once a particular path to circumvent the law or state institutions has been discovered by one of those two parties, it can be used by the other as well.

3. Criminality also may lead to violent extremism through jail-induced radicalization. The experience of both developed and developing countries suggests that the relevant processes, here, include the following:

- The subjecting of prisoners to torture and other forms of degrading treatment.¹⁴⁰
- Exposure to indoctrination and recruitment mechanisms.
- A prison-triggered religious awakening which – especially when combined with the previous factors, and/or with the presence of (often self-proclaimed) “spiritual leaders” – may lead to the adoption of violent extremist views regarding both religion and politics.
- The ways in which the coming together of violent radicals previously active within amorphous and scattered groups may facilitate the emergence of more effective leadership structures, and lead to greater collective self-awareness and confidence.

There is significant empirical evidence pointing to the role which prisons have played as incubators for Salafi jihadism. In both Egypt and Saudi Arabia, brutal and humiliating treatment in jail fueled al-Qaeda recruiting.¹⁴¹ Among European and American converts to radical Islam, Richard Reid (the “shoe bomber”) in the UK, Jose Padilla in the US, and José Emilion Suárez Trashorras (the Spaniard who supplied the explosives used in the 2004 Madrid bombings) all came to embrace violent extremist agendas while incarcerated; previously, they had been petty criminals with no apparent interest or involvement in radical political or religious causes. The post-2003 Moroccan example deserves perhaps particular attention, in that all four of the jail-induced radicalization processes identified above appear to have been at work in the kingdom – until approximately 2005, when the Moroccan authorities became aware of the perverse dynamics involved and took steps to reverse them.

E. Individual-Specific Variables

On several occasions, earlier sections of this document illustrated the contribution that specific types of traumatic events in the lives of individuals can make to those individuals’ turn to violent extremism. From Chechnya’s “black widows” to many Palestinians who carried out suicide attacks during the second intifada,¹⁴² a desire to exact revenge for harm done to loved ones was shown to be a frequent motivation. More generally, as Pedahzur (2005: 142) has noted:

The basic urge to inflict pain on those perceived as responsible for the anguish of the aggrieved party appear in many biographies of suicide bombers throughout the world... Revenge is not limited

or the army, while violent extremists are being hunted down by the authorities (or vice versa), the former may hesitate to ally themselves with the latter. In essence, in a game that involves three actors – criminals, state officials, and violent extremists – any two of them may be reluctant to forge an alliance when doing so might lead one of those two actors to expose himself to the costs involved in antagonizing the third one.

¹⁴⁰ See this document’s earlier discussion of the role of torture in the radicalization of Sayyid Qutb, `Ayman al-Zawahiri, and a large number of militants who ended up leading the jihad at home and abroad.

¹⁴¹ On Saudi Arabia, see Hegghammer 2006: 42 and endnote 42 on p. 57.

¹⁴² See the evidence, presented earlier, that many such suicide bombers previously had been injured or arrested by the Israeli Defense Force (IDF), and/or had a relative (often a brother) who had been killed by the IDF. Further evidence is discussed in Pedahzur 2005: 143-147.

... to cases where an individual suffers a direct loss ... [It] can also be in response to the continuous suffering of the community to which the perpetrator belongs. Many suicide bombers stated that they wanted to hurt the enemy in the same way that their people had been hurt by it, and they wanted to make this enemy feel and pay for what it had done to the community.

Indeed, such personal factors can trump the appeal of an ideology, religious fervor, the search for profit, or broader political, social and economic grievances. Of course, these individual-specific variables hardly can be dissociated from the broader political context; for example, the greater the level of society-wide

Radicalization in Moroccan Prisons

The starting point, in Morocco, was the large-scale security crackdown that followed the May 2003 Casablanca bombings. The overwhelming majority of those arrested were incarcerated in three detention centers (in, respectively, Salé, Casablanca, and Kénitra). In all three cases, detainees were placed in the same pavilion. The idea was to separate them from other inmates, so as to prevent “ideological contamination” of the latter. Unfortunately, that strategy has several un-intended consequences. For one, it gave far greater structure and organizational coherence to what had been, until then, a largely disparate, fragmented and inchoate political tendency. Individuals who had been loosely affiliated with the Salafi jihadist (SJ) tendency, but who, previously, may not necessarily have been in contact with many others sharing their outlook, suddenly found themselves in constant and close physical proximity to like-minded people. That situation appears to have prompted a greater sense of collective identity, self-confidence, and empowerment. It became easy for individual detainees to realize that they were not as isolated as they had thought initially, and to feel that there was “power in numbers.” From isolated Salafi jihadists, they became part of a much larger community of such militants, united not only by their common adherence to the SJ worldview, but also but the new sense of camaraderie created by their arrest, detention, and often abusive treatment by the security services and prison authorities.

In addition, some of those who were arrested, but whose previous links to the SJ movement had been tenuous, or who initially did not share the more violent positions of some of their fellow detainees, ended up being radicalized by others. Along similar lines, those who experienced a deepening of their religious convictions after being incarcerated were ideal targets for detained *shuyukh* (preachers), who were on hand to transform an individualistic quest for meaning and spirituality into a group-focused embrace of a radical political agenda. In the process, individuals who merely might have become born-again Muslims if they had been scattered throughout the prison population were turned, instead, into “born-again Salafi jihadists.”

The concentration of all actual and suspected SJ militants in the same pavilions also facilitated the consolidation of a more cohesive and representative leadership among them. Until then, the various *shuyukh* of the SJ movement had not always been in direct physical proximity to their target audience, or to each other. But now they were, which made it easier for them to compare notes, share views, and, most importantly, serve as the spokespersons for all Islamist detainees in the course of discussions with jail authorities (as was the case during several waves of hunger strikes over prison conditions in 2005 and 2006). Those familiar with the situation of Islamist prisoners at the time noted on several occasions that the *shuyukh* were making a deliberate effort to structure the daily life of detainees, including by providing “spiritual guidance,” and by organizing religiously-oriented, group-based activities. In the process, it was not so much Islam per se, but, more specifically, the SJ worldview that became the common thread linking together – and giving coherence to – the various components of those prisoners’ daily lives.*

* In Morocco as elsewhere, the mistreatment of prisoners – which often involved torture, rape, or sexual humiliation – had the effect of radicalizing numerous detainees. Upon their release, those abuses made them prime candidates for recruitment into endeavors far more violent than those which they might have considered prior to their arrest. Significantly, Abdelfattah Raydi (who detonated himself in an internet café in Casablanca on March 11, 2007) had suffered such cruel treatment while in jail from May 2003 until his release in 2005; to those close to him, he had made it clear that that experience had hardened his views.

repression, and the more indiscriminate it is, the likelier it becomes that a significant number of individuals will be motivated by a desire for revenge. Still, because different individuals react differently to the same levels of overall repression, and because they are unlikely to be equally affected by that repression, individual-specific variables do matter and must be taken into account.

One of the conclusions emerging from previous sections is that the example set by close relatives or friends can play a decisive part in the turn to extremism. The desire to honor the memory of a childhood buddy or a brother who has “fallen to the cause” by emulating him can be powerful – as can be the belief that, by dying as a martyr, one will be reunited with such loved ones. Many militants traveled to Afghanistan during the 1980s, and to Iraq after 2003, by following in the footsteps of a brother or friend who had gone before them.¹⁴³

Individual-specific attributes also matter because, due to their background, outlook and previous experiences, certain types of persons may be more vulnerable to the rhetoric of violent extremist organizations. Distraught individuals looking for meaning, a sense of brotherhood, companionship, and a conceptual framework to make sense of a bewildering environment may be particularly at risk. Yet again, however, it is difficult to separate such personal attributes from the environments that often promote them. Thus, for instance, widespread social exclusion, marginalization and dispossession may feed the search for empowerment through violence. By the same token, for reasons analyzed earlier, urban or peri-urban enclaves that are culturally and socio-economically alienated from mainstream society may encourage a propensity to lash out at that society.

F. Intimidation or Coercion

Individuals also can be pushed into violent extremism in response to fear, coercion or intimidation. Violent extremist groups may force communities to provide them with passive or active support – or even, in some cases, with recruits.¹⁴⁴ Coercion is likely to be a particularly salient factor in areas where the government lacks substantial presence, and cannot, or will not, provide security and protection to its citizens. When extremist groups “graduate” to full-fledged insurgencies, and begin to control actual territory (as with the Taliban in Afghanistan or Pakistan), the risk may be even higher.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ For relevant evidence on Saudi violent extremists, see Hegghammer 2006: 49. Overall, the author notes (p. 50), “the available sources point to the extraordinary importance of social networks in mobilizing people to go to Afghanistan. Many had a relative or a friend who had gone previously. Most people made the travel preparations as well as the journey itself with friends or relatives. Group dynamics such as peer pressure and intra-group affection seem to have been crucial in the process.” Along similar lines, Andrea Elliott’s essay on the Mezwak quarter in Tetouan (Morocco) showed that the frequency with which individuals from that neighborhood could be found traveling to become suicide bombers in Iraq, or being recruited into other wings of the global SJ network, was due, to a significant extent, to the demonstration effect or the precedent set by a brother or a former neighbor and friend.

¹⁴⁴ For instance, the Tamil Tigers began abducting young people when the number of volunteer fighters dropped.

¹⁴⁵ In the case of Pakistan’s Tribal Agencies, traditional tribal elders are being assassinated, tribal councils have been attacked, and thousands have migrated to safer areas of the country in an effort to escape extremist violence.

PART SIX: GROUP DYNAMICS, RECRUITMENT AND SELF-RECRUITMENT

At numerous junctures, this document has highlighted the critical role that personal relationships – in particular pre-existing ties to longstanding friends and close relatives – play in prompting individuals to join, become loosely affiliated with, and sustain commitment to extremist groups. When all is said and done, social bonds often trump all other factors. Most leading scholars of terrorism believe very strongly that personal relationships are far more important in shaping radical behavior than “underlying conditions,” ideological convictions, grievances, or any alleged “psychological predispositions” toward violence. It is essential to remember, as Martha Crenshaw noted long ago, that “terrorism is a group activity, involving intimate relationships among a small number of people.”¹⁴⁶ Consequently, analyzing violent extremist movements requires an understanding of group dynamics, and how they impact, and shape, individual beliefs and behavior. With these considerations in mind, this final part of the document proceeds in two steps:

Section A explores the many contributions that social bonds make to recruitment or self-recruitment into violent extremist movements (including of the Salafi jihadist type). It analyzes, more broadly, the role of personal relationships in radicalization processes.

Section B elaborates on the distinction between recruitment and self-recruitment (or between “top-down” and “bottom-up” recruitment). Focusing in particular on violent Islamic extremist groups, it notes the partial shift from recruitment to self-recruitment, as well as two related trends with critical importance for counter-terrorism analysts: the growing role of the internet and virtual communities in radicalization processes; and the shortening of the time frames involved in embracing, and acting on, violent extremist beliefs.

A. The Centrality of Group Dynamics

1. Personal Relationships and the Act of Joining

“People don’t get pushed into rebellion by their ideology. They get pulled in by their social networks.”¹⁴⁷ This comment, by counter-terrorism analyst David Kilcullen, deliberately may understate the contribution ideology can make to extremism, but it is perceptive and holds a great deal of empirical truth. It is echoed by Jessica Stern, who, after analyzing the dynamics of recruitment processes into a wide variety of terrorist groups, concludes that “in some cases, the desire to be with friends turns out to be more important, over time, than the desire to achieve any particular goal.”¹⁴⁸ Along similar lines, in his careful account of the formation of two key recent terrorist cells – those associated with the 9/11 operation and the unsuccessful Los Angeles bombing plot – Marc Sageman showed that prior friendship with, and family ties to, existing members of those cells were the critical factors in drawing other individuals into them.¹⁴⁹ Consequently, it is somewhat inaccurate to view militants as having been “recruited” into those cells; it would be more accurate, instead, to argue that they “drifted” into those groups via previous social bonds with individuals already involved in the global jihad.

¹⁴⁶ Martha Crenshaw, “The Causes of Terrorism,” *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (July 1981), pp. 379-99.

¹⁴⁷ Quoted in George Packer, “Knowing the Enemy: Can Social Scientists Redefine the ‘War on Terror’?” *The New Yorker*, December 18, 2006, p. 60.

¹⁴⁸ Stern, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-5.

¹⁴⁹ Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, Philadelphia, 2004.

After studying in great detail the personal biographies of several hundred young Muslims who ended up in the global jihad during the 1980s and 1990s, Sageman's broader and most important finding concerns the preeminent role that personal relationships played in leading individuals to become directly involved with al-Qaeda. What drove them into the movement, he argues, was neither religious belief (typically, they became more religious only after joining) nor ideology; it was not, at least initially, a shared worldview; and it certainly was not the fact that they had been radicalized by "underlying conditions," whether poverty, economic inequalities, or the absence of opportunities for political participation (such opportunities, in fact, did exist since most of them became affiliated with al-Qaeda while living in the West). Instead, what spurred their initial involvement in the global jihad were pre-existing social ties. Specifically, Sageman notes, 68% of them joined others with whom they had previous friendships, and who were already in the jihad, or they joined together simultaneously as a group of friends. Another 20% were drawn in through relatives (brothers, fathers, or cousins). Overall, therefore, 88% of those in Sageman's sample who became global jihadists did so through pre-existing personal relationships to other individuals.

Drawing on more recent empirical evidence from cases ranging from Jemaa Islamiyyah in Indonesia to the failed July 2007 plot in the UK, and from the attacks in Madrid in March 2004 to those in London in July 2005, Scott Atran (2008) nicely captures the critical role of small-group dynamics when he notes:

Although millions of people support violent jihad, very few are willing to do it. Those who do pursue violent jihad usually emerge in small groups of action-oriented friends. They come from the same neighborhood and interact during activities, such as soccer or paintball. Often they become camping and hiking companions who learn to take care of one another under trying conditions, which causes them to become even more deeply attached [...] Soccer, paintball, camping, hiking, rafting, body building, martial arts training and other forms of physically stimulating and intimate group action create a bunch of buddies ... who become a 'band of brothers' in a glorious cause. It usually suffices that a few [...] of these action buddies come to believe in the cause [...] for the rest to follow even unto death.

The USAID-commissioned study of SJ violence in Morocco provides further evidence of the key part which pre-existing social ties, as well as group dynamics, can play in an individual's journey toward violence.¹⁵⁰ For instance, Ayoub Raydi, who on April 10, 2007 blew himself up next to a police officer in Casablanca, was the younger brother of Abdelfatah Raydi, who had detonated himself in an internet café in Sidi Moumen a month earlier. Similarly, Omar and Mohamed Maha, who carried out the April 14, 2007 suicide bombings on Moulay Youssef Boulevard in Casablanca, were brothers.

Family relationships also can be detected in the leadership of the *Groupe Islamique Combattant Marocain* (Moroccan Islamic Combating Group, or GICM), an al-Qaeda affiliate.¹⁵¹ For instance, Hassan El-Haski,

¹⁵⁰ See Guilain Denoeux, "Some Reflections on the Drivers of Salafi Jihadi Violence in Morocco." Produced by MSI for USAID, July 2008.

¹⁵¹ The limited available evidence suggests that the GICM is a formal and hierarchical organization, characterized by command-and-control mechanisms, division of responsibilities, and the systematic deployment of resources in the pursuit of previously set objectives. Anecdotal evidence points to links between it and AQIM. Operatives within it typically present four characteristics that set them apart from such impoverished suicide bombers as those responsible for the May 2003 and March and April 2007 attacks in Casablanca. First, they were radicalized overseas (not in Morocco), usually along lines reminiscent of the 9/11 terrorists. Second, they joined al-Qaeda during the 1990s. Unlike those responsible for suicide bombings inside Morocco since May 2003, they consequently are part of what Sageman calls the "second wave" of Transnational Salafi Jihadist (TSJ) militants. Third, they often took part in fighting (or had a logistical support role) in places such as Chechnya and Bosnia in the late 1990s. And fourth, unlike post-2003 suicide bombers, whose tenuous ties to the worldwide TSJ movement are mostly a matter of self-identification, GICM operatives appear to be linked to one another and to the remnants of "al-Qaeda Central" by actual personal and/or formal organizational ties. They are links in a (much weakened and still weakening) global chain.

who is may have played a key role in the Madrid bomb attacks, is the brother of Houcine El-Haski and Mehdi El-Haski; all are reportedly are high-ranking members of the organization.¹⁵²

The part which neighborhood and friendship ties have played in Morocco's experience with SJ violence is even more pronounced. Youssef Khoudri – who was wearing an explosive belt as he was waiting for Abdelfattah Raydi outside the internet café where Raydi detonated himself on March 11, 2007 – was Raydi's 17-year old neighbor, and had been recruited by him. Mohamed Mentala and Mohamed Rachidi, the first two of four Salafi jihadists who died in the Hay al-Farah district of Casablanca on April 10, 2007, lived in very close proximity to Abdelfattah Raydi.¹⁵³

The role of neighborhood ties and of friendships going back to childhood has been particularly well documented with regard to Tetouan's Mezwak quarter (*Jama`a Mezwak*) – an old, overcrowded shantytown that is home to 60,000 people. As discussed earlier, intelligence sources, as well as DNA evidence recovered from the scenes of suicide attacks in Iraq, have revealed that several of the young Moroccans who have died there hailed from that very neighborhood. As they were growing up, they lived only a few blocks apart (in some cases, only a few houses apart), were friends, prayed at the same mosque (Masjid al-Robhan), were soccer buddies, hung out at the same café (the “Chicago Café” on Ma'mun Street), and attended the same elementary school (Abdelkrim Khattabi); several of them even ended up being in the same high school class.¹⁵⁴ Several of those implicated in the March 2004 Madrid attacks also came from Mezwak. One understands why, in an effort to dismantle the recruiting ring that revolved around the Masjid al-Robhan mosque, the Moroccan authorities arrested its imam in November 2006. Described by a Moroccan analyst as “a factory of suicide bombers,” and by the Saudi-owned *Ash-sharq al-Awsat* daily as “the highway for suicide bombers in Iraq,” the mosque appears to have acted as a catalyst for the formation or nurturing of personal relationships that eventually came to provide the logistical architecture for suicide bombings from Spain to Iraq.

In addition to kinship and friendship ties, personal relationships also may play a critical role through what Sageman refers to as “discipleship.” Sageman has analyzed the importance of this factor primarily from the perspective of two Islamic boarding schools that were instrumental to recruitment into Jemaah Islamiyyah in Indonesia. But the phenomenon may not be as unique to Southeast Asia as Sageman suggests.¹⁵⁵ The part played by mentor-to-disciple bonds also has been documented in North Africa, for instance. Moroccan press accounts reveal that a single person – a self-proclaimed *emir* or *shaykh*, or an operative within the TSJ network – typically acts as the decisive force in the conversion to the SJ worldview, in the decision to join a cell, and, most importantly, in the *passage à l'acte*, i.e., in the fateful decision to give up one's life for the cause. The presence of an inspiring figure constitutes a recurrent feature of both radicalization of beliefs and the decision to resort to violence. Such a mentor typically has succeeded in being perceived by his followers as someone who understands the true meaning of Islam, and who has organized his life accordingly. Through his daily behavior, he appears to demonstrate that he not only “talks the talk” but also “walks the walk” of SJ convictions. Through the power of his personality and the force of his example, he is able to gain the trust, respect, and often personal allegiance of a follower who, typically, is looking for certainties and new points of reference.

¹⁵² See “La galaxie du GICM,” *Le Journal Hebdomadaire* (Casablanca), 16-22 June 2007, p. 24.

¹⁵³ The police had closed in on a small house where several of those implicated in the March 11 bombing were believed to be hiding. Thirty-two year old Mentala was shot dead the moment he came out of the house waving a saber and threatening to detonate himself. Thirty-seven-year old Rachidi detonated himself on the terrace shortly thereafter.

¹⁵⁴ See Taïeb Chadi, “Nos kamikazes à Baghdad,” *Le Journal Hebdomadaire* (Casablanca), November 25 - December 1, 2006, pp. 17-21; Craig Whitlock, “Terrorist Networks Lure Young Moroccans to War in Far-Off Iraq,” *Washington Post*, February 20, 2007, A01; and Scott Atran, “Who Becomes a Terrorist Today,” *op. cit.*

¹⁵⁵ Sageman, 2008, 113-4.

As discussed earlier, the authority which the *emir, shaykh* or operative is able to wield stems not only from his personal charisma and leadership skills, but also from his ability to provide a simple, but persuasive, ideological framework that weaves into a single narrative local and global injustices, perceived personal indignities and a broader sense of collective humiliation, as well as current events and much older historical trends. The mentor can suggest to his followers that they have the power to transcend their wretched conditions. They can decide for themselves whether they want to remain victims of history, or whether they want to become agents of it by joining others in the global jihad. The act of joining thereby performs of liberating role – one that, ironically, often offers hope through death and self-sacrifice. Someone, who comes with powerful credentials arising from his alleged knowledge of “true Islam” and/or his own longtime involvement in the global jihad, has to “make the case” and articulate that logic. And it is precisely in that regard that the role of an *emir, shaykh* or operative can be decisive.

Finally, personal bonds that develop out of chance encounters sometimes can be decisive as well. That phenomenon has been well documented, for instance, with regard to the Hamburg cell responsible for the 9/11 attacks. Morocco, again, suggests that similar processes may be at work elsewhere. The personal journey of Saad al-Houssaini, who until his March 2007 arrest was the military chief of Morocco’s GICM, provides a case in point.¹⁵⁶ Al-Houssaini had obtained a B.S. in Physics and Chemistry from Moulay Ismail University in his native city of Meknes in 1992. While studying for an advanced degree in chemistry in Valencia, Spain, he made the acquaintance of Sahbi Ben Mohamed Salah Balta (known as Abu Ayman), a Tunisian radical Islamist affiliated with the En-Nahda Islamist movement. As Houssaini later stated to the Moroccan security services, that encounter changed his life. According to Houssaini’s own account, it was Abu Ayman who “made [him] understand the importance of religion and faith (*iman*) by providing [him] with religious books and audiotapes containing the sermons of leading *shuyukh* [radical preachers, among whom Houssaini identified Abu Musa al-Siri and Abdullah `Azzam, the Palestinian Islamist who was bin Laden’s spiritual mentor].”¹⁵⁷

2. Social Bonds and Radicalization Processes

There is much evidence to suggest that, when someone’s life revolves around a small group of like-minded individuals who, collectively, are cut off from the rest of society, that person’s judgment and behavior become, to a large extent, a function of group dynamics, and should be analyzed from that perspective.¹⁵⁸ As the group drifts ever further away from mainstream society, the propensity of its members to adopt increasingly radical views rises as well. The worldview of both the group and the individuals in it frequently become more and more divorced from reality, and they may strike the outside observer as bizarre in their disconnection from the actual world.¹⁵⁹ In effect, the group creates not only its own specific micro-culture, with its distinct set of moral and behavioral standards, but it also builds and lives in a universe of its own. Against this background, as Ehud Sprinzak demonstrated in the case of the

¹⁵⁶ In addition to his critical role in orchestrating the May 2003 and March 2004 bombings in Casablanca and Madrid, respectively, al-Houssaini allegedly was instrumental in the recruitment of Moroccans to fight coalition forces in Iraq. According to some press accounts, he also designed the explosive belts that were used in the March and April 2007 suicide attacks in Casablanca.

¹⁵⁷ See Catherine Graciet, “Moi, Houssaini, Marocain d’al-Qaïda,” *Le Journal Hebdomadaire* (Casablanca), 16-22 June 2007, 26.

¹⁵⁸ See the classic work by Wilfred R. Bion, *Experiences in Groups* (London: Tavistock, 1961). For a more recent work see Jerrold M. Post, “‘Hostilité,’ ‘Conformité,’ ‘Fraternité’: The Group Dynamics of Terrorist Behavior,” *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (1986): 211-224.

¹⁵⁹ Consider, for instance, the call for the “restoration of the Caliphate” by al-Qaeda members today.

Weatherman, individual radicalization can be understood most effectively as a product of the psychology of the larger group.¹⁶⁰

These group dynamics may play an instrumental role in the lifting of previous moral inhibitions on the use of violence, and in one's ability to discard or disregard the moral standards into which one had been socialized. Such "moral disengagement" – the ability to justify to oneself engaging in what one previously would have disavowed as inhumane, cruel, and therefore morally unacceptable conduct – typically takes place incrementally, within a small, tightly-knit community of individuals engaged in intense personal interactions and insulated from mainstream society.¹⁶¹ It also frequently involves "disinhibitory training," which Bandura has described as follows:

The recruits become deeply immersed in the ideology and role performances of the group. Initially, they are prompted to perform unpleasant acts that they can tolerate without much self-censure. Gradually, through repeated performance and repeated exposure to aggressive modeling by more experienced associates, their discomfort and self-reproof are weakened to ever higher levels of ruthlessness. The various disengagement practices form an integral part of the training. Eventually, acts originally regarded as abhorrent can be performed callously.¹⁶²

More specifically, group dynamics can lead to moral disengagement through a variety of processes. For instance, they greatly facilitate "displacement of responsibility": one is less likely to feel responsible for the pain inflicted on others when one feels that one was "just implementing orders." Another vehicle for moral disengagement is "diffusion of responsibility": if the violent act requires the cooperation of several cells or individuals, each of which/whom performs only a small part of the overall enterprise, and all of which/whom must be involved if the act is to be successful, it becomes easier for any given participant to absolve himself/herself of moral responsibility, since he/she can convince himself/herself that he/she made only a small contribution to the overall enterprise. Group-based decision-making processes can play a similar role since, as Bandura puts it, "no single person feels responsible for policies arrived at collectively. When everyone is responsible, no one is really responsible."¹⁶³ Group dynamics also facilitate "transference of blame" since "any harm done by a group can always be ascribed, in large part, to the behavior of other members. People therefore act more harshly when responsibility is obfuscated by a collective instrumentality than when they hold themselves personally accountable for what they do."¹⁶⁴

Finally, in a small, intimate setting characterized by intense communal life, individuals constantly receive psychological reinforcements and reassurances from other members.¹⁶⁵ In the process, they can be more easily convinced of the righteous nature of their actions. Research on charismatic religious cults has shown that the likelihood that individuals might engage in acts that fly against the moral standards into which they have been socialized is positively correlated with the extent to which membership in the group provides a relief from the sense of alienation, isolation or anomie which individuals had felt prior to joining.¹⁶⁶ Put differently, the greater the individual's need for a clear identity and a sense of belonging, and the greater the ability of the group to satisfy that need, the greater the propensity of that individual to value affiliation

¹⁶⁰ Ehud Sprinzak, "The Psychological Formation of Extreme Left Terrorism in a Democracy: The Case of the Weathermen," In Walter Reich, *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies and States of Mind* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1990), pp. 65-86.

¹⁶¹ Albert Bandura, "Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement," in Walter Reich, *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies and States of Mind* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1990), pp. 161-191.

¹⁶² Bandura, 186.

¹⁶³ Bandura, 176.

¹⁶⁴ Bandura, 176.

¹⁶⁵ See Crenshaw..

¹⁶⁶ See for instance Marc Galanter, *Cults: Faith, Healing and Coercion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, 2nd edition).

with the group to the point at which he/she might be prompted to commit morally reprehensible acts which he/she previously would not have considered.¹⁶⁷

3. Sustaining Motivation and Commitment

Social bonds not only draw individuals into violent radical groups, they also keep them there. The perception of being all under siege and hounded by the authorities enhances feelings of solidarity and interdependence; it strengthens the belief that mutual protection is an obligation, and that each “owes” the other. Consequently, there often is guilt associated with doing less than what others in the group are ready to do. Such perceptions may prompt members to engage in radical, violent behavior they would not have been involved on their own; they also make it much harder for members to leave the group. Not going along, and not doing one’s part, easily can be construed as a form of betrayal of those who have placed their trust in you.

In some cases, leaders resort to sophisticated techniques to make sure that, once in the group, individuals will not leave it. Many of these techniques involve group dynamics: burning the members’ bridges to their families and to the communities of which they previously had been a part; intensifying personal interactions within the group through the multiplication of meetings and joint activities (e.g., eating, praying and fasting together, living in the same apartments, etc.); and deliberately fueling feelings of humiliation, deprivation or moral outrage in order to enhance commitment to the group and the cause. Finally, there often is pressure to conform;¹⁶⁸ dissenting voices may be suppressed and other control mechanisms may be at work as well. Over time, ideological conformity may become self-enforcing. There also typically are serious costs to leaving the group, as those who have attempted to defect from such organizations as the IRA have experienced.

B. Recruitment, Self-Recruitment, and Time Frames for Radicalization: Recent Trends

1. From Recruitment to Self-Recruitment

a. Among the critical trends that have affected, and continue to reshape, violent Islamic extremism in the past several years, the shift from recruitment to self-recruitment (or from “top-down” to “bottom-up” forms of recruitment) looms large. Recruitment refers to a process by which individuals already affiliated with a violent extremist organization enlist others into it. The extent to which such recruitment is conducted in a systematic and organized manner varies from case to case; at one end of the continuum, top-down recruitment is carried out by individuals (“recruiters”) who specifically are entrusted with this function, and who themselves operate within a specialized unit charged with this task. Some of them may scout locations known to constitute particularly fertile grounds for potential recruits, in an effort to identify individuals who may be particularly vulnerable to violent extremist narratives. Where top-down recruitment is at work, it is assumed that individuals typically need at least some “convincing” or “nudging” before they join.

b. “Self-recruitment,” by contrast, refers to a process by which individuals enlist themselves into the jihad, physically or virtually; they do so with, at the most, only limited direct physical intervention, or deliberate organized efforts, by others. They may end up carrying out attacks on their own, or with a handful of like-minded peers, but they act with only minimal specific guidance from more organized components of the organization or movement with which they have affiliated themselves. The primary

¹⁶⁷ See for instance Jerrold M. Post, “Terrorist Psycho-logic: Terrorist Behavior as a Product of Psychological Factors,” in Walter Reich, ed., *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies and States of Mind* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1990), 34-35.

¹⁶⁸ See for instance Post, 33.

ways in which they relate to that organization or movement is virtually (via the internet) or/and through a “gatekeeper,” to whom they have reached out on their own initiative, or as a result of a chance encounter.¹⁶⁹

Self-recruitment may take several forms. A single individual may reach out to someone (or a group of individuals) already connected to an extremist organization, or he/she may take direct action, invoking the name of the broader movement (“the brand”) to justify the act. Alternatively, individuals bound together through pre-existing personal bonds may form a (more or less formally organized) cell. They may strike on their own, or make contact with a better-organized, broader network (national or transnational).¹⁷⁰ In this latter scenario, the role of a gatekeeper is again critical. Without him, the cell will become increasingly isolated from the broader movement – both in terms of its outlook and with regard to the resources and expertise it can muster; in particular, it will lack access to the technical know-how and other forms of logistical support which that movement can provide. As a result, attacks are likely to be less carefully planned and deadly, and they may display the “amateurish” features which, for instance, have characterized many strikes carried out by “al-Qaeda wannabees” since 2001. Operatives directly connected to transnational networks also may be instrumental in providing encouragement at key junctures, in sustaining motivation, and in vindicating or reinforcing beliefs. They serve partly as inspirational figures and mentors, and partly as logistical facilitators. For many years, veterans of the war in Afghanistan performed such functions for al-Qaeda.

c. The trend toward a shift from recruitment to self-recruitment should not be overstated. There is evidence that formal recruitment is still at work (it played an important role in funneling volunteers to Iraq, for instance). There is however no mistaking the tendency toward individuals, on their own, seeking out others with similar worldviews, and reaching out to existing extremist networks, both domestic and transnational. In this context, as Atran (2008) recently noted, “standard counterterrorism notions of ‘cells’ and ‘recruitment’ – and to some degree even ‘leadership’ – often reflect more the psychology and organization of people analyzing terrorist groups than terrorist groups themselves.”

2. The Growing Role of Virtual Communities

Largely as a by-product, or manifestation, of the partial shift from recruitment to self-recruitment – but also, in part, as a result of tighter police surveillance, anti-terrorism measures, and repeated security crackdowns in the wake of terrorists attacks – the past several years have witnessed a rise in the role of the internet as a driver of (or at least as a mechanism for) VE. As it becomes harder to organize without drawing the attention of the authorities, and as violent extremist groups become more susceptible to infiltration by the security services, the internet takes on new importance as a tool for recruitment, organization, and operationalization. That has been true despite efforts to block access to violent extremist sites, and to monitor discussions in chat-rooms where violent extremists might communicate with each other.

¹⁶⁹ “Gatekeepers” play a far more proactive role in recruitment processes than they do in self-recruitment. Where recruitment is at work, a gatekeeper is not merely “reached out to;” he/she reaches out to potential recruits, and is instrumental in their eventual joining.

¹⁷⁰ That, for instance, was the general pattern for al-Qaeda before 9/11, and it remains the case of that organization to a significant extent until today. As noted earlier, contrary to much conventional wisdom, al-Qaeda never invested much effort into a comprehensive recruitment drive. It, instead, waited until individuals or groups would come to it, and, at that point, it would select those whom it felt were most qualified to play a leading role in the global jihad. Prior to 9/11, much of that selection process took place in al-Qaeda’s training camps in Afghanistan. From there, those handpicked by the leadership of the organization would be dispatched to the other “fields of the jihad.” See Sageman 2004.

a. In tighter security environments, the internet presents violent extremists with several advantages. First and foremost, it minimizes the need to rely on operatives and face-to-face contacts in order to recruit, organize, train, and provide instructions to would-be jihadists. Technologically sophisticated sites provide freelancers with very specific information on such topics as how to set up a cell; how to select its leaders, and which criteria that leader ought to satisfy; what the optimum size of the cell is; how often the cell should meet; how to organize and run meetings; how to train the cell's members; how to secure financing; how to build a rudimentary bomb or an explosive belt; and which targets should be viewed as priority ones.¹⁷¹

b. The ways in which internet-use connects to large-scale social exclusion and fragmentation also need to be explored more systematically. Cyberspace provides geographically scattered and alienated individuals with means of partially overcoming their isolation. In that respect, the internet serves a “community-building purpose”: it works as a vehicle for the creation of new forms of social bonds among marginalized and socially atomized individuals. It helps thousands of such individuals to create new, virtual communities of their own. That universe may be largely disconnected from physical reality, but it provides such individuals with a way to transcend the degrading conditions of their existence. It also enables them to identify with, and emotionally connect to, the suffering inflicted on their fellow Muslims from Palestine to Afghanistan, and from Iraq to Chechnya. Web-based, detailed coverage and discussion of international events plays a key role in heightening the perception that one is part of a global community that finds itself under attack. As discussed earlier, images relayed through the internet help vindicate the SJ narrative of victimization and humiliation of the *umma*, and the need to “do something about it.” By disseminating the messages of the remnants of the al-Qaeda leadership, and by reporting on their activities, the internet also provides inspiration and role models for angry and alienated youth to emulate. Its ease of access, the sense of intimacy and comradeship it can promote, and the power of the images it relays contribute to its popularity among idle youth seeking to escape the monotonous and depressing life described earlier. To individuals with very limited education and life skills, the internet also provides a “ready-made political consciousness” that is compelling in both its simplicity and accessibility. It offers the motivations to act, and some of the rudimentary know-how necessary to do so. That “political tool kit” can be further developed – if need be, and almost on demand – by more direct forms of assistance from al-Qaeda operatives.

3. The Shortening of Radicalization Time Frames

a. The time frames for recruitment into Islamic extremist groups, and for participating in the violence they carry out, were once gradual and slow. Individuals would go through several identifiable phases (e.g., progressive radicalization of beliefs; recruitment into a cell; group seclusion from mainstream society; rising propensity on the part of members to view violence as legitimate or even necessary; contacts with other groups and/or individuals capable of providing the support and resources needed for violent acts; and actual perpetration of violence). Such a sequence of more or less clearly demarcated phases created

¹⁷¹ For instance, two such sites, apparently used by Moroccan Salafi Jihadists, provided the following advice. A cell's membership should not exceed five individuals. Members immediately should choose an emir to lead the cell. If possible, the emir should be the oldest and most knowledgeable member of the group (“knowledge,” or *ilm*, probably entails here not only religious knowledge, but also familiarity with SJ literature and doctrinal debates). A consultative council (*majlis ash-shura*) should be formed. The extent of the emir's prerogatives should be decided with the approval of 70% or more of the members of the shura council. A majority of 70% of the members of the shura council also should be required to expel the emir from the cell, in which case someone immediately must be chosen to replace him. And the list goes on. See Driss Bennani et al., “Enquête: Au-delà de la panique,” *Tel Quel* (Casablanca), No. 270 (April 21-27, 2007).

potential opportunities for trying to interrupt the path to VE at various key junctures. In other words, it made it possible to envision phase-specific counter-terrorism initiatives.¹⁷²

Unfortunately, there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that, in several countries at least, the time frames involved have shortened considerably, and the turn to VE is occurring much more quickly. In such cases, individuals no longer go through a gradual process beginning with radicalization or recruitment, and ending with the perpetration of violence. Instead, they might accept violent worldviews, be recruited by (or reach out on their own to) violent extremist cells, and be “operationalized” over an extremely short period. As a result, while they are appealing, the concepts of “phase-specific counter-terrorism initiatives,” and of “gradual ... socialization processes into terrorism” (Horgan 2008) may be based, increasingly, on outdated information and analysis. In fact, in some cases, the “phases” involved may be so compressed that differentiating among them may be neither particularly accurate empirically, nor especially useful from a programming perspective.

b. Focusing, for instance, on Western European Jihadists (second-generation immigrants who join, or gravitate toward, al-Qaeda), Roy notes that a majority of them were radicalized very suddenly. They typically embraced violent worldviews, and quickly acted on them, shortly after becoming “born-again Muslims.” In other words, many of them switched rather suddenly from Westernized lifestyles to strict religious piety, and from integration or assimilation into mainstream society to total alienation and separation from it. Roy (2008: 144) underscores that, in many cases, the transition to violence followed very quickly thereafter. In other words, the non-violent, born-again phase was very brief, and individuals veered into VE shortly after being “reborn,” or converted, as Muslims.¹⁷³

c. Evidence from Morocco also suggests that the length of the journey into Salafi jihadism can vary tremendously from one individual to another.

- By the time they caught the attention of the authorities, some militants had been moving gradually – often over a period of several years – into the world of Salafi jihadism. Frequently, that process had begun with a religious awakening, and had manifested itself through significant changes in physical appearance and behavior. For instance, the individuals involved had grown beards; started to dress “Afghan-style;” begun to pray assiduously; become increasingly outspoken on such topics as the “immorality” around them, the “need to fight impiety through jihad,” or the “virtues of martyrdom;” insisted that a return to original Islam was the only path to salvation; collected the CDs and DVDs of radical Saudi preachers; and/or had been heard expressing sympathy for the worldwide SJ movement, its leaders, and activities. In such cases, a direct association with SJ circles typically represented the culmination of a long process of increasing alienation from friends, family and society alike.
- However, many other young Moroccans who ended up implicated in terrorist activities never went through that gradual process of radicalization. Instead, they apparently were converted to an SJ outlook, and then turned into human bombs, all in record time. Hence, revelations of their involvement in violent endeavors came as a complete shock to relatives, friends and neighbors, who had not suspected anything.

From a CE perspective, the brevity of this second type of journey creates particular challenges. For one, it makes it especially difficult for the authorities to identify suspects. It also deprives CE professionals with the opportunity to design interventions that reflect the specifics of a particular phase in a more gradual radicalization process.

¹⁷² As suggested, for instance, by John Horgan (2008).

¹⁷³ Of course, only a minority of European converts or born-again Muslims turn to violence. But, for those who do, the journey can be very short.

PART SEVEN: CONCLUSION

The single most important point that the reader should take away from this publication is that VE must be seen in context -- whether one is analyzing a specific VE movement, or broader manifestations of VE in a particular society or locality. There can be no general theory about “why and how the turn to VE occurs,” because the answer to that question will vary from one setting to another. A detailed and nuanced understanding of the context, therefore, represents the first step toward the development of adequate policy responses to stem the flow of volunteers into VE organizations, deter community support for those organizations, and/or create an environment that makes it harder on them to operate. In general, prevention (or mitigation of modest VE problems) should be to be the primary focus; once VE has progressed to an insurgency or near insurgency, the utility of development assistance tools may be more circumscribed.

While analyses of VE movements and phenomena should place the latter in their context, it is important to avoid deterministic explanations. No context prompts automatic and predictable responses by the actors affected by it. In other words, while context matters, so do the assessments of the environment by those individuals and organizations that resort to VE. VE being a human endeavor, there is no avoiding the role of personalities and individual predispositions, chance encounters,¹⁷⁴ miscalculations, the misreading of particular situations ... or just plain chance.¹⁷⁵ To the extent possible, analyses of particular cases ought to reflect an appreciation for those variables as well.

Since VE typically results from the confluence of several factors and dynamics, mono-causal explanations of it should be viewed with particular skepticism. That conclusion, combined with the overarching importance of context, suggests that, from a programmatic perspective, there is no “magic bullet” for the many challenges posed by VE.

It is difficult to generalize not merely about the drivers of, and pathways into, VE, but about “VE” in general. For instance, the radicalization of Palestinians in Gaza, Shiites in Lebanon, second-generation Muslim immigrants in Western Europe, Chechen communities across the Russian Federation, or Pakistanis in the country’s tribal areas, are all driven by different combinations of factors. In fact, for each of the examples just provided, the dynamics and variables underpinning the turn to VE have varied over time. Moreover, what VE actually entails in any given setting is affected by the extent to which VE is the expression of a minority viewpoint, or a more widely shared one. In most contexts, those holding VE ideas represent a small minority; as a result, they typically are forced to conceal their opinions and/or operate underground. By contrast, in other settings, VE beliefs and/or behavior are far more pervasive and socially accepted -- indeed, they may come close to representing the “mainstream position.” In such instances, violent extremists may be able to operate in the open (at the very least, they will enjoy far greater freedom to maneuver).

¹⁷⁴ This document provided several examples of the role that chance encounters can play in the genesis of particular VE movements or situations. One example that was not discussed was the partnership that was forged during the 1990s between Osama Ben Laden, with his unique personality, organizational skills, and considerable resources, and Ayman al-Zawahiri, who from the very beginning was always the organization’s main ideologue. Had it not been for the decision of these two men to join forces, al-Qaeda may never have appeared -- or, at the very least, it would not have developed in the manner it did.

¹⁷⁵ Consider, for instance, the gift that the invasion of Iraq represented for al-Qaeda, which, in the wake of the loss of its Afghan sanctuary in the Fall and Winter of 2001, had seemed in disarray and increasingly marginal to global events. That invasion, and its aftermath, provided al-Qaeda with a new cause and recruitment tool, which the organization desperately needed in order to survive and remain relevant.

While generalizations are difficult, this document has identified specific political, economic and social factors, as well as particular types of group dynamics and socio-psychological processes, which, the record suggests, are particularly apt at generating or increasing vulnerability to VE. As was shown, some of those factors and dynamics operate at the macro (society-wide) level, others at the micro (individual) or meso (intermediate grouping) levels.

When examining a particular case, one should remain attuned to these “risk factors” and “risk processes.” One should remember, furthermore, that the relative importance of these factors and dynamics -- and, most importantly, the manner in which they combine to produce VE -- will vary from one setting to another, as well as over time. There also will be important distinctions to be made depending on whether one is concerned primarily about the involvement of individuals into VE activities; about community support for, or tolerance of, activities by VE organizations; or about the emergence of an environment conducive to the operations of such organizations.

Analysts, therefore, need to be specific about what exactly is being explained. Is the primary concern individuals joining VE organizations? Is it, instead, the emergence of a complicit society? Is it that transnational VE groups are beginning to operate? Is it the creation of an enabling environment for VE? Or is it several, or all, of the above? Different answers to those questions likely will lead analysts to emphasize different factors, processes, and combinations. But in all cases (i.e., whether analysts are concerned about individuals getting pushed or pulled into VE groups, about community support, or about an enabling environment), it is essential that analysts be able to separate those drivers that are critical from those that are less so, and that they identify how the most salient drivers relate to one another in ways that (depending on what is being explained) prompt individuals to join VE organizations, create a complicit society, and/or foster an enabling environment. Following these simple but important guidelines should enhance significantly the likelihood of effective policy responses to the challenges posed by VE.

ANNEX A: KEY DEFINITIONS

“ISLAMISM” AND “ISLAMISTS”

Islamism refers to the broad range of political movements and parties that share the belief that principles drawn from the Islamic tradition should have substantial influence on the public sphere and on the manner in which a society conducts or organizes its political life. Islamists disagree significantly with one another regarding ultimate objectives, strategies and tactics; the kind of society and political order to be established; and the exact role that religion should play in public life. What makes them all *Islamists*, however, is their rejection of the notion of a separation between religion and public life. *Islamists* believe that ideals, values or principles rooted in Islam are relevant to the modern world, and that they provide useful guidance on contemporary political and public-policy issues.

Islamists are concerned, first and foremost, with political power and governmental issues. They seek to attain political influence, and to gain access to state institutions in order to create a political, economic and social order that is more consistent with the views they espouse. In addition to their belief that Islam has something pertinent to say about how society should manage its affairs, the second key attribute of an Islamist is his/her belief in the merits of political action. A Muslim missionary striving to spread the faith, or a *Salafi* (see the definition below) concerned with what he views as a disturbing increase in immoral behavior, may both eschew political action. They even may be scornful of politics, preferring instead to focus on the spiritual salvation of individuals and communities. By contrast, an *Islamist* sees political action as a critical way of achieving his/her objectives; s/he eagerly enters the political arena and seeks to attain political power. *Islamists* often participate in formal politics, running in elections where they are allowed to do so (unless they decide to protest “unfair rules” by boycotting such contests). In more oppressive environments, they usually work outside the system. Even there, they may or may not adopt violent tactics.

“SALAFISM”

In current usage, *Salafism* refers to a highly conservative, dogmatic, and backward-looking religious outlook that advocates the need to return to the “pure Islam” practiced under Prophet Muhammad and his first four successors as leaders of the Muslim community. Salafism revolves around issues of personal morality and piety. It is concerned, first and foremost, with preserving Muslim faith and identity against what it views as the forces of “unbelief” and “heresy.” It emphasizes the need for individuals to abide by a strict code of conduct based on a rigid interpretation of the *sharia* (Islamic law) and a literal interpretation of the founding texts of Islam. *Salafism* sees impiety and deviations from the letter of the *Quran* and the *hadith* (the sayings and deeds of the Prophet) as the fundamental cause of all evil. It seeks to propagate its puritanical and inflexible vision of Islam through proselytizing and societal pressure, and it increasingly has come to be associated with reliance on violence as well. But it does not necessarily advocate violence.

“SALAFI JIHADISM”

Salafi jihadism refers to the merging of a *Salafi* outlook and a *jihadi* call to violence. SJ groups are motivated by a mix of religious and political objectives: they embrace a strict, literal interpretation of Islam, and combine it with an emphasis on *jihad*, understood here as holy war. They view *jihad* as the primary instrument through which their *Salafi* desire to “return” to the original message of Islam will become reality. Unlike first-generation radical *Islamists*, they approach jihad as a global struggle that knows no borders, and that focuses on combating the West, in general, and the United States, in particular. They form an amorphous, transnational movement, and disseminate an ideology that is fundamentally

hostile to modernity, to the secular, democratic nation-state, to the logic of globalization, and to the peaceful coexistence of different cultures and religions.

CONTRASTING “RADICAL ISLAMISTS” AND “SALAFI JIHADISTS”

While condoning and resorting to violence may be viewed as a shared attribute of radical *Islamists* and *Salafi jihadists*, the two groups of actors are, in fact, clearly differentiated by the manner in which they use violence, and by the type of goals which violence is supposed to serve. A radical *Islamist* may preach and resort to violence, but he/she does so for primarily political reasons. Examples include: a) members of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) who were radicalized by the cancellation of the second round of parliamentary elections in Algeria in January 1992, and who were seeking to force a return to the electoral process, or bring down a regime that had denied them the electoral victory they seemed about to achieve; and b) Hizballah or Hamas, who have used “armed resistance” as a way of securing political concessions (including the end of occupation). By contrast, a *Salafi jihadist’s* resort to violence is driven mostly by a religious agenda; political considerations also play a role, but they are secondary. To a *Salafi jihadist*, resort to violence is not a primarily a political tactic, but a religious obligation.

As the discussion above suggested, radical *Islamist* movements that have resorted to violence have done so typically in an effort to achieve clear and achievable political (as opposed to religious) objectives: the withdrawal of foreign forces, the overthrow of a particular government, or changes in government policies. In this particular case, therefore, violence is in the service of a political agenda that is at least reasonably realistic. It is possible to envision a solution to the dispute involved. By contrast, *SJ* movements resort to violence in the pursuit of objectives that are impossible to satisfy and incompatible with the logic of modernity and globalization (e.g., “the restoration of the caliphate”), and the satisfaction of which would entail the complete surrender and/or annihilation of the opponent. In addition to their extremely vague and overly ambitious ultimate goals, *SJ* movements are characterized by their under-developed and constantly changing political strategy. They lack not only a clear, coherent political project, but also a compelling blueprint for achieving it. They exist primarily through their capacity to wreak havoc.

TABLIGHI JAMAAT

The Tablighi Jamaat was founded in the late 1920s by the well known scholar Maulana Ilyas in India. It is an apolitical, quietist, missionary movement. Its central focus has been the renewal of Muslim society by renewing observant Islamic practice. With the ascent of Maulana Yusuf, Ilyas’ son, as its second emir, the group began to expand activities in 1946, and within two decades was working in Southwest and Southeast Asia, Africa, Europe, and North America. Once established, the Tablighi Jamaat began engaging local populations as well. It is very active in the Sahel and in the Horn of Africa. By 2008 it had a presence in nearly 80 countries and had become a leading revivalist movement. (Drawn from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tablighi>.)

TAKFIR/TAKFIRI

Takfir is an Arabic word that literally means “pronouncement of unbelief against someone,” and can be translated as “excommunication.” A takfiri is someone who excommunicates other Muslims. Takfir is the notion that an unbeliever, even a Muslim, may be excommunicated the moment that individual does not follow Sharia, or Islamic law, in its strictest sense. Merely fulfilling Islam’s five pillars isn’t enough, and may well be a cover for otherwise un-Islamic behavior if the individual is still susceptible to Western, Christian, Jewish, “Zionist” influences. Such susceptibility is equated with a return to jahiliyah, or the “state of ignorance” that prevailed before the advent of the Prophet Muhammad and Islam in the 7th century. Modern jahiliyah is considered even worse by believers in takfir, because Muslims today have the means to differentiate between true belief and ignorance. When they choose the latter, their crime is greater even

than that of non-Muslims. Excommunication for Muslims is the equivalent of apostasy--itself a justification for capital punishment in extremist interpretations of Islamic purity. The notion of takfir has been used by al-Qaeda and similarly militant and terrorist Islamist organizations to justify the killing of innocent people, Muslims as well as non-Muslims. But takfir is a controversial concept in Islam. Most Muslims, including most clerics and fundamentalist organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood, reject the concept as un-Islamic, deviant and dangerously divisive, as it is more likely to tear apart the ummah, or Islamic community than bring it together. (This definition is from <http://middleeast.about.com/od/glossary/g/me081213.htm>.)

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