# THINKING ABOUT RADICALIZATION AFTER SO CALLED ISLAMIC STATE: AN INTRODUCTION

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## ABSTRACT

Radicalization is one of the most debated concepts of the last decades which covers the process in which the individual, who feels alone in the society, departs from mainstream point of view and even adopts violent activities and beliefs. States attach special importance to coping with radicalization because of the fact that radicalization is not only a prospective process but also a retro-active one. In other words, radicalization is, up to a point, preventable, restrainable and reversible process. The process of radicalization tells us a lot about the reasons why people join terrorist organizations, and provides an insight into deradicalization of those who leave such organizations.

Terrorist organizations benefited from the environment of failed states in Iraq and Syria and increased their number of terrorist fighters into tens of thousands. During this period, a number of foreign fighters illegally entered Iraq and Syria to join different terrorist organisations. However, a lot of States face with the problem of returned foreign terrorist fighters after the defeat of so called Islamic State. States have to meet the challenge of returnees as they pose a risk of engaging in new recruitment, planning and carrying out new terror plots. Therefore, it is important for States to adopt counterradicalisation policies for those people who alienate in societies and have potential to adopt radical beliefs, to disengage those people who have already adopted such beliefs or participated in conflicts, and to deradicalize those who are disengaged or leave the terrorist organisations.

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## DAEŞ SONRASI RADİKALLEŞME ÜSTÜNDE DÜŞÜNME: GİRİŞ DENEMESİ

### ÖZET

Toplumda yalnızlaşan bireyin ana akım düşüncelerden koparak toplumun kabul etmediği düşünceleri kabul etmesi veya daha da ileri giderek şiddet içerikli eylemleri benimsemesi ile sonuçlanan süreci kapsayan radikalleşme olgusu, son yıllarda en çok tartışılan kavramlardan biridir. Devletler, radikalleşme ile mücadele konusunu oldukça önem vermektedir çünkü radikalleşme sadece ileriye dönük değil aynı zamanda geriye de gidebilen bir süreçtir. Diğer bir deyişle radikalleşme bir noktaya kadar önlenebilir, engellenebilir ve geriye döndürülebilir bir süreçtir. Radikalleşme süreçleri bize terör örgütlerine katılan kişilerin katılım sebepleri ile ilgili ipuçları verirken örgütten ayrılan kişilerin tekrar ılımlılaştırılması için de ışık tutmaktadır.

Irak ve Suriye'deki çatışmaların yarattığı başarısız devlet ortamından yararlanan terör örgütleri, savaşçı sayılarını on binlerce kişiye çıkartmışlardır. Bu dönemde, çok sayıda yabancı savaşçı değişik terör örgütlerine katılmak için yasa dışı şekilde Irak ve Suriye'ye giriş yaptılar. Ancak, sözde İslam Devletinin Irak ve Suriye'deki yenilgisinden sonra birçok ülke savaştan geri dönen savaşçı sorunu ile karşı karşıya kalmıştır. Geri dönen kişiler döndükleri ülkeler için örgütlere yeni üye kazandırma faaliyetlerine girişmeleri, yeni terör saldırıları organize etmeleri ve uygulamaları açısından oldukça büyük sorun teşkil etmektedir. Bu anlamda, devletlerin toplumdan soyutlanan ve radikal düşünceleri benimseme olasılığı bulunan kişiler için radikalleşme karşıtı politikalar, radikalleşmiş bireylerin şiddet içerikli eylemler ve düşüncelerden ayrışması ve radikalleşen kişilerin tekrar ılımlılaştırılması konularında politikalar benimsemeleri önem arz etmektedir.

**Anahtar    Kelimeler:**    Radikalleşme,    Radikalleşme    ile Mücadele, Arındırma, Ilımlaştırma, Yabancı Terörist Savaşçılar

## Introduction

Radicalization is a key term which helps us understand some of the most debated concepts of the 21st century such as extremism, terrorism or deradicalization. Although the concept has been studied before, the 9/11 attacks is a turning point in radicalization studies. Especially in the United States, scholars began to search for the reasons of the concept (McCauley and Moskalenko, 2017:205). That is mostly because of the fact that people who are called as mujahideen and perceived as moderate in Western States became terrorist after 9/11 (Taarnby, 2005:7). Besides, radicalization needs rethinking after the ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Syria as the conflicts add different dimensions like transnational fighters problem in radicalization studies (Dzhekova et al, 2016:5).

In this study, we aim to discuss the radicalization process as a whole to clarify contradictions in terms, to name the steps of reversing radicalization and take a big picture of the radicalization problems occurred after the conflicts in Iraq and Syria. We hope this study will be a starter for further studies so we add 'an introduction' in the title. We adopt a descriptive method to express the subjects covered in the study. Also, we try to express the subjects hiring a positive approach so as to give what is debated so far. The data given in the study is specially chosen from the most recent studies to give more accurate information.

First of all, we will begin with 'radicalization' to give a basis for the other sections of the study. We discuss the meaning of radicalization and give nuances between other terms. Then, we try to explain the problem of foreign terrorist fighters after the defeat of so called Islamic State (IS) in Iraq and Syria. In the last section, we define the terms related to reversing the radicalization process. In this section, we define 'counterradicalization', 'disengagement' and 'deradicalization'.

### 1- Radicalization

Although the term radical is, nowadays, used as if it has a negative meaning, it was used to describe people who are for political and social reform in 18th century (Schmid, 2013:6). 'Radical' is defined in Oxford Dictionary as "advocating or based on thorough or complete political or social change; representing or supporting an extreme or progressive section of a political party" and "characterized by independence of or departure from

tradition; innovative or unorthodox". Moreover, radicalism is "the beliefs or actions of people who advocate thorough or complete political or social reform (Oxford Dictionary, 2018)."

The definition and roots of radicalism is a highly contested term among scholars. However, the point almost all the scholars agree is that adopting radical beliefs is a process called as "radicalization". For Demant et al (2008:12-13), 'radicalization' is "a process of delegitimation, a process in which confidence in the system decreases and the individual retreats further and further into his or her own group, because he or she no longer feels part of society". In other words, radicalization is a psycho-social process which starts within an individual and needs a social medium to grow. This process is mostly associated with violence and extremism. For example, Borum (2011:9) defined radicalization as "the process of developing extremist ideologies and beliefs". Similarly, McAllister and Schmid (2011:217) state that "radicalization refers to a process of ideological socialization of (usually) young people towards effectuating fundamental political changes, usually through the use of violent tactics of conflict waging against the political enemies and their followers." Therefore, we have to differentiate between radicalism and extremism. Scruton (2007:237) defines extremism as "(1) taking a political idea to its limits, regardless of 'unfortunate' repercussions, impracticalities, arguments, and feelings to the contrary, and with the intention not only to confront, but also to eliminate, (2) Intolerance towards all views other than one's own, (3) adoption of means to political ends which disregard accepted standards of conduct, in particular which show disregard for the life, liberty and human rights of others". When describing the distinction between a radical and an extremist, Schmid (2013:10) states that radicals can be more democratic and more open-minded than extremists, who are strictly bound to their ideology.

As there are more people who have radical beliefs but not reached Iraq and Syria than those who did, there is an important question to be asked: whether every radical tends to be an extremist. Then, it is important to differentiate between cognitive and violent radicalization. "Cognitive radicalization is the process through which an individual adopts ideas that are severely at odds with those of the mainstream, refutes the legitimacy of the existing social order, and seeks to replace it with a new structure based on a completely different belief system. Violent radicalization occurs when an individual takes the additional step of employing

violence to further the views derived from cognitive radicalism (Vivino and Brandan, 2012:9)."

In the light of foregoing definitions, we could barrow Schmid's definition to define radicalization in a broad sense. Radicalization is "an individual or collective (group) process whereby, usually in a situation of political polarisation, normal practices of dialogue, compromise and tolerance between political actors and groups with diverging interests are abandoned by one or both sides in a conflict dyad in favour of a growing commitment to engage in confrontational tactics of conflict-waging. These can include either (i) the use of (non-violent) pressure and coercion, (ii) various forms of political violence other than terrorism or (iii) acts of violent extremism in the form of terrorism and war crimes (Schmid, 2013:18)."

## 2- The Problem Of Foreign Terrorist Fighters In Iraq And Syria

Before talking about the further steps of radicalization, it is important to understand the problems that the Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs) pose to States. The first problem is their diversity and growing numbers. FTFs are defined in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 2178 (2014) as "individuals who travel to a State other than their States of residence or nationality for the purpose of the perpetration, planning, or preparation of, or participation in, terrorist acts or the providing or receiving of terrorist training, including in connection with armed conflict". Although there is no implication to Islam in the definition of UNSC, FTFs are inequitably associated with Islam, which always sees human life as sacred and praises peace. This is mainly because the major terrorist organizations in Iraq and Syria against which the international coalition fight are of Salafist roots. However, there are FTFs other than Salafist organizations such as the FTFs fighting in the Kurdish and pro-government fronts whose numbers are in tens of thousands. Though the number of FTFs in Iraq and Syria differs, that is for sure that the total number has always increased so far. There were once around 300 fighters around Osama bin Ladin (El-Badawy et al, 2015:4), now, the number of Salafist FTFs has reached tens of thousands. The number was 15.000 in late 2014 (UNSC, 2014:1), 25.000 in 2015 (UNSC, 2015:3), then became more than 40.000 (Barrett, 2017:12-13). The defeat of IS in Iraq and Syria slows down the number of new recruits (UNSC Report, Symbol No: S/2017/573), yet it does not decrease the total number. A recent report (Barrett, 2017:9) indicates that even though the flow of new recruits slows down, the total number of Salafist FTFs increased. Moreover,

there are also 18.000 Shia militias fighting for Syrian Regime (Temizer et al, 2016) and around 30.000 Kurdish militias (Acun and Keskin, 2016:27). In a recent report (Orton, 2017:116) which examines 60 foreign fighters from 12 different countries shows that 78 percent of the foreign fighters in Kurdish fronts are from English speaking countries.

Another problem is the situation of the returnees. Barrett's report (2017:12-13) shows that there have been around 45.000 FTFs from more than 110 countries reached Iraq and Syria, and more than 7.500 of whom have returned to their origin or residence country. According to Barrett (2017:18-19), the returned IS FTFs fall into 5 categories, each of which resembles a different level of risk: (1) those who left early without integrating IS, (2) those who think they are disillusioned, (3) those who wants another place for fighting, (4) those who left IS because of the defeat or stopped/captured while travelling to join, and (5) those who are sent on a mission by IS. The threat of those people is also illustrated in a UNSC report (2017:5-6), which categorizes returnees under three categories: "The first category includes returnees who are disenchanted by ISIL as a group and terrorism as an ideology and therefore can potentially be deradicalized and reintegrated. The second much smaller category includes individuals who return with the specific aim of conducting terror attacks and therefore present a high risk to Member States. The third category is the most difficult to identify as it includes individuals who have clearly cut ties with ISIL after being disillusioned by ISIL as an organization. However, those individuals remain radicalized and are ready to join another terrorist group should the opportunity arise. Those individuals present a particular challenge as they pose a threat without concrete indications of current connections to terrorist groups."

FTFs, either Salafist or not, have become a problem for international society once more due to the fact that the numbers of returned FTFs constitute a threat for origin or residence States of the returnees so that they can pursue their goals after they have returned. From the declaration of its so-called caliphate in June 2014 to February 2017, "IS conducted or inspired around 143 terrorist attacks in 29 countries, causing the death of over 2,000 people and injuring many more (Barrett, 2017:14)". IS involved in 38 out of 42 attacks against the West between 2014 and 2016 (European Union's 'Radicalisation Awareness Network [RAN], 2017:15). While not all of the returned FTFs have the potential to

carry out an attack, the perpetrators of some of the most known attacks are IS connected or inspired. 6 of the Paris attackers in 2015 and 3 of Brussels attackers were returnees (RAN, 2017:15). Apart from returnees, there is another important group: those who were stopped and could not reach to battlefield. As Barrett (2017:15) stated, they have both enthusiasm of a new recruit, as well the hatred for being stopped to reach to battlefield. Only in Turkey, 4.957 foreigners were deported because of well-founded terror suspect since 2011, and 53.781 people from 146 different countries were banned to enter Turkey (Ministry of Interior Affairs[MIA], 2017:57-58). Interaction between the returnees and would-be FTFs can be a great threat. However, attacks or attack plots performed by would-be FTFs are more than the ones returnees involved. For Hegghammer and Nesser (2015: 27), "… there have been over twice as many IS sympathiser plots (22) as plots involving foreign fighters who returned from Syria (9). … The implication for counterterrorism professionals is clear: worry not only about the foreign fighters, but also about IS sympathisers who never made it to Syria". Besides, the perpetrator of Manchester concert bombing in 2017 had help and training from IS supporters (Barrett: 2017:15).

Even if they do not involve in any pots of terror act, FTFs pose a real challenge for States after their return because returning from the battlefield does not mean that FTFs will leave their ideology and stop being an FTF. Returnee men, women and children are also a problem of paving the way for radicalization. The threat they pose lies in their profiles. As presented in a manual by RAN (2017:6), the returnee men "have higher risk of combat experience and skills, [are] often involved in and exposed to war atrocities and [had] variety of roles within the terrorist-held territories … [Women are] "… mother to future soldiers, driven by sense of empowerment and their role in building 'the caliphate', involved in recruitment, indoctrination of children and others. [Children have] … intense ideological indoctrination through education and socialization, [are] recruited for combat and other violent activities from age 9 and severely traumatized."

### 3- Coping With Radicalization After The Defeat Of Is

With the help of States' strict control of their borders and the massive international military effort to end IS in Iraq and Syria, new recruitment to the organization nearly ended. After capture of Mosul and the so-called capital city of IS, Raqqa, the flow began to change, and the foreign terrorist fighters started to go back their home or to their residence countries. A recent report (Barret, 2017) shows that there are more than 7.000 European foreign

fighters returned and there are many more in other countries. There are also nearly 50.000 prevented people who attempted to reach Iraq and Syria (MIA, 2017). The numbers of returnees and people who could not manage to travel to so-called caliphate is so great a number that States are in search of dealing with the problem they pose. States should not only deradicalize and reintegrate the returnees but also take to protect those who are not radicalized or not involved in terrorism. There are three important concepts on coping with radicalization: counter-radicalization, disengagement and deradicalization.

### A. Counterradıcalızatıon

States responsibility to deal with people who are not radicalized or not involved in terrorism can be named as 'counter-radicalization'. In a UNSC report (2008:5) counter radicalization is defined as "policies and programmes aimed at addressing some of the conditions that may propel some individuals down the path of terrorism. It is used broadly to refer to a package of social, political, legal, educational and economic programmes specifically designed to deter disaffected (and possibly already radicalized) individuals from crossing the line and becoming terrorists."

Counter-radicalization is not a lawful enforcement and it focuses on communities that can be affected by radical ideas. It also focuses on people those who are not involved in extremist activities and on the edge or danger of radicalisation. A study by United States Bipartisan Policy Center (USBPC) (2011:16) explains that "Counter-radicalization seeks to prevent non-radicalized populations from being radicalized. The objective is to create individual and communal resilience against cognitive and/or violent radicalization through a variety of non-coercive means." The objectives of counter-radicalization are explained as:

"Counter-grievance: If violent extremists aim to exploit grievances, real or perceived, one of the core objectives of counter-radicalization is to address these grievances or the perception thereof.

Counter-ideology: If violent extremists seek to promote extremist narratives and make their ideology resonate, the purpose of counter-radicalization is to expose and counter such ideas; educate communities and thereby strengthen their defenses against the extremists' narrative; and empower community leaders to speak out against violent extremists and their ideas.

Counter-mobilization: If violent extremists attempt to form cells and recruit followers, the objective of counterradicalisation is to help communities build networks, knowledge, and "tools" that can be used to challenge and resist such attempts (USBPC, 2011:18)."

## B. Disengagement And Deradicalization

Disengagement and deradicalization are two important terms in coping with radicalization. Although these two terms are interrelated, they are different from each other. Disengagement is "the process whereby an individual no longer accepts as appropriate the socially defined rights and obligations that accompany a given role in society" (Ebaugh, 1988:3). Deradicalization is defined in Oxford dictionary as "the action or process of causing a person with extreme views to adopt more moderate positions on political or social issues." Nevertheless, the two contested words are different from each other and can happen without each other. As stated by Hearne and Laiq (2010:2),"deradicalization … refers to the process of divorcing a person, voluntarily or otherwise, from their extreme views, while "disengagement" refers to the process of moving a person away from their extreme group's activities, without necessarily deradicalizing that person or changing their views."

As it is understood from above, disengagement is about abandoning extremist activities and methods, and can happen without deradicalization. Horgen (2010:2-5) states that disengagement can have a psychological and physical dimensions. In the former dimension, an extremist can stay in the organization with only changing his role in it. Psychological disengagement can cause from developing negative sentiments, change in priorities and sense of disillusionment. In the later one, the extremist still has the ideology but departs from the violent activities. Physical disengagement can stem from imprisonment, forced or obligatory role change, being ejected from the organization or change in priorities. In both cases, the extremist abandons violent activities without ceasing the extremist ideas and beliefs.

Berger (2016:2-3) defines "disengagement is the process by which individuals cease to be mobilised in support of a violent extremist movement. [On the other hand,] de-radicalisation is the process by which individuals cease to hold extremist beliefs." Disengagement without giving up extremist roles and beliefs can revive former extremist activities. Hence, disengagement should end up with deradicalization, which is "the process of abandoning

an extremist worldview and concluding that it is not acceptable to use violence to effect social change (Rabasa, et al, 2010:1-2).”

Deradicalization can happen individually or collectively (Demant et al, 2008:13). It is clear from the above-mentioned definitions that individual deradicalization is one's ceasing extremist beliefs and activities on his own. Rabasa et al (2010:11-12) states that the individual deradicalization begins with a traumatic event or emotional crisis which leads the individual to think about benefits and harms of leaving the organization. When the individual reaches a turning point and leaves the organization, he or she will disengage. Then, the individual tries to develop a new identity and become a member of the society again. This last one is related to "the presence of a moderate social network, whether the individual has a job, whether the individual is accepted or ostracized by society, and whether the individual deradicalized." Otherwise, the individual can be an extremist again.

"Deradicalisation on a collective level means that a radical movement ceases to exist (Demant et al, 2008:13)." The collective deradicalisation depends on internal and external factors. The internal factors that affect collective deradicalization are 'failing ideology', 'failing organisational capacity' and 'failing leadership' (Demant et al, 2008:22). On the other hand, the external factors that affect collective deradicalization are disappearance or losing ground of the radical organisation, negative sentiment towards the organisation, a change in public opinion and a more attractive competing organisation (Demant et al, 2008:26)."

### Conclusion

Radicalization, which is one of the most important problems in the last decades, is a process in which an individual adopts radical beliefs departing from mainstream social views. The individual, who alienate from society, can turn onto radicalization by joining small groups of radicals where he or she feels more secure. Moreover, this process can turn into extremism by adopting the means of violence. However, radicalization is a retroactive process, as well being prospective.

It is a long process for an individual to be deradicalized whether voluntarily or involuntarily. Convenient factors should occur, and the individual cease the radical beliefs and activities. In this context, deradicalization means ceasing radical beliefs and concluding that adopting violent means is faulty. Nevertheless, the success of deradicalization process is bound to the

individual's having a new identity and reintegration into society. To do so, "finding a job and a new social network, acceptance by a supportive community, and whether the person deradicalized (Rabasa et al, 2010:12)" are quite requisite.

Rethinking about radicalization after the defeat of IS in Iraq and Syria is of vital importance when the contribution of extremists in terror attacks is considered. The number of returnees and people who wanted to reach Syria but could not is a daunting challenge for States. In the last few years, the perpetrators of terror attacks have motivation, training or logistics from member of terrorist organisations unless they are a member of an organization. Hence, States should adopt counterradicalisation policies to prevent radicalisation of those who are under risk of radicalization, to disengage those people who has already adopted such beliefs or participated in conflicts, and to deradicalize those who are disengaged or leave the terrorist organisations.

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