

Chapter 64

Radicalization and Recruitment: A Systems Approach to Understanding Violent Extremism

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ABSTRACT

Recent events such as the terrorist attack in Algeria (January 2013), the Boston Marathon Bombing (April 2013), the apprehension of two suspected al-Qaeda linked terrorists in Toronto, (April 2013), highlight the requirement for greater understanding regarding the radicalization and recruitment of terrorists. As detailed in the US Department of State Report (2011), over 10,000 terrorist attacks occurred in 2011, affecting nearly 45,000 victims in 70 countries and resulting in over 12,500 deaths. With a focus on the outcomes and results of terrorist activities, terrorism itself often becomes a 'blackbox' concept that does not capture the essence of the radicalization process nor the mechanisms of recruitment. This conceptual paper introduces Actor Network Theory (ANT) as a systems lens to open the 'blackbox' of terrorism. This systems lens '...is a discipline for seeing wholes. It is a framework for seeing interrelationships rather than things, for seeing patterns of change rather than static snapshots' (Senge, 1990:68). The systems view facilitated by ANT is supported and informed by methods of network analysis and conceptual modelling that highlight how dynamic networked actors shape the radicalization process through the actor network process of translation.

INTRODUCTION

Terrorism is often labeled a global threat. The events in Algeria, Boston and the recent arrests in Canada highlight issues pertaining to recruitment, radicalization and supporting structures that enable terrorism worldwide. These events and others challenge our understanding regarding the impact of ideology and local context on the motivations and recruitment for terrorism. How do we collectively deal with such complex issues as terrorism, often termed 'wicked problems'? The 'fixes that fail' archetype detailed by Senge (1990, 2006) and Sterman (2000) describe how action taken to rectify a situation, often only results in short term gains without addressing the foundational issues of the problem space.

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What is required in such wicked problems is greater understanding of the dependencies and interconnectivity that arises from a systems view of the problem space. This conceptual paper highlights actor network theory (ANT) as a systems lens to begin to reveal and unravel the complexities associated with terrorism and radicalization. In particular, the paper explores the application of the ANT process of Translation comprised of: problematization, interessement, enrolment and mobilization, to distinguish how heterogeneous becoming (Chia & King, 1998) of entities is reified within the context of terrorism and radicalization.

Global systemic factors, state structural, and socio-cultural factors (Davis & Cragin, 2009:xxiii) provide a macro-perspective on the problem space of terrorism. By opening these 'blackbox' (macro-perspectives) and 'following the actors' (Latour, 2005) we trace a complex, interconnected network that is best characterized as a rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). The network schema that is revealed through ANT has far reaching implications beyond the visual representations to include how we understand the temporal and spatial heterogeneity that is resident within the actor network. As such, this challenges our notions of far/close, small scale/ large scale and inside/outside (Latour, 1996:370) and to think in terms of associations and relations. This inherent relationality is central to our understanding of ANT and presents a unique systems lens on terrorism. The spatial and temporal implications are profound for our understanding of radicalization and terrorism. The actor network recognizes that 'what is acting at the same moment in any place is coming from many other places, many distant materials, and many faraway actors' (Latour, 2005:200).

This conceptual model that leverages ANT, draws upon the literature on terrorism and radicalization as well as contextually on 3 recent terrorist events: the terrorist attack on an oil processing plant in Algeria (January 2013); the Boston Marathon terrorist bombing (April 2013) and the apprehension of 2 alleged al-Qaeda terrorist in Canada (April 2013).

TERRORISM

The complexities associated with the definition of terrorism transcend the single-discipline approaches to understanding the motivations for terrorism. Within the context of terrorism, Bjelopera and Randol, (2011:3) define radicalization as a '...process of acquiring and holding extremist beliefs. ... violent extremism describes violent action taken on the basis of radical or extremist beliefs'. Bjelopera and Randol, (2011:10) argue that radicalization stems from the exposure of individuals to ideological messages and the movement of those individuals from mainstream beliefs to extremist viewpoints. Rabasa, Pettyjohn, Ghez and Boucek (2010:1) define radicalization as '...the process of adopting an extremist belief system, including the willingness to use, support or facilitate violence, as a method to effect societal change', thereby purporting the connection between extremist beliefs and violence.

Regarding the complex aetiology associated with radicalization and terrorism, studies by the DHS Office of Intelligence and Analysis indicate that radicalization varies across ideological and ethno-religious spectrums, different geographic regions and socio-economic conditions (Bjelopera & Randol, 2011:12). It is important to note as argued by TNO (2008:5) that although not every radical becomes a terrorist, every terrorist has gone through a radicalization process. What becomes apparent is that the process of radicalization emerges from the complex interrelationships and interdependencies of factors (actors).

Of particular interest given the 3 recent events in USA, Algeria and Canada is the strategic importance of home-grown recruits and facilitators of radicalization and recruitment. As described in Davis

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