VIOLENCE RESEARCH LAB

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Through radicalisation to violence

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ZAGREB, October 12, 2020 – A policeman was shot this morning on St. Mark's Square in front of the Government building. An ambulance arrived in front of the Government and transported him to the hospital. Police started an intensive search for the perpetrator and found his body in Jabukovac. They reported that the suspect committed suicide. The injured police officer is stable (Hina.hr).

The Chief Public Prosecutor's Office (DORH) said on Thursday **(23/07/2021)** that the 12 October 2020 attack, carried out by 23-year-old Danijel Bezuk, was an act of terrorism but that the attacker did not have an abettor or instigator.

Commenting on DORH's decision, **Prime Minister Andrej Plenković** said that he had seen footage of the attack, recalling that the perpetrator had twice returned to shoot at the government building and police.

"This incident was unprecedented. The perpetrator was young. This act cannot be described otherwise than a terrorist attack because it was an attack on an institution," the prime minister said.

He added that it was hard for him to believe that such a young person had committed such a crime for no reason and unprovoked.
"I think additional efforts should be made to see who are the **people who influenced such a young person, who indoctrinated him and led him to do something like that**. I don't think that he himself made the gun that he used, or that he learned to shoot on his own, or that he came to that decision on his own. I doubt there were no abettors or instigators," Plenković said (vlada.gov.hr).

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Radicalisation

- In general, the focus on radicalisation since 2004/05 is a welcome one since it is part of the long-neglected search for the root causes of terrorism.
- There is no universally accepted definition of 'radicalisation' in academia or government.
- There is only one common feature of radicalisation on which the radicalisation experts agree on – that **radicalisation is a process**.
- In 2006, the European Commission defined **radicalisation as 'the phenomenon of people embracing opinions, views and ideas which could lead to acts of terrorism'**(there are several problems with such a formulation).
- Definition of US Department of Homeland Security (DHS): **'The process of adopting an extremist belief system, including the willingness to use, support, or facilitate violence, as a method to effect social change'.**

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Radicalisation

- **Radicalisation is usually a gradual, phased process.**
- One model, developed by Joshua Sinai in 2012, divides the trajectory into three distinct phases: (1) Radicalisation, (2) Mobilisation (a form of active engagement) and (3) Action (i.e. terrorism).
- For the Radicalisation phase, Sinai identifies six groups of factors:

  1. Personal factors, such as a cognitive opening which takes the form of a seeking of an empowering religious or political ideology that addresses the individual's concerns,
  2. Political and socioeconomic factors, such as a perception that one is being discriminated against,
  3. Ideological factors which are crucial but insufficient by themselves,
  4. Community factors such as the presence of extremist subcultures within one's local community,
  5. Group factors, such as the presence of an extremist gateway organization in one's community,
  6. Enabling factors that provide means and opportunity to become an extremist.

- Sinai describes the Mobilisation's active phase as consisting of three primary components: (1) opportunity (e.g. contacts to a terrorist group), (2) capability (e.g. training in the use of arms), and (3) readiness to act on behalf of a terrorist group.

Joshua Sinai, 'Radicalisation into Extremism and Terrorism: A Conceptual Model', The Intelligencer, Vol. 19, No. 2 (Summer/Fall 2012), pp. 21-3.

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The process of radicalization to violent extremism

Table 1. Potential Risk Factors for Radicalizing to Violent Extremism

Experiencing identity conflict
Feeling there is a lack of meaning in life
Wanting status
Wanting to belong
Desiring action or adventure
Having experienced trauma*
Having mental health issues or being emotionally unstable/troubled
Being naïve or having little knowledge of religion and ideology
Having strong religious beliefs
Having grievances
Feeling under threat
Having an "us versus them" world view
Justifying violence or illegal activity as a solution to problems*
Having engaged in previous criminal activity*
Stressors (e.g., a family crisis, being fired from a job)
Societal discrimination or injustice
Exposure to violent extremist groups or individuals
Exposure to violent extremist belief systems or narratives
Family members or other in violent extremist network*

* Risk factor was identified by comparing individuals who did and did not engage in extremist violence.

The process of radicalization to violent extremism generally involves multiple facilitators and may vary by individual, group, type of belief system, and context.

Radicalization and Violent Extremism: Lessons Learned From Canada, the U.K. and the U.S. National Institute of Justice, Arlington, VA. July 28-30, 2015

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The process of radicalization to violent extremism

Table 2. Most Frequently Mentioned Facilitators of the Radicalization to Violent Extremism

Connections With Violent Extremists in Social Network
Identity Processes
Violent Extremist Belief Systems or Narratives
Group Dynamics
Connections With Violent Extremists and Violent Extremist Material via the Internet and Social Media
Grievances
Search for Meaning
Threats or Perceived Threats
Triggering Events
Activities to Demonstrate Commitment

There are several models of the process by which individuals are radicalized to violent extremism.

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Causes for radicalisation that can lead to terrorism

1. Micro-level, i.e. the individual level, involving e.g. identity problems, failed integration, feelings of alienation, marginalisation, discrimination, relative deprivation, humiliation (direct or by proxy), stigmatisation and rejection, often combined with moral outrage and feelings of (vicarious) revenge.

2. Meso-level, i.e. the wider radical milieu – the supportive or even complicit social surround – which serves as a rallying point and is the 'missing link' with the terrorists' broader constituency or reference group that is aggrieved and suffering injustices which, in turn, can radicalise parts of a youth cohort and lead to the formation of terrorist organisations.

3. Macro-level, i.e. role of government and society at home and abroad, the radicalisation of public opinion and party politics, tense majority – minority relationships, especially when it comes to foreign diasporas, and the role of lacking socio-economic opportunities for whole sectors of society which leads to mobilisation and radicalisation of the discontented, some of which might take the form of terrorism.

Marc Sageman, Understanding Terror Networks (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), p. 115.;Stefan Malthaner and Peter Waldmann (Eds.), Radikale Milieus. Das soziale Umfeld terroristischer Gruppen (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2012

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De-radicalisation, Disengagement and Protection

1. **De-Radicalisation Factors**	1.1 Rejection of rigid ideology
	1.2 Rejection of violence
	1.3 Evidence of replacement of non-violent goals
	1.4 Motivation to de-radicalise present
2. Disengagement Factors	2.1 Belief that violence is a failing strategy
	2.2 Disillusionment with spiritual leadership
	2.3 Shift in ideology
	2.4 Disillusionment with organisation experiences
	2.5 Grown away from movement
3. Protective Factors	3.1 Family/girlfriend/spouse influence relating to rejection of violence
	3.2 Community public opinion moved away from support for violence
	3.3 Change of vision of enemy and desired outcome
	3.4 Reversal of social alienation
	3.5 Non-violent views of significant others

D. Elaine Pressman, Risk Assessment Decision for Violent Political Extremism, Report by Public Safety Canada (2009), p. 24.

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Conclusion

- The main problem is radicalisation to extremism, not to radicalism.

- While the Western traditions of freedom of thought and expression can accommodate radical thought (but not necessarily all types of radical action), there is no real compromise possible with closed-minded extremists.

- Whenever extremism raises its head in the form of pushing a political agenda against Western core values due to its preference for: (1) force/violence over persuasion; (2) uniformity over diversity; (3) collective goals over individual freedoms and (4) giving order over seeking dialogue, **our alarm bells should go off.**

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Some Recommendations for Countering Violent Extremism

Domestic Counter-radicalisation Policies

- It is important to propagate and demonstrate good governance and develop inclusive institutions that can provide for peaceful, gradual, reformist social and political flexibility and change.
- **It is crucial to strengthen and maintain a strong sense of legitimacy among the public regarding the fairness of the judicial and the political system.**

Foreign Policy

- Governments should strive to work towards improvements in the human condition everywhere and assist wherever possible in strengthening human security for all.
- Governments and non-governmental organisations should engage and cooperate in efforts to build international consensus to delegitimise extremists and their ideologies.
- Governments should promote the rule of law and good governance as an instrument of foreign policy in general.

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Communication Policies

- It is vital to neutralise extremist indoctrination efforts by preventing and countering hate speech, extremist propaganda and ill-founded conspiracy theories in the public sphere and on the Internet.

- Government and civil societies should encourage the media and Internet providers to deny the free and easy access to publicity for terrorists and their supporters in return for producing atrocities.

- Instead of solely following a repressive, take-websites-down approach, governments and civil society actors should try to engage with extremists online to counter the violent extremist narrative.

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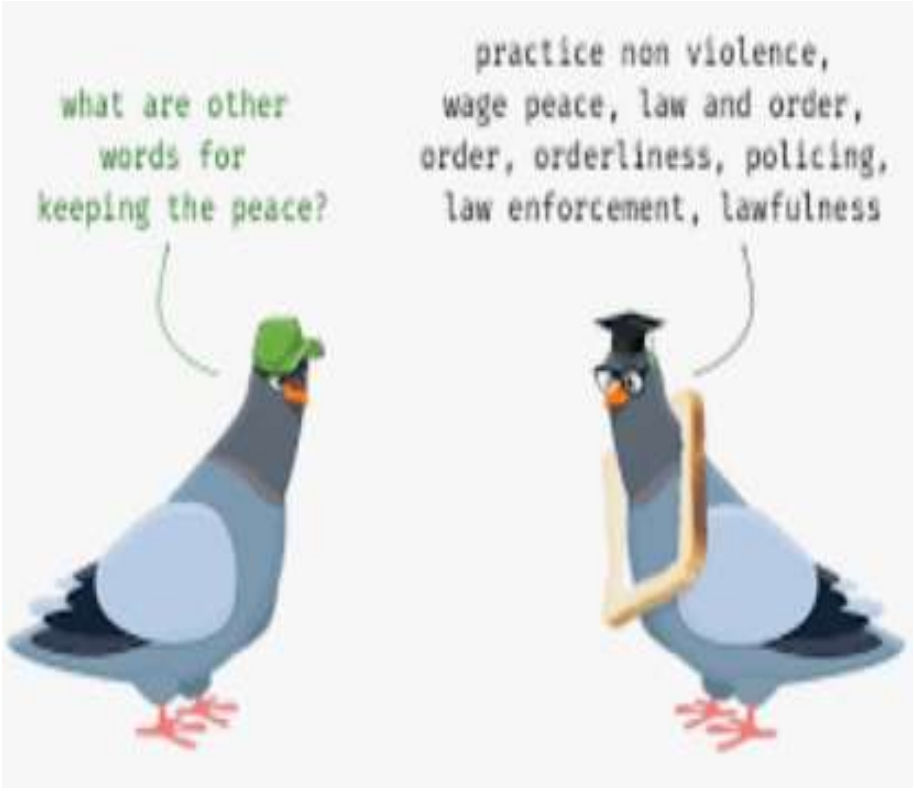
In the end – Some thoughts



- **Governments** do not need to be perfect before they can effectively engage in successful counter-radicalisation efforts.
- **Political leaders** need to stand on the moral high ground when it comes to fighting abuses of power, readressing injustices and address popular grievances.

Wherever that can be achieved at least in part, extremists and terrorists have, in the long run, no chance of success.

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Thanks For Your Attention !

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