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**TACKLING
INSURGENT
IDEOLOGIES**
in a Pandemic World

Edited by
Maya Mirchandani

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Editor's Note

When the impact of COVID-19 will be analysed historically, the ability of the pandemic to exacerbate existing political, socio-cultural, religious and ideological faultlines will undoubtedly find prominence. If 2019 saw governments and tech companies commit to working towards the elimination of terrorist and violent extremist content online by signing on to the Christchurch Call to Action, 2020 has seen a 'viral' explosion of weaponised information that has not only deepened polarising divides but also underscored the challenges of keeping up with the speed, volume and ever-changing nature of technology and how it is being used in these unprecedented times.

The Christchurch Call was premised on the fundamental belief of the need for a free, open and secure internet, and the right to and respect for freedom of expression. However, the fine balance between safeguarding these freedoms and ensuring that technology does not become a tool in the hands of bad actors—state or non-state—using platforms in a pandemic to promote hate and violence is being severely tested. Deepfakes using heavy-duty artificial intelligence and computational manipulation and cheap fakes that doctor existing video have snaked through cyberspace to impact perceptions of public health and humanitarian crises, about the reach of Big Pharma and Big Data, to create conspiracies, and to threaten and target already marginalised communities.

Extremists are taking advantage of such an *infodemic* characterised by several forms of weaponised information. Intentionally false narratives or 'disinformation', inadvertently false 'misinformation', an intentional lack of fair and balanced reporting or 'missing' information, and 'mal-information' that can lead to cyberattacks that amplify religious or racial polarisation have been unleashed globally in a climate already vitiated by radical, ideological violence. Our contributors make the case that 'ideological formations and online subcultures' are building extremist cohesion amongst disparate individuals and inspiring acts of violence offline. Instead of group affiliation, the need of the day is to understand the advent of extremist 'ecosystems'.

In the West, particularly the US, which is currently in the throes of a vicious election campaign, COVID-19 has become political. Not only has it only worsened a geopolitical and geo-economic conflict between the US and China, it is feeding conspiracies about the supposed enemy—immigrants, atheists, Muslims, 'rogue' nations and the like. So much so that our American contributors argue that their country's biggest threat today is not only transnational jihadist violence from groups like ISIS and al-Qaeda, but by what the FBI is prioritising as domestic terrorism—white supremacist groups fueled by these divides. If the US wants to pursue countering violent extremism (CVE) strategies, can the

current White House have a consistent message against all forms of extremist violence, jihadist and otherwise?

But it is not just the US. Across the world, whether it is in Turkey (where the centuries old Hagia Sofia has been declared a mosque instead of a museum, pitting Muslims against each other as moderate or radical), or Hungary (where Viktor Orban has used the pandemic to decree his permanent presidency and enforce authoritarian control over a democratic country), or in India (where the COVID-19 lockdown on the back of violent communal riots in Delhi that targeted Muslims for their vocal opposition to new citizenship laws, found members of a conservative, proselytising Muslim sect at the receiving end of accusations of having spread what several right-wingers termed #coronajihad), the intersections between populist politics, ideology, dangerous speech and real world harm have become all too apparent. Our contributors make the case that a new post pandemic threat landscape is fluid, and global extremist movements have become fractured franchises, adding to the breadth of the challenge.

As political discourse turns tribal, reductive and binary, it not only challenges law enforcement and national security agencies in terms of the new threats it creates, but also in terms of the drivers of radicalisation that need addressing. Our contributors argue that this “lethal combination of political, institutional, legal, economic and social exclusion promises to sow the seeds for a conflict that will destabilise India in the years to come.”

While defining a global CVE agenda, the United Nations has repeatedly emphasised the need for a comprehensive approach to tackling the spread of terrorism and violent extremism, and asked member states to promote inclusion and cohesion within their borders, to engage with relevant local communities, and to address conditions that abet the spread of violent extremism by empowering youth, their families, and cultural, social or religious organisations. The hope that law enforcement, researchers, practitioners and the media could not only ensure security, but also become agents of positive change is, however, premised on the building of trust. Trust among these various institutions and individuals, and between those vulnerable to radicalisation. And yet, in an atmosphere of hate and intolerance, amplified by a pandemic that has brought out our basest survival instincts, it seems we are back at the beginning.

As several of our contributors ask—can we define and identify a process of radicalisation? Can we identify drivers of radicalisation beyond the obvious markers of ethnic, racial or faith-based identities? Can we find ways to address the concerns of individual, community or national security, while ensuring a free and democratised internet, without the government’s interference and the attendant dangers of its surveillance of political dissent? And perhaps most importantly, can we do it urgently, to mitigate the damage already done by the cauldron of radical violence, ideological hate and populist polarisation that threatens our futures as seriously as a pandemic does today.

Maya Mirchandani

1

Confronting the Challenge of 'Post-Organisational' Extremism

Milo Comerford

The UK's recent ban of the sixth far right group since 2016, the neo-Nazi Feuerkrieg Division, might come as little surprise given the growing challenge posed to the country by right wing extremism. But what might seem stranger is that this largely online entity—allegedly founded by a 13-year-old Estonian boy—'no longer existed' by the time of its proscription, with members already fanning out to join new online groups since the its dissolution in February (1).

Episodes like these reflect a constellation of interrelated challenges associated with an increasingly 'post-organisational' threat landscape—where the fluid boundaries between organisations and movements, direction and inspiration, and online and offline are becoming more and more ambiguous.

The fracturing and franchising of global extremist movements globally poses a critical challenge for policymakers and tech companies. Amid mounting pressure from governments and civil society, some progress has been made in recent years in removing illegal terrorist content associated with proscribed groups from more mainstream social media platforms. However, our current approaches are not fit to tackle an increasingly diffuse, 'post-organisational' threat emerging from both Islamist and far-right extremism.

Given the increasingly decentralised, post-organisational and 'crowdsourced' nature of both the global Islamist and far-right movements, in large part enabled through burgeoning online extremist ecosystems, it is essential that policymakers and tech companies alike develop policy frameworks that move beyond a group-centred approach to understanding the threat from violent extremist groups.

A Changing Threat Landscape

In 2019, high-profile attacks in New Zealand, the US, Germany and Norway were committed by individuals with little or no connection to extremist organisations or proscribed terrorist groups. Evidence suggests that these individuals were connected to

loose extreme right networks largely operating online (2)(3)(4)(5).

This points to a shift towards an increasingly post-organisational paradigm whereby online connection to extremist culture and ideology could be as important to inspiring violence as connections to “on the ground” groups. Scholars Bruce Hoffman and Colin Clarke posit that “a confluence of ideological affinities is more powerful in inspiring and provoking violence than the hierarchical terrorist organizational structures of the past”(6). Across Europe and North America, we are seeing the challenge moving from a “monochromatic threat from Salafi-jihadist groups like al-Qaeda and the Islamic State’ towards ‘a kaleidoscope [of] new threats from “boogaloo bois,” white supremacists, neo-Nazis, shadowy anarchist elements, and the extreme fringe of violent incels”(7). The FBI’s listing of the fringe conspiracy community Qanon as a domestic terror threat, and threats coming from an increasingly wide range of actors tangential to the extreme right show the diversification of this challenge (8).

Digital platforms have played a major role in realising the long-seeded concept of ‘leaderless resistance’ and ‘leaderless jihad’, first discussed decades ago by extremist ideologues such as white supremacist Louis Beam Jr and the al-Qaeda-linked Abu Musab al-Suri (9). In understanding this post-organisational landscape, it is essential to analyse the online ecosystems that provide a permissive space where violent and terrorist activity can be explicitly endorsed.

The Post-Organisational Far Right

This post-organisational challenge poses a particular threat within far right extremism, with increasingly ideologically cohesive, networked and transnational movements forging new online ecosystem across unregulated imageboard sites such as 8chan and 4chan, censorship-free discussion platforms like Voat, ultra-libertarian social media sites like Parler, and encrypted messaging channels such as Telegram, to coordinate campaigns and share extremist content (10).

But there remains considerably less international alignment around the far right than there is on Islamist threats, posing major challenges to classification and enforcement. There have been moves to proscribe far right groups as terrorist organisations in some national contexts, such as National Action in the UK and Blood & Honour in Canada, while the US recently proscribed its first foreign ‘Racially and Ethnically Motivated’ terrorist organisation, the Russian Imperial Movement (11) (12) (13). But such movements are banned in some countries but not others, even if, like Combat 18, they have transnational membership (14). While tech companies have been developing their own internal guidelines and terms of service around ‘hateful’ and ‘dangerous’ groups, specific policies around terrorism are partly hamstrung by the limitations of international lists of proscribed terrorist groups, such as the UN Designated Terror Groups list, which are focused on ISIS and al-Qaeda related threats (15).

Meanwhile groups like Atomwaffen Division, originally formed in the US, are currently not banned at all despite explicitly advocating for the use of terrorist tactics. An analysis of the presence of terrorist-supporting constituencies on Telegram has shown that while the organisational power of groups such as Atomwaffen Division is still important, there

is an expansive network of terrorist-endorsing channels on the platform that are not explicitly affiliated with any group, which are very easy for individuals to tap into without expressing formal affiliation to a movement or making contact with other affiliates. Channels and content can thus be seen as “pro-terrorist” whereby support is expressed for politically motivated violence or individuals who have committed attacks, even when there is no express affiliation to a proscribed organisation (16).

Such ambiguity points to the importance and urgency of a broader discussion at a national and international level around ways of addressing the post-organisational extreme right through a counter-terrorism apparatus, which is still largely geared towards countering a group-based challenge, and proscription-based approaches.

Defining the parameters of an extremist movement

Such ambiguities have been especially clear in the recent case of the ‘Boogaloo’ phenomenon, a broad-based anti-government movement with considerable white supremacist elements whose membership has been accelerated by crisis narratives around the COVID-19 pandemic and the protests in the wake of the murder of George Floyd (17). Individuals identifying with the amorphous movement, which hinges considerably on a distinctive and fast evolving online subculture, have been arrested for plotting to fire-bomb Black Lives Matter protesters (18).

In a recent series of takedowns targeting hundreds of Boogaloo affiliated groups, pages and accounts, Facebook sought to distinguish between a “violent” boogaloo network that was banned, while leaving online what it described as a different, “broader and loosely-affiliated boogaloo movement” that does not seek to commit violence (19). But such a distinction is not necessarily that clear cut. Joan Donovan director of the Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard Kennedy School claimed that Facebook’s attempt to distinguish between violent and non-violent boogaloo groups was “particularly dangerous” and “a fallacy that allows some white supremacists to continue to operate so long as they tone down their violent rhetoric” (20). Whether the Boogaloo movement is inherently supremacist remains open for debate, but this episode demonstrates the challenges in considering extremism threats through a solely ‘organisational’ lens.

While reflecting the internal processes of a private company rather than a government, such distinctions have echoes of the (largely arbitrary) distinctions made between the ‘violent’ and ‘political’ wings of groups like Hamas and Hezbollah in considerations around terrorism designation. While Hamas is banned in its entirety as a terrorist group by Israel, the US and the EU, the UK instead lists Hamas’s military wing, the Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades, as a proscribed terrorist organisation. Meanwhile, the UK and Germany recently joined the US in proscribing Hezbollah’s entire organisation, while only its military wing is banned by the EU (21).

After ISIS

This post-organisational challenge goes beyond the far right. With ISIS' so-called 'caliphate' territorially defeated, the international community risks making an oft-repeated mistake, by underestimating the continuing ideological threat and morphing patterns of mobilisation of the wider Salafi-jihadi movement. There has been limited action by policymakers and platforms to target the broader extremist ideological ecosystem that will inevitably outlast the rise and fall of any individual group or organisation. For instance, while social media companies have had relative success in removing official ISIS and al-Qaeda content from platforms, including through a cross-industry 'hashing' database of terrorist propaganda, there is still a considerable 'gray zone' of Islamist extremist ideological material that falls foul of platform terms of service, but slips through the gaps due to enforcement primarily focused on 'organisational' material.

ISD researchers have identified considerable networks of users, channels and pages sharing al-Qaeda and ISIS "legacy terrorist content" across both Facebook and YouTube. This includes seminal texts that underpin the strategies and objectives of Salafi-jihadist groups, from Abu Musab al-Suri, an ideologue described as the "architect of global jihad" who has been central to the tactics, techniques, and tone of Islamist extremism for the past two decades (22). In 2019, research from ISD found that al-Suri's 1,604-page tome on jihadist strategy, 'The Global Islamic Resistance Call', referred to as the "Mein Kampf of the jihadist movement", could easily be found on both Facebook and YouTube simply by searching for their titles in Arabic (23).

Meanwhile, as the online challenge posed by ISIS and its supporter networks enters an increasingly 'post-organisational' frame with the degradation of its centralised media operations, even official propaganda from the terrorist group continues to proliferate on mainstream platforms in 2020. ISD researchers recently carried out a three-month investigation on a network of pro-ISIS accounts on Facebook that are freely sharing explicit propaganda material to audiences in the tens of thousands, documenting the use of a range of tactics to evade moderation and takedown (24).

Implications for Effective Responses

The increasingly post-organisational nature of the extremism threat across the ideological spectrum has a number of implications for traditional top-down, group-based approaches favoured by policy makers. As Hoffman and Clarke point out, "Bureaucratic organizations with hierarchical leadership structures and clearly-defined objectives have been supplanted by loosely networked movements with amorphous goals that exist across the ideological spectrum," challenging the usual methods adopted by policymakers and practitioners to disrupt the operations of specific groups, online and offline (25).

It is becoming clear that viewing the challenge through a purely organisational lens fails to reflect the current threat landscape, particularly on the far right but also increasingly with contemporary Islamist challenges. Rather, there is a clear need to understand the role of wider ideological formations and online subcultures in building extremist cohesion and inspiring offline activities, including terrorist violence. This

realisation has broad policy implications, from offline prevention to online moderation, where approaches need to move beyond framing threats in terms of group membership and towards understanding extremist ecosystems.

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2

Domestic Terrorism in the US, Disinformation and the Impact of COVID-19

Colin P. Clarke

The US is dealing with a shifting threat landscape, which looks far different from the days of the so-called global war on terrorism. Since the 11 September 2001 al-Qaeda attacks through the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the US has been primarily focused on combating the threat posed by Salafi-jihadist groups overseas, as well as working to prevent the radicalisation of American citizens who are encouraged to launch attacks on US soil.

In 2020, the threat has changed, and the US is now just as concerned about domestic terrorism as it is about transnational terrorism. To be sure, the transnational threats still remain, and even some of the far-right extremist groups born in the US have developed international connections. And as evidenced by the terrorist attack at Naval Air Station Pensacola by a Saudi Air Force lieutenant inspired by al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, Salafi jihadist groups like al-Qaeda and ISIS, and their affiliates, offshoots and franchise groups, will continue to search for innovative ways to attack the US.

Rising Domestic Terrorism

The US has been grappling with a sharp rise in domestic terrorism, specifically fueled by the broad category of far-right extremists, which includes violent white supremacists, neo-Nazis, anti-government militias and emerging movements like the so-called 'Boogaloo Bois,' motivated by a shared hatred of law enforcement (1).

Violent white supremacists and neo-Nazis are the most clear and present danger. The Base is a neo-Nazi group that maintains linkages to Canada, Australia and South Africa, and promotes the idea of accelerationism, or destroying "the system" in a quest to eradicate governments and nation-states (2). Its leader Rinaldo Nazzaro (aka Norman Spear) is allegedly based in St. Petersburg, Russia. Members of The Base, which in Arabic translates to 'al-Qaeda,' frequently display an affinity for jihadist groups and Osama bin Laden in their online propaganda (3). Several members of The Base were arrested earlier this year as they planned to attack police officers and civilians involved in a pro Second

Amendment (pro-gun) rally in Richmond, Virginia (4).

The Atomwaffen Division (AWD) is another group with roots in the US that has now gone global. AWD has cultivated a relationship with the Azov Battalion. The group boasts transnational linkages with other groups too, including with Sonnenkrieg Division, a white supremacist group based in Europe, with strong membership in the UK and Eastern Europe. Its members also have linkages in Canada, Germany and Ukraine (5). There have also been linkages to the Antipodean Resistance in Australia. The group has an intense obsession with violence, previously publishing videos featuring members training with firearms and spreading white supremacist propaganda (6). Should the online network revolving around AWD ever metastasise into a full-scale underground terror movement, it could draw upon an anonymous globalised network with an indeterminate number of supporters.

Another domestic threat in the US are the so-called 'Boogaloo Bois,' part of a decentralised, nationwide network that is more of a loosely defined movement with a shared hatred of law enforcement than anything approaching a group or an organization (7). The term "Boogaloo" itself is largely used online as a code word for civil war. Adherents of this movement foresee a conflict between armed citizens and law enforcement that ultimately results in the US government being violently overthrown. Members of the movement are highly visible at protests and demonstrations, often bedecked in trademark Hawaiian shirts (8).

There exists a larger pool of far-right extremists beyond the Boogaloo, to include QAnon, white supremacists and other anti-government militia types. There remains significant potential for cross-pollination between these entities, and the 4chan /k/ board, where the feature is weapons, is one site where the co-mingling takes place (9). The Boogaloo movement itself has become a repository for fringe extremists, many of whom hold conspiratorial beliefs and frequently reference false flag incidents, the Deep State, and disinformation related to the coronavirus (10). Conspiracies have the potential to link the Boogaloo movement with the ever-growing and bizarre world of QAnon followers, who believe that well-connected elites like Hillary Clinton and George Soros are actually pedophiles that operate a global sex trafficking ring (11). Several incidents have crossed over from the virtual world and have become violent, including the infamous 'Pizzagate' incident in Washington D.C. in 2016 (12). The movement has apparently spread to Canada, where it has gained new followers (13).

A History of Extremism

Anti-government extremists and right-wing radical groups in the US have a long history. The militia and paramilitary movement in the US peaked in the 1990s when its broader membership was assessed at as high as five million members and sympathisers, (14) although terrorism expert Bruce Hoffman notes that realistically the number may have been closer to 100,000 (15). Still, following the election of Barack Obama, coupled with a devastating economic recession, the number of militia groups is estimated to have expanded significantly, from approximately 50 distinct groups to more than 276 over the next several years (16). Hoffman divides the militias into "talking militias" (also known

as “out-front” militias) and “marching militias,” (or “up-front” militias). The distinction is that the former is primarily concerned with the Second Amendment and issues related to anti-gun legislation, while the latter are “actively involved in violent, seditious activities, embracing the combination of revolutionary, racist, and anti-Semitic doctrines inherent in the wider American Christian Patriot movement” (17).

A range of other conspiratorial beliefs permeate the broader Patriot and militia movement, most of which involve the idea that the US government will seek to subdue large numbers of Americans in detention camps, in some cases through a partnership between US special operations forces and foreign troops (18). Because the militia and paramilitary movement is so diverse and the range of beliefs can vary from group to group, splintering is not uncommon as groups fall out with one another over issues including finances, political and religious beliefs, or disagreements over what should constitute ‘traditional values.’

Many of these militia groups adhere to a highly conspiratorial ideology that fears a shadowy cabal of elites and “a millenarian view of history” (19). These groups are heavily armed and frequently glorify previous incidents where clashes occurred between federal agents and members of the movement, including seminal events such as the siege of compound in Ruby Ridge, Idaho, and the standoff at the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas, in 1993 (20). Incidents like Ruby Ridge and Waco have had a radicalising influence on militia members, reinforcing their desire to remain on a “war footing” to defend against the belief that the US government is specifically targeting domestic militia and paramilitary groups (21). Other incidents that are revered in the movement include Timothy McVeigh’s 1995 bombing of the Oklahoma City Federal Building. There have been numerous instances where militia groups have been arrested while attempting to acquire deadly toxins and contaminants to be used in terrorist attacks. Additional cases involve individuals arrested by the FBI for their interest in acquiring and using so-called “dirty bombs” (22).

Sovereign citizens are distinct from the Patriot movement, but the Patriot movement employs some language, concepts, and conspiracy theories lifted from sovereign ideas. Sovereigns are less cohesive and organisational. Sovereign citizen ideas are strongly historically linked to white nationalism, but that element has receded, and there are quite large numbers of black sovereigns today, with closely related but somewhat different beliefs that lead to the same kind of behaviors. Tax resisters or tax protestors frequently attempt to conjure quasi-legal arguments to claim immunity from income tax, and often engage in tax fraud.

Uncertainty Ahead

Layered on top of the evolution is disinformation that has been introduced into white supremacy and far-right propaganda. COVID-19 has provided an opportunity for the far-right to push its worldview and ideology on its members and potential recruits. The usual scapegoats—Jewish people (23), minorities (24), and immigrants (25)—are blamed for the spread of the virus. The accelerationists within the far-right have also seized upon the unrest and instability surrounding the protests over the murder of George Floyd (26).

With everyone at home during quarantine and spending time online, white supremacists and other anti-government extremists have had ample opportunity to recruit new members. Indeed, the first half of 2020 may well prove to be a watershed moment in recruitment and propaganda for domestic terrorist groups and other violent extremists in the US. In these troubling times, when even the US president is a frequent purveyor of disinformation and conspiracy theories, uncertainty abounds.

Unfortunately, the lead up to the November 2020 presidential elections will be a time of rising tensions in an already tense country. Foreign influence campaigns and disinformation will proliferate. And in a nightmare scenario, if US President Donald Trump were to lose re-election and go on to use social media to label it “rigged,” which he is already setting the groundwork for, the US could see some of the most sustained political violence, domestic terrorism and civil unrest since the late 1960s and early-to-mid 1970s, when protests over the Vietnam War destabilised the country.

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3

Countering Violent Extremism in the US: A Work in Progress

Eric Rosand

The rationale for countering violent extremism (CVE) is straightforward. Traditional counterterrorism and law enforcement approaches alone are unable to prevent extremist violence from taking root in communities. Instead, more comprehensive, “whole of society” efforts aimed at addressing the drivers of the violence and countering violent extremist narratives and propaganda are needed to prevent the radicalisation and recruitment of young people. Moreover, involving non-law enforcement actors, such as social workers, mental health professionals, peers, community leaders, civil society organisations and teachers, will allow law enforcement and other security actors to focus their attention and resources on those individuals who have already committed to violence.

Despite resting on seemingly unobjectionable premises and the US playing a leading role in internationalising the CVE agenda, including by contributing to the development of good practices and guidance for other countries to follow, the history of CVE in the US is a checkered one (1). Domestic CVE efforts have struggled to gain public support and momentum, and the US has so far fallen well behind most of its allies in this critical area. Nevertheless, there is a clear path for improving its record, grounded in the same good practices, should the political environment allow.

CVE under Obama

CVE as a concept started to gain attention towards the end of George W. Bush’s presidency as part of a wider effort to move beyond the “War on Terror” that characterised the initial post-9/11 period. However, it did not become a policy priority for the US government until the latter part of Barack Obama’s presidency, when ISIS and other Jihadist-related radicalisation and terrorism within US borders became of increasing concern, starting with the Boston Marathon bombing (2).

During its last two years in office, the Obama administration launched a flurry of CVE activities, with mixed results. It hosted a CVE Summit designed in part to showcase

nascent CVE efforts in Boston, Los Angeles and Minneapolis (3). It set up a variety of domestic-focused CVE initiatives, including a federal task force to facilitate more coordination among the growing number of federal agencies expected to contribute to the effort, launched a US\$10-million federal grants programme to support the development of community-led CVE efforts (some 26 local programmes eventually received two-year funding), and created an office in the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) focused on engaging with and building partnerships with the communities most affected by extremist recruitment (4). Moreover, the Department of Justice invested in CVE research to get a better understanding of what works and what does not to counter violent extremism (5). At the same time, the National Counterterrorism Center, together with other security agencies, continued to deliver Community Awareness Briefings to communities across the country on the nature of the terrorist threat, including on how international terrorism is affecting violent extremist recruit and radicalisation in the US (6).

Although well intentioned, the Obama administration's CVE efforts struggled to gain support from the communities they were intended to benefit for several inter-related reasons. For instance, there was a perception among some American Muslims and civil liberties groups that, despite the administration's insistence that its focus was on all forms of violent extremism, the efforts were targeting only a single form relating to ISIS and other Islamist terrorist groups, which were of greatest concern to national security officials at the time.

Second, partly because CVE emerged as a national security-led, federally-driven effort, the initiatives inadvertently stigmatised some communities, and were seen by some as serving as a guise for intelligence-gathering and violating the civil liberties of law-abiding citizens. Having law enforcement agencies so prominently involved in CVE did not help (7).

Third, despite the Obama administration's recognition of the importance of locally owned and led CVE initiatives, the opportunities for communities to contribute to the development of policies and programmes in this area were few and far between. Many communities objected to the use of the term "CVE" and encouraged these efforts to be integrated into existing, wider, non-securitised local initiatives to prevent violence or strengthen social cohesion.

In part because of the limited support from communities, CVE was not able to garner friends in the US Congress. Democratic lawmakers tended to see CVE efforts as unfairly targeting and violating the civil liberties of American Muslims (8). Republicans typically viewed CVE as too "soft" or unproven, and that attempts to focus on all forms of extremist violence were too "politically correct" and insufficiently focused on what they (despite the evidence) see as the "real" threat of "radical Islam" (9). Moreover, there were few local CVE programmes being implemented, so there was no track record of success or even promise to convince skeptical lawmakers of the need to invest in such efforts.

CVE under Trump

Upon Donald Trump's election as president, conventional wisdom was that CVE in the US would be dead in the water (10). Although threats to rename it "Countering Radical

Islamic Extremism” remained just that, the administration rescinded funding for multiple CVE projects that had been awarded in Obama’s final days (11), eliminated funds for the modest DHS CVE grants programme (12), reduced the number of DHS staff focusing on CVE, and allowed the inter-agency CVE task force to atrophy. More significantly, the White House’s divisive and anti-immigrant rhetoric undermined the little trust that existed between local communities and the federal government. This required strengthening not further erosion if CVE efforts were to move forward in the US.

Yet, predictions that CVE in the US would not survive the Trump administration and the anti-immigrant, Islamophobic and divisive rhetoric from the White House have not materialized—at least on paper. After reflexively criticising and dismantling much of the Obama-era CVE efforts—and following a comprehensive DHS-funded RAND review of CVE in the US that is informed by international CVE good practices—the administration took a number of modest steps to reorient CVE efforts in ways that might be steps in the right direction (13).

For one, the DHS moved away from the stigmatising the “CVE” moniker and embraced what is likely to be a more palatable from the perspective of communities—“terrorism and targeted violence” prevention framework (14). This emphasis on targeted violence is a positive development as it offers space for law enforcement and civil society actors to move beyond a focus on specific communities and adopt local strategies that address a range of threats to and concerns of the communities.

Beyond just the name change, the DHS developed a terrorism and targeted violence prevention strategy that explicitly addresses “racially, ethnically, and religiously motivated violence” and calls for a “whole-of-society” approach that includes non-law enforcement federal agencies and states and cities across the country (15). Moreover, it emphasises the importance of involving local professionals and practitioners, including mental health professionals, social service providers or community-based organisations, that can identify those on the path to extremist violence and steer them in a non-violent direction (16).

Notwithstanding the advances on paper, the Trump administration acknowledged that it didn’t request funding to implement the plan and it was only following Congressional intervention, that DHS committed more staff to the new office and the administration sought funding, including for a new US\$10-million grants programme (17).

Before announcing what largely amounts to the continuation of the programme albeit under a different name, the DHS conducted a review of the Obama-era grants with a view to apply the lessons learned from them to the new programme (18).

The review revealed several interesting aspects. For instance, despite the rhetoric about the need to involve non-law enforcement and front-line professionals (such as social, health and youth workers, and teachers), and develop “off-ramps” for those on the path to radicalisation to extremist violence, most of the programmes focused on community engagement, training and awareness raising (primary prevention). These professionals constituted less than 15 percent of participants in these programmes. Moreover, few of the programmes focused on identifying and working with individuals at risk of radicalisation to extremist violence (secondary prevention), an area where cooperation between police and social and mental health workers is critical.

Most, if not all, secondary prevention programmes dealing with violent extremism in the US have emerged organically from within locally communities and are run by non-governmental, non-law enforcement institutions. These include the Colorado Resilience Collaborative led by the University of Denver and the Boston Children’s Hospital-led “Communities Connect” programme, which address the psycho-social and other needs of individuals on the path to extremist violence (19) (20).

The DHS review offered an endorsement of programmes that, rather than being designed to address a single form of extremist violence, have the ability to focus on a wide range of risk factors for terrorism(21).

The DHS commitment to improving CVE (or terrorism and targeted violence prevention) programming extends beyond the review of the Obama-era grant programmes. Following a growing international trend to invest in research on terrorism and violent extremism, and what works and doesn’t to prevent and counter these threats, the DHS recently committed US\$35 million toward ten years of research in this area, starting a center of excellence based at the University of Nebraska (22).

CVE gaps in the US

While the Trump administration deserves some credit for belatedly restoring much of the CVE architecture (albeit using different terminology) developed by its predecessor, significant gaps remain.

For example, there is still no comprehensive, national CVE (or terrorism and targeted violence prevention) framework along the lines of what the UN is calling on all countries to develop. Following international good practices (23), such frameworks typically outline the roles and responsibilities for different national agencies, both law enforcement and non-law enforcement, and are increasingly developed following an inclusive process that allows for contributions from local and community-based actors, including civil society organisations.

In addition, with the Obama-era CVE task force dormant, there is no standing mechanism to coordinate among the different federal agencies involved in CVE— a recommended international CVE good practice (24)—to ensure that essential non-law enforcement institutions such as the health and education departments can engage state and local partners around the country consistently, and to enable lessons learned from CVE efforts in others countries to be systematically shared across the US government and among CVE practitioners across the country.

Beyond the coordination platform, there is no leadership on this issue coming from the White House to highlight the government’s sustained commitment to the issue and to consistently promote the “whole of society” approach to the challenge that is reflected in the DHS strategy (and international good practices more broadly), including by encouraging and incentivising the involvement of non-law enforcement and non-governmental actors in the response.

Programmatically, the US continues to lag well behind its partners in terms of available funding and focus. On the former, and as documented in the RAND study, US government investments in CVE programmes are dwarfed by those of other western

countries facing similar threat levels (25). On the latter, virtually every such country has developed programmes across the full spectrum of CVE to include primary, secondary and tertiary prevention. The overwhelming majority of the small number of CVE programmes in the US, however, have focused on primary prevention (awareness raising, training, dialogue and engagement). Instances of secondary and tertiary prevention initiatives—multi-disciplinary, intervention programmes that seek to steer “at risk” individuals away from violence, and/or rehabilitate and reintegrate into society those that may have already committed to violence (including terrorist offenders), such as those that exist in countries such as Australia (26), Canada (27), Denmark (28), the Netherlands (29), and the UK (30)—are virtually non-existent.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, there is the lingering gap in trust between local communities—the intended targets and beneficiaries of CVE efforts—and the government, starting with local law enforcement. Trust, which is typically a foundational element of any effective CVE policy or programme, has been further frayed during the Trump administration-era. This can be attributed to several factors, including police violence against Black Americans and the resulting social unrest. It also is the result of having a president whose rhetoric seems more intent on sewing divides rather than uniting communities, and who is unwilling to unequivocally condemn and mobilise a coordinated, “whole of society” response to the rise in right-wing extremist violence and hate during his term. This rhetoric, in particular, has eroded the modest progress DHS might have made by leaving behind the troublesome “CVE” lexicon by including a focus on right-wing and other non-Islamist extremist violence, and initiating a second iteration of the CVE grants programme that has benefited from the lessons learned from the inaugural one.

Hope for the future

Currently, the political climate for addressing the CVE lacunae in the US is not ripe and is unlikely to be so as long as Trump is president. This is particularly troublesome given the continuing rise in extremist violence, especially from white supremacists, and the growing need for effective architecture to help prevent such violence.

However, should the climate improve, the steps for filling them, drawing on international good practice and the lessons learned during the bumpy history of CVE in the US, are clear.

First, the federal government (and not just DHS) needs to develop a comprehensive strategy for addressing all forms of extremist violence, now also prioritising the white supremacist and other right-wing violence that is responsible for the vast majority deaths in the US in recent years (31). Such a framework should be informed by the diverse needs and priorities of communities across the country, underpinned by respect for privacy and other human rights, and must outline the roles and responsibilities of government and non-governmental actors who will be encouraged, prodded, and/or mandated to contribute to its implementation.

Although Washington should lead the strategy development effort, it should avoid “top-down” dictation and instead follow an inclusive process that allows state, local

and community stakeholders to contribute. The process should be led by the White House, rather than a particular federal agency, to ensure it reflects a balanced “whole of government” approach and avoids having the process driven by law enforcement agencies, which have historically been at the forefront of CVE efforts in the country.

Second, beyond simply reconstituting the Obama-era task force, Washington should ensure the body is at least co-led by a non-law enforcement agency, such as the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), particularly given the abysmal DHS track under the Trump Administration of putting children in cages and sending paramilitary forces to occupy parts of American cities, and allows for sustained involvement of non-federal actors, such as representatives from cities and local community groups.

Beyond improving both horizontal and vertical collaboration, a mechanism should be put in place to promote accountability and ensure measures taken to implement the strategy are non-discriminatory and otherwise international human rights-compliant, age- and gender-sensitive, and independently monitored and evaluated.

Third, Washington should establish a federal grants programme funded at a level commensurate to the threat (at least US\$200 million per year) to support locally-led prevention initiatives that are designed and led by communities and civil society, framed around the most pressing local threats and concerns, and prioritise the involvement of and collaborations with the police, social, youth and health workers, teachers and community leaders. Given the lingering controversies surrounding the DHS-led CVE grants programme and DHS more broadly under President Trump, and to emphasise a public health-driven preventive approach that supports rather than risks stigmatising communities and to incentivise the involvement of local stakeholders who have been leery of becoming involved in past CVE initiatives, a non-law enforcement agency such as HHS should lead this effort.

Fourth, a significant portion of these funds should be used to support the development of community-level prevention and intervention teams of social workers, psychologists, school administrators community advocates, community-based organisations and representatives from law enforcement (32). These teams would be trusted resources for concerned family members or others in the community who see an individual demonstrating behaviours indicating they might be on the path to committing violence, potentially allowing intervention before a crime is committed (33). Early intervention by a trained mental health professional could reduce the likelihood that violence will follow (34).

Finally, all of this must be underpinned by a clear and consistent message from the White House and across the federal government, condemning all forms of extremist violence and committing to work with all segments of society in a transparent and rights-protecting way to prevent such violence, starting with the most affected communities.

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4

Understanding Radicalisation is Key to Effective Countermeasures

Sajid Shapoo

Growing up in the strife-torn erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir exposed me early in life to the malicious interplay of religious narratives and political violence. I would frequently hear arguments about the ideological hijacking of a tolerant local religious milieu by the more rabid and violent narratives proliferating in from across the border. However, hardly anybody in those early years of militancy—neither policymakers nor the counterinsurgents—talked about the ‘radicalisation’ of Kashmiri youth or that of a tolerant Kashmiri society. The term ‘radicalisation’ had not yet entered the lexicon of political or scholarly discourse. It was only after the devastating 9/11 attacks in the United States that ‘radicalisation’ became a catch phrase.

In an attempt to make sense of the growing anti-West feeling amongst a section of Muslims around the world, the radicalisation paradigm provided quick answers—a heuristic to understand the more complex problems and questions like “Why do they hate us?”. Holding the process of ‘radicalisation’ as the root cause for the complex phenomenon of global jihadism, scholars and policymakers were using simple heuristics to understand a vexed and diverse phenomenon. Political scientists like Robert Jervis, Janice Stien, and Keren Yarhi-Milo have done seminal work on the role of human cognition on problem solving and decision-making. Driven by the need for simple rules, people systematically use heuristics and biases to make sense of complex phenomenon and uncertain environments. Bringing disparate narratives and divergent causes under one umbrella provided easy and implementable empirical answers—that of response to ‘radicalisation’. Deradicalisation or counter-radicalisation became the cherished countermeasure for law enforcement agencies.

Decoding Radicalisation

There is no single agreed upon definition of radicalisation. Despite the conflictual understanding of the term, countries around the world have curated policies

and programmes based on the understanding that people turn to violence because of radical or extreme religious beliefs. The questions often raised are, 'How much radical is radical enough?' or if it is only the religious beliefs that drive people to violence or if there are other forms of radicalisation such as political or racial.

The extant theory of radicalisation assumes that there are set stages that people undergo during the process of radicalisation, which eventually leads to violent behaviour (1). This understanding of radicalisation, which took root in the West post-9/11, has permeated to other parts of the world. Countries like the US and United Kingdom took the lead in establishing "counter-radicalisation' programmes", and the term is now popular in the policy community, especially among law enforcement agencies. A successful deradicalisation effort presupposes two crucial things— that the implementing agencies understand the process of radicalisation and are equipped with robust counter narratives, and that the radicalisation has already happened and can be reversed.

Deradicalisation as a part of larger effort to counter violent extremism is predicated on the assumption that the agencies, particularly law enforcement, understand the radical narrative, and once deradicalised, the person will automatically be weaned away from violence. This over-reliance on the religious conveyor belt theory—which asserts that radicalisation is a linear, unstoppable progression from 'non-violent extremism' to 'violent extremism,' such that the more conservative a Muslim is in their beliefs, the more radical they will become, ultimately turning to terrorism—lacks both robust scholarly backing and empirical evidence. A large body of literature in the field of political science has shown that terrorists are motivated more by political goals than just by socioeconomic, religious or cultural factors alone. Alan Krueger argues that the evidence is nearly unanimous across the Middle Eastern and North African states that terrorists are primarily motivated by political goal (2). Alexander Lee, while rejecting the economic grievance model, posits that terrorists, like other members of political groups, acquire information about the political process and they come from relatively well-off sections of the society (3). Some experts argue that most Islamist terrorists are relatively well educated and most come from reasonably affluent social backgrounds (4)(5).

The accepted understanding of how one becomes a terrorist influences the choice of countermeasures. The assumed link between religiosity and terrorism prioritises the mapping of person's religious behaviour, shifting focus away from other key indicators of criminal behaviour. The simplistic theories developed and adopted by many law enforcement agencies assumes a fixed trajectory of the radicalisation process and that each stage of the process has some identifiable markers. In 2012, for instance, a law enforcement agency in a central Indian state arrested a group of students for participating in an alleged anti-national public meeting (6). The meeting was called *Seerat Pak Jalsa*, which means 'a gathering to discuss the pious life of the Prophet' but was erroneously translated to 'a gathering to discuss the goodness of Pakistan'. While accepting the mistake, the agency argued that the one of the men at the meeting was very likely to commit a violent act as he believed in a radical Islamic ideology. Such a widespread assumption in law enforcement circles is convenient but misleading, since many who adhere to such ideologies have never indulged in any political violence.

The Salafi Question

A glaring example of such a simplistic understanding is the way in which Salafism or Salafi ideology has been framed and understood as a big threat, which has forced governments in different parts of the world to see it as a distinct identifiable marker of radicalisation and, therefore, of violent behavior. Although many of the terror groups in the West and South Asia, including al-Qaeda and ISIS, adhere to Salafi ideology, not every Salafi is a potential terrorist and Salafism in no way feeds into the conveyor belt theory of radicalisation.

The term Salafi has received unprecedented attention in recent decades, especially after the 9/11 attacks in the US. Salafis, with their alleged proclivity to use violence against the West, are routinely portrayed as the biggest threat to liberal democracies. Scholars and policymakers frequently attribute all the ills associated with radical Islam either to the Salafi *mindset* or the Salafi ideology (7). According to a former U.S. National Security Advisor Michael Flynn, the “ideology” of Salafism is what unites Islamic terrorists around the world (8). Another senior US official also described Salafism as a “fundamental understanding of Islam” that justifies terrorism (9). At the same time, there have been efforts to convince Americans to not be “afraid of their Salafi neighbors” (10) and that the “majority of Salafis are not violent” (11). Another common trend among scholars, both political and religious, is the interchangeable use of the terms Salafi, Wahhabi and Salafi Jihadist.

Salafism is not a monolith, and people with diverse ideational beliefs have either been placed under the Salafi umbrella or claim to be Salafis. The traditional politically quietist Salafis who believe that politics undercuts the sovereignty of God (*Hakimiyah* of Allah) and thus remain generally aloof from politics, claim the exclusive domain of being ideologically Salafis (12). The jihadist Salafis are looked down upon by these traditional Salafis as corrupted. There are also groups like the Nour party in Egypt, who believe that Salafis will have to take recourse to mainstream politics to bring about a systemic change (13).

The divergent and disparate narratives of groups like ISIS, Nour party or the Salafyo Costa (an Egyptian Salafi group founded in 2001 to promote tolerance and cooperation between diverse groups) (14) exacerbates the contradictory understanding of Salafism. Traditional Salafi scholars have repeatedly launched scathing attacks on ISIS for their use of indiscriminate and brutal violence (15). ISIS, with its violent worldview, and Salafyo Costa, with its conciliatory approach, adhere to the basic tenet of Salafism, which calls for Muslims to practice faith as practiced by *al-Salaf al-Salih* (pious ancestors). But this is where the similarity ends. Their methods and approaches towards the political and social questions are strikingly different. Salafyo Costa, like many other Salafi movements, is apolitical and the Nour party believes in change through parliamentary democracy, while groups like ISIS are ruthlessly driven by an irredentist political agenda of establishing an Islamic caliphate.

Salafi movements have had distinct paths of development in different countries. The Salafis of Morocco maintained their distinctive reformatory attributes while interpreting Salafism, whereas the Syrian Salafis confined themselves to the doctrinal and ritual aspects of the *Salafiyya* (16). Similarly Salafi-minded groups in India, such as

the All India Jamaat e Ahle Hadith and the Kerela Nadhvathul Mujahideen, see violence as antithetical to their Salafi path (*manhaj*). While the peace-loving and quietist Salafi groups have rigorous religious standards that guide their behaviour, their interaction with the society is not based on imposing those standards coercively on anyone else.

Establishing Effective Deradicalisation Programmes

Radicalisation is a huge area of concern, but without understanding the radical narrative, and the finer nuances within such narratives, it is counterproductive to frame deradicalisation programmes on a limited understanding. Such understanding of the radicalisation process provides the toolbox through which law enforcement agencies are trying to identify a nascent terrorist or prevent attacks. The overreliance on a simplistic understanding has mandated law enforcement agencies to shift focus from traditional crime prevention methods to gathering information about social, religion and political patterns. Radicalisation has transformed the landscape of preventative counterterrorism policing, placing political and religious cultures of certain communities at the centre of the counterterrorism project, with unexamined costs.

Security experts and community leaders have often proposed community policing by local law enforcement personnel as a solution to the deteriorating relationship between the police and the community. Community policing measures include regular communication between local law enforcement officers and the religious communities, the creation of community liaison positions, increased cultural sensitivity training for law enforcement personnel, greater recruitment of community members into law enforcement positions, and mechanisms for overcoming linguistic, cultural and social barriers (17). Framing deradicalisation programmes as a community policing measure, as has been done by the Maharashtra police (18), humanises even intrusive measures and are not seen as targeting a particular community.

Establishing a mechanism to evaluate the effectiveness of deradicalisation measures will be a welcome step. Such a mechanism should assess whether our broader counterterrorism agenda is better served by a surveillance-heavy response to radicalisation or through the evolving best practices of identifying criminal and violent behaviour.

Governments should also consider evolving such outreach endeavours that do not stigmatise any community. The ultimate goal is to improve the response of law enforcement agencies to radicalisation by bringing greater rationality and transparency to the effort. By framing policies based on our knowledge of radicalisation, and by evaluating the policies based on the knowledge gap, ineffective, counterproductive and rights-violating policies will be discontinued. Such a scrutiny will advance the efficacy of counter-radicalisation measures, and their adherence to rights and values.

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5

Indian Muslims and Jihadist Failures: Past and Future

Mohammed Sinan Siyech

Over five years after ISIS declared itself a caliphate and al-Qaeda announced a South Asian branch, al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), the Indian Jihadist landscape has not progressed in a major way. At best, there have been some failed plots and recruitment drives, such as in 2019 where security agencies arrested ten ISIS-inspired individuals in Maharashtra who were planning a bombing (1).

Given the number of Muslims in India—nearly 200 million—this is surprising for many reasons. There have been waves of homegrown attacks in India, especially after the Babri Masjid demolition and the 2002 Godhra riots (2). Indeed attacks were witnessed upto 2014 with one of the most significant attack being the accidental bombing by members of the Jamaat ul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) in West Bengal in 2014 (3). As such, India was no stranger to Jihadist networks or waves.

Moreover, discrimination, bias, Islamophobia and other related factors have existed for decades in India. Many of these issues are being deliberately exacerbated by the current right-leaning government. Reports of lynchings, minority blaming and shrinking spaces for minority expression (4) provide major and plausible push factors for people to join terrorist groups to right such injustices (5).

ISIS and AQIS have been trying to recruit members from India but have consistently faced a muted response. While at least 200 people who joined ISIS in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan (a minute per capita number) (6), there have been no major attacks in India. Indeed, this reticence is so high that several of ISIS and AQIS's India-oriented propaganda videos have lamented the lack of participation by Indian Muslims (7).

What explains such a positive development in India? Without disregarding, the excellent security work done by intelligence and government agencies (8), a larger portion of the responsibility of preventing Muslims from joining these groups lies on the shoulders of India's Muslim community.

Heterogeneity as an Answer

Many analysts will likely consider the religious and political beliefs of all Indian Muslims as one, but they are not a monolithic religious or political entity (9). Indian Muslims are divided by theology (for instance, Barelwis or Deobandis), economic and caste lines (Ashrafs, Thangals, Syeds, Ajlafis, and Arzals), by schools of jurisprudence (Shafi, Hanafi, Ahle Hadeeth/Salafis), by reform movements (for instance, Tablighi, Jamaat e-Islami or Deobandi), and by language and geography (for instance, Bengali, Urdu, Tamil, Gujarati, Malayalam).

All these groups and their members constantly intersect and interplay, creating a massive heterogenous society. Variety is one reason why Indian Muslims do not participate in conflicts—each group has local contexts, aspirations and challenges. Transnational terrorist groups are only able to appeal to smaller subsections depending on the language of propaganda used. Until most recently, this was limited to Urdu but there have now been attempts to use Malayalam and Tamil as well (10).

Development of Muslim Political Thought

Another strong reason is the political directions that Indian Muslims (in all their different communities across India) have expressed for centuries. Historian Muzaffar Alam noted that to prevent rebellions, Indian Muslim rulers in the pre-Mughal times (largely) encouraged theological justifications for Hindu-Muslim unity, a tradition that continued till independence (11). As India became a nation state, the various Muslim movements, such as the Deoband, Ahle Hadith (Salafists) and Jamaat e-Islami, split into two major factions—one that opted to remain in India and another that argued for the case of a religiously separate state, Pakistan (12).

The Indian factions of these movements used theological arguments to underpin their reasonings to remain in India, thereby cementing the idea that India was a home for Muslims. As such, Muslim scholars and community leaders rooted themselves within the Indian polity by engaging with different political parties. For instance, the Deoband has been allied or at least close with the Congress party at different periods in history (13).

Such alliances have helped shape Islamic political thought as largely Indianised, thereby using secularism as a measure of a favourable political atmosphere for Muslims rather than an Islamist vision. As Irfan Ahmed has argued previously, this is because the opposite end of secularism in India is not Islamism (as in places like Turkey, Egypt and Pakistan) but Hindutva (as is being seen in the current context), and Muslims have learned to engage more constructively with secular democracy (14).

The Indian Muslim community have thus placed their trust and participated enthusiastically within the secular democratic framework and have often voted for non-Muslim politicians who take up their causes. The overall economic stability, reasonable community camaraderie, and recourse to law over the past years—barring the injustices that have been more frequent in recent years—have allowed Muslims to remain within the nonviolent framework and benefit from it. Since this framework allows them upward mobility, it is a preferred option over other means.

That is why the major organisations and movements, such as the Deoband, Jamaat e-Islami, Ahle Hadeeth and Bareilvis, have condemned terrorism repeatedly despite their counterparts in Pakistan and Bangladesh tolerating some levels of violence (15).

Despite the importance that analysts (and this essay) confer on theology as an explanation of radicalisation, many factors are at play, and religion is only a small part of the puzzle (16). Factors like kinship, political climate, ability to conduct attacks and/or travel to jihadist hotspots count as much, if not more. The question that then comes up frequently is—will the toughening political conditions for Indian Muslims make recruitment easier? Understanding that requires a brief theoretical look at what causes terrorism in any situation.

Will Indian Muslims Capitulate?

In his incisive look at terrorism and its roots, Tore Bjorgo contended that terrorism had a few levels of causation—structural causes such as long term discrimination and government inaction towards the upliftment of communities; facilitating causes such as the media and internet; motivational causes such as personal reasons; and triggering causes such as drastic events and deaths (17).

The Babri Masjid demolition and the Gujarat pogrom were both triggering causes, leading to the violent activities of the Student Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) and the formation of the Indian Mujahideen (IM). Combined with structural causes, such as the rise of Hindu extremism in the 1980s, the increasing tone of accusation towards Muslims post the September 2001 US attacks globally, and the unending blight of poverty and unemployment among the Muslim community that is emphasised by news outlets (structural and facilitating factors), it was inevitable that such events would cause a large Jihadist blowback.

Currently, most structural, facilitative and personal factors are in place. Indeed, perhaps a trigger factor is all it will have taken to spark another Jihadist wave, which would be homegrown with some help from transnational groups.

However, the Delhi riots of 2020 (18), which could qualify as a strong trigger factor has not seemingly caused another violent jihadist wave to erupt. One could argue that this is because such mobilisation takes time and with the COVID-19 pandemic intensifying in the country soon after the incident, such machinations have slowed down.

Education and Social Services—Bulwarks Against Radicalisation

An alternate explanation is that the Muslim community, despite its poor socioeconomic status, is at its highest point of literacy— 68 percent, as of 2011, with the 2021 census is expected to show an even higher number (19). The Muslim literacy rate also grew faster than in other communities in the 2001-2011 period, resulting in a reducing population rate and slightly better socioeconomic conditions (20).

Moreover, Muslim responses to Islamophobia, which seemed to have hit a crescendo during COVID-19, has been both tactically sound and retributively forgiving in nature. For instance, the number of Muslims taking legal actions to curb hate speech in states

like Gujarat have increased, leading to a fall in such speeches (21).

More importantly, there seems to have been concerted Muslim participation in volunteer services across India in respective localities and cities to deal with COVID-19. Various institutions and Muslim-run NGOs distributed food, educated citizens on the virus, buried the dead, and coordinated with various police and governing officials to assist in relief efforts (22). Indeed, established charitable activities preceding the pandemic laid the foundation for strong, quick and coordinated action during the pandemic.

This is important because volunteering and community service have multiple benefits. They help provide an outlet to Muslims (and, for that matter, any individual) to feel engaged in reducing their own problems and helping their community. Moreover, they are instrumental in providing a sense of purpose to youngsters and a feeling of being connected, and help improve intra-religious and community – government relations in the local setting.

Thus, social service acts as an important bulwark to prevent radicalisation and recruitment of individuals to terrorist groups since the very same benefits people receive from it are also what motivates some others to join terrorist groups.

Analysts should internalise the understanding that there is no silver bullet explanation that explains why Indian Muslims have refrained from Jihadist action. Neither is there a single reason that will motivate a new wave of terrorism like SIMI and IM. That the Muslim population has been involved in constructive responses, including legal, educational and community service-based ones, holds a positive connotation for the lack of Jihadist terrorism in India.

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6

Manufacturing Conflict: Indian Muslims and the Shift from Marginalisation to Exclusion

Ali Khan

Since 9/11, an entire industry has taken root within academia and policy circles to study Muslims' relationship to violent extremism. One dominant point of view that has emerged argues that Islam, and Salafism (referred to as 'Islam's unstable isotope' by Cambridge academic Tim Winter) (1), is fundamentally prone to violence. While Winter argues that Salafis and their interpretation of the Quran and the hadith, the corpus of the Prophet's sayings, goes completely against traditional Islam, others argue that it is precisely this literalist and extremist Salafi interpretation that faithfully reflects true Islam while everything else is a 'cotton candy' version (2). Notwithstanding the merits or demerits of this claim, one of the most important aspects about 'Islamic terrorism'—a misnomer in itself—is the lack of analysis of non-religious factors in the creation of Muslim militarised extremists. Identifying religion as the root cause of terrorism makes it much easier to gloss over, even justify, sacrificing civil liberties and human rights at the altar of national security. For instance, China seeks to hide its agenda of Han ethnic chauvinism and justify the persecution of Turkic Uighur Muslims as potential *jihadis*. Blaming Islam is useful as it deflects from broader uncomfortable questions about the manner in which governments create conditions under which people turn to violent extremism.

It is important to note that many people often think that seeking to understand the root causes of violent extremism conflates explanation with justification. Writing about the Holocaust, historian Inga Clendinnen calls this "moral sensitivity exclusion," wherein to even begin to understand why someone does something 'evil' is to start the process of rationalising their actions (3). Perhaps it is impossible to comprehend what goes through the mind of a suicide bomber at the time of the attack or even when they decide this is the only course of action open to them. However, the factors that lead up to this must be acknowledged and understood to prevent people from crossing the point of no return. Violence and terrorism must be seen as products of a set of mitigating factors and not simply the result of a blind belief in ideology.

Muslims and the BJP

In analyses of terrorism and Islam, Indian Muslims are often heralded as an example of a community that has largely avoided radicalisation. Theories abound about the absence of radicalisation but one of the arguments made by the government and policy officials and members of the *‘ulama* (religious clergy) is that there is something exceptional about Indian Islam. This homogenisation is in itself problematic as it overlooks the huge cultural, linguistic, regional and sectarian diversity amongst Muslims in India. It fails to take into account that this very diversity and some degree of political, social and economic stability has meant that political discourse amongst Muslims is rooted in the belief of an inclusive and secular India. For instance, protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) were grounded in the language of the Constitution. This is despite the woeful disparities that the Sachar Committee report highlighted in terms of the economic ‘backwardness’ of Indian Muslims (4). Notably, the handful of Indian ISIS followers have come from the same region in Kerala (5), where the Muslim community is relatively more prosperous and does not carry the burden of partition that their North Indian cousins do.

Importantly, the ruling Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) initially sought to project some Muslims—Sufis and Shias—as more Indian while implicitly damning others (6). This not only fit in neatly with global narratives on the ‘war on terror’ but also amplified sectarianism domestically, which in turn exacerbated intra-Muslim polemics. During the 2016 World Sufi Forum in Delhi, Prime Minister Narendra Modi equated Islam in India with Sufism, implicitly signaling that Sufis are seen to be ‘acceptable’ Muslims. Similarly, the BJP has tried to create the perception that Shia Muslims, because of their heterodox practices, are naturally Indian. Both these perceptions have been at odds with the statements of several BJP politicians who view *all* Muslims as anathema to their vision of India. This latter position, as illustrated by the *ghar wapsi* (reconversion to Hinduism) programme, is indicative of the various constituencies that the BJP seeks to appeal to. The top brass wants to project an image of inclusivity in the international community, but the lower levels of leadership use anti-Muslim sentiment to garner votes. The other perception that the BJP sought to create was that it was concerned with the upliftment of Muslim women (7) (8), which won it plaudits from its own supporters and from people across the political aisle who hold the patronising opinion that Muslim women need saving. Interestingly, the striking aspect of the mostly women-led CAA protests was that they served to consolidate and emphasise Muslim identity over sectarian identities and thus unraveled the politics of division being propagated by the BJP.

The BJP and the New Centre of Indian Politics

One of the consequences of the rise of the BJP has been that it has shifted the centre of Indian politics further to the right. This shift of the centre has also meant an implicit shift in the politics of most of the so-called secular opposition parties. An unpublished survey of under-35 youth voting patterns in four states—Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh—offers some interesting insights on issues that the BJP links to its Hindu nationalist agenda (9). For instance, 84.7 percent voters intending to vote for the

BJP support the introduction of the Uniform Civil Code, while 74.29 percent of voters who do not intend to vote for the BJP support it on this issue. Significantly, a number of young people who did not plan to vote for the BJP gave it issue-based support on issues like CAA, triple talaq and cow protection.

It was noteworthy that Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal was silent as anti-Muslim violence broke out in the city earlier this year. Predictably, the anti-CAA protestors and the people who were targets of the mob violence continue to be labeled as ‘jihadis’ and terrorists by the BJP for defending themselves (10). Many of the people who participated in these protests were subjected to a witch-hunt by the authorities during the COVID-19 lockdown (11), and several student leaders, activists, journalists and others were arrested for exercising their constitutional right to protest. The BJP’s clarity about not wanting Muslim votes combined with the relative silence of the opposition has sent a clear signal to Muslims about their political untouchability (12). In February 2020, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said that “Muslims did no favour to India by staying here” after Partition (13). Additionally, the partisan way the police and judiciary have behaved in Delhi and other BJP-ruled states has also sent a clear signal of institutional exclusion. To date the brazen provocations to violence by various BJP members, including Anurag Thakur and Kapil Mishra, have not been met with any charges. On the other hand Muslims, and indeed a number of their non-Muslims supporters, who were protesting against the CAA have been imprisoned under stringent national security laws and in many cases also denied bail. Apart from political and institutional exclusion Muslims have also had to face legal, economic and now social exclusion.

Over the last year, a whole raft of legislation has been perceived, rightly or wrongly, as specifically targeting Muslims. The Triple Talaq bill, the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act amendments, the revocation of Article 370, the Babri Masjid decision, the CAA combined and the announcement of a National Register of Citizens all consolidated the perception that the BJP is intent on disenfranchising Muslims. The lynching of Muslim cattle farmers, the closure of abattoirs, the inability to find accommodation in cities except in Muslim areas, the rewriting of textbooks, the constant call to be accountable for the crimes (real or imaginary) of Muslims rulers from the past 1000 years and the accusations of love jihad have made Muslims feel politically and socially cornered and humiliated.

Even during the COVID-19 lockdown, the misdemeanors of the Tablighi Jamaat were used to vilify the entire community with hashtags like #IslamicVirus and #CoronaJihad trending on Twitter (14). Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, the sole unelected Muslim in the BJP’s cabinet, likened the meeting of the Tablighis to a “Talibani crime” (15). Fake videos of Muslim men urinating or spitting on food were propagated on social media and even on mainstream news channels, which were in turn used to demand the social and economic boycott of Muslims. However, despite deep theological differences and indeed outright hostility, Muslims from across the social sectarian spectrum came forward to defend the attacks on the Tablighis (16).

Muslims: Marginalisation to Exclusion

This lethal combination of political, institutional, legal, economic and social exclusion promises to sow the seeds for a conflict that will destabilise India in the years to come. The use of conflict to sustain political narratives is not only unpredictable but the demons that are created often come back to haunt those that gave birth to them. Today, close to 50 percent of India's Muslims are below 19 years old. These are young people who are growing up in an atmosphere of hate and intolerance. This is a generation that has grown up experiencing exclusion and alienation. Due to the shift in the political centre of Indian politics, young Muslims are increasingly frustrated with the secular opposition as much as with the BJP.

For instance, JNU student activist Sharjeel Imam was arrested in January 2020 for making an 'anti-national' speech, but rather than being seditious, his speech actually mostly echoed the BJP's criticisms of the opposition and India's post-partition politics (17). Imam's views found support amongst a large number of younger Muslims who are increasingly unapologetic about asserting their religious identity. However, with this increasing discontent and the shift from marginalisation to outright exclusion, it is likely that sooner or later some people might turn to what they think is the only way to assert their voices—violence. Inevitably this violence will be projected as the result of Islamic extremism and not the result of the structural and systemic inequities and inequalities they face. This is precisely the narrative that was gradually built in Kashmir, and which will manufacture a conflict that will sustain the politics of the BJP for years to come. Abdul Radheed Abdullah, a preacher of ISIS ideology in Kerala, sees the advent of the BJP as a "blessing in disguise" (18).

ISIS launched a ten-page magazine as a wake-up call to Indian Muslims a day after the Delhi violence (19). While terming nationalism as a disease, one article castigated Muslims for having strayed from the path of Islam as the main cause of their humiliations. This desire to equate the lack of personal piety as the main cause for decline is something that finds echoes in the writings of various Muslim reformists from the 18th and 19th centuries. The article damned the BJP, but it also labeled Maulana Arshad Madani and his nephew Mahmud Madani, important voices of the Deoband seminary, as the "wicked scholars of Islam". Incidentally both men have faced much criticism from young Muslims for their détente with the RSS and BJP in recent months. The article also published pictures of Asaduddin Owaisi and Kanhaiya Kumar, identifying them as those who "mislead Muslim youth". The article ends with an exhortation to "fight in the name of Allah... for the pen has been lifted and the scrolls have dried".

There may be hardly any takers for this narrative as Muslims have sought to establish themselves as champions of India's secular Constitution. However, it will only take a handful of disenchanting, frustrated and angry young people to take up arms and further the BJP's narrative that ultimately Indian Muslims are all *crypto-jihadis*. This will be further exacerbated by the frustration amongst young non-Muslims due to political and social destabilisation brought about by the collapse of the economy. The BJP will seek to channel this anger and direct it towards Muslims as the main culprits of their woes, as it has done for the past six years. This is precisely the narrative that has justified the

lockdown of Kashmir and is a clear example of what the BJP will willingly do in order to further its agenda. Until now, Kashmiri militancy has been largely confined within the state but in the years to come, as the BJP manufactures its own Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it remains to be seen what direction Indian politics will take. Across the world people have turned to violence when they find that they no longer have a stake in politics or in society. In India the shift from marginalisation to exclusion combined with a sense of humiliation amongst Muslims, which is in turn amplified by media and social media, does not portend well for India's future. There is still time to halt this march towards a political and moral abyss. However once the cycle of violence begins, there is no predicting where it will take us.

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7

Peacebuilding Framework, Narrative and Policy Intervention in Jammu & Kashmir

Ashima Kaul

There are several community-led organisations in Jammu and Kashmir, including some helmed by women and the youth. Some of these work to create enabling spaces for alternate expression by young people, some focus on cross-cultural and community dialogues, peace education, women's rights and livelihoods, and many others engage in service delivery, including running homes for destitutes and orphans, drug de-addiction centres, rehabilitation programmes.

However, these community organisations, irrespective of if they have emerged organically in their local contexts or are being run from outside the region, have not been able to advance a peacebuilding programme to comprehensively counter a meta narrative that justifies and glorifies violent expressions. The meta narrative, arising from 'wounds of memory', is instrumental in linking personal and political agendas, and has led to an identity construct around victimhood that often overshadows every other narrative, including those seeking peace. In the absence of home-grown 'peace sprouts' and supportive structures that strengthen, uphold and glorify the idea of peace, existing peacebuilding initiatives have remained isolated, insulated and dwarfed in front of this meta narrative that has popularised the language of confrontation, hate and violence.

Peacebuilding actors understand that the foremost requisite to work effectively within communities is to establish trust, acknowledge and heal the trauma of conflict, find justice, hold accountability and develop an empathic leadership. In Jammu and Kashmir, we are far from taking such steps. On the contrary, the region, particularly the Kashmir Valley, has seen a rising influence of security forces that has exacerbated the violence and the politicisation and polarisation of identities, giving rise to uncertainty, division and deep despondency.

The socio-political space in Jammu and Kashmir is contested turf wherein narratives push against each other to define the space. The last decade has seen a shift conflicts worldwide, with a rise in religious and ethnicity based violent movements. Conflicts like those in Syria, Yemen, Ukraine, Iraq, Myanmar and Afghanistan are protracted, intractable, deeply complex and multilayered. These conflicts are no longer being fought

on a battlefield, but have entered our homes, streets, by-lanes, localities, towns and cities, becoming violent encounter sites. There has also been a tactical shift in the root causes of conflicts. They are firmly rooted in the realm of identity politics and are, in their most extreme form, deeply conservative and reactionary. Similar trappings are seen in Kashmir. While these conflicts are impacting men, women, young people and children are the hardest hit. Such conflicts are influencing young women and men, feeding their imagination, shaping their psyche and destroying their mental wellbeing, and drawing them in as victims of violence or participants.

Ageneration has grown up in Kashmir witnessing and experiencing the intersectionality of violence, terror and religion in their daily lives, and absorbed imported global narratives on Islam that rose during the early 2000s. The advent of the internet, smartphones and social media made it possible and easier to infiltrate and disseminate extremist ideologies that drew the populace to the ideas of martyrdom, jihad and mujahideen valour. The recruitment of young people to terrorist groups as over-ground workers and sympathisers opened new narratives on jihad and the Islamic caliphate as a departure from political concepts like right to self-determination, crystallising Kashmiri identity from a Muslim to Islamic one influenced by global Islamist movements based on the supremacist idea of caliphate and jihad. This was also the same period that a right-wing political party came to power in New Delhi, fanning an extreme nationalist discourse across the country. It hardened the position of various drivers and actors of the conflict in Jammu and Kashmir, polarising the two regions and transforming the socio-political space into an exceedingly competitive and confrontational one. The region became the battle ground for opposing ideologies and narratives—the Wahabhi vs the Hindutva. At the local level in Jammu and Kashmir, the politicisation of demography and identity-based politics fueled and added to the identity constructs.

Peace Intervention and Policy

Governments see Jammu and Kashmir through the singular lens of geo-strategic security dimensions, law enforcement and political chicanery. Undoubtedly, the reality of insurgency and proxy war dimensions cannot be ignored. However, policies must encapsulate all dimensions of ‘contact and engagement’ besides the military since it is the human mind and its particular conditioning that fuels conflicts. By engaging with the drivers and various actors of conflicts, particularly the youth and women, community-led organisations can attempt to tackle the issues that lead to radicalisation and recruitment in hostile conflicts like Kashmir.

When it comes to peacebuilding efforts, especially in the context of grassroots groups, a positive environment must be actualised through engagement, acknowledgement and recognition. This in turn discourages the reductive narrative of the ‘victim’ versus the ‘perpetrator’, as it closes spaces for enablement to emerge. For instance, in 2013, 15 young stone-pelters in north Kashmir were made to participate in a theatre workshop, which gave them an avenue to share their emotions and beliefs through scripting and express themselves on stage. Such neglected emotions, if left unexpressed, will fuel further grievances and may empower extremist thought.

The law enforcement agencies cannot understand these nuances of peacebuilding approaches, and so grassroots organisations that adopt such methods can be unwittingly labelled as ‘collaborators’ and ‘supportive of anti-national elements’, putting them at risk. Such situations arise because, within security establishments, there is no familiarity with peacebuilding organisations—what they do, their frameworks of reference and vocabulary. The gendered and mental health dimensions of the conflict are also lost on most law enforcement officers.

Research on women, peace and security informs how patriarchal structures often disempower women, forcing them to claim their agency through relational structures (as a mother, daughter, wife or sister). These gendered dynamics are played out in a conflict when one loses a male relative, especially through action by an ‘occupier or oppressor’, a narrative that coalesces with sentiments of ‘injustice (*zulm*) and denial of justice’. These form a lethal combination for a support base by women, who prompt and encourage ‘men’ to take revenge. When they see no scope for justice, young women are radicalised along the binary faultlines of community and social issues. But radical groups are especially intolerant towards women and their rights. They understand the power and influence of women, so they seek to control, coerce, co-opt and subjugate them (1)(2)(3). Women are often drawn to the popular narratives because of the pre-existing social environment and their alienation. As such, women become the ‘silent nation’ in these conflict zones since they are the tools through which these new ‘wars’ are instrumentalised. When faced with vocal strong women leaders and movements, extremist actors strive to erase and silence them in the public arena (through trolling and targeting a woman’s agency and autonomy) because they know women will be the first to challenge their bigotry. This means they must also fear women. It is from these private and familial spaces that social narratives are sourced, often riding on extreme radical ideologies. These spaces are controlled by men who command societies, movements, politics and narratives. This is true for any extremist groups operating to establish their rule or gain political power and control. Identity and its social and political interplay are important in the experience of women in a conflict. Her sense of nationality, ethnicity, caste, religion, marital status, disability, age, sexual preferences can intersect to amplify vulnerability. She can be sexually violated, subjugated and marginalised because of her gender. Her sense of vulnerability and how intersectional identities interplay must be understood and tapped as a resource to provide unique perspectives for the establishment of peace and security in a world that is full of diversity. Does the security paradigm consider the gendered dimensions of conflict—that when young women are alienated through insensitive and abusive action, their allegiance to extremist discourse becomes a natural shift?

Perception of categorising and seeing young women and men only as victims or as perpetrators helps in constructing polarised narratives. Approaches must be built to understand the nuanced dimensions of conflict. Recruiters indoctrinate a sense of victimhood and law enforcement sees its manifestation in the perpetrator. However, there is an enabling space and enablers who need to be empowered. It is within these extremes that a counter narrative must be founded. Furthermore, enabling spaces need to find online expressions to counter violent narratives as these are the new platforms where insurgencies are being fought.

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8

How the World's Longest Internet Shutdown Has Failed to Counter Extremism in Kashmir

Khalid Shah

The repeal of the special status of Jammu and Kashmir and its conversion into two union territories in August 2019 was accompanied by an unprecedented security lockdown that disempowered the population. Even as the goal of legally and politically integrating the region with the rest of India was achieved, the hard security measures have alienated the population of the erstwhile state (1).

Among the harsh measures imposed by the government since 5 August 2019 is a near complete internet shutdown, which has affected all in Jammu & Kashmir (2). Initially, a complete shutdown was imposed for just over five months, following which archaic 2G services were restored (3). Nearly a year on, these restrictions continue—mobile data speeds remain throttled at the 2G level with a 384 Kbps upper limit (4). The decision to curb the internet was primarily driven by security concerns as the government considers social media and other online platforms the primary drivers of militancy (5).

In a bid to end violence, militancy and online extremism in the region, the Indian government imposed restrictions on the internet—currently, the longest-ever in any democratic country—despite the objections from human rights organisations, civil society, political parties and even retired security officials (6)(7). The restriction, which the government has said are meant to “curb misuse of data for uploading, downloading, circulation of provocative content on the social media and prevent or reduce rumour-mongering and fake news, counter attempts of recruiting gullible youth into the militants’ ranks,” will likely continue for a few more months (8). But importantly, they have not curbed violence or militancy (9). At least 203 fatalities have been reported from militant activities between 1 January and 22 July 2020, including 17 civilians, 34 security personnel and 152 militants. The region also saw 223 terror-related incidents over the same period (10).

There is also evidence to suggest that the internet shutdown has failed to fully “curb” the misuse of the internet by militant groups (11). Hundreds of WhatsApp groups run by militant outfits, such as the Hizbul Mujahideen, al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent, the Resistance Front, and their supporters continue to operate, attracting a large fanbase

among the local youth who have spent most of their time indoors owing to multiple lockdowns.

Militants have found ways of working around the low internet speed by ensuring the video and audio messages uploaded on these WhatsApp groups are of a small size. Only the upload, download or streaming of high-resolution videos has been disrupted by the restrictions; the exchange of low grade visual and text content, which glorifies violence and violent actors, remains unaffected.

Riyaz Naikoo, the operational commander of Hizbul Mujahideen and the most wanted militant in Kashmir, was killed in an encounter by security forces in May 2020. Immediately after the encounter, the internet and telecom services in the entire Valley were snapped (12). Once services were restored, the names of many WhatsApp groups meant for the distribution of militant propaganda were changed to 'Shaheed Naikoo Media' (Martyr Naikoo Media), sharing audios, videos and other content eulogising Naikoo. Similar campaigns by Hizbul Mujahideen and other outfits, have run throughout the year undeterred by the internet restrictions.

A new militancy outfit called 'The Resistance Front' made its appearance on Telegram in October last year after it claimed a grenade attack in Srinagar. The group rose to prominence in the first week of April when it claimed the killing of five members of Indian Army's paratroopers in Kupwara sector of Kashmir valley . Immediately after this encounter, the TRF grabbed headlines and prime time debates in Indian media. Whereas analysts have pointed out that the group is a cover, new brand name under which various militant outfits operate, the media in declared it as the biggest threat. A classic example of how militant outfits weaponised the social media to claim a success against the security forces.

In the absence of a credible counter-narrative and counter-speech, militant propaganda of continues to hold traction (13)(14). The jingoistic discourse witnessed online and on the mainstream media to counter militant narratives is proving counterproductive as it often tends to label the entire population by the same brush—jihadi, anti-national, terror sympathisers and the like. Often the jingoistic media outlets latch up the militant propaganda and end up amplifying it even more. Furthermore, the discourse of ultra-nationalism fails to address the root causes that lead to the radicalisation of the youth.

According to the security forces, there has been a 48 percent-decline in the recruitment of local youth into militant ranks this year. Traditional security actions (such as dismantling civilian networks that aid militancy, disrupting the financial and logistical channels, aggressive deployment of forces, and operations to kill or arrest the militants (15)) coupled with the restrictions imposed since last year and the COVID-19-induced lockdown have led to a drop in recruitment. However, even an iron fist approach has not completely stopped militant recruitment. As of 30 June, 67 local Kashmiris are thought to have joined militant ranks (16).

Security forces claim 118 militants have been killed in the first six months of 2020 and the low recruitment as a success. But it is premature to declare a victory or even credit internet restrictions for such a momentary decline. Militancy in Kashmir has seen phases of rise and decline over the years, and peaked in pre-internet and pre-mobile telephony era as well.

The democratic political system of Jammu and Kashmir was impacted after several mainstream leaders who have contested elections in opposition to extremist groups, including former chief ministers and state and Union cabinet members, were detained without any charges (17)(18). After discussing the matter only after it introduced the constitutional changes, the central government's efforts to help establish new political parties in the region have done more harm than good. The ensuing "political vacuum" is a recipe for disaster. In the battle of extremes, the middle ground—centrist space for democratic political expression—has been completely dismantled (19).

The restrictions in Kashmir have also had an impact on businesses, jobs and the access to education (20). The internet curbs have also meant that students have been unable to turn to online learning (21)(22). Such disruptions have led to increased anxiety among the youth regarding their future, which could push some towards religious indoctrination (23). While education is seen as a tool to counter the violent extremist ideologies around the world, in Kashmir, it has become collateral damage (24).

New Wave of Radicalisation?

The abrogation of Article 370 and the bifurcation of Jammu and Kashmir has come at the cost of socio-political groups seeking a resolution of the Kashmir conflict within the framework of the Indian Constitution or through negotiations. Yet, long before these decisions were announced, the ground had already shifted towards a radicalised path espoused by new-age militant icons Burhan Wani and Zakir Musa (25).

The methods of collective punishment, such as the internet shutdowns, have caused widespread alienation among the population in the Kashmir Valley, parts of Jammu and is open to exploitation by militant groups. In 1987, a political blunder—the rigging of assembly elections—triggered a militant movement in Kashmir, which has endured for three decades. The 5 August decision could prove to be a bigger factor than that.

In the absence of a credible polity that can channelise the anxieties and political aspirations of the youth, the militant Islamist groups appear more attractive for two reasons—first, the belief in some quarters that the 5 August decision was in fulfilment of the Hindutva movement's ideological goals, amid the ongoing polarised discourse in the country; and second, the hard-line security-oriented approach is unbearable. For instance, a young man released a video clip on social media alleging that the daily harassment and torture by security officer had forced him to take up arms, a predicament faced by hundreds of young men and women in the region.

Ahead of the anniversary of the bifurcation Jammu and Kashmir and the repeal of its special status, the Hizbul Mujahideen released a 10-minute audio message on WhatsApp and Telegram thanking the Indian government for "undemocratic decisions" which are "illegal" and have awakened the "conscience and created a collective consensus" among the people of Kashmir. These decisions, the message says, will help the people find a resolution to the Kashmir conflict, with "hundreds of highly educated youth" waiting to join militant groups even as recruitments have been put on hold for tactical reasons.

The current environment in Kashmir undoubtedly remains a fertile ground for further radicalisation and violence. It is only a matter of time before things start to unravel again.

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9

Analysing the Impact of the Taliban Deal on Jihadist Violence in South Asia

Kriti M. Shah

On 29 February, representatives from the US and the Taliban—who had been at war for 19 years—came together in Doha, Qatar, to sign the ‘Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan’. The deal set deadlines for a US withdrawal from the country in exchange for promises by the Taliban that it would not protect al-Qaeda or any other militant group that threatens Washington. Since the signing of the deal, the Taliban has refocused its attacks on the people of Afghanistan instead of US troops, demonstrating its resolve to continue with jihad, come what may (1).

The deal validates the Pakistani security-intelligence establishment’s thinking that should it continue to arm, fund and encourage a proxy militant group, like it did with the Taliban, it can be successful in achieving its goal—getting a leg up in strategic and political decision-making in a country.

In the case of Afghanistan, since the US announced its intention to begin a dialogue with the Taliban, Pakistan has been in the driver’s seat. Islamabad has repeatedly stated its “commitment to play the role of facilitator” in the talks, doing its “best to bring the Afghan Taliban to the table with America” (2). To demonstrate its ‘good faith’, Pakistan released Taliban co-founder Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar from a Karachi prison in October 2018 (3). Baradar has since become the chief negotiator for the Taliban. During Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan’s visit to Washington in July 2019, he said he intended to meet the Taliban and encourage them to talk to the Afghan government, stating that the peace talks should lead to “an inclusive Afghan election” where the Taliban participates as well (4). This is indicative of what Islamabad wants from Kabul—an ascendant Taliban will lead to a power-sharing arrangement that will align with its vision for ‘strategic depth’ in Afghanistan (or in simple words, a Pakistan-friendly government) (5).

A steady US withdrawal from Afghanistan will solidify the thinking that Pakistan’s long-standing support of the Taliban has paid off. When the US first entered Afghanistan in 2001, it made a partnership of convenience with Pakistan, whereby the latter received large amounts of financial and military support in exchange for targeting terrorist and militant sanctuaries along its border with Afghanistan. While the Pakistan army targeted

certain groups, it turned a blind eye to others that did not threaten its immediate interests. Now that the US is ready to pack its bags and leave, Pakistan hopes it will be “rewarded” with a friendly government in Kabul and continuing financial support from the US. Islamabad is now one step closer to achieving this goal as the exiting US will still need it to secure the border with Afghanistan and the Taliban is in a strong position to negotiate with the Kabul government.

Another consequence of the US-Taliban deal is the potential for a resurgence, revival and resurrection of other Islamist jihadi groups in the subcontinent.

Before 9/11, when the Taliban was in power in Afghanistan (1996-2001), al-Qaeda operated a number of terrorist training camps across the country, fostering close bonds with other Islamic groups in the region, particularly those from Pakistan (6). When ISIS opened up its branch in the region (ISKP), it was able to establish itself along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border despite the area already being controlled by groups such as al-Qaeda and the Haqqani Network. Other groups that were previously associated with al-Qaeda, such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and factions of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, joined ISKP, with it also recruiting new militants from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and India (7). Today, the ISKP and al-Qaeda remain alive and active despite the Taliban’s promises to sever ties with the latter. Al-Qaeda’s longevity over the years can be credited to its connections and collaborations with local groups. The Haqqani Network, which are armed allies of the Pakistani army, has also established strong ties with a wide variety of terrorist groups. Today despite ideological differences between the groups, the Taliban, al-Qaeda and ISKP enjoy the benefits of overlapping loyalties, shared military commanders and, of course, the patronage of the Pakistani establishment (8).

Risks for the Neighbourhood

The complicated terrorist-militant-criminal nexus between the various groups in the region threatens the stability of South Asia. Should the Taliban gain some political power or representation in Kabul, it could result in a morale booster for other Islamist militant groups in the region. The Taliban’s extremist interpretation of Islam and understanding of Islamic jurisprudence or *sharia* law would directly threaten the many political, judicial, social and cultural reforms made by the Afghan government post 2001. It would embolden the Haqqani Network, with one leg in Kabul, to support other groups such as the al-Qaeda.

The US-Taliban agreement makes no mention of the al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) or other affiliates, only marking al-Qaeda and its presence in Afghanistan as a threat to US interests. The AQIS poses a serious threat to India, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Pakistan, given not only its operational capabilities but the fact that it has a number of fighters embedded within the Taliban ranks (9). AQIS has also been successful in bringing different groups and organisations across state boundaries together under the al-Qaeda banner, including the Ansar Ghazwat ul-Hind, Harkat ul-Mujahideen and Indian Mujahideen in India and Ansar al-Islam and Jammāt ul-Mujahideen in Bangladesh.

In India, AQIS runs a strong propaganda campaign that seeks to capitalise on cleavages between the Hindu majority and Muslim minority, describing Indian Muslims as “living under the shade of Hindu occupation” (10). Its jihadist magazine regularly publishes calls for Muslims to support the Afghan Taliban and adhere to Islamic sharia laws (11). In 2019, al-Qaeda chief Ayman al-Zawahari asked mujahideen in Kashmir to “inflict unrelenting blows on the Indian army and government” to make the Indian economy “bleed and suffer sustained losses” (12).

While AQIS has focused its Indian campaign on developing propaganda on the “injustices” against Muslims in the country, it also criticised India for supporting and promoting secular policies in Bangladesh. Since 2014, when AQIS inserted itself into the Bangladeshi jihadi landscape, it has carried out attacks that target secular activists, liberal bloggers, atheists and members of the LGBTQ community due to a perceived assault on Islamic values (13).

In Buddhist-majority Myanmar, AQIS highlights the violence against the persecuted Rohingya community, seeking to radicalise and recruit the disillusioned Rohingya.

A Taliban “victory” in Afghanistan would also cause India great concern since it could provide fresh fuel for anti-India terrorist groups operating in the Kashmir area (14). Groups such as Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) and Lashkar-e-Taiba have previously cooperated with the Taliban and have been found orchestrating attacks in Afghanistan as well (15). The attack on Indian security forces in February 2019 in Pulwama was carried out by a suicide bomber reportedly inspired by the “Taliban victory” in Afghanistan (16). The bomber, a JeM member, encouraged Kashmiri youth to wage jihad against India, underlying the success of the jihad waged by the Taliban against the US. Such cases of ‘jihadi inspiration’ could increase once the US leave Afghanistan.

Three of the Central Asian republics, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan share a direct border with Afghanistan and will likely be directly impacted should there be an uptick in violence in the northern part of the country. Since the signing of the deal, terrorist groups in these countries such as Jamaat Ansarulla (Tajikistan), Katibat Imam al-Bukhari (Uzbekistan) and Turkestan Islamic Party have congratulated the Taliban, calling the withdrawal of international forces a victory of “Islamic Ummah”, confidently believing that the Taliban would not cut off ties with al-Qaeda (17)(18).

Afghanistan’s neighbourhood remains at risk because of the apparent political legitimacy of the Taliban and the durability of groups such as the al-Qaeda. The withdrawal of US troops from the region has the potential to be used by other militant Islamist groups as grounds for recruitment and radicalisation, motivated by the success of the Taliban in driving the US out of the country (19). Groups that maintain ties to AQIS could, through the use of social media, further strengthen their ranks by using the Taliban “victory” as propaganda to recruit and radicalise vulnerable youth.

Can the Taliban Change?

The agreement between the US and the Taliban assumes that the Taliban have changed and evolved since 2001. It is predicated on the belief that the Taliban can honour the promises it makes to prevent Afghanistan from being used as a launch pad for attacks against the

US and its allies. Trusting the Taliban to uphold this commitment is the basis on which the US has agreed to withdraw from the country. This risky and precarious move grants legitimacy to the Taliban and what it stands for. There is no evidence that the Taliban has turned over a new leaf, or that it has changed its stance on human rights, women's education, democracy and secular values. Yet, the deal grants it a certain degree of respect and empowerment. The deal temporarily shields US and NATO forces in Afghanistan, but has directly harmed Afghan civilians, security forces and allies in the region.

The deal with the Taliban lacks any type of an enforcement mechanism. What will happen if the Taliban falls back into the al-Qaeda's embrace once the US leaves? Will this mean a return of US forces? Can the US guarantee there will be no future terrorist attacks on its soil? Has it ensured the security of their allies in the region? The deal's success hinges on the Taliban's ability to be sincere and truthful, a tall order for a militant group that has shown no remorse in killing its compatriots. If the Taliban renege on their end of the deal, Afghanistan could turn into a hotbed for internal strife and terrorism, which will affect the gains made by the international community over the last two decades.

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10

Decoding Gendered Online Trolling in India

Simantini Ghosh

Understanding human behaviour has been one of the primary goals of research and inquiry through the ages. The history of psychology and neuroscience offers an insight into how both nature and nurture are situated as dominant contributors to behaviour in academic and public discourse. One key theme has repeatedly stood out—rather than being determined by nature or nurture, behaviour is a product of their interaction, and complex behavioural traits are mostly polygenic (many genetic systems regulating several biochemical and neurological processes moderate complex behaviours) (1)(2)(3). Analysing violent behaviour, particularly violence directed towards women in Indian cyberspace, through this lens and that of virtuous violence—which posits that the perpetration of violence stems from a self-righteous and morally grounded position, and perpetrators tend to believe that violence is the correct moral recourse to answer the problem at hand—will help explain how psychosocial factors can moderate the dissemination of online hate speech (4).

Understanding violence

An array of terms has been used to describe and discuss gender-based online harassment, including cyberbullying, stalking, hate speech, abusive language, sexual innuendo-filled obscenities, smear campaigns, disclosing personal identifying information online (doxing), and sharing pictures or videos without consent that may be explicit (5). Hate speech, for instance, is a singular aspect of a full spectrum of antisocial online behaviour deployed against women and minorities. Gendered online hate speech can be understood as when a perpetrator weaponises the gender of the victim to threaten, abuse or debase their dignity (6). Online trolling has been defined as “the deliberate provocation of others using deception and harmful behavior on the Internet which often results in conflict, highly emotional reactions, and disruption of communication in order to advance the troll’s own amusement” (7). However, in the current context, amusement is not the only

relevant incentive; there is also an organised political motive and other psychosocial factors. This essay will largely focus on Hindu far-right troll accounts and the vitriol they unleash on women and gender fluid people with non-conforming sexual orientations for the established reason that the magnitude of the majority can silence every voice that reacts unfavourably to it, irrespective of violence or lack thereof.

In 1974, artist Marina Abramovic's *Rhythm Zero* performance demonstrated a few dark facets of humanity—violence escalates if the victim is passive, and seemingly normal people are capable of callous and dangerous cruelty when they foresee impunity and a lack of consequence of their actions (8). Cruelty as a human trait has been investigated extensively through an evolutionary lens, and the manifestation of hatred by verbal or other behaviour is deeply tied to cruelty as a trait (9)(10). Psychological research has identified several other individual attributes and personality traits that are associated with online trolling behaviour, including the 'dark tetrad' of Machiavellianism, narcissism, psychopathy and everyday sadism (11)(12)(13). Situational factors like loneliness have been identified as a moderator of the relationship between the dark tetrad and trolling (14). However, focusing on individual contributors to antisocial behaviour often comes at the cost of letting environmental contributors slide away from scrutiny and discourse. When it comes to gender, a disproportionate amount of socially acceptable justification can be attributed to just biological sex differences (15). Furthermore, if a genuinely integrative and interactive behavioural model is considered for any form of violent behaviour, then environmental factors must also be considered in addition to the individual factors. Environmental factors are far easier to control, and understanding them usually leads to better-designed interventions.

Online violence in India

India has the largest gender gap (46 percent) when it comes to access to mobile phones and internet in South Asia—79 percent of Indian men have access to mobile phones, compared to 43 percent of women, and only 24 percent of Indian women have access to smartphones (16). Even when they have access to a device, only 11 percent of women have internet access. This reveals the magnitude of online violence when considered alongside the fact that girls, women and LGBTQI individuals are disproportionately over-represented in victims of all antisocial online behaviour. In a 2017 survey of Tier-1 Indian cities (where respondents are arguably more educated and better informed), eight out of ten individuals reported facing online harassment and 41 percent women reported facing online sexual harassment (17)(18)(19)(20).

Women who are vocal about various social injustices consistently draw more flak (21)(22)(23)(24). No political establishment has been particularly kind to vocal women in India, despite the Constitution allowing ample protection against gendered abuse. Over the last few years, however, there are very notable changes (25). Islamophobia has emerged as a dominant theme, and cyberspace has turned increasingly acerbic, becoming near impossible to separate real and virtual violence. A large section of internet trolls has a clear focus on deepening the fault line along the Hindu-Muslim axis (26). They propagate

an upper caste Brahminical version of Hindutva, a homogenous formulation of faith with misogyny embedded in its DNA. In this strongly patriarchal framework that glorifies faith-based violence, a vegetarian diet, extreme reverence of Hindu deities and the cow as the emblematic holy animal, stereotypical notions of gender and sexuality, moral policing of sexuality and its expression, and xenophobia are all virtuous. Anything or anyone that contradicts this belief system, even if in a minor way, is easily vilified, and can then be justifiably threatened, shamed or forced into silence. In this formulation of faith, there is no room for India's pluralist traditions, and faith-based opinions can dominate logical explanations. The tradition of goddess worship has been appropriated cleverly to binarise women into good versus bad. While good women self-censor themselves, the bad women need to be taught their right place and the right way to behave. It is easy to see how the framework of virtuous violence is applicable. With the online disinhibition effect (27) (the exaggerated expression of feelings using the anonymity offered by the internet), the easy creation of fake accounts and bots, and rampant impunity and an enabling environment, perpetrators frequently engage in extremely graphic forms of online hate speech. Neologisms such as 'anti-national,' 'love-jihad' and 'urban Naxal,' and the reframing of any public debate on sociopolitical critiques, public health and even innocuous humour into a narrative along Hindu-Muslim contention are alarming. For instance, women who respond to rabid hatred and widespread Islamophobic backlash against insurgent attacks in Kashmir that affect Kashmiri citizens are often viciously trolled, irrespective of their background (28)(29).

Countermeasures

When it comes to mitigation of online hate speech, the most common recourse for women is the proverbial swallowing of the bitter pill. Feminist scholarship has consistently observed how law enforcement, legal systems and government-funded schemes intended to protect Indian women routinely fail them (30). Unless the victim is a public figure or the abuse is exceptionally graphic and followed by public and media outcry, arrests for online hate speech are exceptions rather than the norm (31)(32)(33). On the contrary, women in India are subjected to widespread victim-blaming, which criticises the use of internet and expressing their views freely as the root cause of trouble (34)(35). Reporting online abuse and seeking redressal often backfires on the woman (36). Social platforms such as Twitter and Facebook can no longer avoid the onus of countering hate speech, and must improve their diagnostic algorithms to detect and prevent hate speech. Counter-speech could be an effective mitigation tactic, but long-term solutions must address and reduce the glorification of gender stereotypes and inherent misogyny that dominates the current psychosocial space, especially when driven by a majoritarian political agenda. Integrative solutions will require significant political will to change the gender discourse from the bottom up.

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11

UN Framework on Countering Violent Extremism Online is the Need of the Hour

Ilyas El Omari

The dire repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic on the economy, social relationships and the politics of countries around the world can be seen as normal when compared to the devastating effects of natural disasters, epidemics and wars throughout history in terms of the loss of human lives, the economic aftershocks, and the depletion of health and medical resources. For this reason, the material effects of COVID-19 remain relatively limited, albeit with some variance amongst countries (1).

Nonetheless, one should be aware that the psychological, moral and symbolic transformations—which have accelerated since the emergence of the pandemic at the beginning of 2020—have left marked scars on human existence, and deep cracks in individual and social relational networks. Indeed, human behaviour has undergone transformations because of the pandemic’s tremendous shock for both individuals and the structure of social relationships.

Amongst the changes that occurred at the very onset of the pandemic was the drastic decline in economic production systems with the closure of production units, the restriction of movement in a bid to slow the spread of the virus through quarantine and lockdown measures, and the declaration of COVID-19 as a pandemic by the United Nations (UN) on 11 March this year.

These changes have not only impacted economic and material production but also non-material production, such as creativity, the arts and entertainment.

However, compared to previous natural or human disasters, the first significant novel factor that is clear is the role played by the Internet and social media. Even as the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on lives and livelihoods were being felt worldwide, there was a remarkable paradigm shift, with a steady increase in demand for new technologies, especially those related to the web and social media.

The use of the Internet has increased, primarily for the dissemination of updates relating to the virus spread, ways to combat it and protect human lives from its lethality, and the possible vaccines to eradicate the disease. Secondly, this strong growth has been related to not just the dissemination of information but to receiving updated information

on the pandemic and, thirdly, to overcome the sudden deadly boredom that had resulted from stay-at-home orders.

While the setback that impacted material and non-material production chains was a bitter curse for individuals, groups, and small, medium and large-sized enterprises, the considerable boom experienced by the Internet sector was a blessing, a good omen, and a tremendous promise for telecommunications carriers and social networking companies who have benefited from this increasing demand and unprecedented interest in the use of these networks. These large companies have thus accumulated astronomical financial figures from earnings generated by web users. For instance, a new report by research firm Global Market Insights predicts that the videoconferencing industry is projected to grow to US\$50 billion by 2026 from US\$14 billion in 2019 (2).

Questions may be asked of the nature of the topics that dominated the discussions in social media rooms, and the type of topics, films and programmes that have been popular during this pandemic. Was the use of social networks limited to publishing or making inquiries related to the pandemic in addition to filling the void caused by quarantine measures that compelled people to stay at home?

With the increase in demand for internet services, and owing to the sheer volume and diversity of the issues that are raised on social media, there has also been noticeable interest in certain topics that are considered highly dangerous, such as extremism and terrorism.

This increased focus on topics with violent content presents a challenge to the ruling elite in terms of the real-world consequences to this steady rise of extremist rhetoric, with all its dangerous implications. The sharp rise in extremist rhetoric threatens those countries that are built on the substantive elements of multilingualism, multiculturalism and religious pluralism. Hence, instead of being a source of enrichment for these countries, this diversity can be exploited to bring about unrest and violence. A recent report by the UN on 'The Impact of the Pandemic on Terrorism, Counter-Terrorism, and Countering Violent Extremism' has identified the factors that have provided short-term opportunities for terrorist groups to indoctrinate and recruit more members (3). These factors include a captive audience, such as the one billion students no longer in full time education; a fertile ground for integrating COVID-19 into the narratives of terrorist groups by spreading conspiracy theories against minority groups, governments and other authorities; and an opportunity to use the pandemic as a means to ramp up the social services provided by terrorist groups in areas where the state's presence is already weak or contested.

At the release of the UN Report 'COVID-19 and Human Rights: We are all in this together' (4), UN Secretary General António Guterres warned that "the virus is having a disproportionate impact on certain communities through the rise of hate speech, the targeting of vulnerable groups, and the risks of heavy-handed security responses undermining the health response" (5). In the face of this danger, the ruling elite who monopolise decision-making are expected to kick into gear to set up the legal arsenal

needed to counter extremism and violence on social media. This legal arsenal is likely to protect societies and ensure the cohesion of nations.

Even as the growth of violent and extremist content online continues to concern governments and security institutions, there has also been a marked interest in issues related to civil and universal rights and liberties. There is a growing trend of using internet networks to raise issues related to rights and freedoms. For instance, the #BlackLivesMatter movement in the US saw a surge of (almost immediate) support on social media platforms across all countries. Earlier, it would have taken weeks before news of the struggle reached distant shores, with only official news channels and newspapers providing information on it.

In many countries, political regimes have exploited, for ulterior motives, the extraordinary powers and measures adopted to stem the spread of the virus, such as restricting the freedoms of human rights activists. In this respect, international organisations have reported marked setbacks to the rights that were, until recently, an intrinsic and unquestioned part of citizens' lives. The recent report submitted by UN Human Rights Council President Elisabeth Tichy-Fisslberger to Guterres reviewed a significant part of such violations, and reiterated the need to speed up the development of a UN Charter to protect human rights and social media activists (6).

Notably, the enactment of an international law to protect internet users has constantly been rejected for over 15 years. The prevalence of extremist and violent rhetoric, the confiscation of rights and freedoms, and the crackdown on social media activists are occurring in the absence of an international law that protects the rights of media users.

With the advent of the Fourth Industrial Revolution in the early 21st century, the merging of the real and virtual worlds was already ongoing. The pandemic has only compressed timelines and accelerated this trend. It is, therefore, imperative that we set up a normative framework to address important issues that arise online but manifest in the real world with dire consequences. The COVID-19 pandemic and the digital revolution have proven to be an adverse force multiplier for the rise of violent extremism and for the repression of citizens' rights by states who are (over)utilising the extraordinary powers granted to them to tackle the public health crisis.

This then begs the question—will states be willing to let go of these overarching and overreaching powers once the pandemic is over? It is here that international institutions like the UN must play a role in protecting human rights beyond the real world into the virtual. In a bid to counter violent extremism online, states must not resort to using heavy-handed security measures that adversely impact the rights of their citizens. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is not a static document destined to be rendered obsolete by the ravages of times; it must evolve to meet the needs of a new 21st century reality. The UN must lead the charge in setting up a normative framework that will not only protect human rights in the real and virtual worlds, but also strengthen the rules-based order and lead the way towards a new era of freedom post-COVID-19.

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12

The Role of Human Voice in the Communication of Digital Disinformation

Rita Singh

Without doubt, extremism and xenophobia have been exacerbated in today's world by the availability of pervasive communication. Rhetoric that incites these problems rides the wings of digital communication technology, reaching vulnerable minds more quickly and more impactfully. Worse, it allows their *reactions* to be swiftly synergised and directed towards targets. Much like a freely-spreading global pandemic, uncensored disinformation infects and consumes all who are psychologically vulnerable – anyone who cares to listen.

The Sensory Impact of Sound

People consume digital information through four means: audio, video, images and text. Each modality is perceived and processed by the brain through different sensory pathways. Each can independently create impressions and lasting memories, incite the mind, arouse feelings and thoughts, and cause those to be translated into action. However, each modality, with equal exposure, affects the mind *to different degrees*.

When it comes to conveying complex ideas and ideologies, human speech (and the human voice) is by far the most powerful influencer. Textual spread is limited by literacy and other issues, and it is hard to convey cogent and complex ideologies through visual imagery.

How sound and the human voice influence the brain

Sound has a profound effect on our perception of the world: of people, their interactions and intentions, situations and our environment (1).

The messages conveyed by images and written text, when accompanied by sound, are intensified and driven deeper into the human psyche. When images and text are accompanied by sound, the areas of the brain that are activated amount to greater than the sum of the unimodal processing areas—the auditory cortex, visual cortex and areas of the

frontal cortex that process linguistic information (both spoken language and text activate the linguistic processing areas). Simultaneous multisensory inputs shift activations from sensory-specific (“unimodal”) cortices of the brain into multisensory (“heteromodal”) areas of the brain, and at the same time, each type of sensory input actually affects the unimodal processing areas of the brain as well (2)(3).

While this applies to all stimuli, other studies show that the effect of sound is profound on our perceptions about co-occurring stimuli. Sound can not only enhance, but *alter* our perception of the world, even when nothing else changes in it (4)(5)(6)(7).

For instance, an online article on police brutality may carry an image of people running (only showing their backs), with the caption ‘People dashing to shelter from charging police’. If the event is unlikely, the visual presentation and the authenticity of the report, and their correlation could be questioned. However, when the same scene is presented with sounds (8)(9) of police sirens, and people shouting situation-relevant words, the retrospective reaction is more likely to be visceral anger directed at the police. The presentation may go unquestioned. And yet, objectively, there was never a guarantee that the sounds and the visual scene ever co-occurred. In general, people question acoustic evidence much less than textual or visual evidence, because sound, being invisible and pervasive, is not subconsciously “observed” well enough to be learned about.

Humans routinely form impressions about other people based on their voices. These impressions profoundly influence how they interact with and react to them. Human voice is also a powerful mass stimulus, and can instigate mass responses and mass hysteria more intensely than other kinds of presentation (10). For instance, the rabid responses that Adolf Hitler’s speeches to the Nazi Party evoked in its audiences, for example, can be evidenced in historical recordings. It has been conjectured that in addition to other factors, the conversion of an otherwise decent society to a murderous, xenophobic one was powerfully driven, compounded and exponentiated by Hitler’s persuasive speeches—his vocal delivery of his ideologies.

Humans are highly susceptible to sounds. While in some cases a picture is worth a thousand words, in others, a spoken sentence may well be worth a thousand pictures.

Voice and Disinformation

It is not just the *content* of speech, but the *sound of the human voice*, that carries this potential of driving the human psyche. With high likelihood, Hitler with a comic voice (for instance, that of Mickey Mouse) may not have succeeded in driving the Nazis to extremes.

To comprehend the role of the human voice in digital disinformation, it is important to realise how pervasive human speech is in the digital world. As of October 2019, people watched five billion videos each day on YouTube alone (11). Similar content is delivered over many other channels on the internet, digital communication lines and radio, propelling the uptake of audio and audio-visual media into additional billions each day. Social media channels add to these numbers. 5.2 million users watched branded Instagram videos during the first quarter of 2017 alone (12).

An unquantifiable, but increasingly large fraction of this volume of media supports disinformation.

The consequences of the deceptions carried out through speech are comparable to physical crimes. They range from psychological illnesses and causing financial ruin by talking people into glib financial schemes, to actual death caused by misuse of commodities that are convincingly touted as safe, or about which crucial information is withheld.

Table 1: Examples of large-scale disseminators of voice-supported deceptions

Broad category*	Gain type	Medium of delivery
Misinformation**	None	TV, Internet Search Engines (accessing audio/video content servers)
Disinformation***	Commercial	TV, Audio/Video content delivery channels, News, Magazines, Social media channels, Customised business transaction channels (e.g. broker channels connected to stock markets)
	Political	Propaganda disseminating channels (many of the above)
	Personal	Audio/Video content delivery channels, Social media channels, Telephone data channels (for Bot-compromising voice-authenticated or voice-based services)

**This list excludes individual-level crimes such as criminal indoctrination, harassment, bullying, extortion, identity theft, banking fraud, immigration fraud etc. The list of such voice-based crimes is quite large, but not particularly relevant in the current context.*

Misinformation: False or misleading information, intentional or unintentional. **Disinformation:** the specific kind of misinformation that is propagated deliberately with intent to deceive.

Source: Author's own

What emerges from such analyses is the (surprising) realisation that the originator of an insurgent ideology is just the spark. The communication channels are the dry down – the forests that convey the fire to those around. Operationally, the problem of the spread of insurgence lies not with the originators and recipients of disinformation—because humans will behave in conditioned ways—but with the messenger.

The deluge of unfettered and unrestricted information being ferried around by the messenger each day, and it is the messenger that must be curbed, technologically. We discuss this next.

Technological Solutions

Psychologically, insurgence and radicalism stem from existential fears driven by complex socioeconomic factors that put individuals and groups at significant disadvantages from early life. Technological advances alone do not help these groups; there is enough evidence to show that they only serve to shift the requirements of global job markets, pushing already disadvantaged groups further down the socioeconomic ladder. These are serious problems and must be addressed at the root to truly dissolve extremism.

However, these socioeconomic issues can be set aside to think purely (robotically) in

terms of the technological containment of this scourge, for no reason other than these are the only solutions that are clear and immediately actionable.

With a focus again on speech, the important question is how to curb the free spread of insurgent rhetoric? The pachyderm in the room here is the messenger – *the medium that operates in an uncurated manner*. The simplest solution might be to render all spoken communication Mickey Mouse-ish unless properly curated. We expect that this would curb the effect of spoken rhetoric (13) on the masses, to the point of making it completely insipid and ineffective. However, this is not an acceptable solution in the real world. More practical (and acceptable) potential gatekeeper technologies are mentioned below.

Speech recognition

Speech recognition technologies deal with the transcription of recorded speech. While the transcription of spontaneous (freely spoken) speech, and speech in high noise environments still remains an unsolved problem, automatic speech recognition systems are getting better at these rapidly. Based on transcribed speech, databases for different levels of fact-checking can be built. Once speech is converted to textual form, other powerful natural language processing and natural language understanding technologies can help curate content.

Speaker verification and Identification

Speaker verification and identification technologies are based on matching of voiceprints to those present in carefully curated voiceprint databases. In speaker verification, the identity of the speaker is given at the outset, and voice matching verifies the authenticity of the claim. In speaker identification, the identity of the speaker is unknown at the outset and is found by matching the given voiceprint to those present in a database. Misrepresentation through machine-generated and human voices (propaganda from fake sources) can be monitored through the use of these technologies.

Speech paralinguistics

The word paralinguistics stems from the word *paralanguage* (or *vocalics*). It refers to those aspects of speech-based communication that qualify or alter the meaning of the spoken words, and may convey the emotion, feelings or intent of the speaker to the listener without explicit verbalisation. Paralinguistics can help curate speech at a meta level by flagging it for the presence of different (incongruent) emotions, lies and other tactical deceptions carried out through speech. These technologies are limited in accuracy, since they use data labelled by humans to learn from, and humans can only label as accurately as they judge or perceive.

Voice profiling

Voice profiling involves the analysis of human voice to deduce a plethora of information about the speaker (14). Human voice a powerful bio-parametric indicator. It carries information that can be linked to *current* (referring to the time of recording of the voice) physical, physiological, demographic, sociological, medical, psychological and other characteristics of the speaker, and to the speaker's environment.

Voice profiling technologies can also inform us about those aspects of voice that can be altered to render the content more benign, without affecting the perceived quality of speech. These technologies can perhaps help us implement the Mickey Mouse solution in an insidious (and acceptable) manner – to take away the confidence, control and leadership related qualities embedded in voice, rendering it less effective.

Conclusion

From an acoustic perspective, the only actionable strategy to tackle the spread of insurgent ideologies seems to be the preposterous equivalent of killing the messenger, instead of trying to modify the factors that condition the originators to send the message and the recipients to absorb the message.

Voice content delivery channels must be analysed objectively for their potential impact in spreading inciteful content. Voice technologies must then be judiciously applied to curate the most harmful ones. Channels that deliver the greatest acoustic content volume per unit time, and per unit population size, must be held to some minimal regulatory standards for delivering authenticated content, even if the standards merely require them to have made a reasonable, scientifically supported attempt to curate content.

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13

Debating the Ethics of Deepfakes

Ashish Jaiman

Imagine a few days before an election, a video of a candidate is released showing them using hate speech, racial slurs and epithets that undercut their image as being pro minorities. Imagine a teenager seeing an explicit video of themselves on social media. Imagine a CEO on the road to raise money to take their company public when an audio clip of them stating their fears and anxieties about the product is sent to the investors. These scenarios are examples of the malicious use of AI-generated synthetic media known as deepfakes (1).

Recent advancements in Artificial Intelligence (AI) have led to rapid developments in audio, video, and image manipulation techniques. Access to commodity cloud computing, public research AI algorithms and abundant data has created a perfect storm to democratise the creation of deepfakes for distribution at scale via social platforms.

Although deepfakes could be used in positive ways, such as in art, expression, accessibility, and business, it has mainly been weaponised for malicious purposes. Deepfakes can harm individuals, businesses, society, and democracy, and can accelerate the already declining trust in the media. Such an erosion of trust will promote a culture of factual relativism, unravelling the increasingly strained fabric of democracy and civil society. Additionally, deepfakes can enable the least democratic and authoritarian leaders to thrive as they can leverage the 'liar's dividend', where any inconvenient truth is quickly discounted as 'fake news' (2).

Creating a false narrative using deepfakes is dangerous and can cause harm, intentional and unintentional, to individuals and society at large. Deepfakes could worsen the global post-truth crisis as they are not just fake but are so realistic that they betray our most innate senses of sight and sound. Putting words into someone else's mouth, swapping someone's face with another, creating synthetic images and digital puppets of public personas to systematise deceit are ethically questionable actions and should be held responsible for the potential harm to individuals and institutions.

Deepfakes can be used by non-state actors, such as insurgent groups and terrorist organisations, to represent their adversaries as making inflammatory speeches or

engaging in provocative actions to stir up anti-state sentiments among people. For instance, a terrorist organisation can easily create a deepfake video showing western soldiers dishonouring a religious place to flame existing anti-West emotions and cause further discord. States can use similar tactics to spread computational propaganda against a minority community or another country, for instance, a fake video showing a police officer shouting anti-religious slurs or a political activist calling for violence. All this can be achieved with fewer resources, internet scale and speed, and even microtargeted to galvanise support.

Deepfakes created to intimidate, humiliate, or blackmail an individual are unambiguously unethical, and their impact on the democratic process must be analysed.

Types of Deepfakes

Celebrity and revenge pornography were among the early malicious uses of deepfakes. Deepfake pornography is placed in the macro-context of gender inequality and exclusively targets and harms women, inflicting emotional and reputational harm. About 96 percent of deepfakes are pornographic videos, with over 134 million views on the top four deepfake pornographic websites (3).

Pornographic deepfakes can threaten, intimidate, and inflict psychological harm on an individual. It reduces women to sexual objects and torments them, causing emotional distress, reputation harm, abuse and in some cases even financial or employment loss.

Deepfake pornography, often non-consensual, is disturbing and immoral, and several sites have pre-emptively banned such content (4)(5)(6).

The ethical issue is far more convoluted where consensual synthetic pornography is concerned. While some may argue that this is equivalent to the morally acceptable practice of sexual fantasy, consensual deepfakes could normalise the idea of artificial pornography, which could further exacerbate concerns about the negative impact of pornography on psychological and sexual development. The realistic virtual avatars could also lead to negative outcomes. It may be morally acceptable to act adversely towards a virtual avatar, but how will this impact behaviour with another person?

Another area of concern is synthetic resurrection. Individuals have the right to control the commercial use of their likenesses. In a few US states, like Massachusetts and New York, this right extends to the afterlife as well. But this may be different and complex process in other countries (7).

The main question concerning public personalities is who owns their face and voice once they die. Can they be used for publicity, propaganda, and commercial gain? There are moral and ethical concerns about how deepfakes can be used to misrepresent political leaders' reputation posthumously to achieve political and policy motives. Although there are some legal protections to using the voice and face of a deceased person for commercial gain, if the heirs have the legal right to use these features, they can use it for their commercial benefit.

Another potential ethical concern creating a deepfake audio or video of a loved one after they have passed. There are voice technology companies that will create synthetic

voice as a new kind of bereavement therapy or help people remember the deceased and remain connected with them (8). Although some may argue that it is akin to keeping pictures and videos of the deceased, there is a moral ambiguity about using the vocal and facial features to create synthetic digital versions.

Although voice assistants like Alexa, Cortana and Siri are increasingly sounding more realistic, people can still identify them as synthetic voices. Improvement in speech technology allow voice assistants to imitate human and social elements of speech like pauses and verbal cues. Efforts are underway, such as Google's Duplex, to develop voice assistant features to make calls on behalf of a person in a way that it is indistinguishable from human voice (9).

A potential human-sounding synthetic voice raises several ethical concerns. Since the deepfake voice technology is created to project human voice, it could undermine real social interaction. Racial and cultural bias could also occur due to prejudice in the training dataset for these tools.

Synthetic voice deepfakes can also be used to deceive people for monetary and commercial gain. Automated call centers, deepfake audio of public personalities and phone scammers can use synthetic voice tools maliciously for their benefit.

Deepfake technology can create an entirely artificially generated face, person, or object. Creating and enhancing fake digital identities for fraud, espionage or infiltration purposes is unethical (10).

A synthetic face is generated by training a deep-learning algorithm with a large set of real face images to generate a deepfake. But it is unethical to train a model using real faces unless proper consent for such uses has been granted.

Democratic Discourse and Process

In politics, stretching a truth, overrepresenting a policy position and presenting alternate facts are normal tactics. They help mobilise, influence and persuade people to gain votes and donors. Political opportunism is unethical but now the norm.

Deepfakes and synthetic media may have a profound impact on the outcome of election if political parties choose to use them. Deception creates profound harm to individuals because it impedes their ability to make informed decisions in their own best interests. Intentionally distributing false information about the opposition or presenting an alternate truth for a candidate in an election manipulates voters into serving the interests of the deceiver (11). These practices are unethical and have limited legal recourse. Similarly, a deepfake used to intimidate voters not to vote is immoral as well.

Deepfakes may also be used for misattributions, telling a lie about a candidate, falsely amplifying their contribution, or inflicting reputational harm on a candidate. A deepfake with an intent to deceive, intimidate, misattribute, and inflict reputational harm to perpetuate disinformation is unambiguously unethical. It is also unethical to invoke the liar's dividend.

A Moral Obligation

The creators and distributors of deepfakes must ensure they employ and implement synthetic media ethically. Big technology platforms like Microsoft, Google, and Amazon, which provide tooling and cloud computing to create deepfakes with speed and at scale, have a moral obligation (12). Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and TikTok, which offer the ability to distribute a deepfake at scale, must show an ethical and social responsibility towards the use of deepfakes, as must news media organisations and journalists, legislators and policymakers, and civil society.

The ethical obligation of the social and technology platforms is to prevent harm. While users on these platforms have a responsibility towards sharing and consuming content, structural and informational asymmetries make it hard to expect users to play a primary role in effectively responding to malicious deepfakes. The burden-shifting to users to respond to malicious synthetic media might be ethically defensible. Still, platforms must do the right thing and bear the primary responsibility of identifying and preventing the spread of misleading and manipulated media.

Most technology and social platforms have policies for disinformation and malicious synthetic media, but these must be aligned to ethical principles. For instance, if a deepfake can cause significant harm (reputational or otherwise), the platforms must remove such content. These platforms should act to add dissemination controls or differential promotional tactics like limited sharing or downranking to stop the spread of deepfakes on their networks. Labelling content is another effective tool, which should be deployed objectively and transparently, without any political bias or business model considerations.

Platforms bear ethical obligations to create and maintain the dissemination norms of their user community. Framing of community standards, community identity and user submission constraints can have a real impact on content producers. Norms and community guidelines, including examples of desirable behaviour and positive expectations of users as community participants, can reinforce behaviour consistent with those expectations. Terms of use and platform policies play a meaningful role in preventing the spread of harmful fabricated media.

Institutions interested in combating problems related to manipulated media have an ethical obligation to ensure access to media literacy programmes. Platforms must empower users with knowledge and critical media literacy skills to build resiliency and engage intelligently to consume, process, and share information. Practical media knowledge can enable users to think critically about the context of media and become more engaged citizens, while still appreciating satire and parody.

Conclusion

Deepfakes makes it possible to fabricate media, often without consent, and cause psychology harm, political instability, and business disruption. The weaponisation of deepfakes can have a massive impact on the economy, personal freedom, and national security. The ethical implications of deepfake are enormous. Deepfake threat models,

harm frameworks, ethical AI principles and commonsense regulations must be developed through partnerships and civil society oversight to promote awareness and encourage advancement and innovation.

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14

Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism at Facebook: Technology, Expertise and Partnerships

Erin Saltman

At Facebook, we rely on a combination of technology, people and partnerships with experts to help keep our platforms safe. Even as governments, companies and non-profits have battled terrorist propaganda online, we've faced a complex question over the best way to tackle a global challenge that can proliferate in different ways, across different parts of the web.

Often analysts and observers ask us at Facebook why, with our vast databases and advanced technology, we can't just block nefarious activity using technology alone. The truth is that we also need people to do this work. And to be truly effective in stopping the spread of terrorist content across the entire internet, we need to join forces with others. Ultimately this is about finding the right balance between technology, human expertise and partnerships. Technology helps us manage the scale and speed of online content. Human expertise is needed for nuanced understanding of how terrorism and violent extremism manifests around the world and track adversarial shifts. Partnerships allow us to see beyond trends on our own platform, better understand the interplay between online and offline, and build programmes with credible civil society organisations to support counterspeech at scale.

Proactive Efforts at Facebook: Technology and Human Expertise

Deploying Artificial Intelligence (AI) for counterterrorism is not as simple as flipping a switch. Depending on the technique, you need to carefully curate databases or have human beings code data to train a machine. A system designed to find content from one terrorist organisation may not work for another because of language and stylistic differences in their propaganda. However, the use of AI and other automation to stop the spread of terrorist content is showing promise. As discussed in our most recent Community Standards Enforcement Report, in just the first three months of 2020, we removed 6.3 million pieces of terrorist content, with a proactive detection rate of 99 percent (1).

This was primarily driven by improvements to our technology that helps us detect and manually review potential violations, often before anyone sees the content. While these numbers are significant, there is no one tool or algorithm to stop terrorism and violent extremism online. Instead, we use a range of tools to address different aspects of how we see dangerous content manifest on our platforms. Some examples of the tooling and AI we use to proactively detect terrorist and violent extremist content includes:

- *Image and video matching:* When someone tries to upload a terrorist photo or video, our systems look for whether the image matches a known terrorism photo or video. This means that if we previously removed a propaganda video from ISIS, for instance, we can work to prevent other accounts from uploading the same video to our site. In many cases, this means that terrorist content intended for upload to Facebook simply never reaches the platform.
- *Language understanding:* We have used AI to understand text that might be advocating for terrorism. This is language and often broad group-type specific.
- *Removing terrorist clusters:* We know from studies of terrorists that they tend to radicalise and operate in clusters (2)(3). This offline trend is reflected online as well. So, when we identify pages, groups, posts or profiles as supporting terrorism, we also use algorithms to “fan out” to try to identify related material that may also support terrorism. We use signals like whether an account is friends with a high number of accounts that have been disabled for terrorism, or whether an account shares the same attributes as a disabled account.
- *Recidivism:* We are now much faster at detecting new accounts created by repeat offenders (people who have already been blocked from Facebook for previous violations). Through this work, we have been able to dramatically reduce the time that terrorist recidivist accounts are on Facebook. This work is never finished because it is adversarial, and the terrorists are continuously evolving their methods too. We are constantly identifying new ways that terrorist actors try to circumvent our systems, and we update our tactics accordingly.

The use of AI against terrorism is increasingly bearing fruit, but ultimately it must be reinforced with manual review from trained experts. To that end, we utilise expertise from inside the company and from the outside, partnering with those who can help address extremism across the internet.

While some overtly violating content can be removed directly with automation, the technology and AI is also programmed to triage a large amount of content to our human review and subject matter expert teams. More tech solutions do not mean less human involvement. Often it is the opposite. Human expertise is needed for nuanced understanding of language, detecting new trends and reviewing content that is not obviously violating. Along with increased industry collaboration, we continue to deepen our bench of internal specialists— including linguists, subject matter experts, academics, former law enforcement personnel and former intelligence analysts. We now have 350 people working full time on our dangerous organisation teams. This includes full time support for policy, engineering, operations, investigations, risk and response teams. This is supplemented by over 35,000 people in our safety and security teams around the world

that assist with everything from translation to escalations. These teams have regional expertise in understanding the nuanced existence of terrorist groups around the world and also help us build stronger relationships with experts outside the company who can help us identify regional trends and adversarial shifts in how terror groups are attempting to use the internet.

Despite Facebook's increasing efforts, we know that countering terrorism and violent extremism effectively is ever evolving and cannot be done alone. The nature of the threat is both cross-platform and transnational. That is why partnerships with other technology companies and other sectors will always be key.

Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism

Our Counterterrorism and Dangerous Organization Policy team at Facebook works directly with the public policy, engineering and programmes teams to ensure that our approach is global and understands the huge variety of international trends. In the counterterrorism, space the most notable partnership has been built through the launch of the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT) (4). In the summer of 2017, Facebook, Microsoft, Twitter and YouTube came together to form GIFCT. Since then, the organisation has grown to include a myriad of companies working together to disrupt terrorists' and violent extremists' abilities to promote themselves, share propaganda and exploit digital platforms to glorify real-world acts of violence.

Since its foundation, GIFCT companies have contributed over 300,000 unique hashes, or digital fingerprints, of known terrorist images and video propaganda to our shared industry database, so member companies can quickly identify and take action on potential terrorist content on their respective platforms. We have made progress in large part by working together as a collective of technology companies, but we have also partnered with experts in government, civil society and academia who share our goal. For example, by working with Tech Against Terrorism (5), a UN Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate-mandated NGO, GIFCT has brought over 140 tech companies, 40 NGOs and 15 government bodies together in workshops across the world to date. In 2019, we held four workshops—in the US, Jordan, India and the UK—to discuss and study the latest trends in terrorist and violent extremist activity online.

Working with experts and collaborating in a multi-sector environment in India has been significant to GIFCT's progress. In November 2019, GIFCT held its first workshop in India. The event brought together 85 leading experts across India, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh focussed on counterterrorism, counter-extremism, and localised resiliency work. Recognising the importance of enabling research on terrorism issues in the South Asian region, the Observer Research Foundation was invited to participate in the GIFCT's Global Research Network on Terrorism and Technology in 2019 and continues as a member of the Global Network on Extremism and Technology (6)(7). ORF's paper for GIFCT examines what government and social media companies can do in the context of Jammu and Kashmir and the nexus between technology and terrorism (8).

GIFCT has also grown to respond to real world threats that have online impact. The abuse of social media to glorify the horrific terrorist attack on 15 March 2019 in

Christchurch, New Zealand, demonstrated the need for greater collaboration to respond to mass violence to curb the spread of violent extremist content. In May 2019, Facebook and founding GIFCT companies signed the Christchurch Call to Action (9), whereby GIFCT has worked to implement a nine-point plan to prevent terrorist exploitation of the internet while respecting human rights and freedom of speech (10). As part of this plan, GIFCT developed the Content Incident Protocol to respond to emerging and active terrorist or violent extremist events, and assess for any potential online content produced and disseminated by those responsible for or aiding in the attack. Since the attack in Christchurch, GIFCT member companies have developed, refined and tested the protocol through workshops with Europol and the New Zealand government.

Given its expanding capacities, it was announced at the UN General Assembly 23 September 2019 that GIFCT will transform into an independent NGO (11). In June, the first executive director of the NGO—Nicholas J. Rasmussen, former director of the US's National Counterterrorism Center—was announced, along with a multi-sector, international, Independent Advisory Committee (IAC). Meanwhile, the IAC will serve as a governing body tasked with counselling on GIFCT priorities, assessing performance and providing strategic expertise. The IAC is made up of representatives from seven governments, two international organisations, and 12 members of civil society, including counter terrorism- and countering violent extremism experts; digital, free expression and human rights advocates; academics and others.

Counterspeech

A large focus is often on efforts that remove terrorist and violent extremist content. However, removing content alone will only tackle a symptom of radicalisation, not the root causes. In addition to having strong policies and enforcement, there is immense value in empowering community voices online through counter narratives, or counterspeech. Our online community uses our platform to raise moderate voices in response to extremist ones and it is our role as a tech company to upscale and optimise those voices, strategically countering hate speech and extremism.

Online extremism can only be tackled with a strong partnership among policymakers, civil society organisations, academia and corporates so that we can work closely with experts and support counterspeech initiatives, including commissioning research on what makes counterspeech effective, training NGOs about best counterspeech practices, and partnering with other organisations to help amplify the voices of those on the ground.

In India, for instance, the Voice+ platform allows practitioners, experts and NGO leaders to share their experiences of countering violent extremism and of people building positive changes in the face of terrorism and insurgency (12). Nearly 100 civil society and grassroots organisations, peace and youth activists, and journalists participated in Voice+ Dialogue events around India. Additionally, Voice+ Counterspeech Labs were rolled out in five cities across India, equipping over 500 university students, policymakers and experts with the essential tools and resources to counter extremist narratives through photography, storytelling, humor and digital video. For three consecutive years, Facebook has also partnered with one of India's leading publications, *The Indian Express*,

to celebrate ‘Stories of Strength’ (13). Through this partnership, Facebook seeks to enable conversations on community resilience against terror and extremism.

In March 2020, Facebook launched the Resiliency Initiative across Asia Pacific and Southeast Asia. Despite restrictions on travel, we innovated to connect with grassroots organisations which served minority and marginalised communities to provide them with hands-on training to help them improve on their social media outreach activity. In three months, we reached over 140 activists from 40 organisations across nine countries. Participants were given free workshops to learn tools and strategies to develop more creative content to build community resiliency, and were invited to submit their creative pieces for feedback and suggestions. We also continue to actively support UNDP’s Extreme Lives programme, which is now in its third year, and discusses real life experiences of extremism (14).

The Future

Terrorism and violent extremism are transnational, include regional nuances, attempt to exploit the real world and online spaces, are cross-platform and are constantly evolving. Efforts to combat terrorism and extremism, therefore, will also be ever evolving in order to understand and meaningfully challenge adversarial threats. It is only when each of our sectors—technology, government, civil society, academia—recognise where we are best placed to work together and combine our expertise that we get true impact.

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Her academic career spans over two decades of research on a wide range of topics in the areas of speech and audio signal processing, multimedia forensics and cyber forensics. Her current work is focused on creating and developing the science of profiling humans from their voice, a new sub-area of Artificial Intelligence and Voice Forensics. The technology pioneered by her group has led to two world firsts: In September 2018, her team created the world's first live voice-based profiling system, demonstrated live at the World Economic Forum in Tianjin, China and in 2019, they created the world's first instance of human voice – that of the artist Rembrandt – generated based on evidence from facial images.

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