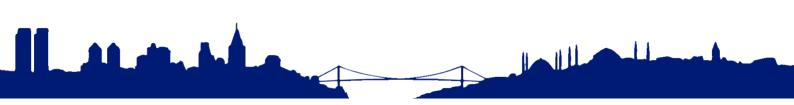# RESEARCH REPORT

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC, AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION (UNESCO)

PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM RESULTING FROM RELIGIOUS INDOCTRINATION THROUGH EDUCATION

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Basic Overview of the Issue

Over the past few years, there has been an increase in the number of recorded assaults by violent extremist groups. As tragedies increase on all continents, it can be understood that violent extremism knows no boundaries and affects all societies. Nevertheless, young people are at the greatest risk. They are the main targets of strategies for recruitment and fall victim to extreme violence. This trend is alarming, as it is an indicator of a generation lost to despair and detachment. There is no single solution in the face of such risks. Security responses are important, but not enough, and will not address the underlying conditions that generate violent extremism and drive young people to join violent extremist groups. Soft power is needed, such as education. Education has thus been utilized to radicalize and de-radicalize young people and politicians in countries affected by violence are increasingly interested in funding projects as part of educational programs to counter violent extremism.

The use of violence in the name of religion has led many to question all or most religions and to see religion as a threat to peace and harmony; to argue that religion unconfined to private life results in religiously motivated political struggles, conflict, and violence, which are a source of motivation for certain forms of terrorism. Others have suggested that some religious beliefs and acts of terrorism are actually linked. Regrettably, the aggravating factor remains that while religion or ideology does not expressly encourage violence, there are people who believe that killing in the name of their faith or belief is legitimate, even necessary. The only plausible solution for these indoctrinated people is through education since they cannot be saved from the influence of false religious values without being shown the wrongness of them.

The Middle East presents a fertile field with the use of physical force— violent extremism— for both religiously inspired and secularly motivated groups pursuing their ends. Syria remains the state with the greatest confusion. Even though President Assad and his supporters and critics have continuously controlled trends, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) have played a significant role there. One of the main players was a regional civil war with Russia, the United States of America (USA), Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia. Although Syria is slowly slipping towards a potential military victory, attempts are continuing to pursue a negotiated solution. Yemen remains similarly embroiled with each side characterizing the other as violent extremists, although less in the public eye. In the meantime, Libya is even more

complicated and full of acts by Egypt and other outside powers that have led to a household mess that is hard to unravel. Certain parts of the region — Jordan, Lebanon, and Bahrain — have fragility all the while. Each in their own way has borne the burden of domestic disturbance compounded by the interference of players who are non-local and often abusive.

Explanation of Important Terms

Violence

The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either result in or have a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation.[1]

Extremism

Literally, "extremism" means the "belief in and support for ideas that are very far from what most people consider correct or reasonable. "Extremism" thus refers to attitudes or behaviors that are deemed outside the norm. This basic dictionary understanding highlights the inherently subjective nature of the term, which can take on different meanings depending on who defines the norm and decides what is acceptable or not accordingly.[2]

Violent Extremism

Refers to the beliefs and actions of people who support or use violence to achieve ideological, religious or political goals14. This includes terrorism and other forms of politically motivated and sectarian violence. Typically, "violent extremism" also identifies an enemy, or enemies, who are the object of hatred and violence. The conceptual core of violent extremism is that it is an ideologically motivated resort to the use of violence, commonly based on conspiracy theories. [3]

Terrorism

Refers to a particular strategy adopted to achieve a political goal, which is singularly the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear. The terms "violent extremism" and "terrorism" are often mistakenly used interchangeably. While terrorism is a form of violent extremism, and terrorism is also often motivated ideologically, the conceptual underpinning of terrorism that distinguishes it from violent extremism is the creation of fear or terror as a means to an end.[4]

Radicalization

The term is used to describe the processes by which a person adopts extreme views or practices to the point of legitimizing the use of violence.[16] The key notion here is the process of embracing violence. If one wishes to point to the process by which one becomes a violent extremist, the expression "radicalization leading to violence" will be more appropriate than "violent extremism", which focuses on the ideologically motivated resort to violence.[5]

Jihadism

The term "Jihadism" is a neologism of the 21st century found in Western languages to describe Islamist movements that are perceived as "rooted in Islam" and "existentially threatening" to the West.[6]

Detailed Background of the Issue

History of Violent Extremism

The 1980s gave rise to modern jihadist terrorism: al-Qaeda's mobile, transnational movement that raised the issue of violent extremism on September 11 in 2001 to a global priority; it was further elevated by the rise of ISIS in the 2010s. Today, thousands of extremist jihadists are taking part in violence around the globe, from terrorism to insurgency.[7] With the increased movement of people, objects and ideas across borders, the potential of violent extremist groups to extend and project themselves beyond their national points of origin has grown exponentially over the past decade. With its roots in Syria and Saudi Arabia, ISIS and al-Qaeda have aggressively targeted their area as well as parts of Asia, Africa, Europe, and North America. There is now substantial regional cooperation between Boko Haram, which is a jihadist terrorist organization based in North Africa, and al-Shabaab, a terrorist organization which is based in East Africa. Violent extremism has destroyed tens of thousands of lives, 32,000 in 2014 alone, and 29,376 in 2015. Extreme right-wing hate groups were equally capable of mobilizing online recruits across national borders.[8]

Violent extremism is not a new phenomenon and is not related to radical religious views alone. World War II emerged from Nazism, a radical totalitarian ideology that crossed national boundaries and took the lives of millions of civilians worldwide. Ethnically motivated violence has taken millions of lives (e.g. most recently in Rwanda and Burundi), even among groups

sharing the same religion. But new today are four important developments:

- The globalization of violent extremism or the cross-border nature of the reach of a group, including its range of recruitment and operations that can be sub-regional, regional and even global for some groups.

- The willingness, in addition to the more conventional networks (universities, religious communities, social groups) to use modern communication technologies (social media in particular), to politically seduce groups and individuals to commit acts of violent extremism through widely dispersed territories.

- The degree of unpredictability of violent extremist attacks due to the random selection of targets (from girls ' schools to concerts, clinics or office parties) and the fact that a number of violent extremists committed to death in advance while carrying out random killings.

- Unprecedented exposure to lethal weapons, including tools capable of causing mass destruction.

Drivers of Violent Extremism

Diverse and multi-layered are the roots of violent extremism and the causes of radicalization leading to violence. There is no single sign suggesting that a person is at risk with any degree of certainty. The drivers of violent extremism are traditionally differentiated into two categories: the factors of "push" and "pull." Factors of drive apply to circumstances conducive to violent extremism. These are the wider mechanisms that can "drive" individuals into violent extremist groups. Pull factors are known as individual motives that attract potential recruits and the basis for legitimizing aggression. These factors are listed below. However, this does not mean that each factor is a signal of violent extremism. For example, while this research report primarily focuses on religious factors of violent extremism, it should not be considered the sole cause of it. Therefore, to resolve this issue, other drivers should be taken into consideration.

Pull factors (individual motivations)

- Personal origins (existential and religious quest for identity and purpose, utopian vision of the future, boredom, youth crisis, sense of mission and courage,

promise of adventure and energy, attraction of violence, etc.)

- Identification of mutual grievances and victimization myths that trigger powerful emotional responses that charismatic leaders can exploit

- Distortion and misuse of beliefs, political ideologies and ethnic and cultural differences (attraction of simple views of the world dividing the world into "us versus them," etc.)

- Charismatic leadership and social groups and network attraction (i.e. charismatic recruiter offering access to power and resources, a sense of belonging to a strong group/community, etc.).

Push factors (societal conditions)

- Lack of socio-economic opportunities stemming from unemployment, poverty, and corruption

- Marginalization, injustices, and racism (including rejection and inequality perceptions, stigmatization, humiliation)

- Poor governance, violations of human rights and the rule of law (lack of experience in / exposure to processes of dialogue and debate, a culture of impunity for unlawful behavior, violations of international human rights law committed in the name of state security, lack of means to make voices heard or vent frustration, etc.)

- Prolonged and unresolved conflicts

- Processes of radicalization in jails that legitimize violence[9]

The Process of Religious Indoctrination

There are many different religious extremist groups active around the world, each of them associating themselves with various "teachings" or "sects" of a certain religion. However, as this year's focus is on the Arab World, this report will mainly examine the religious indoctrination methods utilized by Islamic terrorist groups.

One of Jihadist religiosity's most important issues is that of farqa enadjia (the chosen group). Many groups in the history of the Muslim world have proclaimed themselves as the selected group, but what justifies divine choice here is the radical nature of the Jihad itself rather than the attachment to just religious practice. Radicalism is enough for them in their

speech and/or practice while waiting for heaven without burdening themselves with the laborious accumulation of good actions. This religious supremacy often nourishes the context much more than the standard, considering that the definitions of contemporary jihadism as a religious group are quite ambiguous. The Muslims who abandon the violent struggle is seen as "useless to Islam," as are the manifestations of the community in the mosque like the Friday prayer. Islamist parties are especially guilty for them of only debating the Islamic State plan without "having ever succeeded in implementing the sharia." Paradoxically, the strongest allegations were aimed toward spiritual wise men, accused of "selling false religion interpretations just to please their masters the Americans." In a situation where religion is dominated, if not stolen, by the state or made more complex by the Ulemas (interpreters of religious knowledge), Jihadism makes it possible to re-appropriate a religious authority based on a simple logic: the marginality of the devotion of the Muslim to the Jihad reinforces the character chosen by those for whom it is the heart of faith. Through alternate spaces such as social networks, religious and political jihadist readings indicate a simplifying way to fix the world's chaos, but only exposed as a secret to those worthy of it.[10]

Education as a Solution

Tackling violent extremism as part of development initiatives represents a wider international change towards terrorism prevention and efforts to address the climate that is conducive to terrorists spreading their agendas and attracting supporters. Some national and international programs and policies piloted against violent extremism by education–while a relatively new idea in global discourse.[11] Education can shape the abilities and economic opportunities of a person, social environment, civic values, pro-social behavior, levels of trust, and self-esteem. It could thus increase the probability of using indirect methods to engage in violence. Education will alter the relative pay-offs made by young people in either legal or illegal activities. This improves hard skills (such as literacy and numeracy) and soft skills (such as critical thinking) that are essential to legal labor market performance. Schooling increases productivity, leading to higher earnings in legal firms, and thus increases the cost of joining a militia or violent extremist party. Not surprisingly, the quality of education seems to matter in particular, e.g. programs with better teachers offer better prospects for the development of expertise and future success of the labor market.

Major Parties Involved

ISIS, Al-Qaeda & Boko Haram

Terrorist groups like ISIS, Al-Qaeda and Boko Haram have influenced our perception of violent extremism and the debate about how to handle this threat. The message of intolerance from these groups — religious, cultural, social — has had dramatic effects on many parts of the world. Holding territories and using social media to express their ideas and attacks internationally and in real-time, they are trying to challenge our shared values of harmony, justice, and human dignity.
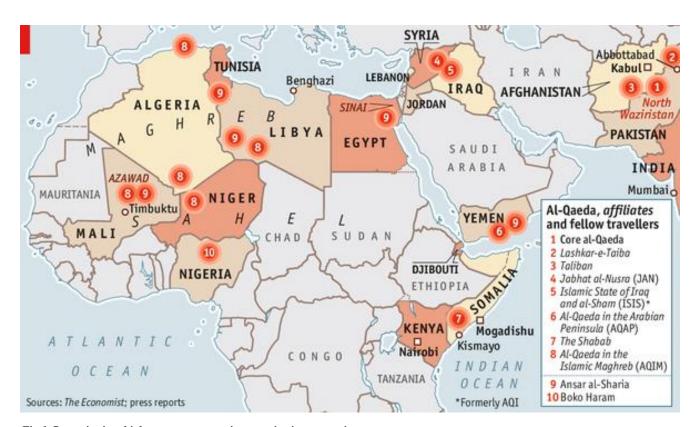

Fig.1 Countries in which numerous terrorist organization are active.

The spread of violent extremism has further exacerbated an already unprecedented humanitarian crisis that goes beyond any region's boundaries. Millions of people have fled the territory controlled by extremist terrorist organizations and violent groups. Migration flows have increased both from and to the conflict zones, involving those seeking security and those lured into the conflict as foreign terrorist fighters, further destabilizing the affected regions. Violent extremist groups make a significant contribution to the process of instability and armed conflict that affects many parts of the world. Al-Qaida and its allies have tried to threaten governments by virulent propaganda campaigns and dramatic attacks in order to change their policies. The latest iteration of violent extremist and terrorist groups, especially ISIS, has further transformed the challenge: taking advantage of existing armed conflicts in Syria and instability in Iraq and Libya, its leaders have succeeded in taking over large areas of territory and "governing" it according to their laws. They are well-armed, mobile, tech-savvy and well-organized. By attempting to replace existing states and abolish established boundaries, ISIS and Boko Haram weaken state authority and destabilize not only the most directly concerned territories but also the surrounding regions.

Saudi Arabia and Iran

The proxy dispute between Iran and Saudi Arabia is the ongoing struggle for influence in the Middle East and surrounding regions between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Both countries have given varying degrees of support to opposing parties in regional conflicts, including civil wars in Syria, Yemen and Iraq. This support increased the influence of the violent extremist groups aforementioned in the report throughout the Arab world. As both of these countries have religious differences (Saudi Arabia is Sunni Muslim whereas Iran is Shia Muslim), the terrorist organizations their support also comes in the form of religious indoctrination practices, as well as providing arms and monetary resources.

Syria, Iraq, Libya, and Yemen

As the main victims of violent extremism resulting from religious indoctrination in the Arab world, these countries need the utmost support from the Member States. The ongoing conflict, poor socio-economic situation, and overall human rights conditions in these countries have made them susceptible to the influence of extremist groups. Although there has been a

significant improvement in the living conditions in these countries, the fact that many civilians are exposed to violent extremism remains unchanged.

The USA, Russia, and Turkey

Aside from regional parties that have an impact on violent extremist groups, foreign powers such as the USA, Russia, and Turkey play an important role in the spreading of ideologies. One of the paradigms of foreign involvement in the Middle East is the Syrian Civil War. While Russia supported the Syrian Government, the USA and Turkey gave logistic, military and political support to Syrian Rebel Groups. It can be argued that by using local groups in the guise of helping resolve the conflict, these foreign powers may have actually prolonged it; which exacerbated the situation.

Chronology of Important Events

Date	Description of Event
November 22, 1965	United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is formed.
1988	Al-Qaeda is formed by Osama bin Laden.
1997	International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings is passed.
1999	International Convention for the Suppression of Financing of Terrorism is passed.
1999	ISIS is formed.
20 March 2003 – 18 December 2011	Iraq War
September 8, 2006	The UN General Assembly adopts the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

March 15, 2011	The Syrian Civil War starts.
2015	The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are adopted by the UN.

Relevant International Documents

- "Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism", Adopted by the General Assembly at its 70th Session, 24 December 2015, (**A/70/674**)
- "International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings", Adopted by the General Assembly, 15 December 1997, (**A/RES/52/164)**
- "International Convention for the Suppression of Financing of Terrorism", Adopted by the General Assembly, 9 December 1999, (**A/RES/54/109)**

Past Attempts to Resolve the Issue

The UNDP has started numerous initiatives regarding this issue. In 2015, the UNDP-implemented Stabilization Funding Facility (FFS) in Iraq was launched to promote the return of displaced Iraqis, lay the foundations for stability and development, and prevent the revival of violence and extremism. By October 2018, more than US$ 900 million had been donated by 26 donors— which helps restore safety and essential services and bring millions of displaced Iraqis back.

The UNDP Funding Windows tackles democracy, building stability, crisis, and resilience. Currently promoting peace-building and prevention is the UN-wide multi-partner trust fund. The Global Program for Strengthening the Rule of Law and Human Rights for Sustaining Peace and Development provides seed funding for joint support in fragile states for justice, security, and human rights systems. Together with the State-and Peace-Building Program of the World Bank and the United Nations Peace-Building Fund and Support Office, these are among the best examples of burden-sharing, helping to coordinate priorities and programs around a common objective.

Also, the previous resolutions passed in the General Assembly (GA) have not been able to substantially resolve this issue, as they were not directly enforced upon Member States. The UN bodies responsible for implementing these resolutions could have been more insistent,

reminding signatory Member States of their responsibilities, which would have made the resolutions more effective.

Solution Alternatives

In some contexts, high drop-out rates among primary and secondary school leavers made a significant contribution to recruiting extremist groups. Addressing high drop-out levels can, therefore, be the first move towards minimizing young people's recruitment into violent extremism. Children and young people who do not have access to formal education may also be susceptible to recruitment and radicalization. It may be an important step to provide rewards (such as cash transfers) to parents to ensure that children are enrolled and have access to education.

Terminology and branding are critical and must be carefully considered in order to avoid securitization of the education sector. A program called "countering violent extremism" may draw negative reactions from societies and may become a target for radical groups in itself. These countering violent extremism programs should be integrated into the daily curricula and teaching methods as much as possible instead of being introduced as a discrete initiative.

It is critical that schools provide safe and supportive learning places for those who will have access to education in the years to come. Unfortunately, they can be the first social environment for many children where they are the victims of deliberate and aggressive behavior, and/or where they develop behavior patterns that may overwhelm their intellectual awareness that the indiscriminate use of violence is incorrect. Under these circumstances, schools are places where learners create or intensify feelings of rejection and intolerance rather than experience the welcoming ethos of their community. Nothing is more critical in preventing violent extremism through education than liberating the school environment itself from violence and enabling all learners to experience and learn first-hand how to live together in peace.

Creating a community-based care plan includes treating school violence incidents as ways to show that school staff is committed to non-violence and respect for human dignity. Consequently, disciplinary measures should be constructive and not merely punitive when violence occurs. Students must consider their wrongdoing and the consequences of their acts. It is also important in these situations that students participate in discussions to understand

the causes and mechanisms of conflict escalation that contributed to violence being used. It is equally important for students to be interested in seeking a reasonable resolution. Some effective strategies include the use of well-structured and supervised peer mediation to address secondary school abuse situations. Including peace and conflict resolution education in structured curricula and well-targeted outreach programs can also be successful in developing conflict resolution skills among learners (of all ages), educators, school staff, and parents.

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Useful Links

- https://www.arabstates.undp.org/content/rbas/en/home/regioninfo/ , UNDP Arab States General Information

- https://www.mei.edu/programs/countering-terrorism-extremism , Middle East Institute News on Countering Terrorism & Extremism