**Introduction to radicalisation**

Radicalisation is not usually an event, rather it is a process in which individuals are drawn into terrorist-related activity. In many cases this process is related to the search for identity, meaning and community. It is a social process, in which peer relationships are likely to be significant in persuading an individual that terrorism is a legitimate course of action.

In order for an individual or group to become ‘radicalised,’ three components are usually present. Those are the existence of a radical ideology; the involvement of a radicaliser propagating that ideology and the presence of vulnerabilities and local factors which heighten the susceptibility of the individuals or groups to radicalisation. In order for these vulnerabilities to be fully exploited, there will be an absence of factors which would otherwise protect against or act as an obstacle to radicalisation.

Research suggests that there is a two-stage pathway to radicalisation. The first stage encompasses an attitudinal journey, where an individual begins to hold extremist views. The second stage focuses on behaviours, where extremist views turn into violent actions.

The first stage of the journey occurs when a vulnerable state of mind is exposed to a radicalising ideology and draws the individual towards an extremist point of view.

- A **vulnerable state of mind** is thought to be the result of a combination of factors, which can include background issues (e.g. entrenched criminality, troubled family background);
- **experiences and influences** (e.g. friends, family, media)
- and **unmet psychological needs** (for belonging, status and meaning) to create the opening for extremist ideology.

The second stage of radicalisation is the result of a deepening commitment to the extremist cause brought about by one of three factors: either social (where the cost of disengaging from the extremist network is high); emotional (by cutting themselves off from outside influences and deepening their emotional engagement with the terrorist or extremist cause) or experiential (by participating in terrorist-related activity).
Others categorise this vulnerability to extremism as being a balance of vulnerabilities and opportunities, or ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Push factors</th>
<th>Pull factors</th>
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<td>• Sense of grievance, injustice</td>
<td>• Ideology provides a diagnostic function</td>
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<td>• Need for identity, meaning, belonging/comradeship</td>
<td>• Identification with a noble cause, accessing a proxy family, social capital</td>
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<td>• Desire for excitement, challenge, adventure</td>
<td>• Access to excitement, challenge, adventure</td>
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<td>• Need for status, significance</td>
<td>• Empowered by extremist identity</td>
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<td>• Criminality</td>
<td>• Outlet for criminal capability</td>
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<td>• Attraction to authoritarian ideologies</td>
<td>• Opportunity to be an authoritarian leader or follower</td>
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<td>• Certain mental health problems</td>
<td>• Extremist ideologies can make sense of a confusing world</td>
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We use the term ‘radicalisation’ to describe the process of an individual engaging with an extremist ideology – a ‘radicaliser’ is therefore someone who influences others to engage in, maintain and deepen their involvement in violent extremist and terrorist activity. A radicaliser’s influence can act as a catalyst to terrorist involvement for many individuals who become terrorists.

Whilst radicalisers may be skilled manipulators, often they may also be polite, sociable, likeable and self-disciplined. Such individuals may show a range of positive behaviours and characteristics, and it is often these positive characteristics that give these individuals their power to influence others, and some may even be involved in positive activity not directly linked to radicalisation, such as helping young people get off drugs, reconcile with their families or stop (some types of) criminal activity.
Q&A

What sort of person becomes a terrorist?

Government and academic research has consistently indicated that there is no single socio-demographic profile of a terrorist in the UK, and no single pathway leading to involvement in extremism. Terrorists come from a variety of backgrounds and appear to become involved in different ways and for differing reasons.

What factors can result in an individual becoming an Islamist terrorist?

No single factor is enough to cause someone to join a terrorist movement. Instead, several factors together – a ‘perfect storm’ – create the conditions under which radicalisation to terrorism can occur.

With the right interventions it is possible to prevent an individual from becoming radicalised in the first stage, and to prevent those already holding extremist views from acting violently.

What kind of individual may be vulnerable to radicalisation?

Again, there is no single archetype of an individual vulnerable to radicalisation, but there are certain common factors, specifically individuals with a vulnerable state of mind, who find themselves exposed to an extremist ideology, and who lack the protective factors (which would include strong family and community networks) that would otherwise help insulate them from radicalisation.

How important is the influence of ideology in the radicalisation process?

Whilst ideology remains central to radicalisation, it needs to be addressed in tandem with psychological needs and vulnerabilities. Often terrorist propaganda appeals to these psychological needs, such as the desire for status or excitement. Ideology acts as a ‘pull’ factor, providing a framework that fulfils a need for identity, and a diagnostic by which to make sense of one’s feelings of grievance or injustice.
How significant a ‘push’ factor is UK foreign policy?

Grievances towards UK foreign policy are readily exploited and manipulated by extremists. Extremists provide a simplistic framework for individuals to explain why they feel a wider sense of injustice. Grievance towards foreign policy alone is unlikely to push someone towards being radicalised to the point of conducting a terrorist act. It is the combination of a ‘perfect storm’ of factors, including a vulnerable state of mind (background factors, influences, psychological needs), which may result in this.

Are people who suffer from mental health issues more vulnerable to becoming terrorists?

Most terrorists do not have severe mental health problems and mental health problems do not necessarily lead to terrorism. Mental health problems are common within the general population and one would therefore expect some terrorists to suffer from mental health problems. Someone who has a mental health problem is typically not likely to be at increased risk of violence to others. Individuals with mental health problems are more likely to harm themselves than someone else.

What is the influence of online propaganda?

Online propaganda is one platform used by extremists and terrorists to promote ideological material. Material also includes books, leaflets, video and audio material that may be online or distributed via MP3, DVDs, CDs, websites, including forums and online newsletters. While formal media releases such as online magazines and propaganda videos are important, the growth of the use of social media platforms such as Twitter or Tumblr has allowed a greater involvement of ‘amateur’ Islamist extremist propagandists. While much of this content may be made up of reposted material from established groups, it can often be presented in novel and different ways.

We can see this clearly in the flow of propaganda material coming out of Syria, where the formal pronouncements from groups such as ISIL or the Nusra Front are matched by a parallel stream of material from ‘Western’ recruits on Twitter or other social media sites. This material may provide a more targeted and relevant message with greater appeal amongst the target audience.