Radicalization in the Heart of Asia Countries:
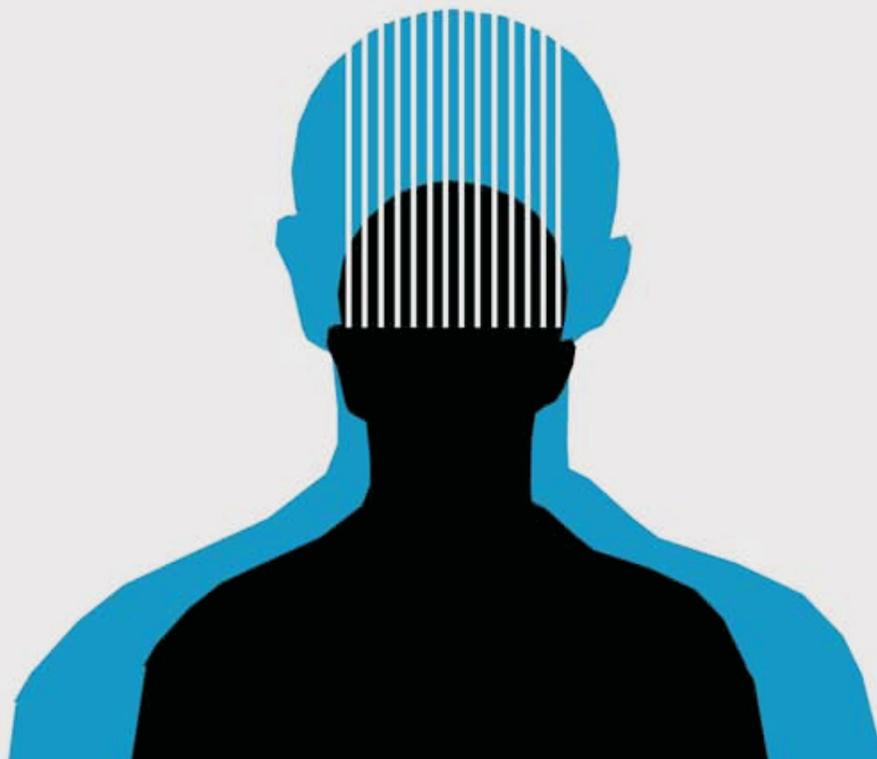## Inputs for Informed Policy Actions

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Radicalization in the Heart of Asia Countries:
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Policy Input Paper prepared for the Regional Cooperation Directorate,
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AISS	**Afghan Institute of Strategy Studies**
CT-CBM	**Counter Terrorism Confidence Building Measures**
EU	**European Union**
FTFs	**Foreign Terrorist Fighters**
HoA	**Heart of Asia**
HuT	**Hizb ut-Tahrir**
ICG	**International Crisis Group**
IJU	**Islamic Jihad Union**
IMU	**Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan**
ISIS	**Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS)**
JeM	**Jaish-e-Muhammad**
JPoA	**Joint Plan of Action**
LeT	**Lashkar-e-Taiba**
NATO	**North Atlantic Treaty Organization**
OSCE	**Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe**
RAN	**Radicalization Awareness Network**
SCO	**Shanghai Cooperation Organization**
TTP	**Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan**
UAE	**United Arab Emirates**
UK	**United Kingdom**
UN GCTS	**UN Global Counter Terrorism Strategy**
US	**United States**
USIP	**United States Institute of Peace**

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Executive Summary

What is radicalization, how can it be identified, prevented and stopped before it leads to violence? How common is this phenomenon in the Heart of Asia (HoA) countries? What commonalities exist in terms of motivations and manifestations, and how can countries come together to combat it collectively? These are some of the questions that this paper tries to answer as input for policy development by the HoA countries involved in the Istanbul Process Counter Terrorism Confidence Building Measures (CT-CBM).

The paper begins with a conceptual discussion of radicalization, using examples from global experiences and moves gradually closer to the experiences of the HoA countries directly. It ends with a number of recommendations as to concrete follow up steps.

1) Characteristics of radicalization, motivations, domains, etc.

Although one definition is not proposed for the HoA region, elements of a definition could be taken from the various ways that radicalization is being described in literature, mostly as a process which refers to deviating from traditional and accepted norms of society (the "status quo") and moving towards extremist views, which may or may not result in violence. The status quo may be of political order (e.g. the country's constitution, the vetted system of governance, or the government in general), religion and religious traditions and dogmas (e.g. adhering to what is considered the right path in religion or tolerance for followers of other religions), or social norms and societal core values (such as attitudes towards human rights, women's rights, ethnic or linguistic pluralism, etc.). These views may or may not be acted upon using violence.

It is also important to clarify what radicalization is not: It is not the same thing as terrorism, and is definitely not the same as Islamization. By extension, violent extremism is not synonymous with Islamic radicalism. Religion does not necessarily play the primary, nor the dominant role in the process of radicalization. People can be mobilized by economic, political or social interests. Caveats are in order: Becoming concerned with radicalization and over-focusing on the persons being radicalized rather than the cause, would be paramount to depoliticizing their political and social grievances, including those that have been instigated by political powers in the first place. Finally, there may be a tendency for some countries of the region to exaggerate the risk of radicalization for their own interests.

Distinction is made between cognitive belief whereby individuals and groups are

attracted to extreme, intolerant and violent views, and behavioral radicalization whereby individuals and groups express a readiness to take action to enforce their views. Radicalization can begin either as a grassroots bottom-up approach wherein individualized sentiments manifest into radicalized views and approaches, or a top-down dynamic influence where radical groups recruit and indoctrinate candidates.

Different types of radical thoughts or domains can be distinguished, though they often overlap, with all the different domains having intolerance towards others as the common denominator: Religious radicalization is recognized when there is lack of tolerance – and even acceptability in most extreme forms – of groups that do not share religion or religious views and interpretations.
Radical groups and individuals can also be characterized by their opposition to principles of democracy and pluralism enshrined in the constitutions of the countries they live in and at the most extreme would be ready to take actions to overturn the political order. Finally, a third domain of radicalization is in the rejection of social norms such as human rights, women's rights and freedoms .

In order to target policies and strategies effectively, it is important to understand the motivations that drive people and groups to radicalization. These factors can include extremist religious zeal; Nationalism or ethnic sense of supremacy; Socio-economic and political grievances especially in a context of political repression, injustice, marginalization, and inequality; Psychology/trauma, including reaction to the loss of family members; Greed or radicalization for monetary reasons; and Social acceptability among particular groups, peer pressure and admiration for charismatic leaders.

2) The scope of the present and future danger in the Heart of Asia

The threat of radicalization that could lead to violence can be recognized among three different groupings in the HoA region: localized political/separatist movements, transnational networks, and religious/ideological groups. While the consequences of the phenomenon can take different forms in different set of HoA countries, the common factor is that radicalization at the domestic level is often tied to, directly or indirectly, resources and networks from abroad.

In one set of HoA countries, political radicalization is localized and specific to a geographic location within the country where different political groups have separatist demands or are at odds with the politics of the central government. Examples include Sunni separatist groups in the Sistan and Baluchistan province of Iran, Muslim separatist group East Turkistan Islamic Movement and their influence over Uighur populations living in Xinxiang in China and Chechens and other groups in

the North Caucasus in Russia.

In another set of HoA countries more geographically proximate to Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS)/ Daesh territory, such as Turkey, radicalization is facilitated by both internal, domestic problems and exposure to trans-national terrorist groups.

The potential of radicalization turning to violence and instability is most current and urgent in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Central Asian countries. Here, radicalization is mostly motivated by political/religious ideology even though socio-economic grievances also play a role in preparing the ground. The threat is to the secular governments (as in Central Asia) or to an Islamic government that has adopted liberal institutions of democracy (as in Afghanistan. Three specificities prevail concerning the phenomenon of radicalization in these set of countries:

First is the prevalence of radical ideology among some of the population in the region, mostly young, uneducated men, who are vulnerable to recruitment given the fertile ground in terms of deficits in economic, social and political opportunities. A second problem is related to the outflow of radicals ready to join international terrorist groups, with recent reports raising alarms about Central Asians joining ISIS/Daesh. A third and increasingly worrying phenomenon is the allegation that ISIS may be opening a new front within the region. While this threat has not been fully assessed for veracity, preventive measures are necessary to allow ISIS open a new front).

Some of the primary places where radicalization and recruitment occurs in the HoA region include Madrasas, especially the unregistered and unregulated ones where the curriculum can preach radical and violent ideas; Social Media and the Internet where radical and extremist groups are actively propagating for their view; Universities and Institutes of higher learning where radicalization seems to be on the rise in the region and where groups take advantage of social mobilization of the youth; Mosques and Friday sermons where there is no government control, although over-control of religious sites also leads to desire to radicalize; Prisons where conditions of overcrowding and under-staffing make radicalization easier and radicalization prevention in prison extremely difficult; and, finally, labor migrant camps and sites where recruiters prey on vulnerable populations searching for alternative livelihoods far from their families and communities.

3) Responses and methods to prevent and combat radicalization

From experiences around HoA countries, as well as those of the US, Europe, Asia and the Middle East, a number of strategies have been used in response to rad-

icalization, to varying degrees of success. These have included: The use of force which has not been an effective strategy of prevention and has often led to backlash; Border control to prevent the trespassing of radical groups; The use of intelligence, data gathering, data analysis and data sharing as among the most effective tools for recognizing and countering radicalization, although challenges exist in coordinating among the many databases available in the region; The enactment of proper legislation especially those related to the new phenomenon of Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs); Monitoring the Internet and social media for materials that spread radical propaganda and developing counter narratives; Raising public awareness of the dangers of radicalization among the youth; Instigating inter-faith and intra-faith dialogue; Addressing the grievances that radicals - or those vulnerable to radicalization - purport to suffer from, such as economic opportunities, education, political participation and revamping the education system, both secular and religious.

These types of responses are categorized in the paper and assessed along three stages: Prevention strategies, strategies to counter radicalization, and de-radicalization afterwards.

4) Recommendations for next steps for HoA countries

In order to dwell deeper into the question of radicalization in HoA countries, a number of next steps can be proposed, clustered around the development of 1) research and information, 2) counter-narrative for the media and education systems, 3) strategies, plan of action and legislation harmonization, and 4) special focuses on particular areas for cooperation among HoA countries, namely cyber radicalization, religious dialogue, cooperation among security officials and training on specialized topics.

Introduction: Purpose of the paper

In order to inform the Heart of Asia (HoA) countries of options and experiences in identifying and addressing radicalization that can lead to violence, the Regional Cooperation Directorate of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, which serves as *de facto* secretariat for the HoA/Istanbul Process and joint chair (together with Turkey and the United Arab Emirates) of the Counter Terrorism Confidence Building Measures (CT-CBM), with financial support from the European Union organized an expert level seminar on January 29, 2015 in Kabul. Experts from HoA countries presented their research on the origin of radicalization in the region, state policies as well as the role of civil society and the media in preventing and responding to radicalization.

This paper builds on discussions initiated at the seminar and serves as a thought piece to inform and muster further action by policy makers on a common concern for all the HoA countries. Radicalization in the HoA encompasses a number of different forms, root causes and outcomes, but is a growing phenomenon that deserves further scrutiny. To this end, this paper seeks to inform policy makers and interested members of the public about the following questions:

1. What is radicalization and what is it not? How can it be recognized? What are its different motivations?
2. What is the scope of the problem in the region?
3. What are the best practices for preventing, combatting and deradicalizing that could be adopted by HoA countries?
4. What could be some concrete steps to take in the immediate future?

Where possible, examples are provided from HoA countries to illustrate the different ways the countries have been affected and the different strategies undertaken in the region. The paper starts with a conceptual discussion providing examples from global experiences and moves gradually closer to the experiences and direct threats to HoA countries. It ends with some recommendations as to concrete follow up steps.

1) Characteristics of Radicalization

Elements of a definition

The very concept of radicalization is a contested concept. There is no single definition as academics and practitioners disagree on whether it represents simply a rejection of society's core values or whether violence must be an end goal. There are also disagreements as to who are most susceptible to radicalization: the rich or the poor, the well-educated or the ill-informed, youth or people with political maturity, etc.

The UK Government, for example, bases its response on a definition of radicalization as 'the process by which people come to support violent extremism and, in some cases, join terrorist groups' (implying an implicit connection to violence).[1] Peter Neumann, an academic, describes radicalization as a deliberate cognitive phenomenon whereby an individual shifts from mainstream beliefs to extremist views.[2]

Although one definition is not being proposed here for the HoA region, elements of a definition could be taken from the various ways that radicalization is being described today, mostly as **a process which refers to deviating from traditional and accepted norms of society (the "status quo") and moving towards extremist views, which may or may not result in violence**. The status quo may be the political order (e.g. the country's constitution, the vetted system of governance, or the government in general), religion and religious traditions and dogmas (e.g. adhering to what is considered the right path in religion or tolerance for followers of other religions), or social norms and societal core values (such as attitudes towards human rights, women's rights, ethnic or linguistic pluralism, etc.). These views may or may not be acted upon using violence. We cannot stipulate that all radical thoughts necessarily lead to action. Distinction should be made between radical ideas and action, as well as radicalization as a personal psycho/social phenomenon and as a political process.

1- Anthony Richards, "The Problem with 'Radicalization': the Remit of 'Prevent' and the Need to Refocus on Terrorism in the UK", *International Affairs*, London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, Vol. 87, No. 1, January 2011, pps. 143-152

2- Peter R. Neumann, "The Trouble with Radicalization", *International Affairs,* London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, Vol. 89, No. 4 , July 2013, pps. 873-893

What radicalization is not

It is also important to clarify what radicalization is not:

- Radicalization is not the same thing as terrorism. Terrorism involves a violent political act against civilians. To be of concern to policy makers of HoA countries, radicalization may not necessarily include a propensity towards violence, and distinction should be made between radical ideas/opinions and violent acts.

- Radicalization is also not the same thing as Islamization, despite its problematique association in public discourse in the West and among some governments after 9/11. Radicalization, for example, has been used wrongly by the media and policymakers to explain why Muslims participate in violence against the West in the name of religion.[3]

- By extension, violent extremism is not synonymous with Islamic radicalism. While religious belief can be used to legitimize ideology that can contribute to violent activity, other grievances such as political and social conditions including corruption and personal freedoms could also trigger violent extremism. While ideological radicalization may lead to violence and terrorism, we must accept that violence may occur in the absence of religious radicalization.[4]

- Religion does not necessarily play the primary, nor the dominant role in the process of radicalization. Rather, individuals or groups who have no other grounds for legitimacy manipulate religion as a means for gaining the recognition necessary to convince others into following them. Moreover, this following is often mobilized toward meeting the political, economic, or social interests of recruiters or those higher up in the hierarchy.

- Becoming concerned with radicalization is depoliticizing the grievances that lead to the process in the first place. The problem is put on the person being radicalized rather than the cause, which could be political and a reaction to government policies. In much of the discussions about radicalization around the world, emphasis is put on how radicalization has taken shape but not on the reasons behind

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3- Jonathan Githens-Mazer, "The Rhetoric and Reality: Radicalization and Political Discourse", *International Political Science Review,*, Vol. 33, No. 5, November 2012, pps. 556-567

4- Robert Zaman and Abul Ahad Mohammadi, *Trends in Student Radicalization across University Campuses in Afghanistan,* Kabul: Afghanistan Institute of Strategic Studies, 2014.

it, including perceptions of misguided or aggressive Western policy in the region.

- Finally, there may be a tendency for some countries of the region to exaggerate the risk of radicalization for their own interests, which may include clamping down on political opposition, gaining access to resources from the US and the EU devoted to countering terrorism, and so on.

Approaches

To study the scope of radicalization in the region, a number of different approaches can be used:

- An *empirical* approach would focus on what the different movements are, how they interact with each other, how many recruits they have, and who pays for these movements. Such an approach would scrutinize the different ways that governments classify Islamic groups. For example, in Central Asia, the Hizb ut-Tahrir (HuT) is considered a radical group in a number of countries, while the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) are classified as terrorist groups. The East Turkestan Islamic Movement is considered a terrorist organization in China, but not in the other countries.

- A *political* approach would seek to study the political motivations and ideologies of radical and extremist groups, and how the process of radicalization graduates from mere views and opinions to hate speech and finally to violent action. It would also look at how groups sustain themselves, whether there is nexus with other illicit activity such as drug trafficking and how leaders use radicalized armies/ fighters to reach their political aims.

- A *geopolitical* approach would extend such an analysis to the international level and would try to understand how these groups are being used by some states as a weapon of foreign policy against other states, and scrutinize who is financing and sustaining them for what interests. Such a query would concentrate on the support of Saudi Arabia for Sunni extremist groups, Iran for the Shia ones, Pakistan for groups making claims against or attacking Indian interests, etc. It would also examine the extent to which radicalization is a phenomenon born as a reaction to Western policies in the Middle East.

- A *sociological* approach would scrutinize how extremist groups indoctrinate new members, how groups use speech or violent acts to express their grievances such as indignity, exclusion and marginalization. It will essentially see radicalization as a reaction expressed by a group with grievances, justified or not.

- Finally, a *psychologic*al enquiry, much less adopted but perhaps one of the most important approaches, would try to understand what goes on in the mind of the person who undergoes the process of radicalization, how he/she starts rejecting the status quo either as a result of indoctrination or reaction to a lived event or a harm done, and how the process of radicalization changes his or her relations with family, friends, society, etc..

Some characteristics

- Distinction is made between *cognitive belief* whereby individuals and groups are attracted to extreme, intolerant and violent views, and *behavioral radicalization* whereby individuals and groups express a readiness to take action to enforce their views.[5] In essence, this distinction marks a continuum from radical thoughts (cognitive aspects) to acts of violence (behavior). The position of individuals and groups might change in the continuum as they interact with their environments and respond to other groups. As a result, radicalization is not a permanent property of individuals and groups.

- Distinguishing between the nature of radicalization is important because it will also determine what type of responses need to be developed. In other words, it helps identify whether to focus on the individual's personal needs (e.g. psychological traumas, economic situation, political dissatisfaction), or on access to information or resources that may be influential in converting ideology to the extreme (e.g. madrasa education, Internet recruitment efforts, social media, etc.), or perhaps on the pull factors in countering radicalization and eventually terrorism (by for example eliminating the appeal and developing counter narrative and propaganda).

- Radicalization can begin either as a grassroots, personal bottom-up approach wherein individualized sentiments manifest into radicalized views and approaches, or a top-down dynamic influence where radical groups recruit and indoctrinate candidates.

5- Peter R. Neumann, 2013

Domains of radicalization

As mentioned above, radicalization can be about the rejection of the status quo and deviations from traditional norms governing religion, political governance or social order.[6] Countermeasures have focused mostly on the nexus between radicalization, violence and terrorism while little attention has been paid to factors behind non-violent manifestations of radicalization. Radicalization that does not lead to violence should also be identified as an area of concern. Different types of radical thoughts or domains can be distinguished, though they often overlap, with all the different domains having intolerance towards others as the common denominator:

Religious radicalization:

Under this category, radicalization is recognized when an individual or group practices *takfir,* declaring others who do not share the same religion, religious views or interpretations of religion as non-Muslims or apostates. This could include rejecting those who have left the faith, or who reject the key tenets of Islam. At their most radicalized and militant scale, *takfiris* (such as ISIS members) believe it to be a divine duty to wage war against anyone who fails to surrender to their interpretation. At their most extremist versions, radical groups and individuals tend to provide support for violent actions, such as the practice of suicide bombing, when these are thought to have religious justifications. Some go as far as rejecting the idea that a peace agreement with non-Muslims is possible. These radicals are, by consequence, against regional cooperation between countries and against a peace agreement for Afghanistan.

Rejection of the political order:

Radical groups and individuals can also be characterized by their opposition to principles of democracy and pluralism enshrined in the constitutions of the countries they live in and at the most extreme would be ready to take actions to overturn the political order. Radicals may not accept a secular or liberal system of governance, and would reject the notion of open societies and open markets, competition, and freedoms as liberal principles incongruent with their belief that a higher authority should institute justice and order.

6- A number of these indicators were developed by the AISS research project on Radicalization in Madrasas for which this author is an advisor. Special thanks to Dr. Mohammad Moheq and Kabeer Salehi who helped develop some of these indicators.

Rejection of social norms:

Radicals, in their rejection of the status quo and their deviation from norms accepted in society, would reject any notion of liberties and freedoms for individuals outside of the groups. Hence, they tend to oppose internationally accepted norms of human rights, the right of women to work or participate in public life, freedom of the press and opinion, right to education, travel, freedom to participate in politics and other core values of democratic society. As such, extreme forms of radicalization would categorically reject the legal system, the penal code, the criminal code and the constitutions of the countries they live under in their belief that elements of Western, secular culture and experiences have infiltrated these laws and spoiled them. For radical Islamists, for examples, Islamic law (Sharia) reigns supreme and there is no need to copy laws from non-Muslim communities. In fact, doing so would be heretical for the Islamist radical.

Motivations

In order to target policies and strategies effectively, it is important to understand the motivations that drive people and groups to radicalization. It is also important, although difficult, to distinguish between the declared motivations and the real causes. The usual factors that are conducive to radicalization among groups and individuals are the same driving factors in the HoA region, and include:

- Extremist religious zeal, in which one's religious beliefs are seen as the only acceptable way of life and tolerance of other religions and beliefs must be rejected. In other words, *takfiri* ideology and internalization of Islamic ideologies. The growth of radical tendencies is exacerbated by poor religious education and grievances against the region's secular or more liberal governments.
- Nationalism or ethnic sense of supremacy with the rejection of those whom radicals consider inferior in terms of identity.
- Grievances, but especially lack of recourse to change the status quo given political repression, injustice, marginalization, and inequality. These claims can include:
  - Socio-economic grievances such as unemployment, food and health insecurity especially when perceived to be the outcome of government policy failures, corruption, nepotism, discrimination, etc.
  - Reaction to political pressures, such as repressive govern-

ment policies, violation of community rights, pressure on religious and moderate groups, discrimination, injustices, forcible resettlement of populations, etc.

- Psychology/trauma, including reaction to the loss of family members.
- Greed or radicalization for monetary reasons, falling under the spell of radicalizers promises of financial support and better conditions for one's family.
- Social acceptability among particular groups, peer pressure, admiration for charismatic leaders and identification with a group where a sense of belonging is developed.

2) The Scope of the Present and Future Danger in the Heart of Asia

If a rough typology could be constructed, the threat of radicalization that could lead to violence can be recognized among three different groupings in the HoA region: localized political/separatist movements, transnational networks, and religious/ideological groups, with which this paper is most concerned. In this section, distinction is not being made between the degree of radicalization and extend to which the groups that espouse violence to reach their ends can be classified as radical, extremist or terrorist. They are presented here as threats perceived from HoA governments. While the consequences of the phenomenon can take different forms in different set of HoA countries, the common factor is that radicalization at the domestic level is often tied to, directly or indirectly, resources and networks from abroad.

In one set of HoA countries, political radicalization is localized and specific to a geographic location within the country where different political groups have separatist demands or are at odds with the politics of the central government. In these countries, radicalization is mostly a political enterprise even though it tends to be centered around populations that follow a religion or sect different than that of the state's majority. Examples include Sunni separatist groups in the Sistan and Baluchistan province of Iran, Muslim separatist group East Turkistan Islamic Movement and their influence over Uighur populations living in Xinxiang in China and Chechens and other groups in the North Caucasus in Russia. In India, Maoists and transnational terrorist groups in Jammu and Kashmir are the greatest sources of violent radical activity. In these countries, extremism tends to be seen as an internal, domestic matter despite linkages made with trans-border groups. The ultimate objective of radicalized activity is autonomy and political power for the group.

In still another set of HoA countries more geographically proximate to ISIS/ Daesh territory, radicalization is facilitated by both internal, domestic problems and exposure to trans-national terrorist groups. Turkey for example is most concerned about group activity at or near its borders and the use of its territory for extremist transit. While in the past, most of political violence in Turkey came from secular Kurdish nationalists, concerns today rest on the potential radicalization of Sunni Turks as a result of exposure to the proximate activities in neighboring Syria and Iraq. The Turkish government also fears the possibility that young Turkish Islamic conservatives, radicalized in Syria, could return home with destructive intents.

The potential of radicalization turning to violence and instability is most current and urgent in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Central Asian countries. Here, radicalization is mostly motivated by political/religious ideology even though socio-economic grievances also play a role in preparing the ground. The threat is to the secular governments (as in Central Asia) or to an Islamic government that has adopted liberal institutions of democracy (as in Afghanistan). It is also in these countries that domestic radicalization is most tied to global networks. Once the cradle of Islamic civilization, where tolerant forms of Islam ruled (ranging from the Hannafi Sunni school of jurisprudence to the Ja'fari Shia school) and from where major Sufi orders and Tariqat stemmed, these countries have become the seat for recruitments by radical groups willing to take up arms in the name of religion since the 1980s. It is in this region that radicalization has led to violent extremism and terrorism among a variety of political Islamist groups, including the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), Jamoat Ansarulloh, Islamic Jihad Union, Jundollah, Hiz-ut Tahrir, Al Qaeda, Taliban (Afghan and Pakistani variety), Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement and, allegedly, a new front of the ISIS/ Daesh in Afghanistan, although the connections of which with the original ISIS in Iraq and Syria is not clear. These groups have the ability to move across borders in order to connect to their sympathizers and networks. Some of them have also been the connectors to help recruit foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) from this region to fight in other parts of the world, namely as part of ISIS/Daesh. While these groups each have their own methods, they converge in their common belief of an Islamic system of governance, a caliphate, ruling over the Ummah (Islamic community).

Because of the potential risks coming from this core set of countries and because information is most available for these countries (Afghanistan, Pakistan and Central Asian republics), they are the subject of much of the empirical information presented in this paper. Three specificities prevail

concerning the phenomenon of radicalization in this set of countries:

First is the prevalence of radical ideology among some of the population in the region, mostly young, uneducated men. This population is vulnerable to incitement of violence by spoilers (entrepreneurs of conflicts) with political, religious and sometimes economic interests. The ground for domestic radicalization is also fertile given the dearth of economic opportunities for the youth, marginalization of their voices in local politics and public life and the low quality of education, both in the modern or secular education system and in the large number of unregistered religious schools (madrasas) that propagate a narrow, often incorrect religious education.

A second problem in the region is related to the outflow of radicals ready to join international terrorist groups. A sizeable number of Central Asian militant factions – by some estimates up to 3000 people – have now reportedly joined ISIS/Daesh at various fronts in Iraq and Syria. Some of these were previously allied with the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban or with the IMU. Others were recruited while they worked as migrant workers in Russia. The International Crisis Group, in a report published in January 2015, claimed that ethnic Uzbeks, including citizens of Uzbekistan, are most numerous among the Central Asians with the Islamic State, but Kyrgyz, Kazakhs, Turkmen and Tajiks are also well represented.[7] Most Central Asians allegedly find themselves in *jamaats* (factions) within ISIS organized loosely along ethnic and linguistic lines, leading fighters from across the former Soviet Union. The return of such people, highly trained, war-tested and deeply radicalized, presents most of the nightmare scenarios for the governments of the region.

A third and increasingly worrying phenomenon is the allegation that ISIS may be opening a new front within the region. It is possible that the nascent ISIS/Daesh presence, confirmed by the Afghan government in March 2015, is actually the regrouping of Central Asian fighters and a few marginalized Taliban. But if a front is established in greater 'Khorasan' (as ISIS ideologues have been proclaiming) then it could easily attract fighters from outside the HoA region. Unlike the Taliban that did not have the ambition to rule over territory outside of Afghanistan, ISIS/Daesh has its eyes on a larger area to the north of the Amu Darya in Central Asia, over the Durand Line in Pakistan, and even to Iran. For now, ISIS presence has been allegedly spotted in the south of Afghanistan (Zabul, Logar, and Helmand - where their purported head, the former Taliban commander and inmate at

7- International Crisis Group (ICG), "Syria Calling: Radicalization in Central Asia", *Crisis Group Europe and Central Asia Briefing N°72*, Brussels, 20 January 2015.

Guantanamo Bay Mullah Abdul Rauf Khadim, was killed in February) and in northern provinces (Faryab, Kunduz, Badghis and Badakhshan) close to Central Asian borders. The potential entry of ISIS in the HoA is worrying for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the potential sectarian (Shia-Sunni) or intra-Sunni ideological (Hanafi/Deobandi versus Salafi) violence that it could lead to – adding to a clash with the Taliban. In February 2015, 31 Hazaras were abducted by forces allegedly loyal to ISIS and residents of western Kabul, which has a large Hazara community, were apparently receiving night letters bearing the ISIS logo in which Shi'ite Muslims were denounced as infidels.

Some analysts have played down the presence of ISIS fighters in Afghanistan and in Central Asia, claiming that local officials might be exaggerating their presence in a bid to attract funding from the central government or from international allies. At the same time, however, preventive measures are highly necessary to prevent this international group from establishing a meaningful foothold in the HoA region from its new base in Afghanistan.

Where does radicalization tend to happen in the region?

Mosques, madrasas, social media websites and prisons are some of the primary places where radicalization occurs in the HoA region. By way of example, Central Asians who have left to join ISIS in Iraq and Syria are recruited through four channels : the presence of Jihadi groups within the Central Asian countries, social media, charismatic leaders, and radicalization that occurs in Russia where they work as labor migrants.

- Madrasas: Religious schools, especially those that fall under the radar of official control, are one of the primary places where radicalization is apparently taking place. Post-9/11, much media and policy focus went on the alleged link between madrasa and militancy, and the 9/11 Commission even claimed that a number of Pakistani madrasas, were "incubators for violent extremism." The actual role of madrasas in the process of radicalization has not been sufficiently studied in the region however. Madrasas differ in terms of their interests, sources of funding, interpretation of Islam, leadership connections, ideologies or links to political parties. Although they can play a role in recruitment, mobilization and facilitation of militancy, as a Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) research claims, most madrasas do not produce militants, the majority don't have a violent nor an extremist agenda and remain focused on providing religious educa-

tion. [8] But it is the ones that are connected to transnational networks, often of the radical sort, that worry policy makers in the region. Many are linked to institutions abroad through the flow of people, ideas and finances. Saudi Arabia for example funded various Islamic groups, madrasas and mosques during the Soviet war in Afghanistan in the 1980s and networks within Saudi Arabia have continued to finance religious schools in Central Asia and Pakistan.

A combination of factors encourages Afghans and Central Asian students – until they were banned - to seek religious education abroad, and particularly in Pakistan, given the well-developed and locally-respected madrasa system there. Subsequently, the governments' concerns are two fold: Improving the quality and relevance of religious education within the country, and in cases where students go abroad to attain or pursue their religious education, preventing the radicalization of their youths abroad. The responses in the region have been for governments to try to gain more control over the curriculum and funding, starting with bringing the madrasas under government control through registration. As part of its own war against radicalism, the Pakistani government has started to look into ways to regulate madrassas by attempting to monitor their funding and curriculum. However, funding is often provided in the form of cash from abroad and many madrassas have no capacity (or will) to be transparent with respect to financing. It is the curriculum that needs control when it legitimizes violence and hatred.   Such has been the case of the Ashraf ul Madares in Kunduz Afghanistan for example, which, according to a BBC investigation, preaches to its 6000 women girl students that listening to radio, watching television and taking photos are un-Islamic activities and that women should not work outside their homes. [9] In 2006, the Afghan government developed a comprehensive plan to improve the quality of religious education and enhance oversight through registration. It also opened hundreds of madrasas to prevent students from flocking to Pakistan. If there were 222 religious schools during the Taliban era according to the Ministry of Education, the government opened approximately 405 more since then. The Government of Tajikistan adopted a decree in 2010 calling all students studying in madrasas abroad to return to the country. It also closed down a number of religious schools within the country

8- Kaja Borchgrevink & Kristian Berg Harpviken, "Teaching Religion, Taming Rebellion? Religious Education Reform in Afghanistan", *PRIO POLICY BRIEF 07*, Oslo: Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), 2010.
9- Malyar Sadeq Azad, « Afghan madrassa accused of radicalising women », BBC News, 16 March 2014.

and expanded the curriculum of the officially registered ones beyond religious education. The government of India carried out a survey in late 2014 that found that foreign instructors, who had managed to acquire Indian documents, were a key source of indoctrination among young Indian Muslims. Madrasas that are registered under the Indian government teach normal curriculum apart from religious education, but unaided and unregulated ones only teach religion. The government of India is also considering an outreach program for the mainstreaming of madrasa education and introducing more skills, given the findings that only a small percentage of madrasa-educated youth find employment as Imams, while others remain unemployed and vulnerable to radicalization.

- <u>Social Media and the Internet:</u> All over the region, and ostensibly the world, a number of radical groups have begun investing significant resources in the use of social networks (Facebook, Twitter, blogging websites) to promote their ideologies and recruit individuals for violent extremism. The Internet has been particularly effective in radicalizing thousands of individuals because it can offer "friendship, acceptance, or a sense of purpose" to the kind of socially ostracized individual vulnerable to recruitment.[10] It appeals to the radicalizer for its low cost, high reach, and constant, 24/7 availability. The technical difficulty and implied free speech limitations that censorship of the Internet or social media suggests make legislative corrections difficult. The ability of young persons to connect and socialize without supervision and in the privacy of their own home presents a unique challenge to law enforcement. While ISIS has been active in targeting Western recruits through social media, increasing numbers of Central Asians fighting with ISIS have also been posting videos online to convince their former compatriots to joint them in Syria. The IMU also regularly posts recruitment videos on its website and Twitter account from Pakistan's tribal areas. Additionally, the Russian language versions of Facebook, websites VKontakte and Odnoklassniki have become instrumental in connecting Central Asians with ISIS recruiters.[11] Similar examples of social media use by radicals are plenty in Afghanistan, Pakistan and other HoA countries. Where populations are mainly illiterate, radicalization tools also include night letters (shabnnameh), CDs with sermons or videos of training camps

10-Robin L. Thompson, "Radicalization and the Use of Social Media." *Journal of Strategic Security,* Vol. *4,* No. 4, 2011, pps. 167-190.
11- Bruce Pannier, "Central Asia's Desirable Militants." *Qishloq Ovozi*, 6 November 2014. http://www.rferl.org/content/central-asian-militants-islamic-state/26677167.html

and battle victories, and, increasingly as is the case in Afghanistan, propaganda SMSs sent through cell phones.

- Universities: Institutes of higher learning have traditionally been the hotbed of political activism in many of the countries of the region, particularly Iran, Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan. If activism during the 1970s and 1980s concentrated on ideologies such as communism, Marxism, and nationalism, in more recent years religious radicalization has found its way in secular universities. Radicalization seems to be on the rise in universities especially in Pakistan. A study of 345 university students carried out by the Pak Institute for Peace Studies in 2010 found or example that a large section of Pakistani youth resisted ethnic and religious diversity.[12] The study also pointed out the perception among the educated youth that the US—and not Al Qaeda or the Taliban—constituted the main threat to Pakistan's security. Ayesha Sidiqqa, in her study of 608 university students similarly found an alarmingly conservative mindset among the youth.[13] They would fluctuate between being socio-culturally liberal, but have a closed approach in matters pertaining to geo-politics, geo-strategy and identity politics. Other studies in Pakistan have all pointed out that Pakistani youth are getting radicalized, which they attribute to poverty, poor governance, political instability, poor quality of education and absence of the link between education and social mobility.[14] Sidiqqa's study, however, debunks the argument of radicalism as a natural by□product of poverty and/or lack of education. She argues that it stems from the construction of stereotypes of 'us' versus 'them' as part of an identity crisis and the popular notion of clash of civilization, rather than a deep understanding or sympathy for the underlying religious or moral foundations. In Afghanistan, however, a study of 400 students in eight university campuses was conducted by the Afghan Institute of Strategy Studies (AISS) and showed that while students demanded the reduction of US operations in the country, most were concerned over job prospects rather than ideological ambitions. The study also found out that while as an institution, the university did not play a strong role in the radicalization of its students, external groups took advantage of student mobilization as a means for spreading propaganda that contributed to student radicalization.

12- Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), "Radicalization: Perceptions of Educated Youth in Pakistan", Islamabad: PIPS, September 2010.

13- Ayesha Siddiqa, Red Hot Chilli Peppers Islam: Is the Youth in Elite Universities in Pakistan Radical?, Heinrich Boll Foundation, 2010.

14- See for example Moeed Yusuf, "Prospects of Youth Radicalization in Pakistan: Implications for US Policy", Washington DC: Brookings Institution, October 2008.

- <u>Mosques and Friday sermons</u>: Given a large number of unregistered mosques in the HoA region, and where there is no government control or influence over Friday sermons, mosques especially in rural and semi-rural areas are sometimes used as centers for radicalization. Despite efforts by the Afghan government for example to develop a unified curriculum for training religious leaders, their levels of education vary widely—some having little higher education and many having received training in unmonitored Pakistani madrasas. Extremist zealots prey on vulnerable individuals attending prayer and directly convince them, sometimes over considerable periods of time, to adopt a more strict adherence to their ideology. Given relatively poor knowledge of Hannafi Islam in some parts of Central Asia for example, recruiters are able to radicalize more easily by taking advantage of gaps in actual Islamic teaching. At the same time, too much government control of religious expression could lead to further radicalization, which could be a problem in parts of Central Asia. As nearly all 66 thousand plus Sunni Imams in Turkey are employees of the Turkish government's Religious Affairs Office, they are obliged to participate in an individualized congregational outreach program and to share traditional religious values. In this way, the Turkish government makes a concerted effort to ensure that extremist messages are not shared at the mosque. While this may have the effect of limiting message sharing, it may instigate desire to radicalize as a reaction to state control.

- <u>Prisons:</u> As Peter Neumann puts its, prisons are 'places of vulnerability' where near-perfect conditions for radicalization exist. The prison environment affords the time, interest, and proximity for radicalizers to identify 'identity seekers', 'protection seekers' and 'rebels' – each of whom are vulnerable candidates for extremism. In Pakistan and More often than not, convicted terrorists are the ones serving as radicalizers, after volunteering for religious roles such as leading Friday prayers, to gain the confidence of their fellow inmates. It has happened, however, that extremist Imams have gained access to prisons under the guise of providing support to Muslim inmates. Regardless of the source of radical ideology within prison, however, released prisoners often carry their newfound radical identity beyond the prison walls and seek out organizations to which they feel a previously unrealized connection (such as ISIS). The problem is especially prevalent in HoA countries such as Pakistan and Afghanistan. While serving as commander of the US forces in Afghanistan, General Stanley McChrystal was quoted as saying that are "more in-

surgents per square foot in corrections facilities than anywhere else in Afghanistan." [15] In Pakistan, there are reportedly more than twice as many inmates as there are prison cells, and it is not uncommon for adult and juvenile offenders to be housed together. Obviously, over-crowding and under-staffing make radicalization easier and its prevention in prison extremely difficult, although in some instances prisons have served to effectively deradicalize extremists through specific programs. (Prison deradicalization programs will be discussed later in this paper.)

- <u>Labor migrant camps and sites:</u> A large number of Central Asians have migrated to Russia, where they work illegally and live in extremely precarious circumstances. Seeking identity and community, many have begun participating actively in religious activity or social organizations. Often, it is through these activities that they have fallen prey to recruitment by ISIS which has invested in selling the idea of joining their jihad as a more attractive option than continuing to work in a dangerous, low-paying job in a country where they feel ostracized. ISIS is not the only recruiter of these migrant workers. Radical movements from northern Caucasus and the Hizb ut-Tahrir are also acutely aware of the opportunity they have to convert and recruit from this vulnerable population in search of livelihoods abroad, far from their families and communities .[16]

Can there be a regional approach? Yes but with caveats…

At first glance, the answer to whether there should be a regional approach to preventing and countering radicalization is positive. Not only is radicalization widespread and as an idea can move across borders in a balloon effect, but the structural causes that allow this phenomenon to spread are present in all societies (e.g. lack of access to education or economic opportunities). HoA countries are all undergoing a process of development that is creating discomfort between modernizers who strive to take society forward by means of technology, education and modern (sometimes secular) liberal values, and traditionalists who resist change (e.g. rejecting the entry of women into public life). At the same time, rapid urbanization and opportunities in cities have widened the urban/rural gap, leaving pockets of deeply poor, isolated, underdeveloped populations in the countryside who

15- Peter R. Neumann, "Prisons and Terrorism Radicalisation and De-radicalisation in 15 Countries" International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR), King College, London, 2010.
16- International Crisis Group (ICG), "Syria Calling: Radicalization in Central Asia", *Crisis Group Europe and Central Asia Briefing N°72,* Brussels, 20 January 2015.

are highly vulnerable to radicalization and recruitment by radical groups.

Similar structural problems and fault lines within societies would seem to call on cooperation across countries. Yet, causes for radicalization, recruitment modalities and responses by law enforcement authorities are quite different country by country within the HoA region. Different motivations are at play here: religious ideology, war economy, group grievances, socio-economic marginalization, etc. In some countries, radicalization is the result of domestic grievances against national government policies, while in others it stems from – or is exacerbated by - exposure to international radical movements.

Even within the core set of HoA countries where radicalization is most apparent today, motivations and responses are different. In Afghanistan, for example, the new alleged presence of ISIS/Daesh is a continuation of the decades of wars, with different groups neutralizing each other (Taliban fighting the Mujahiddin in the 1990s, ISIS apparently fighting the Taliban in some parts, mostly in the South, and allegedly supporting each other in other parts, such as in the North). The phenomenon of radicalization is taking place within a context where an Islamic government is trying to modernize the system of governance and society but is periodically confronted by resistance from religious and traditional elements within. The response relies primarily on force, as a continuation of the counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency approaches of the past decade.

Radicalization in Pakistan is fostered by a number of religious, political and militant organizations in Pakistan, some of them operating with the tacit support of the state, but with different motivations.   These groups include *sub-nationalists* - those with political motivation such as the Balochistan Liberation Army fighting for Baloch rights and the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) who have an ethno-nationalist affinity with the Pashtuns; *Nationalists* like Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM), Harkat-ul-Mujahideen, and Hizb-ul-Mujahideen with their grievance of Indian rule of Jammu and Kashmir; and *International Islamists* (or, ideological Jihadists) who are ideologically motivated to defend and even expand their Ummah, and include Federally Administered Tribal Area-based Taliban such as the Haqqani Network, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and Sipah-e-Sahaba. Radicalization in Pakistan is also the product of an exclusively Islamic identity—meaning a majority of the youth identify primarily through their religion over nationality.[17] Until Pakistan joined the American-led War on Terror in 2003, the government had tolerated radical groups as they defended their national interests abroad, mainly against India over Kashmir and against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. After General Musharraf sent the troops into tribal

17⁹ Raheem ul Haque, "Youth Radicalization in Pakistan" *USIP PeaceBrief No 167*, Washington DC, United States Institute of Peace (USIP), 26 February 2014.

areas in 2004, however, the "Pandora's Box" of extremism and radicalization was opened with a backlash by various militant groups under the loose banner of the Pakistani Taliban.

In Central Asia, radicalization is happening for different motivations, such as monetary incentives or to fill an ideological vacuum. The official response relies more on intelligence gathering and targeting of individuals and groups by security officials. The challenges there are to keep to the tenants of secularism even if society seeks a revival of Islam and to maintain law and order while respecting fundamental freedoms.

The motivations for radicalization and policy responses are different in India, China, Russia, Turkey, and elsewhere. Despite these differences, however, a regional approach is necessary as the phenomenon is growing in the region and countries can learn from cooperating with each other on this common problem.

3) Responses and Methods to Prevent and Combat Radicalization

The real challenge for devising a response or prevention strategy starts with the problem of defining radicalization and identifying who the radicalized are: Does the concept refer to behavior and action or also to ideology and beliefs? Are the radicalized those who engage in violence, or also those who support, understand and empathize with radical or violent thoughts? How can intent be recognized before it becomes a violent action? The answers have consequences for the policy response at three stages of radicalization: 1) prevention before, 2) combatting during and 3) de-radicalization following.

Types of responses

From experiences around HoA countries, as well as those of the US, Europe, Asia and the Middle East, a number of strategies have been used to counter radicalization, to varying degrees of success. These responses can be clustered as follows:

- *The use of force* against radical groups may bring quick results for eliminating training sights, sending a threatening message, or killing suspected terrorists, but it is also likely to create backlash and victimization and therefore not be an effective strategy of prevention by itself. As UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon expressed it at the

UN General Assembly meeting in September 2014, "Missiles may kill terrorists. But good governance kills terrorism."[18] The HoA region has ample evidence of increased radicalization as a result of drone attacks in the tribal areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan. In Central Asian countries, the use of force against suspected Islamists may exacerbate grievances that lead to radicalization in the first place.

Border control to prevent the trespassing of radical groups and individuals is high on the agenda of Afghanistan and a major concern for Central Asian countries, China, Russia and Iran, among others. Border control requires enhanced assessment of risks and cooperation not only between law enforcement agencies within countries, but also across countries at the regional level. Securing borders goes beyond mere interdiction and demands a complex approach: political will for cooperation, a developmental approach to involve the communities living in border areas, ensuring that interdiction is conducted within the rule of law, and by adhering to humanitarian principles. But border control is not enough as radicalism involves indoctrination that does not need to pass through physical borders. Radical groups can indoctrinate through the Internet, for example. Border control strategies need to be comprehensive packages that don't start at the borders.

- The use of *intelligence, data gathering, data analysis and data sharing* are perhaps among the most effective tools for recognizing and countering radicalization. Here again, however, caution is necessary as over-surveillance should not be to the detriment of freedoms (of movement, of speech, of religion, etc.). Risk assessment and intelligence data sharing could be effective only if it were shared among relevant officials across HoA countries in real time. However, the existence of a number of different databases and channels of communities in the region hamper coordination and cooperation to prevent the movement of radicalized individuals and groups.

- The enactment *of proper legislation* is key for HoA countries. All of the countries of the region have legislation against terrorism, and some are in the process of reviewing it to adapt to new realities such as interdicting citizens from traveling abroad to become a foreign fighter, following the resolution passed by the UN Security Council on this growing concern in the fall of 2014. However, interdicting for-

18- Secretary-General's remarks to Security Council High-Level Summit on Foreign Terrorist Fighters, New York, 24 September **2014**. http://www.un.org/sg/statements/index.asp?nid=8040

eign travel when intentions are not clear is hard in such cases. Furthermore, enactment of proper legislation in the region suffers from a number of shortcomings. Among them are the lack of capacity to enforce laws and regulations and the lack of harmonized definitions (of terrorism, terrorist acts, radicalization, etc.) which make international cooperation on countering radicalization difficult. At the same time, some countries have enacted legislation on religious beliefs and practices that are unnecessarily restrictive, and may engender violent resistance. Legislative frameworks need to be strengthened, harmonized, adequately implemented and monitored from a human rights perspective.

- *Monitoring the Internet* and social media for materials that spread radical narratives and propaganda or conduct recruitment for violent actions is fast becoming a common activity among HoA countries. Central Asian authorities, for example, regularly spot sites that conduct *Daavat* (invitation) to violent extremism and terrorism, including from Central Asian fighters who have joined ISIS in Syria. However, a full blockage of social media and websites is problematic and ineffective. If sites were closed, they would simply move to other sites, making it harder to trace and monitor their activities. Monitoring the Internet also requires technologies, new laws and practices that do not impede on freedoms. There is much that should be done by the governments of the region together with media outlets and journalists in terms of cooperation in the development of counter-narratives and awareness-raising for the public. This relationship, however, should not compromise the principles of a free and objective media, since this would undermine its credibility and could be counterproductive.

- *Raising public awareness* of the dangers of radicalization is what needs to be accelerated in a region that is fast becoming ground for recruitment into international terrorism. When developing education and information campaigns, youth need to be kept in mind as they are the primary targets for recruitment. Lack of knowledge about the true principles of main religions in the region make youth particularly vulnerable to misinterpretation and to the spreading of ideas that incite hatred. Prevention, therefore, requires a broad approach: knowledge to understand the motivations that lead people to be recruited in marginal, violent extremist organizations, and awareness-raising and the promotion of a culture of peace, dialogue and tolerance via the mass media, education system, and online. A variety of approaches and strategies such as involving religious leaders/Imams, educating

young people about their religion, and working with families, schools, mosques and prisons should be developed and enhanced. Cooperation is also necessary with religious leaders who are close to communities in order to raise awareness about the true religious principles and counter extremist narratives.

- Radicalization, being an assault on thoughts, requires a response in terms of thoughts as well. In this regard, one of the most important strategies for the prevention of further radicalization is *dialogue*. Inter-faith and intra-faith dialogue needs to be promoted more broadly by the HoA countries. In Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and elsewhere, cross-ethnic and cross-religious dialogues have been instituted and these experiences need to be shared. But as religious radicalization is happening within Islam, more dialogue and exchanges in the open are necessary in order to expose the viewpoints of different branches of Islam (Hannafi, Wahabi, Salafi, Deobandi, Shia, Sufi, etc.) on matters such as peace, economy, human rights, governance, and violence. Through these dialogues, all parts could be expressing their views and finding common grounds where possible, and informing youth on differences. A healthy debate about the role of religion in societies is necessary among HoA countries, be they secular ones like the Central Asian republics, or Islamic republics such as Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan.

- Among the most important, long-term strategies to counter radicalization is to *address the grievances* that radicals - or those vulnerable to radicalization - purport to suffer from. These include countering discrimination in society and job markets, and encouraging more representative government. In prevention strategies, the most important target population (i.e. youth) need special attention through the provision of socio-economic opportunities, including employment possibilities, education, and social programs for marginalized youth. Governments need to pay more attention to the quality of the education systems in Central Asian countries in general in order to provide opportunities for youth and to prevent them from seeking alternative ways of life. The education systems in most of the HoA countries also need to be thoroughly modernized to respond to the needs of growing labor markets. At the same time, religious education in HoA countries needs to be better regulated and curriculums modernized.

Stages of response

A) Pre: Preventing radicalization programs and approaches

Variations in what makes an individual susceptible to radicalization make macro-level approaches to prevention difficult. To be truly effective, preventive approaches need to focus on the individual, which is a difficult expensive, and, in large populations, almost an impossible task. The task is also complicated by the fact that motivations for radicalization differ and require targeted interventions at varying levels. For example, to prevent radicalization stemming from government grievances would require good governance (anti-corruption, equality, employment, and social security). If the motivation for radicalization is ideological, then programs to counter it should be about oversight of the curriculum in education systems, standardization and regulations, and dialogue. If the process of radicalization through mobilization needs to be prevented, then policing, intelligence and eradication of spoilers who conduct recruitment need to be considered.

Currently, prevention programs typically target national education curricula, public messaging through media channels and in religious settings, and limiting or controlling religious expression. Yet, the success of these programs has not been measured with any degree of reliability. Some of these programs include the following:

- The EU has developed some responses at the local level to the growing problem of radicalization (in France, Netherlands, Belgium, etc.) and is running a Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN) of 500 practitioners for exchanges of practices. The EU response to the phenomenon of radicalization and foreign fighters rests on 5 pillars: 1) the need to understand *motivations* (such as ideology, religion, and unemployment), *profile* (such as socioeconomic status and education level), and *modus operand*i (such as travel patterns and financial sources); 2) preventing radicalization by training front liners such as prison workers, families and communities; removing illegal content from the Internet; developing the counter narrative; and working with education systems; 3) detecting suspicious travel and disrupting operations through joint data bases including airline passenger name records, deciphering motivation for travel, invalidating passports, and notifying families: 4) responding through the criminal justice system, including harmonizing European criminal system and legislating cooperative collection of evidence; and 5) handling returnees, including designing rehabilitation programs, segregating them, and remaining aware of further radicalization dangers in prisons. It

should be noted, however, that the phenomenon in Europe is related to individuals (lone wolves) becoming disillusioned and joining radical groups, whereas in most of HoA countries, radicalization is a group phenomenon, related to ideology, lack of economic opportunities and political grievances.

- The UK Government's Preventing Violent Extremism Program (also known as the Prevent Strategy) began a decade ago and funds schemes to prevent young people from following al Qaeda and extremist Islamist ideology. The strategy is supposed to cover all forms of extremism, including far-right and some aspects of non-violent extremism, but it has prioritized Islamic extremism. It has led to the funding of a large number of projects on community cohesion, Internet monitoring, working with families, etc., One of its successes has been through the so-called 'Channel,' which involves inter-agency cooperation to give individuals access to services such as healthcare, education, and mentoring. Yet, the problem is that non of the programs have been properly assessed. The strategy has also been controversial, critiqued for stigmatizing Muslims and increasing the surveillance of Muslims in the UK..

- The US government provides grants through many US embassies abroad for programs that "provide positive alternatives to radicalization and recruitment into violent extremism, counter violent extremist narratives and messaging, and increase civil society and government capacity to address drivers of radicalization."[19] Examples of projects funded throughout the HoA include youth sports leagues, leadership development workshops, conflict-resolution exercises, support groups for youth in prisons, and forums for sharing narratives of victims of terrorism and former terrorists.

- The experience of Central Asian countries with the prevention of radicalization rests on a two pronged approach. The first, more contentious response focuses on government-established limitations on Islamic education (e.g. control of Madrasa curriculum, Friday sermons by official state-sponsored religious leaders, financing of mosques and clergy, and government publications on 'proper' religious values). In Afghanistan, attempts are similarly made to engage religious communities through Friday sermon messages from the Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs. While these measures seek

19- Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, State Department, Country Reports on Terrorism 2012, Chapter 5: Terrorist Safe Havens (Update to 7120 Report), May 30, 2013.

to control the potentially radical and incorrect messaging that Muslims receive, they could potentially encourage resistance if they are too restrictive or impose too drastic limitations on freedom of religion and expression. The other approach rests on actively preparing and disseminating messages for young people, prison inmates, migrant workers, etc. in the form of lectures and televised interviews from former terrorists on the dangers of radicalization and of joining terrorist organizations. Kyrgyz security officials, for example, are working with religious leaders and training journalists to prevent the spreading of extremist ideology. The Uzbek government has published religious textbooks through its official agencies.

- Turkey has instituted a broad-based community outreach program that targets recruitment of vulnerable populations with social projects, parenting programs, and teacher and religious leader trainings. Turkey also controls the sermons of Imams, nearly all of which are employees of the Turkish government's Religious Affairs Office.

- Counter-radicalization efforts in the UAE center on the prevention of extremist preaching in Emirati mosques through the provision of Friday sermon guidelines and monitored compliance. Prominent officials and religious leaders make a point of regularly and publicly condemning extremist ideology.

- China maintains a large military and police presence in areas where domestic terrorist groups operate, tightly restrict access to Internet websites and information sharing, encourage media messages in the northwest region that seek to deradicalize[20], and conduct crackdowns on illegal madrasas to prevent radicalization.

- Iran maintains strict control over access to Internet websites and online information sharing, making radicalization efforts through these mediums more challenging. Additionally, the government has recently begun to denounce extremism in Islamic thinking - a move toward moderation that may be a direct result of disdain for ISIS activity.[21]

20- Omar Ashour, "Online De-Radicalization? Countering Violent Extremism Narratives: Message, Messenger and Media Strategy" *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 4, No 6. 4 January 2011.
21-Ali Mamouri. "Moderate Islam Pushes Back Extremism." *Al-Monitor.,* 30 January 2015 http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/01/terrorism-moderate-islam-iraq-iran-arab-world.html

B) During: Combatting-radicalization as it happens

While individuals and groups may be motivated to become radicalized in the first place by various factors described above, continued involvement in radical movements can have roots in the psycho-social needs of individuals, such as:

- An appreciation of the community of individuals terrorists are engaged with,
- Role models from within the movement,
- Implicit or explicit 'approval' from peers and family,
- The opportunity for advancement within the movement, and
- Increased disillusionment with other life options.

Such motivations for continued involvement require a focus on the push factor within individuals' lifestyles but also the perpetual pull factor that directs propaganda. Periods of relative calm in violence often allow policymakers to shift attention elsewhere, but radicalization is still occurring during these periods of perceived peace.

Two schools of thought have emerged in countering radicalization as it happens: 1) Focusing on countering violent behavior, and 2) focusing on behavior *and* cognition (as in when individuals and groups are attracted to extreme, intolerant and violent views) through countering radical speech and narratives and promoting inclusive nationalism and active citizenship in ways that protect freedoms of speech/religion/expression.

The Anglo-Saxon approach to countering radicalization focuses on behavior that is violent. It is not political motivation or ideology, but criminal intent which is the threshold for intervention. [22] Given that freedom of speech and religion are primary, any attempt to change even an extremist's views or obstruct their freedom of expression would be considered anti-democratic, misguided, and potentially illegal or unconstitutional. From this perspective, 'counter-radicalization' is, as a concept, contentious, as it may be offensive to beliefs in freedoms of expression and speech.

By contrast, European approaches to countering radicalization confront both behavior and cognition through a combined strategy of Prevent, Protect, Pursue and Respond. From this perspective, extremist ideas alone can

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22- Peter R. Neumann, 2013

be dangerous and should be stopped as they have the ability to fracture or polarize society. Yet in the European experience, counter-radicalization cannot be left only to law enforcement: democracy and citizenship must be pushed and ideas thwarted before they can take root. Most HoA countries have adopted this latter, European perspective with officials supporting the idea of more democratization or good governance as a way to prevent radical thoughts to take root in society. But in practice, counter radicalization is still dealt with traditionally, either through force or through focusing specifically on the appeal of alternative, subversive Islam groups by controlling madrasa curriculum, speeches, the Internet, and so on.

C) Post: De-radicalization programs and approaches

Deradicalization programs have taken a number of different forms in different parts of the world, but tend to share the fundamental principle that would-be terrorists must be cognitively dissuaded from radical belief systems. De-radicalization programs pay a varying level of attention to the individual's situation (e.g. joblessness, psychological trauma, family situation, personal networks, peers, etc.), but all contain components of changing extremist ideology. Current de-radicalization efforts consist of programs such as social services post-release from prison, follow up with former inmates through post-release dialogues, involvement of families, etc.

Deradicalization programs began in Egypt during Hosni Mubarak's rule as an attempt to sew divisions within the Muslim Brotherhood. After 9/11, similar programs were started in Yemen, using tribal leaders to dissuade extremists. By 2003, a larger and better-funded initiative started in Indonesia, using Islamic judges to work with inmates. The largest (and by some estimates the most successful) program to date started in 2004 in Saudi Arabia, by involving religious clerics and Ulemma to debate with extremists. The US took this Saudi approach to Iraq and Afghanistan, but with less success. Since 2010, deradicalization programs have sprung up in Europe (notably in the UK, Denmark, Sweden, and Germany), and have tried to involve families and communities in the process of de-radicalization (and prevention) and by providing social services such as healthcare, jobs, and follow-up. However, the effectiveness of these programs has not been evaluated.

One common tactic is to have moderate Imams encourage alternative readings of Islam to undo extremist mindsets. Saudi Arabia, for example, has been implementing one of the largest programs and claims to be successful in turning terrorists away from violence. Their program involves religious clerics engaging with prisoners. But debating religion is not enough. Mate-

rial incentives and psychological support are also needed. The Saudi program also includes a Care Rehabilitation Center which provides convicted Saudi terrorists with religious reeducation, psychological counseling, and job assistance: recidivism rates for those who go through the program are far lower than for other types of criminals.[23]

Involving Imams to prevent further radicalization in jails has also been introduced in a number of countries. But as Newmann argues, while prison Imams have an important role to play, they are not a panacea. "Their independence and credibility need to be protected. It is neither reasonable nor realistic to expect them to be spiritual advisers, welfare officers and terrorism experts all at the same time."[24] He suggests that prison services should invest more in staff training. Deradicalization work with prisoners needs to also include post-release follow-up, prison aftercare, psychological counseling, and family inclusion.

A number of programs have also seen the importance of the environment in which radicalization happens, and try to create a more receptive environment in the community and family. The importance of providing jobs, alternatives, hope and dignity for a better alternative future is primordial for success.

What the different experiences do show is that the motivations for joining violent radical movements must be understood at the individual level in order to design and implement adequate policies. While the effect of de-radicalization programs have not been properly evaluated, some characteristics of effective programs can be summed up as follows:[25]

- Successful interlocutors/instructors who are credible and willing to be listened to by the subject of the de-radicalization effort,
- Programs that combine self-reliance and incentives with religious doctrine are more effective than those which focus solely on religion,
- Post-program monitoring and aftercare are essential to ensure a smooth return to society, continued interaction with

23- Jessica Stern Mind Over Martyr, "How to Deradicalize Islamist Extremists" *Foreign Affairs* , Vol. 89, No. 1, January/February 2010, pps 95-108.
24- Peter R. Neumann, 2010.
25- Angel Rabasa, Stacie Pettyjohn, Jeremy Ghez, Christopher Boucek, "Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists", *National Security Research Division,* Rand Corporation (2010)

the initial interlocutor is effective in this, and

- Involvement of the participant's family encourages continued engagement.

Some European countries have made it illegal for people who have participated in foreign wars as foreign fighters to return to their countries of origin. Others, such as the UK, have proposed to strip the citizenship of suspected militants, although this approach has its critiques among those who believe that in the long-term, groups like ISIS benefit from an army of stateless people serving an Islamic state not recognized internationally.

Deradicalization as a concept has also been criticized because it depoliticizes the motivations of actors and assumes that radicalism is the result of brainwashing and is inherently irrational. Viewed like this, officials do not see reason to understand the motivations, or to question their own role in implementing policies that solicit reactions, justified or not, such as Western policy and action in the Middle East, Islamophobia at the global level, or insult in the media. While radicalization may be a result of revenge for Muslim lives lost to US-led wars, de-radicalization programs can hardly be effective as they do not deal with the structural causes. The disenfranchising and alienating effects of counter-terror programs that have treated entire Muslim communities as terrorists are also often neglected.

If deradicalization programs have been criticized, experts argue that the aim should be limited to disengagement, which focuses on dissuading individuals from engaging in terrorist activity. Former members of extremist groups have been dissuaded to disengage from violent activities, but it is rare that they also give up their radical ideas. At the same time, there is no fixed approach that has proven successful for disengagement because motivations to engage and disengage are different. The reasons that individuals, including those with radical beliefs, may decide not to act violently or to give up on violence is varied: sometimes it is a question of incentives – financial, familial, or social. Other times, individuals may simply become disillusioned with certain groups or tactics.

Deradicalization program examples from HoA countries include the following:

- India conducts a rehabilitation and integration program for certain cases of individuals leaving separatist or violent movements called the "Scheme for Surrender cum-Reha-

bilitation of Militants in the North East." The program's effectiveness is unknown.

- Afghanistan has been implementing the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program for former fighters who agree to abide by the Afghan Constitution and laws on women's rights. To what extend these former fighters are de-radicalized is not certain, even though they have renounced violence.
- In Pakistan, a significant amount of resources has been invested in the Sabaoon Rehabilitation Center, a deradicalization program for youth in a military camp setting that focuses on the rehabilitation of child militants who were formerly recruited by the TTP. Participants are taught ethics, patriotism, and Islam, and the program has a proven track record of success. Young people who are turned in by their parents or self-report compose 60% of participants, the other 40% are apprehended and sent to the camp by Pakistani security forces.

4) Recommendations for Next Steps for HoA Countries

In order to dwell deeper into the question of radicalization in HoA countries, a number of next steps can be proposed, clustered around the development of 1) research and information, 2) counter-narrative for the media and education systems, 3) strategies, plan of action and legislation harmonization, and 4) special focuses on particular areas for cooperation among HoA countries.

1) Research and information

A number of questions need to be answered which requires further research:

- What is the scope of the problem of radicalization in the HoA? How much of the threat is coming from within HoA countries and how much from global areas outside the region?
- What are some of the best practices that can be adapted for the region in terms of preventing, countering and dissuading/disengaging radicals?

- What are the factors that make the HoA region prone to recruitment (outflow) of radicals as well as ground activity within (inflow)?
- What common elements would be needed for a regional approach and how can it be enforced?
- On what areas can cooperation be strengthened?
- What could be elements for a counter-narrative in the region?

The result of these studies, in addition to existing and on-going studies on radicalization (such as the three studies on radicalization in Madrasas, in the media and in the army that is currently being conducted by AISS) should be disseminated widely.

2) Counter-narrative

Using experiences from around the world and particularities of HoA countries, counter-narratives for radicalization need to be developed in the different languages of the region by scholars, religious leaders, members of the media and civil society representatives native to the region. These need to focus particularly on the youth who are vulnerable to radicalization. Women's NGOs and community leaders should also be involved as they could play a role in influencing youth. Brochures should also be produced in regional languages to warn against the dangers of radicalization and joining foreign wars. These narratives and brochures could be used by the media of the different HoA countries as well as in the education systems.

3) Strategy and Action Plan development and legislation harmonization

The HoA region needs a strategy for preventing and countering radicalization. The development of such a strategy, with a concrete action plan for implementation, will bring together concerned officials of the region to work on their common grounds and pool their resources for common goals. The process of developing a common strategy also would help better define the concept of radicalization for the region and make choices about an approach that focuses on behavior (like the US) or on cognitive and behavioral aspects (like the EU).

In this process, the experiences of other regions or thematic areas can be

helpful: These include the European Union Strategy for Combatting Radicalization and Recruitment into Terrorism adopted in 2005 [26] and the European Union Strategy on Preventing Radicalization to Terrorism and Violent Extremism: Strengthening the EU's Response adopted in 2014.[27] Other examples include experiences gained in the development of the Joint Plan of Action (JPoA) for the Implementation of the UN Global Counter Terrorism Strategy (UN GCTS) in Central Asia adopted in 2011.

At the same time, the legislation of the HoA countries concerning radicalization, terrorism, foreign fighters, etc. should be reviewed, updated and harmonized in the region.

4) Focus on special areas of cooperation

A number of areas can be highlighted by HoA countries for cooperation among their relevant law enforcement officials, members of the media, civil society representatives, religious leaders, scholars, and other interested parties. They include:

Cyber radicalization

How is the internet being used to radicalize the youth of the region? Media and civil society organizations could conduct joint work on developing tools to prevent radicalization through the Internet and social media platforms. Early detection software and educating parents about the dangers of unmonitored web activity by young people are two examples of such tools.

Religious dialogue

In recent years, the activities of different emissaries with different ideological and religious positions have become active in Central Asia and Afghanistan. The region, once home to Sufism and tolerant branches of Islam (Hannafi) as well as the Deobandi Sunnism and various branches of Shism, have be-

26- European Commission. "Preventing Radicalization to Terrorism and Violent Extremism: Strengthening the EU's Response." (2013). http://register.consilium.europa.eu/doc/srv?l=EN&f=ST%2014781%202005%20 REV%201

27- Council of the European Union. "The European Union Strategy for Combating Radicalization and Recruitment to Terrorism." (2005). http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/e-library/documents/policies/crisis-and-terrorism/radicalisation/docs/communication_on_preventing_radicalisation_and_violence_promoting_extremism_201301_en.pdf

come increasingly populated by clerics preaching different traditions. There need to be an open debate among societies, launched by religious leaders and youth, about the different ideological braches within Islam and which are contributing (or not) to radical ideologies.

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Cooperation among security and law enforcement officials

Security and law enforcement officials (including police, border guards etc.) of HoA countries need to come together to explore ways to effectively counter radicalization and violent extremism in the region through exchanging data, launching joint investigations, preventing the entry and exit of foreign fighters, etc. . In this task, they could also learn from the experiences of regional organizations such as the EU, the Organization for Security Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). HoA countries need quicker, easier and faster access to joint databases, a task that could be facilitated by regional organizations.

Training and awareness raising

As the problem of radicalization is a growing phenomenon in the HoA region, new methods need to be developed to counter it. Specialized trainings could be organized for different population groups who may be exposed to the problem and could play a role in prevention. They include training for journalists, Imams and religious leaders, community leaders, prison guards and law enforcement authorities.