

2. NONMILITARY SECURITY

IS NETWORK THEORY THE MOST SUITABLE FOR UNDERSTANDING TERRORIST RADICALISATION?

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ABSTRACT

Terrorist radicalisation has been broadly discussed in different research environments, and there are many different opinions about reasons why some people resort to such extreme acts of terrorism. In January 2015, the Kouachi brothers went into the satire company of Charlie Hebdo in France and killed 12 people, and in November the same year a group of terrorists killed 139 people in different attacks in Paris. There have been many terrorist attacks not only in European countries, but also around the world in general. It is not something new, but globalisation and closeness to the media make us more aware of the terror than earlier. The purpose of the paper is to argue, by using different theories within the terrorism studies, that network theory is not the most suitable way to understand terrorist radicalisation, but that different theories in general supplement each other. At the beginning terminology will be explained, followed by introducing network theory, comparing theories on the basis of different factors like understanding terrorist's background, and look at both internal and external factors that influence individuals. Subsequently, different theories will be compared on how well they explain the root causes for violent actions leading to final conclusions.

KEY WORDS

Terrorism, international security, roots of terrorism, theories of terrorism.

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Introduction

Is network theory the most suitable for understanding terrorist radicalisation? Terrorist radicalisation has been broadly discussed in different research environments, and there are many different opinions

about reasons why some people resort to such extreme acts of terrorism. In January 2015, the Kouachi brothers went into the satire company of Charlie Hebdo in France and killed 12 people, and in November the

same year a group of terrorists killed 139 people in different attacks in Paris. There have been many terrorist attacks not only in European countries, but also around the world in general. It is not something new, but globalisation and closeness to the media make us more aware of the terror than earlier. Video transmission of terror attacks, photos of victims and terrorists are shown almost daily in the media. A question to ask is why or how did these perpetrators turn into violent terrorists? It is not an easy answer or a clear understanding of why some people become terrorists, and some of them do not.

The purpose of this paper is to argue, by using different theories within the terrorism studies, that network theory is not the most suitable way to understand terrorist radicalisation, but that different theories in general supplement each other. The way they supplement each other is because researchers explore different aspects of radicalisation, use different methods, and the objects they study are also different. Some researchers focus more or less on different levels, such as individual, group or state levels. At the beginning, I will clarify some terminology, introduce network theory, compare theories on the basis of different factors like understanding terrorist's background, and look at both internal and external factors that influence individuals. Further on I will compare the different theories on how well they explain the root causes for violent actions, and finally make a conclusion in order to answer the main question: Is network theory the most suitable for understanding terrorist radicalisation?

Terminology and structure

A word *terrorism* is not clarified properly within the area of research, and there is no universally acceptable definition of the term. Because of that, it is also challeng-

ing to agree on a unified *terrorist profile*, what kind of traits are typical of terrorists. In Kleinmann's book, a scholar Walter Laqueur expresses his understanding of the term terrorism as follows: 'many terrorisms exist, and their character changes over time and from country to country. The endeavour to find a *generic theory* of terrorism, one overall explanation of its roots, is a futile and misguided enterprise' (Kleinmann, 2012, p. 280). As Laqueur explains, there is not only one clear definition of the term terrorism. In one way we can look at terrorism as *activities*, asymmetric attacks from violent radical groups or individuals in order to accomplish a goal. In some discussions one can say that it is a poor man's weapon. One person alone, or together with others can cause huge disasters without a lot of resources. Terrorism is inexpensive and considered to be a simple method. One goal of terrorism is to change the environment, and terrorism uses means like deterrence and destruction in order to accomplish that. It is sad that in many ways deterrence does not work. An example is the polarisation and protectionism happening in Europe and other countries.

In this paper I will use sources and theories based on studies of global Salafi Jihad, other social movements and use findings that focus more on psychological aspects. Salafi Jihad is considered to be Islamic extremism associated with Wahhabism and Salafism, but the latter two directions do not support terrorism (McCauley and Moskalenko, 2011, p. 5). The Jihadists use violent actions in order to spread and turn the environment back to what the persons think is true Islam. The consequence of their beliefs is that everyone else, having another opinion or belief is regarded as enemies. The challenge is that the movement is global, and as mentioned earlier, violent attacks can happen all around the world.

The essence in the social movement is that some people sacrifice themselves for a greater good, in a belief that is more important than the person himself/herself.

In order to study terrorism, one need to look at the process of becoming a terrorist. Radicalisation can be seen as a process where a person or a group is becoming convinced that their belief and values are the superior ones, and that they have to change the status quo in order to achieve this new status or environment. It is useful to make some distinctions between radicals; those people holding radical ideas, and violent radicals, those holding radical ideas and turn their beliefs into violent actions. Some even have the opinion of seeing radicalisation as the pathway to terror. In this paper radicalisation will be understood as violent activities, such as terrorism. In Scott Kleinmann's book, a terrorism expert Peter Neumann describes violent radicalisation as; 'changes in attitude that lead towards sanctioning and, ultimately, the involvement in the use of violence for a political aim' (Kleinmann, 2012, p. 282).

Network theory

A network theory approach is mainly a study of social networks, which provides a distinctive focus on social relations such as patterns of relationships. It can be studied how these patterns of network ties can be linked to other patterns of network, and can be analysed to find patterns of how decision-making is happening within a group or network (Kilduff and Tsai, 2003, p.19). The approach includes the studies of the connections and influences within different structures like terrorist networks, such as studies by the researcher Marc Sageman. Some researchers criticise network theory for being a collection of methods and that it contains or borrows other theories such as statistical comparison and psychologi-

cal theories (Kilduff and Tsai, 2003, p. 37). Network theory shifts the level of analysis from the established hierarchical group to *horizontal networks*. The study concentrates more on horizontal rather than hierarchical ties (Pedahzur and Perlinger, 2006, p.1989). Traditional hierarchies are based on top-down management, while networks are decentralized with decision-making and action dispersed among multiple actors. These actors may hold a high degree of local autonomy. Although hierarchy in a traditional sense is absent from the network, the boundaries between networks and hierarchies are not always clear. 'Networks are never managed by single central authority' (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Calvert, 2008, p. 12). Another criticism is from Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen. She states that the scholars of network theory or social networks lack real explanations because they do not gain access to individuals personally involved in radical groups. Her opinion is that the network researchers rely on interview objects like community leaders and outcome from other person's interviews, like social workers in the field (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010).

Terrorist's background

Looking into the substance and explanations of understanding violence, it is true that the explanations concerning why some people use violence have become a controversial topic, particularly among researchers in the area. Many researchers have various theories as to why some people resort to violent activity, such as terrorism. The root causes to become violent have been discussed for years and they include explanations like poverty, trauma, ignorance and madness, the understanding that only *mad* people are capable of taking another person's life (Sageman, 2004, p. 80). Network theory and the study of social networks offer an important insight

into understanding the radicalisation and recruitment process in general, and especially how young Muslims around the world join these networks. The theory has a focus on *who you know*, and underline the importance of group processes and socialisation. Sageman and another scholar Wiktorowicz advocate that the social networks are the ones that transmit radical ideas, and that violent radicalisation takes place within smaller groups, where bonding, peer pressure, and indoctrination gradually change the individual's view of the worlds (Daugaard-Nielsen, 2010, p. 801). Marc Sageman provides a good overview of the different terrorist networks around the world, and explains the power and compulsion within a group. On the other hand, the theory is limited to explaining why they use violence in order to accomplish their goal.

Looking especially at the work of Sageman, we discover that among a study of 132 terrorists, over 60% had some kind of college education and the leadership which is represented by 80%, 20% of the leaders have doctorate degrees (Sageman, 2004, p. 75). It actually shows that these terrorists are more educated than average people worldwide, and that they often come from completely average family relationships, standards and economic security. Sageman also concludes that terrorists are surprisingly normal in terms of mental health (Sageman, 2004, p. 83). This research by Sageman surpasses the former explanations that some people become terrorists because of poverty and madness. Another researcher, Jitka Malečková also gives the same explanation as Sageman as regards the statement that terrorists do not necessarily come from a poor background. Malečková states that; 'One of the major criticisms of the inference that poverty is not a root cause of terrorism because terrorists are less likely to come from impover-

ished background than their non-terrorist countrymen is that terrorists may act out of concern for their poor countrymen or other disadvantaged groups of population, not out of their own personal desperation' (Børgo, 2005, p. 36). This statement can be understood that there is not anything wrong with their mental health, but can immediately show that they can have the ability to care for their own countrymen, those who believe in the same understanding of how the world should be like.

Even though here are still some scholars who explain that lack of opportunities and poverty still has a place among the potential causes of terrorist activities. In Malečková's conclusions she says that; 'research suggest that neither the participants nor the adherents of militant activities in the Middle East are recruited predominantly from the poor' (Børgo, 2005, p. 41). Further on, she also states that there is no evidence from her group's research on both individual and national level that there is any direct linkage between poverty and terrorism (Børgo, 2005, p. 41). Her statements also add up and support Sageman's findings. A distinction between Malečková and Sageman is that Sageman lacks the explanations as regards different levels, while Malečková expresses the levels better in her studies.

The results from these arguments give us a picture that there has been a change of understanding when it comes to discussing the background of terrorists, their level of education, also mental health, that they do not act only because of poverty or madness. They can also act violently because they care for others who have the same belief and common understanding of what is important. On the one hand, the study of terrorist networks gives us an understanding of the terrorist's background, that they come from educated societies, and that poverty in itself does not represent

a main reason. Marc Sageman also explains how the group members share common social background, common psychological make-up, and a particular situation at the time of recruitment (Sageman, 2004, p. 69). The network theory is providing a good overview of statistical information, but on the other hand, it is limited in seeing how some of the statistical information can give answers and it is useful to understand the radicalisation process.

Internal and external aspects

There are different ways of understanding how individuals and groups become radicalised. Within the area of research there can be both internal psychological aspects within a person, but there can also be external factors like compulsion from outside, the society, other individuals or groups. Both scholars Sageman and Wiktorowicz focus on the power of small communicative communities to create shared worlds of meaning that shape identity, perceptions, and preferences. Wiktorowicz also explains the framing theory, which forms the individuals into collectivity. Network theory is more of a sociological theory and explains that radicalisation is a group process where extremist individuals radicalise other people within their social networks (Kleinmann, 2012, p. 280). According to the researcher Scott Kleinmann the network theory is only a part of understanding a radicalisation process, and that there are other theories that can complement the overall understanding. Kleinmann refers to other theories like national cultural theory, which make a distinction between individualists, who are more likely to attack their own people, and collectivists who are more likely to attack *outsiders* to defend the in-group. Another direction, which he mentions, is; 'that people who live in violent

regions and who witness terrorism regularly may seek to imitate terrorists or learn from a culture that glorifies terrorists' (Kleinmann, 2012, p. 280). One of the main arguments within network theory is the compulsion and power that happens within the terrorist network groups, the social bonding and the influence between the group members are external factors that influence each member over time. Network theory explains that the decisions to act violently lie within the group, as group decisions, not as single member's decisions. Another theory, the I3M by Kirkpatrick and Schneider provides a more generic theory, which can be applied to all different actors. It makes a framework, which contains both external and internal factors. The main factor of I3M model is *mobilisation*, which means how a person or a group acts and supports the social movement. For a person to be become mobilised there are three main facilitators; (1) *Identification* with the group, (2) *indoctrination*, how individuals get influenced to join the group and the last one is (3) *interest*, which is the curiosity for the movement. Underneath there are three incentives that trigger the person on physical, emotional and ideological ways through the facilitators (Kirkpatrick and Schneider, 2013, p. 24). This model provides a good overview and includes several factors, both internal and external factors that provide a more complete picture when analysing. Network theory has a lot of its focus on external factors, especially group compulsion in order to explain the radicalisation and decision-making process, but it immediately seems to lack the individual internal aspects, like motivation and incentives.

Scott Kleinmann divides the understanding of radicalisation into three levels. The first one is the (1) *individual-level*, which addresses internal forces which only directly affect the person who is radicalising;

(2) *group-level*, which includes top-down social movement and horizontal social-network recruitment; and (3) *mass-level*, which argues that societal forces or strains that affect large populations are radicalising mechanisms. Kleinmann's understanding is that by 'categorising radicalisation theories in this manner allows for comparison within and across disciplines' (Kleinmann, 2012, p. 280). Other theorists that search for answers about the radicalisation process are McCauley and Moskalenko. They explain different root causes to violence, both at individual, group and mass levels. In their studies one of their findings is that sometimes the decision to act violently appears to be a personal one, often triggered by an individual crisis in that person's life. It can be based on personal psychological aspects, such as grievances, insults, being an *outsider* in the society, not being understood, or not being loved (McCauley and Moskalenko, 2011). This theory goes more into explaining the depth of what happens at the individual level, and it shows that it can come from inside of a person, not necessarily from outside compulsion. To sum up, the network theory focuses more on external factors rather than inherent psychological characteristics or socioeconomic deprivation to understand violent radicalisation. The empirical background conclusions from network studies can be understood as limited, since they do not contain comparisons between different motivations and incentives at the individual level, nor make a distinction between radicalisation processes happening at different levels. In order to get a better understanding of terrorist radicalisation, it is important to see the process that happens at different levels of the society. Individual aspects to act violently are something that McCauley and Moskalenko have a better overview of in their studies, especially talking about the example concerning in-

dividual crisis as a trigger. Kleinmann's understanding of three levels of radicalisation, I3M model with its different factors, hereby both external and internal factors can complement network theory.

Root causes and identity

There seems to be a common opinion among scholars that there is no single root cause of terrorism. Even though there can be many different causes, it is not a reason for stopping searching for different explanations. As mentioned above, McCauley and Moskalenko's research provides good explanations about individual, group and mass radicalisation. One of their main factors is grievance, which you can find at all three levels. Another researcher and film producer, Deeyah Khan has studied Brits who became religious fighters, but later they changed; they abandoned the status of being jihadists and later started to prevent others from joining the terrorist networks. One female tells her story about when she was raped in Britain. She went to the police, but the case lacked evidence and was closed down. She was not supported, the perpetrator was not prosecuted and she did not get any form of reconciliation. The woman became angry, especially towards the government. She searched for support and solutions, and wanted the perpetrator to be punished. As a part of that rejection she was neither heard nor understood and became radicalised. She said that in that new society perpetrators were punished within the system (Khan, 2015). Another example of grievance is also underpinned by the actions taken by the Black widows of Chechnya. Their way of sealing revenge for their own experience of rape, but also deaths of husbands, brothers, sons at Russians hands (McCauley and Moskalenko, 2011, p. 16). The reaction for revenge or justice can be against an individual or against

a whole group. The examples show that one of the triggers to become violent can be the anger that appears not to be heard or understood when a terrible crisis appears. McCauley and Moskalenko explain it as follows; 'harm to self or loved ones can move individuals to hostility and violence towards perpetrators' (McCauley and Moskalenko, 2011, p. 13). Another scholar who studied Islamic radicalisation in Western Europe, Syed Mansoob Murshed identifies that also group grievance can be turned into individual grievance. He argues that 'low social standing may encourage individuals to abandon their primary identity in favour of other, less frowned upon, identities' (Murshed, 2011, p. 265). In his conclusions, Murshed explains that 'political and economic inequalities suffered by Muslims, both worldwide and within Europe, are central to the formation of their collective grievances. Evidence from the country-based profiles further shows that discrimination against Muslims is rife, leading to conditions that are ripe for political mobilisation' (Mansoob Murshed, 2011, p. 275). The same aspects here mentioned are also represented in Khans documentary where young Muslims in Britain get angry at the government and society because they feel constantly watched, accused, suspected, feel as outsiders, and are not able to find their identity. In Scott Kleinmann's work you find the same arguments; 'joining a terrorist movement offers an identity stabilizer for people with low self-esteem or for those who, as excluded minorities, are searching for belonging as a way to consolidate and defend their identity' (Kleinmann, 2008, p. 280).

Not all persons who become terrorists are connected to a network; an example is the white male Anders Behring Breivik who killed 69 persons in Norway because he had a different view on how the environment should look like. It is though stated

that he is not mentally ill, and therefore he got convicted. He might share the same opinions as others, or other groups, but there were not any clear linking that he was integrated in a network. Another discussion in this case is how you categorize and see his actions, and whether they are an act of terrorism or mass murderer? Since there is no clear common definition of terrorism, it can be difficult to distinguish and categorize the activity.

Looking at the root causes and to understand violent radicalisation, there are theories that revolve around case-study approaches that have a more nuanced view of the different motivations and trigger factors that can lie within different individuals. In these studies, there are researchers like Petter Nesser who look at cases across Europe. He explains and shows that the socioeconomic profiles of individual members vary widely. Besides, he also discovers and identifies a limited number of personality types or roles within terrorist groups. These personalities have different roles and play different parts, also in the recruitment process and decision-making process (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010). On the one hand, network theory provides many factors to how people join terrorist networks, but somehow lack further explanations as root causes to violent actions. On the other hand, theories presented give more knowledge of root causes such as grievances at individual, group and mass levels, individual crisis as a trigger, feeling as an outsider of the society and not able to find their identity. As already mentioned, not all terrorists are connected to a network either, and these individual terrorists also need to be studied.

Conclusion

Is network theory the most suitable for understanding terrorist radicalisation? In gen-

eral, the answer is no. The network theory itself does not give a clear answer to why some people turn into violent actions, especially at the individual level. Though the theory provides a good overview of statistical information, such as the network itself, the connections between different individuals, and terrorists' background such as their level of education. It gives a good overview of the relations between individuals and explains the group compulsion and the recruitment process. On the other hand, it is limited to how to identify the root causes in order to understand the radicalisation process.

Also, the empiric background conclusions from network studies can be understood as limited, since they neither contain comparisons between different motivations and incentives at the individual level, nor the theory distinguishes the different levels within the radicalisation process. As mentioned before, network theory neither explores the root causes or triggers of violent actions thoroughly, nor makes a clear distinction between internal and external aspects that influence a person. Elements about individual aspects to act violently are something McCauley and Moskalenko have a better overview of in their studies, especially the example about how an individual crisis can be a trigger for violence, and also their explanations of grievances at different levels. Kleinmann's three levels of radicalisation and the I3M model can complement the network theory in offering a more structured analysis. The I3M model gives a good overview because it provides different facilitators and incentives, which can be applied to both individuals and groups. The model also includes triggers that can develop from both internal and external factors. The physiological incentives can be related to individuals and manipulation as a facilitator can be related to a group.

As final comments, all the different theories available use different sources, study different levels and areas of why some people become violent terrorists. It is rather difficult to provide only one theory that gives all the correct answers. Looking at all these different theories it seems that they need to be studied individually, but also compared to each other. The final argument is that the theories need to be looked at as complementary to each other, as they focus on the different levels of analysis. Even though network theory does not explain terrorist radicalisation, it is useful in a broad context, especially to drive the mapping of terrorist networks in general. The analysis can locate both informal and formal leaders, who are essential for the network survival and decision-making process. The information drawn from the network analysis can provide results, which are essential to counter terrorism. Further research and theories on terrorism might give or draw better links between the already mentioned theories. Research findings will change because the environment change, terrorism change and so do terrorists.

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