La Toya Waha [ed.]

United by Violence, Divided by Cause?

A Comparison of Drivers of Radicalisation and Violence in Asia and Europe

With a Foreword by Christian Echle

Nomos

KONRAD ADENAUER STIFTUNG

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Foreword

Germany has experienced various forms of terrorism over the past 50 years, starting with the left-wing extremist attacks of the Red Army Faction since the 1970s, followed by right-wing extremist acts since the 1990s, and the threat of Islamist terror after the attack on the World Trade Center, and its actual appearance in a series of Islamist attacks since the 2010s. Throughout these five decades, security authorities had to adapt to new groups of perpetrators and different modi operandi in their fight against violent extremism. After the end of the Cold War, terror has become one of the world's greatest challenges to security and social cohesion, regardless of whether the attacks are carried out in the name of religion, ethnicity or ideology. The consequential changes in the global security architecture, which particularly concern dealing with non-state actors, were accompanied by large and sometimes painful learning processes and have not been completed to date, as the war against the Taliban in Afghanistan shows.

It took humankind centuries of war to develop a martial law which guides violent conflicts and makes war the domain of states. One of its core principles became the greatest possible protection of the civilian population. Even if the institutions which are to uphold these principles have been weakened over the last few years, there is a general understanding about the nature of war crimes and how to prosecute them. In stark contrast, the fight against terrorism seems to lack any globally acknowledged rules. There is no formal way to end a violent confrontation between a network of terrorists and a nation state, and no international body that could help facilitate negotiations. Many demands of terrorist networks are at best vague and can never be realised in a globalised world or democratic societies. While some of the emerging threats to global security – like cyber warfare – have to be met – at least partially – by a set of new rules which contains these threats' destructive potential, this is not an option for terrorism.

Terrorists are arbitrary in their choice of tools as long as they can create the highest possible level of fear and insecurity in society. Their victims have nothing in common but to belong to a group of "others" – be it alien in belief, in ethnicity or in ideology. This is true for the attacks on churches and luxury hotels in Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday in April 2019 as much as for the attack on mosques in New Zealand during Friday prayers, a month earlier. Both acts are exemplifying the blind hatred and brutality of

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terrorist attacks, often combined with the willingness to die for one's own convictions. They were carried out in the name of very different ideologies. Nevertheless, the question arises: Are there connections in the respective radicalisation processes whose identification could enable us to better understand radicalisation per se? And would these connections allow us to recognise the process of radicalisation at an earlier stage, or even to prevent it?

Looking at the public discourse, this question has so far only been partially answered. From a purely demographic point of view, it is certainly true that men between 20 and 40 years of age are most susceptible to radicalisation. But the role of women – especially in financing terrorist activities and recruiting new members for the networks – is rightfully receiving more attention in recent research in this area. Lack of perspective and experiences of exclusion are widely regarded as important factors in the radicalisation process. However, this does not explain the terrorist activities of materially well-equipped actors from the upper middle class as in the Easter attacks in Sri Lanka or the Islamist terror acts in the Muslim majority societies in Indonesia and Malaysia. Last but not least, the role of the internet in its various possible uses, from recruitment and reinforcement to the organisation and distribution of acts of violence, does not seem to have been sufficiently researched.

Konrad Adenauer Stiftung has been addressing all these aspects with its "Regional Programme Political Dialogue Asia" for several years, especially on the platform of the "Counter Terrorism Dialogue Asia Europe". Since 2015, this format has brought together representatives of security agencies and ministries from both world regions who are involved in the fight against terrorism and the prevention of violence. The exchange promotes the mutual understanding and trust that is necessary in order to effectively counter global terrorist networks. In addition, the format gives the opportunity to present particularly interesting case studies, such as the successful reintegration of radicalised criminals in Singapore, to a broader audience.

At the same time, this dialogue also shows how difficult it is to combat globally organised terror. The competences and capacities of the respective authorities differ not only strikingly between Europe and Asia, but sometimes also within the same region. Security agencies often find it difficult to share relevant information with other countries, or to classify the information received from other countries as valid and important.

In quite a few cases, politically motivated narratives furthermore prevent a closer examination of the real causes of radicalisation. This can be observed in some Asian countries, where governments are trying to play down the influence of extreme Islamist forces within their societies, but

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can also be said for Europe, where some countries have underestimated the radicalisation of right-wing and left-wing extremists for a long time.

In order to address these challenges, a complementary new approach was chosen for this publication. Researchers dealing with radicalisation processes and political violence in different disciplines and with a focus on a range of ideologies were invited to participate. The aim of the project is to identify commonalities in these processes and to provide basic research on the nature of radicalisation. In the long term, we hope that this will enable more targeted prevention measures that can be implemented across countries and regions in Europe and Asia. At the event in Singapore, the challenges of this approach became apparent when it was already challenging to find a common terminology for the processes described. But the effort is worth it, considered how complex the process of radicalisation is. Psychological, sociological, cultural and political influences can only be comprehensively understood if experts from the respective disciplines sit together at one table. I would therefore like to thank all participants and authors who have contributed their expertise and experience to this project. My special thanks go to Dr. La Toya Waha, who designed the project and drove it forward at the KAS Regional Programme in Singapore. It is my firm belief that the results of this publication provide concrete help for better dealing with the threat of terrorism and radicalisation, and in addition also provide a good basis for further interdisciplinary research projects in this area.

Singapore, 21 April 2020
Christian Echle
Director

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Putting together a book of this kind requires the support from distinguished scholars, but also the freedom to be creative and the resources to implement ideas.

This book builds on the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung's long-standing effort to promote cooperation and exchange in the field of security and countering violent extremism and terrorism between Europe and Asia and many other parts of the world. The Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) is committed towards securing and increasing peace, freedom and prosperity in Europe and throughout the world, and this book shall be understood as an attempt to contribute to fulfilling this obligation. Without the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung's global engagement for international cooperation and dialogue, this project would not have been possible.

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