

RED WORKSHOP PAPER

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The following is meant as a plain-language articulation of how we define Red and what we see as recurring dynamics within the phenomenon of terrorism. These descriptions are meant to be taken as “rules of thumb”—dynamics that are mostly true, most of the time rather than comprehensive or complete. *This document is meant as a discussion starter—something for participants to react to—more than as a declarative statement.* These dynamics are written very simply in an effort to reduce them to dynamics we discuss and map in a systems diagram that locates Red within the context of Blue and Green.

What is Red?

Red are actors who engage in violence to (1) say “no” to a political, religious, societal, or other condition they object to, (2) or say “yes” to a transformative vision they wish to implement. Either way, they choose violence as a means to enact that objection or vision because they perceive nonviolent means of change or response insufficient or nonviable. We commonly refer to Red as terrorists or violent extremists, and for our purposes we consider them largely non-state actors.

- An actor can be an individual or a group. A movement is made up of individuals and groups. A movement is inspired by a motivating ideology, oftentimes expressed as a narrative in which the actors are characters attempting to live out a plotline to fulfill a mission. *Ideology* and *narrative* may be used interchangeably in this workshop. Individual *beliefs* are parts of an ideology or narrative.

Red actors can be binned by two basic impulses. Some are *reactionary*—they are resistance movements. Others are *revolutionary*—they are transformational change movements that seek to overthrow or eradicate a system in order to create a better one in its place. Many actors are a mix of both, but have one impulse “in the driver’s seat.”

- For example, The Earth Liberation Front is (or was) reactionary. Communist fronts were revolutionary. Al-Qaeda is mostly reactionary with a very poorly articulated revolutionary vision on the back end—the group (and those who hold parallel beliefs) seeks a return to a prior, more pious condition, and envision a society (to be sorted out later) rooted in that piety.

Binning in this manner allows us to group present Red movements and anticipate some future Red movements. Some future terrorist movements may arise in objection to a yet-to-appear world change (and are thus reactionary); others may be inspired to implement a yet-to-appear vision that replaces a system they find exploitative (and are thus revolutionary). Considering both basic terrorist orientations may help us identify as many different types of future terrorisms as possible.

Can we forecast Red behavior?

If we can forecast what people will say “no” or “yes” to , and if we can forecast the breakdowns, or lack of faith in, or absence of nonviolent change avenues, we can forecast the emergence of some new Red movements.

The forces, drivers, or aspects of the world that Red actors object to more often come from Green (present or emerging world developments) than from Blue (actions or policies of the US Government). The revolutionary visions that inspire some Red actors most often emerge from nonviolent ideologies within the Green world.

Why do people join a Red movement?

At the macro scale, we have seen a spike in Red as a phenomenon over the past several decades. This is probably because in a post-Cold War, increasingly post-Westphalian global system, and in the face of the velocity of world changes and onset of globalization, more and more people object to the onset of these cultural, societal, political, or other changes, or find inadequate the emerging systems of economics, governance, faith, and society. More to the point: some of these changes may be increasingly perceived as existential threats to long-held, treasured notions of meaning and belonging and self-determination.

Also, as a result of these rapid changes, some people lateral back into perennial identities as global persons (“citizens of the world” rather than citizens of a nation) and/or according to their religious identities (“citizens of the Kingdom of God or of the ummah or a caliphate” rather than of a nation), or combine their identities into religious nationalisms. These reactions to change can yield great positive change and negative change, great positive visions and negative visions. For Red actors, it means that their goals may not be secular political goals (earthly and in this lifetime), but instead may be rooted in perennial or even cosmic priorities (not of this world and efforts to assert divine agendas into earthly situations).

At the micro scale—the scale of individual motive—people become Red actors for a number of reasons. Adherence to violent extremist rationales and membership in Red movements can provide for those who need or want it:

- Life meaning and/or belonging by providing a cause in which one is a hero struggling against villains to save their treasured world.
- Direction for lost people, particularly in the wake of a traumatic personal loss.
- A way to define one’s virtue, worth, or pride through opposition.
- A way to give name to one’s floating fears and anxieties, and channel for one’s anger.
- Something or someone to blame for one’s lot in life.
- A way to baptize one’s bigotry and make it God’s.
- A way to validate one’s absolutist or purist tendencies by giving one a way to demonize or purge from one’s world what they cannot accept.

- A justification to pursue power in the name of rescuing one's treasured world or in the name of making one feel safe from whatever frightens them.

We find that motivations to join a Red movement are the result of a range of causes working in concert, even for a single individual. We hold that violent extremist ideology or rationale is always present within the individual's motive, however, and always plays a role *otherwise those people would pursue courses of action other than to join a Red movement*.

It's too easy to dismiss terrorists as mentally ill, broken, or simply irrational—usually they are not. We find sheer thuggish-ness, mental illness, and true sociopathy relatively rare among terrorist movements; we find that most terrorists are relatively normal people who have come to extreme conclusions. Most Red actors are sincere rather than cynical, and accurately express their motives rather than cynically present an ideology they have crafted to manipulate others.

Dissuading someone of belief in a violent extremist ideology and extricating that person from a terrorist movement can be difficult because extricating those beliefs may deprive them of their identity, meaning in life, and definition of their own virtue, worth, and nobility. It can take away their “good war,” and without that war they don't know who they are any more. Helping them find alternative life meaning may draw them out of a terrorist movement.

What do Red actors believe or at least assert?

All violent extremist ideologies or rationales contain six elements. All six are necessary. The removal of one or more makes the rationale fall apart. These Six Elements are laid out in our attachment *The Structure of Violent Extremist Ideologies*..

How can we tell the good guys from the bad guys?

Violent Red ideologies usually are derived from nonviolent ideologies. Those nonviolent ideologies are either benevolent (constructive), or firebrands (bigoted or fear-driven). Firebrands often inspire violent Red actors *but usually do not realize it and blanch when they learn they have*. Put another way, firebrands provide five of the Six Elements of a violent extremist ideology or rationale.

- Salafi (Islamic fundamentalist) firebrands inspired al-Qaeda. Environmentalist firebrands inspired The Earth Liberation Front.
- Violent Red actors are or were inspired by a nonviolent ideology or movement but find the nonviolent approaches of the rest of the movement insufficient, inadequate, or outright treasonous or guilty of diluting the needs or goals of the movement. Al-Qaeda finds the Muslim Brotherhood, Saudi religious establishment, and fellow Salafis inept or inadequate to fulfill God's Will, and see their use of violence truer in purpose and principle to God's requirements for his followers.
- Benevolents and even some firebrands can help dismantle the Six Elements within a Red actor's mind.

What do Red movements want? What do they expect will happen if they win?

Red movements do not necessarily seek to conquer and rarely seek power for themselves. (Most Red actors assume their efforts are more apt to be self-sacrificial than self-successful. They often do not assume they will personally survive the conflict in which they are engaged. For example, Osama bin Laden and Anders Breivik expressed that they did not expect to see the world they called for realized.)

- Reactionary terrorists want a world in which their treasured world or life perspective is safe from the world changes they fear. They believe that if the bad guys are removed from the equation, their world will self-correct.
- Revolutionary terrorists want a world in which the system that causes the vicious cycle of exploitation or oppression they object to has been destroyed. They believe that if that bad system has been broken and marginalized, a better system can be created and put into place. They are fighting to destroy that bad system in order to create the window of opportunity necessary to build a new, better system.

Red movements do not see themselves as cruel, nor do they “wake up every day trying to figure out how to destroy” Blue. Red movements see themselves as noble groups who are trying to persuade the good guys to rise up as a tsunami against their enemy (by conducting attacks akin to “shots heard ‘round the world” meant to inspire an uprising by demonstrating that their foe, while implacable, is actually defeatable), and dissuade the bad guys from continuing their bad behavior by striking fear into their hearts. (Because we see and understand the latter more so than the former, we refer to Red as “terrorists.”) Red movements see themselves as persuasion movements.

Several other points should be made about a Red actor’s perception of itself:

- In Red’s eyes, they do not attack innocents; they attack the complicit.
- Red does not necessarily oppose (or care about) Blue until or unless Blue acts against Red (or Red perceives Blue acting against it). The larger Blue’s actions against them, the more Red considers them their main enemy. Red defines itself according to the problem it seeks to solve more than against the enemy who caused or preserves that problem’s existence.

What sustains a Red movement?

Some actions exacerbate Red’s actions (by validating its motivating narrative) and some undermine it (by negating its motivating narrative). Blue and/or Green can, through its actions, egg on a vicious cycle with Red or create a virtuous cycle that eliminates Red instead. Behaving like the enemy Red claims one to be validates and can supercharge the validity of Red’s ideology, worldview, claims, and actions among those it seeks to persuade or inspire.

When this vicious cycle is in place, Red and Blue actors can derive life meaning from opposing each other. This process is referred to as “reciprocal radicalization.” Also, Red actors can derive life meaning from opposing other Red actors – or even Green actors – and create a cycle there. (For example, private citizen Islamophobes who burn Korans in public validate al-Qaeda’s claims that the West is at war with Islam despite US Government claims to the contrary. Similarly, cartoons published by Charlie Hebdo—a Green actor—were taken by some Red actors as an attack on Islam, and rather than attack the local Blue actor, the government of France, the Red actors attacked the Green actor, Charlie Hebdo staffers.)

What kills a Red movement?

What ends a violent extremist group may not end the violent extremist movement that inspired it.

We find that many Red actors are led by an ideological perspective rather than by people, and that arresting or killing people does not remove the movement's "commander." Even arresting or killing everyone in a group does not end the movement; the motivating ideology—if left intact or validated through belligerent countermeasures—can inspire new groups into being.

Red movements are vulnerable to two major things—gaining a viable nonviolent change method, and/or losing part of their rationale or *raison d'être*. If we can forecast—or create the conditions for—those ends, we can anticipate or manufacture the end of a Red movement.

As we mentioned before, Red ideologies or rationales are made of up six rhetorical elements. Once one or more of these Six Elements is removed from a Red movement's rationale, however, the movement tends to collapse.

- Extremist groups customize each of these Elements to appeal to specific, local audiences—for example, they will fulfill the *Two Camps* element by scapegoating or blaming a local group, government, or actor for woes that locals suffer. (This is spoken like, "There is a world war on Islam that's going on across the globe. The government here or these particular people are the local agents or local arm of the conspiracy. Fighting them will solve what ails us, and will strike a blow against the global conspiracy by proxy." Similarly, "Attacking cartoonists who publish offensive depictions of the Prophet are not attacks on freedom of expression; they are attacks on an arm of the conspiracy against Islam.")
- When a Red actor loses an element, it may attempt to replace the lost element with a substitution. For example, if American forces leave an area, Red actors may claim that a local group of people are the agents of the conspiracy against Islam instead and so continue to conduct violence. Rather than losing the *Two Camps* element of their rationale, a Red actor names a new enemy to retain the *Two Camps*.
- Gaining a viable nonviolent change method can deprive a Red actor of violent *Method* from their rationale and can also undermine *Danger of Contamination* if the Red actor finds the nonviolent change implementers trustworthy even though they are in an enemy *Camp*.
- A simple change in world circumstance can remove an element. For example, the collapse of the Soviet Union invalidated communist revolutionary groups' arguments that communism was a viable form of governance (depriving their rationale of its *Reward*) and that the pursuit of revolutionary violence to install communist rule was worthwhile (depriving its *Method*). Similarly, the violent strain of the New Left of the 1970s around the world went into rapid decline following the end of the Vietnam War—a development that removed the *Crisis Point* from its rationale.

Nonviolent religious and ideological actors within Green routinely successfully inoculate members of their faiths and communities against belief in most or any of the Six Elements and have prevented Red from becoming anything larger than fringe movements. Actions by Blue or others within Green can help or hinder these benevolent inoculation efforts.