Countering Violent Extremism or Resolving Conflicts? Bridging Micro- and Macro Perspectives on Countering Jihad

by Mona Kanwal Sheikh and Isak Svensson

Abstract

This article brings together two divided fields that suggest different solutions on how to counter violent jihad, namely Conflict Resolution (CR) research and Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) approaches. Common for the CVE approaches to jihadism is that their main level of analysis is the individual, seeking to understand what/who attracts the individual recruit to embrace extremist views, in order to devise strategies for preventing the individual radicalization process. In contrast, the CR framework has paid less attention to violent jihadism as individual radicalization but focuses more on group behavior. In this article, we explore whether synergy can be created by combining insights from these two fields. Three areas appear to be potentially fruitful for a future research agenda: creating interaction between research on disengagement and conflict transformation, creating synergy between research on conflict extension and the globalization of jihad, and searching for solutions using institutional forms of religious autonomy. The article ends by exemplifying how jihadi conflicts can be analyzed, both from a worldview perspective but also as a reflection of a macro-securitization process.

Keywords: jihadist conflicts, Islamist, conflict resolution, countering violent extremism, religion

Introduction

This article aims at examining the field of Conflict Resolution (CR) and its nascent thinking on jihadi conflicts and asking how it can utilize relevant insights from radicalization literature and the derived Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) approach to violent jihad. It is puzzling that two fields that have so much in common, not least their ambitions to find practical solutions to a shared challenge, rarely interact.[1] We conceptualize violent jihad broadly as violence committed by actors with self-proclaimed jihadist claims i.e. they frame their struggle as a religious obligation. While both CR and CVE are broad fields, and we cannot hope to capture all of the variances within these fields, our scope here is to explore the ways these two approaches have been used to study violent jihad. We do not suggest that the fields need to be merged, but rather that in the study of violent jihad, insights and approaches that have dominated in one field may be useful to be considered in the other.

The CVE framework covers literature and a range of policy initiatives that apply socioeconomic, psychological, or sociological frameworks for understanding the reasons for radicalization and analyzing options for countering-strategies.[2] Common for the CVE approaches to jihadism is that their main level of analysis is the vulnerable individual, asking what/who attracts the individual recruit to extremist views or extremist networks, in order to inform strategies for preventing the individual radicalization process.[3]

By contrast, the CR framework has paid less attention to violent jihadism as an individual form of radicalization process and focused either on the groups and movements as the relevant level of analysis, or on the conflict constellation as the main analytical category. Our review of the CR literature leads us to identify some areas of synergy. In particular, we point at how the question of individual disengagement and collective conflict transformation need to be better understood by drawing on insights from both literatures/approaches.

The article will proceed as follows. First, we review the field of CR, its merits and blind spots when it comes to understanding jihadist conflict. This leads to an examination of focal areas from CVE approaches on how to deal with violent jihad that can be useful for CR research. The final sections briefly introduce examples of theoretical approaches—macro-securitization and worldview-analysis—that represent ways to merge insights from both perspectives.

How CR Approaches Are Seeking to Counter Jihad

The insight that conflicts can be resolved—not only won, lost or avoided—is ancient, but the idea that it can be worthwhile exploring through scholarly study is little more than half a century old.[4] The *Journal of Conflict*

Resolution was founded in 1957, and this can be regarded a growing acknowledgment of the value of studying how conflicts, at various levels of analysis, can be dealt with in a peaceful manner. Conflict resolution has been a central theme of interest for peace research since its inception.[5]

A primary, although not exclusive, interest has been in actors who are armed (governments and rebel groups). This interest in armed actors has led to the field being dominated by group-level analyses. Studying conflict resolution on the group level can thus be seen as a reflection of the capacity to use force of various actors. Whereas individuals may cause havoc, the destructive capacity of individuals pales compared to the one of armed groups and state actors. Governments and organized non-state actors (rebel groups) have access to material, military, economic, social, and cultural resources which they can mobilize when engaging in conflicts, making conflicts where they are involved particularly destructive and dangerous.[6]

The group-level analysis has traditionally led to an interest in collective outcomes, rather than focusing primarily on individual decisions. For instance, CR has been particularly interested in studying how peace agreements, as a collective outcome in social, and particularly armed conflicts, can be reached. The process of reaching, as well as the content of, peace settlements that meet the aspirations of the engaged actors, be they state, non-state or inter-governmental, actors, have therefore been key focal points of study in the field of CR. Group-level analysis has been the focus in conflict resolution, but also one of its weaknesses. Increasingly, CR as a field has started to explore micro-dynamics of conflict resolution processes by, for example, paying more attention to the role of attitudes of populations in post-conflict peacemaking,[7] as well as processes which drive individual level rebel-recruitment.[8] However, this has so far not been extended to the analysis of violent jihad.

Thus, there is a widespread recognition that parties in armed conflicts are not unitary actors, and that there is a need to study intra-party dynamics. Group-level decisions are formed through dynamics between forces that may have very different positions and interests in terms of reaching conciliatory relationships with the other side. In particular, there can be tensions between hardliners ('hawks') and softliners ('doves') within one side in conflict, tensions that may not necessarily be visible from the outside and that may lead to contradictory behaviors and statements. Actors are not unitary and different (sub-)actors and (sub-)factions have different incentives in terms of seeking a resolution of conflicts—an insight that has generated considerable research on spoilers in conflict resolution processes.[9]

Insights from the Conflict Resolution Approach

There are a set of fundamental insights and perspectives that have guided and permeated the study of conflict resolution, which are important in the study of violent jihad. The first is to study the armed *conflicts* and insurgences in which jihadi actors are involved, rather than extremism or radicalism more broadly. Most jihadi violence occurs within the context of armed insurrections, and only a fraction occurs outside of zones of active armed conflicts, as manifested in sporadic attacks in Western countries. Focusing on conflicts therefore enables CR to deal with the thrust of the problem and enables CR to compare and contrast jihadist conflicts in relation to other types of armed insurgencies.

The second focus of the CR approach is its *relational* perspective: conflict is not primarily studied through the perspective of one side, but as an interlocked system. Conflicts are seen as social systems of antagonistic relationships between actors, and the resolution of conflict requires attention to all the actors included in that social system, paying attention to their behavior, positions, attitudes, and interests. Conceptually, conflict resolution has analyzed conflicts as incompatible claims to the same set (or, at least, perceived set) of limited resources between at least a pair of conflict actors (so-called *dyads),* or several conflict actors *(multi-party conflicts).* If we want to understand why a conflict is resolved or not, we thus need to pay attention to all actors involved in a conflict, and their respective relationships.

The second insight of the field of conflict resolution is the need to pay attention to the incompatibility from the perspectives of the belligerents themselves. This has led CR to explore the dynamic relationship between conflict parties' *stated positions and the underlying interests or needs*. Structural perspectives of social inequality, including class-, gender- or nationalist perspectives, rest on an assumption of what conflicts are about (e.g. eco-

nomic inequalities, gender inequalities, and ethnic differences), even though the parties in conflict themselves may not necessarily be (fully) aware of this. Conflict resolution, by contrast, takes the parties' own perspectives and self-definition as a starting point for the analysis. This means that the stated positions of parties in conflict need to be taken seriously—which helps to categorize conflicts by dimensions of incompatibility—but also that the resolution of conflict requires the parties to search for potentially common underlying interests. An analysis of conflict must pay attention to what the parties themselves say about *why* they are fighting, but at the same time, not take the stated reason as the final answer: the diagnosis of conflict resolution requires that questions are asked about the underlying interests and, even more so, needs that parties in conflict have—the deeper reasons why they pursue a particular aspiration in a conflict.

By digging deeper in an analytical sense, conflict resolution can help to shed light on the reasons that lie behind suggested solutions. If these reasons can be disentangled and made explicit, a basis for other types of solutions can be created, which meet the interests or at least the needs of the parties, but not necessarily in a way that was originally desired by the parties themselves.

A third insight from CR is that, since conflict escalatory dynamics will kick in to further escalate conflicts once they have started, the resolution of conflict will not occur until the parties exhaust themselves, at least in some respect. Processes of conflicts tend to reinforce themselves, up to the point when further escalation is not possible, given the available resources and limited interests of the parties in achieving their originally stated aspirations. Serious negotiation between antagonists will not be initiated until the situation is ripe for resolution: when the parties have reached a stalemate from which they cannot escalate the conflict, while simultaneously being disincentivized to move away from this stalemate due to the perceived costs being too high. In short, conflict actors will generally not be willing to come to the negotiation table unless there is a so-called 'mutually hurting stalemate'.[10] Still, hurting stalemates are not enough. Conflict resolution requires opportunities and space for finding a mutually acceptable outcome. There has to be a formula on how to settle the conflict in the broadest way. Moreover, conflict resolution requires the presence of valid spokespersons.

CR has, like other fields, been theorized on the basis of a certain empirical scope, primarily on the series of successful conflict resolution attempts in the early 1990s, most of which were not by actors involved in violent jihad. Whether the insights of conflict resolution are applicable therefore remains an open empirical question, but the specificity of jihadist conflicts pushes us toward some considerations that are new to the field.

Firstly, while conflicts are, from a CR perspective, pursued to advance underlying interests and/or needs, what about situations where waging conflict is itself the aspiration? What if religious actors are in fact fighting for religion, or in defense of religion, so that religious claims are not just a rhetorical cover over some more earthly issues that are assumed by some to be the 'true' cause of conflict? Some jihadist actors may engage in conflict because they value the fight itself, as a religious obligation, or the expected reward—a place in paradise. This would represent a fundamental challenge to the CR perspective. It would affect, for instance, the perceptions of costs in conflicts. Can belligerents be incentivized to move from the battlefield toward the negotiation table, if death (sacrifice) and destruction (fighting for God) is valued as a price rather than perceived as costs?

Secondly, the CR framework requires that, ultimately, there must be possible solutions in which both parties' aspirations, or at least their interests and needs, are met simultaneously. There has to be a 'zone-of-agreement' in order for a process of conflict resolution to make sense. But do such zones of agreements exist in jihadist conflicts where the claims relate to the protection of the sovereignty of God?

Thirdly, CR approaches apply a schematic conflict structure, where the government is often on one side of the conflict dyad and the rebels on the other. Transnational jihadist groups like the Islamic State or al-Qaeda are, however, not opposed to only one government. This has implications for bargaining, as transnational jihadist movements can retreat to other countries. It has also implications for theories of 'conflict ripeness' and 'mutually hurting stalemates'—assumptions that are foundational for much CR thinking.[11]

How CVE Approaches Are Seeking to Counter Jihad

The bulk of the literature on jihadism that arose in the wake of 9/11 was inclined to focus on the radicalization process of the individual, although some of the literature also focused on group or organizational levels of analysis. Part of the literature is interdisciplinary and attempts to combine factors of explanation such as moral outrage about a perceived war against Islam, the resonance of jihad with personal experiences, and mobilization of networks.[12] Focus has primarily been on the individual, sources of discontent, or influence from a "radicalizer", who is often seen as the instigator of the radicalization process, disconnected from macro-level conflict structures. CVE practice is part of this trend, which developed from policy demands to think tanks and academic research centers which were expected to explain the phenomena of either jihadist violence or the individual embracement of jihadist ideas through their respective disciplinary lenses. Psychologists became preoccupied with searching for cognitive patterns,[13] sociologists and area specialists (and much of the public policy community) with social networks,[14] and political scientists with questions related to counterinsurgency and foreign fighters.[15] Another overall trait of the CVE practices is that, like radicalization research, they are based on psychological and sociological explanations, sometimes in a fruitful interplay, and sometimes as isolated frameworks for explanation.

CVE practices offer insights into the practices of engagement in, and disengagement from, terrorism,[16] focusing on building resilience and reducing the structural causes to terrorism (discrimination, corruption, lack of democracy, etc.). In addition, there are proposals made in programs for bringing back to society members of violent extremist groups, usually referred to as 'disengagement strategies'.[17] Incentives can include amnesties, job training and education for reintegration, economic subsidies to participants and their families, as well as introducing them to new social networks.[18]

A second insight that particularly radicalization studies bring to the table is a focus on the *centrality of legitimacy* in efforts to address the attractiveness of jihad.[19] One analysis of terrorism in Europe has, for instance, shown that "legitimacy-challenges" can explain the rise of terrorism in selected European countries. Engene, for example, found in 2007 that the countries that faced the biggest challenges from homegrown terrorism were characterized by three types of legitimacy problems: ethnic fragmentation leading to separatist movements, integration problems marginalizing some groups of society, and problems with transforming from one type of governance to another (e.g., from democracy to dictatorship, or reverse).[20]

Finally, CVE and radicalization approaches to jihadism have, due to their focus on ideology and religion, led to multiple understandings of the role of religion in mobilization. Whereas most of this literature is preoccupied with causalities (between religion and violence), and is also often criticized for drawing too-simplistic chains of causation, they have nevertheless opened up spaces for multidisciplinary debates on what the role of religion is and whether it is a minor or a major driver of jihadist violence.[21] This has ultimately led to a multidimensional approach to religion, thinking of it not only as ideology, but also identity, emotions, culture, etc. This has opened a venue for the study of the significance of religious emotions in conflict escalation,[22] and thrown new light on the significance of jihadi culture.[23]

It is often hard to strictly separate literature that deals with radicalization (and its causes) and assumptions behind "countering" extremism approaches, since the latter is based on assumptions or theories generated by the former. Rather than entering here into a discussion about weaknesses of the radicalization concept or offering a description of its main theories,[24] we instead want to discuss in the following the specificity of the CVE focus in terms of its thinking on countering radicalization and extremism. Taken as a whole, existing countering strategies deal with almost everything—ranging from border security to community policing, from intelligence gathering from social media to the development of counter-narratives that are focused on prevention of radicalization, while also covering so-called exit-programs in which individuals are assisted in leaving extremist environments.

Three countering paradigms run through the literature: one of the most dominant is to conduct interventions aimed at "at-risk individuals".[25] These approaches are, however, sometimes criticized for being counterproductive as they can contribute to strengthening vulnerable individuals' feelings of marginalization. A second

countering paradigm is to counter extremist ideas, for example by building resilience against extremist ideas among vulnerable communities. Concretely, in US policies, this has meant countering violent extremist propaganda while promoting US ideals.[26] Finally, a third countering paradigm entails disrupting potential social triggers to extremism (e.g., job loss, discrimination). This also includes focusing on social networks and leaders. The physical presence of radical charismatic persons leading extremist networks are in some instances described as a major reason why terrorist acts take place in some environments but not in others, in spite of similar socioeconomic characteristics.[27]

Disengagement and Conflict Transformation

Based on our brief review of the two fields and the different discussions that flourished within them, we shall in the following try to identify some areas of synergies: how the CVE and CR perspectives can be fruitfully combined in the study of violent jihad.

A question that arises is whether CR can gain from insights into disengagement processes and the transformation of violent to nonviolent activities. The core question of this research field continues to be: what makes individuals leave jihadi movements? Part of the CR literature on armed-rebel-to-political-party transformation (as a CR mechanism) already deals with this aspect.[28] How can the insights from the study of individual disengagement and collective conflict transformation be integrated? If both approaches are used simultaneously, they can ideally serve to strengthen each other. When rebel groups and governments sit down at the table and jointly discuss programs of demobilization, space is opened for conflict resolution. Alternatively, when disengagement campaigns deplete an insurgent group's manpower, it can push its leaders to seek accommodation. Ultimately, a successful transformation from a violent to a civil actor requires that both cadres and supporters are ready to disengage from violence.[29] We have seen such transformations occurring in Egypt (Egyptian Islamic Group), the Philippines (Moro Islamic Liberation Front) and Tajikistan (Islamic Renaissance Party). Yet, there are also tensions between the different counterstrategies in terms of their emphasis on the group or the individual: measures aimed at individual deradicalization aim to weaken and undermine the group, whereas the facilitation of rebel-to-party transformations may strengthen or solidify a group transforming its means of influence from violent coercion of the opponent to nonviolent persuasion of the electorate. Following both strategies at the same time can be counterproductive. For example, in the context of Pakistan, both counter-terrorism measures and negotiation attempts with the Pakistani Taliban were initiated at the same time, leading to a breakdown of negotiations.[30] Attempts to break away individuals from a violent jihadi insurgency will, from the rebels' perspective, be seen as hostile acts aimed at weakening the group. Deradicalization programs (e.g., in the form of conditional amnesties) have, however, been part and parcel of military counterinsurgency campaigns against rebels in the past.

It should be recognized that the macro- and the micro approach may be most fruitful in different phases of conflicts. As conflicts emerge, relying too heavily on the micro-perspective may risk external actors to lose sight of the macro-level changes on the political level that may be needed in order to manage public grievances. Once conflicts have been framed in jihadist terms, the micro perspective on, for example, how to prevent foreign individuals from joining a jihad, is particularly applicable. Once an acute phase of a conflict is over, the post-conflict society requires attention to both the micro- and macro-level approaches in order to be able to reach a sustainable and stable peace. Moreover, the macro- and micro approaches may also be more or less applicable depending on the different types of conflict actors. The more radical a group is perceived to be, the less emphasis can be put on group-level changes, and in such case more emphasis has to be placed on counterstrategies targeting individuals on individual counterstrategies.

Global Jihad and Conflict Extension

CVE approaches have in general applied a more network-based conceptualization of jihadist actors than can be found in the field of CR. Jihadist insurgencies correspond poorly with traditional rebel-group structures and the unitary actor assumption that prevails in the CR field is inappropriate.

Jihadist conflicts are globalized, making it difficult to disentangle one particular conflict from the web of other

related conflicts. Regional conflict-complexes have existed before, but the jihadist conflict complex is both global and disaggregated in a way that has not existed before. CVE has tended to focus more on the globalization of violent jihad, particularly due to a concern for the role of returned foreign fighters, and how different geographical areas of conflict interact in various and complicated ways. This has only partially been paid attention to in CR- and conflict management literature.[31] This circumstance forces us to think about conflict resolution in transnational terms. Global conflict resolution may entail the evaluation of the usefulness of conflict extension theories as prism to understanding transnationalization, where conflicts expand across borders branching out from a locally defined internal armed conflict. In the broader CR literature, transnationalization is conceptualized as the involvement of external actors in domestic conflicts (conflict extension theories); as an effect of a disjuncture between the state-system and multi-ethnic communities (particularly the literature on the internationalization of ethnic conflicts has this approach embodied in the interaction theories), or as an instrumental tool for leaders who aim at increasing internal coherence in their own country by entering into disputes with other states (conflict transformation theories).[32] These theories are limited by their focus on external intervention in civil wars, by their more descriptive than explanatory contribution, or by their focus on the instrumental gain of power holders, when conflicts are transformed from the national to the international level. The dynamics of globalization, as conceptualized in CVE frameworks, seem to be more complicated and allow for causal arrows to point in more directions than just local → global.

Recent research has also suggested that these types of conflicts have a unique tendency to transnationalize and expand more easily due to the existence of transnational jihadi movements such as Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State and the existence of multiple foreign diasporas that can be targeted for radicalization.[33] This dimension has led scholars to look at both conflicts as they affect the worldview of jihadists,[34] but also the noncognitive dimensions of conflicts, such as the ability of some conflicts to attract foreign fighters from faraway places.[35] Scholarly attention has also increased regarding collaboration and conflict between local jihadist movements and transnational jihadist movements (IS/AQ), and the regionalization of conflicts in terms of spillover of violence to neighboring countries.[36]

Searching for Solutions

Curbing the dynamics on the macro-level may affect the motivations and perspectives of individuals in relation to jihadist conflicts. One example is the demand for establishing and implementing sharia law, which appears in many conflict-contexts where Islamists are involved. A CR perspective may take the sharia-demand as a starting point in a search for solutions that may satisfy local demands regarding the role of religion in politics. Examples of autonomy solutions in the realm of religious affairs have been tried, with varying degrees of success, in Pakistan, Indonesia, Philippines, Nigeria and Mali. A CVE-perspective can help to alert of the potential negative implications of providing legitimacy to non-secular ideas. Combining CR and CVE may thereby help to shed light on the repercussions of applying "religious autonomy" as a conflict resolution mechanism in the face of violent conflicts with Islamists.[37]

The ongoing conflict in Mali shows the potential value of combining micro-macro perspectives of CVE and CR. For most of the conflict's recent history, the CVE perspective has been dominating, which has shaped the Western approach to the conflict. Increasingly, there is now a recognition that the armed conflict cannot be brought to a sustainable end without dialogue and negotiations that must also include armed actors fighting under jihadist banners. Peace feelers between the governments and radical Islamist groups such as Katiba Machina are signs of a willingness on the sides of both the government in Bamako and among some of the actors in the jihadist insurgency that political accommodation is necessary. While at the time of writing this, it is too early to evaluate the outcome of these feelers, they are still noteworthy, implicating the potential usefulness of conflict resolution perspectives in managing violent jihad. Still, the CVE perspective will remain important, especially in terms of thinking about how to decrease the pool of recruits to the jihadist insurgency. Afghanistan is another example where initiatives on the micro-level, such as reintegration of insurgent actors, were later supplemented with attempts to start political negotiations with representatives from the Taliban leadership. However, it raises the question of what would have happened if there was better coordination of the policies aimed at reintegration at the foot soldier level, and the relatively unsuccessful attempts of national

reconciliation-based dialogue between the different militant and political factions of Afghan society.

Combining the Micro-Macro Scales—Two Approaches

There are many ways in which the micro-macro perspectives can be meaningfully integrated. As we have mentioned above, the literature on rebel recruitment as well as the emerging literature on popular attitudes toward peace processes are examples of this type of integration, although none of the existing literature has been applied to the study of jihadist conflicts in the framework outlined above. When it comes to the study of violent jihad in particular, the following two examples might be instructive.

One way in which the CVE and CR perspectives can be integrated is in the study of *de-securitization as a conflict-resolution approach*. The theory of securitization formulated by the Copenhagen School of Security Studies offers another way of understanding conflict resolution than the traditional approaches of CR.[38] Macro-securitization, a term coined by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, departs from the idea that international security can sometimes be structured by one dominant conflict, as happened during the Cold War.[39]

Jihadist conflicts can be understood through this lens, as it contains an overarching narrative in which the West and Islam represent opposing sets of values and ideas of governance.[40] The securitization of jihadism is driven by complicated transnational dynamics that ultimately are difficult to relate to a single securitizing move or a single securitizing actor. An analysis of the processes of macro-securitization requires the exact combination of looking into the mobilization of an audience on a micro-level scale (which the radicalization literature has typically done) and the meta-level narratives and speech acts that transform an issue from being a local-level concern to becoming a global/transnational concern, attracting new/broader audiences.

Thus, thinking of jihadist conflicts as cases of macro-securitization can lead to a new way of thinking about conflict containment, one which is more about de-linking local conflicts from ideological macro-level conflict structures and less about thinking of resolution within a civil war context, in which conflict-resolution mechanisms, such as granting autonomy to rebel groups/power sharing,[41] or negotiating the conditions for peace on a national level stand at the center of peace-making efforts.[42] This is a different approach than the countering-discourses, which stem from the individual-level analysis and are different from the containment thinking which stems from a civil war approach to jihadist conflicts.

Johan Galtung (1969) has spearheaded the view that conflict must be understood as a dynamic phenomenon, meaning that it is often of limited value to search for the root causes of a conflict.[43] Rather, it is more important to understand conflict as it is currently running in order to find ways to derail the self-propelling mechanisms.[44] This is partly what underlies in the concept of de-securitization,[45] though it remains underdeveloped as an operational conflict-containment mechanism.

Another way in which the CVE and CR perspectives can be integrated is through the study of *religious worldviews*. Mark Juergensmeyer's work on what he termed 'cosmic warfare' connects the significance of individual imagery with its relation to conflicts. According to Juergensmeyers elaboration, religion—when conceptualized as a worldview—can have explanatory power when it comes to situations of escalation. At the same time, one of the most important agenda items for future research on the intersection between religion and war will be to understand those aspects of religious worldviews that can have a de-escalation potential. Thinking about how cosmic wars have ended in history, also seems to be a fruitful path for future peace and conflict studies.[46]

CR has, as with International Relations (IR) studies more generally, tended to de-emphasize the role of religious dynamics as an explanatory framework, with a smaller subfield as a possible exception.[47] If jihadist violence has been included in the analysis, it has been conceptualized as part of a continuum of armed conflicts. CVE, on the other hand, has emphasized religious aspects, and while one will find simple causality models linking religion to violence, it has also triggered a broader and more nuanced conceptualization of religious dimensions of violence. Particularly the concept of 'ideological attraction' appears to have some utility for CR thinking. Literature on religious experience, religious emotions, and religious culture is still nascent in CR but might have relevance for theorizing about resolution, since these factors could offer potential explanations for why resolution is potentially harder to obtain when religious actors are involved.

Analyses based on the elaboration of a worldview and its components can hence say something about whether conflicts are prone to escalation, because it can reveal how individual actors perceive, interpret, and individually align themselves to the conflict. Hence—as the theory of securitization also prescribes—the cultivation of war imagery and the acceptance of the imagery from a convinced audience can increase the probability of mobilization and conflict escalation.[48]

Conclusion

In this article, we have sought to examine some relevant insights from two practice-oriented fields—CR and CVE—with different sets of assumptions about what matters most, in order to examine if there are any lessons to be learned concerning the containment of jihadist conflicts and individual mobilization for participation in jihad.

The merits of a CR approach to managing jihad are that they look at jihadi conflicts as systems of relationships, including the actions on the government's side. Hence the government is not automatically seen as the "countering" actor, but as a more active part of the (origin of the) conflict. Yet, despite an often-uncritical understanding of the role of the state/government in CVE approaches, CVE thinking can help bring other factors to the attention of CR: first, that transnational jihadi actors and movements are the premier examples of conflict constellations that currently escape standard CR schemes of conflict analysis. Second, it can potentially bring to the fore the centrality of "contested" paradigms of legitimacy, which seem to be particularly important for resolution thinking in the face of claims about religious autonomy. Finally, it brings in an attention to the significance of religion and ideology in spite of the fact that both the CVE and radicalization literature are often criticized for the way religion is often accounted for: as a root cause, or as a motivation on the actor level.

Compared to CVE, the group-level analysis in CR literature has led to an interest in collective outcomes rather than individual decisions and motivations. A clear merit of the CR approach is the relational perspective: conflict is not primarily studied through the perspective of one side, but as an interactive system. CR also works on the background of more global data, rather than being Western-biased, and CR literature also shows a recognition of the importance of conflict dynamics. However, the phenomenon of transnational jihad challenges central CR ideas like those about 'mutually hurting stalemates' and 'finding zones of agreement'.

This article has sought to identify some areas of synergy and future research. In particular, the combination of analyzing processes (individual and group-level) with structural conditions and more macro-level securitization seems to be fruitful to understand the dynamics of interplay at different levels.

Additionally, there are lessons to be learned by exchanging dynamics on individual disengagement practices and conflict transformation. CR has nascent literature on rebel-to-party transformation that could gain from the lessons from the individual level processes prompted by CVE initiatives. It can of course be questioned to what degree lessons from the West can be useful for non-Western conflict zones (where the context is remarkably different). However, studying the emotional, ideological and psychological aspects of disengagement and transformation is a potentially fruitful pathway for both, CR and CVE studies.

Conflicts with jihadi actors force us to bridge the gap between different units of analysis, rethink our conflict schemes, the role and significance of the state/government, and interaction dynamics between individual imagery and mobilization and macro-scale narratives and conflict drivers. Radicalization research and CVE thinking points us in the direction of thinking about conflict resolution detached from a civil-war context where conflicts "grow" from the local to the transnational. The dynamics of globalization seem to be more complicated and allow for causal arrows to point in many directions rather than just from the local to the global. As we have suggested in this article, macro securitization theory and the concept of cosmic war can lead us toward an increased alignment between the individual and the collective, the local and the global.

About the Authors:

Isak Svensson *is professor at the Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, Sweden. His research focuses on religious dimensions of armed conflict, international mediation in civil wars, and dynamics of nonviolent civil resistance. He is the project leader for the international research project Resolving Jihadist Conflicts? Religion, Civil Wars and Prospects for Peace.*

Mona Kanwal Sheikh *heads the research unit 'Global Security and Worldviews' at the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS). Her research focuses on religion in international relations, religious violence and jihadism. Currently she is the leader of 'Explaining Transnational Jihad – Patterns of Escalation and Containment', a project funded by the European Research Council.*

Notes

[1] Beatrix Austin and Hans J. Giessmann (Eds.) *Transformative Approaches to Violent Extremis.,* Berlin: Berghof Foundation, 2018.

[2] Jerome P. Bjelopera, *Countering Violent Extremism in the United States,* Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2014; Georgia Holmer "Countering Violent Extremism: A Peacebuilding Perspective," *United States Institute of Peace, Special Report*, 2013; Randy Borum "Radicalization into Violent Extremism I: A Review of Social Science Theories," *Journal of Strategic Security* 4(4) 2011, pp. 7–36; Minerva Nasser-Eddine, Bridget Garnham, Katerina Agostino and Gilbert Caluya, "Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Literature Review," Australia: Counter Terrorism and Security Technology Centre, Department of Defence, 2011.

[3] Tore Bjørgo and John G. Horgan, *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement.* Abingdon: Routledge, 2009.

[4] Christopher Mitchell and Michael Banks, *Handbook of Conflict Resolution: The Analytical Problem-solving Approach.* London: Pinter, 1999; Oliver Ramsbotham, Hugh Miall and Tom Woodhouse, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution.* Malden, MA: Polity, 2016; Louise Kriesberg and Bruce W. Dayton*, Constructive Conflicts: From Escalation to Resolution*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2017; Peter Wallensteen, *Understanding Conflict Resolution*. Los Angeles: Sage, 2019.

[5] Peter Wallensteen, *Peace Research: Theory and Practice.* London: Routledge, 2013; Nils Petter Gleditsch, Jonas Nordkvelle and Håvard Strand "Peace Research–Just the Study of War?," *Journal of Peace Research* 51(2) 2014, pp. 145–158.

[6] Peter Wallensteen (2019), op. cit.

[7] Karin Dyrstad, Kristin M. Bakke and Helga M. Binningsbø, "Perceptions of Peace Agreements and Political Trust in Post-War Guatemala, Nepal, and Northern Ireland," *International Peacekeeping* 20(4) 2021, pp. 1–26. DOI: 10.1080/13533312.2020.1869541.

[8] Scott Gates, "Recruitment and Allegiance: The Microfoundations of Rebellion," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46(1) 2002, pp. 111–130; Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy M. Weinstein, "Demobilization and Reintegration," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 51(4) 2007, pp. 531–567; Kristin Eck "Coercion in Rebel Recruitment." *Security Studies* 23(2) 2014, pp. 364–398;

[9] Desirée Nilsson & Mimmi Söderberg Kovacs, "Revisiting an Elusive Concept: A Review of the Debate on Spoilers in Peace Processes," *International Studies Review* 13(4) 2011, pp. 606–626.

[10] William I. Zartman (Ed.), *Elusive Peace: Negotiating an End to Civil Wars*. Washington DC: Brookings Institution, 1995.

[11] Brynjar Lia, "Globalisation and the Future of Terrorism: Patterns and Predictions," London: Routledge, 2005.

[12] Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: The Face of Modern Terror*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008.

[13] John G. Horgan, *The Psychology of Terrorism,* Abingdon: Routledge, 2005; Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.

[14] Petter Nesser, "Joining jihadi terrorist cells in Europe"; in: Magnus Ranstorp (Ed.), *Understanding Violent Radicalization: Terrorist and Jihadist Movements in Europe*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010, pp. 87–144.

[15] Bruce Hoffman, "Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 29(2) 2004, pp. 103–121.

[16] Bjørgo suggested in 2009 that engagement and disengagement are better terms as they refer to changes in action, and not in values and attitudes, as he argued that the radicalization/deradicalization literature was doing at that time.—Tore Bjørgo, "Processes of disengagement from violent groups of the extreme right"; in: Tore Bjørgo and John Horgan (Eds.) *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement*, (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 30–48.

[17] Naureen Chowdhury Fink and Ellie B. Hearne, "Beyond Terrorism: Deradicalization and Disengagement from Violent Ex-

tremism," *International Peace Institute Publications*, October 2008. URL: https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/beter.pdf.

[18] John G. Horgan and Kurt Braddock, "Rehabilitating the Terrorists? Challenges in Assessing the Effectiveness of De-radicalization Programs," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22, 2010, pp. 287–291. DOI: 10.1080/09546551003594748.

[19] Jan O. Engene "Five Decades of Terrorism in Europe: The TWEED Dataset," *Journal of Peace Research* 44(1) 2007, pp. 109–121.

[20] Jan Oskar Engene's dataset "Terrorism in Western Europe: Events Data" (TWEED), is based on over 11,000 terror attacks from 200 terrorist groups operating in 18 European countries between 1950–2004.

[21] One of those who challenged the primacy of religion as driver is the French sociologist Olivier Roy who in his book *Jihad og Døden*, *Vandkunsten,* 2017, holds the view that at least in France religion is basically politics, rebellious politics. In his books, Olivier Roy argues that Islamic State (IS) extremism cannot be explained with reference to religion but emanates from a global and violent youth culture. An opposite view is taken by another Frenchman, Gilles Kepel, who postulates the primacy of religion in radicalization. E.g., Gilles Keppel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*, Harvard University Press, 2003.

[22] Mona Kanwal Sheikh, "Religion, Emotions and Conflict Escalation*"*; in: Bernt J. Steele and Eric A. Heinze (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Ethics and International Relations*, (London: Routledge, 2018), pp. 518–526.

[23] Thomas Hegghammer (Ed.), *Jihadi Culture: The Art and Social Practices of Militant Islamists.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

[24] One of the defining—and often criticized—ideas in the CVE discourse is that, in order to counter extremism, the "root causes" or starting point for the radicalization process ought to be identified and addressed. See for example Minerva Nasser-Eddine et al. 2011; Randy Borum (2011), op. cit.

[25] Jerome P. Bjelopera (2014), op. cit.

[26] Ibid.; See e.g., Ann-Sophie Hemmingsen's article, "The Attractions of Jihadism. An Identity Approach of Three," Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2010, on the challenges of designing counter-narratives.

[27] See the critique of the top-down focus of radicalization in Manni Crone, "Radicalization Revisited: Violence, Politics and the Skills of the Body," *International Affairs* 92(3) 2016: pp. 587–604. See also the point of Olivier Roy 2017, who argues that we are dealing with an Islamization of radicalism rather than a radicalization of Islamism, i.e., that radical Islamist is primarily a counter-culture that in principle could have embraced any other ideology.

[28] Mimmi Söderberg Kovacs and Sophia Hatz, "Rebel-to-party transformations in civil war peace processes 1975–2011," *Democratization* 23(6) 2016, pp. 990–1008.

[29] Jerome Drevon, "The emergence of ex-Jihadi political parties in post-Mubarak Egypt," *The Middle East Journal* 69(4) 2015, pp. 511–526.

[30] Mona Kanwal Sheikh, "What Do Islamists Bring to the Negotiation Table? Religion and the Case of the Pakistani Taliban," *International Negotiation* 25(3) 2020, pp. 413–434. DOI: 10.1163/15718069-25131251.

[31] Monica Duffy Toft and Yuri M. Zhukov, "Islamists and Nationalists: Rebel Motivation and Counterinsurgency in Russia's North Caucasus," *American Political Science Review* 109(2) 2015, pp. 222–238. See also Isak Svensson and Desirée Nilsson, "Disputes over the Divine: Introducing the Religion and Armed Conflict (RELAC) Data, 1975–2015," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 62(5) 2018, pp. 1127–1148.

[32] David Carment, Patrick James and Zeynep Taydas, "The Internationalization of Ethnic Conflict: State, Society, and Synthesis," *International Studies Review* 11(1) 2009, pp. 63–86.

[33] Mona Kanwal Sheikh, *Expanding Jihad: How Islamic State and Al-Qaeda find New Battlefields*, Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2017.

[34] Mona Kanwal Sheikh and Mark Juergensmeyer, *Entering Religious Minds*, London: Routledge*,* 2019.

[35] Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis,* Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998.

[36] Manni Crone (2016), op. cit.; Mona Kanwal Sheikh (2017), op. cit.

[37] Mona Kanwal Sheikh (2020), op. cit.

[38] Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver & Jaap de Wilde (1998), op. cit.

[39] Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, "Macrosecuritization and Security Constellations: Reconsidering Scale in Securitization Theory," *Review of International Studies* 35(2) 2009, pp. 253–276.

[40] Mona Kanwal Sheikh, "The Religious Challenge to Securitization Theory," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 43(1) 2014, pp. 252–272.

[41] Caroline Hartzell & Matthew Hoddie, "Institutionalizing Peace: Power Sharing and Post-Civil War Conflict Management," *American Journal of Political Science* 47(2) 2003, pp. 318–332.

[42] Stephen J. Stedman, "Spoiler problems in peace processes," *International Security* 22(2) 1997, pp. 5–53; Jacob Bercovitch, Theodore Anagnoson and Donnette Wille, "Some Conceptual Issues and Empirical Trends in the Study of Successful Mediation in International Relations," *Journal of Peace Research* 28(1) 1991, pp. 7–17; Desirée Nilsson, "Partial Peace: Rebel Groups Inside and Outside of Civil War Settlements," *Journal of Peace Research* 45(4) 2008, pp. 479–495.

[43] Johan Galtung, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research," *Journal of Peace Research* 6(3) 1969, pp. 167–191. DOI: 10.1177/002234336900600301.

[44] Ole Wæver and Mona Kanwal Sheikh, "Global Security and Conflict"; in: Mark Juergensmeyer & Helmut K. Anheier (Eds.), *The Encyclopedia of Global Studies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2012, pp. 645–653.

[45] Ole Wæver, "Securitization and Desecuritization"; in: Ronnie D. Lipschutz (Ed.) *On Security*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995, pp. 46–87.

[46] Mark Juergensmeyer, "God at War: A Mediation on Religion and Warfare," New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020, p. 9.

[47] E.g., Ron Hassner, "War on sacred grounds." Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2009; Isak Svensson "Ending Holy Wars," Brisbane, University of Queensland Press, 2010.

[48] Mona Kanwal Sheikh (2020), op. cit.