

# 5 Ways out of terrorism

**CAROLIN GÖRZIG**  
➤ *Max Planck Institute  
for Social Anthropology,  
Halle (Saale)*

According to a survey, three out of five German citizens fear terrorist violence. Their fear is fed not only by the perceived unscrupulousness of the perpetrators of violence, but also by the fact that terrorists appear to be barely predictable in their actions. Yet even radical groups act in accordance with a certain logic that can be studied. Our research focuses on understanding the patterns, which cause terrorists either to become radicalized or else to renounce violence.

**D**o you think we should negotiate with terrorists? Political and public debate often questions whether this would be feasible at all, but the question of how this might be achieved is often overlooked. To make well-founded statements about how to negotiate with terrorists, it makes sense to examine the learning processes of terrorist groups with regard to how a reflection on the meaningfulness of violence is set in motion.

In our research group, we compare the learning processes of terrorist groups that can result either in their deradicalization, i.e. to a renunciation of violence, or radicalization. We collect empirical data in interviews with former and current members of various terrorist groups and have conducted field research in Egypt, Colombia, Palestine, Syria, Niger, Kyrgyzstan, Northern Ireland, and Turkey.

As a result, we have identified a rationale of deradicalization: in the initial stages at least, rather than simply changing their objectives, radical groups tend

to question the means and values that define them. Such considerations may arise due the discrepancy between objectives set and objectives achieved. It is also possible, however, that their objectives contradict each other and that the groups in question attempt to resolve the conflict.

To set the mechanism of deradicalization in motion, the groups themselves must problematize such contradictions. As the organizational scientists Chris Argyris and Donald A. Schön describe it, the aim is to make so-called double binds discussable. These are situations in which conflicting demands result in no-win situations and the paradoxicality of the situation is moreover difficult to define.

The militant Egyptian "Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya" movement, for example, recognized for itself that jihad – which had become an end in itself – was not compatible with their objective of leading people, and ultimately found it counterproductive. The group solved the double bind by prioritising their objectives and concluding



## Dialogue can help terrorist groups to understand the contradictory nature of their objectives

that jihad is merely a means to an end. It is important that the leaders of such groups become aware of the irreconcilability of their objectives.

Negotiations can also help. For contrary to the assumption that willingness and success in negotiations are based only on the rational cost-benefit calculation of the participants in the negotiations, a dialogue in itself can help terror groups to recognize the irreconcilability of their objectives. The Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA) also adopted new means to achieve their objectives. They had learned from the South African ANC, among others, to renounce violence while remaining true to their own objectives.

Instead of approaching terrorist groups with the demand that they completely abandon their objectives, which is perceived as capitulation and tends to reinforce double binds, negotiations should be aimed at changing the means. In this way, the talks can also provide the leaders with the arguments they will need to convince their supporters. Negotiations can be based on the fact that the actual learning lies in questioning the means and values that define the objectives.

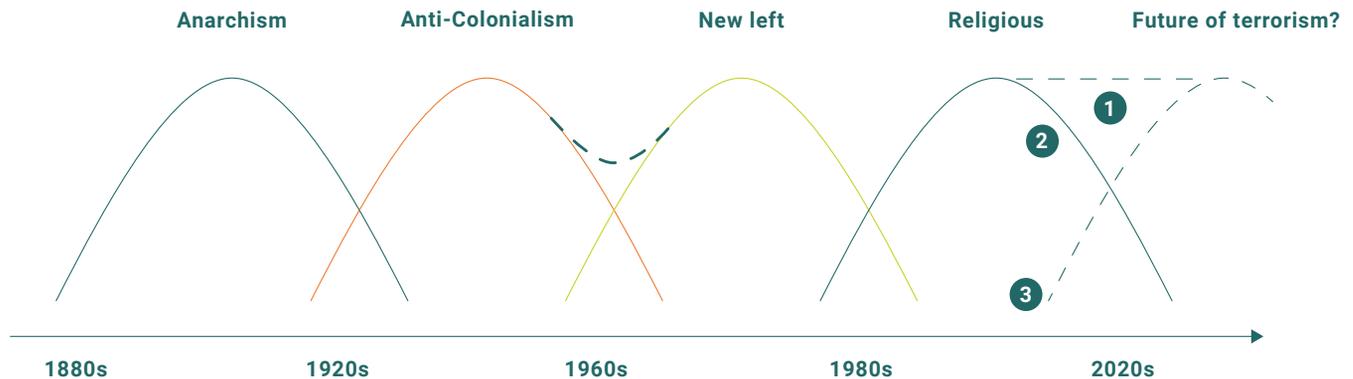
However, the mechanism of deradicalization can also be associated with radicalization. When groups turn away from violence, more radical factions often split off. When the Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya movement deradicalized, some members migrated to Al-Qaeda, which viewed the moderation of the Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya movement as a defeat and responded by escalating violence against the "distant enemy", culminating in the 9/11 attacks. This created a new conflict of objectives between global jihad and the local agendas of Islamist groups that were focused on overthrowing their home governments rather than provoking the West too much.

## The drone war produces more terrorists than it kills

The globalization of jihad in turn leads to more radical state countermeasures, such as the U.S. drone war. Such measures, however, are often counterproductive because they strengthen the arguments of radical factions against moderating groups. Numerous civilians repeatedly fall victim to drones, which even leads high-ranking US military personnel to conclude that the drone war produces more terrorists than it kills. The victims of the anti-terror struggle often serve more radical groups as arguments against moderate organizations. Al-Qaida leader Ayman Al-Zawahiri, for example, accused Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya of betraying its ideals to the Egyptian state when it became more moderate. The accusation was that the movement was buying itself out of prison and abandoning its aims, while many other Islamists are being tortured in Egyptian prisons. Such arguments can be defused if state actors act less brutally in the fight against terror and renounce maximum demands such as the abandonment of objectives in negotiations.

## The next wave of terror could come from right-wing extremists

Political scientist and pioneer of terrorism research David Rapoport divided development of terrorism since the 1880s into four overlapping historical waves, each lasting about 40 years: the anarchist wave (ca. 1880s-1920s), the anti-colonial wave (ca. 1920s-1960s),



1 Continuation/ Renewal of religious wave

2 Declining religious wave

3 New wave (right-wing extremism)?

— — Organisations across waves (e.g. IRA, PLO)

*According to political scientist David Rapoport, terrorism is developing in waves, with changing objectives.*

the wave of the New Left (ca. 1960s-1990s), and the current religious wave that began around the 1970s and 1980s. The logic of radicalization and deradicalization described above affects both groups of the current religious wave and groups of previous waves, as the examples of the ANC, the IRA or the Palestinian organization the PLO show.

The radicalization of groups in one wave and the overreaction of states could already be preparing the way for the emergence of another wave. Even if military force can contain terrorism in the short term, it contains the roots of long-term developments of violence and terror. Negotiations can provide an alternative that breaks the spiral of violence and the waves of terrorism and counterterrorism.

In any case, the parallel radicalization of the state and non-state groups raises the question of the future of terrorism. Assuming that the current religious wave is coming to an end according to Rapoport's historical pattern, the question of the next wave remains. Recent developments suggest that right-wing extremism could play a role in this context. But the jihadist movement

could also manage to preserve the energy of its wave or transfer it to a second religious wave. Furthermore, it can be observed that right-wing extremists adopt elements of religious groups and, for example, tie in with Christian fundamentalism or Germanic neo-paganism. A future wave could also be of mixed form.

Can the spiral of violence between the state and terrorists be broken? The leaders of the Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya came to their new positions when they exchanged views with other political prisoners, for example secular liberals. Not only can internal processes and new lines of argumentation be triggered from outside, but arguments for radicalization can also be defused from outside. The learning processes of terrorist groups provide information about the logic behind the mechanisms of radicalization and deradicalization. Our goal is to get to the bottom of these patterns. Our insights into the logic of escalation and deescalation can provide answers as to how such processes are reversed. It is about finding ways out of violence and developing alternatives to repeating counterproductive measures. Do you think we should negotiate with terrorists? o