

**To what extent can soft power be used
as a means of de-radicalization for
extremist islam in the west ?**

Recent spikes in European terror attacks have shocked the world. Still grieving the Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris in early 2015, a blatant attack on free speech and western culture in general, in November of the same year an even deadlier attack, killing 130 people (BBC, 2015). However, there is something different about these terror attacks. Although many people believe these Paris attacks to be the European version of 9/11. All attacks that were committed were done so by European Nationals (BBC, 2016). Meaning thus that the traditional path of a terrorist has been altered. The terrorists are no longer exterior to European society. They are being radicalised internally and are no longer being sent in externally. These are people who are radicalised through borders, with a new medium being brought forward through globalization, known as the internet, a new pathway for soft power has been created. However, if Islamic terrorist organization can utilise this medium and soft power in general as means of radicalization; **to what extent can soft power be used as a means of de-radicalization for extremist Islam in the West?**

The interest in this topic sparked whilst watching the news and being informed that young adults of similar age to myself left home to fight for ISIS. Having studied the utilization of soft power and its increasing relevance in our world due to new pathways being created for it. I wondered if "the majority of radicalization was accomplished over the internet and providing extremist rhetoric (ie the exertion of soft power) can this be countered by western powers through their own utilization of soft power". Essentially, realizing that bombing desert tents (ie the usage of hard power) on the other side of the world is probably not going to solve the radicalization problem that has hit the west, thus, what other means can be used? To explore this issue further I decided to interview two people whom are opposed on this issue and find what happens when a theory is applied onto the real world and what kind of tension this creates. First, I interviewed a Dutch rehabilitation worker who has dealt with the reintegration of radicalised individuals and has had first hand experience in how providing alternate rhetoric and essentially the usage of soft power can be used to accomplish "de-radicalization". On the other hand, I had also interviewed someone who works at a Criminal Investigation Department and had a different opinion on how suspected Jihadist or radicalized individuals should be treated. Although, not entirely opposed to a soft power strategy there was a certain limit to which these can be implemented to effectively allow for a country to de-radicalize individuals. Moreover, while conducting these interviews an interesting divide into what the scope of this de-radicalization process should be. On one side, the local approach in which communities are helped individually and on the other the belief that a clear national approach should be instated for a local approach to even be slightly effective. Provided the knowledge that was gained from these interviews, two different sides to how radicalization should be dealt with. An interesting insight into current systems that are in place emerged, the effectivity of both will be analyzed throughout the paper and compared to our current models of understanding and how they fit into them.

An important thing to know before the question is analyzed is what the term radicalization means and why it happens. Although this is a question that is extremely hard to define within one paragraph, a short overview should be given to increase understanding as to how soft power plays into this. "Radicalization is a process whereby youth are lured to hold extreme principles, demonize certain communities and embrace violence" - Prashan de Visser (TEDx Talks, 2015). Throughout the research this is the best definition I have found to define the

term radicalization. One word that is extremely interesting in this definition is the word "lured", lured is usually associated with a way to make a person doing something without forcing them to (ie soft power). Although, radicalization is not a new phenomenon, a new era has approached which is described by Kumar Ramakrishna in his paper which states that "internet-driven self radicalization of the lone wolf is an increasing cause of concern for governments" (Ramakrishna, 2014). The soft power that is needed to radicalize someone has found new routes: the internet. The internet has created arguably one of the most effective channels for the spread of soft power and has allowed for terrorist organization such as ISIS to spread a message that 20 years ago would never have gone further than the next town. Root causes of radicalization such as; social marginalization, language barriers and general socioeconomic disparity are much easier to exploit by terrorist organization as they can provide a violent and extremist rhetoric to why this has overcome the particular individual and give them a place to channel their anger and frustration. This factor was also addressed in the interview with my contact from the CID whom stated that "youth can usually not have their questions answered in their direct community and thus go online to search for answers" (Liebers, 2016).

Soft power, as learned in theory, has gained a tremendous amount of relevance in the past decade. In an increasingly connected world, the ability to control the outcomes of situations or manipulate people's thinking without using violence has gained a great amount of popularity with state actors and non state actors alike. The main cause of this increasingly relevant form of power has come with globalization and in turn the rising power of the internet. With extremely low entry requirements and "globally, 3.2 billion people" (International Telecommunication Union, 2015) having access to the internet, the ability to connect to the entire world can literally be in somebody's back pocket. This somebody can thus also have malicious intent and thus spread extremist rhetoric with which was military grade technology a decade ago, in a finger click. Soft power all comes down to spreading one's message and this is much more easily accomplished if the message can be published to millions. Opposed to compelling somebody to do something (ie hard power) the new way that things are being approached is to persuade people to do something (ie soft power). It has been proven that this form of power can be extremely effective in terms of radicalization. If one looks at most major terror acts that have occurred in Europe over the past 3 years they have all come in the form of "lone wolves" who have been radicalized through the use of soft power which has been amplified by the internet such as the Charlie Hebdo shooting or the Brussels bombing. The theory has been shown to have some relevancy concerning the radicalization of people; however, to what extent can the opposite goal be achieved?

According to the interview I conducted with my contact from the rehabilitation center an essential part of reintegrating or deradicalizing a person lays in soft power. Examples such as finding a "new place to live far away from the risk situation" (Van de Hoogen, 2016), talking to psychologists and an analysis of the targeted person's social life are key aspects of the reintegration of an ex-radicalised person. The way this is handled is very comparable to the theory. In essence what is being done is blocking out the exterior forces (moving away from them) and analysing their ex-social circle allows for an effective way to disintegrate the line of communication and not allow extremist rhetoric to be passed on. Once this is done they talk to psychologist and other designated individuals whom give another side of the story

and also utilize a form of soft power in which they provide an alternative narrative. Adding on to this, "this form of treatment is always for a minimum of two years" thus allowing for a long term exposure to a new perspective eventually and hopefully blocking out the extremist one. The strategy that is described here is a very local approach as "each individual has a personalized plan" and thus no de-radicalization plan is the same. However, the interviewee also stated that "at this moment people who are thought to have been radicalised are put behind bars for a considerable amount of time because it is very difficult to get a grip" (Van de Hoogen, 2016) on. Despite, the plans to de-radicalize very liberal nature and soft power approach there is thus still an aspect which involves the exercising of hard power.

On the somewhat opposing end of this issue my contact from the CID. Whom stated that "national approach with effective resources" is needed to solve this problem. Moreover, this national approach is needed "to allow for local approaches to be successful" (Liebers, 2016). A problem with a soft power approach is that it is not entirely effective punishment. When people are arrested on suspicion of planning a terrorist attack or being in contact with terrorist organization it is a crime that they have committed. If it is crime shouldn't punishment come before a plan to de-radicalize? If people see that if you were involved with radicalization and your punishment were two years of talks with psychologists and a new living place would this really scare of potential terrorists to commit atrocities. This leads to the question: To what extent can the priority to de-radicalise somebody come before the priority to punishment. Hence more tension can be seen between the two approaching sides to this and how justice should be implemented. If soft power is used solely as a means to de-radicalise is the justice system being upheld fairly. People whom have committed crimes such as robbery are not taken to a psychologist and have a two year treatment plan to decriminalize them so should this be the case for radicalization? This is a key aspect to solving the current radicalization problem. Due to it being an extremely new phenomenon an effective way of treating people has not been found. This was also evident with people I tried to interview who rejected and stated that "we simply don't know yet". However, one thing that my contact from the CID did identify is that the current "detention policy" was worrying to him. "Jihad suspects are now being put together in a ward. I do not have the impression that this leads to a less radicalization amongst the target group" (Liebers, 2016). This thus potentially suggesting that somewhere in the middle between the utilization of soft power and hard power the solution lies.

The influence and strength of soft power can't be denied and the usage of it by terrorist organization such as ISIS is increasing exponentially. Essentially, it has become a new battle, a battle of ideas, rhetoric and perspective. However, to what extent can we fight terrorist organization with ideas and the usage of soft power. It is definitely a key aspect as stated before killing somebody on the other side of the world is not going to stop ISIS's twitter from spreading message of hate. What it boils down to is that the west has to play the soft power game with ISIS. So far, most de-radicalization plans are built on locking the victims up and then seeing from there. This is solely due to no other viable solutions being known of. However, what can be extracted from both interviews it is a key aspect to try and block out the soft power that ISIS has and provide the rhetoric of the west. Whilst there are many other issues that cause radicalization that can be looked at and solutions made. One must not underestimate the power of rhetoric. Providing a different perspective towards

terrorist rhetoric is certainly a key aspect to de-radicalization. Western countries such as the one explored in this paper, the Netherlands, should and are including the usage of soft power in their de-radicalization schemes.

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Appendix

Interview Questions “How people are de-radicalized”

Do you think that an ex radicalised person can be effectively brought back into a society ?

What is the current strategy for doing so ? is there a special plan for radicalised people is this plan fluid (does it adjust to the specific needs of the person)

What are the challenges in keeping a person from being radicalised once they are brought back into society

Have there been any situations in which the treatment of radicalised people has given important information on a suspected terrorist plot

Do you think there is a potential link between inequality, marginalised societies and bad integration systems and people becoming radicalised

Interview Questions “Social media’s role in Radicalization in the west and how it is being dealt with”

How does social media affect the frequency and likelihood of a young person in the west to be subject to radicalisation?

What strategies do you think are most effective for reducing radicalization that the EU or national government can employ ?

What can people do on a local level to stop radicalization and is this more effective than a nation wide strategy ?

Especially in the Netherlands, do you think that a rise in Right wing politics and Islamophobia (PVV) have an effect on the vulnerability of a young person to be radicalised.

If you had to sum up three key ideas on why radicalization happens, what would these be ?