"Innovative ways to deal with violent extremism"

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First session: "Preventing Violent Extremism: Innovative Approach"

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Today the definitions of terrorism are as prolific as the number of terrorist groups that some key and essential elements of a workable definition of terrorism remain. Often and thoughtlessly repeated, 'One man's terrorist in another man's freedom fighter' is one of those sayings that cry out for logical and philosophical analysis, yet highlights the double standards in defining terrorism and determining who is a terrorist. While some brand a terrorist attack as an act of bravery, others consider it as a criminal act. The same goes for terrorists, seen by some as freedom fighters and by others as criminals. There are two definitional approach of terrorism, the first is structural and the second is cultural.

The most commonly given structural interpretation attributes the emergence of violent extremism to a set of economic or socio-economic or generational socio-economic factors, emphasizing the importance of the economic factor in the emergence of violent extremism and terrorism, as evidenced by the slogan raised during Egypt uprising in 2011, "Bread, Freedom, Social Justice", which gave priority to a prosperous life. Frustration and nibbling resulting from challenging economic conditions, could lead to unlawful and anti-establishment behavior; it is thus a must to address economic problems as a fundamental tenet to prevent terrorism. The other structural interpretation has a political dimension, which connects the origins of terrorism with totalitarian regimes and lack of political participation, along with the existence of an international system based on self-interests. Implementing a culture of democracy, strengthening political participation and embracing alternation of power, will contribute at preventing extremism. The same goes with resolving some international disputes, such as the Arab-Israeli conflict. The third structural interpretation championed by researchers, attributes the emergence of violent extremism to socio-psychological factors, particularly with regard to the Middle East, where repressive societies lead to

frustration especially among young people. Addressing this aspect could be crucial in preventing extremism and terrorism.

Alternatively, the simplest theory within the perspective that relies on cultural interpretations to explain violent extremism, seeks to establish causal relationships between the rise of terrorism in the Middle East and the social structure based on power and force along with the cultural structure it has engendered. The second theory prevalent in Europe and the United States links the origins of extremism and terrorism to the essence of Islam, arguing that the war on terror is a war between the West and Islam. Although this theory is narrow, it has gained prominence in the West especially after 9/11 events, when the clash of civilizations narrative sprouted in the Western countries in general and the United States in particular. In this context, some have connected terrorism to Salafi Wahhabism, a branch of Sunni-Islam, rather than to Islam in general, saying that the real foe in the war on terrorism is the Wahhabi teachings.

All these attempts to explain violent extremism highlight aspects of the topic, but do not bring to light this multi-pronged phenomenon. However, it should be noted that the cultural interpretations do not underscore the existence of a clash of civilizations, but rather they spotlight the fact that the Western Civilization had succeeded in achieving modernity while Eastern Civilization had not. Throughout its history, the Western society had produced a culture of institutional powers based on respect for human rights, tolerance and acceptance of others, starting with the Renaissance and the enlightenment thought strengthened with the French Revolution.

Alternatively, the East adapted this culture with the advent of Napoleon's army, which paved the road then to the rise of the so-called Ammiyat. Albeit the East sought to assimilate this culture, it had failed because it was not part of its nurtured cultural structure.

When we reflect on the new system that had emerged in the region after the World War I, we can objectively say that the twentieth century was in the Middle East the era of state restructuring and assimilating the state-building concept conforming to the European model. But we did not succeeded, and what had been created instead was a series of failed patriarchal nations; he stressed that what we are witnessing today is the consequence of a 200 years of civilization failure to accommodate the forces of modernity inhibiting us from assimilating the social values correlated to the political concepts that we had adapted from the west. He said that the extremist mentality runs as such: "their bombs and our martyrs, their violence (the West) is

hidden, ours is wide-open, as we resort to violence in order to install a balance of terror".