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Psychological aspects of extremist activity

This scientific article is devoted to the problem of the psychological aspects of such an important social problem as extremism. Extremism — is a complex phenomenon, despite the fact that its complexity is often difficult to see and understand. Today, all of us know about the nature and the reasons of extremism few. In this article the main theoretical approaches to definition of concept of extremism are considered. One of forms of manifestation of extremism is the terrorism. In article psychological aspects of terrorist activity, psychological factors the mechanisms inducing to membership in the extremist organization, specific features and psychological inclined to extremist activity are considered.

Key words: Extremism, extremist group, terrorism, religion, value, involvement, personality, behavior, attitude, individual, violence.

Nowadays violence is an essential element of public relations. It is present in the relations between individuals and between nations and states. Its forms are varied and range from coercion and threats to the physical destruction. The fact of the possibility of violence against the person exerts on a huge emotional impact forces to change the strategy of behavior, make thoughtless actions or inaction. Survival instinct is a powerful tool, which is often used by some individual and the state to achieve their goals.

Today both political extremists and ordinary criminals and criminalized businessmen and simply unhealthy singles have successfully mastered the technique of intimidation of their opponents. Currently, we know little about the nature and causes of terrorism, and the individual incentives of individual terrorist behavior. This occurs, among other reasons, because we have not learned how to allocate its varieties, we are in constant search of the unique motive which generates extremist behavior.

Today, we still know little about the nature and causes of extremism, personality and individual incentives of extremist behavior. Studies have shown that topical issue of control over extremism is a scientific and official understanding of given acts of certain forces and circumstances that give rise to them, and the adoption of political, legal and other measures to prevent and suppress extremist activity. An important role in the development of measures to prevent and combat extremist manifestations occupies the study of the psychological nature of the phenomenon. It should be borne in mind that the psychology of terrorist activity has a significant specificity, sometimes little intelligible, if we start from the generally accepted motivational and behavioral standards. «Effective anti-terrorism policy, — writes the American researcher D. Hubbard — depends on understanding what the terrorists think and why they do what they are doing; if we take ourselves as a model, the behavior of the terrorists would seem inexplicable».

Under the Extremism (extremist activity) in the legal doctrine means: 1) the activities of individuals and various organizations (religious, social, etc.) to plan, organize, prepare and commit acts aimed at violent change of the constitutional order and violation of the integrity of the country, undermining national security, seizure or appropriation of authority power, the establishment of illegal armed formations, commission of terrorist acts, etc.; 2) outreach and public demonstration of Nazi and similar attributes or symbols; 3) public calls for such activities; 4) the financing of such activities. Thus, the definition of terrorism is one of the complex problems of world science and practice of the fight against crime. Currently, there are a huge number of concepts of terrorism, none of which are recognized as generally accepted. This situation is due to both the complexity of the phenomenon itself which is terrorism, and subjective factors that exist at the national and international levels.

Majority of works on the study of the problem of terrorism is of criminological and penal in nature. Psychological research in this field appeared relatively recently. Therefore, the amount of work in this direction is very small and does not correspond to the severity of the problem. Existing research on the psychological problems of terrorism, mainly aimed at the study of typology and motives of terrorism and the terrorist structure of personality, decision-making process in the commission of a crime, etc.

Let's consider the main theoretical approaches to the definition of the concept of extremism.

Extremism — is a complex phenomenon, despite the fact that its complexity is often difficult to see and understand. The easiest way is to define it as the actions (as well as beliefs, attitudes to something or someone, feelings, actions, strategies) personality, far from the usual common. In the context of the conflict is a demonstration of rigid forms of conflict resolution. However, the designation of the activities of individuals and groups as «extremist» and a definition of what should be considered «normal» or «conventional» — is always subjective and political issue. Thus, we assume that any discussion on the topic of extremism affects the following.

Usually, some extremist actions by some people regarded as fair and virtuous (e.g. prosocial «struggle for freedom») and other extremist actions — as unfair and immoral (antisocial «terrorism»). It depends on the values, political beliefs, moral constraints of the evaluator, as well as his/her relationship with the figure.

In addition, the same human moral assessment of the same extremist actions (for example, the use of the tactics of guerrilla warfare by Nelson Mandela against the South African government) may vary depending on the conditions — leadership, world opinion, crises, «details of historical account» and so on. Thus, the modern and the historical context in which the action takes place extremist actions forms our views on it.

The difference between the forces is also important in determining extremism. During the conflict, the actions of the members of the weaker groups often seem to be more extreme than the same actions of members of a strong group defending the status quo. In addition, extreme measures will be used by probably marginal people and groups who are considering a more normative form of conflict resolution as unavailable to them, or treat them with prejudice. However, the dominant groups too often resort to extreme actions. Extremist actions are often associated with violence, although extremist groups may differ in preference of a violent or nonviolent tactics allowed by the level of violence, preferred targets for their violence (from infrastructure to military personnel and civilians and even children). Again, the weaker groups are more likely to use and take direct and episodic forms of violence (such as explosions of suicide bombers) whereas dominant groups tend to be more structured and institutionalized forms of violence (such as the use of secret torture or informal resolution of police brutality).

Despite the fact that the extremists and groups (such as Hamas or Islamic Jihad) are often seen as linked together and agreed upon mischief, it is important to understand that within them may be conflicts and ambivalent behavior of the group members. For example, some members of Hamas may be very different in their willingness to enter into negotiations with the Palestinian Authority and, finally, with certain factions in Israel.

Finally, the main problem is that extremism that is present in situations of prolonged conflict — is not as cruel, but the most notable from actions of the parties. The rigid and intolerant extremist position is extremely difficult to change.

It should be noted that in the legal literature terrorism is regarded as an extreme form manifestations of extremism.

«Terrorism» — is violence or the threat of violence against individuals or organizations, as well as the destruction (damage) of or the threat of destruction (damage) property and other material objects, endanger people's lives, causing significant property damage or other socially dangerous consequences, carried out for the purpose of undermining public security, terrorizing the population or influencing the authorities decision adoption, favorable to terrorists or to satisfy their illegal property and (or) other interests; encroachment on life of a statesman or public figure, committed to end its state or other political activity or out of revenge for such activity; the attack on the representative of a foreign country or an employee of an international organization under international protection, as well as on the office accommodations or vehicles of persons using international protection if the offense is committed for the purpose of provoking war, or complication of international relations.

A psychological approach to the problem of terrorism shows us the desire of individuals to solve problems extremely by the maximalist measures that is pushing them to extremism.

The research of activities of terrorist groups (at the moment there are about 500 associations of this kind) demonstrates a variety of forms of violence against the person: physical, property, moral and psychological. Methods for moral and psychological violence are part of the methods of physical violence and property, as a terrorist is always striving to intimidate real or perceived enemy. At the same time, the moral and psychological violence against a specific person or group can act as an independent method of violence. It is important to note that the moral and psychological violence, carried out by means of blackmail, threats, defamation and similar actions aimed at seeding man, bullying him, elimination from mental equilibrium.

Modern terrorism psychologically has a number of distinctive features:

Firstly, extremism is the way of psychological pressure. Its distinguishing feature is the deliberate creation of a condition of fear, depression and tension. Its main object is not those who are victims but those who survived. Accordingly, it deals not only material, economic and political damage, but also the painful moral injury to society.

Secondly, the extremism includes nihilism — the rejection of the common ethics, as a cultural foundation. Human values are rejected or reduced to nothing — they just do not exist for modern terrorism as an extreme form of extremism. It denies the basic human right — the right to life. Well-known English researcher Wilkinson writes that «terrorism is fundamentally different from other forms of violence not just by cruelty, but also by the highest degree of immorality, unscrupulous and uncontrollability» [1]. It is an effective tool to collect radical youth from marginalized sections of society and guide it to the decoys.

Thirdly, the extremism is distinguished for its public nature of execution. Extremist movements do not exist without wide publicity, open demanded requirement. Extremists take into account the public outcry caused by their actions, followed by the indictment of law enforcement and government officials, allegedly unable to protect citizens, and it is always a challenge to society. Its base contains of impaired human life.

Fourthly, now a modern extremism is closely associated with the modern mass media. Amoralism of extremists underlined by the fact, that sometimes the most violent crimes are committed for the sake of external effect, which is often sought through the mass media. The extremists need, perhaps, a large audience, the maximum echo, a wide resonance. They usually suggest and calculate reaction of political parties and governments, the general public. They do not know any boundaries spatially, and has only political and psychological borders. The media creates for extremism «virtual space», through which it would be possible to achieve political and psychological impact on the real world. It is no coincidence that in recent years have increasingly raised the issue of the moral responsibility of the media [2].

What motivates a person to engage in extremist activities, what motives are pushing for membership in an extremist organization? The answer must be found in the depths of its psychology. Definitely, there are social, political, economic and many other causes of extremism, but they are refracted in the personality and the presence of certain personal factors, psychological mechanisms, personal predisposition and, finally, lead man into the ranks of extremists.

Psychologists have distinguished a number of personal predispositions, which often become incentive motive of individuals on entering the path of terrorism as an extreme form of extremism [3]. Excess concentration on the protection of the «I» by the projection of a constant aggressive defense readiness; lack of personal identity, low self-esteem, the individual elements of the splitting; a strong need in joining the group, i.e. in a group identification or affiliation; experience a large degree social injustice with a tendency to project onto the public the reasons for their failures; social exclusion and alienation, the feeling of being on the margins of society and loss of life perspective. This is not to say that given a set of these characteristics is somehow generalized psychological profile of the individual extremist. This is not to say that given set of these characteristics are somehow generalized psychological profile of the individual of extremist. Significant role, in some cases, play a political and ideological motives in joining extremist groups. Nevertheless, they are often appears to be a form of rationalization of deeper personal motives — commitment to strengthening personal identity and, most importantly, the needs of belonging to a group. Extremist groups in the psychological sense relieve the individual incomplete or split of psychosocial identity.

It becomes for him a stabilizing psychological basis, which allows feeling aholistic person, an important component in his identity and finding meaning in life, a powerful engine of spiritual, valuable and behavioral stereotyping.

Individuality of extremist characterizes negative attitude, which occurs under the influence of a number of factors. First of all, it refers to the discrepancy between the image of the ideal model of the world and oneself in reality and the possibilities of self-realization. This contradiction with the ideal is transformed into a subjective sense of personal and social inadequacy; as a result, the extremist individuality represents the position, «I'm good, the world is bad». This position becomes a tool of moral self-defense which allows justifying any destructive actions. Thus, the extremist activities assume the characteristics of destructive self-realization. At the same time through the negation appears a new speculative concept of self-righteousness, which reduces to a minimum the possibility of a positive impact on extremist groups and individual extremist.

It is clear that extremism is caused by complex factors. Forthcoming extremists come to this path under the influence of the society, family and the media — to the greatest extent they are affected by the trendy ideas in given environment. Religious affiliation is the only, but quite important factor. Religious views allow

the leaders of extremist organizations to recruit new supporters easier and to subsume under the ideological base of their actions. But, at the same time, every extremist group pursues specific policy objectives. The combination of sacred religious principles and short-term political objectives are inherently absurd, but this contradiction does not bother adherents of extremist ideology. Extremism is severe because extremists usually have nothing to lose. In most cases, they are under the influence of religion or other ideologies that glorify martyrdom and self-sacrifice.

Besides the personal factors, there are series of socio-psychological factors, which ensure the involvement in extremist activities. Among them are the following:

- The use of different kinds of psychotechnologies aimed at «brainwashing» (inspiring effects, indoctrination, brainwashing, etc.);
- The mechanism of group identification, providing people with flawed self-assessment opportunity to feel like a complete person, joining one of the «elected, destined to correct the world»;
- Deindividuation of mind — there is a «group think» the contents of which are split by the members of the group without any criticism and any attempt to self-independence. The confrontation defines the main content of the thought. The world is divided into «ours» and «not ours». Everything that comes about «ours», any of their statements and actions are completely discouraged. All that comes from «not ours», are antecedently condemned and declared vicious. Any information contrary to this fixed installation is blocked and not perceived;
- Conflict situations, especially the confrontation with law enforcement, are fairly often criminal and anti-social experience;
- Personal contacts with members of terrorist organizations [4].
- Responsiveness of extremist group leaders to victims. Kelman observes that «responsiveness to the other's needs and fears is a fairly common form of influence in normal social relations» [5].

Subjects entered the ranks of the radical group (hereinafter: the extremists) — usually come from the various social classes and walks of life. There are a set of certain personality traits which must be possessed by extremists. Appears considerable personal changes associated with the ownership of an individual, by a certain culture and its acceptance as a valuable system, describes Conway. German scientists (Bayer, Keitel and etc.) observed such changes in soldiers, and defined it as «bounce». «Bounces» i.e. abrupt changes also occur when joining the extremist organization, because a person renounces his membership in a particular social group, drops the connection with society and is forced to keep an underground existence [6].

By studying the different social groups, by consultation with a variety of people, consultants and social psychologists have made the following conclusions. There are certain social characteristics of individuals who are prone to rapid changes — «bounce»: hysterics, people inclined to paranoia disorders, psycho-asthenia dependent personality types, hyper-ward, people from broken, dysfunctional families, people with disabilities who have experienced several psychological trauma, people with developed eidetic perception (hallucination in reality), prone to confabulation (a kind of «false memories», «hallucination memories»), children, grandchildren and relatives of cultists or terrorists [7].

The genesis of the formation and behavior of «involvement» of the person depends on the following factors: upbringing, education, attitude, opportunities for self-realization in modern life, society that surrounds this person. The mechanism of extremism is deeply ingrained in a person, disguised by layers of speech justifications. The most common triggers for extremist actions are a sense of hopelessness of the situation, which turned out to be a minority, a violation of psychological comfort, which impels to assess a situation as serious. Thus, involvement in cults happens to individuals who are in a state of emotional imbalance, most of all, it may be post-traumatic stress. With a wide variety of extremist and religious groups all have in common blind devotion of adherents of the organization to goals and ideals.

It can be assumed that these goals and ideals push people to join the organization. Although at times it is not necessary. The goals and ideals are the logical explanation of belonging to such organizations. The real reason is the clear need for group affiliation and a deeper sense of self-identity.

The feeling of alienation that occurs in these situations, push the person to join the group, seeming to him as antisocial, as he did. A strong need for such involvement in the group of people, connected with the problems of self-identity is a distinctive and common feature of all the terrorists.

Identification with the antisocial group provides such people a social role, albeit negative. Exiting from the group for the «involved» person is almost impossible — it is like a psychological suicide. Representations of adherent of grouping may be similar to the views of some women, who preserve the unhappy mar-

riage for the reason that it's better than being alone. For the «involved» person to get out of grouping is equivalent to a loss of identity. «Involved» person usually has low self-esteem so that to refuse to re-found self-identification is not possible. So people who are not among the authoritarians become members of rigid authoritarian groups. By engaging in such a group, they gain protection from the fear of authoritarianism and tyranny. Thus, any attack to a group is perceived as an attack on themselves. Therefore, any action from the outside considerably strengthens group cohesion. The religious extremist organizations have usually high percentage of aggressive paranoia. These individuals tend to externalize, causal attribution and the search for external factors to explain their own inadequacy. Eric Hoffer fully confirmed it by the conclusions in his monograph named «Orthodox», where clearly demonstrated that the majority of religious cults characterized by the image of a common enemy, which can be blamed for all the internal problems of a religious organization. So the enemy can be Satan, the government, other religions, etc.

Also, psychologists identified the paradox that for many terrorists the typical psychological feature is the deep fear of death. According to experts, terrorists seek to death — their own and others, trying to overcome own fear, «come over it». In childhood and adolescence potential suicide bombers may demonstrate an increased interest in the topic of death and in adulthood they deliberately choose a mortal variant of self-realization.

Thus, the actual and perspective direction for the development of science is the problem of extremism psychology research. Researchers are interested in the psychological, personal and socio-psychological aspects of this problem. Psychology of extremism, as we were convinced, is one of the most important branches of modern psychology.

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Экстремистік әрекеттің психологиялық аспектілері

Мақала экстремизм сияқты өзекті әлеуметтік мәселенің психологиялық қырларын қарастыруға арналған. Экстремизм — оның күрделілігінің жиі көрінуі және түсінілуі қиын болғанына қарамастан, күрделі құбылыс. Бүгінгі таңда біз әлі болса да экстремизмнің себептері мен оның табиғаты жайында аз білеміз. Авторлар «экстремизм» түсінігіне негізгі теориялық көзқарастар тұрғысын келіп, зерттеген. Экстремизмнің көрінуінің бір формасы терроризм болып табылады. Мақалада террористік іс-әрекетінің психологиялық аспектілері, экстремистік ұйымның мүшесі болуға итермелейтін психологиялық факторлар, экстремистік іс-әрекетке бейімділігінің психологиялық механизмдер мен индивидуалды ерекшеліктері қарастырылған.

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Психологические аспекты экстремистской деятельности

В статье рассмотрены психологические аспекты такой актуальной социальной проблемы, как экстремизм. Экстремизм — это сложное явление, несмотря на то, что его сложность часто трудно увидеть и понять. Сегодня мы все еще мало знаем о природе и причинах экстремизма. Авторами выделены главные теоретические подходы к определению понятия «экстремизма», одной из форм проявления которого является терроризм, а также проанализированы психологические аспекты террористической деятельности, психологические факторы, побуждающие к членству в экстремистской организации, индивидуальные особенности и психологические механизмы тех, кто склонен к экстремистской деятельности.

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