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Mutual Radicalization

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norms and values are transmitted, received, and implemented. For instance, multilateral engagement is a means through which states learn about “best practices” in regard to governance and economic management. Close cooperation allows for a number of socialization opportunities as governments gain a closer view of the functioning of politics in the societies of their multilateral partners.

International trade cooperation is often thought to be an important part of the promotion of democracy and representative forms of government. If multilateral cooperation requires policy harmonization, for example, states may choose to abandon restrictive or oppressive economic or political governance practices or curb state favoritism and participation in in-group/out-group conflicts. National elites may choose multilateralism as a strategy to better realize visions or images of a “good society,” fostering international cooperation in order to boost their standing at home or abroad. A history of success in multilateral engagement can accord advantageous reputational credentials to a state as a “good neighbor,” “honest broker,” or “transparent partner.” Building a good reputation may allow for greater influence in a state’s immediate neighborhood and beyond (e.g., the Scandinavian states and international conflict resolution). At the individual and group levels, political ideology can play a major role in predispositions toward cooperation and collusion and thus toward multilateral engagement. Individuals and the social groups they identify with may realize higher levels of personal or group satisfaction through altruistic, cooperative, or reciprocal behaviors. The willingness to cooperate is associated with other cognitive, personality, or group-level attributes such as a lack of nationalism, a decreased tendency to favor one’s own community over others, and a decreased need for group belonging. These attitudes effectively amount to a propensity to value differences across cultures and across nations.

Multilateral engagement in the 21st century includes those issues deemed most salient to international and regional security and/or economic growth including concerted counterterrorism and counterinsurgency efforts, stemming the spread of pandemic viruses and diseases, mitigating the spread and use of nuclear weapons technologies and other weapons of mass destruction, and regional and global initiatives to combat global warming and global climate change.

Luke B. Wood

See also American Exceptionalism; Contact Theory; Defense Planning; Deterrence and International Relations; Diplomacy; International Humanitarian Law; Nationalism; Parliamentarism; Political Deliberation; Positioning Theory; Reconciliation

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## MUTUAL RADICALIZATION

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Political behavior is sometimes influenced by *mutual radicalization*, when two groups take increasingly extreme positions against one another, reacting against real or imagined threats, moving further and further apart, with the ultimate goal of thwarting, blocking, or even destroying the other. Associated with this process is *pathological hatred*, in which each side interprets a loss for the other side as a gain for the self, with the destruction of the other bringing maximum self-satisfaction. Mutual radicalization is a dynamic process that can involve individuals competing against other individuals, as when two people become extreme in hatred and acts of aggression against one another. However, the more common and destructive form of mutual radicalization involves large groups, such as when groups formed on the basis of religion, ethnicity, nationality, and/or ideology mobilize to harm or destroy others.

The dynamic nature of the mutual radicalization process means that increases in radicalization in the first group impacts other groups, leading them to further radicalize, with the result that their radicalization increases the radicalization of the first group. The outcome can be a ratcheting process, with each group becoming increasingly radicalized and also influencing other groups to radicalize, with little or no opportunities to deradicalize. The culture and identity of each group becomes transformed and takes shape in opposition to “the enemy.” The three main stages in the mutual

radicalization process are *group mobilization*, with each group taking positions and distancing themselves from out-groups around particular issues; *extreme in-group cohesion*, when conformity and obedience increases within groups and the distance between different groups increases; and *antagonistic identity transformation*, when the identity of each group changes on the basis of enmity toward the out-group(s).

Mutual radicalization impacts family life, the education system, and all other mechanisms for socialization of the next generation. Children grow up seeing and believing "the enemy" to be evil. For example, the relationship between Arabs and Israelis has been characterized by mutual radicalization. Other examples are India and Pakistan, who have fought three wars and countless skirmishes since gaining independence from Britain in 1947. The relationship between extremist Muslims and right-wing nationalists in Europe is also taking on the characteristics of mutual radicalization.

Mutual radicalization also takes place in domestic politics, as reflected by "gridlock" on Capitol Hill during the presidency of Barack Obama (2008–2016). The shutdown of the federal government of the United States of America from October 1 until October 16 in 2013 was an outcome of mutual radicalization. This came about when the Democratic-controlled U.S. Senate and the Republican-controlled U.S. House of Representatives could not agree on funding for "Obamacare" (the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act), signed into law in 2010. The government shutdown was an attempt to "inflict political pain" and with a mentality that "whatever hurts the opposition must be good for us." The shutdown cost the United States economy at least \$24 billion, and the employees given a "forced holiday" received back pay.

The importance of the mutual radicalization process derives from the powerlessness of individuals to resist conformity to group norms, obedience to authority figures, and collective changes in general. Individuals are often reluctant to go along with group radicalization because they can see the group is making a mistake, but they become entrapped within collective changes. About 80 years of psychological research, including the studies of Turkish-American psychologist Muzafer Sherif in the 1930s, Solomon Asch in the 1950s, Stanley Milgram in the 1960s, and Phil Zimbardo in the 1970s, demonstrates that individuals with normal personality characteristics can be influenced by the group and by authority figures to make decisions they can clearly see are wrong and harmful to others.

Furthermore, research by Henri Tajfel and his associates suggests that mutual radicalization can take place

on the basis of what in objective terms are "trivial" criteria, or at least criteria that are psychologically rather than materially important. This helps explain why mutual radicalization and associated conflicts seldom result in material benefits to either side. For example, if Arabs and Israelis acted rationally in a way that maximizes the material interests of both sides, their relationship would be very different. Instead, mutual radicalization leads each side to treat each loss by the other as a gain for the self. This also explains why wars often end in material losses and no gains for both sides. For example, the 8-year war between Iran and Iraq (1980–1988) ended with neither side gaining an inch of territory or other resources but costing millions of lives and enormous material destruction on both sides. The two sides were led by belligerent dictators (Saddam Hussein ruled Iraq; Ayatollah Khomeini ruled Iran) who led their respective nations down a path of mutual radicalization and increasing destruction.

The power of the mutual radicalization arises from the automatic and irrational behavior of groups and individuals caught up in this process. Even individuals who can clearly see their group is moving in the wrong direction often are compelled to conform, obey, and move along with the rest of the group. If these "wise" individuals attempt to resist the collective movement, they are often victimized and branded traitors. However, it is often the courage of individual rebels that redirects the mutual radicalization process and prevents further destruction. The removal of the kinds of leaders who benefit from intergroup conflict and the improvement of communications between groups are other extremely important paths to preventing mutual radicalization.

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See also Calculus of Dissent; Deviance and Control; Dictatorship; Ethnicity-Based Voting Blocs; Groupthink; Irrationality; Powerlessness

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