



# TSAS

canadian network for research on  
terrorism, security and society

## **Workshop on Terrorism: The Social Conditions & Processes of Radicalization**



TSAS held the first of three scheduled workshops for 2012-2013 on November 10<sup>th</sup>, 2012 in Ottawa. The workshop on “The Social Conditions and Process of Radicalization” was a oneday event designed to piggy-back on the Kanishka Project Opening Conference run by Public Safety Canada. About 54 people participated in a day of research presentations and discussion focused on the study of the process of radicalization leading to terrorist violence. In line with one of the core objectives of TSAS, the participants were a mixture of academics and people working for the government of Canada in areas of policy and research related to terrorism and security issues. Government participants came from many agencies, ranging from the RCMP to the Ministry of Justice and the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal. Representatives from Chatham House in England and the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism in the Netherlands were present as well.

The morning was dedicated to insights from experimental social psychology, with presentations on basic and cutting edge findings by Aaron Kay (Duke University), Stephen Wright (Simon Fraser University), Richard Eiback (University of Waterloo), and Ian McGregor (York University). Social-psychology has a key role to play in helping us to understand the reasoning and motivations of individual terrorists and the operation and significance of the small group dynamics in terrorist groups. This role is widely acknowledged in the research literature, yet the integration of social psychological theory and data into terrorism studies is handicapped by differences in the training and disciplinary habits of scholars in both fields of study. The translation of insights from the one arena to the other has been too slow and we sought

to highlight some of the advantages of pursuing this type of knowledge mobilization more aggressively, and some of the specific ways in which it might be accomplished. This ambition is in line with another core objective of TSAS, to promote and facilitate the multidisciplinary approach to the study of terrorism, which is so often called for by scholars and yet rarely achieved.

The afternoon was dedicated to a series of presentations highlighting how the location and political conditions in which terrorist incidents occur has an impact on how we should best understand them. The first presentation by Aurélie Campana (CRC at Laval University) discussed the transition to terrorism in insurgencies, using the example of the conflict in the Chechen Republic. Jeremy Kowalski (PhD candidate, York University) then discussed insights from his dissertation research on the case of the Toronto 18. Lorne Dawson (University of Waterloo) discussed the ways in which the literature on terrorist radicalization has yet to really come to grips with the role of religion as a prime motivator for terrorism, and Ian Reader (Lancaster University) delineated some of the specific ways in which religious beliefs have motivated terrorist violence in an array of cases.

Many of the presentations sparked lively discussion, and in the end, despite having set more time than is common at workshops for question and answer periods, it was widely thought that more time was needed for interaction with the speakers and amongst audience members. In the evaluations of the day, most participants rated the quality of the speakers as high, and the usefulness of the content as high or medium, but we recognize that more attention must be paid to drawing out and scrutinizing the policy implications of the research presented. Clear lessons were learned and they are being applied to the two other workshops on security and the societal response to terrorism and securitization planned for later in 2013.