



Hamed El-Said

New Approaches to Countering Terrorism: Designing and Evaluating Counter Radicalization and De-Radicalization Programs

Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, 295 p.

Since the 1980s religious terrorism is on the top of many nations' agenda. No doubt the phenomenon might be known to the world since humanity's origins. Killing civilians for one's political goals is not particularly typical of religious terrorism. Not only terrorist groups use, terroristic tactics States use them to achieve their goals too. Today Islamic terrorism dominates the political agenda. However, since the Arabic Spring, the political transformations and civil wars in the Middle East, many civilians from the region are fleeing to Europe. In Europe islamophobia and violence against refugees, especially in Germany, is on the rise. In short, political extremism is increasing not only in the Middle East but also in Europe. It is not only a challenge inside the Muslim community but also inside the Christian European societies.

In his book published in 2015 Hamel El-Said evaluates several "Counter Radicalization and De-Radicalization Programs" in several nation states or regions of the world. After an introduction the author sets the framework for his study (p.13-53). The chapters 3 and 4 focus on Australia and the De-radicalization program in this country (p.53-96). The 5th chapter takes a close look at Mauritania and its challenges with violent Islam (p.96-138). Counter radicalization in Singapore is analysed in chapter 6 (p.138-174). Sudan and Turkey are separately evaluated in the chapters 7 and 8 (p.174-254). Concluding remarks are found in chapter 9 (p.254).

This review will focus on chapters 2 and 8. The second chapter sets the framework of the study. El-Said develops a hypothesis and a theoretical framework to evaluate his study. For example, the first hypothesis on page 17 asserts that Violent-Extremists (VEs) are a greater threat to failed states or states which are at risk to lose their order. Somalia or Yemen serve as examples to support the assumption. Economic status of individuals or groups and their influence on VEs are also critically analysed. Socio-economically disadvantaged people might more easily join terrorist groups or become extremists. However, the author hesitates to use the socio-economic factor as an all-explanatory theory since some extremists are from wealthy families. With regard to some American Muslim VEs the economic factor plays a less important role. Additionally, the prison environment and some rehabilitation programs, global environment, civil society etc. are discussed in the second chapter. In short, the author is able to show that there are several ways in which radicalization can take place. Therefore, nation states embrace multidisciplinary counterterrorism measures to defeat radicalization.

Chapter 8 focuses on Turkey and its struggle with left-wing, right-wing, religious and nationalist terrorism. According to El-Said Turkey's greatest challenge was and is Kurdish terrorism. Its roots can be traced to the time of Ottoman Empire, 1880 in particular. However, the late Ottoman Empire was generally confronted with (Muslim and non-Muslim) nationalist uprisings; they used terroristic tactics to achieve their political objectives. Kurdish minorities, likewise non-Muslim ones, also tried to involve the great powers of the 19th century into their independence struggle to gain more political attention and foreign support (p.221). Being aware of that, Abdülhamid II tried to reintegrate insurgent Kurdish groups into the Ottoman Empire by developing the politics of "Pan-Islamism". Since the Kurdish majority was Muslim and were aware of the Islamic tradition and law Abdülhamids "Pan-Islamic" policy successfully integrated some parts of the Kurds back in the Sublime Ports society.

The Turkish Republic of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk had more trouble to deal accurately with Kurdish radicalization. Since the new nation state cut all ties with the Islamic Empire and its multi-religious as well as multi-ethnic identity, the state had trouble to include those parts of society to its new identity policy reforms, that were not ready to accept Turkism (based on



ancient Turkish history and ethnicity) as their new bond. However, Atatürk and his supporters knew that they would face those kinds of challenges and therefore they created the Department of Religious Affairs “Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı”. In short, Turkish laicism, which surprisingly is not mentioned by El-Said, has a vital interest to control religion and to dictate legal religious practice. Some parts of the Sunni majority and a big part of the Kurdish minority were against the “Diyanet”, because it was not an independent Institution; it was created to reduce religion influence and fit it into the Kemalistic modernization process. However, the author claims that the Kurdish insurgents were ignorant of modernization (p.223-225). Such a view on the Turkish-Kurdish question reduces the complexity of the conflict.

After a brief examination of the formative phase of the early republic, El-Said focuses on the beginning of the multiparty period till today. The author rightly emphasizes that Turkey was never colonized by foreign powers. It was its own rigid modernization policy (state-terrorism) combined with a racist Turkish nationalism, which caused radicalization inside the Kurdish minority (p.224). During the 1950s the Democratic Party (with strong ties to Islam) tried to loosen up the Republic’s politics towards Islam and to open a way for religious voters to participate in politics. During the 60s, 70s, 80s and 90s several political parties with strong ties to Islam tried to challenge the cultural as well as ethnical homogenization process of the republic. However, as El-Said rightly emphasized, since 2002 the Turkish government changed its strategy to deal with Kurdish terrorism. For example, “winning hearts and minds” was challenging the traditionally governmental assumption that only a military solution could save Turkey from Kurdish extremism. Economic developments in eastern Turkey as well as a closer relationship between state members and members of the Kurdish society created an atmosphere of trust and could better prevent extremism. El-Said convincingly shows that the government’s decision to challenge violent extremism with democratic instruments bear more fruit than merely military solutions.

In conclusion, El-Said continuously emphasizes that there are no “one size fits all” solutions to the challenge of extremism. However, the study is full of insights on how and why de-radicalization works and fails. It is a good and timely book.

Huseyin Cicek, Ph.D.
University of Enlargen
huseyin.cicek@outlook.com