

Islamist Radicalisation in Europe and the Middle East: Re-assessing the Causes of Terrorism, edited by George Joffé (London & New York, NY: I. B. Tauris, 2013), ix + 354 pp., ISBN: 978-1-84885-480-2, £68.00

Radicalism, radicalization, violence, and terrorism have increasingly drawn the attention of scholars since the events of 11 September 2001. These scholars belong to various disciplines including: theology, political science, sociology, psychology, history, and other fields that provide important insights on such issues. Yet, although these different areas of study disagree about the appropriate use of the term ‘radicalization,’ they often assign this phenomena to the non-state realm while blending it with concepts of ‘extremism’ and ‘violence’. Some of these studies not only mix together and overlap radicalization with violence, but go further and identify radicalization and extremism specifically with Islamic doctrines – as being responsible for violence in the Middle East and in European Muslim communities.

The current volume tries to challenge these assumptions by further investigations of the complex causes and motivation that guide radicalization, with special emphasis on the question of how conditions for radicalization are created. It contains twelve essays, based on the proceedings of a conference held in Cambridge in 2009, covering a wide array of topics on Islamic radicalism in Europe and the Middle East. These essays are thematic and range from theoretical constructs of radicalism and radicalization, as presented in the introduction and first chapters, to empirical Middle-Eastern country studies, including Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, and the Gulf region. Some of these essays refer to the ‘Arab Spring’ events that transformed the politics of the Arab world in 2011. Through these essays, this volume aims at providing further insights, as the volume editor puts it: “... into the phenomenon of radicalization in the post 11 September 2001 era and of perceptions of radicalization that have emerged since then” (p. 12).

To this end, this volume suggests further investigation of radicalism from other critical angles – that of the state and its interaction with society – a point largely ignored in prior studies. One prevailing hypothesis in this volume is that radicalization is a process consisting

of a complex interrelationship between governments and their political opponents. In so far as these governments suppress and exclude their opposition from the national political game and declare discontent voices as being illegitimate, governments become central players in the creation of radicalization. This is manifested, *inter alia*, when non-governmental groups seek other, clandestine pathways for the expression of their political tendencies, sometimes in a radical ways.

Another important observation in the current volume is the clear conceptual distinction between 'radicalization', 'extremism', and 'violence'. A key difference between 'radicalism' and 'extremism', according to the authors, lies in the degree of social interaction. That is, 'radicalism' is conducted through social movements driven by peaceful mass mobilization, while 'extremism' stems from the failure to accommodate demands made by the masses, leading to violence perpetrated by much smaller groups (based on the 'moral' support of the masses). These observations are clarified in the various essays dedicated to the country case studies mentioned above. The authors shed important light on processes of radicalization, while concluding that some of the radical Islamic movements are neither extremist nor violent. Moreover, radicalization is not necessarily based on religion; it can also occur due to ethnic grievances, as shown in the study of the Kurdish minority in Turkey. This author, among others, stresses the critical role of the state in the radicalization process.

The major problem throughout this volume is related to the placement of the 'Arab Spring' in the context of the discussion. Indeed, the editor noted in the introduction that this issue is not covered in detail due to certain considerations, but mainly because of the volume's major purpose – to examine the motives and causes, rather than the outcomes produced. Yet, one critical question this volume asks is how these motives affect the series of events in the various Arab countries. Another weakness of this volume is the unbalanced discussion on Islamic radicalization in Europe and the Middle East. While this volume promises to provide insights in both these arenas, much more attention is paid to the latter at the expense of the former. This hampers a deep understanding of the subject by means of comparative perspectives.

Despite the aforementioned weaknesses, this book adds significant new details on the complex relationships between radicalism, radicalization, violence, and terrorism. It strengthens our definition of

‘radicalization’ and our understanding of how it relates to ‘extremism’ and ‘violence’, while providing more information on the non-religious motivation of radicalization, that had previously gotten much less attention from scholars. It can be appreciated by students of Islam, Middle-East scholars and even by the general public.

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