

## **Selected literature on radicalization and de-radicalization of terrorists: Monographs, Edited Volumes, Grey Literature and Prime Articles published since the 1960s**

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“When, why, and how do people living in a democracy become radicalized to the point of being willing to use or directly support the use of terrorist violence against civilians, and when, why, and how might they de-radicalize and draw back from such action? The empirical basis for understanding the background factors and trigger events pushing or pulling people towards Islamist militancy is very limited. Moreover, there is no consensus within the research community as to which theories and approaches offer the most promising avenues for further exploration”.—A. Dalgaard-Nielsen, DIIS WP no. 2008/3:17.

### **Introduction**

by Alex P. Schmid

Much of terrorism research has been driven by political processes following significant terrorist attacks. When Aum Shinrikyo launched a Sarin gas attack in the Tokyo subway in 1995, the topic ‘terrorism and weapons of mass destruction’ became ‘hot’. When in the year 2000 the second Palestinian Intifada against the Israeli occupation saw an increase in so-called martyrdom operations, ‘suicide terrorism’ became the buzz word for researchers searching for grants. When, a year later, 9/11

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happened, research on Al Qaeda and salafist jihadism became the order of the day. When the illegal US invasion of Iraq outraged many Muslims in the Middle East and in Western Muslim diasporas as well, radicalization processes in the form of mainly ‘homegrown terrorism’ became a major research priority. Later, after jihadists terrorists and supporters were captured and imprisoned in great numbers, the problem of de-radicalising them arose. As a consequence, in the last six years we have seen a growing number of studies on radicalisation to and de-radicalisation from terrorism.

In certain respects this is welcome since it is part of the somewhat underfunded search for root causes of terrorism. Peter Neumann noted that “Following the attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001...it suddenly became very difficult to talk about “the roots of terrorism” which some commentators claimed was an effort to excuse and justify the killing of innocent civilians....It was through the notion of radicalisation that a discussion...became possible again”.<sup>1</sup> However, it can be argued that this focus is too narrow and one-sided. The causes of terrorism should not just be sought on (i) the individual and group levels but also (ii) on the national and societal level and, last but not least, (iii) on the international and global system level. Much of the current discussion focuses too much on the individual and his or her radicalisation. In a way this is just as one-sided just as the old dictum that “every society has the crime it deserves”, was in erring on the opposite side.

The literature on (de-) radicalisation is young. In the attached bibliography the majority of the 175 titles are from the last decade, especially from the last six years. Only eleven titles are from the 1990s, four from the 1980s, none is from the 1970s and only one from the 1960s. Most of the literature focuses on Islamist radicalization. The majority of studies describe radicalisation processes with studies of de-radicalisation being fewer and of more recent origin. The literature selected here is, however, more illustrative than representative for the dynamic and fast-growing field of (de-) radicalisation studies. Part of the literature is “grey”, that is, it consists of reports that are not distributed in the form of academic monographs or published in social science journals, though many of them are available online.

Radicalisation literature approaches the subject of socialisation to violence from several angles. One school explores mainly how so-called ‘vulnerable’ individuals are socialized ideologically and psychologically by recruiters of terrorist organizations, ending up as killers or even suicide bombers. Another school stresses more how young individuals looking for adventure and a—in their eyes—worthy cause seek out terrorist organizations by themselves or act in line with them or on their behalf in search for personal fulfillment and acceptance by violent extremist organisations. Sometimes the radicalising individual is not becoming a “lone wolf” terrorist but radicalises as part of “a bunch of guys” who share common experiences (like feeling alienated in a diaspora situation). It is often assumed that radicalisation precedes recruitment but there have been cases where recruitment comes first and is followed by radicalisation.<sup>2</sup> When it comes to de-radicalisation we also find that in some cases dis-engagement from a terrorist organization antedates ideological distancing from the philosophy of terrorism.

<sup>1</sup> Peter R. Neumann, cit. M. Sedgwick. *The Concept of Radicalization as a Source of Confusion. Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 22, No. 4, p.480.

<sup>2</sup> Magnus Ranstorp Introduction to M. Magnus (Ed.). *Understanding Violent Radicalisation. Terrorist and Jihadist Movements in Europe*. London, Routledge, 2010, p. 7.

Part of the literature focuses on the places where radicalisation is said to take place—prisons, mosques, universities, madrassas, diasporas or the internet. Another part stresses alleged triggers of radicalisation—discrimination, foreign occupation or counter-terrorist over-reaction. Yet other studies focus on the roles of ideology and religion, especially salafism and wahhabism. Surprisingly few studies compare radicalisation to terrorism to the joining of organized crime groups or religious sects.

There is also another imbalance in the discussion about radicalisation and terrorism. It can be argued that much of that literature is blind on one eye, neglecting the question whether many counter-terrorists have not also become radicalized during the eight years of the Bush-Cheney administration. The Obama administration, while starting its term full of good intentions, has not been able to change gears and de-escalate the struggle with Al-Qaeda as the Pentagon has continued most of the policies of the previous administration. It seems that the Republican Party but also a good part of the American media and the public as well as the Homeland security bureaucracy have to some extent been radicalised as well after 9/11. However, almost nothing on the way to de-radicalise some of the counter-terrorists can be found in the existing literature.

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