



PREVENTING AND TREATING RADICALIZATION: A TWO VOLUME REVIEW

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There is a new plague in the world today: the plague of extremism. It progresses into violence and it threatens civilized societies the world over. Nations must brace themselves combat the phenomenon. The global war on terror that claimed vast number of lives and immense resources already, has been a war on the extremists. And there is a vast difference between **extremists** and **extremism**. Extremists are **people**. They can be killed; they can be apprehended. Extremism is a **state of mind**. It is highly contagious; it can spread like a disease; It cannot be killed or put in jail, and it is rooted in human psychology. But how can it be prevented? And once it takes hold on human souls how can it be treated and removed?

Two recent volumes published by Imperial College Press: “Resilience and resolve: Communities against extremism” edited by Jolene Jerard and Salim Mohamed Nasir, and “Terrorist Rehabilitation: A New Frontier in Counter-terrorism” edited by Rohan Gunaratna and Mohammad bin Ali offer a wealth of insights and suggestions on just these matters. These insights are particularly valuable because they come from practitioners who have spent the better part of the last decade carrying hands on efforts to cope with the scourge of radicalization. They describe what seems to have worked, what errors of approach had better be avoided, and what the nitty-gritty of strategy and tactics of combatting extremism consisted of in specific local instances where they have been implemented.





The “Resilience and Resolve” volume focuses largely, though not exclusively, on prevention. Its chapters depict ways in which radicalization has unfolded in specific cases, and on how communities may immunize themselves against radicalization. Important notions of **community engagement**, and of “**whole society**” versus “**whole government**” approaches are explored alongside notions pertaining to credibility of counter-extremist argumentation, the social psychological bases of radicalization, the role of moderate ideology and the persuasive power of concepts of **religious harmony**, **forgiveness** and **reconciliation** as tools in the counter-radicalization effort.

The “Terrorist Rehabilitation” volume Part 1, highlights efforts aimed at deradicalization of detained militants, and its chapters depict first-hand accounts of major deradicalization programs such as those carried out in Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Indonesia. Basically, these programs can be successful if they address three interrelated factors: the detainees’ psychological *motivations*, their *ideologies*, and their social *networks*. Because detainees’ motivation for radicalization is to imbue their life with significance, the deradicalization programs are successful if they equip the detainees with alternative ways to significance, typically through provision of vocational education that may allow them respectful participation in society. On the ideological front, provision of a counter narrative to the radical rhetoric by credible sources, e.g. reputable Islamic clerics, demonstrate that the extremist way does not confer significance, but to the contrary is shameful and unacceptable. Finally, successful programs such as those in Saudi Arabia, Singapore or Iraq made important use of the detainees’ network by involving their families in the process of rehabilitation, thus recruiting credible allies with great sway over the detainees and strong interest in getting them back into society.



In addition, Part 2 of the volume covers the ideological principles central to the Islamic moderation counter-narrative, and shows how notions like “Jihad,” “Takfir” and “Al Wala wal Bara” abused in the violence-justifying ideology, must be re-interpreted to reflect their true religious meaning in Islam. Jihad, which in Islam means “internal struggle” or highly regulated and lawful fight in defense of Islam, is typically interpreted by the extremists as licensed violence against anyone who isn’t Muslim or a particular kind of Muslim. Takfir which in Islam means “excommunication” on exceptional and strictly defined grounds, is interpreted by the extremists by declaring as apostates any one with whom one is in theological disagreement. Finally, Al Wala wal Bara (Loyalty/Enmity) refers to the concepts of loyalty to Islam and only to Islam, which by the jihadists is interpreted as the injunction to carry war against non-Muslims.

We learn that the process of combatting radicalization does not end with graduation from any given program, and that efforts toward treatment and prevention of extremism must be long-term, based on a profound understanding of radicalization, and interwoven into a comprehensive whole-society effort aimed at forestalling and defeating the pernicious wave of extremism that threatens to engulf the world. The rich and highly varied texture of experience by devoted practitioners of the combat against extremism featured in these two volumes should be extremely helpful to all those who understand that the global war on terror must now be taken to its next level, and who are determined to join the worldwide counter-radicalization project. Fighting the **extremists**, however essential, is not enough. “We cannot kill our way out of this mess” as Governor Romney recently quipped. The more fundamental fight is that of combating **extremism**, and the international community, governments and civil societies alike, need to vigorously confront this truly global challenge.