

# Jihadi Terrorism and the Radicalisation Challenge. European and American Experiences

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## INTRODUCTION

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Ten years now separate us from the tragic events of 11 September 2001. The ensuing decade witnessed large-scale terrorist killings and many foiled terrorist plots, overreacting officials and profound human tragedies, brave attempts to bridge misunderstandings and vulgar political exploitation.

Numerous efforts have been made to try to make sense of what happened before and after that tragic day. Often it was forgotten that citizens in Muslim-majority countries bore by far the largest share of the burden of terrorist attacks in the name of Islam – and still do nowadays.

Osama bin Laden, the master brain behind the attacks, was killed in May 2011 by U.S. Special Forces in Pakistan. By the time of his death two narratives were already competing as to the scope of the jihadi threat. It was thus not surprising that the consequences of Bin Laden's demise would be interpreted in widely diverging ways. The first narrative is that al-Qaeda is still the formidable foe it once was. It has shown remarkable strength and adaptability to ever-changing circumstances, notably by targeting the West from within by home-grown groups and individuals it lures into terrorism through sophisticated propaganda. Bin Laden's death does not alter the fact that the world still faces a significant terrorist threat. He will remain a potent symbol that mobilizes radicals worldwide. Revenge plots by affiliate groups are inevitable and the need for a heir to al-Qaeda's leader shows the persistent relevance of the global terrorist network Bin Laden has created.

The alternative narrative portrays a scattered group of amateurs displaying more fervour than skill. Already at the time of Bin Laden's death, his organisation and the state of jihadi terrorism were starkly different from their heydays between 1997 and 2004. Osama bin Laden himself had lost his Rob Hood image and jihadi terrorism its juggernaut sheen by the sheer revulsion its killings inspire, and as a result of international and national efforts and the growing resilience in Muslim communities and Muslim-majority countries. Osama bin Laden's death was an emotional triumph for the United States, but merely marks the symbolic end of an era, according to this view. If it has any relevance in the real world of terrorism, then this will chiefly consist in accelerating the waning of his message and the declining fortunes of his strand of terrorism – even if jihadis will doubtless try to maintain a semblance of momentum by hatching new plots and attempting new attacks.

This book offers an updated and entirely revised edition of the first print published early 2008. One of the major changes in the policy environment that has occurred since, was that searching for 'root causes' no longer is limited to Europe. In the beginning, speaking about root causes was very much a taboo in the United States. In Europe it was on the contrary considered to be of paramount importance to understand what drove individuals towards terrorist violence – so as to be able to dry up the breeding ground of terrorism. It was one of the many trans-Atlantic differences of opinion on terrorism and counter-terrorism. But it no longer is. American and European police, policy and academic discussions on this topic have now become standard.

Another important change occurred in 2009 in the United States. The realisation that young Americans from Somali descent living in Minneapolis went on a suicide mission in Somalia came as a shock to many in the counter-terrorism community and public at large. Up to that moment home-grown terrorism by self-radicalising groups was considered a quintessential European phenomenon, borne out of a failed integration policy and large-scale discrimination Muslims had to face in Europe. American Muslims, so it was long assumed, were well integrated and often living in affluent suburbs rather than poor ethnic enclaves as they did in Europe. Unfortunately, self-radicalisation is not limited to the European continent alone.

The making of this new edition offered the opportunity to reflect upon recent trends in terrorism and radicalisation, as well as to fill some gaps in the existing research. This has structured the present volume.

This book comprises four parts. Part 1 provides a global assessment of the jihadi threat nowadays, addressing the aforementioned competing narratives. In Chapter 1 Paul Pillar sketches the status and the shape of jihadi terrorism today as a baseline for the chapters that follow. Olivier Roy does the same in chapter two, from a European perspective and with particular emphasis on the second generation jihadis, born and raised in the West. Hugh Roberts (chapter 3) delves into the history of jihadi violence in the Maghreb that largely predates the rise of al-Qaeda and connects the dots between its earlier manifestations and today's al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. Teun Van de Voorde concludes the first part with her critical assessment of the current state of research in the field of terrorism studies, where quantity is not necessarily synonymous with quality.

Part two aims at rehabilitating the neglected longitudinal and comparative analysis of terrorism. It is often said, but seldom acted upon, that comparative research is the real missing link in the field of terrorism studies. In chapter five Martha Crenshaw questions the frequently repeated judgment that we are facing a new variety of terrorism today and argues that the distinctions claimed by the 'new' terrorism school are generally not points of fundamental difference. Leena Malkki compares the radical left terrorism wave of the 1960s and 70s with the contemporary jihadi variety of terrorism and discovers more similarity than divergence. In chapter seven I attempt to do the same with the anarchist

terrorism of the end of the nineteenth century, that will be linked to jihadi terrorism by their common characteristic as being two expressions of 'revolutionary terrorism'.

Part three then deals with the concept of radicalisation, sometimes considered the holy grail of terrorism studies – how does an individual turn into a terrorist? Jocelyne Cesari explains how joining the jihad is a social process and not simply an individual decision, made possible by a set of specific enabling factors of a doctrinal, socio-cultural, ideological and political nature. In chapter nine Marc Sageman makes clear, based on personal itineraries of convicted jihadis, how great the threshold is between extreme ideas and actually using violence and doing so generates a model to explain how individuals go down the path of political violence. Edwin Bakker provides in chapter ten an exceptional inventory of biographies of European jihadis and addresses the one billion question how to identify the standard profile of a jihadi. Ruud Peters details the radicalisation trajectory of Mohamed Bouyeri, who killed the Dutch film-maker Theo van Gogh in 2004. He used the digital material found on Bouyeri's computers and offers a rare insight in a personal trajectory of a jihadi activist. In the last chapter of part three I attempt to analyse the rise and demise of jihadi terrorism in Belgium, using for the first time the court verdicts in the recent jihadi trials in Belgium.

Part four deals with de-radicalisation in Europe and the United States. John Horgan and Max Taylor start with an overview of what we know about de-radicalisation experiences and note that the obvious distinction between disengagement en de-radicalisation has not been thought through in de-radicalisation programs. In chapter fourteen Clark McCauley addresses the issue of demise of terrorist groups, as a result of group dynamics and envisages how jihadi terrorism might eventually end, comparing it to earlier instances where terrorist campaigns also came declined. Tarik Fraihi describes in chapter fifteen the many impediments immigrant and Muslim communities face when confronted with this thorny and complex issue of radicalisation. Robert Lambert looks at his own experience as head of the Metropolitan Police's Muslim Unit and describes his difficult journey when working with so-called Salafists in a common effort to counter the jihadis' call to arms in Great Britain. Lorenzo Vidino and I end this part with an analysis of the American and European strategies to countering terrorism and radicalisation.

The conclusion tries to sum up the many novel ideas, intriguing research results and personal experiences the contributors brought together in this book, making it a valuable state of the art in this complex and ever changing imbroglio of terrorism and radicalisation. It finishes with a ray of hope, if the history of terrorism can be trusted as a guide.

Finally, in the appendix a report by the Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation, set up by the European Commission in 2006, is published in print for the first time. This report summarised the main academic findings in this field and remains a most relevant contribution to the study of radicalisation and de-radicalisation as several contributors point out.

This book owes its value to the fine group of distinguished officials, scholars and astute observers I had the pleasure and the privilege to bring together in this book. They share a common concern of avoiding easy stereotypes when dealing with such delicate and thorny issues as terrorism and radicalisation. My sincere gratitude goes to: Edwin Bakker, Jocelyne Cesari, Martha Crenshaw, Tarik Fraihi, John Horgan, Bob Lambert, Leena Malkki, Clark McCauley, Ruud Peters, Paul R. Pillar, Hugh Roberts, Olivier Roy, Marc Sageman, Max Taylor, Teun Van de Voorde and Lorenzo Vidino.

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