

Book Review of "Islamist Terrorism and Democracy in the Middle East"

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In the post-9/11 period, it was widely accepted and appeared to inform Western foreign policies that there is a causal link between Islamist terrorism and the lack of democracy in the Middle East. Partly funded by the United States Institute of Peace, *Islamist Terrorism and Democracy in the Middle East* challenges this widely held assumption through a detailed investigation into the activities of both radical and moderate Islamist groups across the Middle East. The author, Katerina Dalacoura, explores whether repression and political exclusion pushed Islamist groups to adopt terrorist tactics and whether inclusion in the political process had the opposite effect of encouraging them toward moderation and ideological pragmatism.

Although political explanations of repression and exclusion are the book's primary focus, Dalacoura emphasizes a combination of social, economic, and political factors as the material/ structural causes. She investigates how they interact with ideas and ideologies or ideational causes in pushing some Islamist movements towards terrorism. Her analysis mainly rests on a grievance- or strain-based approach and it guides her analysis of the case studies in the book. The case of al-Qaeda is analyzed to challenge the assumptions that Islamist terrorism now operates exclusively in association with al-Qaeda and as part of a transnational network. To show that these assumptions are unfounded Dalacoura analyzes the movements of Hamas and Hizbullah, and those of the Armed Islamic Group in Algeria (GIA) and the Gamaa Islamiya in Egypt. She argues that these prominent Islamist movements are not at all associated with al-Qaeda and they "employ terrorist tactics while remaining firmly embedded in their respective domestic contexts" (p. 40). On the other hand, a transnational, rootless existence, which in the case of al-Qaeda reinforced its lack of connectedness with political processes, does not necessarily lead other radical transnational Islamist movements like Hizb ut Tahrir to adopt terrorist tactics.

If a consistent causal link between political factors and Islamist terrorism cannot be established, then what might be the cause of this terrorism? Although Dalacoura states that it is "not the purpose of the book to answer what causes Islamist terrorism," she does offer "some tentative answers" to the question (p. 181). In the cases of GIA and Gamaa Islamiya, for example, socio-economic factors (e.g., marginalization, alienation, economic deprivation, and poverty) are shown to have played a role in their violent insurgencies against their respective governments. On the other hand, in the cases of al-Qaeda, Hamas and Hizbullah, their terrorist tactics are thought to be highly strategic/instrumental; they were used when their leaderships concluded that these actions might help deliver the expected results (in terms of their ideologies).

Is the moderation of some Islamist groups or movements the result of their acceptance of democracy and political pluralism? To answer this question, Dalacoura looks at some Islamist movements directed against their respective governments: the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and the Tunisian Nahda movements. She also examines the experience of some governments, such as Turkey's government-supported Justice and Development Party and Welfare Party, and the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Here again, her findings are mixed.

The inclusion of the Muslim Brotherhood in political processes in Jordan led consistently to its moderate ideological stance. The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, in contrast, was slightly influenced by its partial inclusion in the political process, but its initial major shift towards moderation had occurred largely as a result of repression under Nasser, and subsequently under Sadat and Mubarak. Political repression and exclusion also did not push the Tunisian Nahda movement towards the adoption of terrorism or any other form of radicalism. The ideological moderation of Turkey's Islamists, who had considerable electoral successes, was partially the product of political inclusion but largely the outcome of state repression. One exceptional case is Iran, where the Islamist movement captured the entire state apparatus following the 1979 Revolution and led to moderation in the form of more pragmatic policies. According to Dalacoura, all these cases show that political participation does not necessarily lead to moderation of radical Islamist movements and can only partly account for it.

However, the author does not claim to offer a complete account either. Her explanations repeatedly emphasize the strategic/instrumental reasons, or a calculation by the leadership that terrorism would be counter-productive. The book also highlights socio-economic factors, including the support given to Islamist movements by a widening middle class with an interest in avoiding confrontational politics. The major weakness of the book's case-study-based evidence is that it does not support any particular explanation for the adoption of terrorist tactics or moderation by various Islamist movements. Instead, the reader or the policy maker is left with the choice to draw his or her own conclusions from the book's investigation.

There are clearly many causes of Islamist terrorism. Dalacoura's recommendation is that policy makers must take all of the causes on board, and at the same time they should combine a case-by-case approach with a multi-pronged policy. They should not marginalize democracy promotion in the Middle East, but they should also focus more on development and welfare in the region to reduce public grievance and feeling of deprivation. Dalacoura argues that Islamist terrorists are rational actors, and that "understanding and responding to the utilitarian way they use terrorist tactics, is the most vital element of a successful counter-terrorism policy" (p. 186).

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