# Resources

Daniel Koehler. *Understanding Deradicalization: Methods, Tools and Programs for Countering Violent Extremism* (London / New York: Routledge, 2017), 306 pp., US $155.00 [Hardback], US $43.88 [E-book]. ISBN: 978-1-138-12277-2 (Hardback), 978-1-315-64956-6 (E-book).

## Reviewed by Bart Schuurman

Acts of terrorism tend to elicit hardline responses from politicians and the public. But the modern experience with this form of political violence has demonstrated time and again the limitations of what are euphemistically termed 'kinetic' countermeasures. A criminal justice approach has become prevalent in Europe especially, but here also limitations must be acknowledged. Most terrorists cannot be imprisoned forever. In the European context, the prosecution of returned 'foreign fighters' has shown just how difficult it can be to gather sufficient evidence for crimes allegedly committed in conflict zones. Finally, for the relatively limited number of actual terrorists, there are many more individuals whose 'radical' views (whether Islamist, right-wing or otherwise) make them potential security risks in the eyes of the authorities.

In response to these issues, recent years have seen many initiatives across the globe aimed at developing policies to prevent or respond to terrorism by addressing the radical convictions often assumed to underpin it. Just as the debate on how and why people become involved in terrorism has been dominated by the concept of radicalization, policies and programs aimed at preventing such involvement, or accomplishing the reintegration into society of former terrorists, frequently center on 'deradicalization'. Notwithstanding some governments' suspiciously triumphant claims of success, if and how such prevention or reintegration efforts can work remains uncertain. Key issues include a muddied definitional debate, lack of (publicly available) hard data to measure initiatives' effectiveness, an associated lack of program evaluations and, no less critically, ambiguity about the processes underpinning deradicalisation and disengagement and just how interventions can (contribute to) bring about these outcomes.

Enter Daniel Koehler's new book *Understanding deradicalization*. Although research on deradicalization has become increasingly prevalent in recent years, there are few publications that provide a central point of reference for the many issues and questions that this topic raises. Koehler's book recommends itself in part precisely because it covers the breadth of the debate on deradicalization and disengagement and because it presents this material in a fashion that is accessible to both professionals and academics. Those working to develop, implement or assess deradicalization or disengagement projects will benefit in particular from the topically-focused chapters, the many examples and overviews taken from existing initiatives and the work's emphasis on practice as well as theory. Readers with a stronger orientation on research will appreciate Koehler's ability to map the state of the art, his theoretical perspectives on deradicalization and disengagement, and his typology of the various efforts currently underway to effectuate these outcomes.

Koehler's work spans eleven chapters and numerous themes. The first three chapters outline the methodological approach taken in the book and provide the necessary academic background on the research and practice of deradicalization and disengagement. Particularly noteworthy are the sources on which the book is built; in addition to the academic literature and press reporting (which usefully includes German and French as well as English sources), Koehler incorporates the experiences of staff involved in these programs on various levels, as well as his own professional background working within such initiatives. Chapters 4, 5 and 7 theorize the various aspects of deradicalization and disengagement programs and critically assess the (under-researched) question of effectiveness. Chapter 7 in particular will be of benefit to readers eager to learn more about designing and evaluating deradicalization and disengagement initiatives.

The book gives detailed descriptions of existing programs in chapter 10, which provides a useful overview of relevant initiatives from a global perspective. In a sense, chapter 6 complements this descriptive approach with a look at programs that specifically include or are centered on family-based counseling. It is a shame this chapter isn't longer, as it is one of the most interesting ones in the book. Effectuating deradicalization and disengagement requires the cooperation between a host of agencies, such as the public prosecution service and the probation service. It is becoming increasingly apparent that families also have a key role to play in achieving these policy goals, for instance by providing an alternative social environment to that offered by erstwhile extremist compatriots. At the same time, families are often torn apart by the radicalization process and in need of specialized counseling themselves, a topic that Koehler could have covered more extensively.

Perhaps most interesting to those looking for guidance on actual interventions that they can use to bring about deradicalization or disengagement, are the tools and methods covered in chapter 9. Covering such topics as the role that former extremists and the various forms of counseling can take, Koehler provides to-the-point overviews that will appeal to the professional seeking information on 'what works'. This focus on lessons learned returns in the concluding chapter, which also provides some pointers for useful future research including the need for more empirical studies.

The overall impression of Koehler's book is a very favorable one. Of course, there are some aspects of the book that raise questions; the thematic organization of the chapters sometimes feels slightly disjointed and some paragraphs tend to run very long. Chapter 8 on moral and methodological problems is so short as to feel somewhat like an unfinished afterthought. In his discussion on evaluation initiatives, the published experiences with Dutch and Indonesian programs are not referenced. On the whole, however, the breadth of the topics covered, the use of unique data, the attention drawn to important yet underexplored topics and a presentation style that will appeal to both academics and practitioners combine to make Koehler's book an important and valuable addition to the debate on deradicalization and disengagement.

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