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B O O K R E V I E W

RADICAL ORIGINS: WHY WE ARE LOSING THE BATTLE AGAINST ISLAMIC EXTREM- ISM-AND HOW TO TURN THE TIDE

DR. AZEEM IBRAHIM

New York, N.Y.; Pegasus Books, 2017

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Index. Bibliography. Sources cited. Pp. xx, 298

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Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, myriad tomes on Islamic extremism have hit the bookshelves. The majority of them either extol Islam as a belief system wrongfully misunderstood and maligned (Islamophile), or portray it as the root of all evil in the modern world (Islamophobe). *Radical Origins* takes a different path between the two extremes to thoughtfully examine how the current state of affairs came to be.

Dr. Ibrahim, who serves as an Adjunct Research Professor at the U.S. Army War College, outlines how Wahhabism, the Sunni variant of Islam practiced in Saudi Arabia, has influenced global jihadis and is the root cause of the Islamic terror-related security dilemmas the United States now confronts. His work is both accessible and erudite, with appeal to a broad audience. This tome would be an excellent primer for high school or college students to understand the historical context and background of how the United States must grapple with events in the Middle East and South Asia that have a direct impact on modern homeland security issues.

The book begins with an examination of the origins of Islam and how Muhammad evolved from a merchant into a political and religious leader. An outline of the early Islamic caliphates and their impact(s) on the world at the time precedes an overview of how the tribes who eventually established the Saudi dynasty aligned with fundamentalist Wahhabi zealots to consolidate power in the Arabian Peninsula. The discussion of the early caliphate is useful, but comes off as simplistic and whitewashes treatment of non-Muslims in conquered lands. This theme is prevalent throughout the book: Islam is benign and has been hijacked by Wahhabis who caused this detour into extremism.

In his treatment of modern jihadism, Dr. Ibrahim walks the reader through how terrorist movements evolve, using classic sources (Ted Robert Gurr and Marth Crenshaw) to explain root causes of terror. He then outlines how the jihadi mindset rationalizes a “just war” to defend the “true faith.” This section is particularly useful to help the western reader understand the perspective of some of the jihadis, whose mantra is “we love death as you love life.”

The stages of radicalization section is a solid primer to help a reader unfamiliar with the topic better understand how an individual transforms from a law abiding citizen into someone willing engage in violence for the sake of Islam. He walks the reader through the four stages and shows how the convert’s thinking evolves with each change. This process goes from “we are oppressed” to “they are attacking our people” to “band of brothers” to an individual ready to engage in violent jihad for their cause. His description of this incremental evolution is one of the book’s

strong points and would be an excellent section to an anthology on how individuals come to embrace violent extremism.

Dr. Ibrahim takes the reader through a few case studies of how Wahhabism and its Salafist variant impacted the thinking and influenced actions of jihadists in the former Yugoslavia, Iraq, and Syria. He also briefly examines the al-Qa'ida (AQ) faction known as the al-Nusrah Front and the AQ offshoot known as the Islamic State.

He concludes the book with policy prescriptions. He suggests the Saudis need to change their behavior and cease support of radical factions. He also prompts the United States to urge the Saudis to do the same. The suggestions come off as unrealistic and somewhat naïve. This is not the first time these suggestions have been offered and yet we're nowhere nearer to their realization than the first time they were offered years ago.

He also offers recommendations for western policymakers, teachers, journalists, and "all of us" on how to combat radical Islamic extremism. While he rightfully cites political correctness as a problem and accurately outlines the depth and breadth of the challenges faced, the solutions come off as simplistically altruistic and even kitschy. Ironically, his policy suggestions make perfect sense to the western mind, but their mirror imaging of western values onto a non-western mind fall flat.

He is correct when he says "our media and opinion leaders need to start taking responsibility for the consequences of their actions. They cannot just pander to the ignorance and xenophobia of specific target audiences" (257). However, as he blames Fox News for propagating disinformation, he ignores the same behavior from CNN. Throughout the book, his left of center bias comes through quite clearly.

It would be an interesting exercise for a high school teacher or college professor to assign this book and Dr. Sebastian Gorka's latest tome (written from a more right-of-center perspective) and have the students compare and contrast the information and perspectives of both books. This book is written at too basic a level for someone already steeped in the topic, but useful for a young person attempting to better understand the topic.