

IV. Book Review

Petter Nesser. *Jihad in Europe. Patterns in Islamist terrorist cell formation and behaviour, 1995-2010.*

Oslo: University of Oslo PhD Thesis, 2011. 577 pp. [no price information available]

Reviewed by Alex P. Schmid

Scandinavia is not only home of some of the world's leading centers for the study of armed conflict but has, in the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI), also one of the best terrorism research institutes. Under the supervision of its research director, Brynjar Lia, Petter Nesser wrote a remarkable doctoral dissertation, based mainly on in-depth, inductive analyses of case studies. 15 jihadist cases were selected from 28 serious plots, 44 seemingly serious but less documented ones and 23 vague plots registered in Europe. The jihadist plotting cells varied, with two exceptions, from 2 to 10 core members. In 13 out of the 15 cases the foreign ties with the European jihadists were strong or probably strong. At least 5 of the 15 cases were clear-cut suicide operations and in only three cases the perpetrators planned to escape. Their operatives came, in declining frequency, mainly from Algeria, Pakistan, Morocco, Jordan, Turkey, Iraqi and India and were between 18 and 32 years old. In all plots studied, at least one core member had spent time in a foreign-based terrorist training camp. The role of the Internet as a virtual training camp, Nesser found, was, at least for the period he investigated, still minor. He discovered that "real-life cases rarely agree with simplified models" (p.499) and concluded that "the dismissal of an al-Qaeda recruitment apparatus in Sageman (2004) appears too categorical, and is probably wrong" (p.519).

The author distinguished various types of cell members: terrorist entrepreneurs and their protégés on the one hand, and the more numerous foot soldiers who tend to be misfits and drifters, on the other hand. Each type joined the jihad for somewhat different reasons. This differentiation, linked to different motivational drivers (religions-ideological, political and social) has important implications for inducing members to dis-engage from terrorism and, on the counter-radicalisation side, for preventing disenfranchised and under-employed Muslim youth in Europe from joining jihadist groups to begin with. However, Dr. Nesser also stresses the importance of conflict resolution efforts in countries of origin (e.g., Pakistan) of Muslim radicals in European diasporas as a way of reducing terrorism. Based on a wide range of open sources, sharp thinking and nuanced judgment, this study breaks new theoretical and empirical ground. One can only hope that its commercial publication is not further delayed or that an electronic version is made available to the research community in the near future. The same is true for many other worthy dissertations but this one, in particular, stands out head and shoulders for its clear thinking and counterterrorism policy implications.

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