

In The Minds of Extremists

Written by Dr. Mahmood Abdulla

Review by Afzal Merali (MA)

In The Minds of Extremists by Dr Mahmood Abdulla, is an in-depth academic and journalistic study into the roots, beliefs, and strategies applied by extremists who falsely ascribe themselves to Islam. It is distinguished in terms of its scientific methodology, rich information, and the universal language used by the author.

As for its methodology, this book is an intense research which is both academic and journalistic.

The reader will firstly find that the book's academic calibre is evident in that it begins by giving an interesting preface about the topic at hand, followed by a definition of extremism, a historical analysis of its roots, and its contemporary manifestations in different societies, with a special focus on Wahhabism/Salafism in the Muslim world.

Secondly, all of its arguments are supported with clear logic, strong evidence, and extensive sources that are all authenticated.

Thirdly, the book has a manifest touch of experienced analytical and investigative journalism, whereby the author has exhausted all resources available to him, whether they be primary sources such as the Holy Qur'an and prophetic narrations mentioned in works such as *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, or otherwise, such as newspapers, websites, and television programmes from mainstream media in different languages, including the controversial *al-Ittijāh al-Mu'ākis* (The Opposite Direction) show on Al Jazeera, whereby in his analysis of it, it becomes obvious that Dr Abdulla is a keen observer of its rhetoric and content. With this taken into account, the reader will quickly come to the conclusion that this book is a culmination of many years of research.

With regard to the book's wealth of information, one can turn their

attention to the theories postulated by Dr Abdulla, such as specifying the root causes of extremism in the Muslim world as being injustice by despots, misleading clerics affiliated to rulers, and existence of religious fanatics. In addition, it presents detailed case studies on certain extremist Salafī scholars, such as Dr Yusuf al-Qaradawi and Dr Zakir Naik – whose celebrity mob-culture tactics, which are exploited for moulding the crowd's beliefs and thoughts according to their own extremist ideologies – are exposed.

An example observed by the author is when Dr Naik declares the likes of the toppled despotic tyrant of Iraq, Saddam Hussein, a “martyr”, whereas Imam al-Ḥusayn, who is venerated by Shīʿī Muslims as a successor of Prophet Muḥammad and was martyred in his uprising against the Umayyad tyrant of his time, Yazīd, was wrong and an oppressor, because he rose up against what Naik calls the imam and legitimate ruler of his time.

Furthermore, one who reads this book can find a thorough analysis of how the Arab Spring of the general masses was hijacked by extremist elements such as the Ikhwān movement in Egypt, international Wahhabi insurgents in Syria, and Al-Qaeda and ISIS ideologues in Libya.

On another note, all of this is presented with a universal language, suitable to people of all backgrounds. This affords it clarity, whereby no unnecessarily complicated terms are used by the author. However, on the other hand, in order to maintain its scientific and academic level, the author does use various Islamic and Arabic terminologies, whose translations he also provides. So, if the layman reader is not familiar with such scientific Arabic terms, they will not be indecipherable for them.

To summarise, this excellent book is a must-read for academics, journalists, scholars, orientalist, and all those who are perplexed by the recent rise of Salafi/Wahhabi extremism in the geopolitical field of today, though have a vague understanding of its beliefs, brainwashing tactics, political hypocrisy of those countries which both sponsor or cover up for them, and of the agents who fuel this lethal fire.

Also, its content must be studied by all influential Muslim personalities, especially imams and scholars from the Sunnī denomination in order for them to gain awareness as to how Salafī and Wahhabi extremism is being introduced in their mosques and religious circles by suspicious elements.