

Review - Volatile Social Movements

Written by Joshua Kilberg

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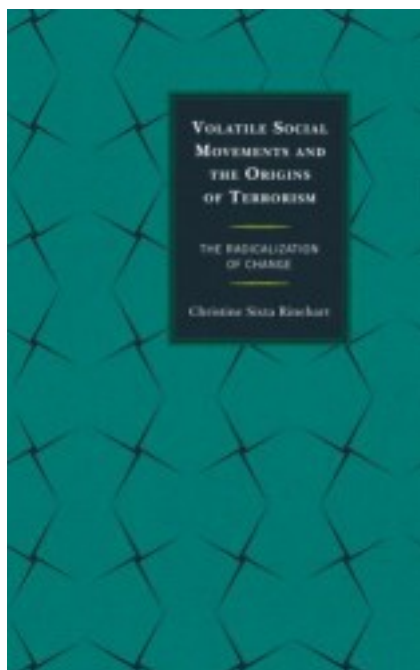
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JOSHUA KILBERG, AUG 21 2013

Volatile Social Movements and the Origins of Terrorism: The Radicalization of Change

By: Christine Sixta Rinehart

Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012



The principal goal of Professor Christine Sixta Rinehart's book *Volatile Social Movements and the Origins of Terrorism* is to understand the conditions under which peaceful social movements turn violent. Like many books adapted from a doctoral dissertation, the four case studies examined herein are exhaustively well researched and convey to the reader a sense of the internal dynamics of each organization as it moves towards introducing violence into its modus operandi.

The four cases examined include: The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt; the Basque separatist group *Euzkadi ta Askatasuna* (ETA); the Colombian group *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC); and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka. Rinehart doesn't provide much detail of her case selection methodology (discussed below) but in all of these cases, the group originated as a peaceful social movement but eventually became violent. Each case study is examined separately, across four chapters. Each chapter includes profiles of the individual leadership characteristics and the group's internal dynamics.

For a social movement to radicalize, Rinehart finds that three factors must exist: Charismatic leadership (if these leaders are themselves prone to violence, so much the better); a build-up of frustration in group members stemming from a lack of success; and violent personalities attaining leadership positions. Rinehart observes several similarities

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in the evolution of the four groups from peaceful to violent. A social movement comes together around a charismatic leader. The movement's peaceful action for political change is stymied by authorities. The movement becomes frustrated; radical voices from within the group push for violence. The turn to violence becomes inevitable.

Using Max Weber's work on charismatic leadership, Reinhart provides an in-depth account of each of the groups' leaders. Leaders endowed with charisma, Reinhart argues, are not only responsible for growing a social movement but also for transforming a peaceful movement into a terrorist organization. For example, she writes that the Egyptian Hassan al-Banna's charismatic leadership pushed the Muslim Brotherhood to embrace terrorism in 1945 – seventeen years after the founding of the organization. Al-Banna became frustrated with the lack of progress by the Brotherhood in achieving any of its political goals. Rinehart painstakingly charts al-Banna's personal development, selecting excellent examples from his prolific body of work; from his boyhood goal of reforming Egyptian society through the political process to his decision, at age 39 (a decade after the founding of the Brotherhood), to use terrorism to push for religious reform (Chapter 1, pp. 17-52).

Reinhart tells a similar story of charismatic leaders pushing the process of radicalization for both the FARC in Colombia and the LTTE in Sri Lanka. Followers of FARC and LTTE were eventually commanded to use violence. As loyal soldiers, they complied (Chapter 3 (pp. 75-108) and 4 (pp. 53-74)). Only in the case of the Basque group, ETA, does Reinhart find that charismatic leadership was absent in the beginning stages of the organization. In this case, contrary to the other groups explored in the book, ETA's original founding members were eventually pushed aside by a more hardcore element, led by Jose Luis Zabilde. Reinhart suggests that the hijacking of the organization (and subsequent radicalization) occurred as a result of ETA's organizational structure, a horizontal, decision-making-by-committee configuration. ETA's flat organizational structure is markedly different from the autocratic leadership styles of the other groups (Chapter 2, 53-74).

By telling these stories, one after another, the book highlights the importance of leadership in a terrorist group. Each of the four groups profiled are the product of particular historical examples; their leaders were the right people for the job. Timing is also important; charismatic leadership alone cannot explain the ascendance of these groups. Rinehart uses Dollard's frustration-aggression theory (refined by Ted Gurr) to explain the circumstances under which a group's followers mobilize and adopt violence. For each of the four groups studied here, the frustration of the members eventually lead to the abandonment of peaceful protest and the adoption of violence.

Why do Some Groups Radicalize?

It is at this point that the book's case study selection should be examined. Reinhart chose the Muslim Brotherhood, ETA, FARC, and the Tamil Tigers as her case studies because they are still (relatively) powerful terrorist organizations and because they represent a good international sample of such groups. At present, the Muslim Brotherhood, protesting their deposition from power by the Egyptian military, is still very much a capable organization. ETA is still a viable, if somewhat diminished, organization. The FARC is in an almost constant leadership crisis owing to repeated leadership targeting by the Colombian government, and the LTTE is a shadow of its former self since the Sri Lankan military killed its leader Velupillai Prabhakaran in 2009.

The groups profiled in this book were selected by Rinehart because they each emerged from a larger social movement and eventually turned violent. Since a primary motivation of the book is "to look at the internal dynamics of social movements as an alternate explanation for the formation of terrorist groups" (p. 139) I wonder if this book's analysis would have been strengthened by selecting one example of a popular social movement, led by a charismatic leader, that didn't turn to violence. This could have given more insight into the internal dynamics of a social movement and what does (or, indeed, does not) push a group to adopt terrorism. (Other notable cases, such as *Sendero Luminoso* of Peru, which seem to fit the mold of charismatic leadership pushing a movement to adopt terrorism, are omitted from the book.)

Methodological quibbles aside, Christine Sixta Rinehart does a very good job of bringing into focus the process of group radicalization and the connection between social movements and terrorist groups. Scholars of both social movements and terrorism alike will benefit from a thorough reading of *Volatile Social Movements and the Origins of*

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Terrorism. De rigueur, the study of radicalization is often focused on individuals. The Al-Qaeda-inspired men involved in attacks at the Glasgow Airport, the Boston Marathon, and Times Square may not be members of an organization approaching the sophistication of the Muslim Brotherhood, ETA, FARC, or the LTTE but their association to a group still matters: radicalization doesn't occur in a vacuum. (One exception is the Unabomber, Ted Kazynski). For radicalization to occur, an individual looks somewhere for guidance and assurance. Many of the most successful terrorist leaders over the past fifty years have provided that guidance in a similar process to that outlined in this book yet, strangely, this process has been largely overlooked by most scholars. Rinehart's contribution to the literature addresses this previously ignored gap.

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