

Katerina Dalacoura's response to Mohammed Hafez's review of her book: *Islamist Terrorism and Democracy in the Middle East*, Cambridge University Press, 2011

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In my book, I extensively engage with Mohammed Hafez's rich and interesting book, *Why Muslims Rebel*, pointing out where I disagree with his interpretation and analysis (specifically on the trajectories of the Algerian GIA, the Egyptian Gamaa Islamiya and the Tunisian Nahda movement). Hafez has not returned the compliment. Rather than addressing our differences of opinion and continuing a scholarly exchange, he has skidded through parts of my argument and has taken me to task for not writing the book that he has written. This is most glaring in the list of sources that, in his long footnote, he argues I failed to consult: not a single one of them is on terrorism (my subject). Most deal, instead, with rebellion, mobilization, protest, guerrilla warfare or collective action (Hafez's subject).

The careful reader would have noticed that Hafez eschews the term "Islamist terrorism" in outlining his own arguments in the review above, as he does in his book. It is, indeed, a profoundly problematic term because it has been used time and again as an ideological stick against Islamist movements and to disparage the causes they stand for (causes which are often laudable, such as national liberation). Perhaps more than many other terms, the definition of 'terrorism' is bedevilled by grey areas. However, for all the problems associated with the term (which I discuss at the outset of my book) there were stronger reasons – for instance, trying to address a wider public debate and not just an academic one – for making "Islamist terrorism" my main focus.

Hafez argues that my book's argument responds to a straw man and that: "Seasoned experts of political violence rarely make mono-casual arguments or go as far as to argue that authoritarianism causes terrorism and democracy precludes it." In a disclaimer in the book's Introduction (p. 2), I state emphatically that the question I set myself was not "what are the causes of Islamist terrorism?". Instead, my task was the more limited one of isolating a possible explanation (authoritarianism) and putting it under the microscope. The book is not a response to any one particular expert (a "man", made of straw or anything else). It investigates the idea that "authoritarianism causes terrorism and democracy precludes it", as it applies to the Middle East. It is undeniable that this idea is widely prevalent, not least among policy makers and wider public. In the first term of the Bush administration, it drove policy.

Hafez argues: "It may be true that authoritarian regimes in the Middle East can forestall the outward manifestations of radicalism, but any regional expert can tell the author that these regimes are viewed negatively as corrupt, oppressive, and unresponsive to their increasingly youthful populations. In short, they lack legitimacy. This context has made radical ideologies and tactics more acceptable, or at least excusable, among mass publics." My book challenges precisely this kind of common sense, "obvious" association between Middle East regimes'

infamous lack of legitimacy and Islamist terrorism. (It also challenges the easy association between ‘radical ideologies and tactics’ and terrorism by pointing out that some Islamist movements are very conservative, even fundamentalist, but have not opted for terrorist tactics.) I use eleven case studies of both Islamist terrorist and moderate Islamist movements to show that the causal relationship between authoritarianism and Islamist terrorism and, conversely political inclusion and moderation, is not consistent enough to constitute an established pattern and therefore a convincing theoretical proposition.

My argument is nuanced: I do not deny that authoritarianism or inclusion may at times contribute towards, respectively, Islamist terrorism or moderation but argue that the weight of the evidence is against it (p. 180.) Furthermore, and despite the fact that my question is not “what are the causes of Islamist terrorism?” I make tentative suggestions about other possible explanations of either terrorism or moderation in the conclusion of each chapter. I suggest that what I call strategic or instrumental calculations are very often behind the choice of terrorist tactics and that they are, on balance and despite variations, more convincing than either political or socio-economic explanations.

Hafez finds fault with how I measure the dependent variable of terrorism. He is critical of my treating it as absent or present and not looking at different levels of support, duration or scope; not having a “single chart or graph” to show levels of violence across my cases or demonstrate levels of violence in relation to per capita figures. This is an interesting point but not one I could address within the book’s structure and methodology. I explain in the Introduction (p. 11) that, after much deliberation, I chose to focus on specific Islamist movements, rather than on countries or settings. For all its problems and limitations, this approach – which also involved focusing on movements ‘from within’ - allowed clearer insights into my argument which was about the motivations behind the choice of terrorist tactics. It allowed me to take a long historical view of these movements, which would be difficult to measure in charts or graphs. More pertinently, “per capita” figures are irrelevant when the framework of analysis is not a specific country but a movement. How would I provide such an indicator in the case of al Qaeda, for example?

I find some of the other, smaller criticisms and remarks in the review rather puzzling. I do not make the claim that it is “original” to say that oppression does not cause terrorism and democracy does not end it. The claim to originality, in this context, is in making connections between ideas which, in public, policy and academic debates, pertain to the rest of the world but are somehow seen as inapplicable to the Middle East.