

*Prisoner Radicalization and Terrorism Detention Policy:
Institutionalized fear or evidence-based policy making?*

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Book Review by Nicholas Addis, Sheffield Hallam University

In recent years, there has been a substantial rise in the number of arrests and detention of terror-related suspects. This has left policy makers and practitioners questioning ‘where and how should these inmates be detained’ (p. 1) to prevent both further radicalization, and the risk of prisons becoming ‘hot beds’ for the growth of extremist ideologies. This forms the crux of this book, in which Tinka Veldhuis provides a detailed and critical analysis of prisoner radicalization and terrorism detention policy, with a particular focus on the Dutch model. Specifically, the Netherlands takes a concentration-based approach, housing offenders in separate ‘terrorism wings’. In chapter one, Veldhuis explores how and why a concentration-based approach may be adopted, as well as the underpinning decision making behind this. The notion of fear is introduced here as a fundamental element throughout the decision-making process.

The book is split into four sections, the first of which offers a helpful overview of the context and background to this work, providing a valuable introduction to the different stakeholders involved in the Dutch terrorism detention strategy. Chapter two provides further context, in considering the climate and conditions within which the terrorism wing emerged, as well as the factors that impacted on the decision-making process. Chapter three reveals a fascinating insight into the perceptions of stakeholders and their views on the potential risks involved with the detention of terrorists, as well as the mechanisms required for effective intervention. For me, this chapter was invaluable, providing a rare glimpse into the priorities of stakeholders and how their concerns translated into practice. Veldhuis argues how the

concentration policy ‘was rapidly developed in response to the perception of a real and present security threat and designed to optimize control’ (p. 41), thus placing greater weight on the importance of containment over prisoners’ interests, with limited opportunity for rehabilitation/de-radicalization.

Part two of the book considers the theoretical and empirical underpinnings on the potential for prisoner radicalization. Firstly, chapter four presents a theoretical model that illustrates the conditions in which inmates may be susceptible to the influence of radicalization and the factors likely to increase such risk. However, the potential influence of terrorist offenders in radicalizing others is also a central factor in this process. This is a central theme throughout chapter five, which explores terrorist offenders’ position in the inmate hierarchy. Veldhuis found that terrorist offenders were viewed extremely negatively (particularly when part of a terrorist detention regime), at the bottom of the inmate hierarchy. This finding helps challenge the assumption that terrorist offenders may hold substantial influence over (and thus the potential capacity to radicalize) fellow inmates.

Part three of the book turns its attentions to the way in which the Dutch concentration model was implemented. Chapter six examines the allocation of terrorist offenders to the terrorism wing. This chapter reveals the rigidity (and risk-centred nature) of selection processes to the terrorism wing, which led staff to exercise discretion to overcome issues faced. Veldhuis argues how the inconsistency with which the policy was applied cast doubt on the policy’s success, challenging the value of a standardised and risk-averse approach which does not allow for flexibility to tailor to individual need. This is also an issue raised in chapter seven, which analyses the implementation of a standardised regime. Veldhuis found that inmates were initially faced with a restrictive regime. However, over time, they encountered greater freedom and engagement with out-of-cell activities. Interestingly, there was some appreciation shown for elements of the regime, for example, the opportunity to engage in education.

In part four of the book, Veldhuis examines the influence of fear on the policy-making process: ‘When government officials use fear-related language in their communication, they create the impression that prisoner radicalization poses an imminent security threat, which can lead to pressure on the decision-making process and arouse a public demand for immediate and decisive governmental action’ (p. 130). Chapter nine sees Veldhuis seek to shift policy decision making away from a ‘fear-related discourse’ (p. 152), taking a realist approach to consider appropriate interventions. Here, Veldhuis raises various considerations to guide policy makers in the development of appropriate rehabilitation/reintegration initiatives, to ensure decision-making processes are not governed by fear but, instead, by evidence-based reasoning.

In the final chapter, Veldhuis provides a comprehensive summary, and points to the findings which suggest policies that seek to concentrate terrorist offenders do not appear truly effective, and may in fact increase the risk of prisoner radicalization. Veldhuis calls for further evaluation, which as well as focusing on outcomes, should pay close attention to the underpinning decision-making processes to develop our understanding on the impact of ‘fear-based terrorism detention policies’ (p. 187).

In short, *Prisoner Radicalization and Terrorism Detention Policy* provides an accessible, critical, and well-grounded argument, which helps illustrate how the power of fear-based rhetoric can induce severe political and societal pressure, and has substantial impact on the decision-making process. What set this book apart for me was the unique access to a multitude of stakeholders involved in this process; from policy makers and security/intelligence officials, to terrorist (and non-terrorist) offenders, enabling a multi-faceted and comprehensive analysis of the concentration policy and the underlying decision-making processes. This book will be valuable not only to those interested in countering violent extremism and prisoner radicalization, but also those working across the prison/probation sectors, as well as those with a wider interest in prisons, penal policy and penal reform.

