

Letter from the Editor

Dear Colleagues,

Perspectives on Terrorism (PT), the on-line journal of the *Terrorism Research Initiative* (TRI), is now in its third year. It has gained a readership of several thousand academic researchers and security analysts. The mission of TRI and its journal is the promotion of the “three Cs” – Coordination, Cooperation and Collaboration - among individuals conducting research and analysis on terrorism and related political violence. One group that is especially close to our hearts is that of graduate students who are working on doctoral theses in this field. We hope to help promote their creativity through the publication of their novel research in our journal. We invite them, as well as established researchers and analysts, to use PT as a forum for presenting research findings. PT is a non-traditional electronic journal that is not constrained by commercial or political interests. It is flexible in terms of content, style, length and number of articles as well as the frequency of its publication. Yet at the same time PT adheres to professional scholarly standards.

We at TRI see *Perspectives on Terrorism* as a synergistic networking platform that serves the needs of the research and analytical communities. Our aim is to be practical, helpful and useful to all those who subscribe to our vision of enhancing security through collaborative research. Since terrorism itself continues to be a ‘contested concept’, the field of Terrorism Studies has suffered from politicization. For more than ten years, efforts have been under way in the United Nations’ General Assembly to reach consensus on a legal definition of terrorism. For even longer, efforts have been under way to reach an academic consensus definition (for the latest version, see: <http://knol.google.com/k/anonym/terrorism/dd3psyh8k3c3/2?domain=knol.google.com&locale=de>). Definitions are important if we want to get away from the morally flawed double standard notion that “One man’s terrorist is the other man’s freedom fighter”.

As new Editor of *Perspectives on Terrorism*, let me briefly introduce myself. Together with Robert Wesley, I have been involved with the *Terrorism Research Initiative* and its journal since their inception. However, until recently professional obligations have prevented me from playing a more active role in its publication. Until May 2009, I was Director of the *Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence* (CSTPV) at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland. I also was, together with David Rapoport, Editor of *Terrorism and Political Violence*, one of the two leading academic journals in this field. I recently returned to Austria where I had previously served for a number of years as Senior Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Officer at UNODC and Officer-in-Charge of the United Nations’ Terrorism Prevention Branch.

With the collaboration of you - reader, researcher, analyst - and the assistance of PT’s Editorial Team - we hope to further develop *Perspectives on Terrorism* as a common discussion forum of the research community. Like in the past, most of our future issues will reflect a variety of topics and approaches. Some, like the present one, will mainly focus on one particular issue – Counter-Narratives in this case. It illustrates how one subject can be viewed from different perspectives. Truth is unlikely to be found in any single perspective and debate is the lifeblood of both academic scholarship and civil society.

Four Perspectives on Counter-Narratives

There is still much confusion and controversy about the best way Salafi jihadists ought to be confronted. Should “the West” develop its own Counter-Narrative to al-Qaeda’s *Single Narrative*? Many argue that the West has already a powerful counter-narrative, one based on democratic values and individual rights. The problem is that when it comes to the foreign policies of some Western states in the Middle East and beyond,

these policies have, in the past, too often been guided by *realpolitik* alliances with non-democratic forces. That has made Western democracies open to charges of double standards. Counter-narratives which are not backed by deeds that give credence to them are bound to be perceived as hypocritical and might in the end do more harm than good. Western democracies have to be both forceful and careful in what they say and how they say it in their Counter-Narratives to the Single Narrative of the transnational jihadist movement spearheaded by al-Qaeda.

A discussion on such issues took place under the heading *Counter-narratives and the Performative Power of Counter-Terrorism* in the Netherlands on June 4-5, 2009. This International Expert Meeting was held under the auspices of the Leiden University's *Centre for Terrorism and Counterterrorism*, the *National Coordinator for Counterterrorism* (NCTb) and the British and Canadian embassies in The Hague. The Editor of *Perspectives on Terrorism* attended this meeting and asked four of the forty speakers and participants for their views on the matter. The current issue of *Perspectives on Terrorism* contains their contributions. A publication on the entire proceedings of that International Expert Meeting is under preparation by the NCTb and will be available in early 2010.

Sincerely,

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