

Anneli Botha. *Terrorism in the Maghreb: The Transnationalisation of Domestic Terrorism*. Pretoria/Tshwane: Institute for Security Studies, 2008. Reviewed by Benjamin P. Nickels.

Terrorism in the Maghreb receives comparatively little scholarly and media attention, which makes this book by Anneli Botha, a senior researcher on terrorism at the Institute for Security Studies in Pretoria, South Africa, particularly welcome. After a brief executive summary and introduction, Botha offers chapters on terrorism in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia. She then provides two wider assessments, studying the region in terms of transnational terrorist networks and counterterrorism strategies, before closing her book with a conclusion. With this monograph, Botha has rendered an important service to researchers. She consulted numerous reports on her subject and presents them in a succinct narrative, punctuated by useful maps, tables, and figures.

The book makes two overarching claims. The first concerns transnationalization, as the book's subtitle indicates. Botha bills her work as an effort to assess "the threat and implication of the name change announcement of the Salafist Group for Combat and Preaching (GSPC) to al-Qaeda in the Land of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)" in 2007. She contends that the "name change in itself implied that the original domestic group had transnational ambitions" (p. viii). The second claim concerns history. Botha warns that while it is "a mistake to assess the threat of terrorism in any country in historic isolation[,] this holds "particularly true when one tries to assess and understand the 'renewed' threat of terrorism in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia" (p. viii).

Botha links transnationalization to regime strength, pointing out that AQIM targets foreign and regional interests even though it can no longer threaten the Algerian government (p. 83). She also asserts that Tunisian radicals join international terrorist outfits because their local efforts have failed (p. 123). Describing terrorism's spread beyond the Maghreb is something of a challenge for Botha, however. *Trans-national* (rather than international, global, etc.) is the precise term for her approach, as she tends to focus mainly on individual countries even when addressing phenomena 'across nations.' The chapter on transnational terrorist networks, for instance, is unexpectedly structured primarily as a series of nation-by-nation accounts, with full sections dedicated to Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia, which inevitably leads to repetitions from the three national chapters (e.g., pp. 107–8 and 166–168).

Botha's national focus does, however, reinforce her argument for historical context; she manages to push her story into the past – back to the early 1990s for the regional assessments, to the period of independence in the 1960s and 1950s for the national chapters. Yet Botha builds her book primarily from recent media sources (well over half the work's citations come from press agencies; see pp. 209–236) while setting the stage for her descriptions of Islamist ideological challenges to Maghreb regimes by citing Muslim thinkers and movements from the Near East

(pp. 11–17). The feeble sense of Maghreb history that results is punctuated by minor errors regarding the specifics of individual Maghreb nations, such as muddling the Arabic transliteration of the Moroccan monarch's title Commander of the Faithful (“*amir amoumine*” on p. 88), abbreviating his name insufficiently as simply “King Mohammed” (p. 89), or describing “*Liberation*” as his country's “leading newspaper” (p. 67), and so on.

Focusing intensely and separately on the three nations of Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia does yield one surprising benefit. Botha's book fortuitously, if inadvertently, reveals the relative arbitrariness of the Maghreb as a unit of analysis, at least in terms of contemporary terrorism. Among the three countries that comprise what was once called ‘French North Africa,’ Algeria is of incomparable bigger importance and clearly merits Botha's first and most extensive chapter, which is much longer than the chapters dedicated to Morocco and Tunisia combined. Algeria's long-standing significance in transnational terrorism is also featured in Botha's historical passages on the potent threat posed by the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), an organization already present in the United States (p. 159) and conducting attacks in France (pp. 37–38) during the 1990s. Botha highlights Algeria's uniqueness explicitly near the book's end and does implicitly so also at the book's opening, through her focus on AQIM. This group remains prominent across the volume, as when Botha dedicates full sections of her chapters on Morocco and Tunisia to their citizens' involvement in this new spawn of Algeria's GSPC (pp. 103–107, 119–123). But AQIM is hardly a Maghreb phenomenon. In fact, chapters addressing, say, Mauretania and Mali (rather than Morocco and Tunisia) might have offered more insight into AQIM, given the group's significant development in the Sahel.

However, the monograph finishes on a strong note, leaving the reader wishing the author had stepped back from the details of her mainly news-based narrative more regularly throughout the work. Botha mentions only briefly her conversation with a security expert in Tunis (p. 184) and her interviews with Polisario Front members in Tindouf (p. 196), and she leaves underdeveloped some important thoughts – for example, that the end of the war in Iraq may unleash on the Maghreb another wave of radicalized and experienced fighters akin to the Afghan Arabs (p. 200), or that the current concern with interdicting funds to terrorists overlooks the prevalence of self-sufficient, small cells (see pp. 202–203). Nonetheless, her work, despite some shortcomings, will serve as a useful resource for future attempts to address these and other issues related to terrorism in the Maghreb.

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