

Book Reviews

Beatrice de Graaf. *Evaluating Counterterrorism Performance*.

London: Routledge, 2011.

Reviewed by Martha Crenshaw

The work of Beatrice de Graaf (professor of Conflict and Security at Leiden University's Centre for Terrorism and Counterterrorism), *Evaluating Counterterrorism Performance* is both rich in historical detail and novel in its use of theory. It focuses on counterterrorism policy in the Netherlands, the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, and the United States in the 1970s. This period in time marks the beginnings of counterterrorism policy in Western democracies, long before the "jihadist" era, when the threat was primarily but not exclusively left revolutionary terrorism of domestic origin. Despite similarities in the nature of the threat and in basic constitutional principles these four states responded differently. De Graaf evaluates the effectiveness of their responses through the lens of a "performative power" model. She argues that while terrorism is clearly performative and communicative, so too is counterterrorism, although governments appear not to recognize the importance of their actions in setting the agenda (especially defining the threat), mobilizing popular support in support of counterterrorism, and framing the issue in the public mind.

The work is based on thorough research into the policies of these four states, using archival materials and interviews as well as exploring secondary sources written in four languages. It is thus admirably authoritative and comprehensive. Anyone wanting simply to understand the history of counterterrorism during this time will appreciate the scholarly depth of the volume. The project was supported by the Dutch National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research.

Each national case study is organized in terms of five questions: How high was terrorism on the political agenda? How was the threat defined? Did the government try to mobilize the public in responding to terrorism? How visible and intrusive were counterterrorism measures? What sort of solution was proposed – intransigent or conciliatory? Very roughly summarized, according to de Graaf the Dutch response was generally characterized by pragmatism, restraint, and tolerance, especially toward the minor threat from the far left "Red Youth" and somewhat less so toward a more lethal threat from a South Moluccan group. Germany, faced with mounting terrorism from the Red Army Faction, initially had no national strategy at all, but the situation shifted dramatically in mid-decade to "hysteria" and "moral panic." The media played a large role in creating a national security crisis that brought into question the nature of the state. In the United States, the Nixon Administration relied heavily on law enforcement and intelligence to suppress the revolutionary left as well as violent black liberation groups. Ironically, this approach was discredited by the government's own illegal actions that produced the Watergate scandal. Italy faced the most severe terrorist threat in this period, in terms of the numbers of people engaged in anti-state violence and the lethality of its consequences. Nevertheless, before 1977 the Italian

government did not take the threat seriously and even after mobilizing to meet the challenge counterterrorist policy was not effective (in fact, the author terms it “commedia dell’arte”).

The study then offers specific cross-national analysis of policy implementation on the part of the police, intelligence services, and the judiciary, with a chapter devoted to each subject. The key problem for the authorities is to avoid disproportionate responses that reinforce the terrorists’ “injustice frame.” The discussion of the role of trials is particularly interesting. As the author points out, trials not only demonstrate a state’s adherence to the rule of law; they also provide a theatre for the terrorists. What matters is not so much the legal verdict as the effect on a watching audience.

Professor de Graaf concludes that “low levels of performative power” on the part of the state are positively correlated with a decline in terrorist incidents. The causal mechanism remains somewhat obscure, but it is clear that exaggerating the threat is likely to lead to more rather than less radicalization. In the end, a policy that employed a criminal justice approach, restrained rhetoric, and reduced visibility for counterterrorism measures was most effective. This study raises a number of questions for further research. One is why some democratic governments appear to be so tempted to do the opposite of what this study recommends. One answer may be the role of the news media in particular societies and circumstances. Another question is why democracies respond differently to similar threats.

About the Reviewer: Martha Crenshaw is a Senior Fellow at the Center for International Security and Cooperation (CISAC) and the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, as well as Professor of Political Science at Stanford University.