

III. Book Reviews

Counterterrorism Bookshelf: Capsule Reviews of 13 Books

by Joshua Sinai

The following are capsule reviews of important books recently published on terrorism and counterterrorism-related topics.

Dominique Avon and Anais-Trissa Khatchadourian [translated by Jane Marie Todd], *Hezbollah: A History of the "Party of God"* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 256 pages, US \$24.95 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-0-674-06651-9.

An examination of the Lebanese Hezbollah from its origins in 1982 until 2009. Although the book's overview of Hezbollah is only 110 pages in length, what makes it especially valuable are the additional 100 pages that provide a selection of the organization's primary ideological documents (including its charter), as well as the appendices, such as a lexicon of Hezbollah's theological principles and portraits of Hezbollah and Lebanese leaders. The authors are French academic experts on Hezbollah.

Nasser al-Bahri, with Georges Malbrunot, *Guarding Bin Laden: My Life in al-Qaeda* (London, England: Thin Man Press, 2013), 238 pages, US \$14.95 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-0-9562473-6-0.

Originally published in French, this fascinating 2010 memoir by Usama bin Laden's former chief bodyguard provides an insider's account of life in al Qaida prior to 9/11. Nasser al-Bahri had served with bin Laden from 1996 to 2001, when he succeeded in escaping from Afghanistan following the overthrow of the Taliban regime, eventually making his way to Yemen, where he was arrested. Al-Bahri, born in Saudi Arabia to Yemeni parents, was radicalized by extremist jihadists in his teens. He then proceeded to join jihadist militants in Bosnia and Somalia, eventually making his way to al Qaida's Afghanistan headquarters in Tarnak Farm. There he was spotted by bin Laden and was rapidly promoted to head his personal security unit. Of particular interest are the author's descriptions of various assassination attempts against bin Laden, al Qaida's inventory of armaments, the security measures instituted to protect bin Laden, portraits of the organization's leaders and their families, as well as the group's links with the Taliban and Pakistani security services. The author concludes that "The Jihad movement will never agree to negotiate with the West unless all its legitimate claims are met. The Clash of Civilizations has many days ahead of it."

William C. Banks, editor, *New Battlefields/Old Laws: Critical Debates on Asymmetric Warfare* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2011), 320 pages, US \$29.50 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-0-231-15235-8.

As explained by the editor, the contributors to this volume attempt to examine “from an interdisciplinary legal and policy perspective the challenges posed to humanitarian law as weaker, non-state combatants use forbidden tactics to offset their military disadvantage, and as irregular warfare becomes a common means for weaker parties to achieve political goals that they could not accomplish through established channels.” Such an examination is warranted today, the editor writes, because the changing patterns of asymmetric conflict are forcing legal practitioners to reexamine the traditional laws of war, particularly the Hague Rules, the customary laws of war, and the post-1949 law of armed conflict, which are no longer relevant in accounting for the way non-state groups, whether terrorist or guerrilla forces, are waging their protracted insurgent campaigns. This volume is a highly important contribution to the study of the interplay between international and military law and the response measures by democratic governments to terrorist insurgencies.

Benedetta Berti, *Armed Political Organizations: From Conflict to Integration* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), US \$49.95 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-1-4214-0974-0.

An important and innovative comparative and theoretical examination of how disparate insurgent organizations such as the Lebanese Hizballah, the Palestinian Hamas, and the Irish Republican Army (IRA) decide to transform themselves from terrorists into political organizations, using the electoral process by their “political wings” to attempt to become legitimate political actors in their societies. The author argues that the classic theory of the democratization process, which views violence and elections at opposite ends of the political spectrum, is inadequate to explain the negotiation and disarmament process that is necessary for peaceful resolution of protracted terrorist conflicts. To remedy this theoretical shortfall, the author develops an alternative model that explains the reasons terrorist groups create political wings to compete in elections, and how this organizational choice affects their subsequent decisions about their armed struggle. One might argue that while such an electoral option was wholeheartedly embraced by the IRA, it was never genuinely adopted by Hamas and Hizballah – nevertheless, the author’s conceptual framework and case studies are an important contribution to understanding the types of measures that governments need to adopt in order to engage with their terrorist adversaries who may have finally entered the phase in which they are ready to transform themselves into legitimate political actors, which is the precondition necessary to peacefully resolve their conflicts and bring about their political integration into society.

Charles T. Call, *Why Peace Fails: The Causes and Prevention of Civil War Recurrence* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2012), 288 pages, US \$32.95 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1-58901-894-5.

In this important study, the author examines the factors leading, in some cases, to the failure of peace accords that attempt to resolve their societies' protracted civil wars, thereby plunging them once again into armed conflict, while in other cases peace accords survive and succeed in sustaining themselves for the long-term. Fifteen cases of civil wars in Africa, Asia, the Caucasus, and Latin America are examined. The author finds that some explanations for the outbreaks of civil war – such as poverty, conflict over natural resources, and weak states – are less causative than the crucial factor of political exclusion, while the inclusion of former adversaries in post-conflict governance plays a decisive role in sustaining peace accords for the long-term. Thus, those involved in post-conflict reconstruction must remain fully engaged in supporting the newly-elected governments, to ensure that they include former combatants in power-sharing and governance.

Ahmed S. Hashim, *When Counterinsurgency Wins: Sri Lanka's Defeat of the Tamil Tigers* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 280 pages, US \$59.95 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-0-8122-4452-6.

A highly authoritative and up-to-date study about the protracted civil war in Sri Lanka, which was terminated with the military defeat by government forces of the separatist Tamil Tigers in 2009. The author discusses the evolution of the military measures that ultimately won the intractable insurgency - a conflict which for many years was viewed as unwinnable by the Sinhalese government's forces - although its military victory came at the cost of human rights violations (and the Tamil insurgents engaged in such violations as well). Also discussed are lessons learned about terrorist tactics by the Tamil Tigers that have been emulated by terrorist groups such as Hizballah, Hamas, as well as al Qaida-affiliated groups in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Somalia. The author also discusses whether the Sri Lankan government's counterinsurgency tactics are worthy of being implemented by other governments facing their own protracted terrorist insurgencies.

David Jacobson, *Of Virgins and Martyrs: Women and Sexuality in Global Conflict* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 272 pages, US \$24.95 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1-4214-0754-8.

Although much of this conceptually innovative study focuses on the impact on the self-identity of women in patriarchal Muslim societies around the world, the author also provides a valuable discussion of the connection between tribal patriarchy and radicalization into Islamic extremism through an innovative tool he has developed, which he terms the tribal patriarchy index. To analyze this process of radicalization, he draws on empirical data about Islamists who have been convicted under terrorism laws in Britain and France because, he writes, "they provide us a lens into two very different responses to patriarchy and to religion." He concludes that one of the

factors driving such men (and particularly immigrants) in Britain and France to embrace extremism is that they “generally are disproportionately (compared with women) stuck at the bottom rungs of the social ladder. Combined with the dynamics of patriarchy, discrimination, and religious politics, this state of affairs has an alienating effect on poorer second- and third-generation Muslim men.”

Martin A. Miller, *The Foundations of Modern Terrorism: State, Society and the Dynamics of Political Violence* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 306 pages, US \$28.99 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1-107-62108-4.

An interesting, well-written and highly provocative survey of the history, evolution and trajectory of modern terrorism, from its beginning in early modern Europe up to the contemporary period. Of special interest is the author’s unique interpretation of terrorism (which is not generally accepted in the terrorism studies discipline), which attempts to “integrate” the “violence of governments and insurgencies into a single narrative format as a way to understand terrorism in its broadest historical representation.” To validate this approach, the author selects significant historical cases, such as 19th century Russian revolutionary and tsarist terrorisms, government and anti-government terrorism in 19th century and early 20th century Europe, terrorism in the United States, Communist and fascist authoritarian terrorism, ideological terrorism during the Cold War, and terrorism in the contemporary period. With the traditional notion of state legitimacy being contested by insurgent and government forces, the author finds that the use of terrorist tactics has become part of a violent contest for control of state power between those in government and the competing terrorist insurgents. Although one may disagree with the author’s contention that terrorism has since evolved into a competition between insurgents and state security forces that employ similar violent behaviors and tactics, this book is nevertheless a highly useful, intellectually sophisticated and thought-provoking “alternative” history of terrorism and counterterrorism.

Donatella della Porta, *Clandestine Political Violence* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 344 pages, US \$36.99 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-0-521-14616-6.

In this highly insightful, empirically-based theoretical and comparative study, the author (a political sociologist and one of Italy’s foremost experts on terrorism) argues that “clandestine political violence” (another term for terrorism) falls into four general types: left-wing (in Italy and Germany), right-wing (in Italy), ethno-nationalist (in Spain), and religious fundamentalist (for instance, in Muslim societies). A common conceptual framework is employed to analyze the causal mechanisms that operate at the beginnings of such underground movements, during their persistence, and at their demise, as well as within the context of the interactions between them and the state. Also examined are the ways in which the different violent actors “cognitively

construct the reality they act upon,” as well as their internal dynamics. Empirical evidence is used to illustrate the crucial cyclical phases that characterize these cases of “clandestine political violence.”

Hy Rothstein and John Arquilla, editors, *Afghan Endgames: Strategy and Policy Choices for America's Longest War* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2012), 248 pages, US \$29.95 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1-58901-908-9.

The contributors to this insightful volume employ a multidisciplinary approach from the fields of history, strategy, anthropology, ethics, and mass communications to examine effective strategy and policy options (including the costs, risks, and benefits of each alternative option) to terminate the involvement by the United States and its allies in Afghanistan's protracted civil war. Some of the findings reached by the contributors are that, following the Western withdrawal from Afghanistan, a strong, legitimate central government in Kabul is unlikely to emerge; that fewer remaining coalition forces (used in creative ways) might achieve better results on the ground than a larger, more conventional presence; and that Afghanistan's neighbors, particularly Pakistan, should be encouraged to become more actively involved in the conflict's “endgame.” Such an approach, they believe, while not ensuring “complete peace” in Afghanistan, will likely create a self-sustaining security system that will be able to restore order in the wake of violent outbreaks.

Michael W.S. Ryan, *Decoding Al-Qaeda's Strategy: The Deep Battle Against America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 368 pages, US \$37.50 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-0-231-16384-2.

In this groundbreaking and highly informed study, the author examines the writings of jihadist theoreticians, such as Sayyid Qutb, Abd al-Salam Faraj, and Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, in order to “decode” al Qaida's strategy against its adversaries, with particular focus on its warfare against America. The author finds that such jihadist ideas have more in common with the principles of Maoist guerrilla warfare than mainstream Islam, with leading al Qaida strategists such as Usama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri influenced not only by Salafist ideologues, but also the guerrilla strategies of Mao, Che Guevara, and even General Giap, the mastermind of the Viet Cong successful insurgency. The author applies this theoretical framework to analyze al Qaida's insurgencies in places such as Yemen. He concludes that al Qaida's “political-military strategy” is a “revolutionary and largely secular departure from the classic Muslim conception of jihad.” Once the political, military, socio-economic, cultural, ideological, psychological, and international dimensions of al Qaida's revolutionary strategy are properly understood, the author concludes, they will contribute to substantially upgrading the countermeasures employed by America against al Qaida and its affiliates.

Gershon Shafir, Everard Meade, and William J. Aceves, editors, *Lessons and Legacies of the War on Terror: From Moral Panic to Permanent War* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013), 200 pages, US \$135.00 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-0-415-63841-8.

The contributors to this conceptually interesting and provocative volume utilize the framework of what they term a political “moral panic” to examine the lessons and legacies of the United States-led “Global War on Terror.” One of their general findings is that terrorists (in the form of 9/11’s catastrophic attacks) have “prevailed” by forcing the United States to change its “way of life,” with transportation, trade, communications and other daily activities disrupted, even when “the pace and intensity of terror attacks have abated.” Also of concern to the contributors is that what were expected to be “temporary security measures and sacrifices of liberty” adopted in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 type terrorist events soon became “more or less permanent.” To examine how such constraints on civil liberties ensued, the contributors examine the social, cultural, and political drivers underlying the “war on terror” in which “perceived” threats to individuals and institutions have affected the targeted countries’ “social norms and values, civilization, and even morality itself.” To validate this thesis, a wide range of case studies are examined, including the United States involvement in Africa, Afghanistan and Iraq. The concluding chapter argues that “we all lost the ‘war on terror,’ because real external security threats were reconstructed by a political moral panic into a dysfunctional miasma of national insecurity,” and that “deconstructing the politics of fear” is required to “unpack moral panic, and reconstruct a rational assessment of threat, normative commitment to the rule of law, and global social imaginary.”

Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, *The Muslim Brotherhood: Evolution of an Islamist Movement* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 360 pages, US \$29.95 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-0-691-14940-0.

In this important and authoritative study, the author (a veteran academic expert on Islamist movements) examines the evolution and current status of the Muslim Brotherhood, which achieved “a level of influence nearly unimaginable before the Arab Spring.” The book was written prior to the ousting of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in early July 2013, so some of its conclusions need to be revised when its new edition is published, but, nevertheless, the author’s analysis paves the way for understanding how it became the “resounding victor” in Egypt’s 2011-2012 parliamentary and presidential elections. Drawing on more than one hundred in-depth interviews as well as Arabic language sources, the author traces the evolution of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt from its founding in 1928 to the fall of Mubarak and the elections of 2011-2012. She also compares the Brotherhood’s political trajectory with those of its counterpart Islamist groups in Jordan, Kuwait, and Morocco, including highlighting their internal divisions. Interestingly – and presciently (in light of the ouster of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood from

power) – the author finds that Muslim Brotherhood parties in the Middle East are not proceeding along a linear path toward greater moderation, but that their trajectory is marked by tensions and contradictions, in which “hybrid agendas” embrace “themes of freedom and democracy [that] coexist uneasily with illiberal concepts of Shari'a carried over from the past.” Understanding such political and doctrinal nuances provides a glimpse into these organizations’ predicaments as they attempt – whether successfully or not – to find the appropriate balance that will enable them to sustain themselves in the Middle East’s currently uncertain turmoil and upheaval.

About the Reviewer: Dr. Joshua Sinai is the Book Reviews Editor of ‘Perspectives on Terrorism’.