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Guido W. Steinberg. *German Jihad. On the Internationalization of Islamist Terrorism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013.

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*reviewed by Alex P. Schmid*

The central thesis of this book by Guido Steinberg, a former advisor to the German Federal Chancellery, is that there was no such thing as a global jihad prior to 2001: "...the internationalist scene and ideology we witness today developed only after September 11, 2001, and that the jihadist movement has been going through an internationalization process ever since..." (p.13). With this novel perspective, Dr. Steinberg, an Islamicist by training now working at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs in Berlin, takes a position that is at odds with much of American thinking on the origins of "global terrorism". For Steinberg, Al-Qaeda was, until late 2001, basically an Egyptian-Saudi Arabian armed resistance project aiming at the overthrow of the regimes of two countries, rather than envisioning a 'global jihad'. What was an exclusive Arab phenomenon in 2001, became internationalised in terms of ideology, strategy and social base in reaction to the "global war on terror", attracting Pakistanis, Afghans, Turks, Kurds, Uzbeks as well as American and European converts among others, thereby crossing national, regional and ethnic lines of division (p. 17).

While the title *German Jihad* suggests a narrow German focus, Steinberg's exceedingly well-written volume is considerably broader in scope, covering developments in Central Asia, Turkey, Chechnya, Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan as they relate to Germany. Steinberg is not sparing in his critique of Germany's policies in Afghanistan, where German troops constitute the third largest contingent after the United States and Great Britain. He makes clear that "...the German presence in the Kunduz region was based on a fatal miscalculation borne out of a lack of awareness of the area's recent history" (p.208), with Germany being "...utterly unaware of the importance of Kunduz for the Taliban" (p. 213) - inter alia in terms of routing heroin towards the Russian market. The German intelligence community had, prior to 9/11, no idea that Al-Qaeda was using Germany for preparing these attacks, due - according to Steinberg - to a "peculiar mixture of ignorance and arrogance" (p. 38). He is even more critical of the policies of the United States and some of its other allies, arguing that after 9/11 it "would take several more years and several mistakes by al-Qaeda's adversaries to further internationalize the jihadist movement" (p. 16). However, he also sees among the jihadists indigenous factors at work for going global: "...the increasing attractiveness of internationalist ideology among young Muslims themselves" (p.29). On the one hand, he attributes going global to the "classical jihadist internationalism," that is, "the conviction that every individual Muslim, no matter where he or she lives, is obliged to fight non-Muslims who occupy Muslim territory" (p.32). Yet he also sees "revolutionary nationalism" (focusing on the "near enemy") and "modern internationalism" (focusing on the "far enemy") informing contemporary jihadist thinking whereby the "modern internationalists" or "global jihadists" try to combine the fight against the near and the far enemy. (p.33). In Steinberg's

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view, it was the American-led intervention in Iraq in 2003 that mobilized the strongest of these three currents: “Giving al-Qaeda the opportunity to base its argumentation on classical internationalist thought most likely saved the organization from demise after 2001” (p. 34).

A considerable part of *German Jihad* focuses on the rise of Salafism among Muslims and converts in Germany. He distinguishes between the “organized jihadists” (who act as integral parts of Al-Qaeda), the “independent jihadists” (who lack outside support) and the “new internationalists” (a hybrid variant consisting of those who radicalize independently and subsequently traveled to Pakistan to gain access to Al-Qaeda) (p.44). In this book, Steinberg also portrays the rise of political and jihadist Salafists in Germany. They numbered no more than a few hundred members in 2001, but by 2012 had grown to between 5,000 (official estimate) and 10,000 (Steinberg’s estimate) members, “guided” by some 50 Salafist-controlled mosques. (p.131).

One of the many virtues of *German Jihad* is that it also pays appropriate attention to the online activities of the jihadists, such as those of the *Global Islamic Media Front* whose videos were given wide coverage not only on the Internet but also by mainstream German-language media, making one of the jihadist producers, Mohamed Mahmoud, rejoice: “By God, the video has had an effect. The deeds will, Inshallah, follow” (p.135). In fact, a stream of some hundred jihadist propaganda videos lured several waves of German jihad tourists - altogether more than 200 men and women - to Waziristan, where some of them formed the German Taliban Mujahideen, an “international brigade” subordinate to the Islamic Jihad Union of Uzbekistan. About the “type of guys” among them, Steinberg notes: “All of them went through deep personal crises until jihadism gave their life a new orientation, a feeling of group security, and promised adventure” (p. 146). While nearly useless as a fighting group in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region, they were successful on the propaganda front and, upon their return to Germany, constitute a danger to public security as some of them have attempted to carry out attacks on behalf of their masters in Waziristan.

Steinberg does not refrain from placing blame where blame belongs: “In the German case, political and military fickleness had arguably contributed to the jihadists choosing Germany as an attractive target.” The result of all this is, as he puts it, “a consolidated Jihadist scene in Germany” (p.237) that will form a domestic threat for years to come because “Al-Qaeda’s ideology has spread among young Muslims in Europe” (p.247). Hence his call to rethink Germany’s domestic counterterrorism strategy. Steinberg points to “a severe weakness in human intelligence, including a lack of qualified personnel.” While this problem persists, his call that “The Salafist scene will have to be monitored much more aggressively than it has until now in order to control the situation” (p. 252) appears to be belatedly followed by German authorities, given the wave of recent police actions.

Steinberg also offers sound foreign policy advice: “What is needed is a mode of action stressing that the United States and Europe have an interest in stability and an equally important interest in incremental change toward the rule of law and greater popular participation in government” in

countries that are affected by jihadist activities. (p.251). All in all, Steinberg has written an excellent study, demonstrating the complex interplay between foreign and domestic factors both on the side of the jihadists and their government opponents.

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