

Counterterrorism Bookshelf: Nine Books on Terrorism & Counter-Terrorism-Related Subjects

by Joshua Sinai

This column consists of capsule reviews of books published by various publishers, with the authors listed in alphabetical order.

Alex Boraine, *What's Gone Wrong? South Africa on the Brink of Failed Statehood* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2014), 174 pages, US\$27.00 [Hardcover], ISBN: 9781479854974.

This book offers an important account by a leading South African political activist of what had “gone wrong” in South Africa since the replacement of the Apartheid regime by a democratic political system under African National Congress (ANC) rule. As discussed by the author, the ANC—especially in the post-Nelson Mandela period, which was characterized by a high degree of enlightenment—has been taken over by growing intolerance of opposing views and government corruption. The author describes a significant worsening of conditions in education, public health, safety and security, and employment: the characteristics of a “failing state.” However, he concludes on an optimistic note that “In many ways we are a failing state, but we are not a failed state. Institutions such as the Constitutional Court and parliament are still in place. The media is largely free, civil society is still active. There have been other dark days (think back to the 1980s), and we survived and eventually triumphed.” (p. 145) Alex Boraine, who served in South Africa’s parliament, and helped to set up South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, now serves as Global Visiting Professor of Law at New York University’s Hauser Global Law School Program.

Robert J. Bunker, John P. Sullivan, Brian Michael Jenkins, Matt DeVost, and James T. Kirkhope (Eds.), *Counterterrorism: Bridging Operations and Theory* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2015), 444 pp., US \$ 27.95 [Paperback], ISBN: 9781491759776.

Since this reviewer wrote one of the volume’s articles (on “Threat Convergence” – the creation of a new category of terrorist threat through the convergence of terrorism, WMD proliferation, criminality, cyber weapons proliferation, and enabling conditions in weak, failed, and even strong states), this should not be considered as a book review but a general overview of this book’s chapters. Led by Robert J. Bunker, who assembled prominent contributors to write the volume’s 65 articles, this book is encyclopedic in scope, with the articles’ topics organized alphabetically. The articles [with the authors’ names within parentheses] cover topics such as the Abu Nidal Organization (Jennifer Hardwick), al Qaida (Rohan Gunaratna), asymmetric warfare (Robert J. Bunker), aviation security (Kevin R. McCarthy), biological warfare (Peter Katona), chemical weapons (Raymond Picquet), conditions promoting terrorism (Byron Ramirez), counterinsurgency (Thomas X. Hammes), critical infrastructure protection (Stefan Brem), global insurgency (David J. Kilcullen), Hizballah (James. T. Kirkhope), homegrown violent extremism (Erroll G. Southers), netwar and networked threats (John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt), radicalization (Mitchell D. Silber), surface transportation security (Brian Michael Jenkins), terrorist mindset (Jeffrey A. Baxter and Daniel S. Gressang IV), and urban terrorism (Russell W. Glenn). Overall, these topics represent important issues in terrorism and counterterrorism studies.

Robert J. Bunker and John P. Sullivan (Eds.), *Criminal Insurgents in Mexico and Latin America* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2015), 432 pp., US \$ 26.95 [Paperback], ISBN: 9781491759790.

Continuing the long-term work on these issues by Robert J. Bunker and John P. Sullivan, this edited volume

is a fourth compilation of articles published in *Small Wars Journal*, this time covering developments in the narco-trafficking-related crime wars and criminal insurgencies in Mexico and Latin America in 2014. The volume's chapters [with the authors' names within parentheses] cover topics such as coverage of the activities of Mexican cartels (John P. Sullivan and Robert J. Bunker), an assessment of the effectiveness of the first year of Mexico President Pena Nieto's "war on drugs" (Chris Ince), an application of "grounded theory" in defining the cross-border violence by Mexican drug trafficking organizations (Clint Osowski), institutionalizing a risk-based approach for the U.S. Border Patrol (Robert D. Schroeder), the employment of advanced technologies such as 'narco-submarines' by drug smugglers (Byron Ramirez), the prevalence of 'narco-cities' in Mexico and beyond (John P. Sullivan), coordination failures among Mexican security forces (Irina Alexandra Chindea), how Plan Colombia can be applied to countering the drug cartels in Mexico (Michael Osborne), and the narco-trafficking problem in the Caribbean (Geoffrey Demarest).

Gary LaFree, Laura Dugan and Erin Miller, *Putting Terrorism in Context: Lessons From the Global Terrorism Database* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015), 262 pp., US \$ 145.00 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-0415671422.

This book is an important empirically-based examination by social scientists of the nature and magnitude of contemporary terrorism, drawing on the Global Terrorism Database (GTD), an unclassified source for data on terrorist incidents which is maintained by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), headquartered at the University of Maryland (where the three authors work, with Dr. LaFree serving as START's Director). The book begins with an overview of the GTD, as well as other comparable terrorist incident databases, and the definition of terrorism utilized in populating the GTD's terrorist incidents: "the threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by non-state actors to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation." (p. 13). One of the advantages of such a general definition, the authors point out later in the discussion, is that it includes attacks by terrorist groups against civilian noncombatants as well as, in certain instances, military targets. (p. 112)

The book's chapters then discuss trends in the frequency and geographic distribution of terrorist incidents around the world, the groups that are "attributed responsibility" for conducting such attacks (including their organizational "life spans"), an assessment of the types of weapons (e.g., firearms, bomb explosives, chemical or biological agents or radiological devices), tactics (e.g., armed assaults, bombings/explosions, assassinations or kidnappings), and targets (e.g., private citizens, businesses, government facilities, police, military, etc.) that terrorists consider and use in their attacks. They also examine the extent of fatalities and injuries produced by terrorist attacks (with airline bombings among the most lethal of such attacks), the factors that need to be considered in distinguishing domestic from international terrorist attacks, tactical innovations in terrorist attacks, the components of effective counterterrorism (e.g., coercive vs. conciliatory) in deterring terrorism, and what the authors term "taking stock" of lessons learned in their study of terrorism.

With much to commend in this comprehensive volume, especially interesting is the authors' discussion of tactical innovations in terrorist warfare, such as in aerial hijackings, as well as the attractions of chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear weapons to attackers, the difficulty of obtaining and 'weaponizing' such weapons and the potential risks to their own safety in attempting to employ such dangerous weapons for those contemplating such catastrophic warfare. It is curious, however, that the most significant and, surely, the most effective tactical innovation in terrorist warfare in the contemporary period is not discussed: the use by terrorist groups such as Hizballah and Hamas of sophisticated rockets and mortars in several wars against Israeli targets, which represents a 'revolution in military warfare' by such terrorist groups and making it possible for them to rely on less effective tactics such as suicide bombings, which do not inflict as much

widespread panic and anxiety, as well as physical damage on their targets – the primary objectives of terrorist warfare.

Also valuable is the authors' discussion of the risks and 'rewards' to terrorist groups that employ the tactic of suicide terrorism in their warfare, especially their noting that "Probably the greatest disadvantage of suicide terrorism as a strategy is the difficulty of recruiting individuals who are willing to die for the cause." (p. 194) When they write that "as organizations become more prestigious, they likely get more volunteers for their missions," (p. 194) perhaps the term to describe such recruiting success is not "prestigious" but effectiveness in their "ideologically or religiously doctrinaire" appeal to persuade such susceptible adherents to become martyrs for their cause. The concluding chapter is especially interesting for its many insights about the state of terrorism and counterterrorism research, including a valuable discussion on future trends in automating terrorism incident databases.

Mark S. Hamm, *The Spectacular Few: Prisoner Radicalization and the Evolving Terrorist Threat* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2013), 272 pp., US \$ 85.00 [Paperback], ISBN: 9780814725443.

This volume provides a compelling account (by a former prison warden in Arizona) of the origins, nature and magnitude of Islamic radicalization into violent extremism in the American prison system within the wider context of radicalization into extremism within prisons systems throughout modern history. As Mr. Hamm explains, his book is "about how prisoners use criminal cunning, collective resistance, and nihilism to incite terrorism against Western targets." (p. 16) What is especially different about radicalization in prison as opposed to other venues, such as universities, mosques or the Internet, is that "Those radicalized in prison tend to play for keeps....[and are] transformative experiences among inmates....[because of] the social marginalization of inmates and their desire for bonding, group identity, and spiritual guidance. These changes make prisons a better place to foment terrorism than any other setting." (p. 16) The book's chapters cover topics such as Islam in prison, prisoner radicalization after 9/11, pathways to terrorism, "Al-Qaeda of California," and a highly important discussion of "Terrorist Kingpins and the De-Radicalization Movement." The appendix includes a valuable listing and description of terrorism-related activities of inmates in American prisons who were radicalized during their incarceration. Mr. Hamm is currently a professor of criminology at Indiana State University and a Senior Research Fellow at the Terrorism Center at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York.

Donald Holbrook, *The Al-Qaeda Doctrine: The Framing and Evolution of the Leadership's Public Discourse* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2014), 304 pp., US \$ 130.00 [Hardcover], ISBN: 9781623563141.

A comprehensive examination, as explained by the author, of "the ideational elements that have been communicated publically by the Al-Qaeda leadership and the ways in which these have evolved over the past two decades," in order to comprehend the organization's ideological doctrine and objectives. (p. xvi) What makes this book innovative is its utilization of manual coding, based on a "bespoke checklist of themes," of the statements of al Qaida's leadership, particularly Usama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, to discern "long-term trends and changes over time" in the organization's public rhetoric. (pp. 6-7) These themes are arranged according to three broad categories: first, problems, issues, and grievances; second, "envisaged responses and alternatives to these identified problems; and, finally, "communicative efforts to convey these sentiments toward various audiences." (p. 7) The themes are also outlined in numerous figures and tables that accompany the text. This book was written prior to the emergence of the Islamic State as al Qaida's primary jihadist challenger, where its forces have overtaken al Qaida's allies in Syria and Iraq as well as apparently

superseding al Qaida's ideology in attracting Western recruits to wage jihad in those countries (as well as in their own societies). The author's conclusions, as a result, are out-of-date, but he does make the insightful point that the mass mobilization that bin Laden and Zawahiri had "envisaged had failed to materialize." (p. 165) This author's analysis sheds important light on how al Qaeda's multifaceted discourse has evolved and affected, as he writes, "a new generation of Al-Qaeda supporters, activists, and sympathizers." (p. 166)

Jeffrey Kaplan, Helene Loow and Leena Malkki, editors, *Lone Wolf and Autonomous Cell Terrorism* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015), 276 pp., US \$ 145.00 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-1138851221.

This edited volume was initially published as a special volume of the academic journal *Terrorism and Political Violence* (January–March 2014, Vol. 26, No. 1) by Routledge's 'parent' company Taylor & Francis.[1] The contributors to that issue of the journal had initially presented their papers at the conference "Lone Wolf and Autonomous Cell Terrorism" that was held at Uppsala University, Sweden, under the auspices of the university's Center for Police Research, on September 24-26, 2012. Following an introductory overview by the special issue's editors, the contributors discuss issues such as counterinsurgency, law enforcement tactics, lone wolf terrorism, profiling lone wolf terrorists, governmental responses to lone wolf terrorists prior to the First World War, case studies of lone wolves such as Carlos Bledsoe, Anders Breivik, loners and autonomous cells in the Netherlands, school shootings as examples of lone wolf violence, lone wolf terrorism and weapons of mass destruction, and detecting "linguistic markers" for signs of extremist violence in social media. Although one might argue that some of the lone wolves discussed in the volume may have actually been part of larger "packs of wolves" and were radicalised in social media by more "conventional" terrorist groups, this volume represents an important contribution to advancing our understanding of this important phenomenon.

Jessica Stern and J.M. Berger, *ISIS: The State of Terror* (New York, NY: ECCO/Harper Collins, 2015), 416 pp., US \$ 27.99 [Hardcover], ISBN: 9780062395542.

Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassan, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror* (New York, NY: Regan Arts, 2015), 288 pp., US \$ 14.00 [Paperback], ISBN: 9781941393574.

Since their recent publication within a few weeks of each other, these two books have become best sellers on the subject of ISIS, the acronym of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, also called Islamic State, or, in its derogatory term, Daesh. With ISIS becoming the world's most notorious and territorially successful terrorist group due to its savage, brutal and genocidal warfare tactics—even surpassing al Qaida and its affiliates as the top concern of counterterrorism community members in many countries—readers are eager to understand its origins, leadership, strategy, the nature of its religious appeal to susceptible Muslims around the world, and future trends in its warfare. Both books accomplish these objectives to some extent, although each is flawed in its own way.

Stern and Berger's *ISIS: The State of Terror* is written in a more clear fashion and is better organized than Weiss and Hassan's *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror* (which reads like a series of densely written episodes in ISIS's history and current activities). However, the latter book, written by journalists who have spent extensive time in the region, is, nonetheless, better at capturing events and their dynamics on the ground, while the former is more academic, with a reliance on social science concepts to explain the ISIS phenomenon. At the very beginning of Stern and Berger's book they spend too much time discussing ISIS as a 'terrorist' organization, defining terrorism as "an act or threat of violence against noncombatants." And yet, ISIS has demonstrated a military prowess in its combat against the ineffectual Syrian and Iraqi military forces (also due to the presence of former Iraqi Baathist military officers in ISIS's ranks), demonstrating that it is,

in fact, a paramilitary guerrilla army and not merely a grouping of ‘terrorists.’ The book’s successive chapters provide a valuable overview of the origins and evolution of ISIS (although one may disagree with the authors claim that “ISIS was born from the crucible of America’s ‘war on terrorism,’ (p. 177) when it should be seen instead as the product of the internal breakdown of Muslim societies in which it operates); the strong appeal of its religious ideology to recruits from around the world, including Western countries (as well as, unlike al Qaida, appealing to women, who have joined en masse); and its great success in exploiting the Internet to advance its ‘message.’

Stern and Berger explain that “Salafism, like all fundamentalism, is a response to the pain of modernity,” (p. 242) but they neglect to mention that as religious traditionalists, Salafists are driven by a fear of the opportunities for ‘liberation’ (especially among the sexes) and the scientific progress provided by modernity. The authors minimize the threat presented by Western returnees from Syria and Iraq, when they write that “Western returnees have been horrified by what they saw in the Islamic State and appear to have little interest in attacking their home countries, at least for now.” (p. 201) However, this analysis is called into question by recent cases in Europe and elsewhere that have involved returnees who have proceeded to plot or carry out terrorist attacks in their home countries. Finally, while the authors are correct that an effective campaign against ISIS must blunt its narrative, this reviewer feels that the ISIS narrative is so extremist and genocidal that the only means to counter this group is to substantially degrade its military capability and the territory under its control.

In comparison, the Weiss and Hassan book presents a more realistic portrayal of ISIS, and does not aim to provide sweeping policy recommendations to counter its wide appeal. They conclude that as “a deadly insurgency adept at multiple forms of warfare [it] has proved resilient, adaptable, and resolved to carry on fighting. A legacy of both Saddam and al-Zarqawi, ISIS has excelled at couching its struggle in world-historical terms. It has promised both death and a return to the ancient glories of Islam. Thousands have lined up to join it, and even more have already fallen victim to it.” (p. 242) On the same page, the authors also claim that “The army of terror will be with us indefinitely,” although anyone who has studied terrorism long enough will recognize the impossibility of such a claim.

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Notes:

[1] This special volume of the journal was also previously capsule reviewed by this reviewer in <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/340/html> and is reiterated here.