

**Aviva Guttman, *The Origins of International Counterterrorism. Switzerland at the Forefront of Crisis Negotiations, Multilateral Diplomacy, and Intelligence Cooperation (1969-1977)*.** Brill: Leiden/Boston, 2018. 286 pp. ISBN: 978-90-04-27664-2; EUR:104.-; US \$ 120.-

reviewed by **Beatrice de Graaf**

In recent years, almost all European countries have been provided with one or more studies historicizing their approach to (counter-)terrorism. Until recently, Switzerland was an exception. That has now changed with Aviva Guttman's Ph.D. thesis turned into a Brill monograph, *The Origins of International Counterterrorism*. As she notes in her opening chapter, Europe was struck by a series of terrorist attacks in the early 1970s - both by domestic groups and by international terrorist organisations. Mainly due to transnational terrorist operations, Guttman argues, countries such as Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium and France started to cooperate, bilaterally, and sometimes, in a very ad hoc manner, multilaterally. However, Dutch, Belgian, French and German police officers already exchanged information and intelligence relating to fugitive domestic terrorists like those of the German RAF and, in later years, with the UK on IRA operatives running afoul on the continent. However, with that reservation, Guttman is correct in noting that governments started to develop more institutionalised policies to counter the threat emanating from international terrorist organisations in the early 1970s. She also correctly notes that the Swiss government played an interesting part in early developments on the intelligence front. This is the history she sought to cover.

One question, however, immediately poses itself to the reader: which approach to adopt in bringing into focus this special international role the Swiss government has allegedly played? She notes quite early in her dissertation that neutral Switzerland sided with the US and UK in supporting Israel against Palestinian terrorist groupings, thereby opting for a 'breach of the principle of universality' (p.4). Whose principle, and which universality were supposedly broken, Guttman fails to elaborate. Does this signal that the author adopted an international rights perspective as her interpretative framework? Not really. Guttman states in the introduction that her research is embedded in 'International History' while focusing on 'the country's cooperation with European and other states' since 'this helps to understand counterterrorism cooperation mechanism[s]'. Furthermore, she claims that this also 'contributes to identifying today's difficulties for international counterterrorism cooperation and can provide insights in counterterrorism studies more generally'. This 'more generally' needs to be taken quite literally, since Guttman subsequently does not further elaborate how she intends to analyse counterterrorism measures and management. Rather, she proceeds with a number of diligent chronologically arranged chapters on how Swiss authorities dealt with a series of attacks and crises in the years 1969 to 1977.

These minute descriptions of attacks, especially one by the PFLP in February 1969 and an abduction by 'Brazilian rebels' in 1970-1971 are the real bonus of this monograph. These attacks - and the response by the Swiss authorities - have indeed not been investigated thoroughly before. Guttman unearths fascinating new details, e.g. on how, at first the Swiss authorities decided on a solo run in dealing with the PFLP hijacking of a Swissair plane, thereby safeguarding their declaratory policy of neutrality. However, when some of the communications with the terrorists and the media got messed up, Swiss crisis managers very quickly accepted US assistance, abandoning a position of neutrality.

Guttman then continues to describe Swiss participation in UN negotiations on some of the first international counterterrorism conventions, and on how Swiss diplomats were instructed to 'find an elegant way of doing nothing' when confronted with US demands in initiating new resolutions and conventions. The chapters on the formation and functioning of the Club de Berne are equally fascinating - especially Guttman's assessment that its inception, and the way intelligence sharing worked and was prompted, had everything to do with a joint European stance against Palestinian activism and terrorism, resting on the willingness to engage in large scale intelligence sharing with Israel.

Guttman study's chief merit consists of her 'thick' descriptions of a number of attacks and the measures taken to counter terrorism in the 1970s in Switzerland, as well as in her reconstruction of the Swiss participation in

UN negotiations and its role in the Club de Berne. That said, the absence of a proper conceptual or interpretative framework makes itself felt throughout the book. Mostly in the way the author keeps reiterating Swiss official self-assessments of its government as an ‘important security partner’ or being ‘very well prepared’. She is also bestowing the epithet ‘balanced and coherent’ to an approach, that - as emerges from the author’s own account - relied on luck and ad hoc measures as much as on strategic depth of insight. On the other hand, the author assumes a quite moralistic tone in the conclusion when she appears to blame the Swiss authorities for ‘violating neutrality’. Yet, if the history of terrorism and counterterrorism teaches us anything, it is that questions of legitimacy, constitutional norms and traditions in international relations may be challenged overnight following a major attack or crisis, and might subsequently experience a total overhaul. Understanding how that happens, under what conditions, how countries and governments respond differently to international crises or to public calls for better security are at least as important as unearthing new details on past attacks. It also needs to be said that the subtitle of this volume is misleading; in the end it was not Switzerland that was ‘at the Forefront of Crisis Negotiations etc.’ but countries like West-Germany and Italy, prompted by the US – something which does not really transpire from Guttman’s work.

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