
Book Reviews

Henry Prunckun and Troy Whitford, *Terrorism and Counterterrorism: A Comprehensive Introduction to Actors and Actions* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2019), 269 pp., US \$ 85.00 [Hardcover], US \$ 35.00 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1-6263-7760-8.

Reviewed by Joshua Sinai

The threat of terrorism is a paramount national security concern to governments and their citizens worldwide. Innumerable books are published on the nature of terrorism and the components of counterterrorism to defeat the terrorist threat. Henry Prunckun's and Troy Whitford's "Terrorism and Counterterrorism: A Comprehensive Introduction to Actors and Actions" stands out as is an exemplary resource for understanding these issues. Mr. Prunckun is a former senior level counterterrorism analyst in the Australian government. He is a widely published author, and a research criminologist in policing and security studies at Charles Stuart University, where Mr. Whitford is a lecturer.

This easy-to-follow textbook covers many relevant topics involved in analyzing the nature of the terrorist threat. This includes defining terrorism from the perspective of democratic governments: a violent political act by a group or by lone actors in furtherance of extremist objectives. Such political violence is criminal because it violates a democracy's penal laws, and is directed "against a government (via innocent victims) as opposed to aggression that emanates from a [foreign] state's military" (p. 5).

The authors explain how the resort to terrorism can be traced to Sun Tzu's doctrine of asymmetric warfare, in which the weaker side exploits vulnerabilities of its more powerful adversary government — that if you "kill one, [you] frighten ten thousand" through the publicity anxiety that accompanies such incidents when widely published. Terrorists' strategic objectives aim to disrupt the targeted government's activities to such an extent that it appears incapable of defending its citizenry, and thereby provoking it to overreact by implementing stern coercive response measures that might end up eroding a society's democratic nature and personal freedoms. This can inadvertently legitimize the insurgent groups' portrayal of an "unreasonable" government response.

Regarding terrorism's root causes, the authors observe that political violence is often a response to features of the larger context in which terrorists operate as they wrongly believe that only violence can redress their grievances. Such conflicts are difficult to resolve through negotiations because "The philosophy of terrorism does not entertain the possibility of coexistence between the group and society. Rather it seeks to destroy society" (p. 16). Nevertheless, the authors point out, there are a few instances in which "this absolutist perspective can change over time" (p. 16). One of these rare instances was the Irish Republican Army's (IRA) moderation, through Sinn Fein, its political wing, which enabled it to reach a peace agreement with the British government, thereby ending Northern Ireland's decades' old conflict.

Also covered in this volume are issues such as how radicalization into violent extremism takes place, and the reasons terrorists use to justify their resort to politically-motivated violence. The authors also explain how terrorists finance their operations (including by cooperating with criminal groups to raise funds). They point to the increasing lethality of terrorist warfare in terms of weaponry used (including the worst case scenario of weapons of mass destruction) and terrorists' rationale for targeting high-value human and physical targets, such as 9/11's simultaneous aircrafts' destruction of the World Trade Towers, which caused a catastrophic loss of life and major physical damage. Finally, the important topic of media coverage of terrorism is discussed. Here the authors are proposing guidelines for objectively covering terrorist incidents during the initial "fog of war." Regarding the components of effective counterterrorism, the authors discuss the role of intelligence agencies in tracking down terrorists, using both open source information and covert means — one of the book's major contributions — and the roles of law enforcement and the military in countering terrorists, whether domestically or overseas.

Another crucial component of counterterrorism in preventing future terrorist attacks are various de-radicalization programs established around the world to promote the disengagement of local terrorists from violence. Here the authors develop an innovative formula for what is required to win the “war on terror.” As part of this formula, the authors recommend applying a risk management methodology — which is usually absent from the academic study of counterterrorism. This consists of five steps: identifying the threat, gauging its likelihood, exploring one’s own vulnerabilities, assessing the consequences of an attack, and constructing a prevention, preparation, response, and recovery (PPRR) emergency plan to prepare a response. With these steps providing an overriding framework for counterterrorism, the authors conclude that while the underlying causes that give rise to terrorism’s grievances need to be understood and addressed, “Simultaneously, we must also take a tougher stance” (pp. 192-209).

Regarding future trends, the authors highlight the continuously evolving nature of terrorist warfare. When it comes to cyber-terrorism (which is still in a nascent form) terrorists might employ cyber weapons to gain remote access to their adversaries’ SCADA (Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition) systems to bring down critical parts of a nation’s infrastructure, such as a major electricity-generating power plants or transportation networks. Fortunately, such attacks have not yet materialized globally.

It is such practice-based insights that make this book a valuable guide for understanding the components involved in analyzing terrorist threats and the measures required for effective responses.

N.B.: This is a revised and expanded version of a review that initially appeared in The Washington Times. It is reprinted here by permission.

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