

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

Reviewed by Joshua Sinai

So many books are published on terrorism- and counterterrorism-related subjects that it is difficult to catch up on a large backlog of monographs and edited volumes received for review. In order to deal with this backlog, this column consists of capsule reviews, including tables of contents of five recently published books.

Louis A. Del Monte, *War at the Speed of Light: Directed-Energy Weapons and the Future of Twenty-First-Century Warfare* (Lincoln, NB: Potomac Books/An Imprint of the University of Nebraska Press, 2021), 280 pp., US \$ 29.95 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-1-6401-2330-4.

Innovations in military technology are transforming the way warfare is being conducted at a breakneck speed. A significant revolutionary innovation that is the focus of this informative volume is the introduction of directed-energy weapons in what is now termed “hyper-warfare,” such as laser, microwave, electromagnetic pulse, and cyberspace weapons. The advantages that such weapons present to contending warring sides, particularly the United States, Russia, and China, are driving them to continuously innovative in these weapons systems to such an extent that they are disrupting what was previously a relatively stable deterrence doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction, which had prevented them from engaging in nuclear warfare in the past. Increasingly less-than-nuclear weapons can be quickly deployed to cause catastrophic damages on their adversaries. These directed-energy weapons can also destroy an adversary’s hypersonic missiles and drones – even when they are deployed in swarm attacks. As these new warfare technologies are being deployed by leading states, the nature of national security threats is changing. According to the U.S. 2018 National Defense Strategy “Inter-state strategic competition, not terrorism, [is – JS] now the primary concern in U.S. national security”, as the author points out (p. 60). He cautions, however, that the terrorist threat should not be discounted, because a rogue state or an organized terrorist group, using a truck or a car, could launch a non-nuclear electromagnetic pulse (EMP) warhead against vulnerable infrastructure targets (pp. 157-158). With the concern about worst case scenarios in terrorists’ resort to weapons of mass destruction (WMD), the author’s account of the use of directed-energy weapons in warfare is an important contribution to the literature on advanced military technologies and how they can be used and how they need to be countered. The author is CEO of Del Monte and Associates and has more than thirty years of experience in physics, technology, and engineering.

Table of Contents: Introduction; Part 1. The Game of Cat and Mouse; Tilting the Balance of Terror; The Quest for Global Dominance Using Conventional Weapons; The Coming Fourth U.S. Offset Strategy; Part 2. Directed-Energy Weapons; Laser Weapons; Microwave Weapons; EMP Weapons; Cyberspace Weapons; Part 3. “Shields Up, Mr. Sulu”; Directed-Energy Countermeasures; Force Fields; Part 4. The Coming New Reality; Autonomous Directed-Energy Weapons; The Full-Scale Weaponization of Space; Not Gambling with the Fate of Humanity; Appendix A: U.S. and Chinese Defense Budgets Adjusted for Purchasing Power Parity and Labor Costs; Appendix B: The Design and Operation of a Laser; Appendix C: Radiation-Hardened Electronics and System Shielding Resources; Appendix D: Articles Describing the Operation of Nonnuclear EMP Devices.

Jack Devine, *Spymaster’s Prism: The Fight Against Russian Aggression* (Lincoln, NE: Potomac Books/An Imprint of the University of Nebraska Press, 2021), 304 pp., US \$ 34.95 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-1-6401-2378-6.

Espionage is the practice of spying and using spies to covertly obtain information about current and future plans and activities of a foreign government or non-state actor, such as a terrorist group. In this fascinating and revealing volume, the author, a legendary former CIA spymaster, provides an insider’s insight about the CIA’s competition with its Russian intelligence service counterparts, including famous spy cases and the recent attempts by the Russian government to interfere on behalf of former President Donald Trump’s presidential

campaigns. With regard to the CIA and counter-terrorism, readers will find especially interesting the author's account of the attacks by Iran and Hizballah in 1983 and 1984 against American intelligence operatives, the bombing attack against the Marine Corps barracks, as well as their hostage-taking campaign against foreigners in Lebanon, and the CIA's involvement in the Iran-Contra Affair's "arms for hostages" covert operations. The author criticizes the Iran-Contra Affair as misguided, as it violated the U.S. "long-standing foreign policy against negotiating with terrorists [which – JS] had repercussions that endure today" (p. 208). He adds: "Terrorists took solid note that mass casualty attacks prompt military withdrawals and that kidnapping can extract extraordinary bounty for a single American life" (p. 208). This reviewer, however, does not agree with the author's observation that the CIA's focus after 9/11 on countering terrorist groups such as al Qaida and ISIS led to sidelining the "agency's original mandate of espionage and covert action abroad targeting some of our 'big power' adversaries and their spheres of influence" (p. 156) – especially during the Trump Administration. In this reviewer's view, former President Trump was not interested in pursuing such covert activities against Russia, because of his "close" relations with President Vladimir Putin. Overall, this book offers lots of terrifically insightful lessons by a seasoned intelligence practitioner about American intelligence successes and failures over the past seventy-five years, making it an indispensable resource on these issues. Following his decades-long service in the CIA, the author is currently president of the Arkin Group, a New York City-based international risk consulting and intelligence firm.

Table of Contents: Preamble; Introduction; Our Strategic Intelligence Shortfall – Then and Now; Shaping and Reshaping the CIA; A Study in Russian Spycraft; A Spymaster Present; Spies Among Us; A Spymaster's Rules in Counterintelligence; Limits of Counterintelligence; Agents-in-Place; Policy Spies; An American Covert Action Playbook; Best Practice; A Cautionary Tale; Onward; Appendix: Russia's Known Elicitation Attempts in Trump's Inner Circle.

Benjamin S. Lambeth, *Airpower in the War Against ISIS* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press/Published in Cooperation with the Mitchell Institute for Aerospace Studies, 2021), 352 pp., US \$ 55.00 [Hardcover], ISBN: 978-1-6824-7557-7.

Although it would have been interesting for the author to discuss the bases in the Middle East (such as Turkey or from the nearby deployed U.S. Navy's aircraft carriers) from which the U.S. fighter aircraft were launched to bomb the ISIS targets, as well as the role of the U.S. Navy's fighter aircraft on these missions in Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR), these are barely discussed in the book, which focuses on the effectiveness of the U.S. Air Force's fighter aircraft bombing campaign, as it was led by the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) from August 2014 to mid-2018. The author argues that during this period the U.S. airpower's precision air assets were initially under-employed against ISIS's most vital center-of-gravity targets in Syria, although they were used more effectively in the latter period, especially in conjunction with the ground-based U.S. Special Forces in the country. Towards the end of the air campaign, the author explains, "by early February 2018, OIR had reportedly liberated more than 7.7 million inhabitants and 98 percent of the territory formerly held by ISIS in Iraq and Syria since the movement's rise starting in 2012" (p. 247). Overall, this is an important and highly detailed examination of the effectiveness of the role of airpower in fighting terrorist groups that control territory in largely ungoverned states, such as Syria. The author is a Senior Fellow with the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, a position he assumed in 2011 following a 37-year career at the RAND Corporation. His earlier book on *Air Power Against Terror: America's Conduct of Operation Enduring Freedom*, was published by the Rand Corporation in 2005.

Table of Contents: Foreword; Preface; Introduction; America's Air Posture before Inherent Resolve; How the ISIS Challenge First Arose; The Air War's Slow Start; Toward a More Effective Air Effort; On a Winning Streak at Long Last; Consolidating a Successful Endgame; Some Notable Air War Achievements; The Russian Intervention; Issues in U.S. Leadership and Strategy; Conclusion.

Edward M. Spiers, *Agents of War: A History of Chemical and Biological Weapons* [Expanded Second Edition] (London, England, UK: Reaktion Books, 2020), 224 pp., US \$ 14.00 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1-7891-4298-3.

With a biological agent in the form of COVID-19 currently disrupting the international community, national security planners are concerned about potential further outbreaks of viral pandemics and other types of weapons of mass destruction such as chemical agents. This comprehensive and detailed account of the history of the use of such weapons worldwide, is an expanded and updated second edition of the author's 2010 book. It includes two new chapters on the recurrence of chemical warfare in the Middle East by the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad, and later by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, and the use of poisons in the form of chemical, biological and radiological weapons in political assassinations, with the latest attempt the killing by a VX nerve agent by North Korean agents of Kim Jong-nam at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport, in Malaysia, on February 13, 2017. The author concludes that while turning the aspirations by rogue actors, such as terrorists, to acquire and deploy chemical and biological agents in their warfare "may still prove problematic," the use of these weapons remains a "low probability but high consequence" event. He adds, however, that "Nevertheless, aspirations to acquire these weapons are likely to endure as long as the technology keeps opening up new possibilities for their development and usage" (p. 221). The author, an Emeritus Professor at the University of Leeds, England, is the author of several books on the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Table of Contents: Preface; Introduction; The Legacy of Gas Warfare in the First World War; Deterrence and Disarmament: Responses to Chemical and Biological Warfare, 1919-93; Chemical Warfare in Third World Conflicts; The Proliferation of Chemical and Biological Weapons; Iraq's Chemical and Biological Warfare Programmes; Chemical and Biological Terrorism; The Recurrence of Chemical Warfare in the Middle East; Political Assassination by Poisoning; Conclusion: The Evolving Nature of Chemical and Biological Warfare.

Joseph Weber, *Divided Loyalties: Young Somali Americans and the Lure of Extremism* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2020), 230 pp., US \$ 29.95 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1-6118-6372-7.

This is an important case study of the attempts by some 50 young Somali Americans, mostly from Minnesota, who were radicalized into joining groups like al-Shabab, al-Qaida, and the Islamic State in conflict-ridden countries such as Somalia and Syria. To examine these issues, the author, a veteran journalist and professor of journalism at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, draws on extensive interviews to focus on Abdirahman Abdirashid Bashir, an American-born son of a couple who had fled Somalia for Minneapolis. He had attempted to join ISIS in Syria with several friends during the period of 2014 to 2016. While some of his friends succeeded in making their way to Syria, Bashir ended up reversing himself and worked with the FBI to spy on his friends and testified against them in court. The author concludes that "understanding the appeal the militant ideology can have for young, culturally alienated young people will remain important – as will understanding the challenging process of uprooting it" (p. 167).

Table of Contents: Introduction The Seeds of Jihad; A Land of Chaos; The First Wave; Blind Devotion; A Cautionary Tale; Don't Let the Caravan Leave You; Why ISIS?; A Special Case; Peer to Peer; A Woman's Place?; Brotherhood; The Caravan Beckons Again; The Glory of the Shahid; Breaking Down; A Very Real Threat; Straight Out of Hollywood; The Backlash; The Judge; A Closed World?; Taking a Hard Look; Moving On.

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