

REVIEW ESSAYS

THE WISDOM ON TERROR

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Harmon, Christopher C. *Terrorism Today*. Portland, Ore.: Frank Cass, 2000. 316pp. \$24.50

Pillar, Paul R. *Terrorism and U.S. Foreign Policy*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2001. 272pp. \$26.95

Campbell, Kurt M., and Michèle A. Flournoy. *To Prevail: An American Strategy for the Campaign against Terrorism*. Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2001. 416pp. \$18.95

Jacquard, Roland. *In the Name of Osama Bin Laden: Global Terrorism and the Bin Laden Brotherhood*. Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 2002. 293pp. \$18.95

Henderson, Harry. *Global Terrorism: The Complete Reference Guide*. New York: Checkmark Books/Facts On File, 2001. 300pp. \$16.95

Smith, James M., and William C. Thomas, eds. *The Terrorism Threat and U.S. Government Response: Operational and Organizational Factors*. Colorado Springs, Colo.: U.S. Air Force Institute for National Security Studies, 2001. 284pp. (No price given) (available at www.usafa.af.mil/inss/terrorism.htm).

Peters, Ralph. *Beyond Terror: Strategy in a Changing World*. Mechanicsburg, Penna.: Stackpole, 2002. 353pp. \$22.95

The shock of the 11 September attacks prompted an immediate renewal of public interest in books on terrorism, a genre that attracted considerable attention in the 1970s but had since maintained primarily an academic readership. Sales of books on terrorist groups, Islamic fundamentalism, and American policies

toward terrorism skyrocketed. Some are reissues, some are newly published scholarly works, while others advocate specific policies to be followed. To understand the current wisdom on this topic requires an examination of all three categories.

Christopher Harmon is currently on the faculty of the Marine Corps Command and Staff College. His *Terrorism Today* was published two years prior to “9/11,” yet it remains the best single volume on post–Cold War terrorism, because of its “straight ahead” style that leads the reader through the types, techniques, and objectives of various groups without an excess of academic jargon. He approaches the subject with thoroughness and a distinct effort to reduce its apparent complexity to simpler, actionable concepts. Harmon’s ultimate purpose is to inspire and assist counterterrorist planning by pointing out popular misconceptions about terrorists’ motives rather than laying down a series of direct policy recommendations.

Particularly refreshing for an academic volume is Harmon’s underlying (but not overwhelming) sense of moral indignation—a sense that strengthens the book rather than makes it suspect. There is no “one man’s terrorist is another’s freedom fighter” waffling for Harmon. He provides a simple, compelling definition: “Terrorism is the deliberate and systematic murder, maiming, and menacing of the innocent to inspire fear for political ends.” The key words are, of course, *deliberate* and *systematic* physical harm to *innocents* (civilians) as a strategy for war. In Harmon’s construct, terrorism remains an offense against humanity, requiring a combination of vigorous national policies, international law, and global cooperation that holds no sympathy for pseudo-heroic gestures by supposed leaders of the oppressed.

Paul Pillar’s *Terrorism and U.S. Foreign Policy* was published in January 2001, making it slightly more current than Harmon’s book. It is less a history and more a balanced recommendation for policy, which, unfortunately, means that the book’s “balanced approach” appears to lack the necessary intensity of a “post–9/11” world. However, Pillar’s contribution is to place terrorism into the overall context of foreign policy—our and theirs. His focus is on the state sponsorship that is inevitably required for successful international terrorism—a position that differs greatly from the current interpretation that global terrorists are independent of state support, operating solely from areas of complete lawlessness.

While admitting that weak states such as Afghanistan or Somalia might be convenient bases for terrorist training and planning, Pillar maintains that it is the actions of governments through covert financing, moral support, or tacit agreements to ignore terrorist infrastructures (as long as they are not the targets) that determine the success or failure of terrorism. From this perspective, the tolerance of terrorist groups by Greece, a Nato ally, is as disturbing as that of

hostile regimes, although it has been somewhat mitigated by the recent arrest of those identified as members of the revolutionary organization 17 November. Pillar argues that terrorism is “a problem managed, never solved.” He believes that constant, unwavering diplomatic and economic pressure on those nations that are tolerant of terrorists, along with rewards for cooperating with the United States, are the most important tools to stop terrorism. Pillar was formerly the chief of the CIA’s Counterterrorist Center, a fact that in itself provides insight into why the U.S. government views policies toward Iraq and other rogue states as primary elements in the war against terrorism.

To Prevail won the race among think-tank efforts as the first to publish counterterrorism policy recommendations after “9/11.” A product of a task force consisting of more than twenty-four scholars and analysts from the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), the book figuratively, if not literally, was begun on 12 September 2001, reflecting the long-standing CSIS research program on emerging national security threats. Its speed of publication and origin could be considered two strikes against the book were it not for the editorial and organizational talent of its two principal authors, Kurt Campbell and Michèle Flournoy, both former deputy assistant secretaries of defense. They have crafted a balance between individual analyses of the varied tools of counterterrorism, such as coalitions, military capabilities, intelligence, law enforcement, homeland security, public diplomacy, and foreign assistance, with region-by-region assessments of current terrorist threats and foreign government responses.

To Prevail approaches post-Cold War terrorism as a “new form” of threat in which psychological effects are subordinate to actual violence—in other words, killing is now just as important as creating fear in the target audience—and state-sponsorship plays a less important role (in contrast to Paul Pillar’s view). As examined in the chapter “Globalization Goes to War,” the tools that have made for a more open world (cheap air travel, the Internet, cell phones, personal freedom, and the ubiquitous media) have also magnified both the capabilities and effects of global terrorism. Like other elements of globalization, restrictions on these tools would come at considerable cost. An effective response requires that the U.S. government protect the gains of globalization at the same time it attempts to defend against terrorism. To balance openness with protection obviously requires great care; hence, *To Prevail* is the most directly prescriptive of the books under review, with eighteen detailed recommendations for the president and Congress.

Some of these recommendations run counter to conventional wisdom. For example, the book recommended that Congress *not* create a Department of Homeland Security, arguing that such a major institutional change *diverts* attention from

actual counterterrorism activities. Current organizational structures are seen as sufficient, if increased coordination and oversight is applied by the White House. Also recommended is the firm establishment of homeland security as the primary (if not sole) mission of the National Guard, whose duties are currently split between domestic response and overseas warfighting. An intriguing recommendation is the creation of a nonmilitary homeland security service corps, leading to congressional examination of “the merits of mandatory national service given the challenges of a new age.” The book’s own orientation is split between recommending immediate, decisive action against terrorists and concern for long-range efforts to ameliorate the so-called “root causes” of terrorism. The focus on potential causes for terrorism (poverty, perceived exploitation, unequal benefits of globalization, etc.) and de-emphasis on the importance of state sponsorship creates the most significant intellectual contrasts between the CSIS effort and Harmon and Pillar’s works.

Roland Jacquard’s knowledge of terrorist activities, gained through researching and writing a dozen books on terrorism, is only exceeded by his incredible timing. *In the Name of Osama Bin Laden* was originally published (in French) the same week as the September attacks. The core of the book is a brief biography of bin Laden, focusing on his role as recruiter and transporter of fundamentalist Muslim fighters as mujahedeen in Afghanistan’s war with the Soviet Union, and later as terrorists. The key ingredient bin Laden provided to those with an irrevocable hatred of the West was great amounts of money—enough to make suicide into an effective weapon.

Jacquard is director of the Paris-based International Observatory on Terrorism and has been a consultant to the United Nations Security Council. In April 2001, Jacquard was able briefly to interview bin Laden himself by phone. As is clear from responses to Jacquard’s questions, bin Laden sees no reason to hide his hatred for Jews and Christians (no matter what their nationality or politics) or his desire to obtain nuclear and biological weapons. In detailing the thoughts and attitudes of bin Laden’s recruits (particularly those al-Qa’ida members with European citizenship) the book makes evident the underlying sense of anarchy and war-lust that permeates the bin Laden “brotherhood.” A completely Muslim (and thereby peaceful) world may be their eventual, theoretical objective, but killing a few non-Muslims (while possibly achieving martyrdom) is a fine goal for now.

Jacquard’s text provides few new revelations for the “post-9/11” reader, but its fascinating details certainly make al-Qa’ida seem, in retrospect, a most obvious global threat long before September 2001. In preparing the English-language edition, Duke University Press doubled the number of pages by adding interview transcripts, copies of translated al-Qa’ida documents (some had been

smuggled out of Afghanistan to sympathizers in Europe), and other reports collected by the author. However, like the text, none of them is a revelation, but all fascinate nevertheless. Jacquard points out that bin Laden's so-called "will," a document that circulated in London and Beirut in October 2001, portrays an enduring linkage between himself and Hassan ibn al-Sabbah, founder of the eleventh-century Assassins. Whether or not bin Laden is dead, his goal is for the myth of unstoppable Muslim terrorists to survive. The document grandly warns, "After me, the world of infidels will never again live in peace."

Portraying terrorists with their own words and documents is a key feature of another well-timed publication, Henderson's *Global Terrorism*. In it you will find the Website addresses for such Internet-minded terrorist groups as Hamas. Like most Facts On File books, this one is authoritative but not dull and lives up to its objective to provide a one-stop reference of "how to research terror." In addition to technical, well-referenced discussions of how to define terrorism and a survey of existent terror groups, the book strongly focuses on legal issues, with a chronology of counterterrorist laws and court cases. Demonstrative of this focus is an appendix containing the text of the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996, but the annotated bibliography would appeal to more than just legal researchers. It is tough to find a more current initial starting point for any research project on contemporary terrorism.

The Terrorism Threat and U.S. Government Response began as a conference sponsored by the U.S. Air Force Institute for National Security Studies (or INSS, located at the Air Force Academy) in July 1998. The book was published in 2001 and is a compilation of ongoing research by thirteen participants rather than a conference report per se, which allows some of the individual chapters to retain considerable "post-9/11" relevance. Even though many of the contributors are the usual suspects in the scholarly study of terrorism and others are spokesmen for federal agencies extolling their counterterrorism efforts, there are several controversial and contending conclusions that require examination.

For example, Bruce Hoffman, the long-standing "dean" of counterterrorism and counterproliferation at RAND, argues that the U.S. interpretation of how to deter terrorism is flawed. Qaddafi, he argues, did not stop sponsoring terrorist activities after the EL DORADO CANYON strike on Libya, he simply moved to less spectacular, less attributable acts. Even if such "traditional" retaliatory counterstrikes are presumed to have worked in the past, they no longer retain much validity against today's global terrorists. Hoffman agrees with *To Prevail* that post-Cold War terrorists differ greatly from their predecessors; they are subject to neither rational deterrence nor evidence of counterproductive effects on their putative goals. In fact, the need for preemption, which was in 1998 conceptually integrated into the Clinton administration's counterproliferation

policy (to which Hoffman, among others, contributed), is an undercurrent throughout the many chapters of the book. This might indeed be a revelation to those who view the current administration's emphasis on developing preemption strategy as something entirely new. In the chapter by James J. Wirtz of the Naval Postgraduate School, the link is made between counterterrorism and counterproliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Terrorism, like weapons of mass destruction, is viewed as an evolving asymmetric tool of forces too weak to fight the U.S. military conventionally. Wirtz differs, however, from Hoffman and others in his view that "traditional" military forces may indeed retain a considerable deterrent and responsive role.

The Terrorism Threat and U.S. Government Response makes it clear that well before "9/11" all the experts viewed al-Qa'ida as a severe threat. However, no one expected an attack so severe. Reviewing the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, Hoffman wondered whether it was even possible to "topple the North Tower." Thus the book underscores its predictions on the unpredictability but exponentially increasing danger of the "new" global terrorism.

Stylistically, *Beyond Terror* is in a category of its own; reading it is a plunge into a pool of fine literary imagery. In a fairer world, Ralph Peters would be recognized as one of the premiere essay writers in America today. He is that good. His subject matter, however (defense strategy, military ethics, and the clash of tribal warriors versus modern soldiers), deters the editors of most highbrow literary journals from admitting him into their pantheon. Peters applies a novelist's skill (he has published nine) to his exposition of future threats the United States may face. Of course, it is doubtful that Peters, a retired Army officer, unabashed American patriot, and iconoclastic realist who has actually seen some of the world's meaner backstreets, would feel terribly comfortable in a modern literary temple. His writing has more the intensity of an Old Testament prophet pointing out the pretensions of worldly kings.

Beyond Terror is a collection of eighteen essays that fully display Peters's talents, many of which were previously published in *Parameters*, the *Washington Post*, and elsewhere, although not assembled until after "9/11." Those familiar with his work know that Peters does not view post-Cold War terrorism as something new. It is simply a feature of the return of the savage-warrior—men from decaying societies, unable to compete in a globalized world, who hold the fantasy of a glorious, imperial past and whose self-esteem is built on the power of violence. In Peters's construct, such men have more in common with criminal gangs than soldiers—which is undoubtedly why many terrorist groups have no qualms about financing their activities through drug and prostitute smuggling, bank robbery, kidnapping, etc. Neither diplomatic negotiations nor efforts to ameliorate "root causes" have much effect on current terrorists—although they

may help in stemming the tide of future recruits. To appeal to or appease the apparently intelligent and sophisticated leaders and sponsors of terrorism (or even the less sophisticated foot soldiers) is a mistaken policy. Most of them have no understanding or acceptance of the social norms of modern society. As Peters puts it, “A cell phone held to the ear does not mean a modern mind is at work on the other side of the eardrum.”

Peters advocates increased American knowledge of, involvement in, and developmental assistance for the struggling nations of the world (with logical priorities rather than open-ended assistance), along with unrelenting, remorseless destruction of the warrior-terrorists and their leaders. What is needed is neither policy nuances nor governmental reorganization but a willingness to fight intelligently and over the long term in a brutal arena, with the difficult choices, casualties, and inevitable collateral damage that it entails. This requires a sense of humility and respect for non-Western cultures, along with steady pull on the trigger when violence threatens. As Peters advises in his most suggestive essay, “When Devils Walk the Earth,” we must be willing to “whenever legal conditions permit, kill terrorists on the spot. . . . This is war, not law enforcement.”

How can one distill this current wisdom on terror? The most effective way is to point out the differences. The volumes by Harmon, Pillar, Campbell and Flournoy, and Smith and Thomas (USAF, INSS) all see a restructured post-Cold War terrorist threat that, especially after “9/11,” requires new and dynamic policies by the U.S. government. All view homeland security as important, but Pillar differs from Campbell and Flournoy and many of the contributors to the INSS volume in his insistence that it is the domestic actions of foreign states that are the keys to diminishing terrorism. Counterterrorism is therefore a critical element of our overall foreign policy, not a separate war.

Campbell and Flournoy advocate considerable homeland security efforts (and a war against terrorist groups, rather than states) but see victory in ameliorating the “root causes” that induce sympathy for the putative goals of the terrorists. In contrast, Harmon and many of the INSS contributors see a more direct course to victory through military and police action. Henderson’s reference guide seems to suggest that counterterrorism belongs almost exclusively within the sphere of criminal justice. Jacquard and Peters, while potentially sympathetic to the need for a more just global environment, maintain that the “root causes” of terrorism remain within the psyches of the terrorists themselves, whose leaders are hardly poverty-stricken or oppressed. Fighting poverty may be a just policy, but crushing the will of the terrorists by defeating, killing, or jailing them would prove even more effective.

Jacquard’s and Peters’s emphasis on the terrorist psyche has recently acquired its own terminology. Writing in the August/September 2002 issue of *Policy Review*,

Lee Harris proffers the term “fantasy ideology” to describe the motives of al-Qa’ida and similar groups. To these groups the United States is merely a stage prop, and whether Americans are terrified or not, change policies or not, or even solve the Palestinian issue is almost inconsequential. The point of their action is how it makes them feel about themselves as glorious martyrs in a sort of Islamic “dungeons and dragons” world where the will of God has no need for cause-and-effect logic. Harris commends President George W. Bush for initially using the term “evildoers” to describe the “9/11” hijackers, despite media howls at the “lack of sophistication” that the reference to evil indicates. Jacquard and Peters, like Harris, will admit that although al-Qa’ida also sees their enemies as “evil,” they are nevertheless themselves committed “doers” of things that are not logical, effects-oriented, or even moral from their own religious standpoint. But like the Columbine High School killers, their deeds transform them from outcasts into masters of their universes.

The use of “evildoers” can actually be a summary method to categorize the books under review. Three texts logically support its use, three find it “less than sophisticated” or “less than helpful,” and one is mixed on the subject. Such is, in itself, an accurate breakdown of the differing strands of current American wisdom on terror.