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The past, as they say, is another country, and these days it may be difficult to appreciate that less than ten years ago the study of terrorism was barely more than a minority pursuit. This, of course, stands in contrast to the era following the attacks on New York and the Pentagon by groups linked to the jihadist al-Qaeda network on 11 September 2001. Ever since 9/11 terrorism studies has very much been the *plat du jour*. According to current urban academic myth, a book on terrorism is published somewhere in the world every few minutes.

Since its inception as a field of inquiry in the 1970s, the study of terrorism has enjoyed a mixed reputation. No better illustration of how established scholarly opinion viewed this area can be garnered than from the words of the military historian Michael Howard, who declared that terrorism studies had ‘been responsible for more incompetent and unnecessary books than any other outside . . . of sociology’. He went on: ‘It attracts phoney and amateurs as a candle attracts moths’.¹ Three decades ago, when Professor Howard passed his scathing judgment, the issue of terrorism played little role in the academic mainstream, where the prevalence of Cold War diplomacy and inter-state

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politics dominated the intellectual landscape of international relations and military studies; and it was true that what passed for terrorism research in this era was susceptible to superficiality and the production of dull typologies and inconsequential historical catalogues.

Worse still, from the late 1980s a trenchant critique arose that accused the entire subject area of being dysfunctional and did much to tarnish the reputation of terrorism studies for the next decade. Emanating mainly from a radical left perspective, and in part a reaction to the intensely proactive era of Reaganite foreign policy that saw, among other things, the arming of the Contra rebels against the Sandinista government in Nicaragua and the sponsorship of other less than savoury pro-American regimes in the rest of Central America, these critiques denounced conventional terrorism research for its supposedly pro-western, pro-state biases and its propensity for conspiracy theories (such as the view promulgated in Claire Sterling’s The Terror Network, alleging the Soviet Union to be behind worldwide terrorism). Privileging the state in terrorist studies discourse — the state always being projected as struggling against terrorism — was intended, so it was claimed, to condemn and discredit legitimate anti-state resistance, glossing over brutal terrorist states supported by the West, or, indeed, acts of terrorism perpetrated by western states themselves.

The condemnations of conventional terrorism studies, when not themselves conspiratorial, if not, frankly, hysterical in tone, were unfair. The originators of the discipline of terrorism studies, such as Paul Wilkinson, Richard Clutterbuck and Walter Laqueur, were engaged in earnest attempts to appreciate the dimensions of non-state, mainly urban based violence, which flared up from the late 1960s onwards. Far from ignoring the issue of state-directed terrorism, those like Wilkinson were more than conscious of its effects and, moreover, in Terrorism and the Liberal State — a genuinely important book that marked the evolution of this field of inquiry — provided a framework for responding to violent challenges to the state that consistently reiterated the principles of restraint, the rule of law and the observance of proportionality of action. Furthermore, while one can certainly detect the hand of Howard’s phoneys and amateurs in a disciplinary niche that grew increasingly disinclined to question its ruling assumptions, it is also the case that amongst the detritus of terrorism studies, sophistication and insight in some areas did arise, notably in the understanding of psychoanalytic and organizational approaches to sub-state actors.

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2 See for example Edward Herman and Gerry O’Sullivan, The ‘Terrorism’ Industry: The Experts and Institutions that Shape Our View of Terror (New York 1989).
6 In this regard see Alex Schmid and Janny de Graaf, Violence as Communication (London 1982); Peter Calvert, ‘Terrorism in the Theory of Revolution’, in Noel O’Sullivan (ed.), Terrorism, Ideology and Revolution (Brighton 1986); R.D. Crelinsten, ‘Terrorism and Political Communication: The
If the accusation of incompetence, phoney's and amateurs had resonance, which to some extent it did, it was due in no small measure to a touch of arrogance on the part of conservative scholars such as Howard who disdained and dismissed the intellectual endeavour of terrorism analysts. With few exceptions, contemporaneous international relations theorists, historians and strategic experts, who might have had something to contribute to informed discussions about violent non-state actors, absented themselves from the debate in favour of the technical-managerial obsessions of Cold War defence that usually fixated upon arcane, banal, hairsplitting exchanges over nuclear deterrence, arms control and weapons systems. Even if the overall product of terrorism research in the years before 9/11 could not be said to be impressive, given the profusion of intra-state conflicts and insurgencies both before and especially after the end of the Cold War, the attempts of terrorism analysts to examine non-state actors should be properly recognized, because at least they had the inclination to tackle the more messy, violent, low-tech end of international relations during this period. If terrorism studies were incompetent, it was partly because orthodox international and strategic studies were negligent.

When any subject becomes fashionable, as terrorism studies undoubtedly has since 9/11 it will, pace Howard, inevitably attract its fair share of charlatans. In this it is no different from any field of inquiry. What the post-9/11 epoch allows us to do with respect to the four volumes examined here is to review the state of terrorism research to discern whether the massive increase in scholarly engagement with the subject has led to qualitative improvements in analysis and comprehension and whether a coherent, systematic study of terrorism is worthwhile.

The first question that must be addressed in any discussion of this nature is whether there can be an independent study of terrorism at all. A number of the editors and contributors to the books under review begin implicitly from this premise in discussing the vexed issue of how to define terrorism. There have been dozens of definitions advanced over the decades, few of which have been regarded as satisfactory, and none have provided a settled basis for the study of terrorism.


7 It should be recalled that even during the years of the Cold War, the prevalence of so-called small wars and guerrilla wars — that is, wars that often involved non-state actors and in which terrorist violence had a propensity to arise — far outstripped the incidence of supposedly ‘conventional wars’. According to one statistical assessment, only 18–20 per cent of wars since 1945 can accurately be classified as inter-state wars. Of 164 cases of warfare since the end of the second world war, 75 per cent involved armed conflict within states. Tables 1 and 2 in K.J. Holsti, The State, War and the State of War (Cambridge 1996), 22–4.

8 For a discussion see Brian M. Jenkins, The Study of Terrorism: Definitional Problems (Santa Monica, CA, 1980).
of what we call terrorism. For the editor of *Root Causes of Terrorism*, Tore Bjørgo, however, there is at least ‘a growing agreement that there is not one single “terrorism”, but several different “terrorisms”’ (2). This is a proposition that Christopher Ankerson, who has edited *Understanding Global Terror*, also shares when he declares that ‘there is no one understanding of terrorism, but rather a plethora of differentiated meanings’ (2).

Despite these reservations about how to define terrorism, all the books reviewed ultimately presuppose terrorism as an existential phenomenon that can be observed and studied with a measure of clarity. The other two volumes examined here, *The Ideological War on Terror* and *The Economic Analysis of Terrorism*, do not even acknowledge that the foundations of any study of terrorism might be questioned as a result of the inability to define the object of their inquiry with precision, and launch into their respective assessments on the assumption that ‘terrorism’ as a revealed phenomenon is an obvious given.

The sceptical historian or social scientist might pause to wonder whether the lack of a settled or robust definition of terrorism might place a question mark over whether any coherent study of terrorism can be derived from an unspoken assumption that presumes the existence of the subject that analysts endeavour to study. If the alert reader can already detect a degree of doubt in the tone of this review, then at this point I should — as the reviewer — declare my hand. I write from the standpoint of a strategic theorist: that is, someone who studies correlations between ends and means, and who discerns the use, or threat of use, of armed force as a conscious choice of political actors who are intent on rationally pursuing their objectives. For strategic theorists, therefore, terrorism exists only as one possible means to an end that can be employed by any social agent in any context to attain specific goals. Accordingly, there can be no truly meaningful study of terrorism, as it is neither a material nor observable phenomenon. It is merely a method, a tactic.

Contrary, however, to the received wisdom across the spectrum of terrorism research, which holds that terrorism ‘is nearly impossible to define’, strategic theory would contend that defining the term is easy and unproblematic. Simply, terror is an abstract noun that denotes fear, and thus terrorism can be defined as the deliberate creation of fear for a purpose. Unlike the vast majority of terrorism analysts, strategic theorists do not attach moral connotations to an actor who practises terrorism because, like any tactic, it can be used for either good or bad purposes.

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10 For further information on the nature of strategic theory, see the work of Thomas C. Schelling: *Arms and Influence* (New Haven, CT, 1966); *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge, MA, 1980); *Choice and Consequence: Perspectives of an Errant Economist* (Cambridge, MA, 1984).
Deciding what constitutes a morally good or bad purpose is a wholly separate intellectual activity from describing and evaluating the utility of a particular tactic. Mixing up an attempt at description with a moral judgment is what philosophers of language call a category mistake. To give an example, for strategic theorists the much-quoted phrase ‘one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter’ is a category mistake. One part of the phrase — ‘terrorist’ — alludes to the description of a tactic (someone who seeks the deliberate creation of fear for a purpose), while the other — ‘freedom fighter’ — is obviously a morally loaded value judgment. To fuse together these different intellectual tasks is entirely illogical. Consequently, the idea of ‘one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter’ is meaningless, because if one thinks about it, clearly one person can be both. The campaign of city-raising through the Royal Air Force’s night-time area bombing of Germany in the second world war carried an explicit terror rationale designed to cause a collapse in civilian morale. Yet, despite the ethical reservations that some had about this campaign at the time, few would ultimately contest that it was carried out for a moral good, namely the attempt to bring down the nazi regime and thus end the war in as timely a manner as possible.

This parsimonious and coherent understanding of terrorism is not a unique insight possessed only by strategic theorists, but simply the application of Occam’s Razor, the foundation of all rigorous and scientific inquiry: the idea that one should not multiply entities beyond what is necessary. Using Occam’s Razor, we should employ the definition of terrorism that contains as few postulates as possible, which means not adding on assumptions, judgments or ethical valuations that have no intrinsic connection with the basic meaning of the word ‘terrorism’ itself. Thus, from the Occamite viewpoint of strategic theory, there can be no such thing as explicitly terrorist movements or even terrorists — that is, social actors defined only by the means they use — merely actors who at some point in time or another try to facilitate their ends through the intentional creation of fear.

Though there are individual contributors who do possess insight into these definitional tensions, time and again most of the authors repeatedly transgress the principle of Occam’s Razor when trying to comprehend what terrorism means, loading it down with suppositions that cannot be logically inferred from the premise that terrorism is intrinsically about the creation of fear. Hence we are informed variously, throughout these works, that terrorism is a weapon of the weak (not necessarily); or is ‘the deliberate murder of innocents’ (an arbitrary moral judgment); or is ‘a political act taken in the name of a group based on ethnicity, religion, nationalism or ideological orientation’ (a

15 The principle associated with logician and English Franciscan friar William of Ockham (1228–c. 1348).
truism that, taken literally, implies all political acts are terroristic); or ‘the extreme use of violence and force’ (vague and meaningless, not least since violence and force are inherently the same thing).

The continuous, and illogical, multiplication of entities in many of these attempted understandings of terrorism should be an object of amusement and incredulity amongst scrupulous thinkers who believe that precision of language, definitional exactitude and, at the very least, the provision of justifications for the assumptions one is making are the essential prerequisites for any serious-minded academic investigation. This point is one that forms the principal disagreement that I have with the general orientation of these works under review, as I do with what constitutes the entire field of what is called terrorism studies. Each of these books assumes that terrorism is to a greater or lesser degree observable and controllable, whereas a strategic theorist does not. The reader should therefore proceed with an understanding of my own conscious intellectual biases towards this field of inquiry.

If, though, one accepts that terrorism is an observable, existential phenomenon, then the logical place to begin is by looking for causes, as the volume Root Causes of Terrorism seeks to do. At the outset this ambitious enterprise is dealt with skilfully by the editor, whose excellent introduction arguably saves this work from being a deeply incoherent project. Nearly all edited volumes contain their share of contributions that are superficial and of doubtful relevance and this work is no exception to that rule. Anyone who has been an academic editor is likely to attest to the fact they are invariably a curate’s egg, with a sprawling range of subject matter and differing methods and approaches. Consequently, one can only make the best of the quality of material that one is presented with. As is normal with edited works, few if any of the individual chapters go into any great depth; nevertheless, the best contributions to these volumes do introduce ideas that stimulate thought and are capable of genuinely enhancing our knowledge and understanding, and it is these contributions that I would wish primarily to highlight; and Tore Bjørgo’s introduction falls into this category, being an exemplary synthesis of the different contributions.

Bjørgo himself is a Professor at the Norwegian Police University and a research fellow at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, who not only commands considerable authority over the complex arguments within the current terrorist studies matrix, but also represents an interesting continuation of a little remarked-upon phenomenon whereby Norwegian academics have assumed a leading role in contemporary terrorism research, often being at the forefront of the most sophisticated assessments in the field. Commendably, in writing the introduction to Root Causes of Terrorism, Bjørgo does not begin from the premise that ‘terrorism’ has causes but from the belief that it is valid to at least pose the question of whether there are any common factors that prefigure conditions in which terrorist violence arises. He demonstrates an appreciation of the notion of terrorism as an instrumental tool of policy, seeing it as ‘a set of methods or strategies of combat’ as opposed to ‘an identifi-
able ideology or movement’, which traditional terrorism studies approaches are prone to do, and advances a plausible understanding of terrorism that involves ‘premeditated violence’ in order achieve a psychological effect of fear on others ‘other than the immediate targets’ (2). Moreover, he indicates how subjective and problematic the idea of a ‘root’ cause is. (How does a ‘root’ cause distinguish itself from an ordinary everyday cause, and who decides what is and is not a root cause?) Even if Bjørgo occasionally offends against Occamite sensibilities by paying too much obeisance to the assumption that terrorism and causation exist as tangible phenomena, he admirably keeps an open mind in wishing to consider whether a study of the causes of terrorism can be helpful or whether it ultimately can lead us astray (as I would maintain it does, since abstract nouns such as terrorism do not have causes).

This forms the backdrop to a varied range of individual chapters that, if sometimes rather loosely, examine causality and terrorism. The early chapters, for example, present convincing evidence against the belief that terrorist violence is related to issues of deprivation. Drawing off a wide range of literature and survey data carried out in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, including her own research studies, Jitka Malečková shows that the link between poverty and terrorist activity is fragile. In contrast, she states that the ‘perpetrators of international terrorism are more likely to be drawn from the middle and upper-classes than from impoverished families’, though cautions against replacing one inaccurate stereotype of a ‘poor illiterate terrorist’ with another that asserts that terrorists are always drawn from well-to-do sections of society (42). An accurate picture, as ever, is rarely black and white, and while the composition of militant movements may well draw upon educated members of the middle classes, they can be just as likely to ‘choose their foot soldiers and support personnel from among the poor, unskilled and uneducated’. Malečková concludes her chapter by suggesting that ‘even if poverty is not a root cause of terrorism, it is a cause of much suffering around the world, and this should be enough reason to pursue policies to eradicate it’ (42), which is something on which most of us would surely agree.

Picking up on these themes in the subsequent chapter, John Horgan, one of the few serious terrorism scholars of the ‘old school’ who has effectively transitioned from the pre- to post-9/11 era, and who has done much to pioneer psychological approaches to understanding terrorism, argues ‘that it is somewhat misleading, if not naive, to assume that we can remove the grievances of terrorists in an attempt to prevent terrorism from occurring. The uncritical acceptance of such an assumption represents a fundamental misconception about the nature of terrorism (in particular its use as a strategy to influence the political process)’. He continues: ‘Organized terrorist-directed political violence is usually part of a much more complex set of activities related to the attainment of a social and political goal’ (45). It is refreshing to see such an awareness of the core ideas of strategic theory permeating Horgan’s solicitous analysis. In a further stimulating observation that reveals a laudable circumference towards the whole notion of ‘root’ causes, he states:
is it possible that when we ask, ‘What are the root causes of terrorism?’ we may in fact be trying to force these ‘routes to, through, and away from terrorism’ and other questions in some singular explanation. We ought to clearly realize then that if we do not ask the right questions, we most certainly will not arrive at meaningful answers, regardless of the perspective we take in trying to approach the problem in the first place. We can realize that the question ‘How do we prevent terrorism?’ is as complex as ‘What causes it?’ (47).

Horgan goes on to elucidate that the ‘relevance of making these distinctions is not an academic exercise’, but ‘represents the defining quality of the need to see terrorism not as a social movement, or a homogenous threat deriving from some homogenous origin, but as a process which is susceptible to, and limited by, among other things, strategic and psychological factors’ (47). While Horgan still employs the notion of terrorism too broadly for my liking, one can admire the perspicacity of this viewpoint that cuts through the misleading terminology that causes much confusion in current debates and sustains illusory ideas of a monolithic terrorist threat inherent in (meaningless) terms like the ‘global war on terror’.

Though a number of subsequent chapters in this book turn out to be fairly pedestrian encounters, one will find intellectual sustenance along the way. While sometimes descending into excessive partisanship, the chapters on the ‘roots of terrorism’ in the Middle East offer valuable perspectives on the role of social organizations, the place of religion in suicide attacks and the rise of Islamic militancy in the Arab world. The chapters that examine the country case studies of the LTTE in Sri Lanka and the pattern of state failure in the Lebanon as a cause of terrorism will be of interest to those who wish to explore the origins of these respective conflicts. Despite being of questionable relevance to the overarching theme of the book, Alison Jamieson’s interesting chapter explores the differences in the use of terrorism by criminal enterprises and revolutionary organizations. Based on her extensive knowledge of contemporary Italian politics, she compares the terror inflicted by the Cosa Nostra with that committed by the Red Brigades in the 1970s and 1980s. Her study indicates that, unlike the social revolutionary movements, criminal actors are invariably political conservatives. Although they undermine the fabric of society, they see no virtue in self-sacrifice, have no sense of victory or defeat and certainly have no direct interest in undermining the state, the survival of which is very necessary for their activities. Thus, while not being against the state, criminal organizations like the Mafia take advantage of the state and often parallel the state through the establishment of their own ethical rules and codes.

The succinct contribution by Louise Richardson on the notion of state sponsorship as ‘a root cause of terrorism’ provides an illuminating and critical framework for analysis. Focusing on US perceptions of the problem, she argues that state sponsorship has been an obsession with several American administrations, primarily because seeing ‘terrorism’ as the product of rogue nations is a lot easier to comprehend than the notion of complex, de-territorialized non-state actors. Even after the 9/11 attacks began to reveal the level of this complexity, the concerns over the issue of weapons of mass destruction falling into
the hands of terrorist groups and the Bush Presidency’s felt need to remove Saddam Hussein from power combined to keep the issue of state sponsorship at the fore. Richardson goes on to point out that, according to the US government criteria, a case could be made for the removal of Sudan, North Korea and Libya from the State Department’s list of state sponsors of terrorism, but suggests that once a state is on the list it is not easy to get off it, unless US geo-strategic interests dictate otherwise, in which case it seems unproblematic to be removed from the rogues’ gallery even if one’s troublemaking record remains suspect (Syria, for example). Richardson maintains that her thesis is ‘not intended to indict American foreign policy’ but to illustrate that who is and who is not deemed to be a state sponsor of terrorism is highly subjective and contingent on your own national interests (194). If you asked the governments of North Korea or Cuba, for example, who was a state sponsor of terror, they might well specify the USA, arguing that America was trying to destabilize their governments, while supporting coups against regimes deemed to be unfriendly, including complicity in political assassinations such as that which befell Salvador Allende in Chile in 1974. None of these activities may fall into the strict definition of terrorism (according to a strategic theory understanding), but the point Richardson makes is that state-sponsored subversive or paramilitary actions are not simply things that ‘bad guys’ do: ‘Sometimes, the “good guys” do too’ (194). This echoes the point made with reference to the example of British strategic bombing in the second world war. The actions carried out by a state may be violent and terroristic in nature, but they are not therefore ipso facto immoral. Covert actions, state-sponsored terrorism — call it what you will — is but one possible method available to states among a range of policy tools to promote national interests, which may range from peaceful diplomacy to all-out war. How one evaluates the moral content of such actions is, fundamentally, going to be determined by the circumstances, context, political exigency and the standpoint of the individual observer, rather than by the nature of the violent act itself. We should remember, depending on the circumstances, that it is possible to justify the dropping of atomic weapons on large urban areas if the stakes are perceived to be high enough.

In the conclusion to Root Causes of Terrorism Bjørgo efficiently summates what he discerns as the main findings of the book, which, he declares, have helped challenge several popular ideas about terrorism by establishing broad agreement that there is a weak link between deprivation and terrorism; that state sponsorship is not a ‘root’ cause of terrorism; that suicide terrorism is not an explicit function of religion; and that terrorists are not insane. In a reflective observation that exactly correlates with the precepts of strategic theory he

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16 In fact, on 11 October 2008 North Korea was removed from the State Department’s black-list of terrorist states after it agreed to subject its nuclear programme to international inspection. See Paul Richter, ‘North Korea Removed from U.S. Terrorism List after Nuclear Agreement’, Los Angeles Times, 11 October 2008.
states that, in the end, the ‘root cause’ approach is more likely to confuse than enlighten, as it implies that the incidence of terrorism is essentially a reaction to material and psychological conditions rather than the conscious decisions of actors ‘who develop deliberate strategies to achieve political objectives’, who make ‘choices between different options and tactics, on the basis of the limitations and possibilities of the situation’ (257).

For Bjørgo, terrorism should more properly be ‘understood as emerging from a process of interaction between different parties than a mechanical cause-and-effect relationship’, and he proceeds to identify a series of preconditions ‘that set the stage for terrorism in the long run’ (258), ranging from the lack of democracy, failed or weak states, the existence of extremist ideologies, historical grievances, ethnic or religious hatreds, corrupt government, inequalities in power and social injustice. This is where I would, with my strategic theory background, depart from Bjørgo’s otherwise incisive analysis. The problem with these ‘preconditions’ is that they apply to all conflicts, not just those that may be afflicted with terrorist violence. And this is a persistent problem evident in both this book and the others in this review, which is that they continually intermingle assessments of terrorism with warfare generally, without pausing to consider the implications of this for the plausibility of their arguments. As indicated earlier, strategic theorists would classify terrorism, in its violent manifestation, simply as a tactic in war. War itself springs from the same social wellsprings that Bjørgo identifies in his preconditions, and consequently trying to separate out one particular tactic for special treatment as if it constituted a unique facet of warfare is a largely futile, if not trivial, intellectual exercise and, ultimately, an unstable platform upon which to make any generalizations about particular kinds of violent phenomena.

From attempting to comprehend whether ‘terrorism’ has specific causes it is a natural step to contemplate the impact of the phenomenon on the international system, and this forms the organizing principle of the contributions to Understanding Global Terror. As the editor, Christopher Ankerson, notes, ‘International terrorism and the “war” against it are the leitmotif of the times’ (1), and one of the roles that scholars should play in this era must be to ‘explore and interrogate such a zeitgeist, not merely record it’ (2). This approach is one that explicitly relegates matters of definition to a second-order issue, as the emphasis is on ascertaining how people and states react to this amorphous ‘thing’ called terrorism. As a result, the editor leaves his contributors to ‘use (or not) their own definitions of terrorism in reflection of their point of view and line of argument’ (2). While the authors do indeed pursue their own lines of argument, often disobeying all forms of definitional rigour or coherence, nevertheless, the basic objective of analysing how people are thinking or have thought about global terrorism, howsoever conceived, is an interesting premise and provides the foundation for a frequently stimulating set of essays.

In his chapter ‘Global Terror and the International Community’, Chris Brown argues that the ‘war on terror’, whatever its rhetorical problems, is a
worthwhile struggle but with qualifications. Although his definitions of terrorism are questionable (and his view of Clausewitzian understandings of war particularly confused), I think he gets to the crux of the matter when he declares that ‘America and the West are under attack not because of what they do but because of what they are’ (23) (original emphasis). As Brown sees it — and I would agree — fundamentally open, liberal, democratic societies ‘albeit in an imperfect way, instantiate a set of principles that are anathema to’ (23) violent Islamist-inspired militants, which is whom we are referring to when people talk of the ‘global terrorist threat’. Has the war so far, Brown asks, been successful? It is, he thinks, impossible to say for sure, the only certainty being that to speak of an outright victory’ is inappropriate and that at best we can hope only for limited, incremental gains such as those which have been achieved in Afghanistan and Iraq (25). Part of the reason why ‘the West’ is under pressure from movements like al-Qaeda, in my view, arises from a loss of faith in its core values from within, with a wholesale lack of confidence in, and reluctance to defend, the essentially tolerant, humane belief in the essence of individual freedom that is at the heart of democratic systems. In this respect, Brown offers an invigorating contrast to the casual, intellectually cheap anti-western self-loathing that drips from many, if not most, western departments of international relations, particularly under the guise of supposedly ‘critical approaches’, which assert that all of the problems that inspire ‘global terror’ are really all our fault.

Thankfully, Brown has no time for the ‘fashionable’ anti-American enthusiasms that grip the European intelligentsia (25), and, notably over the invasion of Iraq, poses the question: what would you have done? Removing a tyrant like Saddam Hussein is, surely, generally a good thing, and opponents of the invasion should be asked ‘whether they actually regret the fall of Saddam, and if the answer is no, how else this could have been brought about’? (27). United Nations sanctions were clearly failing, transparently fraudulent, and hurting only Iraqi civilians. Containment of an unstable Iraq would have been an open-ended and costly commitment, necessitating the permanent stationing of western (i.e. American) troops in Saudi Arabia, the presence of whom on Saudi soil was one of the main stimuli for Osama bin Laden’s ire against the United States. For post-hindsight specialists who argue that Iraq did not have any WMD (weapons of mass destruction), Brown rightly points out that not only did Saddam exhibit a keen interest in developing WMD material (as well as a hideous track record in the actual use of chemical weapons), but that the intensive system of inspection under Rolf Ekeus that did much to destroy the Iraqi arsenal after the first Gulf War in 1991 was undermined by the French and Russians, who refused to reappoint Ekeus in 2002, with the result that a much weaker inspection regime was instituted.

What Brown is getting at here is that it is wrong to think, as many European intellectuals evidently do, that peaceful diplomacy is the solution every time. Much of Europe may have abandoned faith in the military instrument to resolve global problems, but others in the international system have not, and
this sometimes requires a robust response to defend key values, and the burden of this responsibility has fallen, obviously, on the United States. It is easy to be a ‘free rider’ who takes ‘the benefits of US power while verbally condemning its excesses and attempting to disassociate oneself from the consequences of its operation’ (31). This is a theme that is largely substantiated by Michael Cox in his subsequent chapter that investigates the idea of the United States as the new Imperial Republic. Even in the years before 2001 the notion of America as empire was being openly discussed, but 9/11 acted as the deus ex machina for the revolution in US foreign policy that saw the rejection of multilateralism as a diplomatic necessity and assertion of American ‘hyperpower’, witnessed most graphically, of course, in the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. As Cox observes, the concept of an American empire is not new: it is merely that the USA has had the luxury of practising ‘moral imperialism’ (as Michael Radu has termed it);17 that is, when national interest permits the expansion of territory and influence in the belief that spreading freedom to the rest of mankind is a moral duty. Cox’s pungent discussion suggests that, in the end, the realities of power mean that strong states have to shoulder responsibilities, and that means they do what they have to do (and, as in the case of the United States, often for the benefit of the rest of us), even if it is sometimes unfair to other members of the international system.

In a not dissimilar fashion Margot Light, in her examination of Russia’s approach to the ‘war on terrorism’, proposes that US and Russian attitudes are comparable. Both are characterized sometimes by the brute use of power and disregard for human rights, and a similar ‘for us or against us’ discourse that narrows the scope for political debate of the problems in question. Light maintains, though, that there is a crucial distinction to be made, in that the Russian ‘war on terror’ is fundamentally one arising from the two Chechen wars. There is a contradiction in the Russian view that wishes to depict its Chechen problem as part of the global war on Islamist extremism while insisting that it is solely an internal matter. Russia refutes external criticism of its prosecution of the war in Chechnya, rejects any hint of international intervention and resists all solutions that are not exclusively on Russian terms. In this regard Light argues that former Russian president Vladimir Putin used Chechnya as an instrument to consolidate the Russian state and thus had little interest in seeing the conflict brought to an end.

Other worthy contributions to this volume are to be found in the chapters on suicide terrorism, Southeast Asia’s role in the global terror nexus, a survey of the contemporary problems of terrorism across Africa, and an examination of the financing of ‘global terrorist movements’. It is, however, Lawrence Freedman’s assessment of ‘Globalization and the War on Terrorism’ (215–29) that arrests the imagination for its ability to pinpoint the analytical problem

confronting academics and policy-makers in seeking clear-sighted understand-
ings of the current security predicament. Terrorism, as Freedman appreciates,
is only a tactic of war. And while the particular tactics employed — such as the
attempt to engage in mass murder of civilians — may say something about the
philosophy of a movement that employs them, they actually tell you very little
about the politics of the issue at hand. The trouble with ideas of ‘global terror’
is that they imply that the policy problem is one of thwarting enemy tactics
rather than enemy politics and ‘[b]y declaring a War on Terrorism we risk
taking politics out of the equation’ (227). He notes further that: ‘As the poten-
tial victims of this terrorism we need to try to understand its political roots, but
even when we do we must also recognize the limited quality of the political
response available to us’ (227). What is needed here is not only a comprehen-
sive understanding of the circumstances out of which current conflict arises,
but an acute awareness of ourselves, our political values and collective objec-
tives. The search for political understanding therefore does not mean finding
grievances to appease or vague talk of hearts and minds, but a realization that
‘There is an enemy — it is not a figment of a paranoid Western imagination
and it is not one that should be underestimated, either in its political appeal or
in its methodology’ (227).

Freedman’s subtle intellectual scepticism holds that a ‘preoccupation with
terrorism . . . cannot be the filter through which we view the totality of our
foreign policy’ (228). Fundamentally, we need to get past terrorism, as if it
were some notion of cosmic significance, and get back to politics. Therefore, to
comprehend the nature of the current confrontation with forces that would
wish to establish an oppressive theocratic world order, we have to understand
how, where and why this problem has arisen, and the limited scope for agree-
ment, conciliation and appeasement. For this it is necessary, as Freedman inti-
mates, to apprehend the scope and attraction of jihadist ideology and develop
ideas to counter its appeal. After all, war is politics, and politics is ideology,
and it is the battle of ideas and world views that in many ways is by far the
most important theatre of combat in this conflict called the ‘war against
terrorism’. It is this vital dimension that constitutes the central purpose of
Anne Aldis and Graeme Herd’s edited volume on The Ideological War on
Terror, which concerns itself with investigating the process of radicalization
and recruitment amongst jihadist militants, and how worldwide strategies
might be developed to respond.

The title of this book would suggest that it might itself be guilty of focusing
on the tactics of terror rather than the politics underlying it, taking as read —
so it seems — that an amorphous terror phenomenon exists. Thankfully, how-
ever, Richard Russell, in his chapter on ‘Saudi Arabia’s Conundrum and the al
Qaeda Insurgency’ (37–52), points out that terrorism is simply a policy tool,
not an end in itself, and that the fallacious rhetoric of the ‘war on terrorism’ is
both vague and implausible. ‘A more direct and useful strategic declaration’,
he argues, ‘would have been that the United States is at war with al Qaeda and
any organization, network, or state that aids and abets al Qaeda operations’.
This would, he maintains, ‘have been more readily accepted and understood at both home and abroad as a legitimate policy’ (37). Such clarity is to be welcomed and, indeed, I would extol the Occamite rejection of misleading euphemisms such as the ‘war on terror’ in favour of the Latin virtue, _lex parsimoniae_. Call it by its true name. There is no war on terror; there never has been a war on terror; and there cannot be any such thing as a war on terror. It is a confrontation with the forces of Islamist extremism.

The broad aim of the book is to put the case that ‘countering ideological support for terrorism’ (i.e. Islamist extremism) is crucial to combat al-Qaeda linked militancy and should not be regarded as an afterthought, or an adjunct to military responses that merely deal with the symptoms of the problem. The introductory chapter rightly insists that the battle for Muslim minds is often complex and needs to address multiple audiences comprising fundamentalists, traditionalists, secularists and modernists, each of whom have differing outlooks and sensibilities. Operationally mechanistic or strictly military approaches, it is argued, are likely to prove unproductive if they assume that American/western ideals are inherently what people always want, and that the only requirement is for the effective propagation of the message in the attempt to amplify the moderate voice. Subsequent chapters, notably on ‘Countering Arab Television?’ (68–80) by Anne Marie Baylouny, who studied the impact of the US-sponsored television station Alhurra (the Free One) on audiences in the Middle East and the banning of the Hizbullah satellite channel, Al Manar, from US networks, demonstrate the self-defeating nature of such approaches. The best policy, she advocates, is to allow media commentary to emerge through free debate, rather than denouncing or proscribing stations, which merely sends the signal that ‘free speech is allowed only when it is favourable to the US’ (79). Further contributions advise that instead of simplistic propaganda, more subtle interventions should concentrate on encouraging Muslim communities to neutralize extremist messages by conducting debates within Islamic jurisprudence in a way that allows an appeal to a ‘correct interpretation’ of Islam, which can help in de-legitimizing Islamist narratives.

Although the coverage in this book is sometimes patchy and repetitive — there are two chapters on Islamic radicalization in central Asia that cover largely the same ground, while a study of counter-ideological strategies in western Europe is notably absent — nevertheless, this is a worthy volume on a valuable subject that should get people thinking about what the best ways forward may be to counteract radical Islamist messages. If any single indispensable theme falls out of the book, it is that in the ideological struggle against the forces of violent jihadism, the United States and its democratic allies should be true to their own values, admit mistakes, never deny inconvenient facts, or suppress dissenting voices. As Richard Russell concludes in his thoughtful chapter, the ‘best course’ for countering Islamism ideology is to ‘exercise a steady hand in statecraft while working to improve our own society and welfare to serve as the example for others’. In the end, he declares, ‘the most powerful weapon in the American arsenal is the unvarnished truth. And
over the longer timeframe the truth will expose the lies upon which the barbaric global Islamic insurgency is built’ (51).

In the final chapter the editors outline a number of ‘policy considerations’ to take into account in the formulation of counter-ideological strategies. Such suggestions range from accentuating ideological alternatives to extremist ideologies; undercutting the extremist message; reducing corruption, negative government and abuses that enhance the legitimacy of Islamist claims, to emphasizing intelligence and international co-operation in the development of counter-ideology policies. This advice is creditable, if somewhat of a generalized wish list, and of a fairly obvious nature (though it does no harm sometimes to reiterate the obvious). Of more consequence is the editors’ recommendation that it is necessary to develop a system of metrics with which to evaluate the effectiveness of counter-radicalization strategies. These metrics would, for example, assess the nature and extent of support for extremist ideologies and measure governmental performance in reducing that support.

The attempt to subject terrorism to a set of metrics is the core idea of the last book under review, The Economic Analysis of Terrorism, edited by Tilman Brück. It is Brück’s contention that in the aftermath of 9/11 most economists felt they had ‘little to contribute to the debate about the nature and workings of global terrorism’. On reflection, however, ‘their toolkits had, after all, prepared them to tackle the analysis of terrorism’ (3). This view provides the basis for some detailed examinations that apply economic theories to understandings of terrorist violence and study the impact of ‘terrorist shocks’ on international economics. The analysis contained in the contributions to this volume suggests, for example, that ‘terrorists’ respond to incentives and will engage in substitution, ‘moving from soft targets or shifting their activities over time’ (4). One study examines the relationship between growth cycles and civil wars and finds terrorism is more likely to occur in richer democracies during periods of economic decline, while another argues that economic liberalization enhances the ability to withstand terrorist shocks. Further chapters present a wealth of econometric data that evaluates the impact of terrorism on international trade, capital markets, airline stocks and insurance industries.

At times readers might find the political analysis in this work overly simplistic and even slightly naive. There is a recurrent tendency to conflate war and terrorism and the definitional problem again rears its head. If it is difficult to define terrorism with precision, then obviously this will cast doubt over what constitutes a terrorist act. The result is that data on the incidence of terrorism is notoriously unreliable. Yet time and again the authors take for granted the existence of ‘terrorism’ as self-evident and use data sets at face value without any further interrogation. While I certainly would not cast doubt on the generality of the findings contained in the contributions to this volume, to be fully convincing there needed to be greater attention to issues of theoretical rigour and definition of key terms, and maybe even some appreciation of the precept that if you put rubbish in, you are likely to get rubbish out. Nevertheless, this is an interesting experiment in the application of economic theory.
and, even if aspects of the approach are questionable, the attempt to ‘harden up’ measurement criteria is commendable. In this respect, a book such as this represents a first step in this direction, and it demonstrates that in order to progress towards more robust analytical frameworks we should always be careful to test our assumptions and show a willingness to falsify our arguments and hypotheses.

The works examined here provide a snapshot of the burgeoning academic literature on terrorism, which is a complex picture involving many different facets of understanding. All of them are well-edited, and all of them can perform as useful points of entry into the wider literature. I hope to have shown that, despite my own reservations towards the field of inquiry called ‘terrorism studies’, a number of contributions to these volumes do show considerable sophistication and insight into the contemporary security condition that has brought us the ‘war on terror’. Here there is a growing appreciation of the issues and problems in anchoring the discipline and an encouraging realization that terrorism as a descriptive term has primary meaning as a tactical tool which possesses strategic utility, and should not be used as a cosmic political bogey, a weapon of condemnation, or as a euphemism for particular extremist ideologies. All these developments exemplify an evolving degree of self-awareness in the discipline that simply was not evident 20 or 30 years ago.

At the same time, there is still too much evidence, not just in these works but across the field as a whole, of terrorism research falling victim to the logical fallacy of petitio principii: assuming the principle you have to prove. There is a continuing temptation for writers to assert what needs to be demonstrated, in particular by presupposing the existence of ‘terrorism’ as an obviously self-evident entity. For progress in academic thought about terrorism to be maintained, as well as for effective policy formation, informed scepticism will always be required to challenge our ruling assumptions in order to inquire whether what we think exists is there in reality. If we do not contemplate these first-order problems, and presume to know the answers already, then we will be taking crucial questions for granted, when we should be analysing whether those questions are worth asking in the first place. William of Ockham, a thirteenth-century English logician, may remain an obscure figure to many, but the foundational principle for intellectual endeavour he advocated has still to find its way into the majority of modern terrorism studies.

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