Reviews

Terrorism and Local Law Enforcement: A Multidimensional Challenge for the Twenty-first Century

by Philip M. McVey

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Reviewed by Giovanni Manunta

Perhaps in no other field of security more than that of terrorism have so many authors made so 'much ado about nothing'. The above book by Philip M. McVey unfortunately exemplifies this phenomenon. In real terms the text has little new to say, but does so in an 'academic' style, that tends to obfuscate and confuse rather than communicate and clarify.

It is not immediately evident what the book is about. A title proposing to study the 'multidimensional challenge of terrorism to local law enforcement for the twenty-first century' (whatever that may be exactly) is hardly consistent with contents which seem centred around contemporary guerrilla warfare. Besides, the author is not obviously helpful with his 'conceptualization'. After setting himself quite a formidable task:

In order to forearm the reader, the remainder of the book will be concerned with presenting an in-depth presentation of the foundational principles involved in this phenomena, ie concepts, definitions, revolutionary philosophies, historical antecedents, and the capabilities of contemporary guerrilla organizations (p 7)

Mr McVey then feels an immediate need to reassure the reader that this ambitious programme will be kept within bounds, and that:

every effort will be made to be parsimonious so that the dual qualities of a reference handbook for field administrators and a base of knowledge for departmental personnel can be maintained. (p 7)

Despite this, the exact purpose of the text is never made clear. The reason, for example, why 'field administrators' should require a 'reference handbook' while 'departmental personnel' will require 'a base of knowledge' remains hidden from those unfamiliar with the specific linguistic intricacies of the American police. Whilst this may be excusable given the target audience, on the topic of linguistic intricacies, the subject of tone and style cannot be overlooked. First, the author explores the notion of 'conceptualization' via a farrago of references ranging from Aristotle, Cicero and Plutarch to Fanon, Nechaev, Durkheim, Marighella and Guevara; then he defines the term, writing that:

Theoretically, the conceptualization can be thought of as simply an idea regarding something that manifests itself in society. (pp 8,9)

I am not sure this carries the reader or the subject matter any further forward. The author maintains sole paternity of his views, adding the caveat in the form of a warning to the reader that the conceptualization found in this book is his own. If the reasons for the warning are obscure, the paternity of the offered 'conceptualization' can hardly be disputed, as the author

does not appear to have incorporated the works of Acquaviva, Arendt, Burton, Chomsky, Clutterbuck, Debray, Deutch, Frey, Gal-Or, George, Gutteridge, Hacker, Hanle, Hyams, Leeman, Lenin, Marx, Morris, Metanyahu, O'Brien, O'Sullivan, Rapoport, Reich, Rubin, Warner and Wilkinson, to name but a few of those who have contributed concepts to the study of terrorism.

Difficulties such as these cannot easily be dismissed, when dealing with an author with BSc and MSc degrees, who has been lecturing on the subject at various universities since 1981, and has been consultant to several candidates and members in the United States Congress. Given this experience, it is strange that no mention is made in the book of the comparative experiences of France, Israel, Spain, and East Germany. The US experience under the Kennedy and Reagan administration's doctrines of aggressive counter-insurgency and the evidence given by Col Oliver North are ignored, where they may have shed valuable light on a complex issue. Whether these omissions are due to space or selective editing, readers must judge for themselves.

Other parts of the book are equally uncertain. The analysis of 'guerrilla movements' (seemingly confused with terrorist groups) is imprecise. The author does not seem to be aware of the document *Patterns of Terrorism* published yearly by the US Department of State Publication. Likewise, the inclusion of Mr Arafat's PLO within these groups is questionable given recent events. The description of risk assessment and risk management techniques makes little reference to the existing literature, and reads more as a summary from a somewhat dated Special Forces manual. The figures in the Appendix add to the content, but are less useful in contributing to the subject under discussion. Similarly, the misquoting of a diagram as a flow-chart (fig. 1) is not reassuring. The bibliography is somewhat dated, and seems somehow partial and, at times, inadequate (*Soldier of Fortune* and the *Reader's Digest* are, after all, hardly a base for 'conceptualization').

To conclude, and keeping in mind the plethora of excellent works on this subject on the market, this book cannot be recommended. Its contents, concepts, messages and style do not match its promises. The book does not improve our knowledge of terrorism or shed much light on the capability of local law enforcement agencies to deal with terrorism. Instead of providing 'a framework of understanding, and a set of applicable notions', the book skirts around the issues, confusing the reader with its tone and style, and promoting an apocalyptic vision of a Dark Age just around the corner. On almost one point alone I am in agreement with the author, and that is in relation to his assertion that: 'The concept created in this book will prove to be unique to much of the literature on the subject' (p 9).

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