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Counterterrorism Strategies

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nexus of domestic and foreign pressures means trouble for regional stability in Asia. As Chinese citizens increasingly scrutinize Beijing's relations with the outside world, the Chinese Communist Party can ill afford to look soft on hot-button foreign policy questions. The party's obsession with internal stability thus compels Beijing to guard vigilantly against foreign insults to China's national honor—a critical source of the regime's legitimacy. Consequently, more than ever before, Beijing is primed to overreact to external crises and trigger confrontations that might otherwise have been averted by more temperate responses.

Overall, Shirk makes a compelling case about this peculiar dilemma that Beijing confronts. Although the proposition that the international community ought to be more concerned about China's weaknesses rather than its strengths is not new, her coverage of its domestic challenges is quite informative. In particular, Shirk provides a useful framework for understanding Beijing's internal priorities—leadership unity, social harmony, and tight control of the military—that would be instantly recognizable to those familiar with Clausewitz's famous “paradoxical trinity.” The analysis of China's prickly ties with Japan, Taiwan, and the United States, however, covers well-trodden ground, material that has been widely documented in other studies.

As a former deputy assistant secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Shirk writes with authority on U.S. diplomatic encounters with the Chinese during the Clinton administration. Her extensive interviews with Chinese policy makers, senior military officers, scholars, students, and “netizens”

not only attest to the unusual degree of access she has accumulated during her tenure but enliven the narrative with fascinating vignettes.

Nevertheless, this study is hobbled by an apparent reluctance to revisit basic assumptions about the regime itself, which, after all, the author contends, is fragile. Shirk does not render crucial judgments about the viability of China's regime-sustaining strategies, vaguely observing that “[Beijing] may be capable of surviving for years to come so long as the economy continues to grow and create jobs.” Thus the validity of the book's findings rests almost entirely on the premise that the Chinese Communist Party in its current form will endure indefinitely. The analytical consequences of this unwillingness to explore alternative futures are evident from the author's boilerplate policy prescriptions for the United States, including an injunction that Washington must live with China's repressive domestic policies.

But what if Shirk's cautious optimism about the regime's longevity is wrong? This unsettling question awaits another forward-thinking China watcher.

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Alexander, Yonah, ed. *Counterterrorism Strategies: Successes and Failures of Six Nations*. Dulles, Va.: Potomac Books, 2006. 283pp. \$24

Zimmermann, Doron, and Andreas Wenger, eds. *How States Fight Terrorism: Policy Dynamics in the West*. Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2006. 269pp. \$55

Since the attacks of 11 September, a kind of conventional wisdom about

counterterrorism has emerged. On one hand, the “new terrorism” involves the violent expression of a radical religious agenda, suicide attackers, and mass-casualty violence. It is, therefore, both harder to deter and more destructive than the old ideological and ethno-nationalist varieties of terrorism, whose practitioners, in Brian Michael Jenkins’s now classic (and obsolete) formulation, wanted a lot of people watching, not a lot of people dead. On the other hand, the takedown, led by the United States, of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan forced the operational core of al-Qa’ida to disperse and the transnational terrorism network to become even more flat and decentralized. This meant that operational initiative was increasingly left to local “upstart” cells, which, though perhaps aided by al-Qa’ida middlemen, were merely inspired rather than directed by the central leadership.

The upshot is that the new foot soldiers of the global jihad may be motivated less by the cultural humiliation of Islam at the hands of the West or Osama Bin Laden’s redemptive grand vision of a global caliphate than by local or regional social conditions, onto which they simply graft that ideal and thereby generate greater energy, purpose, and focus. In Europe, the main culprits may be the political and economic marginalization of Muslims in their host countries and their bitter memories of colonial abuses. In the Middle East, the gravamen of the radical Muslim complaint could be the plight of the Palestinians or the perceived co-optation of Arab regimes by the United States and other Western powers. In the Philippines, it might be the refusal of the state to accord Muslims political parity and a measure of autonomy.

In accord with these views, the perception has evolved among counterterrorism experts that containing the Islamist terrorist movement requires disaggregating it into regional and sometimes local elements and devising customized policies to deal with them. Effective policies will inevitably entail direct applications of soft as well as hard power—in particular, conflict resolution and state building. Also, successful applications of soft power are likely to have a more positive effect on Muslim perceptions of non-Muslim governments than are exercises of hard power. Two new edited volumes of essays, Yonah Alexander’s *Counterterrorism Strategies* and Doron Zimmermann and Andreas Wenger’s *How States Fight Terrorism*, approach the challenge of terrorism in the post-9/11 world on a state-by-state basis. In doing so, they appear to certify this evolving view, and with it the corollary that although the global jihadist movement is in many ways transnational and virtual, it admits of no holistic solution. Even if there was, one might add, existing multilateral and supranational organizations would be incapable of implementing it.

Alexander’s book is a workmanlike and highly competent compendium of substantially descriptive historical case studies of counterterrorism approaches in the United States, selected European countries (France, Germany, and Italy), one Arab state (Egypt), and Sri Lanka, bracketed by the editor’s introduction and summary with conclusions. Those conclusions are perhaps the probative elements of the volume, as Alexander in them attempts to distill from the case studies a range of constructive counterterrorism policies. But the proffered list tends either to

state the obvious (“prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction to rogue states and terrorist groups”) or confirm admonitions that have already been made in abundance (“increase cooperative relationships and alliances with like-minded nations”). Furthermore, probably because Alexander’s study was initiated in 1998—that is, before 9/11—the choice of case studies is arguably misaimed. Egypt’s pre-9/11 experience is relevant precisely because it is a formative aspect of the transnationalization of Islamist terrorism and the rise of al-Qa’ida, and the Tamil Tigers’ activity in Sri Lanka is worthy of study also because of their persistence and innovation (for instance, suicide attacks). However, one key European state, from a counterterrorism standpoint—the United Kingdom—is completely excluded.

Zimmermann and Wenger’s book, unlike Alexander’s, was undertaken at the specific prompting of the 9/11 attacks and jihadist terrorism. It constitutes a more incisive and structurally oriented look at issues and challenges, namely, those peculiar to counterterrorism in the post-9/11 epoch. Indeed, following a trenchant introduction outlining the contemporary challenge, the first chapter, by Laura K. Donahue, deals comprehensively with the United Kingdom, aptly summing up the British dispensation as having “not been a radical departure from the previous state of affairs but rather an acceleration of the state’s counterterrorist strategy.” This volume also contains chapters on countries like Norway that have had little counterterrorism experience and those like Canada whose security policies are overdetermined by strong and

prominent neighbors. Given the wide transnational presence of the global jihadist movement and the potential problems it poses to states heretofore untouched by (or at least insulated from) terrorism, the inclusion of such states seems wise. The chapter on the United States by RAND analyst William Rosenau is nuanced and marked by calm pragmatism. Rosenau stresses that even transnational Islamist terrorism as perpetrated by al-Qa’ida does not qualify as an existential threat to the United States and intimates that treating it as such could unduly skew national priorities—and may already have done so. Martin van Creveld’s fine but largely historical treatment appears at first blush to be something of a non sequitur, but it may have been included to illustrate (as it does) the attritional effects that a long-term terrorist campaign can have on a modern state and military in the absence of political resolution.

Rohan Gunaratna’s thorough but familiar assessment, entitled “Combating Al-Qaida and Associated Groups,” counsels that “governments should move from traditional cooperation to collaboration,” if the global network is to be neutralized. It characterizes the war in Iraq as counterproductively antagonistic to radical Muslims and suggests that regional conflicts will have to be ameliorated to tame them. Such recommendations, while generally sensible, may get ahead of the other material in the book. However, the editors’ excellent concluding essay nicely grounds the volume by casting the central counterterrorism task as striking a “balance . . . between the efficiency of the legal, political, civilian and military means used to combat terrorism, on the one hand,

and their legitimacy in the eyes of the affected constituencies, on the other.” Overall, the two books do an estimable job of delineating programmatically what states seeking to counter terrorism can and need to do. In so doing, they also invite more specific and granular analyses of precisely how to do it.

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Alleg, Henri. *The Question*. Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 2006. 74pp. \$16.95

During France’s Algerian War (1954–62), the French journalist Henri Alleg sided with the insurgents. Arrested by French authorities in June 1957, Alleg was detained and tortured. During his confinement he managed to write and smuggle out an account of his experiences. Originally published in 1958, *The Question* was quickly banned by the French government, the first such action France had taken since the eighteenth century. The book nonetheless became a sensation.

Reissued after half a century, this new edition retains its preface by French novelist and philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, now supplemented with a foreword by author Ellen Ray, an introduction by author James D. Le Sueur, and a new afterword by Alleg himself.

The book’s title euphemistically refers to torture. In calm and lucid prose, Alleg describes his fate at the hands of his captors. Held for a month in Algeria’s El Biar prison, Alleg was tortured by French *paras* (paratroopers) before being transferred to another prison, where he composed *The Question*. His “interrogations” ranged from beatings

to electric shock and water boarding. He was even administered Pentothal, or “truth serum.” Despite these outrages, Alleg refused to break, earning him both wrath and grudging respect from his tormentors. He escaped from prison in October 1961, just months before the war ended.

Fifty years later, Alleg’s voice remains as reasoned and penetrating as ever. He laments that France’s political elite have attempted to purge the Algerian War and its attendant horrors from the country’s official memory; many military men responsible for these crimes, he notes, have received not only amnesty but promotion and praise. Only in 2000 did the French government admit that it had perpetrated widespread torture and other abuses during this period. Ironically, one former torturer proudly admitted to his actions in a 2001 book, causing such a backlash that he was punished, albeit lightly. However, Alleg insists that even this slap on the wrist signals a shift in official French thinking.

The accompanying essays deserve mention. Ray minces no words, accusing the United States of pursuing a “strategy that incorporates racism, torture, and murder” in its current conflicts. Seeing America as headed down a moral slippery slope, she wonders if it might go the way of the French Fourth Republic or whether “Americans might be the defendants in future war crimes trials.”

Le Sueur provides background on Alleg’s experiences and the debate that *The Question* aroused in France. He argues that present-day France has yet to come to grips with its sordid conduct. In fact, the French parliament passed a law in February 2005 enjoining educators to teach the “positive role” of