



Terror in our time, by Ken Booth and Tim Dunne

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Terror in our time, by Ken Booth and Tim Dunne, Abingdon, Routledge, 2012, 230 pp., £18.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-0415678315

“Terrorism” has been one of the most researched topics in international relations for the past decade, and even though the research output has been tremendous, it has not necessarily been helpful or academically rigorous. As a consequence, the field of terrorism studies has seen considerable disagreement among scholars about how to best approach “terrorism”. Ken Booth and Tim Dunne added to this debate with their book *Terror in Our Time* from 2012. The book undoubtedly is a strong argument for a more holistic approach to terrorism by moving the debate on terrorism and counterterrorism into the fields of politics and security.

Terror in Our Time seeks to provide an overview of the global political consequences of the 9/11 terror attacks in the ten years that had passed. This is no small task by any measure, but the authors have managed to offer a solid and concise overview in just about 200 pages. The book is made up of 12 chapters, divided into two parts with a prologue and epilogue, and each chapter can be considered an essay on various topics, or in their own words, on different pathologies. In addition, there is an appendix providing the reader with a statistical analysis of terrorist incidents. The general argument is that countering terrorism is not ultimately the challenge of perfecting counterterrorism measures, conceived narrowly, but reconfiguring the way human society is organised globally (10). The first part, called “terror and danger”, deals with terrorism as a strategy. Pointing out the obvious lack of an agreed upon definition of terrorism, the authors offer their own definition which addresses important issues, such as states as possible perpetrators of terrorism and challenging the loaded term of “innocent civilians”. The discussion of what terrorism is constitutes a thought-provoking part of the book, as one would expect from seasoned scholars like Booth and Dunne. Especially, their argument that the difference between *us* and *them* is not a chasm but a slippery slope, should make some orthodox scholars and public officials cringe at the authors’ attempt to look at the human face behind the terrorist mask.

Fear beyond fear is a much used phrase throughout the book, and it is at the heart of what the book seeks to address. Terrorist attacks clearly have the capacity to instil fear and insecurity in a population, but what is it that we fear? The first three chapters of the book are dedicated to bring clarity to the concept of terrorism, and while making it clear that terrorism is a serious threat, they warn that fear can paralyse, cause unreason and make us mad. After 9/11, no other group has caused more fear in Western countries, warranted or not, than Al-Qaida. The last three chapters of Part I explore the history of the group and how military campaigns were set in motion to rid the world of the evil that Al-Qaida was said to represent. In perhaps the strongest chapter of the book, Booth and Dunne reject the rhetoric of evil so dominant after 9/11, making a strong case for multi-causality in terrorism, and consequently how terrorism must be understood in its context. As they conclude: ‘terrorists are made in society, not born in evil’. (75)

The last part of the book is in many ways an introduction to Welsh School of Critical Security Studies for those acquainted with the earlier works of Booth. The book is concerned with how the leading powers in the world failed to promote the conditions of security on all levels and dimensions in the aftermath of 9/11. Prejudice and fear beyond fear led to wars, human suffering and a polarisation between the “West” and “Muslim countries”. To successfully counter terrorism therefore it is not just a question of better models of counterterrorism. We need to reduce the pathologies of the world order and

strive for greater human security. In other words, a better future is possible in a more just and law-governed world.

Terror in Our Time delivers on its main aim which is to provide an overview of the global political consequences of 9/11, and it also offers a good case for why we should think critically about terrorism and approach it as a part of the bigger picture of security. Besides general exhortations however, the authors do not present the reader with clear arguments or policies to change or reduce the dominant pathologies of the world. The intent of the book is laudable: to build a world order, step by step, in which terrorism eventually will be delegitimised as a choice. Despite the good intentions, one is left to wonder if the book set out to achieve more than it could deliver given the limited space. It is after all not a small task to (1) counter terrorism, and (2) change the world order. With so much being written on terrorism, one could perhaps wish that the book had been more focused so as to provide the reader with deeper analysis on chosen subjects. There is no doubt that context is an aspect that largely has been forgotten in the field of terrorism studies. The authors are therefore right when providing context to the discussion of terrorism, and seeking to move the debate on counterterrorism to the bigger context and debate of a more just global world order. The only issue is that while we are presented with context and perspective to critically think about terrorism, the book is just another well-meaning text which fails to delineate a way out of the “terrorism-quagmire”.

Nevertheless, *Terror in Our Time* deserves to be read by academics and interested members of the public alike. It serves as an excellent introduction to think critically about the post-9/11 narrative regarding terrorism by providing statistics and analysis that inspire reflection. More importantly, perhaps it seeks to make the reader reflect upon the world we live in, and how it, in many ways, is not working for a vast number of people. As such, it provides perspective and context for a better understanding of how terrorism is connected with, and part of, global politics.

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Confessions of a terrorist: a novel, by Richard Jackson, London, Zed Books, 2014, 330 pp., £16.99 (hardback), ISBN 978-1783600021

P: You know what set me on this path, what made me become a terrorist, as you call me?

M: What?

P: It is very simple ... you did. (61)

Richard Jackson’s novel *Confessions of a Terrorist* does a remarkable job at capturing the deadly spiral of violence characterised by state and non-state terrorism today. As his two characters – “P”, a former economics professor turned insurgent or “terrorist”, and “M”, an MI5 agent specialised in counterterrorism – genuinely debate and argue over the rights and wrongs of insurgent and state political violence, what is most obvious is that no one needs to be “evil” in this equation, no one needs to enjoy harming others. Jackson