



# Journal of Terrorism Research

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Andrew Silke, *et al.*, (edited by Andrew Silke). *The Psychology of Counter-Terrorism*. Routledge: Oxon UK, 2011. pp. 202. £21.98. ISBN: 978-0-415-55840-2. Reviewed by Robert W. Hand, University of Aberdeen

Edited publications frequently fall short in any number of ways; maintaining stylistic consistency, sub-subject complementarity and focus, sustaining a quality argument throughout the book, and more. These failures occur because all-too-often the editor compromises the holistic approach to produce a volume that is as true to the topic as it can be and as faithful as possible to the original submissions of the contributors, while approachable for the target audience. The resulting compromises often result in a publication that fails to reach its potential. This, however, is far from the case for Andrew Silke's, *The Psychology of Counter-Terrorism*.

Silke's own writing is superb. His own chapter (Chapter 1) is a lucidly written, well-argued treatise on the duality of the impact of terrorism ("...not simply about physical suffering...about making a psychological impact,..." p.1.), the definition of counter-terrorism, counter-terrorism policies, and terrorist campaign elements. Silke goes on to artfully weave these into a critique of the various tactical counter-terrorism systems in use today by the US and UK governments. His chapter conclusion could not be more accurate: "Ultimately, psychology can provide powerful insights for anyone who seeks to better understand terrorism and counter-terrorism."

A broad and appropriate selection of subject matter experts author the remaining chapters. The themes of which are: Understanding terrorist psychology, recruitment, and terrorist group vulnerabilities (R. Borum, Univ. of South Florida); Psychoanalytic, Cognitive, and Social approaches to understanding radicalisation (B. Rogers, King's College); Psychological issues of supporting terrorism (R. Kumari, completing a doctorate in Counselling Psychology); The evolutionary logic of terrorism (R. O'Gorman, Univ. of Essex); The internet (L. Bowman-Grieve, Leeds (Trinity and All Saints)); The good *and* bad impacts of the media and a discussion on whether the media causes terrorism[1] (D. Browne, Univ. of London, and A. Silke); Disengaging from terrorism[2] (N. Ferguson, Hope Univ.); Managing terrorists and extremists in prison (A. Silke); Interrogating terrorist suspects, with significant practical examples and advice (J. Pearse, Managing Director, Forensic Navigation Services, Ltd.); Terrorist tactics and counter-terrorism (G. Steven, international security consultant); Deterring Terrorism (P. Fussey, Univ. Essex); and, Countering terrorism's psychological impact (A. Richards, Univ. East London).

What is unique about this edited publication is that it appears to avoid all of the pitfalls normally associated with a composite product, while (as the breadth of topics above indicate) it also covers the *complete* spectrum of terrorism and counter-terrorism psychology in sufficient detail to be understood and effective. This is even more impressive because the book does so without relying

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on excessive technical references, diverging into evaluations based on different psychological theories, and the use of psycho-analytical jargon that would put its meaning and purpose beyond the reach of non-psychologists.

This publication is a superbly crafted volume of closely-interrelated chapters that cover the key concepts above and many more substantive issues as well. The critical ideas included, such as terrorist psychology, pathways leading to terror, technology's effect on terrorism, effective counter-terrorism measures, and more are essential to our understanding of this difficult subject. While it is largely grounded in psychological aspects of the counter-terrorism discipline, the book is so solidly and lucidly written that it should be included on *any* terrorism reading list for professionals and academics alike. *The Psychology of Counter-Terrorism* is a new 'must have' standard for anyone serious in studying or countering the scourge of terrorism.

## Notes

[1] This is one of the few works that acknowledges a negative effect (i.e., counter to terrorist goals) from media coverage, and makes a sustainable case for this viewpoint.

[2] This volume is also rare in that it discusses the issues surrounding the self-motivated disengagement of terrorists from their cause. One chapter specifically identifies the reasons terrorists leave 'the cause'. Such research must continue as part of an overall strategy to break the cycle of terrorism.