

Inside Terrorism

By Bruce Hoffman

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A Book Review by

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Terrorism is one of the most pressing yet difficult political issues to understand in contemporary society, and requires strenuous academic inquiry. However, scholars continue to debate the meaning of terrorism and its various aspects, which have contributed to the development of a new era of terrorism in the 21st century. A landmark book in the scholarship of terrorism and counterterrorism is Bruce Hoffman's (2006) *Inside Terrorism*. This book attempts to understand how terrorism operates and to demonstrate its implications on our ability to live in peace.

In *Inside Terrorism*, Hoffman (2006) proposes that it is possible to understand terrorism as a virus; it grows and spreads, preying on victims, and morphs its methods and tactics to dodge extermination efforts. As modern technology has evolved, it has been possible to find solutions for the impacts of this problem, but in many instances, those who have worked to combat it have fallen victims to its devastating power. The book demonstrates instances when terrorist efforts have successfully facilitated their desired political change.

Through the processes of globalization, increased interconnectedness, and the erosion of traditional boundaries between states, terrorist networks have grown immensely. Furthermore, development of technology has increased the reach of terrorists, particularly in relation to the power of the media, in order to communicate objectives and outcomes of terrorism beyond local borders. To illuminate this concept, Hoffman describes two examples of lethal terrorist attacks that successfully caught the attention of the world; through the development of an event that was far more than a mere act of violence, these terrorist attacks exhibited the creation of colossal expositions of fear promoted by the mass media.

The first of these examples are the events of September 11, 2001, which many would argue marked the beginning of contemporary terrorist trends. In reaction to Black Tuesday, Western media outlets became obsessed with covering how and why this tragedy unfolded, which ultimately spawned a multitude of speculation and suspicion, with reporters attributing this unimaginable violence to anti-American Muslim terrorists. This information blazed through the media, sparking the world to understand this attack as a religiously driven operation. This topic is categorically examined in depth by Hoffman through four main types of religious violence: Islamic extremism, Jewish terrorism, American Christian and white supremacist

movements, and cults. All of these extreme religious movements have demonstrated the possession of annihilative power, and this discussion is complimented by real-life examples.

Hoffman then dedicates the next chapter to explaining suicide terrorism. According to Hoffman, suicide terrorism is a popular method of attack among many terrorists due to its ability to attract media attention and its effectiveness. Suicide terrorism is undoubtedly a shocking method of violence, and as an outsider, this mode of attack seems outrageous. However, the author describes how this act is not perceived in this light within terrorist groups; it is preached as a divine act. Through his exploration of two groups who have utilized this method of violence extensively—the Tamil Tigers and Palestinian terrorist groups—it becomes clear that suicide missions are often attributed to religious dedication and seen as an act of bravery.

Today, the development of the mass media has led to a new world of terrorism; however, Hoffman frames this discussion by historically tracing links between communication technology and its impact on terrorism. Despite this, there is a constant debate over the media's involvement in contemporary terrorism. Hoffman looks at both sides of this issue, noting that some media critics believe that in providing terrorists with publicity through sensationalized media coverage, they allow terrorists to achieve their objectives through fear. The other side of this argument suggests that while this may be true, media coverage of terrorist activities is not always useful for terrorists. This is an interesting argument that deserves recognition due to Hoffman's comprehensive analysis on this relationship.

Hoffman states that the end of terrorism does not seem to be in sight, because although technology advances, it can be used to the advantage of all parties. He also asserts that state-directed terrorism is a common theme in contemporary terrorism, which shows no sign of diminishing. Finally, he discusses the role of large terrorist operations, such as al-Qaeda, and how they have changed the face of contemporary terrorism. In closing, the author asserts that in order for countermeasures and anti-terrorist efforts to compete with the dangerous potential of such groups, governments must employ efforts to curb such activities to the best of their ability.

In sum, *Inside Terrorism* is an excellent, well-organized book in which terrorism has been explained from many angles. It provides the reader with a comprehensive understanding of how terrorism has evolved and is functioning today. Hoffman asserts that terrorism has existed in many different contexts throughout history. He explains how understandings of terrorism can be misconstrued due to the abuse of this term in the media, and how to differentiate it from different forms of violent activity. Despite being able to arrive at an understanding of the term, Hoffman demonstrates that it is apparent that terrorism is an ever-evolving entity that knows no boundaries.

About the Reviewer

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