

# "The Dynamics of Terror and Creation of Homegrown Terrorists," Richard J. Hughbank, ed. et al., (Mustang, OK: Tate Publishing and Enterprises, 2010)

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***The Dynamics of Terror and Creation of Homegrown Terrorists.* Edited by Richard J. Hughbank, Anthony F. Niosi, and Juan Carlos Dumas. Mustang, OK: Tate Publishing and Enterprises, 2010. ISBN 978-1-61663-669-2. 260 pages. \$16.00.**

*The Dynamics of Terror* is crafted around the interesting and important question of why people become terrorists. The authors in this edited volume endeavor to prove that the psychological, bio-psychic, and psychosocial components leading to terrorism are growing in prominence in American society, leading to a potential "assembly line" capable of producing "homegrown terrorists."

The authors bring to the book varied educational backgrounds and subject area expertise. The result is a ten-chapter volume that covers fairly broad subject matter, which may make the book appealing to a wider audience, but also results in sometimes spotty coverage of a highly nuanced topic. The book opens with a collaborative introduction advocating the consideration of terrorism from a psychological perspective. The premise is that all terrorists begin as "regular guys" and undergo a transforming metamorphosis that enables them to kill other human beings. The purpose of the book is to provide a better understanding of this process.

Richard Hughbank writes the first chapter, "The Phenomenon Known as Terrorism," in order to establish a working definition of terrorism for the remainder of the book. The definition Hughbank supplies is inconsistent with some of the examples used in the remainder of the book, and the links he attempts to establish between Islam, terrorism, and much of the rest of the book are confusing. In this first chapter, he sweepingly states: "For Muslims, jihad is not simply a word that represents going to war. It is a way of life that stems directly from a religious belief structure dating back to the time of their prophet Muhammed. Eliminating or enslaving non-Muslims globally is their ultimate goal, and terrorism is the primary vehicle they intend to use to reach this Caliphate" (p. 32). And yet, most of the examples used in the rest of the book to identify common characteristics among home-grown terrorists are not ideologically motivated, nor are they related to Islam in any way at all. Hughbank summarizes this first chapter by saying that "The Islamic religion preaches hatred" (p. 43), but fails to reconcile this statement with the

remainder of the book, which argues that terrorism is a product of psycho-social and environmental factors.

Juan Carlos Dumas' chapter on the influence of personality on the development of terrorists is an interesting amalgamation of psychological and philosophical musings from some of the best-known thinkers in their respective fields. Using key findings from Freud, Darwin, Skinner, Sartre, and others, Dumas ultimately concludes that human behavior is a complex consequence of a variety of psychological factors. He uses this observation to come to the indisputable conclusion that "the understanding of the etiology of human actions, both normal and abnormal, calls for a multifaceted approach where scientists, clinicians, and theorists in different disciplines of knowledge must work together to assemble a million-piece puzzle of individual and interpersonal dynamics" (p. 63).

The remaining chapters act to clarify the varying facets of which Dumas speaks. Anthony Niosi *et al.* examine the influence of the family system and argue that the system is integral in the creation and prevention of terrorists. However, the causal direction of the argument is never made clear. In one of the cases shared, the authors contend that parental acceptance of a child's recalcitrant personality allowed it to fester and grow into the Virginia Tech shooter (pp. 69–70). However pages later, a hypothetical example is introduced in which parents challenge inappropriate behavior and are credited with "Bob's" decision to "join a group that could be aggressive or violent in nature in order to gratify his need for acceptance and approval" (pp. 72–73).

In a chapter examining the role of schools in the development of violent youth, Kim Rodriguez offers an emotional reminder that a child's decision to use violence can be halted at many different levels if his/her peers, teachers, and guardians are sensitive to his or her emotional development. Following this conclusion, Joseph Greco presents his theory that "bullying, or the perception of being bullied, very possibly is the fragile trigger needed to transform any normal person into a killing machine" (p. 124). In the following chapter on "Apocalypse Children," Constantine Ladikos offers a more nuanced thesis when he suggests that bullying is damaging because it removes meaning from violence. He argues that human beings have an innate need for rituals, but modern society has moved away from rites of passage seen in tribal mythology and the "ancient hunter-gatherer cultures," wherein a wise mentor initiated a child into new states of life. Instead, Ladikos argues, adolescents still crave ritual but participate in hazing or bullying without the safeguarding of a mentor figure. The result is a culture of individuals anesthetized to, or victimized by, violence.

The discussion then turns to the relationship between gender and terrorism—sort of. In the beginning of this chapter, Hughbank and Conkey examine the reasons women might be used for acts of terrorism, as well as the reasons their use may be controversial. The authors briefly introduce the cases of Leila Khaled and Sana'a Mehadli before turning their attention to what they call "Domestic Female Acts of Terror." In this section, two female serial killers are used to highlight that, given sufficient motivation, "while it has been declared all men are created equal, in our society, we suggest women are just as equal; especially when it comes to having the ability to kill another human being" (p. 169). This chapter is the weakest of those included in the volume, in large part because of its straw-man premise (women cannot or will not become terrorists) and the subsequent shaky effort to blow the straw-man down by using two anecdotal cases that do not qualify as terrorism, even according to the definition provided by the author at the beginning of the book. If there was a demographic of readers convinced women were not equal to the task of terror, methodologically and conceptually, this chapter would do little to convince them.

*Dynamics of Terrorism* is easy to read and addresses a topic that will be of interest to a variety of audiences. However, the uneven, anecdotal, and methodologically weak arguments will leave readers wishing for data and analysis where the authors provide observation and opinion. While the book proposes to study incidences of homegrown terrorism, in fact the definition is expanded to include everything from bullies to serial killers, neither of which are ideologically or politically motivated. Moreover, the authors do not address this deviation from their own definition, and the result is a book that provides an interesting series of cases, but lacks a rigorous or useful theme to unite them. Ultimately, this is not the book for a reader looking for statistically tested correlations between cases selected for their methodologically appropriate comparability. However, if the book is treated as a corpus of observations with the potential for future quantitative verification, it will serve the reader well.

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