

Thomas Riegler. *Terrorismus. Akteure, Strukturen, Entwicklungslinien*. Innsbruck, Wien: Studien Verlag, 2009. 635 pp. ISBN 978-3-7065-4604-1.

[Terrorism. Actors, Structures, Trends].

The book is a slightly revised text of a doctoral dissertation by an Austrian academic and journalist who studied history and politics at the universities of Vienna and Edinburgh. It has been said that historians tend to do a great deal of research to publish about a very small subject area and that political scientists work the other way round. Riegler's masterpiece has 2395 footnotes and a literature list of more than 50 pages, combining historical depth with the broader sweep of political scientists - but written with the flair of a journalist. Like few others, Riegler's book succeeds in placing the events of 11 September 2001 in context, unpacking the complexities behind the often one-dimensional portrayal of the phenomenon in media, politics and, unfortunately, also parts of academia.

Part I of the volume provides a skillful synthesis of established knowledge on the conceptual, historical and sociological background of terrorism whereby special emphasis is placed on the evolution of the idea of terrorism as "propaganda by the deed". By consistently taking into account state reactions to terrorism since the days of the anarchists, Thomas Riegler manages, in Part III, to show convincingly that some typical state reactions to insurgent terrorism tend to be clearly counter-productive. Where Riegler really enters new and largely uncharted territory is in Part II where he deals with the "Interpretation, Construction and Visualization of Terrorism". He elaborates in detail the mechanisms of what Brian Jenkins called the "terrorism as theatre", demonstrating how terrorists try to score in a bloody "war of images" that is meant to shock the public and put pressure on governments. He also manages to make plausible what inspiration even fictional media products (e.g. from Italo-Western) could provide for some young people who became members of the Baader-Meinhof group (p.p.248-255).

While many other writers point to socio-economic crises as enabling the emergence of terrorism, Riegler's interpretation, while not disregarding the trigger role of crises, focuses more on the great importance of elements from the ideological suprastructure - the role of powerful ideas, the construction of meaning that bundles fantasies, longings and projections in those individuals who seek revolutionary self-realization through spectacular deeds. He identifies for both left-wing and jihadist terrorists the mechanism of "acting out" as a source of power motivating many non-state terrorists. Or, in the words of one Italian terrorist he quotes: "The main thing was the feeling to be able to influence the world around you, rather than experience it passively" (p. 569). Terrorism is a combination of violence and communication and Riegler's study offers strong support for the view that the battle of ideas is more important in the fights against terrorism than disproportional kinetic action that often creates more new recruits than counter-terrorists manage to neutralize by force. All in all, this volume convinces by its comprehensiveness and the balanced fairness of its evaluations. Had it been published in English, it would, I am sure, already have been recognized as a truly outstanding addition to Terrorism Studies.
