

## Boulden, Jane, and Thomas Weiss, eds. *Terrorism and the UN: Before and After September 11.*

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## Book Reviews

Boulden, Jane, and Thomas Weiss, eds. *Terrorism and the UN: Before and After September 11*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004.

Scholarly work on the subject of terrorism has been, for the most part, the reserve of a few dedicated academics. In the past three years, however, the number of books on the subject has increased significantly. Many of them, unfortunately, cannot be termed scholarly. *Terrorism and the UN* not only tackles the daunting subject of international terrorism, but it specifically examines how the UN has responded to this global challenge. This book is one of the few books on this particular subject. Most works so far have dealt with the question of: "What should 'we' do about terrorism?" but the "we" is invariably aimed at single states such as the United States, Israel, or India. Few books have examined the role of the international community writ large.

More than just a volume of edited works, *Terrorism and the UN* brings together authors that have a wealth of experience with regard to the UN in addition to their knowledge of terrorism-related subject matter. This is what makes *Terrorism and the UN* stand out from the plethora of books that have hit the shelves since 11 September 2001. Since the end of World War Two, most books on the subject of terrorism have been penned either by those who have been dedicated to the topic for many years, or newcomers who have difficulty distinguishing between opinion and fact.

Thomas Weiss and Jane Boulden take the reader on a trip from the ethereal to the theoretical to the practical beginning with Neil McFarlane's examination the United Nations' core values. The second part examines the role of the United Nations in dealing with terrorism. It begins with an overview by Nico Schrijver of the challenges to international law brought forth by the 11 September attacks. Edward C. Luck's chapter compares the US response to the 9/11 attacks with their counterterrorism efforts prior to them. Luck challenges the myth that for an action to be truly multilateral, it must be taken through the UN by demonstrating the variety of measures for combating terrorism. This brings forth an important, and oft overlooked concept in combating terrorism: the necessity for centralized control to maintain the focus of effort. Because terrorists act in an independent fashion, that is, one part of the organization is not necessarily dependent on another, it can only be defeated with coordinated action. To achieve coordinated action, participants must follow a set plan.

Karin von Hippel echoes the challenges underlying multinational cooperation in counter-terrorism with her chapter on European perspectives on the war on terrorism. In it, she illustrates the difficulties in coming to a common analytical framework that is imperative for coordinated counterterrorism initiatives.

Once these obstacles are viewed in a continental context, one begins to understand the magnitude of the task required to accomplish the same with a multitude of countries from different continents. In theory, broad multinational cooperation in counterterrorism is possible. The reality of the situation, however, is not the same, as is articulated in Chantal de Jonge Oudraat and M.J. Peterson's respective chapters on the role of the Security Council and the General Assembly. Therefore, because of the nature of the UN, and of the organization's competing agendas, it is nearly impossible to achieve the kind of coordination required to take definitive action against terrorist groups.

This does not mean, however, that the UN has no role to play in combating terrorism. What Weiss and Boulden's book illustrates is that the UN's role is supportive rather than operational. While measures have been put into place in the UN, both before and since 11 September, there are no mechanisms to compel member states to comply with these measures. Even though this is a greater problem in the General Assembly than the Security Council, the Security Council remains fraught with its own particular challenges.

Weiss and Boulden have succeeded in bucking the trend of post-11 September publications that play to the opinions and fears of the masses in several ways. First, they bring together a variety of personalities who are well versed in terrorism studies and, more importantly, the issues surrounding them, such as the infamous "root causes" debate that is dealt with in an exemplary fashion by Rama Mani. The contributors are not simply a gathering of the "usual suspects" that have been the most prolific on the subject. The authors represent a wide academic background and hail from around the globe adding to the legitimacy of this work. Further, the quality of the research is not to be understated. Each chapter is well presented and sourced from the foremost thinkers on the topic of terrorism.

This work is a must read for students of international organizations and terrorism alike. One of the inherent difficulties is addressing this subject, however, is in presenting policy prescriptions that can be applied to rectify the problems outlined in the book. This is not a shortcoming on the part of the authors or editors of this volume, but rather a future challenge for the academic community. The international community is merely beginning to examine the problem of international terrorism from the inter-state level and, as was the challenge at the outset of the Cold War, there are many more questions than answers. Nonetheless, Weiss and Boulden are successful in producing a thought-provoking book that will hopefully stimulate further high-quality research on the subject.

**Bill Watkins** holds an MA in political science from Carleton University and his research interests focus on terrorism. He currently resides in Ottawa.