

# FOREWORD

*Democracy and Counterterrorism: Lessons from the Past* delivers what its succinct title promises: an analysis of how democratic states have fought groups employing political violence and terrorism, and lessons learned from these experiences that can be applied toward present and future counterterrorism campaigns. Given the current threats and challenges faced by the United States and its allies, the significance of such a volume is self-evident. After all, if we are to successfully wage the “global war on terror,” we need to consider the policies, strategies, and instruments that have been employed by other democratic states in their fights against terrorist groups. While this seems like an obvious observation, more than five years after 9/11 this volume is the first to examine the subject in any kind of systematic, methodical fashion. If for no other reason, then, this assessment is of singular importance for addressing a glaring deficiency in current counterterrorism literature. Editors Robert J. Art and Louise Richardson are due credit for recognizing and filling this lacuna.

Art and Richardson enlisted a team of world-class scholars and practitioners to examine fourteen cases for the volume, focusing on thirteen states and sixteen major terrorist groups. Each case chapter includes a brief overview of the situation presented, a detailed analysis of the policies and techniques employed by the government under discussion, and an assessment of the measures that proved most effective in combating terrorism. While these individual cases in themselves are quite instructive, perhaps the volume’s most valuable contribution rests with its final chapter, in which Art and Richardson synthesize the case findings, examine patterns, and tease out clear and precise lessons for the United States in its fight against al Qaeda and other terrorist organizations.

If the lessons Art and Richardson offer are not novel, they are nonetheless significant. This work has done something past studies have not: it has unequivocally demonstrated the fundamental importance of high-quality intelligence gathering, seamless international coordination, and the judicious use of political instruments in combating terrorism. While political gamesmanship and partisan bickering too often divide and distract critical actors from the task at hand, this work serves as a reminder that our wisest strategy in the war on terror is to focus on the basics. The message is clear: if such strategies have worked for democracies in the past, they can work again.

While the lessons themselves offer sound guidance for combating the transnational jihadist network and for ultimately diminishing the physical threat of terrorism, it also suggests that the United States consider ways to dampen the fuel that stokes the fire of terrorism: fear. If one considers terrorism a form of psychological warfare targeting a society's morale and seeking to win political concessions through public pressure, then perhaps the greatest danger lies not in isolated acts of indiscriminate violence, but in the damage it causes to the collective psyche. In short, the "good guys" are not the only ones trying to influence hearts and minds. Just as the United States needs to positively affect feelings and thoughts in the Muslim world, so too does it need to combat terrorists' efforts to adversely change attitudes within the United States and among our allies. If the war on terror is a generation-long war, as Art and Richardson and many others argue, it is critical to educate and engage the public to distinguish between rational and irrational fear. While we cannot control the actions of terrorists, we can ultimately control our own, sometimes illogical, psychological responses to terrorism and the threat it poses.

While Art and Richardson remind us that many democratic states have defeated terrorist groups—a heartening message in these turbulent times—the volume also makes clear a sobering fact: many other states have not succeeded in thwarting terrorist groups that threaten their societies. Put simply, terrorism often works. It is important to acknowledge this truth so that success and failure can be properly defined. Whether one believes we are facing a short-term tactical

threat or one that is long-term and existential, this volume helps us understand the stakes and sets forth strategic policies for success.

That said, much more scholarship is needed. Using this study's findings as a point of departure, future studies should continue to examine the question of tactics. If *Democracy and Counterterrorism* makes plain what the focus in a fight against terrorism needs to be, future studies must define how to improve intelligence, secure international cooperation, and make better use of political instruments.

Great strength is gained in understanding not only the nature of the enemy, but also the effects, both negative and positive, of our policies toward that enemy. *Democracy and Counterterrorism* is only the latest in a long line of Institute publications to enlist, marshal, and deploy the highest level of scholarship in the service of national security concerns. Past Institute volumes have similarly contributed to our understanding of the hazards we face and the best means to combat terrorism, including *Terror on the Internet: The New Arena, the New Challenges*, by Gabriel Weimann, which examines terrorism and counterterrorism in the digital age; and *The United States and Coercive Diplomacy*, edited by Robert J. Art and Patrick M. Cronin, which offers a broad policy analysis of the emerging marriage between diplomacy and military might.

Willingness and freedom to think about the root causes of terrorism and to discuss appropriate solutions to it may explain one of the more curious observations made by Art and Richardson: over time, the counterterrorist policies of democracies get better and more effective, no matter the country implementing them or the terrorist group being fought. Art and Richardson chose not to examine how authoritarian or totalitarian states fight terror for the simple reason that democratic states are constrained in the strategies they can employ—by the need to observe human rights and the rule of law, among others. But it is clear from their conclusions that non-democratic states are at a significant disadvantage compared to democracies in confronting terrorism. While democracies might be constrained in their methods, they are also strengthened by the legitimacy granted by fighting terrorism, by the inclusive vision and respect it offers, and by the freedom democratic societies provide for innovative thinking,

constructive debate, and policy adaptation. At the core of this volume thus rests a deeper truth about the present global war on terror and the need to protect and maintain democratic principles and values.

In short, *Democracy and Counterterrorism's* most important lesson may ultimately be as simple as its title: our greatest weapon against terrorism lies in democracy itself.

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