

# International Terrorism: New Zealand Perspectives

**James Veitch (Editor)**

**Reviewed by Cameron Crouch**

In mid-August 2005, Victoria University of Wellington and the New Zealand Police hosted a seminar on counter-terrorism; the chief purpose of which was to bring New Zealand government departments 'up to date with operational requirements in counter-terrorism and security.' As part of this seminar, a number of academics, New Zealand Government officials, and former intelligence and police officers presented papers on various aspects of terrorism. *International Terrorism: New Zealand Perspectives* is comprised of a selection of these papers rewritten for publication.

Given the nature of the event from which it emerged, *International Terrorism* is academic in nature; but, nonetheless, widely accessible, with clear areas of policy relevance. The edited volume covers a broad range of subjects, including: counter-terrorism strategies; governmental approaches to counter-terrorism (chiefly in the European Union and New Zealand); the role of intelligence and the law in countering terrorism; different types of terrorism, (ie. cyber-terrorism and suicide-terrorism); examinations of particular terrorist organisations (Hezbollah), and a psychological perspective of terrorist motivations.

The quality of contributions is generally high. Kumar Ramakrishna, from the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies in Singapore, provides one of the collection's best papers. He reconceptualises the traditional notion of 'root causes of terrorism' as an innovative hierarchy of first-, second-, and third-order root causes. The benefit of this framework is that it not only links and boosts comprehension of the numerous, complex, and interrelated causes of terrorism; but it also encourages the development of a holistic counterterrorism strategy. Indeed, Ramakrishna proposes a Counter-Terrorism Master Plan (CTMP), comprised of operational, ideological, and functional elements, which would target each order of root causes as a means of undermining terrorist movements.

Douglas Pratt's exposition on religious fundamentalism and terrorism is of a similar quality. With particular reference to the recent rise of Islamist terrorism, Pratt proffers an interesting and timely explanation of how fundamentalism can pave the way from a relatively harmless 'ultraconservative ... religious belief system, to the reality of a religiously-motivated and fanatically-followed engagement in aggressively impositional, even terrorist, activity.' Elsewhere in the volume, Charlotte Boyer provides an extensive overview of the suicide-terrorism literature and an in-depth discussion of the increasing frequency of female suicide terrorists. Most notably, Boyer highlights the 'shock' value attributed to female suicide terrorists and how this impacts on the strategic calculations of terrorist movements.

While the authorship of *International Terrorism* is commendable, the volume as a whole suffers from three main problems. The first (and relatively minor) of these is the accuracy of the book's supposed emphasis on 'New Zealand perspectives', when nearly half the contributions are authored by people who neither live in, nor are associated with, New Zealand. Furthermore, the volume does not make it clear how or why New Zealand perspectives are sufficiently different from other Western perspectives to warrant a dedicated book on the subject.

A further criticism of *International Terrorism* is that it lacks a unifying theme. Of course, all the contributions are focused, in some way, on terrorism. But they share little other connection – either thematically or structurally – beyond this. If terrorism was a new field of study then such a broad, indefinite approach would be understandable. However, given the relative maturity, voluminous nature, and increasing specificity of terrorism and counter-terrorism as academic disciplines, it is not clear how a collection of disparate essays will either significantly contribute to the literature, or attract scholarly attention.

A final concern with *International Terrorism* is that it does not include adequate facilities for a critical engagement of New Zealand's approach to countering terrorism. As is clear from the volume's three articles which deal with the subject, the New Zealand Government is introducing a raft of potentially far-reaching measures aimed at meeting the contemporary terrorist threat. For a book that promotes itself as a New Zealand voice on terrorism, it would have been beneficial if the volume could have provided some context – such as a history of political violence in New Zealand, or an analysis of the risk of terrorism to New Zealand – that would have given the reader a firmer foundation to reach judgments about the necessity and justification of that Government's counter-terrorism response.

As a whole, *International Terrorism* is a mixed bag. While the scholarly quality of its contributions is high, the book lacks a unifying theme. Moreover, it does not provide any reason why a New Zealand perspective on terrorism is distinctive or indeed necessary. This could have been addressed by including more articles about the history and threat of terrorism in the New Zealand context. Given the broad range of subjects covered, *International Terrorism* would likely appeal more to those seeking an introductory or general understanding of terrorism, rather than seasoned analysts, who typically prefer more specific works. ♦

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