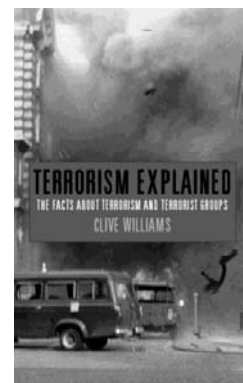


# Terrorism Explained: The Facts About Terrorism and Terrorist Groups

Clive Williams

Reviewed by Tony LeRay-Meyer



Clive Williams is a former military intelligence officer with thirty years experience before he took up his current appointment as Director of Terrorism Studies at the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre at the Australian National University.

The terrorism genre has grown exponentially in the last three years. A myriad of works have been produced in attempts to capture a readership seeking answers in a post-September 11 world. *Terrorism Explained* fills a useful niche. It is not a book for the informed reader or analyst but a book clearly aimed at the beginner—the high school or undergraduate student who is seeking an entry point into understanding the complexity of terrorism.

Williams has sought to engage his target audience with a readable, almost conversational, text, rather than a formal, dry and lengthy technical analysis of what is otherwise an enormously complex subject. *Terrorism Explained* provides a basic text for those not ready for more comprehensive or technical works but the book's approach is essentially self-limiting and does not match the promise of its title.

The book begins with a brief overview of terrorist history and then moves very quickly through the emerging characteristics of contemporary terrorism. It seeks to cover the complete spectrum, from assassins to macro-terrorism, tactics to infrastructure, and finally an introduction to risk management. As this is covered in only 137 pages the book avoids in-depth or extensive analysis of organisations, individual relationships and technical jargon.

Inevitably, the book's limited scope and constrained length limits its capacity to more fully explore the breadth of the subject. Many concepts are raised but not explored in any depth. Although this is clearly a conscious approach by the author, a possible alternative may have been the wider and more detailed use of case studies to enhance the reader's comprehension of the concepts and issues raised. For example, the coverage of the guerrilla and conventional warfare mounted by the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka did not address the use of the 'Black Tigers' as the movement's terrorist capability. Other issues introduced, such as suicide operations, are not followed up in any depth. An insight, through brief case studies, into the employment of females as suicide

operatives in Algeria in 1956 or more recently in Chechnya would have been very effective in providing an understanding of this factor in the nature of contemporary terrorism.

There is as yet no universally accepted definition of terrorism and consequently much sterile debate in academic and professional forums. A key strength of *Terrorism Explained* is the effective personal definition of terrorism offered by Williams. He defines terrorism in terms of political motivation, the targeting of non-combatants, the intent to 'terrify', and the aim to achieve a strategic outcome.

This effective definition offered a sound foundation for the 'story' to be related in the text, but the subsequent analysis of terrorism is insufficiently related back to his definitional model. The definition should have been better used to underpin his coverage of the history of terrorism or his brief discussion of concepts and tactics. Clive Williams has produced a basic and readable text targeted at the student seeking an introductory or general entry point into a complex and burgeoning subject. However, *Terrorism Explained* largely belies the promise of its title and is not suited to the informed reader or the beginner seeking a detailed introduction. ♦

Clive Williams, *Terrorism Explained: The Facts About Terrorism and Terrorist Groups*, New Holland, Sydney, 2004, paperback, 223pp, RRP \$24.95.

When we do not find peace within ourselves, it is vain to seek for it elsewhere.

—Duc Francois de la Rouchefoucauld