

Book Review

The Palgrave Handbook of Terrorism in Africa

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The strength of the book titled *The Palgrave Handbook of Terrorism in Africa* is that the 25 contributors are African-based experts - those who live and study extremism and terrorism in each region. The local knowledge and understanding of the challenges of Africa is vital to mitigating the risks and harnessing the opportunities for peace in the continent. More empirically driven, regional analytic work is needed to develop and advance theories that help explain the why regarding how states continue to grapple with terrorism. The geostrategic implications, whether by states or non-state actors, should drive better policies for prevention and limit the proliferation of unwanted instability. The work reviewed here is an important contribution in understanding the calculus states use in deciding to pursue, develop, and adapt to this unconventional terrorist threat.

With the rise in terrorism as a threat across the continent, the international community should be deeply committed to building capacity in Africa. Every African nation, likewise, should engage with a range of domestic and international partners in cooperation and collaboration to address the challenges of terrorism and extremism. It was good to see so much effort into describing the situation in Africa by the authors. The edited anthology was a very tough but interesting read

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at 813 pages. Dense in a good way. There is not so much good news sometimes, but on the other hand the book really lays out all the different terrorism variations. Africa is a very complex set of countries that have very different issues. A reader will develop a better frame of description on what Africa means to terrorism.

Many chapters outlined youth-led protests. Providing a vivid illustration of how young people act as catalysts for systemic change. Viewed through an inter-generational justice lens, these demonstrations reveal the deep-rooted grievances driving civic unrest and highlight the urgent need for inclusive, forward-looking policy frameworks. Societal upheavals noted in the book—driven by rising inequality, climate fragility, and diminished trust in public institutions—have created profound uncertainties for youth and future generations. The gulf between the “have-nots” and the “have-yachts” is expanding, even as young people gain unparalleled access to information and digital organizing tools.

The book also shows that Parliaments remain the cornerstone of democratic governance. Elected representatives are constitutionally mandated to protect civil liberties, ensure the rule of law, and oversee executive actions. Their involvement is especially critical in shaping legally robust, inclusive, and rights-based policies for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE). In fragile and transitioning contexts throughout the book, parliamentary leadership is indispensable to creating policy responses that are not only strategic but also legitimate and locally grounded by justice—especially inter-generational and environmental equity. Leadership is a prerequisite for sustainable peace and legitimate governance.

After nearly two decades of predominantly Western-led capacity-building efforts across African governance institutions, serious questions arise regarding the sustainability of these knowledge-transfer models often referenced in the book. Structural transformation requires more than external expertise; it demands local ownership, contextual understanding, and empowered legislative leadership. This book further amplifies the need for local leaders to take a robust role—not just in

refining multi-stakeholder frameworks, but in resourcing and enabling civil society to act effectively within government. Every chapter contribution shows deep knowledge at the local level.

Each author brought an incredibly unique perspective given the level of personal knowledge. One author came from a previous institution that I led. I am very proud to see counterterrorism expertise being translated into well-researched articles. As an example of the precision throughout the book, some key things I learned in the Egyptian chapter included: 1) the need to differentiate how Egypt Islamic Jihad or EIJ operates in comparison with other Islamic movements and 2) incredible detail and analysis on how Islamic movements really went back to the 1960s in 1970s and 3) the scrutiny regarding the principal of Takfirism or the radical ideology within this view characterized by the excommunication of Muslims. This chapter's author linked the rise of Takfirism and why secular democratic governance has been so difficult to establish in many of the countries in Africa. This pattern seems to be a general theme throughout the whole book, but I also thought it was interesting that she noted that EIJ disagreed with the Al-Qaeda principle of fighting the far enemy. That (the far enemy) seems to be somewhat on the back burner now, but that is why strategic analysts who see trends are so worried about the Sahel in general as point of instability.

I also found it interesting that the Cairo International Centre for Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding in Africa (CCCCPA) had a program Preventing Radicalization Extremism Leading to Terrorism (PERLT). If one is a student of the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe), they have had this long-standing term VERLT, Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Leads to Terrorism. A plus to read some concepts have been passed on from the OSCE in Europe to Africa. Within the OSCE, Egypt is a Mediterranean Partner for Co-operation and perhaps this linkage occurred from that outreach.

This leads to a next step from this excellent book because although policymakers may prefer criticism in private, recent roundtable discussions with this author revealed a troubling tendency to respond to

civil society pressure by enacting restrictive NGO and CSO laws. Yet, global best practices endorsed by the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Counterterrorism—and embedded in for example many EU legislations—show the value of multilateral collaboration like *The Palgrave Handbook of Terrorism in Africa*. Europe's long history of confidence-building through frameworks like the Helsinki Final Act and the OSCE provides a model, even as challenges persist with the OSCE. African terrorism unaddressed will rise as one of the lethal transnational threats to peace and security. The need for a unified effort cannot be underestimated or led by security forces alone. The effort requires genuine engagement and leadership from NGOs and CSOs adapting existing or even new models.

History and *The Palgrave Handbook of Terrorism in Africa* tell us that sooner or later terrorism will be more active again and show itself through the attacks in areas outside Africa. Then those outside Africa care but too late. One can observe terrorism as envisioned after 9/11 in and of itself has lost its way. Many have completely mixed terrorism up with other issues because it is convenient to label disagreement as terrorism. As one writing this review, I see it even in America where each side calls some of the things that are going on between the so-called right/left by accusing each of them of being a terrorist. It is very unhelpful when one is trying to get to the classic terrorism that causes enormous economic impact because of something like 9/11 or all the lone wolf attacks in the middle 2010s. I frankly think for many there is a hard-to-understand argument about Africa as a priority. An argument by isolationist-minded whether one should worry about transporting the situation as an effect on the US (Africa/Sahel are too far away many would say) as a preminent threat. I think North/West people no longer worry enough about terrorism, again.

The incredible depth and decision to group by regional areas makes the book a must have for any researcher or institution – whether locally, regional, or internationally – a resource that can be used as a whole or selectively by chapters. Lessons from multi-actor civil society programs show that successful strategies must be person-centred and

locally led like this book. With deep community engagement to tailor interventions to the local context. They must also be adaptive and collaborative, establishing benchmarks for continuous improvement and coordination across actors. A balanced approach is essential, integrating non-law enforcement professionals to avoid over-securitisation, while efficiently leveraging existing structures rather than creating unnecessary parallel systems. In contrast, the book shows that failure is more likely when strategies are top-down and government-controlled, with limited local buy-in. Approaches that disproportionately target individuals based on religion, politics, or identity, or that prioritise law enforcement at the expense of social solutions, risk deepening divisions and fuelling future cycles of violence.

African parliamentarians and other leaders may be unaware of these collaborative models across the region as so well outlined in *The Palgrave Handbook of Terrorism in Africa*. Perhaps some are unwilling to make the necessary political sacrifices. The recent resurgence of populist ideas and policies has hampered political will to redirect a portion of hard power resources to address the root causes of such extremism noted throughout the book. With this view, the dual approach combining hard and soft security should complement each other to effectively mitigate risk factors. After reading this book, there is an already significant investment in regional security and resilience programs. Multilateral leadership should support the importance of prioritizing non-traditional aspects of security issues to better integrate outside (i.e., so-called Western) security and development assistance for Africa. Local leaders are ready to seize the opportunity to lead by example. Hope should not be abandoned despite the historical context so well documented. There is always space for a fresh start—a chance to further empower regional trust and demonstrate that Africa's future is one where youth are valued as critical actors in shaping peace, security, and resilience. This is the major takeaway from these 27 chapters and commendable authors.