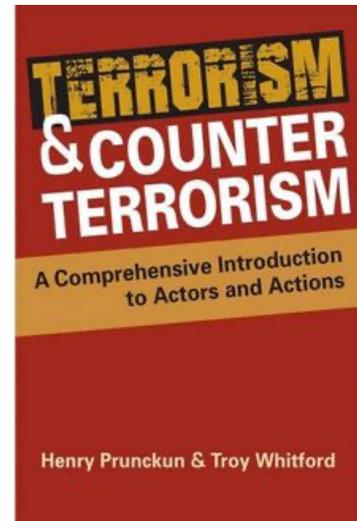


**Terrorism and counter terrorism:
a comprehensive introduction to actors and actions.**

*By Henry Prunckun and Troy Whitford
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Reviewed by Cesar Alvarez.



The old adage says ‘never judge the book by the cover’. But just by reading the title on the cover, it is clear that Henry Prunckun and Troy Whitford set themselves up to a challenging task.

Terrorism and counter terrorism are mammoth-size concepts. Their actors are numerous and arguably expanding. Their actions are complex and their political, social, and economic ramifications run deep in government, security and societal structures. Introducing both concepts, and to do so comprehensively, is indeed easier said than done. Prunckun and Whitford, however, not only rise to the occasion, but more importantly, they have produced a practical, easy-to-read, and timely learning tool for students with little or no previous exposure to terrorism-related issues, either professionally or academically.

Prunckun and Whitford begin by rightly pointing out that terrorism has now become an almost daily occurrence, but paradoxically, despite its commonality, there still no universal consensus on its definition. This sets the scene for the reader to grasp the complexities surrounding terrorism and subsequently counter terrorism. From there, Prunckun and Whitford take the reader through a quick overview of the history of terrorism, ranging from the Zealots to the 20th century in just a couple of pages. This brushstroke is then followed by what might be called a hyphenated taxonomy of terrorism — namely, left-wing terrorism, eco-terrorism, right-wing terrorism, and even anti-abortion terrorism, as well as other forms of terrorism. While Prunckun and Whitford rely, with good reasons, on the most common means to typify terrorist organisations —through the analysis of its goals, it should be noted that further emphasis on David Rapoport’s Four ‘Waves’ of Terrorism would have added clarity and depth to this section.

The authors then focus on the detailed examination of operational aspects associated with the planning, financing and execution of terrorist attacks. From recruitment to the selection of targets, touching also on the role organised crime has in the prospects of success of a terrorist operation, Prunckun and Whitford paint a wide picture of what contemporary terrorist operations entail. Their picture, nevertheless, does not manage to capture neither lightly, let alone in detail, any of the main —active or extinct—contemporary organisations or individuals within the terrorist ‘landscape’. Students, in particular those in the early stages of their journey throughout the terrorism and counter terrorism concepts, would have benefited greatly from an overview of some terrorist agents who have been behind some of the major terrorist operations. Ironically, while Prunckun and Whitford excluded an examination of terrorist organisations and individuals from the book, they dedicated (and rightly so) an entire chapter to the victims of terrorism, providing

the reader with unique perspective on terrorism-related issues.

Prunckun and Whitford start off Part 2 — counter terrorism—by examining the international legal instruments against terrorism (ILIAT), a group of more than twenty-one international conventions, as well as, UN Security Council Resolutions developed by the international community since 1963 to respond to the different manifestations of terrorism and terrorist financing. This appears to be one of the main qualities of this book: having personally worked for the UN building capacities in criminal justice systems across Latin America, and having seen how unfamiliar experienced practitioners were with the ILIAT, I firmly believe students will benefit immensely by the overview on the ILIAT. This international criminal law perspective strips terrorism from its ideological and political nature, simplifies a highly complex concept, and expands the reader's knowledge in often overlooked area. The authors quickly turn the reader's attention towards operational and strategic counter terrorism elements, essentially arguing that there is no silver bullet to prevent terrorism, let alone to combat it. From the role law enforcement and defence forces play in disruption operations, to the challenges military interventions create to the overall deterrence of terrorist threats at home and abroad, the authors emphasise that, although responses to terrorism vary from country to country, the protection of critical infrastructure and the de-radicalisation of extremists are and will likely remain a common trend.

In Part 3, and to conclude, Prunckun and Whitford ventured to answer whether the war on terror can ever be won. There is certainly merit in the authors' intention to move the reader's understanding of terrorism and counter terrorism from the operational to the strategic; furthermore, it makes sense to ground a prospective on the theoretical concepts, particularly towards the end of the book. Yet, the authors could have perhaps devoted this section to discuss other key issues the book did not cover. After all, as motioned before, terrorism and counter terrorism are mammoth-size concepts.

Essentially, Prunckun and Whitford took up on an ambitious task, and delivered. They managed to break not one but two broad and equally deep concepts into small, and easy-to-read pieces. Their contribution is to be understood in terms of 'breadth' rather than 'depth'; nonetheless, newcomers into terrorism studies would appreciate that.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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