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Richard English. *Does Terrorism Work?.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. xv + 350 pp. $39.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-19-960785-3.

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In *Does Terrorism Work?*, Richard English offers an expansive and richly textured exploration of the question of whether terrorism realizes the goals of terrorists. He does this by offering a comprehensive introduction to the question (specifically referring to nonstate terrorism[1]) while pointing out ways to make assessments. He follows this with analyses of four terrorist cases, namely al-Qaida, the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA), Hamas, and Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA), or Basque Homeland and Freedom. A conclusion summarizes the findings and suggests further approaches.

English believes most terrorists are rational actors who are simply pursuing political change. Also, he believes nonstate terrorism is worthy of serious, calm, and even empathic analysis. Though he readily concedes the complexity of finding commonalities between the different terrorist groups, he suggests it is worthy "to ask how far there might emerge at least family resemblances between different cases for us gently to paint some broader shapes" (p. 220). He purposely selected two Muslim terrorist groups and two non-Muslim ones in order to seek those family resemblances. As for the religious component of certain terrorism, English does not regard that as being new or more alarming than secular violence (and he further notes that religion is often simply a tool for a secular purpose).

With respect to the question of whether terrorism works, English suggests there are four types of success: one, "strategic victory" involving the achievement of a primary objective (or objectives); two, "partial strategic victory" involving the achievement of a primary objective (or objectives); three, "tactical success" involving any number of things from operational successes to publicity to the winning of certain concessions to control over a population; or four, "the inherent rewards of struggle as such, independent of central goals" (p. 30).

The problem with English's four-fold approach is its broadness. If success can be measured in so many ways, then it would be difficult to point to any terrorist group and declare it a total failure. The fourth category pertaining to "inherent rewards" is subjective enough to practically allow all terrorists to be credited with some form of success. The inherent rewards of struggle, English writes, may include "prestige and status; an augmented sense of identity and pride, at individual and at group levels; power; lasting celebrity, renown, heroism, and even glamour; intense friendship and the meaningful belonging to a group" (p. 36). But if terrorists are indeed rational actors who are pursuing political change, then it

stands to reason that their success should be strictly measured by how well they are able to make such change occur.

Nonetheless, English's fourth category of success is useful for understanding the terrorist violence that to outsiders seems otherwise quite meaningless. Serious counterterrorism, in fact, would have to take into consideration the inherent rewards of terrorism in order to find ways to undermine appeal to the many who engage in such violent activity. (One thinks of the many ISIS recruits who come from comfortable Western societies. These young people with mixed allegiances are doubtless attracted to terrorism because of romanticized notions connected with certain inherent rewards.) Here the ideological and psychological may be interwoven, but in some cases the psychological exists where ideological conviction is weak or nonexistent. "It might seem strange (even immoral) to ask how far terrorism increases people's happiness," observes English (p. 37). "But clearly for some people this has been the case, and not at all trivially so (and if we are to understand why people continue to join brutal terrorist organizations, then this represents an important insight)."

In his analysis of Osama bin Laden and al-Qaida (chapter 1), English writes that the "central strategic goals (the overturning of apostate Muslim regimes, the expulsion of the USA and its influence from the Muslim world, the renaissance of their strident version of Islam) have not been secured through terroristic violence" (pp. 88-89). However, the "secondary goals of revenge and of sustaining a cause, and of driving local agendas, have seen greater success for them at times" (p. 89).

The key phrasing in the preceding sentence is "at times." Most of al-Qaida's terrorist plots failed, but that fact is overshadowed by the dramatic attacks that were successful. As English points out, the downing of the Twin Towers and the attack on the Pentagon represented one of those rare moments when an individual dramatically changed the course of world events. English suggests that the ambitious goals of Osama bin Laden were such that it was unrealistic that al-Qaida could have pursued them by peaceful means. And there was no realistic way the United States could have responded peacefully to al-Qaida. After "a somewhat embarrassing ten years" (p. 86), the May 2011 raid by Seal Team Six at the Abbottābad compound in Pakistan led to the demise of al-Qaida's founder.

The other Muslim terrorist group English focuses on is Hamas (chapter 3). Before dealing with that Palestinian terrorist group, however, the author overviews the events that led to the founding of modern Israel. He writes, "Though an unpopular point to make in some settings, the establishment of the state of Israel arguably embodies one of the most striking examples of terrorism actually managing to achieve major success" (p. 148). Whether intentional or not, the focus on Irgun will seem to some readers as though the author regards the rise of Black September, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), Hamas, and other such groups as justifiable. Importantly, English does mention the 1967 Six-Day War and how, after Israel gained possession of Palestinian territory, "it … shifted the emphasis for Palestinian resistance and struggle very much onto the Palestinians themselves, rather to any outside Arab states" (p. 152).

Since a central goal of Hamas has been the destruction of Israel, and since that goal seems unlikely to be met, the verdict is Hamas's terrorism has not worked. On the other hand, English observes, Hamas has shown some adaptability and pragmatism by seeking a partial strategic victory--in other words a "practical acceptance of a coexistence arrangement with Israel" (p. 166). Thus, English argues that Hamas's terrorism "has brought about something of its secondary goal of sustaining Palestinian resistance against Israel" (p. 167). Moreover, Hamas has largely won the

public relations battle at the international level in that that Palestinians are recognized as "a people." With respect to rival Palestinian groups, Hamas has used violence to control events, such as scuttling the peace process Fatah was on its way to achieving with Israel. Since so far there is no "end of the story," it remains to be seen whether future historians will be able to look back on the activities of Hamas and point to an overall success resulting from its terrorism.

In his assessment of PIRA and ETA, handled in chapters 2 and 4 respectively, English states that neither group realized its primary aims. Both groups sought self-determination for its people: PIRA's primary goal was the destruction of the Northern Ireland state and removal of the Irish border made in the 1920s while ETA's primary goal was an independent Basque state in northern Spain. Although the Good Friday Agreement (or Belfast Agreement) of 1998 allows for the possibility of a united Ireland, such action would necessitate a majority vote of Northern Ireland rather than a majority vote of all of Ireland. Another primary goal of PIRA was the defense of the Catholic community in Northern Ireland against the British occupation, which English states was a failure (as more, and not less violence, was incurred against Catholics). As for a free Basque state, by the late 1970s the Spanish government had provided a degree of autonomy for the region but it has been unwilling to permit a complete breakaway. Socialistic aims were a part of the agendas of PIRA and ETA, but in both cases this vision was scrapped. Each fulfilled the secondary goal of revenge, but at a price of public revulsion and, especially for Northern Ireland, a "legacy of damage and polarization" (p. 146).

Readers who desire straight and easy answers will find *Does Terrorism Work?* to be challenging. The author, although a professor of politics at the University of St. Andrews, applies an overall historiographical approach to the question, thus emphasizing long context. In doing so, the volume demonstrates the complexity of the question being asked. All depending on how a person looks at it, terrorism works or does not work. The bottom line is, seldom do terrorists achieve their main political goals, but often they do force change to take place. A question that emerges from this study is: even if it partially works (or sometimes enitirely works), is terrorism worth it? English seems to suggest that terrorism is not worth the violence.

In terms of strategic success, English points out (in his concluding chapter) instances in which terrorism worked. Irgun, as noted above, was able to foster Israel's independence by forcing the British withdrawal from Palestine. The Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) achieved similar success for Algerian independence by forcing French withdrawal. Hezbollah became a model for Arab terrorists after its 1983 truck-bombings of soldier barracks in Lebanon compelled US and French forces to depart. Hezbollah was also successful in forcing Israel to retreat from Lebanon in 2000. Hamas benefited when its violence tilted Israeli politics rightward, removing from power moderates who were seeking compromise with Palestinians for a two-state solution. Some of these successes (by Irgun, the FLN, Hezbollah), some observers would argue, were guerilla operations against primarily military targets and not terrorism in its broad sense.

So then, does terrorism work? As English answers, "Every one of the case studies examined sustainedly in this book has involved considerable human suffering being caused; none of them has involved the achievement of the relevant group's central goals" (p. 265). In the same concluding chapter English cites a number of studies that point to the same observation. For instance, Audrey Cronin's overview of 450 terrorist groups concludes that 87.1 percent were completely unsuccessful at achieving their strategic aims while only 4.4 percent accomplished what they had set out to do.[2] However, while terrorists seldom achieve their central goals, they do often achieve

lesser goals, even if it is nothing more than venting hatred and exercising revenge.

Notes

[1]. English focuses on nonstate terrorism but believes "terroristic violence has historically been practiced [more often] by states" (267n1).

[2]. The source the author uses is Audrey Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends: Understanding the Decline and Demise of Terrorist Campaigns* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 215-216.