

O'Ballance, Edgar. Islamic Fundamentalist Terrorism, 1979-95: The Iranian Connection. New York: New York University Press, 1997.

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Following the Iranian Revolution of 1978 and the US Embassy hostage crisis of 1979-80, anti-Western terrorism by Islamic fundamentalist militants has been increasing not only in the Middle East but also in Western Europe, North and South America, and East Asia. While the United States government has blamed Iran for much of this terrorism other interpretations have been offered that identify the source of this terrorism either in the 'root causes' of communal disaffection that have generated the resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism world-wide or else in the unauthorized actions of certain factions within Iran's government. The latter interpretations both exculpate Iran of the charge of being a state sponsor of terrorism and suggest that US attempts to punish Iran for such sponsorship are misconceived and ineffective.

Edgar O'Ballance in this current book has compiled an impressive tally of terrorist actions carried out by professed Muslim militants along with evidence of Iranian state sponsorship of these groups and their actions. He chronicles both the many Iranian-sponsored "terrorist spectaculars," such as the 23 October 1983 bombing of the French and US military bases in Beirut, as well as some of their conspicuous failures, such as the April 1988 hijacking of Kuwait Airways flight 422. O'Ballance attempts to chronicle fully the various fronts and campaigns of Iranian state-sponsored terrorism, including the hostage-taking campaign against Westerners in Lebanon in 1984-92, the hijacking campaign in 1985-88, the systematic targeting and assassination of Iranian dissidents abroad, as well as its more recent involvement with Palestinian, Egyptian, and Algerian terrorist groups and their campaigns.

This book is exceedingly ambitious in its intended scope but it presents sufficient documentation to expose the ingenuousness of the claim that the Islamic Republic of Iran has not been systemically organizing and directing much, if not most, of the terrorist actions being carried out since 1979 in the name of Muslim fundamentalism. However, O'Ballance's work documents two other important facts regarding the nature of this terrorism: first, much of post-revolutionary Iran's behavior in the international arena can be understood as having been shaped in what O'Ballance calls the 'Revolutionary Furnace' (Chapter 3) of Iran's internal revolutionary turmoil and intra-mural bloodletting both during and following the 1978 revolution. O'Ballance points out that Khomeini's closest followers and many high-ranking government officials of his regime were themselves terrorized by the bombing and assassination campaign of another group of self-styled Muslim revolutionaries, namely the *Mujahideen-i Khalq* organization. This internal subversion in turn rationalized the Islamic Republic's own brutal campaign of suppression and extermination of political dissenters and rebels within Iran. Given the conviction of the Iranian leaders that the United States was backing both this internal dissent as well as the Iraqi military campaign against Iran, it was in keeping with their policy of "exporting the Islamic revolution," to sponsor terrorism against US and pro-US targets elsewhere in the Middle East. The other important finding O'Ballance documents is that, although factional infighting and occasional purges have continued sporadically within the ruling elites of the Tehran regime, and in spite of the ascendance of so-called

"moderates" and the decline of the "radicals" in the Iranian government following the election of Rafsanjani as president in 1989, Iranian state sponsorship of terrorism has continued unabated as a tool of diplomacy by other means in Tehran's pursuit of its regional political agenda. This lays to rest the contention that Iranian-sponsored terrorism has merely been due to uncontrolled factions or that it has been merely a by-product of the intramural power struggles in Tehran. O'Ballance avoids the temptation of trying to over-analyze the significance of factionalism within Iran. Also he clearly recognizes that Iran's passing alliances with Libya, Syria, the Abu Nidal Organization, and others amount to little more than temporary tactical alliances with what Iran itself must regard as long-term strategic enemies.

While this book is a valuable resource for students of conflict studies who are not area specialists in Middle Eastern politics, it could be improved in at least three ways. First, the sequencing of topics in the text is chronologically confusing and presents the reader with many details about different events and actors without first providing the overall thesis to which these events should be related. For instance, Chapter 1 deals with bombings allegedly committed by Hezbollah in London, Buenos Aires, and Panama in 1993-94, but it also touches on the 1989 Khomeini fatwa against Salman Rushdie and also the Iranian Embassy siege in London in 1980. Then Chapter 2 looks at the involvement of the Egyptian Gamaa Islamiya group in the World Trade Center bombing of 1993. Only in Chapter 3, 'A Revolutionary Furnace' does O'Ballance begin to create a systematic thesis about the origins and development of Iranian state sponsorship of terrorism. Chapter 7, 'The Enemy Within,' documents the development of state terror directed against dissenting groups within the Islamic Republic. Logically this discussion should follow the material presented in Chapter 3. If the remaining chapters were to follow these two sections and if they were sequenced according to the chronological order of the events described within them this would better enable the reader to digest and understand the significance of the multitude of events, personalities, and groups presented in the text.

The second area for improvement is that the author needs to screen his facts more carefully. There are several factual errors in what he has presented as well as significant omissions. On pages xvii and 56, O'Ballance gives 4 September 1980 as the date of the beginning of the war between Iraq and Iran whereas full-scale hostilities marked by Iraq's invasion of Khuzistan Province began on 22 September 1980. Chapters 4 and 5, discussing anti-US terrorism in Lebanon, never mention the 19 July 1982 kidnapping of David Dodge, Acting President of the American University in Beirut (AUB), nor the 19 January 1984 murder of AUB President, Malcolm Kerr. The significance of these events lies in the prominence of the American University in Beirut as a symbol of American and Western cultural influence in the Middle East. The kidnapping of David Dodge dates the real beginning of the hostage-taking campaign to 1982 rather than 1985 according to O'Ballance. Significantly, Dodge was kidnapped a week after the Iranian Hezbollah 'volunteers' first arrived in Lebanon and he spent over a year in captivity in Iran, which further underscores Iran's direct involvement in the hostage-taking campaign.

The third area for improvement lies in correcting the spellings and transliterations of the Arabic and Persian proper names and terms given in the text. The Arabic term for Khomeini's principle of "rule by the theologians," which O'Ballance cited as *Wilyat e-Faqir* should be spelled *Wilayat-e Faqih*. This may seem a trivial point but to readers having a background in Middle Eastern area studies and languages this is the sort of factual error that undermines confidence in the accuracy of the other facts presented elsewhere in the text.

O'Ballance's research shows that Iran has not renounced its sponsorship of terrorism but actually is supporting the HAMAS and Islamic Jihad in Palestine groups responsible for many of the recent terrorist bombings and suicide attacks within Israel. Accordingly, we should expect to see this book revised and updated in the future.

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