

Book review

Kiss Álmos Péter (ed.), *Az afrikai terrorista- és szakadárszervezetek* (African Terrorist and Secessionist Organizations), HVK TKH, Budapest, 2015. ISBN 978-963-89948-4-4
by András Kocsor

To write a review for a book such as this is not an easy task. Still in justice it must be admitted that, we are in a much easier position than the authors of fore-mentioned work, who undertook no small task. This is not just a brief report on present Africa. Its intend is to give a comprehensive picture, and to study every aspect of the situation in the black continent. Doing it so by examining the relations between different terrorist organizations there geo- and local political enviroments and – sometimes – other ideologies. No doubt, we have a referential yet analyzing book in our hands. We are determined to get our money's worth.

The work itself is made up of 22 articles. Is starts with Egypt beeing discussed in detail, then in a very logical order it passes on to the west towards Libya, Tunisia and Morocco, only to carry on to the countries of the Sahel region and finally the armed organizations of Central Africa.

Even the title itself – which might not be immensely inviting at first read – carries a simple but very interesting aspect: terrorism is not a recent, developing phenomenon. It is an existing, well established entity, which is very much present, deserves investigation, and demands attention to itself.

The books approach to terrorism, however, is even more fascinating. It treats terrorism as a whole, but examines its actors in their own context – avoiding a holistic approach if you will. It focuses on the analysis of individual characteristics, rather than relying to heavily on common features.

The first three articles – which is regarded as the introductory part of the book – makes this point clear immediately. They look at the evolution of the most significant organizations operating in Egypt, meanwhile pointing out the main characteristics of these groups. The authors are doing a superb job in breaking down the differences and similarities, and at the same time, they manage to avoid getting lost in the labyrinths of over analyzing historical explanations. Instead we see how dose available resources or the tightness and quality of connections between these groups effects activity, and even determining primary targets. If somebody can successfully finance his actions, thanks to various crimes, and enjoys good relations with larger organizations – thus bring forth some support – it allows the group to strike considerably larger blows on its chosen enemies (rocket attacks from the Sinai Peninsula, or even attempted assassinations against powerful Western politicians), but if these are not available in the huge risk factors and extremely high costs can no longer allow to carry out an ambitious course of action. These terrorists are forced to settle for Western tourists, or small attacks against 'the servants of the criminal system' that – in their hopes – would lead to the disruption of public order in the

region they want to overcome. However, this is not necessarily a failed strategy, because a number of countries, for example Tunisia, tourism is the most important source of income. There are divisions that like to attack domestic targets, through car bombs and suicide bombers. They are rejecting all patriotic feelings and ideas in favour of restoring the pan-arabic Caliphate, while other teams, nationalistic in nature, let us say Algeria do not feel the need of using heavy weapons in their own countries.

We learn about the much discussed concept of the so-called 'Islamic Caliphate', and its historical background. By the time we reach Gömöri Roland's article, describing Africa's oldest Islamist political clustering, we have an overall picture about the organisational structure of such groups, and the delicate relationship between each other or the government in power. Through these, we can instantly understand the goals and methods of the long-existing Muslim Brotherhood, in light of the world surrounding it, and especially the attitudes of governments towards it.

The authors will show us that operability is unimaginable without the experienced veterans of international jihad, a large variety of specified methods, effective and fanatical executive staff and necessary financial funding. However, these are worth nothing if there is nothing, that can 'take the roll of a compelling enemy' and directly or indirectly provide satisfying targets for terrorism to choose from. These targets may vary in each region. In Egypt, for example, they move on a large scale. But at the same time, other active organizations who just recently managed to to grab a foothold in their countries, thanks to the political upheavals of the near past, are forced to focus their attacks solely against the government's police forces, and often, the oversaturated army.

In Black Africa, however, these groups clearly took actions against their country's status quo. Therefore we often find prominent members of the opposition among their supporters. For example some Nigerian generals, stripped of authority willingly support terrorists on their way to replace the Christian leadership.

We also find that leaving Egypt, it becomes more and more difficult to identify a group with a definable membership or elaborate ideology. These groups behave differently in North African countries, since extreme jihadism could not grow strong enough before the events of 2011. Countries like Muammar Gaddafi's Libya or Zin el-Abidin Ben Ali's system in Tunisia.

The chaos following the Arab Spring was quickly exploited by extremist groups, which had no time to organize themselves around specific ideas, and for this reason members are constantly exchanged between them, their structure is reorganised over and over again. This is their biggest weakness, but perhaps also their greatest strength. Although – particularly in Libya – the population does not sympathize widely with radical Islam, its loose conceptions gives a certain flexibility to these organizations witch allows them to continually replace the fallen or deserted and made it almost impossible for the authorities to find grip on them. For this reason you can find sympathizers almost anywhere who are willing to provide safe shelter for those, who are fleeing from law enforcement. The article written by János Besenyő and Zoltán Prantner about the Ansar as-Saria, provides a deep insight on these elements. Of course, in many countries the strong international assistance and gritty governmental actions successfully suppressed terrorism. But in other places, such as Algeria, the tense relationships with neighbors and the tremendous economic dependence on Western powers, results in the opposite.

This book and its writers gives us more than satisfying examples of all of the above, and all of them reaches their goal. We can see how Nigerian resources fell in foreign hands, by the fault of the dictatorial leadership. It nicely leads us through every step of these kind of processes: how some people took advantage of the impoverished, and how terror groups where organized alongside ethnic divides and tensions.

The processes are all clearly portrayed by every author in unified style, but each with his/her own priorities in mind – in his investigation, Ádám Mayer focuses on the social base and opportunities provided by the surroundings of the groups he discusses, while Béla Tamási or Viktor Marsai ponders about Europes and more importantly Hungary's vulnerability. Although the focus falls on different points, the book – as a whole – maintains an easily digestible fluency through simple language and carefully constructed logic. The reader does not feel lectured, but can also see that it's more than a crash course in the papers.

It is an essential and important feature of the book that every small topic is filled with a huge of a number of exact data and information, that is, names, dates, numbers, technicalities. Fortunately, the authors make sure that they are easy to understand and we do not get lost. Specific examples and events are lined up for us.

The bibliography in most cases is very mature, and impressively wide ranged, the volume finds the right balance between the need for explanations and accurate indication of the data sources. This might seem as a quite weightless sentence, but this book satisfies an enormous need in the Hungarian palette. Nothing proves this better than the torturing lack of Hungarian authors in the bibliography. This was undoubtedly noted by our authors and perhaps this is the reason of the precise, detailed and reader-friendly structure.

To understand the political security, economic, or ethnic situation of today's Africa is very difficult and complicated task. *The African terrorist and secessionist organizations* provides excellent help. Anyone who is interested in this topic will find an excellent foundation in this volume.

The authors: Zoltán Prantner, János Tomolya, Roland Gömöri, Viktor Marsai, János Besenyő, Éva Ladányi, dr. István Kobolka, Béla Tamási, Gábor Búr, Szilveszter Póczik, Dávid Vogel, Dóra Molnár, Éva Remek, Noémi Ritter, György Suha, Gergely Tóth, Ádám Mayer, Tamás Bálint, dr. Mariann Zsifkó, Péter Marton, Veronica Waeni Nzioki, Álmos Péter Kiss, Mariann Vecsey, Zoltán Vörös, Sándor Nagy, Attila T. Horváth.