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Dr. Nick Sitter

The History of Terrorism From Bakunin to the Islamic State



Dr. Nick Sitter explores 150 years of terrorism against Western states and empires and the counter-terrorism lessons drawn from this experience. Terrorist groups come in many forms and draw on a range of ideologies. They differ widely not just in terms of ideology.

Having said that, there are also a number of common elements that can be found in almost all terrorists' strategies. The four common elements of most terrorist campaigns that provide a starting point for developing a robust counter-terrorism strategy are: i) an effort to provoke an overreaction by the state; ii) an effort to polarize society; iii) a effort to mobilize and recruit supporters; and iv) an effort to avenge perceived wrongs.

Consequently, terrorism is better understood as "armed propaganda" than as an existential threat – at least for the USA and European states (in the context of civil wars and insurgencies, terrorism can of course be part of an existential threat to a state or empire). The lessons of 150 years of terrorism and counterterrorism is that terrorism is better fought by law enforcement and intelligence agencies than directly by the military. This holds even for the threat Al Qaeda and the Islamic State represents to western states today.

Dr. Nick Sitter

Dr Nick Sitter is Professor of Political Economy at the Department of Law and Governance at the BI Norwegian Business School; and Professor of Public Policy at Central European University. He is also Research Associate at the Centre for Analysis of Risk and Regulation at the London School of Economics and Political Science. He holds his BSc, MSc and PhD from the LSE Department of Government. He was Head the CEU Department of Public Policy from 2008 to 2011, and Associate Dean for the BI political economy programme 2004–2014. Sitter now runs BI's security program. In addition to political violence, civil war and terrorism, Sitter's research interests include EU public policy and the international political economy of energy.



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