Book review: Handbook of Terrorist and Insurgent Groups: A Global Survey of Threats, Tactics, and Characteristics[1][2]

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The Handbook of Terrorist and Insurgency Groups: A Global Survey of Threats, Tactics, and Characteristics provides a comprehensive overview of some of the most active and influential terrorist and insurgent organisations globally. Delving into the ideological underpinnings, operational strategies, and distinctive characteristics of groups such as al-Qaeda, the Islamic State, Boko Haram, and others, this handbook sheds light on the evolution and metamorphosis of these entities over time. It also explores their ties to international jihadist networks, providing valuable insights into the interconnected nature of modern terrorism.

Authored by more than fifty experts in the field and from countries around the world, this handbook employs a multi-faceted approach to dissecting the complex phenomena of terrorism and insurgency. By combining conceptual frameworks with regional analyses and case studies while drawing on an immense amount of primary and secondary data, the book strives to deepen our understanding of the key dynamics driving these violent movements. One of the central themes explored in the handbook is the response of nation-states to combating terrorism. Through 81 chapters across nine sections, the handbook outlines the various counter-terrorism tactics employed by governments to thwart the activities of terrorist and insurgent groups. By scrutinising the strategies and effectiveness of state responses, one of the advantages of the handbook is that it offers a nuanced perspective on the ongoing struggle against terrorism.

The book seeks to illuminate the political, economic, and social factors influencing the formation and modus operandi of terrorist and insurgent groups. By examining the social, political, and economic contexts in which these groups emerge, the book provides a holistic view of the root causes of terrorism. It underscores the importance of addressing these underlying issues to effectively tackle the scourge of violent extremism. The handbook also delves into propaganda and recruitment methods. It highlights how terrorist organisations leverage modern communication tools and social

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media platforms to disseminate their messages, attract new recruits, and incite fear. By understanding the propaganda machinery of these groups, policymakers and security experts can devise more targeted countermeasures to combat their influence.

The handbook highlights the evolving nature of terrorism in the technological era. The fact that radicalised individuals may find a wealth of information online, including how to make bombs and extremist views, highlights the dangers faced by lone-wolf terrorists. To combat the proliferation of violent extremism on the internet, it discusses the importance of counter-narratives and more robust cybersecurity measures. Through a series of case studies and in-depth analyses, the handbook offers a nuanced portrayal of the diverse landscape of terrorist and insurgent groups. By examining the strategic goals, organisational structures, and external support networks of these entities, the book provides a comprehensive overview of the global terrorist threat.

It discusses the various forms of insurgencies and terrorist attacks that have occurred on the African continent, particularly in North, Central, and Eastern Africa. The book highlights the increasing trend of such activities and the geographical expansion of terror groups in these regions. The chapters delve into prominent terrorist organisations like al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), al-Shabaab, Boko Haram, and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), showcasing their geographical spread and influence. Additionally, it mentions specific groups, like Ansar al-Din, operating in Mali with aspirations to expand into Mauritania and the Ivory Coast, emphasising their ties with AQIM and their role within the broader al-Qaeda 'coalition' in Africa.

The Handbook of Terrorist and Insurgency Groups serves as a valuable resource for academics, policymakers, and security practitioners seeking to deepen their understanding of contemporary terrorism. By synthesising cutting-edge research and expert insights, this handbook equips readers with the knowledge and tools necessary to confront the challenges posed by terrorist and insurgent groups in the 21st century. Although the dedicated section on analysing case studies in Africa is commendable, a handbook that solely addresses African terrorist organisations and insurgencies would be highly beneficial.