

***Countering Terrorism. Martha Crenshaw and Gary LaFree.***  
**Washington D.C: Brookings Institution Press, 2017, 288.**

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The two prominent scholars in the field of terrorism studies, Martha Crenshaw and Gary LaFree have tried to argue in their book *Countering Terrorism* that why it is so difficult to create a policy to counter terrorism. Martha Crenshaw is a Senior Fellow at the Centre for International Security and Cooperation (CISAC) and the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, as well as Professor of political science, by courtesy, at Stanford University. Gary LaFree is Professor of criminology and criminal justice and Director of the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) at the University of Maryland.

In the book, Crenshaw and Lafree provide a very detailed account of global acts of terrorism. The questions raised in the book are very relevant to the subject covered. What makes counter terrorism so challenging? Why is it so hard for the governments to formulate an effective counter terrorism policy? What are the obstacles that experts face and in what ways can terrorism best be defined, classified, studied and understood in order to design the best possible policies to counter it? The authors have answered the above questions into well-written, clear and understandable chapters.

The book is cohesive and well-structured and analyses different aspects of terrorism. The authors argue that the process of attributing a terrorist attack to a certain group, organisation or party is still relatively rare. To support their findings, Crenshaw and Lafree use a credible variety of databases, such as the Global Terrorism Database (GTI), which consists of around 170,000 cases. Their arguments rely on data retrieved from these databases, some of which have monitored every terrorist attack since the 1970s. This is a valuable addition to the quality of the book.

Crenshaw and Lafree argue that mass casualty attacks, such as 9/11, which is still the deadliest attack between 1970 and 2015, are incredibly

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rare. The aftermath of such attacks has changed the structure of national and international security policies — policies and regulations adopted after an attack are difficult to reverse and their impact can be heard vibrantly across the globe. The authors also support their argument that terrorist attacks are still relatively low by stating that in 2012 when there were 15,417 reported terrorism-related fatalities, there were 437,000 homicides worldwide.

A significant point discussed in the book is the ‘failed and foiled’ terrorist attacks. Crenshaw and Lafree argue that these types of attacks are more difficult to assess and study and are of less concern to the public. There have, for example, been around a hundred attempted plots to attack the American targets post-9/11. Of these attempts, only eight resulted in casualties. Crenshaw and Lafree argue that – according to the Failed and Foiled Plots (FPP) database – a plot can either be failed or foiled due to malfunction of equipment, change of intention and external intervention. Both the authors define plots as successful when they are physically completed and result in tangible damages.

Crenshaw and Lafree also argue that counter terrorism policies should be tailor-made to eliminate terrorist organisations due to the absence of a single type of terrorist organisation. The complete understanding and underlining the differences in structure, objective, ideology and alliances of these terrorist organisations is necessary. Without knowing the structure of a certain terrorist organisation, its leadership, cohesiveness and decision-making process, governments struggle to devise a strategy that can hit these organisations or even their reaction to the counter terrorism policies is not possible.

Similarly, creating a working counter terrorism policy for lone actors without understanding their clear affiliation and outside support will not result in producing a successful policy on the ground. What makes this difficult is that, although they are not formally part of any terrorist organisation, such terrorist individuals associate themselves with the identity and cause of a certain organisation. According to the authors, such terrorist threats are very much unexpected and unpredictable and it is almost impossible to prevent them from happening. For governments to link a certain attack to any particular organisation is a difficult process. Many organisations take credit for acts they did not commit and those responsible are not known at all, which may lead to errors in threat assessment for the

upcoming attacks. Being unable to punish the responsible perpetrator due to a lack of knowledge or misleading information or whatever may the reason be can cause public unrest. From data, provided in the book, Crenshaw and Lafree conclude that between 1970 and 2015, there were 93,485 unattributed cases and that only 40.3 per cent of attacks were attributed.

To conclude, Crenshaw and Lafree have shown that defining and measuring the effectiveness of counter terrorism measures is a considerable challenge. Terrorism is a concept that keeps on changing with time and geography so therefore counter terrorism policies should evolve and change as well based on the geography, a specific terrorist organisation, time and threat posed. The book might be dense in places but for students, scholars, counter terrorism experts, government officials and the interested public alike, it is a profound source of useful information that provides clear explanations and data generated over the course of multiple decades, to give a reliable account on the difficulties of countering terrorism.