November 2002

Book Review: Terrorism: Avoidance and Survival by Chester L. Quarles

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Like relics from a bygone era, books about terrorism written before 11 September 2001 have an understandably dated quality. Some nevertheless can be useful until the literature catches up to the new paradigm. Though flawed in many ways, Chester L. Quarles's Terrorism: Avoidance and Survival is one of those books.

The author has impressive credentials. He was a policeman and criminal investigator for both the U.S. Army and the state of Mississippi. He directed the latter's bureau of narcotics and crime laboratory. He also has owned a security company and served as a hostage negotiator/crisis management consultant in Colombia and Pakistan. He holds a doctorate in criminology and criminal justice administration. He has published extensively and directs the criminal justice program at the University of Mississippi. He even has personal experience as the subject of terrorist attacks. The Ku Klux Klan once placed a venomous snake in his mailbox to dissuade him from testifying as an expert witness.

Quarles's primary audience is expatriate employees, security professionals, managers, and executives who work abroad for non-governmental organizations like businesses and churches. He succinctly summarizes his purpose in the introduction. "This book is about learning to understand crime and terrorism in dangerous lands. It is about avoiding crime and terrorism. It is about surviving. It is about pre-incident planning, crisis incidence management and appropriate post-incident reaction" (p. vi).

The chapters about security, crime avoidance, and travel strategies are the most widely applicable. Many of the suggestions are practical, commonsense precautions that one would not ordinarily consider. For example, people should avoid spending
unnecessary time in public places near large windows because glass shards tend to cause more injuries during a bomb attack than does the blast. They should make certain the doorframes of their dwellings are reinforced to prevent a criminal or terrorist from using a car jack to bend the frame outward until the door lock no longer catches.

Quarles goes into his greatest depth when he discusses kidnapping by terrorists. He explains how most attacks consist of four stages: surveillance, invitation, confrontation, and assault. If a person can avoid surveillance, then he or she will likely never become a target for kidnapping. If targeted nevertheless, the person can still prevent an attack by declining requests to light a cigarette, make change, give directions, or assist with auto repairs. Successful resistance becomes much less probable if the attack proceeds beyond the invitation stage.

Once abducted, a hostage should attempt to forge a friendly, dependant relationship with the kidnapper. Although this behavior can lead to the Stockholm Syndrome, in which a person sympathizes with his or her captor, the bonding is often mutual and can lessen the possibility of physical abuse or execution. Quarles suggests that hostages establish a daily routine. They can retain a sense of control over their lives by maintaining their personal hygiene, physical fitness, and dignity. Above all, they should have trust and faith. Although he reminds the readers that terrorists most often take men as hostages, he has pointers for female captives as well. The author supports his advice by citing the experiences of people who survived their ordeals. Not only does he use memoirs, he has conducted interviews with “successful” hostages.

He relies heavily upon his personal background for the chapters about negotiating ransoms and releases. He believes organizations should work to reach an accord with kidnappers for several reasons. First, rescue efforts increase the probability of
death for the hostage. Second, tough rhetoric about refusing to talk with terrorists quickly loses its appeal when the victim is a loved one or close associate. Third, governments like that of the United States may recommend a stance of non-negotiation, but they often violate such policies themselves. Fourth, kidnapping insurance does not provide automatic compensation. Such policies normally pay only for the amount negotiated (up to the sum insured) and become void if word of them becomes public.

Quarles notes that most abductees from non-governmental organizations are taken for purposes of financial gain. Kidnappers are often willing to haggle over the ransom in such instances. Moreover, they will sometimes accept alternatives like donations of food or a promise to fund a community improvement project. An effective negotiator can increase the chance of a "win-win" outcome.

The author recommends organizations plan ahead of time. They should appoint a Crisis Management Team (CMT) consisting of executives and senior-level managers. After undergoing training, the CMT will perform tasks like assessing risk, determining appropriate insurance levels, and establishing policies regarding terrorism. During an actual hostage situation, the CMT will hire a negotiator, assist families, control press releases, and make final decisions regarding payment of ransom.

Quarles's suggestions for developing an institutional response to hostage situations are well reasoned, but they reflect a pre-2001 innocence about faith in large corporations. He says, for example, that employees should be required to sign power-of-attorney documents giving their organizations exclusive control over the negotiation in the event of a kidnapping. The benefit of such a policy, according to Quarles, is that family members could thereby be sued if they dissent or become disruptive. Somehow, placing one's life in the hands of a corporation above one's family seems less palatable since news broke about En-
ron's looting of employee pension funds. The author also recommends that organizations require family members to go back to the United States and that employees who survive a hostage ordeal be ordered to undergo psychological counseling. These policies no doubt have some merit, but they are rather coercive for the private sector.

By focusing so much on kidnapping, Quarles does not address the range of terrorist threats even by pre-2001 standards. How, for example, should an organization react to an attack by terrorists using chemical weapons? The author takes his chronology of major terrorist events to 1997, but he does not mention the 1995 incident in which the Aum Shin Rikyo cult killed twelve people and injured over five thousand by releasing nerve gas at rush hour on three Tokyo subways. How does an organization account for its employees after terrorist attack a building? Quarles devotes only a few sentences to the 1993 World Trade Center bombing. He says nothing about the 1995 destruction of the Murrah Building in Oklahoma City.

These omissions arise in part because the book is a second edition. Quarles published the first during the 1980s, and the updated version remains rooted in the decades of its creation. For example, he makes several references to the Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA), which achieved infamy during the 1970s by kidnapping heiress Patricia Hearst. He assumes knowledge of the 1979 Iran Hostage Crisis, the Shining Path guerrillas of Peru, and the National Liberation Front (ELN) of Colombia. These events and organizations do not reside in the cultural memory of many younger readers. Moreover, the book does not really explain the roots of modern terrorism even though Quarles has a chapter on that subject. He spends pages describing terrorists who lived centuries ago like the Assassins and the Zealots, yet he provides no background about more recent events that have given direct rise to terrorism like the 1948 partition of Palestine or the 1959 Cu-
ban Revolution. Criminal justice students reading the book will need to look elsewhere for this information.

Not all of the book's omissions involve terrorist incidents or history. In the chapter about risk assessment, Quarles says "the Crisis Consulting International (CII) method will be promoted for your use" (p. 177). Unfortunately, he never outlines it. A visit to the organization's web site (http://www.criicon.org) suggests that it is based largely on the work of Steven Fink. Quarles devotes only one paragraph to this writer, noting that Fink has developed a Crisis Impact Scale, a Crisis Plotting Grid, and a Crisis Barometer. Quarles never details any of these methods, however. He instead spends much of the chapter explaining why equation and probability-based risk assessments will not work. These arguments have much in common with the dated references to the SLA in that social scientists tended to have more faith in mathematical models during the 1970s than they do thirty years later.

Also missing from the book is any discussion about the implications of recent technologies like the cell phone and the Internet, both of which were already widespread at the time of writing. The former is an effective communications tool for either preventing or executing a terrorist attack. It also can be used as a bomb detonator (as the Israeli Mossad demonstrated by using one to decapitate an opponent). The Internet contains terrorism bulletins published by the U.S. State Department and private organizations, but conversely, terrorists can launch cyber attacks and use information on corporate web pages to advantage. The author does not refer to the Internet in either the text or the notes.

Quarles has a tendency to argue against hypothetical examples and theories instead of engaging with real ones. On pages 220-221, for example, he develops an imaginary scenario to explain how the press, hysterical family members, and opportunist politicians can make hostage negotiations difficult. He very easily could instead have discussed the role of ABC's Nightline.
newscast, the use of yellow ribbons for symbols by families, and the 1980 U.S. presidential election in exacerbating the Iran Hostage Crisis. Instead of ridiculing the idea of using force against kidnappers by creating fictitious straw men wearing green berets, he could have debated the wisdom of the successful rescue of Electronic Data System employees from Iran by company owner Ross Perot and retired Special Forces Colonel Arthur “Bull” Simons.

The book has extensive style and editing problems. The author frequently repeats himself, and he allows quotations from other works to carry his argument rather than support it. Inconsistent fonts and formats for subtitles make the text hard to follow. Apostrophes after possessive nouns almost never appear. Homonyms are often confused. Moreover, the book contains numerous misspellings, including ones of the countries Chile and Colombia in the first pages. These errors undermine the author’s authority and credibility, not to mention that of the press.

Terrorism: Avoidance and Survival probably should not be assigned to criminal justice undergraduates. The book nevertheless remains a useful resource, particularly regarding kidnapping, until people gain greater perspective on the events of 2001.

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