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In Their Own Words: Understanding Lashkar-e-Tayyaba

C Christine FairHurst, 2019

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dialogue has emerged in the field of development between researchers conducting small-scale experiments and those focused on macro-level factors. *Small Wars, Big Data* may have benefited from more attention to not only the many strengths of the tools used by the authors in this book, but also their limitations or the ways that they can be complemented by other approaches.

Second, and related to the point above, the book would have been strengthened by grappling more directly with the sometimes highly variable findings of studies conducted using the social science tools the authors champion. Early in the book, the authors acknowledge that the generation of empirically substantiated social science theories is a 'mistake-prone process and full of surprises' (p. 29). Yet a number of these surprises get underplayed in the book's discussions of conflict dynamics. In some cases (most notably in the discussion of the effects of civilian casualties), the authors discuss at some length the reasons for apparently discordant findings. But sometimes the authors are guilty of finding too much consistency when studies in fact at least partially contradict one another.

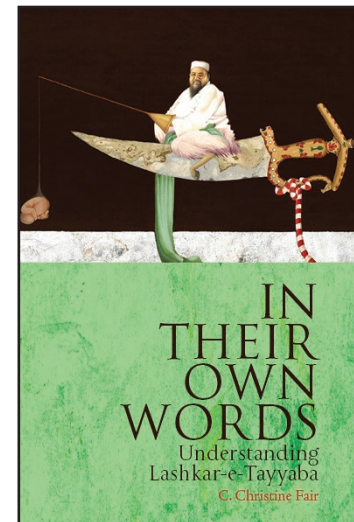
This variation in outcomes is unsurprising. Systematic reviews of randomised control trials and other rigorous micro-level empirical methods used in the social sciences have very frequently found that results vary considerably from one of these studies to the next, and the reasons for the contradictions are often unclear. In the field of development, there has recently been an increased emphasis on systematically comparing the results of multiple evaluations to determine the degree of

consensus behind specific policy recommendations and the precise conditions under which these recommendations apply. Because of challenges in acquiring the necessary data, it is harder in the field of security studies to construct field experiments in a way that might help to resolve apparent contradictions.

Beyond its scientific merits, for research such as that championed by the authors to achieve impact, it will need to be persuasive to policymakers and practitioners. Persuading these two groups – most of whom do not have a thorough understanding of the methods used by the authors of this book – requires social scientists to break away from the language of academic journals and to demonstrate that they have taken their needs seriously. Through its lucid presentation, many concrete examples and anecdotes from the authors' extensive work with practitioners in the field, this book is an excellent contribution to bringing the insights derived from cutting-edge social science tools to debates about the conduct of 'small wars'. ■

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In Their Own Words: Understanding Lashkar-e-Tayyaba C Christine Fair Hurst, 2019

Considered by some to be one of the most dangerous terrorist groups in the world, Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (LeT) emerged from the 'fag end' (p. 57) of the Afghan Civil War that more famously produced Al-Qa'ida. Responsible for the 2008 attacks on Mumbai, arguably the most audacious terrorist attacks since 9/11 and likely one of the key inspirations for the November 2015 attacks by the Islamic State on Paris, LeT is in fact one of the most sophisticated terrorist groups around. As C Christine Fair points out in *In Their Own Words: Understanding Lashkar-e-Tayyaba*, an impressive and detailed history of the group, the organisation has long since moved from being a simple terrorist organisation to becoming a political party, charity and branch of the Pakistani deep state (Pakistan's solid and consistent ruling

structures formed mostly from its security structures) that continues to be a factor in regional politics. Given the centrality to local and international security affairs of its host country, Pakistan, this gives the group an outsized relevance on the international stage. Being a potential spark between two nuclear powers that have long been at each other's throats gives weight to LeT's actions.

The group's link to the UK has always been complex. Back in the 1990s, its senior leadership would openly visit the UK to raise money for its cause from the large Kashmiri diaspora. Its narrative of being at the forefront of the fight to liberate Kashmir appealed to much of the UK's Kashmiri-Pakistani community. Some British citizens went to fight alongside the group, leading to the first trial against a Muslim imam in the UK in 1997, when then Foreign Secretary Jack Straw sought to deport an Oldham-based Ahl-e-Hadith (the sect which provides LeT's ideological basis) preacher who was assessed by MI5 as raising money, recruiting and facilitating travel of young Britons to fight alongside LeT in Kashmir. The path to liberate Kashmir that the preacher was accused of fostering was the same one along which the 7 July 2005 London bombers started their journey to infamy. Written from an American perspective, Fair's book tends to see the Mumbai attacks as the moment when US officialdom really started to focus attention on the ground – the UK was already deeply concerned about the group long before this. Fair also shows the importance of the UK, partition and post-colonialism in the group's mythology (p. 21). A heavily Punjabi organisation, LeT recruits in the part of Pakistan which was most badly impacted following partition (p. 115).

Fair is a well-established scholar of LeT and Pakistan, and an author of numerous books and academic texts on the country and the terrorist groups within it. Her mastery of the languages, and social and political dynamics of the region, is on clear display in this book, which uses LeT's own texts to explain the group. Through this, she opens up a number of interesting new aspects.

One particular phenomenon she highlights using these texts is the role of women within LeT, and their importance in the group's dynamic. This stands in contrast to other Kashmiri-focused jihadi groups like Jaish-e-Mohammed (p. 135) and is what helps strengthen the organisation as a national institution. 'LeT is the only *jihadi* organization in Pakistan that has an active women's wing that issues its own publications' (p. 135). This is significant given the large number of jihadi organisations in the country. In the various LeT texts Fair cites, she quotes stories about women's support for the group, their pride in their sons or husbands fighting and dying for the group – calling on their menfolk's 'brothers' to not 'let his Kalashnikov fall' (p. 144). She also identifies how the group goes out of its way to permit and encourage female support at its events, including creating a separate section where they can gather at public events. The fact the group does this at some monetary cost reflects the importance it assigns to women's participation. Most recruitment Fair identifies takes place among family and friends (p. 125). While she does not explicitly identify any countermeasures that might deal with the role of women as radicalisers for the group, she does propose the idea of women being a vector for future countering violent extremism engagements.

Fair is clearly interested in the role of women in the group, and sees some value in looking in the future into understanding how they might be used to help deradicalise cadres.

The book is also persuasive in illustrating the importance of Kashmir to the overall Pakistani national mythology and its centrality to the Pakistani security state. She quotes Chief of Army Staff (often referred to as the most important figure in the country given the dominance of the army in national affairs) Raheel Sharif who during his Martyr's Day speech in 2014 'explained that Kashmir is Pakistan's *sheh rag*, or jugular vein ... Kashmir is "nothing less than a struggle for [the] very existence of Pakistan as a viable nation-state"' (p. 36). Within this context, LeT, one of the key foot soldiers in the struggle for Kashmir, is characterised as a central institution of Pakistan's deep state. The emergence of a political branch (the Milli Muslim League, MML), its emphasis on charity and support in disaster-stricken areas (in particular during the 2005 earthquake, though Fair points out how the Pakistani state has sought to exaggerate its role (p.190)), as well as its well-funded and effective security apparatus, make it a very useful and deniable proxy in the ongoing tensions between Pakistan and India.

In contrast to the many other proxies that the Pakistani state is accused of supporting, in the book LeT is shown to be one that the state supports both practically and ideologically in many different ways. For example, it refrains from launching attacks within the country, it has refused to stir up the sectarianism that is popular within Pakistan against the Ahmadiyya community (a minority Muslim sect that is believed by many to be apostate) and it tells its followers that they

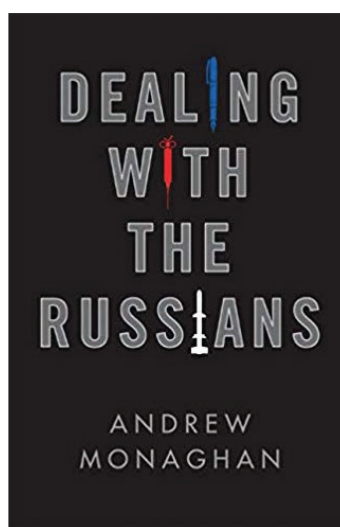
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are not permitted to overthrow Muslim leaders. This is something the group finds itself talking about a lot as followers ask why the organisation is so fixated on fighting enemies of Islam abroad when the government in Pakistan is hurting Muslims through its corrupt behaviour. The group's line is that such leaders do not deserve to be overthrown, but rather to be persuaded through active proselytisation. In her book, Fair cites a number of LeT thinkers who say 'violence is never a legitimate response with which to contend with an illegitimate Muslim leader no matter how dissolute he may be' (p. 172). As with many things, the LeT thinkers see 'any argument for *jihād* in Pakistan as a conspiracy, fostered by India or other enemies of Pakistan' (p. 172).

A detailed and academic text, Fair's book is written in the form of chapters which can each stand alone. While this might impede narrative flow across the book as a whole, it does make for a rich text which draws on an impressive array of primary texts including a number of LeT's own magazines, books and reports to paint a detailed picture of the group. Given LeT's continuing importance, such insightful work is to be welcomed and shows the complex and diverse array of extremist groups that the world continues to face. ■

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Dealing with the Russians

Andrew Monaghan
Polity Press, 2019

How to deal with Russia? For Andrew Monaghan, an acclaimed scholar of Russian contemporary history and military affairs, this is not a rhetorical question but an issue at the heart of the current academic, public and policy debates. His book, *Dealing with the Russians*, brings together history, politics and strategy, both in Russia and in the collective West, to improve understanding of why and how Russia is perceived as a challenge and what is the best way to address it. Although the book is about 'dealing with the Russians', it also highlights the Western strategic mentality and political state of mind currently prevailing in the US and the UK. This makes the book appealing not only for Russia-watchers, but for anyone who follows the current strategic competition between Russia and the collective West. The book has several merits – sharp analysis, broad analytical scope, and original and accessible language. Perhaps foremost among them, however, is its ability to talk to

different audiences – scholars, practitioners and the general public – and to reflect on both ends of the great power competition.

Monaghan demonstrates that the events of 2014 were not the root cause of the problem, but one of its symptoms

Monaghan outlines how Moscow began to emerge, in the West's perception, as a peer military competitor to NATO in the European theatre, and what challenges this perception posed to Western decision-makers. He offers a sharp and elegant narrative, which demonstrates how uncertainty about Russia's strategic intentions and operational capabilities since 2014 has exacerbated the security dilemma for Washington and Brussels, eventually giving rise to a widely shared assumption that Russia is an expansionist geopolitical challenger (Chapter 1: The Predicament). The book goes on to describe how the quest for an appropriate response resulted in the polarisation of Western decision-makers between two camps: advocates of *détente* and *dialogue* with Moscow, with the aim of cooling the tensions, leading towards normalisation and cooperation, and preventing a military clash; and proponents of *deterrence* reinforcement regarding the Kremlin, which mainly focuses on military containment of Moscow's perceived aggressiveness.

Monaghan's argument is straightforward: such a dichotomy is strategically useless, and each school of 'dealing with the Russians' suffers from several