

Taillon, J. Paul de B. *The Evolution of Special Forces in Counter-Terrorism: The British and American Experiences*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001.

In the aftermath of 11 September, scholarly treatments of terrorism and how to combat it have increased dramatically and become far more relevant. With the United States military in full war mode, backed up by Great Britain and perhaps Canada, it is of special interest to understand how allies cooperate to combat the threat of terrorism in all its myriad forms. While the operations against the El Qaeda network in Afghanistan were on a large scale, as evidenced by OPERATIONS ANACONDA and APOLLO, J. Paul de B. Taillon, an Adjunct Professor for War Studies at the Royal Military College of Canada in Kingston, Ontario, examines lower-level British and American counter-terrorism operations of the recent past.

The author explores the history of British and American special forces from their origins in World War II as the British Special Operations Executive (SOE) and the American Office of Strategic Services (OSS) to the modern, elite British Army's Special Air Service (SAS) and the United States Army's Delta Force. After establishing this historical foundation, Taillon proceeds to explain the reasons why certain counter-terrorism operations have succeeded, and has settled on the thesis that international cooperation is essential. Unfortunately, there are some doubts about his methodology and conclusions.

In the first instance, Taillon suggests that governments may not consider the modern terrorist threat "so serious that they would risk open cooperation with regimes with which they feel they have little in common." (p. xii) Clearly, since 11 September the United States is prepared to cooperate with anyone that will lend assistance in the "war on terrorism." What, may one ask, has the United States in common with Pakistan? Taillon is on even less solid ground when he suggests that inflicting heavy cost on terrorist organizations in operations of the very recent past "provided the opportunity for deterring future attacks." (p. xiii) Ironically, he cites the 1998 bombing of Osama Bin Laden's camps in Afghanistan as proof of this assertion. Obviously, this statement is inconsistent with 11 September and Taillon at least later acknowledges that striking back might not have the intended deterrent effect.

The major problem with the book, however, is to be found in his choice of case studies, so chosen to underpin his thesis. His first case study is the 1980 Iranian embassy siege in London, summarily dealt with by the elite 22nd SAS Regiment from Hereford. After a few days of preparation the SAS stormed the building, killed five of the six terrorists and secured the hostages in 11 minutes. Yet Taillon's example of international cooperation in this instance is British access to No. 17 Princess Gate belonging to the Ethiopian Embassy situated directly beside the Iranian Embassy. In fact, it seems a poor example of interna-

tional cooperation, the absence of which would not have mattered. OPERATION NIMROD, as the SAS mission was designated, was a British operation with a lone German GSG9 observer. Indeed, Taillon freely admits that “As this was a ‘home’ operation, the requirements for international cooperation to assist the Special Air Service ... appear to have been minimal.” (p. 50)

Taillon’s second case study, OPERATION EAGLE CLAW, Delta’s attempt to free the Iranian hostages in 1980, appears to be an even more inappropriate choice. International cooperation was indeed more visible in this operation. Egypt allowed the US to use an airfield at Qena and Oman permitted them to use an off-shore island. The British made available Diego Garcia for equipment modification and Turkey may have allowed an AWACS to operate in Turkish airspace. There is some indication that Colonel Charlie Beckwith’s Delta team had trained with GSG9 and had been advised by the SAS and the French GIGN. The GSG9 even offered a team to go in. The Canadian ambassador to Iran, Ken Taylor, also played a role by providing intelligence to the Americans and two former Iranian generals acted as informers. There was also the possibility that Israel lent assistance in some fashion.

Indeed, Taillon assembles much better evidence to support the methodology of international cooperation in this second case study, but his evidence does not enhance his argument that such cooperation is essential for success because of the simple fact that EAGLE CLAW ended in dismal failure in the Dasht-e-Kavir desert. Had it been a success his thesis would have been stronger. Thus, in one case study, there is no evidence to substantiate the claim that international cooperation helped in the successful NIMROD operation and in the other the author gathers more evidence of international cooperation in a losing effort. This basic weakness of logic renders the work incongruous. Indeed, looking only a little farther afield, one can bring forth the highly successful 1976 unilateral Israeli hostage rescue at the Entebbe airfield in Uganda as powerful evidence that international cooperation is not a necessary adjunct to success.

In conclusion, the best part of the book is the evolutionary history of British and American special forces. Even if the essence of Taillon’s work, that international cooperation is necessary for successful counter-terrorism actions, is basically sound, Taillon fails to prove his argument that international cooperation is essential in such low-level counter-terrorism operations such as hostage rescues.

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