The attacks of 9/11 resulted in an inevitable landslide of literature on terrorism. Some of it was good, much of it was not – but all of it tried to respond to the initial and seemingly insatiable appetite for information on terrorists. Information about terrorists was suddenly very important to the United States.

Those aware of what to look for gravitated to resources like Bruce Hoffman’s, *Inside Terrorism*, published three years before the attack.¹ This work gave the astute reader a chance to appropriate a significant understanding of the phenomena. Hoffman’s encyclopedic understanding of terrorism, based on twenty years of research, was then—and remains now—head and shoulders above most commentary on the issue.

From a different but still research based perspective, Philip B. Heymann’s *Terrorism and America* framed how security policy might be considered in light of the terrorist threat,² especially following the Oklahoma City Bombing in 1995 that killed 168 people. Students of terrorism question how aware political decision makers were of the need for careful consideration of terrorism’s impact given the United States’ action/inaction, following the two nearly simultaneous East Africa Bombings in 1998, or the attack on the USS Cole in which seventeen sailors were killed as the destroyer refueled in the Yemeni port in the Gulf of Aden.

What seemed slow in coming immediately after the 9/11 attacks was research-based material that government decision makers, who appeared to be caught off guard by the attack on our homeland, could use to form a coherent strategy to fight back effectively against terrorists. While think tank research from places like the RAND Corporation, funded by the military and intelligence communities, provided specific answers to terrorism questions, there was little available outside of that realm. One exception was Christopher Hewitt’s *Understanding Terrorism in America*,³ which argued, rather convincingly, that governments impact terrorism using traditional law enforcement efforts. While this does not appear to be a groundbreaking insight at this point, in 2003 much of the nation was focused on purely military responses. Nearly ten years later many now agree with Hewitt’s early assessment.

Hard-line Likud Party leader and now two-time Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu wrote the first edition of *Fighting Terrorism* in 1995.⁴ The publisher quickly brought a new edition of the text back to the market in 2001 following the September attacks. Though interesting as a primer on the Israeli experience, the Palestinian focus, Israeli-specific threat environment, and a completely different government situation left little for US policy makers to take from the work. Netanyahu wrote a foreword trying to tie Israeli experience to the events of 9/11, but the scale and lack of research-based direction made the work woefully inadequate to the task facing American policy makers. Importantly, the work was Netanyahu’s perspective on the Israeli experience not the research-based guidance needed at that critical time.

Real research as the base of counterterrorism and insurgency strategies was key to what was needed then, and indeed, what is needed now. It is unclear why the policy community believed that research meeting their needs would immediately spring from a government environment in which few seemed willing to recognize that a post-Cold War conflict period left US hegemony vulnerable to asymmetric strategies devised in ungoverned and hostile regions. By 2004, authoritative commentators on the issue, such as Michael Scheuer writing under the pseudonym Anonymous, warned us in his book, *Imperial Hubris*,⁵ that trusting our
nation’s security to a bi-polar framework that no longer existed was indeed hubris.

The Center for Civil Military Relations (CCMR) at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, CA has been building US partner nation capacity in governments, on issues related to terrorism, since 1994. Paul Shemella is both the program manager for the Combating Terrorism Fellowship Program at CCMR and the editor for this volume. Shemella has put together an impressive array of subject matter experts from CCMR faculty to address the question of how a government can “fight back” against terrorism in Fighting Back: What Governments Can Do About Terrorism.

Shemella, serving as editor in the Stanford University series on security studies, weaves together a three-part framework to address the “complex problem of terrorism” facing nations around the world. The first section of the book deals with many of the most important concerns governments now face in relation to terrorism. Serious research-based analysis is brought to bear on six important terrorism topics, dispelling unsubstantiated claims and giving the reader a firm base upon which to build a strategy for how to fight back.

In the June 2008 edition of Homeland Security Affairs, David Tucker made the argument that the conventional wisdom is wrong when it comes to terrorism, networks, and strategy. Tucker’s article challenges the oft heard line that, “it takes a network to defeat a network.” In Fighting Back, Phil Williams addresses both what Tucker calls the conventional wisdom and an argument related to Tucker’s 2008 discussion that challenges that “wisdom.” The chapter is emblematic of the approach the book takes throughout. The authors situate their analysis within the discussions relative to research today. By understanding and presenting the salient aspects of the various approaches, Fighting Back equips the reader to use elements from each approach in constructing government strategies to combat terrorism.

An issue not often covered in the literature is the threat of maritime terrorism. But with so much of the nation’s global economy delivered by ship this is an obvious deficit in the literature. Peter Chalk has long been a knowledgeable commentator on the issue. In this offering, Chalk makes a strong argument for the danger posed in the maritime domain as it relates to the global economy. Noting the al Qaeda desire to bleed the US economy, the impressive array of sources and arguments the chapter uses leaves the reader concerned with this apparent vulnerability little discussed in much of the terrorism literature.

Beyond the economic impact a maritime attack may have, the idea that cruise ships present a possible mass casualty target should give pause to a nation like the US, which is so focused on leisure.

The book then turns to government responses to terrorism within a realistic and critical framework that argues good governance is key to countering the terrorist threat. While consequence management is appropriately addressed, it does not serve as the hermeneutic for understanding how to frame the fight. This framework must include government capacity, interagency decision-making, and the real “how to” of building counterterrorism institutions in a balanced approach that considers issues like ethics and measuring effectiveness. These topics are often left out when the framework for understanding terrorism is consequence management alone.

The question of ethics in countering terrorism catches some people off guard. The obviously immoral and unethical actions of the terrorist in targeting non-combatants makes many see any counter action as ethical. The first question Robert Schoultz, the author of the chapter discussing ethics asks is, “Why fight ethically?” The question is important and not necessarily straightforward or easily understood for those who are outside the conflict. Schoultz deals with all the standard background and moral frameworks for action in war – but then he goes further and shows the practical issues involved. His argument is couched in what he calls the “honorable warrior” ethos. The series of small vignettes he uses to illustrate the various ethical questions are powerful and effective.

The volume’s real life vignettes also bring to mind how the current leader of al Qaeda, Ayman al-Zawahiri, has talked about his imprisonment in Egypt. In his own words he suggests that the torture carried out by the Egyptian government against him helped
form his ideas about how and why to carry out terrorist attacks. That unintended consequence of his torture is in part shaping this vicious terrorist today. I am not justifying terrorist actions; I am suggesting that Schoultz’s insights on ethics are not to be taken lightly and by considering our actions we may avoid unintended consequences. This is particularly poignant given the recent Arab Spring destabilization of that Egyptian government, which we financed for many years but now admit was brutal and dictatorial while at the same time supported US foreign policy goals in the region vis-à-vis Israel. These are not simple questions and the chapter is a good guide to thinking through the various issues of the day.

Readers of Homeland Security Affairs are likely aware of the impact interagency relationships can have on attempts to form effective counterterrorism institutions. Again, this book boldly goes where few academics are able to effectively tread. The faculty members who put this work together have extensive experience in dealing with these same issues in the field, sometimes in places which where recently conflict zones. The models they propose are relevant to the US at this moment especially given the current budget and economic situation facing our government in particular and the nation in general.

The chapter on interagency decision-making, written by Lawrence Cline, suggests that one of the primary reasons he analyzes interagency communication difficulties is that “...competing interests can pose real obstacles to coordination and cooperation.” The identification of the issues is helpful – but really it is the roadmap to fixing them that should be of the greatest interest to us. Looking at real relationship hurdles between agencies and departments like the Department of Homeland Security, Federal Emergency Management Agency, Office of the Director of National Intelligence, the National Counterterrorism Center and various Joint Terrorism Task Forces allows the reader to deal with the real and significant issues that keep us from being effective in light of Shemella’s previous chapter blueprinting how to build effective counterterrorism institutions. The two together are a powerful statement that should be heeded.

Now ten years into the post 9/11 reality, Fighting Back provides a quality piece of research-based material for students of terrorism and policy makers alike. While the research is more substantial than I am able to deal with in this short review, each of the topics is essential and contributes to the overall positive impact the book makes. Sure to take its place among other important and enduring books such as those mentioned above, Shemella and colleagues have answered their own sub-title of What Government Can Do About Terrorism – they are fighting back.

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5 Michael Scheuer, *Imperial Hubris: Why the West is Losing the War on Terror* (Washington, DC: Brassey’s, Inc., 2004).
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