

Psychology of Terrorists: Profiling and CounterAction

By Raymond H. Hamden. Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2018.
142 pp. \$67.16.

In the aftermath of terrorist attacks, we are often left wondering: How could someone do this? What sort of mind would allow for the killing of innocent civilians through willful action? In the book *Psychology of Terrorists: Profiling and CounterAction*, Dr. Raymond H. Hamden seeks to shed light on the mindset of a terrorist as an individual.

Psychology of Terrorists is organized into 11 chapters, starting with the historical perspective of terrorists, then discussing psychological defense styles. Types of terrorists are detailed next, with specific chapters devoted to each subtype. The author moves through techniques for interviews and interventions and understanding terrorist attacks. The conclusion of the book addresses profiling and its use in both counterterrorism and counteraction.

The book opens with a description of terrorism and the historical underpinnings of this topic. Emphasis is placed on the unique challenges present in defining the word “terrorism” and how various criteria are typically present when an action is labeled as such. The book accurately summarizes how matters of perspective can play a role in the labeling of terrorism, particularly when there is ambiguity between what is considered terrorism and what actions appeared justified to certain groups. The quote “One man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter” encapsulates this interesting dynamic.

One of the most fascinating aspects of this work is the distinction between psychopathic, ethnographic, and retribitional terrorists. In the media, we are commonly exposed to the concept of an ethnographic terrorist, someone who upholds either a religious or a political cause and uses terrorism to further an agenda related to that cause. This differs greatly from the psychopathic terrorist, who may be hired to engage in terrorism but does not subscribe to an overarching religious or political schema. Retribitional terrorists can also be quite distinctive because they are motivated by a desire to right an actual or perceived wrong done to them or to a group with which they identify.

Psychology of Terrorists goes beyond simply introducing a classification scheme, though. The typologies interact with deeper considerations of the psychology of the individuals. For example, Dr. Hamden illustrates the defense mechanisms, profiling, and negotiation tactics within each of these groups, with stark differences in how some of the groups are approached compared with others. This differentiation makes sense, particularly in the negotiation portion of chapters, because different motivations lead to different areas of psychological focus.

The last part of the book discusses an understanding of terrorist attacks, including methods, tactics, and strategies, and how various interventions with those who commit acts of terror can have differing impacts. Hamden cautions against interrogation techniques because the information they might produce is suspect, but he introduces the reader to new ideas for using interventional strategies and “deradicalization.”

I found this book to be a very good overview of understanding how psychological theories apply to terrorists. For a forensic psychiatrist, this is an excellent primer and a valuable sampler of the various components of this topic. The structure of the book maintains interest and builds upon ideas introduced in earlier chapters. Discussions about defense mechanisms appear targeted to an audience already familiar with these concepts, allowing the text to strike a careful balance between being overly simplistic or overly advanced. *Psychology of Terrorists* is sure to inspire an interest in this area of study, both for use in expert evaluations and for future research.

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21 Lessons for the 21st Century

By Yuval Noah Harari. New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2018.
372 pp. \$21.49.

In *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*, Yuval Noah Harari lays out a chilling vision of humanity’s predicament. He argues that liberalism, which emphasizes the importance of liberty and freedom in political and economic life, became the predominant ideology of the

20th century but is inadequate to manage the global challenges of the 21st century posed by nuclear weapons, emerging technologies, and impending ecological changes. Instead, tribalism in the form of nationalism, religion, and culture threatens to divide humanity against itself, leading to such problems as intolerance, war, and terrorism. The solution, Harari claims, is to avoid relying too heavily on any one narrative and instead to strive to see the world as it truly is. To do so, we should remain humble, seek reliable sources of data, understand our limitations and biases, and be ready for change.

As the title indicates, *21 Lessons for the 21st Century* is divided into 21 chapters, loosely organized in five parts, with a brief introduction, endnote references, and an index to round out the page count. Part I: The Technological Challenge asserts that artificial intelligence and mechanization will radically change the nature of human work, as well as enable human behavior to be thoroughly understood and eventually controlled, and these changes will worsen inequality. Part II: The Political Challenge analyzes the emergence of a global community and the limits of that community, identifying different ways in which tribal interests have divided humanity along nationalist, religious, and cultural lines. Part III: Despair and Hope describes the potential conflicts of terrorism and war and proposes that we inoculate ourselves against these threats by being humble and skeptical of both religious and secular dogmatism. Part IV: Truth delves into the “posttruth” world, explaining that the proliferation of unfiltered information undermines our ability to detect factual and moral truths. Part V: Resilience suggests that, to make our way forward, we must first understand ourselves, learn to think critically, and strive to minimize suffering rather than adhere rigidly to any particular narrative or doctrine.

The author, Yuval Noah Harari, has a PhD from the University of Oxford and is a historian and lecturer at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. His other books are *Sapiens: A Brief History of Mankind* and *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*. Whereas *Sapiens* focuses on humanity’s past and *Homo Deus* focuses on humanity’s future, *21 Lessons* addresses contemporary issues.

21 Lessons is well-written and accessible, and deals with many topics of current vital concern. Although it can at times be difficult to trace the thread across different sections of the book, the prose flows well and reads

smoothly. The book’s central theme is that the stories we have told to make sense of the world (political stories, scientific stories, religious stories, personal stories) are failing to account for the massive changes that have occurred in the last few decades. As a result, people are vulnerable as they struggle to develop stories to understand their new realities and can be drawn to restrictive ideologies that offer the allure of a straightforward and simplified view of a complex and shifting society.

Although *21 Lessons* is of general interest, it has little relevance to forensic psychiatry specifically. Some of the issues discussed are tangentially related. For example, Harari speculates about the implications that an improved understanding of neuroscience and human decision-making will have on free will and personal choice. He also discusses the importance of narrative in helping people forge meaning. This emphasis on narrative will be familiar to forensic psychiatrists, who are routinely tasked with ascertaining and conveying the arc of a person’s experiences. Whether writing a report explaining how a traumatic childhood contributed to a defendant’s offense conduct or testifying about the profound effects of psychiatric disability on an individual’s day-to-day life, forensic experts recognize the powerful impact a well-crafted narrative can have.

Ultimately, *21 Lessons for the 21st Century* is a worthy read, not because it deals with topics in psychiatry or law, but because it articulates the big problems facing the global community, problems that will require the talents of scholars in many disciplines, including forensic psychiatry. Readers will likely disagree with some of Harari’s claims and conclusions, but the book provides a digestible and absorbing entry into these vexing matters.

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