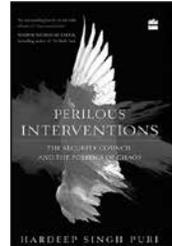

Book Reviews

*Perilous Interventions:
The Security Council and the Politics of Chaos*

Hardeep Singh Puri
(Harper Collins India, 2016)

Rs 435/-



The book *Perilous Interventions* is direct and hard-hitting as it is largely an authoritative narrative based on a series of case studies on the dangers of the interventionism of the West into the complex political systems of the Arab and African worlds of which they understand little, sitting in the plush offices of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). In the words of the author, “The shameless pursuit of narrowly defined interests is most often the motivation, and seldom raises the eyebrows in the world of multilateral diplomacy.” While defining a perilous intervention and the accompanying heavy human and economic costs it has brought, Puri is highly critical of the UNSC and warns the functionaries in the multilateral system that if the council is allowed to function in the manner that it is doing, it would be counter-productive to the singular objective for which it was created – world peace. Hardeep Singh Puri, who served as the Permanent Representative of India to the UN in Geneva from 2002-05 and in New York from 2009-13, coinciding with the period in 2011-12 when India was a non-permanent member of the Security Council, has given readers a rare insight into the events and the short-sighted, misjudged decisions that took place in the UNSC in respect of the intervention in Libya.

The author, through detailed case studies covering the destruction of Iraq by the United States on the pretext of the presence of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs), the genesis of the Arab Spring, the happenings in Libya, Syria, Yemen, Crimea, and closer home, India's intervention in Sri Lanka, has made a strong case against the recurring practice of diplomats at the UNSC to act against the interest of their own countries by arming rebels, affecting regime change, not thinking through the consequences and destroying the cultural fabric in the bargain. The haunting truth, that if the lessons from history are not acknowledged and assimilated, then those same mistakes are liable to be committed again, is looking in the face of the international community today in the form of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and other global terror outfits.

In his misplaced exuberance, Benjamin Netanyahu, the then Prime Minister of Israel, declared in 2002 that if Saddam's regime was taken out, it would have positive reverberations in the region; but as the world would witness seven months later, the US misadventure cost more Iraqi and American lives than were lost during Saddam's regime, leaving behind Al-Qaeda and the ISIS as ugly reminders of this failed intervention. While the 2003 US intervention in Iraq did not have the sanction of the UNSC, the latter authorised the military action in Libya in 2011 and remained starkly inactive in Syria in the following two years. Puri narrates in great detail the situations that led to the military intervention in Libya, apparently to protect civilians, the decision for which was taken in a high-end Manhattan restaurant in the presence of UN Secretary General (UNSG) Ban Ki Moon and top diplomats from countries represented in the UNSC. He then goes on to explain how the Libyan experience led to total inaction at the UNSC, caused largely due to the vested interests of the West attempting to effect a regime change, while the Russians and Chinese, having learnt from the Libyan experience, constantly blocked any move at the UNSC. As the Syrian tragedy unfolded, the world looked on with silent, helpless, bewilderment. Syria, in the last four years, has

seen half a million people killed, nearly five million internally displaced, and millions fleeing the violence; cascading into a major migrant crisis in Europe. The Security Council, experiencing complete paralysis induced by the Russia and China veto, just stood silent.

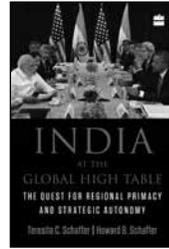
In the last and final case study, the author takes up India's tryst with military intervention in the Tamil-Sinhala conflict in Sri Lanka which ended in the assassination of the former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. The international community and also India chose to look the other way as the Sri Lankan government proceeded with an offensive in May 2009 to militarily obliterate the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

The book, written in the most lucid and readable fashion, could not have come at a better time. It addresses the practitioners, the policy-makers, multilateral diplomats, the international community at large and, most importantly, the Security Council, with a clear message for introspection and soul-searching for having brought the world to the edge. As Amre Moussa, former Secretary-General of the League of Arab States very aptly mentions in the Foreword, reform of the UN is no longer an option but a prerequisite for a sustainable global order.

Lt Col Sanjay Barshilia

Senior Fellow, Centre for Land Warfare Studies, New Delhi

*India at the Global High Table: The Quest for
Regional Primacy and Strategic Autonomy*
Teresita C. Schaffer and Howard B. Schaffer
(Harper Collins Publishers India, 2016)
Rs 599/-



The book is a comprehensive study on India's global vision, its impact on shaping Indian foreign policy from independence till date and the Indian negotiating style in strategic diplomacy. Indians bemoan their own perception that they have been at the periphery in global strategic affairs which is not in consonance with their view of themselves. May be we assign too much of importance to our own image or the West is more involved in West and East Asian affairs which have, since the end of the World War II, impacted its security concerns to a greater degree. Therefore, it is good to introspect through this book without being coloured by our own self-assessment which invariably will be subjective. The Indian reader should see this book as a mirror shown to us by someone who understands our potential and our psyche to a large degree, objectively. Teresita and Howard Schaffer do that very well as they know our strengths as well as weaknesses intimately and do not indulge in heuristics or biases.

Post liberalisation, India has taken on a growing global presence economically and strategically which has brought it into the bigger league. *India at the Global High Table* is an insightful and integrated analysis of how India is managing its evolving role. The authors clarify India's strategic vision and foreign policy, and the negotiating behaviour that links the two. In the beginning, they briefly but very succinctly, explain the historical, cultural and Nehruvian underpinnings of India's foreign policy. These will enable a foreigner to understand the basis for the Indian self-assessment of a civilisational superiority because of which it believes

that it speaks from a moral high ground. The authors state that this is a trait shared with another old civilisation, China, but without the latter's reliance on patience and ambiguity.

There are four concepts expounded throughout the book which offer an explanation of Indian foreign and security policy today. These are firstly, India's belief in its own exceptional character; secondly, its non-alignment history post-independence and drive for "strategic autonomy"; thirdly, its determination to maintain regional primacy; and, fourthly, and more recently, its surging economy. Strategic autonomy, as opposed to non-alignment which was a product strengthened by the bipolar power centres of the Cold War, is something which can be pursued without any partners. Being a nuclear power is an enabling factor in this autonomy. This explains the emotions which were stirred in India in the negotiations of the '123 Agreement' which required placing India's breeder reactors under safeguards. This was construed to be detrimental to India's strategic autonomy.

The book provides valuable insight into, and a compiled history of, modern Indian foreign affairs events as also the thinking which went behind key negotiations that have rarely, if ever, been dissected in detail before. These include the ones regarding the Sino-Indian border dispute and the US-India nuclear deal. The book gives a detailed examination of India's negotiating practices. These are affected by the Indian propensity to not make public its strategic weaknesses and not appear to be a follower or of being dictated to. The latter trait, along with the feeling of being exploited by the Western colonialists, had led to the post-independence policy of non-alignment. Because of the civilisational reason mentioned earlier, India had considered itself to be a wellspring of spiritual and moral authority, a view still widely held by its people and politicians. The book also states that India does not have a culture of quickly undoing a logjam in negotiations because of a wrong decision. This is because of a cultural affinity of respect for

the leader or head of the family, in this case ‘the state’. If the head of the state has taken a wrong decision, there is an almost paranoid requirement of maintaining the dignity of this head by obfuscating the mistake.

This book provides a unique and comprehensive understanding of India as an emerging international player and the choices it will have to consider between its classic view of strategic autonomy and the advantages that come with having a closer strategic partnership in a world where events move faster due to it being a networked world. The project seeks to produce incisive analyses and arguments for a strategy that can enable the United States to shape, defend, and adapt the liberal international order for the 21st century. To that extent, this book not only provides us a useful insight to manage our strategic affairs with respect to the world, but also provides us an oblique view of how to negotiate and interact with the US, a country with which we have an evolving strategic partnership. The book is a valuable read, backed by original research for readers, researchers, diplomats and analysts following India and the South Asia region.

Lt Gen **Ghanshyam S Katoch** (Retd)

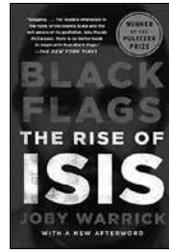
Former Director General, Perspective Planning, Army HQ, New Delhi

Black Flags: The Rise of ISIS

Joby Warrick

(London: Transworld Publishers, 2015)

Rs 699/-



Black Flags: The Rise of ISIS is an all encompassing account of how the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) came into being. Through its brutal terror tactics and international linkages, guided by a certain form of Islam, it is clear that the ISIS is vying for permanency of the Islamic Caliphate. In the recent past, the world has observed ISIS' brand of terror, using modern weaponry and tactics. In *Black Flags: The Rise of ISIS*, the author sets out to explain how a group of criminals considered unruly by Al Qaeda eventually evolved into the present day's most brutal and savage *jihadi* group.

The book tries to explain how the ISIS came of age and the reasons for its appeal to the Muslim population throughout the world. The author describes at length the man who founded the group that evolved into the ISIS, Abu Musab al Zarqawi, a Jordanian criminal whose commitment to violent religious extremism was forged in jail. Though Zarqawi was a Jordanian, the book vividly highlights how Zarqawi was able to push Iraq to the brink of a sectarian war in the aftermath of the US invasion of Iraq through his unrelenting waves of savage attacks on Shiite civilians in their mosques, bazaars, and schools. According to the author, Zarqawi introduced to the world a new form of highly intimidating terrorism – the beheading of individual hostages captured on video and broadcast around the world – a tactic adopted by the ISIS to proliferate its propaganda and spread fear. To account for Zarqawi's story, the author is found to rely on his personal interviews with intelligence and military officers who spent years tracking Zarqawi.

In his account of Zarqawi, the author states that the man had no capacity for warmth or nuance; rather his gruffness and refusal to conform to convention had marked him as a trouble-maker since boyhood. According to the author, Zarqawi was also battle hardened as he fought bravely and even recklessly in Afghanistan against the Soviets, which imbued impulsive violence in his personality. While the author describes him as a brave man bordering on foolhardiness, the author also highlights Zarqawi's belief in becoming a *shahheed* – a martyr – as the only way to be forgiven for his past deeds by Allah. The author describes him as restless, always in haste to achieve all his ambitions in a short span of time.

Black Flags...explains at great length how Zarqawi landed in Iraq after the US invasion of Afghanistan. The author describes how, with Osama bin Laden hiding somewhere in Af-Pak, Zarqawi rose to prominence in terrorism in Iraq, without interference from Al Qaeda. The author explains how Zarqawi won over the Islamists even in Baghdad. The book describes in detail how the United States realised the significance of Zarqawi only after the assassination of American diplomat Laurence Foley in Jordan. Subsequently, the book goes on to describe how, with Colin Powell mentioning Zarqawi in the United Nations, Zarqawi became an important actor in Iraq's terrorism.

While Zarqawi went about killing innocent Iraqis, such killings, according to the author, reinforced a sense of abandonment in the Iraqis, a feeling that the Americans cared less about Iraqi self-governance and were unwilling or unable to provide basic security to the ordinary people. Subsequently, the book explains how, in spite of American intelligence officials and terrorism experts marvelling at Zarqawi's strategic cunning, they made it a point to get him. As regards the Iraqis' feeling of the Americans not being able to provide security to them, the author points out that the US military had hoped to be done with the war and not to deal with the Zarqawi brand of insurgency.

The author also describes how Zarqawi changed the battlefield in Iraq and how he used terrorism as a brutal force for creating new enemies

and allies, as it suited his purpose. The author goes on to say that it suited Zarqawi to stir hatred between Iraq's Shi'as and Sunnis. In other words, Zarqawi's stated goals were to isolate and harass the American occupiers and ignite conflict between Iraq's Shi'ite and Sunni communities. According to the author, Zarqawi achieved both. The book explains in detail how Zarqawi forged a partnership with Osama bin Laden, which marked the birth of a movement that would cleanse Muslim lands of "every infidel and wicked apostate" and pave the way for the restoration of the Islamic Caliphate.

The book recounts how Zarqawi barely escaped American assassination attempts several times and how he was finally killed in an aerial bombardment on June 7, 2006, in a city called Baqubah, with a population of half a million—a mix of Sunnis, Shi'ites and Kurds. However, the author points out that after Zarqawi's death, his foreign-led terrorist network morphed into something more insidious and homegrown. According to the author, there were scores of Iraqi *jihadists* standing ready to take up Zarqawi's mantle. While the Arab Spring spread across West Asia, the book focusses on the crisis brewing in Syria, where the Syrians mobilised to overthrow the Bashar al Assad's regime. The book touches upon how the Assad regime tried to cull the protests heavy-handedly. However, what the author describes in detail is what followed over the months of the clash between the regime and the protestors. The author is of the view that since the beginning of the attempt to topple the Assad regime, two different groups – one inside the regime, and one based abroad – took initiatives in Syria to introduce *takfirs* to the conflict in Syria. According to the author, this turned Syria's domestic crisis into an international disaster.

Further, according to the author, men who had once been aligned with Al Qaeda in Iraq and the disciples of Zarqawi are now roaming around in Mosul and other towns in Iraq and operating under a new name – the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) – and maintain that the organisation was a real country, with an administration and departments and even a flag. For the author, five years after Zarqawi's death, the ISIS

had become something that the terrorist organisations fear even more than their own annihilation. The author points out that in the initial days, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi lacked resources, fighters, a sanctuary and a cause to rally his forces and draw other Muslims into the fold; all these were achieved by Baghdadi in the chaos of revolutionary Syria.

The book describes how Baghdadi would talk about physically restoring the Islamic Caliphate in a way that nobody else had been able to. Baghdadi's aim was to establish an extremist vision of Islam and cleanse the land of apostates, which would pave the way for a final showdown between Muslims and non-believers. Another point noted by the author which he describes vividly in the book is how Baghdadi adopted Zarqawi's vision of videotaping beheadings and attacks on Shiite women, children and other private citizens.

In the recent times, much has been written about the rise of the ISIS. The differentiating factor of the book is perhaps its focus on the ISIS' roots – from Zarqawi to how Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi came to the helm of the ISIS that we know today. The author does not hold back in his assertion of how wrong it was to remove Iraq's military leaders from their jobs, leaving them vulnerable to recruitment by Zarqawi and his successors. The author's narrative in some ways blames the American authorities for not doing enough in spite of the huge amount of money spent in Iraq to block radical groups during the surge of US troops in the Iraq War. However, what is missing from the account is a clear strategy for going forward and a possible solution to bring the ISIS menace to an end. While there are numerous books on various aspects of ISIS, for a fascinating account on the roots of the ISIS and its godfather, Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, *Black Flags...* is a highly recommended one.

Dr Jaikhlong Basumatary

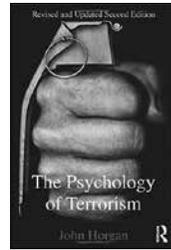
Associate Fellow, Centre for Land Warfare Studies, New Delhi

The Psychology of Terrorism

John Horgan

(Routledge, Revised and Updated Second Edition 2014)

\$ 16.83



In the current global environment, there is little question that terrorism is among the gravest of threats. Almost every country today is allocating massive resources to the task of preventing terrorism. These efforts, however, often lack a conceptual foundation for understanding terrorists and their acts of violence. This void creates a challenge for policy-makers and preventive agencies. To fill this void and understand the psychology of those who engage in terrorism, John Horgan draws on interviews with terrorists and analyses current evidence to argue that only by asking the right questions about this complex problem, and by answering them with evidence, can we truly begin to understand the nature of terrorism, and respond effectively. Consequently, this book presents a critical analysis of our existing knowledge and understanding of terrorist psychology, and in doing so, highlights the substantial shortcomings and limitations of the nature and direction of current research.

Horgan's new book, *The Psychology of Terrorism*, is a revised and expanded second edition. This new volume presents a unique model of involvement and engagement in terrorism by considering it as a process and exploring three distinct phases of the making of a terrorist: becoming involved, remaining involved (or 'being' a terrorist), and leaving terrorism behind. Despite the ongoing search for a terrorist personality, the most insightful and evidence-based research to date not only illustrates the lack of any identifiable psychopathology in terrorists, but demonstrates how frighteningly 'normal' and unremarkable in psychological terms are those who engage in terrorist activity. Horgan portrays a clear picture of the complex processes that impinge upon the individual terrorist; a different type of terrorist psychology emerges, one which has controversial

implications for efforts at countering terrorism in today's world.

The book begins by providing a compact critical review of earlier research on the psychology of terrorism. The author emphasises several points that distinguish his approach from that of others. He begins with acknowledging the phenomenon of heterogeneity in terrorism. The author describes how focussing on selective features of terrorism can mislead us as diversity of motivation and purpose across groups that employ terrorist tactics can be overwhelming and confusing. Explaining this further, the author quotes Jeff Victoroff (2005), "Terrorists are psychologically extremely heterogeneous. Whatever his stated goals and groups of identity, every terrorist, like every person, is motivated by his own complex psychological experience and traits". In addition, he concludes with four traits which may be characteristics of "typical" terrorists: high affective valence regarding an ideological issue, a personal stake (e.g. glory, need for identity, etc.) that distinguishes him or her from the vast majority of those who fulfil the first characteristic one, low cognitive flexibility, low tolerance for ambiguity, an elevated tendency towards attribution error, and, lastly, a capacity to suppress both instinctive and learnt moral constraints against harming innocents, whether due to intrinsic or acquired factors. Both individual and group forces are probably influenced by all the characteristics mentioned above. Whether or not these traits have a predictive value or represent consequential qualities, dissimilarity is a very pervasive theme when a comparison is drawn between the profiles of those who become involved in terrorism. To elucidate the phenomenon of heterogeneity, the author cites the highly coordinated series of terrorist attacks in Mumbai in November 2008. An important finding of the analysis was that "the group responsible for the massacre had higher levels of secular education compared to the generally low average for Pakistani men". One of the experts noted that "the group involved in the Mumbai massacre are some of Pakistan's best and brightest...It is a myth that poverty and madrassas create terrorism". In stark contrast to their Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) counterparts, who are barely literate and whose recruitment is often an escape from grinding poverty.

Further, the book highlights the overemphasis on the issue of radicalisation, which may not necessarily represent the workable solution

that many claim it to be. The danger comes not necessarily from radicals, but from terrorists. For instance, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals arguably stake out radical positions, but they do not typically use violence. The Animal Liberation Front, in contrast, commits acts of terror. The question remains, which group should we study and counteract? Horgan suggests that excessive attention to radicalisation, which is just a part of the spectrum of opinion that challenges the status quo, distracts from the life-saving work of reducing terrorism.

Horgan strongly emphasises his distinction between involvement in terrorism as a state and involvement as a process—a process of progression toward affiliation with a terrorist movement, pursued for any number of reasons, to play any number of roles, but in part to attain status. He also states that so-called “root causes” of terrorism are not root causes. Social injustice, for example, may be a precondition for the emergence of terrorism, but it hardly determines that result. Indeed, there is far more social injustice in the world than terrorism. Tracing the “arc” of terrorism from involvement to engagement to disengagement offers a more focussed way of ascertaining both the key behavioural features associated with each phase and how knowledge of those behaviours can inform preventive strategies. For the same, the author suggests a possible *process model* to identify behaviours and their antecedents, expected consequences and outcomes.

Further, Horgan agrees that very few people exposed to conflict become terrorists. This is the indisputable fact that suggests, contrary to those who deny it, that terrorists are indeed different. But that hardly means that all of them are different in the same way or to the same degree. Horgan characterises the tiny sub-sets who become involved as exhibiting the non-specific quality he calls “openness to engagement.” In the absence of empirical data suggesting a common trait, his amorphous concept of openness to engagement is about as good as it gets in defining the mysterious and diverse combinations of innate, developmental, and social factors that explain why widely varying individuals get involved. Overall, Horgan urges us to set aside the “why” of terrorism studies and devote more attention to the “how,” since knowing how terrorism

emerges seems more likely to empower life-saving security responses. His book is densely supplied with excellent examples of “how” plots evolve from contemplation through execution. He strongly emphasises that the search for a terrorist profile or inner mental risk factors is fruitless, whereas the search for the behaviours associated with terrorism is promising: “identifying the behaviours associated with becoming involved, ‘being’ involved and engaging in terrorist events and disengaging.”

Paradoxically, one of the most insightful contributions of this book is to point out the failures of the scholarly community. One such failure is the dearth of high quality data combined with both failure to share data and failure to understand what the data reveal about the “how” of terrorism. In the last chapter, Horgan finally addresses the main question: the psychology of counter-terrorism. The author boldly proposes that we can no longer shy away from analysing how many counter-terrorists have interfered with, rather than advanced, the very cause they claim to champion. The prioritisation of counter-terrorism initiatives should at least be influenced by those who employ evidence-based and outcomes-based approaches. The crux remains that no one knows how to undertake counter-terrorism in a better way because the right research has not been done and even if unbiased scholars had figured out what seems to work, practitioners disabled by cognitive bias and personal agendas may not listen. This pessimistic approach is the major and only shortcoming of this book. Horgan is not correct in saying we don’t know enough, and in the end, the text leaves us wondering whether we can ever trace the psyche of terrorists. *The Psychology of Terrorism* is an interesting book and it reminds us that it is high time to expose and overcome the structural, political, and psychological underpinnings of continued homeland insecurity. The conclusion of this book is a call for new thinking on terrorism and how to counter it with increasing sophistication and success.

Ms Bhhavya Gahlaut

Research Scholar, Defence Institute of Psychological Research
Defence Research and Development Organisation, Delhi