
Carolyn Goerzig. *Talking to Terrorists: Concessions and the Renunciation of Violence*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2010. 192 pp., £24.95 [Paperback], ISBN: 9780415532556.

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“Talking to terrorists remains a taboo” (Goerzig, 2010: p. 125). The adoption and reinforcement of such a moral position by many Western and non-Western governments alike has played no small role in, to a large extent, states to contain the violence and insecurity bred by terror activist in the post-Cold war and post-9/11 periods. Yet, few policymakers seem to recognize the danger in building political and social environments in which dialogue between states and terrorist groups and organizations is little more than depravity or even a betrayal to entire populations. To be sure, the protection of civilian populations has been entrusted to states that might otherwise learn better means of terrorism deterrence if lines of communication between states and terrorists were less constrained. The taboo of which Carolyn Goerzig² speaks, is one that “has been institutionalized in a legal framework in which ... academics are being asked to report on their students and in which attempting to understand the subjectivities of ‘terrorist’ suspects could be interpreted as a ‘glorification of terrorism’” (Jackson quoted in Goerzig, 2010: p. 125).

Goerzig’s book, *Talking to Terrorists: Concessions and the Renunciation of Violence*, speaks against the notion that open discussions with radicalized individuals serving in the name of violent extremist ideology represents any sort of glorification or signifies a failure on the part of governments to deter terrorist activity and help build a more secure international environment. Rather than allowing the taboo to continue to prevent scientific progress, Goerzig analyzes how the no-concessions doctrine has steered and reinforced the “demonization” of terrorism and how its “projected fears of escalating terrorism only led to

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the neglect of the topic's investigation as well as to a profound distance from the research subject" (Goerzig, 2010: p. 126). The book is therefore a groundbreaking account of what "talking to terrorists" can achieve when individuals look to other methods of solving at least in part the terrorist problem. Indeed, we find that resorting to military violence is far from effective and by no means represents the most informed, effective, or long(er)-lasting approach to deterrence and counterterrorism. Instead, we have seen, in many different instances, the escalation of violence by resorting almost exclusively to the war-model in countering terrorism in more than one location in the world rife with terrorist activity.

In building this study on no-concessions doctrine, Goerzig employs a great depth of empirical research "to establish where there is a link between negotiating with such groups and the spread of violence" (Goerzig, 2010: p. i). As the vantage point of this study, Goerzig explains the logic of the no-concessions doctrine contends that when terrorism is shown to succeed in achieving political aims, we witness the growth of further terrorism. That is, when one sees what works, we should expect to see more of it. The argument on which the no-concession doctrine is based is useful for unearthing its hidden irony – when shown to lead to the renunciation of violence by terror activists, negotiations with terrorist groups and organization, as one might expect or hope for, would become a more appealing course of action as part of counterterrorism strategies and doctrines.

The no-concessions doctrine continues to find support based on the idea of a contagion effect through which giving in to terrorist demands strengthens the position held by terrorists and weakens the position of governments like those of the United States (US), Israel, or even Egypt and Indonesia. However, Goerzig has undertaken extensive qualitative research, including numerous interviews with former-terror activists of different groups, to illustrate the fruitful relationship that can be created between "concessions to terrorists on the one hand and (non-)contagion of other terrorist groups on the other" (Goerzig, 2010: p. i). She presents a lucid and convincing argument that concessions made to terrorist groups does not inevitably lead to the strengthening of that group. Goerzig's research in four different countries overwhelmingly challenges the entire basis of no-concessions. In doing so, we find that much can be learned about the mentality as well as counterproductive and even destructive actions undertaken by many governments in the face of terrorist activities even if their talk about

good intentions and provide discursive accounts of increased security attached to distance created between the state and the terrorist.

Following the first two chapters, “Questioning the no-concessions doctrine” and “Arguing for a differentiated picture,” Goerzig’s book is divided into two parts. Each part addresses two case studies. Part I examines the “effectives of concessions on groups with similar motivations” whereas the second part turns to “groups with competing motivations.” In Part I, Goerzig analyzes *Jama’ah Islamiya*, and the Palestine Liberation Organization’s (PLO) changes and the effects that this had on its relationship with Hamas. In Part II, Goerzig analyzes the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC) and the response of the *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN) (or National Liberation Army) to its changes. She then turns to changes that took place in the *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê* (PKK) (or the Kurdistan Workers’ Party) and impact that had on the Turkish Hezbollah. Taken together, these four cases enable a differentiated conceptualization of terrorist group transformation in the face of “selective/collective” concessions in addition to the rolling effects that such concessions can have on other groups. This illuminating dynamic illustrates the burgeoning effects negotiations can have on groups sharing similar motivations. Being shown an alternative to the application of violent ideology presents avenues for peacebuilding that are mutually beneficial.

The practice does not simply imply that one side loses while the other side wins. Goerzig’s observations include patterns of radicalization viewed against patterns of deradicalization. Goerzig’s (2010: 115) analysis reveals:

[s]elective and collective concessions have the opposite effect on groups with similar motivations (i.e., groups who have a common enemy) and groups with competing motivations (i.e., groups who are enemies). While groups with similar motivations radicalize as a result of selective concessions to their fellow groups and deradicalize as a result of collective concessions to their fellow groups, groups with competing motivations deradicalize as a result of selective concessions to their competitors and radicalize as a result of collective concession to their competitors.

Despite the positive findings, Goerzig acknowledges the problems of generalizability as regards conceding to terrorists. What might be taken as fuel for the imperative not to concede, Goerzig reasons that a possibility still exists that concession can lead to further radicalization. Thus, the findings inform us that there is a distinct value in the use of selective concessions given that one must understand *when* and in *which* cases concessions might well be expected to yield a desired effect. As Goerzig (2010: p. 117) explains, “[t]he findings do not call for cancelling out certain concessions, but instead suggest adapting the practice of political signaling by providing an answer to the question of what should be kept secret and what not.” A particularly attractive feature of the research findings is the applicability of lessons learned to other, non-terrorist group, contexts like criminal groups “that explicitly pursue selective concessions as a monetary rewards” (Goerzig, 2010: p. 121). This idea in itself raises the possibility of extending the research model to other areas such as the crime-terror nexus.

Having begun with the aim of proving the no-concession doctrine wrong and concluding by proving that terrorists groups responsible for years and even decades of violent behavior can move from extremist beliefs to extremely moderate beliefs in which they actually renounce and condemn violence extends beyond the range of notable achievement. Demystifying the legacies of *jihadism* and dismissing the rationale behind the taboo associated with terrorist dialogue, Goerzig has produced an emancipatory study that still receives far too little attention and has been wholly undervalued as a productive means to end terrorism, at least in part, in an age when terrorist activities not only appears to be growing, but is also drifting beyond the control of states and other bodies of authorities tasked specifically to address this monumental challenge. This book should form the basis of a curriculum directed at an entirely new generation of terrorism scholars while seasoned scholars of the subject might be compelled to rethink previous applications of deterrence with the aim of seeing what has been done wrong and which practices should and should not be carried forward. Goerzig has not only succeeded in her challenge of filling a research gap, she has reframed an entire research agenda for current and future scholars for decades to come.