

***Matthew Hughes and Gaynor Johnson (eds.):
Fanaticism and Conflict in the Modern Age***

London: Frank Cass, 2005, 196 pages, ISBN: 0-714-68584-4.

Fanaticism has recently become an omnipresent word. Since the events of 9/11 the world's sensitivity towards its manifestations have naturally increased, and we all have been reminded with bitter regularity that this phenomenon, however defined, is fundamentally present in current international affairs. The use of the term is certainly much easier in banner headlines or media reports, where *fanatic* or *fanaticism* can encompass many undefined or abstract issues. Here the terms do not help or explain events but instead attract attention. As a result the words derived from fanaticism suffer from inflation, leading to ill-considered abbreviations or cliché-ridden definitions. From this perspective, Dominic Bryan in his contribution to the volume notes that the events of 11 September changed the political make-up of the world, allowing the claim that there are terrorists who use illegitimate violence, and those who fight terrorism using legitimate violence. It seems particularly important to relativise this false dichotomy today. Moreover, it is also apparent that the political and historical analysis requires more a precise conceptualization of the problem.

In the introduction the editors pose the key question that, in moderate variants, exercises scientific inquiry and motivates responsible strategists trying to frame the analysis of this phenomenon: *can we talk of a fanatic in terms of a set of defining characteristics?* Readers who expect a direct response will be disappointed. Nevertheless, the question is crucial for the book since it implies the complexity of the concept. Indeed, the proposed objective of this volume is to discover and expose various dimensions of fanaticism that have appeared in the selected modern conflicts. One of the essential messages, which repeatedly confronts the reader, is that the factual meaning of what makes a fanatic is very subjective. However, the contributors rightly attempt to get further behind the popular saying that one man's fanatic is another man's freedom fighter. In fact, the appreciation of subjectivity should not lead to an ignorance of society and falling-back onto absolute values. Instead it is suggested that the label fanatic may be applied instrumentally to outsiders, and hence become a tool or even a weapon. In such cases, the editors suggest, this labeling can say as much about the judges as the judged.

The volume consists of two introductory chapters and nine case studies written by prominent scholars and specialists. Editors Matthew Hughes and Gaynor Johnson provide a framework in the introduction. After a short historical review they argue that there is some continuity as well as change between the religious fanaticism of the medieval and early modern periods and the political fanaticism of the Right or Left shock troops in the 20th century. Both continuity and change consist essentially in the way states have utilized the concept of fanaticism to challenge particular groups. The difference that partially breaks the continuity lies in the fascist and communist fanaticisms

REVIEWS

of the majority or most powerful group in some states. In such cases fanaticism should be regarded as a state activity rather than a sub-state one. The last shots of the Second World War then dislodged the Rightist fanaticism from the political mainstream, but mainly led to the reemergence of fanaticism at the sub-state level. Governments began to identify certain minority groups as threats, as opposed to the pre-war situation when other states were the threats, and hence the meaning of fanaticism returned to its pre-Enlightenment origins. As will be seen later, this book observes two such groups – terrorists/guerillas and religious fundamentalists.

The studies cover a manifold range of events and conflicts. Four of them describe the different kinds of fanaticism of the German and Japanese armies in the Second World War. The first two examine the ideological background of Japanese soldiers' behavior in the Pacific War, and the particular conditions of that war. The other two describe the fanaticism that dominated Wehrmacht troops during the anti-partisan warfare in the Soviet Union, and the infamous case of the 12th SS Panzer Division of Hitlerjugend that fought in Normandy in 1944. Although this latter piece is certainly written to high academic standards, the reading still leaves a peculiar impression. Indeed, Brian Holden Reid, one of the editors of the entire Cass Series of Military History and Policy, of which this volume is issued as a part, notes in the preface that among all the themes of this book, the link between fanaticism and the young impressed him most.

The first case study of the volume is exceptional because it brushes the accepted border of modernity, focusing on the Mahdist revolt, which intended to carry *jihad* throughout the Sudan to Egypt, and thence further East in the last decades of the 19th century. The reminiscence of the colonial period in Northern Africa is also present in a chapter describing fanaticism in Algeria after the unsuccessful political and economic reforms at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. As mentioned, Dominic Bryan, in his work on the disputes between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, shows that behavior that may be considered fanatical may also appear among ordinary peoples of the United Kingdom. Finally, to conclude this short summary, it remains only to mention the case study from the region that could be hardly missing in such a book – the Middle East. Another respected specialist, Meir Litvak, in his chapter focuses on The Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas).

I have decided to review the last of the nine chapters in more detail, since it is this multi-case study that provides some general observations on fanaticism's role in guerilla warfare. Carl von Clausewitz described war as a province of extremes and primal hatreds, making fanaticism inseparable from warfare itself. Although this remark is connected particularly with guerilla wars, many aspects of fanaticism are present in all kinds of conflicts. After all, the statistics of world conflicts show that intrastate conflicts entirely prevail over interstate wars. The first phenomenon, mentioned by Christopher C. Hanlon, is the suicide attack. Two important notes relate to this topic. First, it was often imagined throughout the 1970s that military suicide attacks ended with the Japanese kamikaze pilots. However, this method was revived in 1983, when Muslim militants assaulted the US Marine Corps barracks in Beirut. Se-

cond, the suicide attacks have been most often associated with Hamas or Islamic Jihad, but as Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the Kurdistan Worker's Party have shown they have no monopoly on them. Another manifestation of fanaticism may be found in methods of killing that violate international laws and traditional norms of warfare. One of these might be the especially slow and painful methods of execution often including trademarks such as, for example, "the big smile", known viciously from Algeria. The use of children is another marker of the ferociousness of fanatics. According to UN estimates some 300,000 children participate in regular and irregular troops in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Central America, and Colombia. Hanlon further explores the more commonly-mentioned sources of fanaticism such as thirsts for power, revenge, or hatred of foreign occupation. Yet, he also analyses one more point worth underlining: an intellectual love of action. He concludes that the fanatical attraction of activity that suppresses thought can affect the immature and young particularly.

The case studies deal with diverse topics and events spread out over the last 120 years and in all parts of the world. Although the essays provide relevant and interesting insights into the problems of fanaticism, the volume as a whole exudes an impression of incongruity. For all that, after careful reading I can highlight three essential ideas that the specific and finely focused essays contribute to the analysis of fanaticism. Firstly, fanaticism can help explain a particular behavior or motivation. Regarding the selected studies this was the case of Mahdists, who managed to complement their efficient civil and military administration with fanatical ferocity in the battlefield, as well as Hamas, which is built on a religious and nationalist fanatical basis. Obviously, a cultivated fanaticism was also a driving force of the teenage SS troop.

Secondly, using the concept of fanaticism for an objective analysis is dangerous since it offers simple but superficial explanations. This volume tries to emphasize this danger primarily in the chapter dealing with anti-partisan warfare in the Soviet Union, where Ben Shepherd shows that the brutality and atrocities of the German soldiers were not only driven by fanatic National Socialist convictions but also, if not chiefly, by the frustration and difficulties of their conditions or, for example, by careerism and institutional rivalry. Similarly, the explanation of the virtual civil war in Algeria at the beginning of 1990s must, besides Islamic fanaticism, refer to factors derived from the pre-colonial and colonial period.

Finally, Craig M. Cameron in his study on the Pacific War indicates that the label of fanaticism can serve as a tool to promote certain strategies or even methods against the enemy. Cameron particularly shows how the perceived characteristics of Japanese soldiers as fanatics had two consequences for the American soldiers and society. First, the image of a fanatical enemy supported the indoctrination of the American soldiers, who themselves tended to behave similarly fanatical on the surface. Second, American society began to perceive not only the Japanese army but the entire Japanese culture as fanatical, removing some of the barriers that restricted certain means of defeating the enemy.

This book is not intended to respond to the rise in interest in the greatest challenge to the world's security, global terrorism. The purpose, as satisfac-

REVIEWS

torily given, is instead to indicate various dimensions which should be included in the analysis of conflicts where fanatical behavior plays a definite role. As a concluding remark, the irrational realm of fanatics cannot be considered as always separate from the world of rational and strategic decisions. After all, as Dominic Bryan notes, commonly-used definitions of “fanatic”, as well as experience, imply that such people are neither deranged nor mentally ill. In fact, those considered fanatics usually take the values of their societies or beliefs to extremes. However, their understandings of values and their extremist tendencies signify choice. Hence fanatics are often regarded as crazed but can be sanely rational at the same time.

Vít Střítecký