

Book Review

US Narratives of Nuclear Terrorism Since 9/11, Worst-Case Scenario

Reviewed by Maximiliano Emanuel Korstanje, University of Palermo, Palermo, Argentina

ABSTRACT

In the days after the attacks to World Trade Center, journalism and the Press, in particular, speculated with the idea that radicalized (Islamic) cells would perpetrate a new attack employing weapons of Mass Destruction Weapons (WMD). Although this never happened to date, some voices still toy with the belief that terrorism very well manipulates these types of weapons and of course is planning to use against the US and Europe. In this seminal book, which entitles US Narratives of Nuclear Terrorism since 9/11, David Seed explores -from a qualitative viewpoint- how the discourses revolving around nuclear terrorism interrogates the US but also how social imaginary draws the borders between Christianity and the dangerous Islam.

KEYWORDS

Apocalyptic Narratives, Nuclear War, Terrorism, World Trade Center

US Narratives of Nuclear Terrorism Since 9/11, Worst-Case Scenario

David Seed

@ 2019 Springer Nature Limited

347 pp.

\$39.99

ISBN 978-1-137-54327-1

In the days after the attacks to World Trade Center, journalism and the Press, in particular, speculated with the idea that radicalized (Islamic) cells would perpetrate a new attack employing weapons of Mass Destruction Weapons (WMD). Although this never happened to date, some voices still toy with the belief that terrorism very well manipulates these types of weapons and of course is planning to use against the US and Europe. In this seminal book, which entitles *US Narratives of Nuclear Terrorism since 9/11*, David Seed explores -from a qualitative viewpoint- how the discourses revolving around nuclear terrorism interrogates the US but also how social imaginary draws the borders between Christianity and the dangerous Islam. No matter than the efforts and resources deployed by the US to struggle terrorism, these narratives punctuate that after all, nobody feels safe, anywhere and anytime. Through the review of countless novels and films, Seed argues eloquently that each novel opens with the risk of a total obliteration generated by technology which is handled by Islamic groups who not only hate the US but also the Western civilization. Far from being real risks, as Seed emphatically adheres, these shared narratives which widely circulated in the different spheres of society, finally feedback a state of hysteria and extreme panic. The problem lies in the fact that such narratives are seriously considered by authorities without firm evidence. As Seed puts it, SIGMA group was originally founded in 1992 to alert the government of potential nuclear threats. What is equally important seems to be that its main sources were reputed science fiction authors who broadened the constellations of a futurist landscape. Still further, the post 9/11 contexts accelerated these long-dormant fears into a concrete reality. What 9/11 made real was the possibilities -some remote- that the US would be a potential victim of a nuclear attack. Muslims or radical members of the army forces, terrorists are often portrayed as the sons of a sentiment of fundamentalism which circularly operates in all spheres of the establishment. Quite aside from this, a great majority of these plots says overtly that the Muslim community not only is a proximate danger for Americans but also is the most radical of any other immigrant groups America has welcomed in the past.

As the previous backdrop, Seed articulates an interesting conceptual bridge between the fictions which derive from novel or film plots and the real policies or laws proposed by politicians. It is important not to lose the fact that the borders between fiction (conspiracy thrillers) and reality are being blurred. The shared common-threat argument in these types of plots consists of alerting that the US as an exemplary project that guides humankind to prosperity and peace has resoundingly failed. To correct this, the involving radical cell plans a purge, a cursory genocide aimed at balancing the forces towards new sanitised earth. As Seed brilliantly observes:

It should have become clear by now that defence scenarios and speculative fiction converge on issues of security and in the chapters which follow we shall repeatedly see instances of novels taking their bearing from news items and government reports of the day. (p. 22)

Doubtless, 9/11 marked a turning point where all novels published after 2001 signalled to it as a founding event. The narratives are ideologically oriented to show the power and efficacy of the US to react energetically to an attack or -at least- its technological supremacy to prevent it.

The second chapter is entirely reserved for the start of conspiracy theories since the 1980s and 1990s. In this period, Islamism was not a declared enemy of the US and the “red-scare” occupied a central position. This means that Communism and the Soviet Union were the two threats Americans panicked. Nuclear terrorism -most probably orchestrated by hidden domestic cells- alluded to local actors who are logistically supported by the Soviet Union. Just after the end of the century, the 2000s witnessed a new type of discursivity centred on the precautionary principle, which means continuity of the red-scare now epitomized in modern terrorism. Based on the belief that terrorists loom from the clandestine life, supporters of the precautionary principle coordinate efforts to unveil underway conspiracies which never take place -unless in an imagined future. The pre-emptive discourses, rather, emphasize on the need of preventing the next terrorist attack through the secret information produced by security agencies. In this way, journalism and especially the media represents a serious obstacle in the struggle against terrorism. This point is in-depth reviewed in the third chapter.

The fourth chapter named as “suitcase nukes” deals with the stories which situate suitcases as the source of nuclear weapons. In other cases, the suitcase, which is brought from here to there, leaks radiation. The existence of these dangers is extremely frightening for Americans since there are millions of potential suitcases the security agencies should trace at the streets. In this respect, the social imaginary debates between an extreme panic, which is related to the higher levels of anxiety these potential risks engender, and fascination. Rather, the fifth chapter focuses the attention to plots where crisis management plays a crucial role because the worst has finally occurred. This particularly applies for the rhetoric post 9/11, as Seed observes. Although those novels are framed into this chapter speaks us of the fact that an attack was successfully perpetrated, the next one is coming and nobody knows really when it will take room. The sixth chapter evokes the notion of apocalypticism which is enrooted in the Protestant culture. While in some plots the attack is far from being nuclear, the grim landscape signals to the decline of Western civilization. To put the same in other terms, the chapter gathers millenarian narratives embodied in novels such as *The Turner Diaries*, *Wild Fire*, or *The Road to Armageddon*. Through the corruption of former-soviet officers, Iran gets and develops nuclear weapons to

destroy the Occident. This point resonated historically in the Press as well as media journalism. The themes of cyber-terrorism and bio-terrorism are lastly remarked in the seventh and eighth chapters. Last but not least, in a hyper-connected and globalized society the possibilities lone-wolves employ their bodies to disseminate a lethal virus—once again—is placed as one of the major threats the democratic governments will inevitably face in the next decade.

The present book, at the best for this reviewer, presents a well-argued thesis which seeks to differentiate how the fictional narratives and the reality converge. In fact, Professor Seed offers a high-quality editorial project which alerts on the risks of accepting fictional conspiracies as part of a pre-emptive-reality. As he amply shows in the eight chapters, which form this work, in the Protestant logic, the boundaries among fear, fiction and the precautionary culture seem not to be clear.

Because of the above-noted concerns, we conclude that *US Narratives of Nuclear Terrorism* reminds axiomatically how as a mirror, our fears are the reflection of our own self.

Maximiliano E. Korstanje is editor in chief of International Journal of Safety and Security in Tourism (UP Argentina) and Editor in Chief Emeritus of International Journal of Cyber Warfare and Terrorism (IGI-Global US). Besides being Senior Researchers in the Department of Economics at University of Palermo, Argentina, he is a global affiliate of Tourism Crisis Management Institute (University of Florida US), Centre for Ethnicity and Racism Studies (University of Leeds), The Forge (University of Lancaster and University of Leeds UK) and The International Society for Philosopher, hosted in Sheffield UK. With more than 1200 published papers and 35 books. As author his recent works include, Strategic Tool and Methods for promoting Hospitality and Tourism Services, Virtual Traumascesapes and exploring the roots of Dark Tourism, & Research Practices and innovations in Global Risk and Contingency Management by IGI Global, The Rise of Thana Capitalism and Tourism by Routledge, Terrorism, Tourism and the end of Hospitality in the West by Springer Nature, The Mobilities paradox, a critical analysis by Edward Elgar, Risk and Safety Challenges for Religious Tourism and Events by CABI, and Terrorism in a Global Village by Nova among others. Now he co-edits almost 10 specialized journals and takes part of almost 30 journals associated to themes as human rights, mobility, tourism and terrorism. Korstanje was nominated to 5 honorary doctorates for his contribution in the study of the effects of terrorism in tourism. In 2015 he was awarded as Visiting Research Fellow at School of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Leeds, UK and the University of La Habana Cuba. In 2017 is elected as Foreign Faculty Member of AMIT, Mexican Academy in the study of Tourism, which is the most prominent institutions dedicated to tourism research in Mexico. He had a vast experience in editorial projects working as advisory member of Elsevier, Routledge, Springer, IGI global and Cambridge Scholar publishing. Korstanje had visited and given seminars in many important universities worldwide. He has also recently been selected to take part of the 2018 Albert Nelson Marquis Lifetime Achievement Award, a great distinction given by Marquis Who's Who in the world.