

Assessing the new mantra of the War on Terror: “find the enemy, ensure that the enemy is fixed in that location, defeat the enemy”.

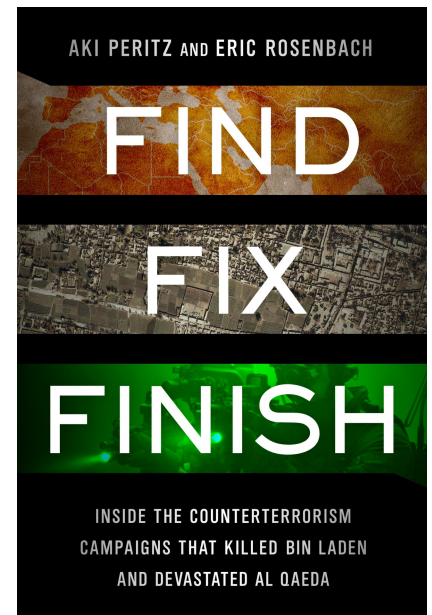
Aug 28 2012

*Two intelligence experts with unique access to inside sources reveal the story behind the evolution of America’s new approach to counter terrorism. On 9/11 the US had effectively no counterterrorism doctrine, but fast forward ten years and Osama bin Laden is dead, Al Qaeda is organizationally ruined and pinned in the tribal areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan, and there has been no major attack on American soil. **Meor Alif** thoroughly recommends the book, especially its use of case studies of those linked to Al Qaeda.*



Find, Fix, Finish: Inside the Counterterrorism Campaigns That Killed Bin Laden and Devastated Al Qaeda. Aki Peritz and Eric Rosenbach. Public Affairs. March 2012.

I like to imagine that upon receiving the news of Bin Laden’s death, my own immediate reaction – of asking “so is it over then?” – was also uttered from the lips of many others around the world. In the minds of many commentators, the death of ‘Geronimo’ (the codename for a hit on Bin Laden) seems to have marked a phase of possible drawdown in America’s grand counterterrorism strategy against Al Qaeda. The death of the most wanted man on earth has at least ushered in an atmosphere of self-reflection and allowed for policy makers and general readers alike to re-evaluate the strategies, mistakes and key players in all sides of the War on Terror.



If one was looking for a book that is able to bring together into one coherent and compelling account all of the disjointed pieces of information which have over the years come to accompany the grand narrative of America’s fight against Al Qaeda, *Find, Fix, Finish* is definitely the one.

The book covers much more than a play by play account of Operation Neptune Spear, the counterterrorism operation that was carried out in Abbottabad to ‘collect’ Osama bin Laden. It also covers discussions on the need for a slimmer bureaucracy that would ease rather than impede

counterterrorism efforts, the impact of technological advancements in engaging in counterterror, and the need for an approach to intelligence-gathering that is morally defensible in the court of public opinion.

The authors, Aki Peritz and Eric Rosenbach, are both extremely familiar with the subject matter. [Peritz](#) is a Senior Policy Advisor for National Security at Third Way and served as a counterterrorism analyst for the U.S government, while Rosenbach is the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defence, a former staff member on the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence where he led oversight of U.S counterterrorism programs and has also taught courses on counterterrorism at the Harvard Kennedy School.

The first chapter pays emphasis on the find, fix, finish doctrine – which roughly translates to “find the enemy, ensure that the enemy stays (is fixed) in that location, defeat the enemy” – and draws out a well explained description of what each of these elements. The doctrine becomes a permanent feature throughout the book – employed explicitly, and sometimes implicitly, as a sort of metaphorical prism through which all evaluations of previous counterterrorism policies are viewed.

The following chapters evaluate how America reinvented its approach to security after 9/11. From chapter two onwards, the book takes the form of a no-nonsense guide to what has actually been carried out in the name of fighting terror ever since George W. Bush declared on September 12, 2001 that “we are at war”. Different counter-terror policies that include the use of drones, torture, extraordinary renditions, and the age old question of trial by civilian court or by military commission are all tackled critically.

In the intelligently titled chapter ‘The Finishing Never Ends: how far will America will go?’, the writers discuss the extent to which coercive interrogations are effective. In reference to the use of enhanced interrogation techniques on Khalid Shaykh Mohammad, identified as the principal architect of the 9/11 attacks, they contrast anecdotal experiences which point to claim that “physical pressure on detainees is, at least in the short run, an occasionally effective means to generate data” with claims that “coerced confessions have led to poor analytical outcomes and disastrous policy decisions”. Similarly, in chapter eight, the writers engage in an equally important dissection of the trade-offs between capture operations and aerial eliminations, to describe that “capture operations on the ground not only demand greater cooperation with foreign partners and better operational security to prevent leaks, but also increased risk to the human beings involved. However, with aerial elimination there is greater risk of collateral damage, alienation of the local public, and the chilling of intelligence trail”. Overall, in the full breadth and depth of each chapter, the book provides an honest and fresh account of the different hallmark events and counterterror policies that has flowed from 9/11.

This book has a textbook-like feel to it for the way each chapter uses case studies of individuals

linked to Al Qaeda to support the arguments of the authors. Almost every major American counterterrorism operation and prominent Al Qaeda personality is discussed in the book and it serves as a good primer to those unfamiliar with Al Qaeda as an organisation or the people who form it. In its concluding chapter, Peritz and Rosenbach even outline in almost bullet-point fashion all the lessons we have learned, and where can the US can go from here, lending the book further to its textbook feel. Safe to say, that if you have been living under a rock since the turn of the decade and need a crash course in American counterterrorism, this is one of the books to pick.

Find, Fix, Finish stands to be one of those pieces of work that will continue to colour the discourse of the global war on terror in the years to come. The authors' conclusion is simple and sensible: "despite its missteps and errors, the US has radically shifted its fighting doctrine to the new find-fix-finish model. It has evolved and adapted to meet the real needs of today's geopolitical environment and take advantage of advances in technology".

Meor Alif is currently completing a MSc Comparative Politics (Conflict Studies) at the London School of Economics and Political Science. He is a volunteer with Stop the War Coalition UK and recently worked as a Research Assistant at the Henry Jackson Society. His current research focuses on the British counterinsurgency experience in Malaya with a particular emphasis on the use of force and coercion seen from a Malayan perspective. He is also a regular writer for the [LSE Global War on Terror blog series](#). [Read reviews by Meor](#).

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