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BOOK REVIEW

Marcus D. King. *Weaponizing Water: Water Stress and Islamic Extremist Violence in Africa and the Middle East*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Reiner, 2023. 245 pp. Bibliography. Index. $95. Hardback. ISBN: 9781955055833.

Weaponizing Water, by Marcus D. King, is a valuable contribution to the growing literature examining the connections between water stress (inadequate water supply, quality, and accessibility) and violent political and religious extremism. King asks "can connections between water geography, water stress, and violent extremism lead to a better understanding of the nature of modern warfare of the type increasingly perpetrated by VEOs [violent extremist organizations, the official term adopted for armed groups guided by extremist political or religious doctrines]?" (4).

King uses the "eco-violence" concept traced back to work by Thomas Homer-Dixon and the concept of "water and conflict cycle" to describe the dynamics of the connections (29). Most of the book is devoted to three case studies of this dynamic in Africa and the Middle East—Iraq and Syria, Nigeria, and Somalia—and to an examination of the response of national governments and international organizations.

The first of these focuses on Syria and Iraq, "the area that became the domain of the Islamic State (IS) during the Syrian Civil War," and "the time period covered by this chapter runs from approximately 2012 to 2016, when the Islamic State's strength and thus its ability to weaponize water were the most intensive" (35–36). It examines how the Islamic State wielded the water weapon and concludes with a discussion of actions that the United States might take to mitigate the impact of water weaponization in these countries.

The second case study is focused on "water-driven internal instability in Nigeria that is perpetrated by non-state actors in a country already ranked among the most fragile on the globe" (109). It examines the weaponization of water by Boko Haram and the sectarian conflict in the Middle Belt between seminomadic Muslim Hausa-Fulani communities and Christian farmers. It concludes with a discussion of how the United States and other members of the international community could help reduce water stress and deter the use of water as a weapon in Nigeria.

The third case study is focused on Somalia and use of water as a weapon by the al-Shabaab insurgents. It concludes with a discussion of policies and actions the United States and other members of the international community could take to reduce water stress in Somalia and deter the use of water as a weapon by al-Shabaab.

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The case studies are concise and well written. They are based on extensive original research, including newspapers, research articles, reports and documents from international organizations, governments, and non-governmental organizations, and other texts. Based on personal experience, I know how time consuming and tedious this type of research can be. King's work will be useful to specialists on the countries that he examines, because he provides a great deal of useful information that is not easy to find otherwise.

Finally, King discusses ideas and proposals that may help "to stop water weaponization where it occurs or, at a minimum, to discourage normalization of its use in modern warfare" (29). He concludes with a useful research and action agenda and ends on a cautiously optimistic note, stating that "it is my hope that this work opens the door to future inquiry about water's use as a weapon under various conditions and in regions across the globe as a step toward eradication of this ancient and odious approach to modern warfare" (212).

The US Department of Defense would probably agree completely with everything King says. Every year the Pentagon gives more than $20–30 million to academic research teams at American universities for social science research through the Minerva Program (Daniel Volman, "The Military-University-Industry Complex Targets Africa," *Foreign Policy in Focus*, accessed at https://fpif.org/the-military-university-industry-complex-targets-africa). A significant proportion goes to projects that seek to understand the impact of climate change on conflict—particularly in Africa—where the Pentagon expects to be called upon to deal with the consequences. But US national security policy remains highly militarized and reliant on the use of force (or "kinetic" action, as it is known in bureaucratic circles) and unlikely to change. Unless, of course, Donald Trump wins a second term as president, in which case all bets are off.

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