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James Hess

American Public University System

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Review of *Confronting Al Qaeda: The Sunni Awakening and American Strategy in Al Anbar*

Martha L. Cottam and Joe W. Huseby, with Bruno Baltodano (2016). *Confronting Al Qaeda: The Sunni Awakening and American Strategy in al Anbar*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. ISBN: 978-4422-6485-4 (Hbk), 978-1-4422-6486-1 (Ebk). 150 pages.

Confronting Al Qaeda: The Sunni Awakening and American Strategy in Al Anbar by Martha Cottam, Joe Huseby, with Bruno Baltodano is an excellent analysis on the Sunni Awakening during Operation Iraqi Freedom. The book is well-researched and presented with sound critical analysis. Perhaps the greatest strength of the book is the incorporation of image theory. Image theory is used in International Relations to evaluate perceptions, and in this case, it is primarily used to explain the tribal perceptions of Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI, later ISIS) and the American military in Al Anbar.

Cottam, Huseby, and Baltodano discuss the evolution of the Sunni tribes in Al Anbar province from the beginning of the Iraq War in 2003 through the period of the Awakening to the resurgence of ISIS. The authors clearly demonstrate that while the tribes had affiliation with Saddam Hussein prior to the war, it was not a case of supporting the former regime. The initial policies implemented by the transitional government hurt the image of efforts of the United States in Iraq through sweeping policies implemented by those who had little understanding of the geo-political situation within Iraq. These policies alienated the Sunni tribes and allowed AQI to exploit the situation, which, along with a growing insurgency (also fueled by misguided policies), led to violence and chaos in the post-Hussein Iraq.

The authors further explained that once the Sunni tribal leaders realized that the goal of AQI was to destroy the tribal identity in order to advance their own ideology, the tribal sheiks began to look toward the Americans. Almost simultaneously, the U.S. military realized that it needed to change its strategy, in regards to dealing with the tribes, and began to employ and negotiate with the sheiks in order to develop an anti-AQI alliance in Al Anbar. As strategies were developed that removed AQI presence in towns across Al Anbar province, the joint United States and Sunni tribal alliance built police stations, networks of informants, economic opportunities, and enhanced infrastructure to consolidate their gains. The authors do an admirable job relating how these efforts met with resistance from the Shi'a-led Iraqi central government in Baghdad. Despite these challenges from Baghdad, the Sunni Awakening was tremendously successful in liberating their province from the control of AQI.

Throughout *Confronting Al Qaeda*, the authors routinely point out the changes in the tribes' perception of AQI and the United States. The authors' use of image theory is valuable tool to explain how and why these changes occurred. Introduced on page 13, Table 1.1 provides the type of images as well as the associated characteristics of these images. For example, the table discusses the imperialist, barbarian, rogue, ally, and enemy images in image theory that relate to the post-Saddam Iraq in Al Anbar. The

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authors do discuss the image theory from multiple perspectives, but the key discussion is in how the tribes' perceptions evolved from 2003 to 2007. This evolution is based on interviews from key leaders, to include sheiks, from both the tribes and U.S. military. The authors discuss each shift in perspective at the end of each chapter to reinforce the events that occurred during that time period and the relationship to image theory.

I highly recommend *Confronting Al Qaeda, The Sunni Awakening and American Strategy in Al Anbar* to any student interested in understanding the events that occurred in Al Anbar province from 2003 to 2007 during Operation Iraqi Freedom. It is primarily an analytical effort, using strong empirical data, to explain the successes that the United States found during the Iraq insurgency. Above all, it is an important reminder that success in counterinsurgency operations is found through a mature understanding of the complex operational environment that militaries are likely to encounter after regime change.

James Hess, Ph.D. Faculty Director and Associate Professor
American Public University System