

THE WRITTEN WORD

Find, Fix, Finish: Inside The Counterterrorism Campaigns That Killed Bin Laden and Devastated Al-Qaeda

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Aki Peritz and Eric Rosenbach
(2012)

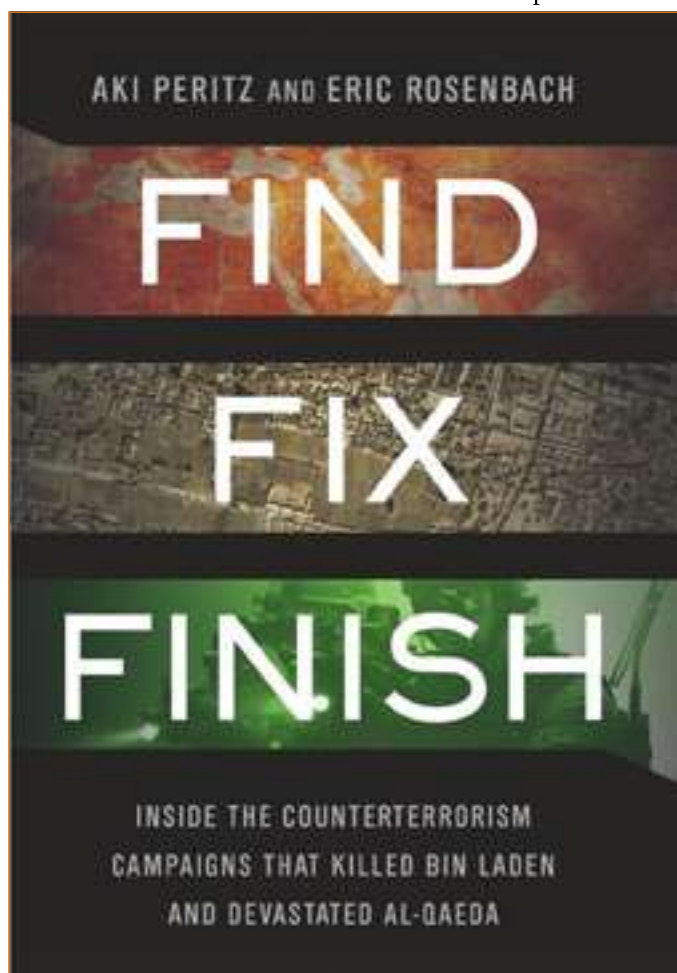
New York: Public Affairs Press
ISBN-10: 1610391284
Hardcover: \$27.99 USD
238 pages

Find, Fix, Finish is a well-written, fast-paced, and compelling overview of U.S. counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan, the Middle East, and the United States since 9/11. Authors Aki Peritz and Eric Rosenbach are former counterterrorism officials with the CIA's Counterterrorism Center and the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, respectively. Their collaboration credibly dissects the evolving legal and operational complexities of conducting counterterrorism.

The book is organized into 12 chapters that present a mix of analysis and case studies. For instance, chapter 2, "Atrophy: National Security before 9/11," assesses pre-9/11 counterterrorism mindsets, while chapter 11, "Geronimo," describes the stalking and killing of Osama bin Laden. By developing their work in this way, the authors balance the tragedy of 9/11 with the ways in which progress and failure have informed and shaped U.S. counterterrorism efforts since then. One of the most positive outcomes over time is the improvement in interagency cooperation and international liaisons with

partners, which have greatly enhanced counterterrorism's success. This is a theme that becomes evident as the book progresses, although it is not explicitly noted until the final chapters.

In the initial period following the 9/11 World Trade Center attacks, U.S. counterterrorism was conducted in a "go it alone" atmosphere, and encountered some notable pitfalls. This was particularly the case regarding the incarceration and interrogation in 2003 of Khalid Shaykh Mohammed, the apparent mastermind of the attacks. The alleged extreme interrogation methods used on KSM, as he is known in the press, sparked wide controversy over the ways in which intelligence was being extracted from high value targets. While the authors do not preach, they provide a number of cases to demonstrate that due diligence, through the compiling of evidence and legal prosecution, proved more successful than "enhanced interrogation" because of the follow-on intelligence potential. Chapter 9, "The Enemy Within," for example, traces the case of Najibullah Zazi, an Afghan immigrant who plotted with two friends to attack New York City's subways with triacetone triperoxide-based explosives. In Zazi's case, interagency cooperation between the FBI and NYPD was initially problematic, but their work improved as officers from the two agencies overcame past misgivings and lack of trust. In contrast to the KSM interrogations,



the authors suggest that the Nazi prosecution was successful due to the downright hard work of intelligence analysis, improved communication, and willingness to share information. In other words, they imply, positive outcomes are more likely when extreme interrogations techniques, i.e., torture, are avoided.

Another intriguing theme in the book regards the conduct of operations that have reached critical decision points. For instance, is taking out a high value target to stop him from acting worth the loss of potential intelligence that might reveal a related network or the target's associates? Again, the book uses a number of examples to show that this dilemma has no set formulas for success. What is more, the authors note, the risk of alienating or even radicalizing local populations when drone strikes or other operations kill or injure civilians cannot be ignored.

This well-researched book has one prominent shortcoming, which is the authors' reliance on current journalism for a substantial amount of their source material. An example of this is the recent death (on June 4, 2012) of Abu Yahya al-Libi, the alleged Number Two in al Qaeda's hierarchy. Chapter 8, "An Increasing Preference for Lethal Ends," details the death of al-Libi in January 2008, while other records indicate that he was killed in December 2009. Al-Libi's third demise in June 2012 demonstrates that Peritz and Rosenbach are dealing with fleeting information that is difficult to verify; a bit more explanation as to the reliability or unreliability of sources would have strengthened their work overall. As it is, this uncertainty undermines the analysis in that entire chapter.

Despite this weakness, not uncommon to books on current events, *Find, Fix, Finish* is a worthwhile overview of U.S. counterterrorism over the past dozen years. While well-informed readers may need to look elsewhere for new information, the book offers a useful analysis of what the United States has learned from its mistakes, and how it continues to refine its operations. ❖

ABOUT THE REVIEWER

Nate Moir is a senior research analyst with the Program for Culture and Conflict Studies at the Naval Postgraduate School. He is also a Psychological Operations Officer in the U.S. Army Reserve and completed a deployment to Afghanistan in 2011 as a Detachment Commander.