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# CTX

**From the Editor**

The *Combating Terrorism Exchange* staff are happy to bring you the Spring 2018 issue of *CTX*. The terrorism landscape looks different and also very much the same since our last issue came out in spring 2017. ISIS is on the run and no longer has a secure stronghold in Syria or Iraq. It has been pushed out of the large cities and towns it once held, but even partial victory has come at a tremendous cost in military and civilian lives, in treasure, and in the very structure of the besieged cities that ISIS held. Much of Mosul was destroyed to save it.

I'm reminded of an animated cartoon I saw when I was a young child. A man is trying to sleep, but a little cricket keeps chirping and waking him up. When the man tries to find the cricket, it stays quiet and eludes him, but as soon as he lies down and shuts his eyes, the cricket begins chirping. The man becomes steadily more frustrated and violent in his efforts to find and kill the cricket, until, in the end, his entire house lies in ruins. But the cricket is still chirping. I laughed at the man's crazy behavior, but I also wondered whether he ever was able to sleep again.

Much of Syria and Iraq lies in ruins. Hidden bombs keep exploding in Kabul, gunmen and truck drivers keep attacking across Europe, refugee families keep hoping for asylum. ISIS, weakened and on the run, will nevertheless keep chirping the same ugly song as long as there are young men and women ready to listen to the message and join its jihad against the world. Will anyone ever rest again?

Anne Speckhard and Ardian Shajkovi of the International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism begin this issue with an unusual interview. The young man they speak with is an imprisoned former ISIS "emir" who proudly describes his role in teaching the ISIS brand of religious ideology to new recruits and very young children. It is only when Speckhard confronts him and plays recordings of former ISIS operatives mourning their participation in violent extremism that the young man's self-image begins to crack.

The next article comes from Wael Abbas, who uses mapping technology to test Mao Zedong's theory that terrain and population play a critical role in the ability of insurgencies to spread and hold territory. Taking the expansion and contraction of ISIS's insurgency between 2014 and 2017 as a case study, Abbas

demonstrates that a supportive population and difficult landscape may be useful indicators of an insurgency's long-term viability.

Our third essay concerns the UN's efforts to stabilize the Democratic Republic of Congo after years of insurgency and counterinsurgency that have left the country devastated and the people traumatized. Authors Badura Hakim and Heather S. Gregg describe why the program of security, demobilization, and reintegration, which ought to serve as a model for similar situations, has not met its goals.

The final feature article takes us to South Sudan, another country that is being torn to pieces by competing insurgencies and an ineffective—even complicit—government. Amarsaikhan Serdari served as Sector North Commander with the United Nations Mission in South Sudan in 2015 and 2016. In that role, he witnessed firsthand how UN peacekeepers are handicapped by the lack of an intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capability in their efforts to provide security and prevent violence for fragile communities in a highly unstable environment.

This issue brings you two very different CTAP interviews. The first is with historian and military analyst Max Boot, who sat down with Anders Hamlin to discuss Boot's new biography of US military adviser Edward Lansdale. Lansdale helped establish a democratic government in the Philippines in the 1950s and then tried to do the same, less successfully, in Vietnam. Boot and Hamlin examine the current geostrategic landscape and ponder, "What would Lansdale do?" The second interview, with Iranian-American scholar Reza Marashi, delves into US-Iran relations and the obstacles that prevent these two important countries from finding ways to work together toward common goals. Although the interview took place in the fall of 2016, Marashi's insights remain cogent and useful for understanding the present rocky state of relations between the two countries, particularly in light of recent uncertainty about the current US administration's commitment to the seven-state nuclear deal.

For our book review, Stans Victor Mouaha-Bell discusses the book *Boko Haram: The History of an African Jihadist Movement*, written by Alexander Thurston. It's a mistake, Thurston notes, to blame ideology alone for insurgencies while forgetting the role of politics. Finally, be sure to check out Christopher Harmon's new book in the Publications section.

We'd love to hear from you at [CTXEditor@GlobalECCO.org](mailto:CTXEditor@GlobalECCO.org) or on Facebook at Global ECCO whenever you read something in CTX that sparks your interest, raises questions, or demands a response. After all, you're the reason we publish CTX. Send your article submissions, comments, and questions to [CTXEditor@GlobalECCO.org](mailto:CTXEditor@GlobalECCO.org). Keep up the great work. We hope to hear from you soon.

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