



Why Terrorism Works: Understanding the Threat, Responding to the Challenge

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The greatest danger facing the world today, says Alan M. Dershowitz, comes from religiously inspired, state sponsored terrorist groups that seek to develop weapons of mass destruction for use against civilian targets. In his newest book, Dershowitz argues passionately and persuasively that global terrorism is a phenomenon largely of our own making and that we must and can take steps to reduce the frequency and severity of terrorist acts.

Analyzing recent acts of terrorism and our reaction to them, Dershowitz explains that terrorism is successful when the international community gives in to the demands of terrorists—or even tries to understand and eliminate the “root causes” of terrorism. He discusses extreme approaches to wiping out international terrorism that would work if we were not constrained by legal, moral, and humanitarian considerations. And then, given that we do operate under such constraints, he offers a series of proposals that would effectively reduce the frequency and severity of international terrorism by striking a balance between security and liberty.

Why Terrorism Works: Understanding the Threat, Responding to the Challenge **Details**

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Rick Patterson says

Although this was written as part of the reaction to 9/11, it isn't at all dated; in fact, some of its observations are absolutely relevant to the current situation in Gaza. Consider this statement: "Palestinian leaders have turned to suicide bombing as the tactic of choice for achieving their goals....because it has worked. And it has worked because the international community has fallen hook, line, and sinker for the Palestinian exploitation of the cruel fact that death produces sympathy for its cause whenever Israelis or Palestinians are killed. The goal of suicide terrorism is to create a "cycle" of violence--or at least the illusion that the violence and counterviolence are part of the cycle of morally equivalent actions and counteractions. But the actions of the Palestinians, who glorify homicide and dehumanize its Jewish victims, are not morally equivalent to the actions of the Israelis, who put their own soldiers at risk in order to minimize the inevitable killing of civilians that accompanies any military response to terrorism, especially when terrorists hide among civilians and use them as human shields" (81-82). If we narrow his use of Palestinians to Hamas, the description is exact.

Dershowitz's argument is really pretty simple: we have effectively encouraged terrorism by not establishing and enforcing clear enough moral and legal lines against it. Rather than engaging in sociological forensic investigations of what the "root causes" are underlying terrorist activities, as Justin Trudeau infamously did when he downplayed the heinous acts of the Boston Marathon bombers, Dershowitz takes the opposite tack. His manifesto is stated early in his book: "We must commit ourselves never to try to understand or eliminate its alleged root causes, but rather to place it beyond the pale of dialogue and negotiation. Our message must be this: even if you have legitimate grievances, if you resort to terrorism as a means toward eliminating them we will simply not listen to you, we will not try to understand you, and we will certainly never change any of our policies toward you. Instead, we will hunt you down and destroy your capacity to engage in terror. Any other approach will encourage the use of terrorism as a means toward achieving ends--whether those ends are legitimate, illegitimate, or anything in between" (24-25). That sounds stirring and bespeaks a lot more spine than the Americans have managed to maintain in the decade since he wrote those words, but the essential point is made: combating terrorism requires a strong, unwavering moral stance. Unfortunately, not many countries have that quality, and even the USA has blinked a number of times. A point Dershowitz doesn't make because it wouldn't have been believed in 2002 is that America may end up losing in its so-called war on terrorism for the same reason the Soviet Union lost the Cold War: they're out of money; they simply can't afford to continue fighting it.

Gary says

A very instructive book published in 2002 about a year after the 9/11 terror attacks and at a time when Israel was weathering terrorist attacks on her civilian population almost daily, whether homicide bombings like the Netanya Pesach Seder massacre, where in Netanya in March 2001, in the single greatest massacre of Jews after World War II, 37 Jewish men, women and children died after a Hamas bomber detonated himself during a seder or celebration of the Jewish passover (Pesach) and the Dolphinarium Disco massacre on June 1, 2001, 21 Israeli teenagers were killed and 132 wounded, many maimed for life, after a suicide bomber blew himself up in their midst

Hamas claimed responsibility and celebrated the attack.

Shaina Dorfman whose grandfather was a rabbi and was burned by the Nazis in Russia, lost her only daughter in an attack on a night club in Tel Aviv but believes in the Jewish saying, Yiyhe Beseder

"Everything will turn out alright"

Or the shooting of Jewish children in their homes.

A ten-month-old Jewish baby, Shalhevet Pass, was shot in her father's arms by an Arab sniper in 2001.

The following year, a five-year-old girl, Danielle Shefi, was shot to death at point blank range by an Arab killer, while cowering under her parents' bed.

That same year, two boys, four- and five-years old, Matan and Noam Ohayon were shot dead together with their mother as she read them a bedtime story, in a kibbutz, by Arab terrorists.

Dershowitz rightly points out that many peoples have been far more oppressed than the Palestinians but have not resorted to terror against civilians. Look at the Tibetans, people of Darfur, and religious minorities in Muslim countries.

Dershowitz rightly points a finger of accusation at Europe for appeasing Arab PLO terror from 1968 to 2000. Barack Obama it might be added by myself has adopted this same strategy of appeasing and implicitly supporting Muslim terror since 2009. seven years after this book was written (though I don't know if Dershowitz agrees). This is what emboldened terrorists of Al Qaeda to carry out attacks against Western targets such as the 9/11 attacks, the Bali bombings, the 2004 Madrid bombings and the 2005 London tube bombings. Of all the terrorists jailed for terror attacks between 1968 and 1975, all but three had been released by 1975.

Not many people are aware that after the murder of 11 Israeli athletes in 1972 by Palestinian terrorists of the Black September group, Germany released the terrorists it held in custody that had taken part in the attack, the attack was certainly coordinated by the Arab terrorists, together with the East German government. also, not well known is that less than two months after the Munich murders West German Chancellor Willy Brandt made deal with the Palestinian terrorists. Together they planned a staged hijacking of a Lufthansa flight from Beirut, in order to have an excuse to free the three Palestinian Munich murderers in German custody.

In 1979 the United Nations General Assembly actually went as far as encouraging Palestinian terrorism directed against Israeli and Jewish targets, by passing an amendment which actually was worded to permit the taking of Israeli or Jewish hostages by Palestinian terrorists. Ruling that the UN's rule against hostage taking would not apply to people 'fighting colonial occupation and alien occupation and against racist regimes.

Dershowitz also points out the very important difference between legitimate freedom fighters such as the American fighters for Independence in the American Revolutionary War of the 1770s and the resistance fighters against Nazi occupation on the one hand and today's Muslim terrorists pointing out the unlike the former, TODAY'S TERRORISTS DELIBERATELY TARGET CHILDREN.

As he points out 'One reason why the double standard concerning Palestinian terrorism is that many world leaders refuse to acknowledge the cynical Palestinian manipulation of the arithmetic of pain. Instead they claim to see a moral equivalence between those who deliberately target innocent civilians and those who respond to such provocations and inadvertently kill innocent-along with not so innocent civilians...virtually all of the dead Israelis were completely innocent noncombatants, such as the teenagers blown up at a disco or the women murdered at a pizza restaurant or the guests at mitzvah or Passover celebrations".

George Habash argues as early as the 70s that all Israelis and Jews were legitimate targets.

Dershowitz deals with the double standard of those who justify mass murder of Israelis and yet then whinge about collective punishment of Palestinians in response.

In his chapters where he supports the use of limited torture of terrorists, in order to save thousands of lives, I would go further and support any and all methods of torture against Islamic terrorists because once these terrorists decided to target innocent civilians, I believe they lost their human rights.

Why is it that those who have no problem with the horrific treatment of young people in Turkey and

southeast Asia merely for transporting drugs, then caterwaul over rough treatment of terrorist involved in the planning of murder at Guantanamo Bay, Abu Ghraib and elsewhere?

the author's last chapter poses the question : ' Are we Overreacting?' Dershowitz pointed out the same may have been said about Hitler and Nazi Germany in the 1930's before Hitler made good on his promises to annihilate millions of Jews, Gypsies and other innocents.

He rightly points out that 'Indeed there are haunting and frightening similarities between what hitler said he would do to the Jews and what many Islamic leaders say they now intend to do to the Jews, Americans and heathens'.

At any rate ask the Christians in Lebanon, the Copts in Egypt , the Buddhists in Thailand and Burma , the Hindus in India, the Christians in Nigeria, Indonesia and Pakistan, the people of Israel and the people of Iraq if anyone is overreacting to Islamic terror?

Ifeoluwa says

Talks about the infamous 9/11 a well over-breathen issue.

Fredrick Danysh says

The author discusses state sponsored terrorism and looks at several possible deterrents. A table shows that in recent years governments have been more likely to appease terrorists just as the world appeased Hitler prior to World War II. The curtailment of personal liberties by governments is mentioned as well as the fact that when people lose their liberties those liberties are almost never restored to the people.

Melissa says

Dershowitz does an AMAZING job of providing readers with a logical and feasible compromise between national security and civil liberties.

Jared says

Very good discussion of the pros and cons of torture, including how it has been used in the past (legally, and under judicial supervision) and how it could affect a democratic society. That's probably where the strength of the book lies, Dershowitz's discussion of how possible solutions to the problem of terrorism intersect with democracy and liberal western ideology.

All in all the book feels a little dated, it is now wrong the primary structure of Al Qaeda, but that doesn't really impact his analysis since it is mostly about the West reacting to the threat, and he doesn't go into much commentary on how to disengage societies from terrorist groups. Well he does, but simply by saying 'don't give in'.

Chapter 2 was probably the most infuriating thing I have ever read. Europe really sold everyone down the river, and now it's coming back to roost. Dershowitz essentially accuses Europe of being anti-semitic, but

never really makes the grander connection. He does, somewhat in passing, near the end of the book, but essentially Europe did gain from appeasing terrorists, while sacrificing nothing of their own. Surely they sacrificed the interests of Israel and America, but in the end the Europeans gained safety for their own citizens. This argument is more powerful, and fits better with his argument that the European nations are responsible for the current situation we are in, oh and they are cowardly. He just doesn't make that final leap.

He also favorably states he would like to see more terrorists in Egyptian jails. Now I understand what his point is, he wants to see more terrorists incapacitated so they can't commit terrorist attacks. But Egyptian prisons? Come on Dershowitz, Egyptian prisons ARE THE REASON we have Al Qaeda today. Zawahiri is an adherent of Qutb, who was turned into a terror advocate IN EGYPTIAN PRISONS, where routine torture, humiliation and abuse are common place.

And I have never read a book that quotes Thomas Friedman more freely. Take that for what you will.

All in all a good, thought provoking read. Quick too, I finished it in about two weeks on top of my 1L class load.

Gary says

A very instructive book published in 2002 about a year after the 9/11 terror attacks and at a time when Israel was weathering terrorist attacks on her civilian population almost daily, whether homicide bombings like the Netanya Pesach Seder massacre, where in Netanya in March 2001, in the single greatest massacre of Jews after World War II, 37 Jewish men, women and children died after a Hamas bomber detonated himself during a seder or celebration of the Jewish Passover (Pesach) and the Dolphinarium Disco massacre on June 1, 2001, 21 Israeli teenagers were killed and 132 wounded, many maimed for life, after a suicide bomber blew himself up in their midst.

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Jessica says

While the ideas and arguments are still valid, I think the book might be a bit dated. It was written in response to 9/11. However, having read this book in 2018 while in the midst of parenting 5 young children, the parallels between raising children and dealing with terrorists were not lost on me. This might be one of the best parenting books I have read!

Eric Palmer says

A little book about big stuff. Worth a second read, which is always more revealing and involved for me.
