



A BIBLICAL VIEW ON

Terrorism



Kerby Anderson



Terrorism



Terrorists crash planes into buildings. Other terrorists attack a U.S. military base. Another terrorist attacks a synagogue. And another terrorist drives a truck through a crowd mowing down citizens. Terrorist attacks are too frequently in the news.

Terrorism has been called the “new warfare.” But terrorists turn the no-

tion of war on its head. Innocent non-combatants become the target of terrorist attacks. Terrorist warfare holds innocent people hostage and makes soldier and civilian alike potential targets.

The Terrorism Challenge

Terrorism has become the scourge of democratic governments. According to Rand Corporation expert Brian Jenkins, nearly a third of all terrorists attacks involve Americans. Democratic governments, accustomed to dealing within a legal structure, often find it difficult to deal with criminals and terrorists who routinely operate outside of the law. Yet deterrence is just as much a part of justice as proper enforcement of the laws.

Democratic governments which do not deter criminals inevitably spawn vigilantism as normally law-abiding citizens, who have lost confidence in the criminal justice system, take the law into their own hands. A similar backlash is beginning to emerge

because of the inability of Western democracies to defend themselves against terrorists.

But lack of governmental resolve is only part of the problem. Terrorists thrive on media exposure, and news organizations around the world have been all too willing to give terrorists what they crave: publicity. If the news media gave terrorists the minuscule coverage their numbers and influence demanded, terrorism might decline. But when terrorist groups are given prominent media attention, governments start feeling pressure from their citizens to resolve the crisis and eventually capitulate to terrorists' demands. When the name of a "lone wolf" is mentioned and his "manifesto" is discussed, it encourages others to follow suit.

Encouraged by the success of others, terrorists usually try again. Appeasement, Winston Churchill wisely noted, always whets the appetite, and recent successes have made

terrorists hungry for more attacks. Some news commentators have been unwilling to call terrorism what it is: wanton, criminal violence. They blunt the barbarism by arguing that “one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter.” But this simply is not true. Terrorists are not concerned about human rights and human dignity. In fact, they end up destroying human rights in their alleged fight for human rights.

Some media refuse to even describe the terrorist event. Instead, we see headlines that merely say a truck or SUV ran into a crowd of people without even mentioning a driver. It is as if the vehicle was parked on a hill and the parking brake failed. Not only do some media outlets have difficulty mentioning the terrorist, but they also don’t say that someone was driving the vehicle.

Governments trying to stop terrorism face a significant set of problems. Often, terrorist groups hide within

certain countries and are not living in fear of their host governments. Instead, law-abiding citizens are often the ones living in fear of terrorist groups.

Combating terrorisms presents a significant challenge to U.S. government leaders because it involves a new type of military strategy, often referred to as asymmetric warfare. Terrorist groups have held Americans hostage, blown up city buildings and military compounds, and hijacked airplanes and cruise ships. Finding a potential “lone wolf” terrorist is even more difficult since many hide their intentions until they act.

Although international diplomacy has been the primary means used by the United States against terrorism abroad, we should consider what other means may also be appropriate. In the past, American leaders have responded to military aggression in a variety of ways short of declaring war.

Military strategy has been deployed to hunt down small groups of well-armed and well-funded men who hide within the territory of a host country. We must also develop a political strategy that will allow us to work within a host country. We must make it clear how serious the United States takes a terrorist threat. American citizens are tired of being military targets in an undeclared war. Through diplomatic channels we must make two things very clear to the host country. First, they should catch and punish the terrorist groups themselves as civilian criminals. Or, second, they should extradite the enemy soldiers and give them up to an international court for trial.

If the host country fails to act on these two requests, we should make it clear that we see them in complicity with the terrorist groups. By failing to exercise their civil responsibility, they leave themselves open to the consequences of allowing hostile

military forces within their borders. In some cases, an American counterterrorism strike force can be deployed when the threat is both real and imminent. Israel provides an example. In the last few years, Israel has been effective in taking out Hamas and Hezbollah terrorist leaders.

Homegrown Jihadists

In my book, *A Biblical Point of View on Islam*, I predicted we might see more “homegrown jihadists.” I had a section in my book documenting what many national security experts say is taking place in the U.S. prison system. One expert said: “Radical Islamists have been more active in European prisons, but there have been a handful of documented cases of Islamist radicalization in U.S. prisons.”

Chuck Colson put it this way: “I don’t usually make predictions, but here’s one I’ll venture: If, God forbid, an attack by home-grown Islamist radicals occurs on American soil, many,

if not most, of the perpetrators will have converted to Islam while in prison.”

A study by researchers from George Washington University and the University of Virginia, titled “Out of the Shadows,” concluded that the United States is at risk of the same sort of homegrown terrorism that is currently plaguing other countries. These terrorists will come from prisons which “are a potential pool of recruits by terrorist groups.” The sources of radicalization are incarcerated Islamic extremists and outside organizations that support them.

Robert Spencer has been on *Point of View* many times and has documented why many of these prison conversions have taken place. Islamic jihad groups have long targeted prisons as key centers for recruitment. They achieve this through proselytizing by prison chaplains who are tied to jihadists groups or their allies. The principal organization that approves

Muslim chaplains for U.S. prison is the Islamic Society of North America. While this group is often identified as a moderate Muslim group, it was named as an unindicted co-conspirator in a terrorist case involving funding of Hamas.

The Lone Wolf Challenge

Perhaps the greatest challenge for the U.S. government is catching a “lone wolf” terrorist before he acts. The former FBI Director James Comey warned about this challenge many years ago while speaking to the National Association of Attorneys General. He explained, “We have investigations of people in various stages of radicalizing in all 50 states.” He also added, “This isn’t a New York phenomenon or a Washington phenomenon. This is all 50 states and in ways that are very hard to see.”

He spent some time talking about how groups like ISIS use social media to radicalize people across the United States. He described three significant

terrorist threats to America:

The first is the obvious problem of our open border. We have caught several people at the border who were on a terrorist watch list. But the bigger concern is the 2.2 million who did not interact with the border patrol (the so-called “got-aways”). These individuals paid the cartels more money not to be caught. We must conclude that some have evil intentions.

The second problem Comey mentioned are the “returnees.” At the time when we mentioned this, the Department of Homeland Security admitted that 40 of the estimated 180 that traveled overseas to fight with ISIS had already returned to the U.S. This represents possible “sleeper cells” that the government has had to monitor.

The third problem is what he called the “city wolves.” These are home-grown jihadists that are part of a network of supporters and sympathizers

in every state. ISIS was using very sophisticated technology and social media to recruit others to their cause. No longer does a potential jihadist have to travel to another country (Afghanistan, Syria, Sudan) to be trained. It can happen in our country.

The ISIS Challenge

Ten years ago, Graeme Wood wrote an article in *The Atlantic* to explain “What ISIS Really Wants.” He wrote this because of so much misinformation. For example, President Barack Obama referred to the Islamic State as: “not Islamic” and as al-Qaeda’s “jayvee team.”

Wood explained “that the Islamic State is Islamic. Very Islamic. Yes, it has attracted psychopaths and adventure seekers, drawn largely from the disaffected populations of the Middle East and Europe. But the religion preached by its most ardent followers derives from coherent and even learned interpretations of Islam.”

He went on to add that “Muslims can reject the Islamic State; nearly all do. But pretending that it isn’t actually a religious, millenarian group, with theology that must be understood to be combatted, has already led the United States to underestimate it and back foolish schemes to counter it.”

Fortunately, there are several Christian books that explain ISIS in detail. Charles Dyer and Mark Tobey have written *The ISIS Crisis* and have also been on *Point of View*. They describe five steps in the rise of ISIS from al Qaeda to the present day.

Another book, by Johnnie Moore is *Defying ISIS: Preserving Christianity in the Place of Its Birth and in Your Own Backyard*. He documented in his book and on our radio program the unspeakable terror at the hands of ISIS. He also explained how ISIS uses the Internet to recruit and train potential terrorists that don’t even have to leave their home country.

One example took place near the *Point of View* radio studios. Two jihadists opened fire at a Garland, Texas event sponsored by the American Freedom Defense Initiative. Pamela Geller and Geert Wilders were two of the speakers at the Muhammad Art Exhibit and Cartoon Contest. Fortunately, the Garland police killed the two jihadists. Otherwise, we might have had a scene like the jihadist attack of Charlie Hebdo in Paris.

Just War and Terrorism

Government is necessary to fight terrorism. Romans 13:1-7 explains that government “bears the sword.” We need the Defense Department and the Department of Homeland Security to protect Americans from terrorist attacks. But we should also be aware that the threat of terrorism has often been used to expand the size and scope of government. We should protect citizens from terrorists but also protect them from a government that uses technology to

invade their privacy and take away their freedoms.

Terrorism is a new form of warfare, but the principles of just war apply to fighting terrorism. We have previously published a booklet on *A Biblical Point of View on Just War* that provides the biblical and philosophical principles of just war. One criticism is worth mentioning.

Critics say that the idea of a just war applies only to nations and not to terrorists. Even so, that would not invalidate American military actions that have taken place in the Middle East against countries (Iraq, Afghanistan).

The criticism, however, is incorrect. Christian thought about just war predates the concept of modern nation-states. The application of these principles can apply to governments or terrorist organizations. Moreover, the very first use of American military force in this country was against Barbary Pirates (who were essentially the terrorists of the 18th century).

Critics also argue that since terrorism is an international threat, the concept of just war would require an international declaration of war. This is not true. Neither the U.S. nor any other country needs to get international approval to defend itself. Even so, both President George H. W. Bush and President George W. Bush brought the issue of Iraq to the United Nations for a vote.

The just war theory attempts to provide a moral framework for discussion about military action and a framework for evaluating military action. We will continue to face a terrorist challenge but we also need to make sure we don't lose our rights as we seek to keep Americans safe.



Additional Resources

Anderson, Kerby; *Christian Ethics in Plain Language*, Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005, chapter twenty-two.

Anderson, Kerby; *A Biblical View on Just War*, booklet, 2022

Dyer, Charles; *The ISIS Crisis*. Chicago, Moody, 2015.

Moore, Johnnie; *Defying Isis*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2015.

Wood, Graeme; “What ISIS Really Wants” Atlantic, March 2015.

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