

Dying to Win--The Strategic Logic Of Suicide

Terrorism. By Robert A Pape. Random House, New York 2005. ISBN: 1400063175. Hardcover, 352 pages.

Why This Book

As a spokesperson for the Islamic Center of Long Island in New York, I am frequently asked: Does Islam permit, encourage or condone suicide bombings? I usually respond by asking a question: Can you name the country which has had the most suicide bombings from 1980 to 2003? As the reader might have guessed, the usual answer I get is Israel, Palestine, Ireland etc. This book helps answer that question and brings out the underlying motive for all suicide attacks, it is **not** an issue of religion, it's nationalism.

Book Description as Outlined in the Promotional Material from the Publisher

Robert A. Pape is an associate professor of political science at the University of Chicago, where he teaches international politics and is the director of the Chicago Project on Suicide Terrorism.

Professor Pape has collected groundbreaking evidence to explain the strategic, social, and individual factors responsible for this growing threat.

Professor Pape has created the first comprehensive database of every suicide terrorist attack in the world from 1980 until 2003. Professor Pape uses this unprecedented research to debunk widely held misconceptions about the nature of suicide terrorism and provide a new lens that makes sense of the threat we face.

FACT: Suicide terrorism is not primarily a product of Islamic fundamentalism.

FACT: The world's leading practitioners of suicide terrorism are the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka—a secular, Marxist-Leninist group drawn from Hindu families.

FACT: Ninety-five percent of suicide terrorist attacks occur as part of coherent campaigns organized by large militant organizations with significant public

support.

FACT: Every suicide terrorist campaign has had a clear goal that is secular and political: to compel a modern democracy to withdraw military forces from the territory that the terrorists view as their homeland.

FACT: Al-Qaeda fits the above pattern. Although Saudi Arabia is not under American military occupation per se, one major objective of al-Qaeda is the expulsion of U.S. troops from the Persian Gulf region, and as a result there have been repeated attacks by terrorists loyal to Osama bin Laden against American troops in Saudi Arabia and the region as a whole.

FACT: Despite their rhetoric, democracies—including the United States—have routinely made concessions to suicide terrorists. Suicide terrorism is on the rise because terrorists have learned that it's effective.

Professor Pape offers the essential tools to forecast when some groups are likely to resort to suicide terrorism and when they are not. He also provides the first comprehensive demographic profile of modern suicide terrorist attackers. With data from more than 460 such attackers—including the names of 333—we now know that these individuals are not mainly poor, desperate criminals or uneducated religious fanatics but are often well-educated, middle-class political activists.

My Personal Views

By and large I agree with the publisher's description of the book. I found the portraits of three suicide bombers in chapter 11 very illuminating and contradictory to the usual description of young men and women who perpetuate suicide terrorism:

Mohammed Atta, who organized and led the September 11, 2001, suicide attack, the deadliest in history

Dhanu of the Tamil Tigers, who assassinated Rajiv Gandhi, prime minister of India and the highest ranking political leader ever killed by a suicide ter-

rorist

Saeed Hotari, a member of Hamas who blew up himself and twenty-one Israelis outside a discotheque in Tel Aviv, one of the worst suicide bombings in Israel

More than simply advancing new theory and facts, these pages also answer key questions about the war on terror:

Professor Pape answers these questions with analysis grounded in fact, not politics, and recommends concrete ways for today's states to fight and prevent terrorist attacks. Military options may disrupt terrorist operations in the short term, but a lasting solution to suicide terrorism will require a comprehensive, long-term approach—one that abandons visions of empire and relies on a combined strategy of vigorous homeland security, greater energy independence, nation building in troubled states, and offering political alternatives aimed at achieving independence in the occupied lands.

The bottom line is that suicide terrorism is motivated by nationalistic sentiments, in an effort to remove foreign powers from the homelands of the terrorists. It is not about religious fanaticism, but about military occupation. The result of Pape's research is very clear on this point and his proposed solution is a sane one, and one that should be considered by those in power.

Sun Tzu and Robert McNamara wrote and said that it was essential to know both one's self and the enemy in order to win. Pape demonstrates that the assumption that suicide terrorists are driven by religious fanaticism is wrong. Pape argues that nationalism is their primary motivation and the reason they attack us is we are—in their minds—violating the "sacred soil of the Prophet". His conclusion is that if we leave the Middle East, while this will not end terrorism, it may well be key to ending the current conflict with al Qaeda, associated groups and nations that support them.

In a recent interview for *The American Conservative* (11 July 2005), Professor Pape explained that: "The central fact is that overwhelmingly suicide-terrorist attacks are not driven by religion as much as they are by a clear strategic objective: to compel modern

democracies to withdraw military forces from the territory that the terrorists view as their homeland. From Lebanon to Sri Lanka to Chechnya to Kashmir to the West Bank, every major suicide-terrorist campaign—over 95 percent of all the incidents—has had as its central objective to compel a democratic state to withdraw.

...Not every foreign occupation has produced suicide terrorism. Why do some and not others? Here is where religion matters, but not quite in the way most people think. In virtually every instance where an occupation has produced a suicide-terrorist campaign, there has been a religious difference between the occupier and the occupied community. That is true not only in places such as Lebanon and in Iraq today but also in Sri Lanka, where it is the Sinhalese Buddhists who are having a dispute with the Hindu Tamils.

Take Home Message

As Muslim physicians in North America, we are likely to be asked about suicide bombings. This book gives very detailed and well documented critique of this topic. In my conversations with members of other faiths I always refer to this book when answering the questions on suicides. In addition the Quran prohibits suicide in very clear terms:

make not your own hands contribute to (your) destruction... (2:195)

Submitted by Dr Faroque Ahmad Khan, MB, M.A.C.P, Professor of Medicine SUNY at Stony Brook, Master, American College of Physicians, Member, IMANA and ISNA Board of Regents.