

Why does terrorism exist in today's world? Experts explain

Daniel Pipes

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appointed Fulbright Board of Foreign Scholarships in 1992-95, Pipes oversaw U.S. government international exchange programs. For seven years, 1986-93, he was director of the Foreign Policy Research Institute.

Q: What is the psychology of terrorism? Is the suicide attacker irrational?

A: Oh no. It is an active mode of

making war, and it is a mistake to look at suicide attack as simply some form of self-annihilation. Islamicists don't have the weapons to make war, so they are improvising. In terms of the individuals who participate, for some of them it is the intense pressure of a choice: You do this and you will be glorified; you don't do this and your family will be killed.

Q: In Israel, there has been some comment along the lines of "now you know what it feels like." What does that mean? If Israel is still under terroristic attack, how can we learn from them?

A: There are two ways of understanding this. One is that now you understand the predicament we are in. Second, it means that the American dilemma now is informed by the Israeli experience, because, although Israel is much smaller than us, they have faced these kinds of attacks.

As to why Israel is still dealing with terrorist attacks, that is in part because we've put shackles

around their response. Even today, we are urging them to sit down and talk with a terrorist chief, Yasser Arafat.

Q: The last war we fought was with Iraq, Iran's enemy. And now we look like we are going against another Iranian enemy, the Taliban. Is there going to be a rapprochement with Iran?

A: So far, there has been detente between Iran and the United States. There are significant elements in Iran who want to change.

Q: According to Bruce Hoffman of the Rand Institute, terror went down in the '90s. Now it is spiking. What's the cause of this?

A: When the State Department is adding up the numbers, they are dealing with things like attacks on businesses in South America. But terrorism didn't really go down, nor can we say that Islamicist violence has spiked. If there is a change of focus with bin Laden, it is that, for him, there is definitely a Gulf issue. His core issue is what he

calls the "American occupation of Mecca." He can't accept American troops in the Gulf.

Q: The paradigm in the '90s was that terrorism is going high tech, but the hijackings were basically low tech. Should we rethink our terrorism strategy?

A: The high-tech aspect is still very important, but what the events last week show is that the terrorists are doing creative thinking outside the box. . . . And that shows that we have to be more creative, have to think outside the box. Remember that movie "Three Days of the Condor" with Robert Redford? He was working for an intelligence agency and his section was reading novels. They were searching for clues by reading novels. Well, maybe we have to have some imagination; maybe we ought to be reading novels, studying movies. Think outside the box.

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