



## The Lessons of Terror: A History of Warfare Against Civilians: Why It Has Always Failed and Why It Will Fail Again

By *Caleb Carr*

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### **The Lessons of Terror: A History of Warfare Against Civilians: Why It Has Always Failed and Why It Will Fail Again** By Caleb Carr

In **The Lessons of Terror**, novelist and military historian Caleb Carr examines terrorism throughout history and the roots of our present crisis and reaches a provocative set of conclusions: the practice of targeting enemy civilians is as old as warfare itself; it has always failed as a military and political tactic; and despite the dramatic increases in its scope and range of weapons, it will continue to fail in the future.

International terrorism—the victimization of unarmed civilians in an attempt to affect their support for the government that leads them—is a phrase with which Americans have become all too familiar recently. Yet while at first glance terrorism seems a relatively modern phenomenon, Carr illustrates that it has been a constant of military history. In ancient times, warring armies raped and slaughtered civilians and gratuitously destroyed property, homes, and cities; in the Middle Ages, evangelical Muslims and Christian crusaders spread their faiths by the sword; and in the early modern era, such celebrated kings as Louis XIV revealed a taste for victimizing noncombatants for political purposes.

It was during the Civil War that Americans themselves first engaged in “total war,” the most egregious of the many euphemisms for the tactics of terror. Under the leadership of such generals as Stonewall Jackson, the forces of the South tried to systematize this horrifying practice; but it fell to a Union general, William Tecumseh Sherman, to achieve that dubious goal. Carr recounts Sherman’s declaration of war on every man, woman, and child in the South—a policy that he himself knew was badly flawed, had nothing to do with his military successes (indeed, it hampered them), and brought long-term unrest to the American South by giving birth to the Ku Klux Klan.

Carr’s exploration of terror reveals its consistently self-defeating nature. Far from prompting submission, Carr argues, terrorism stiffens enemy resolve: for this reason above all, terrorism has never achieved—nor will it ever achieve—long-term success, however physically destructive and psychologically debilitating it may become. With commanding authority and the storyteller’s gift for which he is renowned, Caleb Carr provides a critical historical context for understanding

terrorist acts today, arguing that terrorism will be eradicated only when it is perceived as a tactic that brings nothing save defeat to its agents.

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Novelist and military historian Carr (*The Alienist*, etc.) penned this brief history of terrorism as a corrective to the widespread perception spread by ill-informed journalists and politicians that the September 11 attacks were unique and unprecedented. Carr argues from the start that terrorism must be viewed in terms of "military history, rather than political science or sociology," and that the refusal to label terrorists as soldiers, rather than criminals, is a mistake. Underlying Carr's argument is the view that a repugnant bloodthirstiness arises when one civilization, no matter how advanced, encounters another. Accordingly, as Western civilization spread throughout the 17th and 18th centuries via imperialism, and Europe's seemingly more disciplined armies encountered strange peoples such as the Aztecs, Native Americans and south Asian Indians the wholesale slaughter of noncombatants became commonplace. No liberal, Carr zooms in on the history of the U.S. and looks at how terror tactics are fundamental to U.S. military efforts. Such tactics, he shows, were first established in the Civil War, culminated with the firebombing of Germany and Japan during WWII, and reappeared later during the Vietnam War. He traces the manner in which politicians and intellectuals have sought to justify and then curtail attacks on civilians throughout history. Only occasionally dry or repetitive, this often fascinating, accessible tome skillfully contends that the terrorizing of civilians has a long and controversial history but, as an inferior method, is prone to failure; it is rooted as much in human nature as it is in the need for military expediency. (On-sale: Jan. 29)

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From [Booklist](#)

To ignore history is to repeat past mistakes. History professors proffer that piece of wisdom as the primary reason for studying history. Carr, author of the best-selling historical novels *The Alienist* (1994) and *The Angel of Darkness* (1997) and also a military historian, certainly supports that maxim in this beautifully articulated but sobering history of terrorism. Without a doubt, Carr's book needs to be read by as wide an audience as possible. Looking as far back as ancient Rome and bringing his analysis up to the present, he does not so much suggest as *insist* that terrorism is nothing new and that it is not a political or sociological issue. Terrorism, he argues, is as old as warfare itself, and, indeed, it *is* warfare, the kind of warfare "deliberately waged against civilians" to break the enemy's will. Further, Carr presents convincing evidence that terrorism has *never* succeeded in its purpose and that it cannot be fought successfully by repaying in kind or by refusing to recognize its military nature--we must see terrorists as the soldiers they really are. Why pay such close attention to correctly defining terrorism? Because "there have never been two more vital and powerful forces at work in the world than international capitalist democracy and fundamental Islam, nor two forces more capable of physical and cultural destruction." Jolted into reading this book? Good. *Brad Hooper*

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Review

"**The Lessons of Terror** is so earnest, so well informed and so outrageous...that almost any reader will find something to love and something that will make you want to throw the book across the room. It is, in short, pure Carr."—*Newsweek*

"After the deadly attacks against the United States, many Americans now may view Carr's earlier arguments as prescient and his approach as the only one that has a chance of working. **The Lessons of Terror** is fascinating to read and provocative in the best sense of the word." —*The Christian Science Monitor*

“A provocative history of warfare against civilians from Roman times to the present.”—*Time*

“It crosses political boundaries. It offends and provokes, refreshes and energizes.”—*Chicago Sun-Times*

*From the Trade Paperback edition.*

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