



Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill

By Jessica Stern

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For four years, Jessica Stern interviewed extremist members of three religions around the world: Christians, Jews, and Muslims. Traveling extensively—to refugee camps in Lebanon, to religious schools in Pakistan, to prisons in Amman, Asqelon, and Pensacola—she discovered that the Islamic jihadi in the mountains of Pakistan and the Christian fundamentalist bomber in Oklahoma have much in common.

Based on her vast research, Stern lucidly explains how terrorist organizations are formed by opportunistic leaders who—using religion as both motivation and justification—recruit the disenfranchised. She depicts how moral fervor is transformed into sophisticated organizations that strive for money, power, and attention.

Jessica Stern's extensive interaction with the faces behind the terror provide unprecedented insight into acts of inexplicable horror, and enable her to suggest how terrorism can most effectively be countered.

A crucial book on terrorism, *Terror in the Name of God* is a brilliant and thought-provoking work.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Stern, a former fellow on terrorism at the Council on Foreign Relations (and the inspiration for Nicole Kidman's character in *The Peacemaker*), makes the issue personal by depicting her encounters with religious terrorists around the world. Her definition of "religious terrorism" is comprehensive, encompassing the growing Muslim jihad in Indonesia, militant Palestinians and zealous Israelis, and Americans who kill abortion doctors in the name of Christ. Given the opportunity to articulate their positions, these and other subjects surprise not by their vehemence but by their relative normality, making it all the more curious that many of them eventually elect to strike against their opponents with deadly force. Explaining the "how" therefore becomes as important as explaining the "why," and the book carefully outlines the ways in which militant leaders of all denominations find recruits among the disenfranchised and recondition them, often under cultlike conditions, stoking their zealotry to the point of suicide and murder. Coupled with additional research, Stern's firsthand encounters bring a valuable and much-needed perspective to the problem of religious violence, and she identifies several increasingly broad threats, including the extent to which many governments will tolerate or even sponsor militant religious groups to further their own political agendas. For all the material damage terrorist acts cause, Stern argues, we should understand religious militance as a form of psychological warfare, calculated to bolster the faithful and strike "spiritual dread" in the unbelievers; the most effective counterstrategy is thus not violence but nonviolent techniques such as psychological counterwarfare and the reaffirmation of our own values.

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From [The New Yorker](#)

This sophisticated examination of religiously motivated terrorism is a welcome antidote to the armchair analyses of Islamic extremism that surfaced in the wake of September 11th. Stern spent five years interviewing religious terrorists of all stripes, including anti-abortion crusaders, Hamas leaders, and militants in Pakistan and Indonesia. She found men and women who were driven not by nihilistic rage or lunacy but by a deep faith in the justice of their causes and in the possibility of transforming the world through violence. That faith, Stern suggests, is fuelled by poverty, repression, and a sense of humiliation, and then exploited by "inspirational leaders" who turn confused people into killers. The West cannot fight terror by intelligence and military means alone, she argues; a "smarter realpolitik approach" toward the developing world would use policy to deprive terrorists of not only funding and weapons but potential recruits.

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From [Booklist](#)

Because Scripture specifically forbids the taking of life, why is it that so many of the world's most ruthless killers invoke religion to justify their bloody deeds? By talking directly with radical Protestant militias stockpiling antitank rockets in the Arkansas hills, with Jewish millennialists plotting to destroy Muslim shrines in Jerusalem, and with Islamic extremists training Pakistani and Afghan holy warriors to kidnap and kill Westerners, Harvard scholar Stern has probed the subterranean world of devout terror. Her up-close portraits allow readers to glimpse the fierce alienation and the festering grudges that drive desperate men (and a few women) to embrace violent theologies promising earthly paradise and heavenly salvation to all who join their merciless crusades. Recent world events will heighten readers' interest in the chapters dealing with al-Qaeda and its allies: Stern details the disturbing possibility of such groups' acquiring biological or nuclear weapons, but she also outlines sophisticated strategies for defeating religious terrorists both militarily and politically. Timely and compelling. *Bryce Christensen*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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