Reviewed by Robert Derrick Butterfield*

Richardson, Louise. (2006). *What Terrorists Want: Understanding the Terrorist Threat*. London: John Murray.

Terrorism - - it's the scourge of our times. We seem to be surrounded by a new and virulent danger. There are groups of fanatics everywhere, usually Muslims who seem to hate us and bear an enormous grudge against us. There are suicide bombers, people willing to blow themselves up and take the lives of innocent bystanders. There are people willing to fly jumbo jets into New York skyscrapers to make a political point. So many ordinary people throughout the world are asking, "What have they got against us?" "Why do they hate us so much?" "Where does all this anger come from?" There do not seem to be any easy answers to these questions.

Whether we consider the bombing of London's buses and underground trains last year, the mayhem caused at Madrid's Atocha railway station in 2004, the destruction of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, the present ongoing chaos in Iraq, the Bali nightclub bombings in 2005 or the current troubles in Southern Thailand, then it is clear that we are dealing with a worldwide phenomenon. The most symbolic act of course was 9/11 – the destruction of the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York on September 11th 2001. Terrorism impinges on and affects the daily lives of everyone. Terrorism can persuade people not to go on holiday. Try catching a flight at any international airport these days and you will have to get through an intricate web of security procedures. Suspicion is everywhere. Toothpaste shaving cream, deodorants –if carried in hand luggage - will be confiscated by the authorities. They could be concealing explosives and are thus a security risk. Catch an underground or a sky train in central Bangkok and a policeman will search your bag. Danger is all around us. Where does it originate? What motivates these terrorists? What can we do to protect ourselves?

This book aims to provide answers to these baffling questions. The author is well placed to do this, being not only an eminent scholar (Executive Dean of the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard.) but also having specialised in the study of terrorism for many years. Moreover she comes from a nationalist Irish background, the people who tend to support the Irish Republican Army. The IRA is generally regarded as one of the strongest terrorist organizations in the world,

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and has fought a long war against the British. The author confesses at one point, that while she was at university, she was, briefly, a member of its student branch. However she makes it very clear that she has foresworn such ideas, and no longer has any sympathy for Irish terrorism, nor for terrorism in any form.

Yet what exactly is terrorism? It is used nowadays in a very loose and pejorative sense to condemn and to denigrate one's political opponents. Yet it is important to define it and to pin it down. Richardson defines it thus, "Terrorism, simply put, means deliberately and violently targeting civilians for political purposes." (p. 20) Thus it is violence directed at civilians, non-combatants as opposed to military organizations and soldiers. The first part of the book is taken up actually defining and describing terrorism, putting it in a historical context and profiling those who commit it.

An act of terrorism, says Richardson has certain characteristics. Firstly, it is politically inspired, it has a political purpose. Secondly, it involves the use of violence. Thirdly, its aim is to communicate with people, to convey a political message. Al Qaeida wanted to attack America in its own backyard, so to speak, to show people America's vulnerability. Fourthly, the act has symbolic significance. The 7/11 terrorists attacked Wall Street and The Pentagon , because they were the symbols of America's financial and military power in the world. Fifthly, Richardson states controversially that terrorism is the act of ' sub-state groups' rather than states , and that all terrorists belong to such groups. This would include groups like Hamas in Palestine, the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka and Al Qaeida it self. This is debatable because many states in the past have used terrorism. The bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the U.S. in 1945 were, says Richardson, acts of terror aimed at the civilian populations of those cities, to force the Japanese government into surrendering. Finally, says Richardson, the terrorists want to reach and persuade a particular audience of people. Osama bin Laden is aiming to influence the whole of the Muslim world, including Muslims living in western societies. He wants to persuade Muslims to join his cause, to adopt his ideas.

Richardson states that terrorism is essentially a tactic that political groups will resort to, if they think it will be effective. "Terrorism is a tactic," says Richardson, "and people use it because they think that, at some level, it works." (p. 59) President George W. Bush frequently alludes to terrorism as if it is some kind of political ideology, and has frequently said that his aim is to defeat terrorism. This, according to Richardson, is mistaken thinking, "a meaningless aspiration and an unachievable goal". (p. 22) Strong words, but, I think sensible ones. After all, how do you defeat a tactic? Our aim, says Richardson should be to contain terrorism, "contain the use of this tactic". (p. 22)

Richardson is scathing in her criticism of the present American administration. The declaration of a global war on terrorism is "a terrible mistake," and "a policy doomed to failure". (p. 22) It simply cannot be accomplished.

Terrorism is seen by many as a totally new phenomenon, mainly committed by Muslims. Terrorists are seen as lunatics, psychopathic killers, people who enjoy killing. Richardson states that all of these assumptions are wrong. Terrorism has a very long history - there have been terrorist groups since biblical times – and terrorism has always been with us, in one form or another .A group of Jews called Zealots attacked and killed Romans at the time of Christ. Neither is terrorism a Muslim monopoly. All the world's major religions have produced terrorists at one time or another. Christian Americans used napalm in the Vietnam war. In the period 1946-48 Jewish terrorists attacked the occupying British in Palestine, deliberately targeting civilians. Their leader, Menachim Begin later became Prime Minister of Israel and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize.

Africans, such as Jomo Kenyatta in Kenya and Nelson Mandela in South Africa were originally seen as terrorists, but later became leaders of their countries and respected international statesmen. Terrorism can appear in a highly industrialized and advanced countries like Germany and Italy (the Baader-Meinhoff group and the Red Brigades in the seventies) and in developing countries (the Maoists in Nepal, the Shining Path in Peru.). And terrorists are not mad. They are calculating people trying to attain political objectives, and reckon that terrorism is a more effective strategy than more peaceful forms of political activity. The perpetrators of the London bus bombings were highly educated, middle – class youngsters, from well-to-do families and were regarded as model citizens. There is evidence that terrorist groups, like the IRA, do not recruit mentally unstable individuals. They want dedicated, committed people.

When one examines the motives of those who become terrorists, one often finds the desire for **revenge**. The cause of this might be a particularly bitter personal experience. A young Irishman whose house is ransacked by the British army , might well wish to become a terrorist on that experience alone. Likewise a young Palestinian who is roughly treated by the Israeli army. However, other factors must be present. There must be an enabling group present . In Northern Ireland ,many of the catholic population sympathise with the IRA and frequently offer support and practical help to the terrorists. Richardson talks about the presence of 'a complicit society'(p. 31) ,offering shelter and support to the terrorists. When the authorities come looking, the terrorists simply disappear into their local community. The third factor that must be present is a legitimizing ideology and charismatic leadership. A disaffected person

must be recruited by people who are pursuing certain political goals single -mindedly and have strong leadership. The IRA and the Tamil Tigers can count upon gaining fresh recruits, because they have established a strong framework for their organizations and have strong leaders. Bin Laden is a charismatic figure who has put forward his unique brand of Islamic fundamentalism, and is not afraid to act. Likewise, Guzman, the leader of the 'Shining Path' group.

Another motivating force is the desire for **renown**. Terrorists want to be famous for their terrorist exploits. After 9/11, Osama bin Laden and his organization became household names. Previously, they were totally unknown. The terrorist seems to see himself as a protector and defender of a certain group, and regards himself as a world figure, fulfilling a historic role. He wants to go down in history, to be remembered for his deeds. Bin Laden has often said that he is carrying out 'God's will' by his actions. And all terrorists hope to get a **reaction** to their activities. Bin Laden wanted Britain and America to invade the Middle East after 9/11, because it would be a tremendous opportunity, he thought, to mobilize Muslim opinion to join his cause. Mssrs. Blair and Bush duly obliged him.

Many of today's terrorists are 'suicide bombers' which means that they deliberately kill themselves when setting off a bomb. The bomb is actually strapped to their bodies. Muslims who perform suicide missions, are told that they will go to heaven for killing infidels, i.e. non -Muslims who are enemies of the true religion. Richardson is less impressed. She merely says that the suicide bomb. is the weapon of choice today, whereas in the sixties it was hi-jacking. It is a question of effectiveness. It is extremely difficult for the police to stop someone who is prepared to die in the committing of a terrorist act. It is also a spectacular way of ending one's life and gaining notoriety.

After defining and describing terrorists and what motivates them, the second half of the book is devoted to ways of dealing with terrorism. Richardson is trenchant in her criticism of the Bush administration and of the 2003 Anglo-American invasion of Iraq. She is convinced that conventional military force does not work when dealing with terrorists. The occupation of Iraq has created more terrorists, and has exacerbated the problem of terrorism, rather than reducing it.. Occupying an Arab country with a conventional army just seems like western neo-colonialism to many. No link has ever been found between Al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein's regime. Many people think that the 2003 invasion was solely to take control of Iraq's considerable oil reserves. The failure to find weapons of mass destruction, and the failure to find a peaceful settlement in Iraq has led many to condemn the invasion.

Richardson states that one must have "a defensible and achievable goal" (p. 31) In dealing with terrorism. If, after 9/11, the US

had stated that it intended to capture and punish those responsible for it, it would have set itself a realistic goal. If Bush had stated that his objective was to stop the spread of Islamic fundamentalism, people would have accepted this as reasonable. However he set himself goals that he could not possibly achieve. He was bound to fail.

Richardson says that those fighting terror must live by their principles. The invasion of Iraq was meant to deliver the Iraqis from the brutal and murderous Saddam Hussein regime and offer them something better. The US and Britain claim to espouse liberal democratic values, yet perpetrate the abuse and humiliation of prisoners as happened in the notorious Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad. In Guantanamo prison in Cuba, terrorist suspects are being held without trial for indefinite periods of time, subject only to US military law. They are denied a public trial. The Bush administration has recently admitted that 'water boarding' – generally regarded as a type of torture that simulates drowning - is being practised there with official approval. (8) They are using the same methods as Saddam Hussein.. On cannot claim to be morally superior if one uses torture and abuse . The moral high ground has been surrendered.

Richardson also says that we should know our enemy. It is very useful to know, for example what Al Qaeida's objectives are, how strong is their community support, how wealthy are they and where that money comes from. Richardson states very controversially that we should be willing to talk to terrorists. (p. 246) This might be thought to confer legitimacy on them and may appear that you are rewarding terrorism. Yet one has the example of the IRA and the British Government.

Talks led to negotiations, which led to a ceasefire, resulting in the current situation where there is, at last, a real chance of peace in Ireland after years of bloodshed.

We also have to separate the terrorists from the communities that support and protect them. Generally speaking, a terrorist movement cannot survive for long without this support. In Vietnam, the Americans recognized that winning 'hearts and minds' was the best way of defeating the Vietcong. The Red Brigades in Italy and Baader - Meinhoff in Germany did not last long because they did not have wide popular support. One does this by recognizing and doing something about the grievances that these communities suffer. For example, there was the 'Black Panther' movement in the 1960's, militant blacks who threatened violence in North America. Much was done by the US government to improve the lot of coloured people. Education and housing were improved so that black people could get better jobs and attain middle - class status. The Panthers faded away, very much as a consequence of these policies. Similarly, the US sent a great deal of money to help the Indonesian victims of the Tsunami (December 2004). As a result of this, there was a decline in the support for Jemaah

Islamiya, the organization responsible for bombing Bali.

Richardson advocates engaging with others to combat terrorism. Terrorism is an international threat - the 9/11 victims were drawn from over twenty nationalities including fifty-seven British. After the attack there was tremendous international sympathy for the US.' We are all Americans' said Le Monde, the French newspaper. (p. 252) This could have been mobilized against terrorism. Instead Mr. Bush launched his plans with minimal consultation .He ignored the United Nations and NATO and acted virtually unilaterally. The international sympathy evaporated. Yet 9/11 was an international act of terrorism. It was planned in a terrorist cell in Hamburg, financed from Saudi Arabia and committed in the United States. In the past, different terrorist groups have worked together to achieve their goals. Surely only close international co-operation is going to get the better of them.

Finally, says Richardson, we must be patient. The countries have far more resources that the terrorists. Terrorism is the tactic of the weak when confronted by the strong. The strong win in the long run. The possibility exists that a terrorist group will gain a nuclear bomb or chemical weapons and that is a real threat. Richardson thinks it is unlikely if the nations of the world get together and monitor all the nuclear and chemical weapons and make sure that they do not fall into the wrong hands. Catching the terrorists requires close co - operation between the world's police forces as does preventing further terrorist outrages. Again international co-operation is the key to success.

Richardson has written an extremely cogent and concise study of the nature of international terrorism and what can be done about it. My only disagreement with her is with her insistence that terrorism is primarily the work of 'sub - state groups' (p. 21) .In my opinion, governments can perpetrate terror, and have done, often much more effectively than individual terrorist groups.