



Dr. Robert R. Friedmann "Society cannot afford to let terrorism become a part of normal living."

By [Kavita Chhibber](#)

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Dr. Robert R. Friedmann is a nationally renowned expert in the field of criminal justice and counter-terrorism. Currently Professor of criminal justice and Distinguished Chair of Public Safety Partnership, at Georgia State University, Dr. Friedmann takes a look at the Mumbai attacks, global terrorism and measures needed to be taken before its too late, and in an exclusive interview.

As you saw events unfold in the Mumbai attacks, what were the things that struck you?

Let me make this observation because I haven't seen anyone else making it- having watched closely the 60 hours in which the atrocities took place. What I've noticed in this multitude of attacks is that it has received press coverage internationally of an unprecedented scope and magnitude. I've never seen any of the numerous attacks in India receiving that much attention for such a long time, in such detail. I have also not seen this when Benazir Bhutto was assassinated and that was clearly a political terrorist act. Usually those receive a lot of attention. It did, but not to the extent to which these attacks did. Whether it was intended or not, the attackers have received world wide attention and that of course is a double edged sword because it emboldens those who support activities and those who understand the nature of these terrorist events.

So I think this might point to a future trend. Instead of having a "traditional suicide" bombing, hostage taking may become more in fashion because it receives more attention.

That brings us obviously then to the role of the media, which has come in for a lot of flak in India for irresponsible reporting. There are also thoughts that the terrorists deliberately chose Israelis, and other foreign nationals to show these countries that their citizens are not immune either.

Well, in the US and England, that are countries more adept at handling the media. If you look at the 7/7 bombing in London, the government came in for a great amount of criticism against the British law enforcement and the government entities because for 3 days there was a total blackout on what happened in the underground tube and the bus. In the United States these incidents are quite scarce.

In Israel it is a bit different. The media does get to these parts, and shows bodies and carnage but the unity of command in the fields is quite clear and the reporters will not be able to get into the crime scene itself without the support and cooperation of the law enforcement entities.

I have seen some of the footage of media involvement (in the Mumbai attacks) where officers were desperately trying to remove people from the scene for simple security if nothing else but it was not easy to do.

As to point about the foreigners, I think that could be only a partial response to get attention. I think what attracted the attention of the media more than anything else was- and we are not talking here about a large number of casualties of foreigners-the two luxury hotels and 8 additional sites in the financial center of Mumbai. It's not the first time a luxury hotel was attacked. Remember the luxury hotel in Bali, and the Marriot in Pakistan; so you start to see the pattern and a direct threat to economic and business centers and I think that attracted their attention. Then you add to it the Nazi like selection of undesirable or desirable passports depending on the point of view-that added to it, but I don't believe that was the only reason to hold that much attention. I think all these variables-the fact that there were foreigners involved, it was an economic and financial center and other tensions all combined to get the attention of the scope and magnitude it did.

There has been a lot of criticism on how the Security Forces handled the crisis.

Most of the people who criticize have very little clue about what happened on the ground. It reminds me of a critique of a book where someone said the book is so outrageous I haven't even read it. Some one said the Indian forces need to be criticized for not collecting enough intelligence on the ground before they (terrorists) attacked. How does he know that? That kind of remark is very irresponsible, and very disrespectful to the Indians who tried to do their best. I think until all the facts are collected, "gathered experts" ought to refrain from making comments like " seemingly", " apparently", " I believe that" and so forth. It's not helpful to anyone.

I have seen reactions (to terrorism) in Madrid, London and US and I think India and Israel are the only two

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countries that I can think of where there is there but not always in the same place and that is why in such a huge country, it isn't yet a complete development of the protocol of not only deploying the special forces, but handling the crowd, and the media.

I heard, one of the representatives of the Special Forces commenting, that to him it appeared that the terrorists knew the hotel better than his guys. That may very well be and that can always happen because terrorists are always a step ahead because when they plan the activity they do their homework and its not easy when somebody is controlling the hostages to know the entrances and exits and floor plan as clearly and as well as the terrorists.

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Any time you have an incident like this there are lessons to be learnt. I think the notion that India needs outside help, is patronizing and inappropriate to suggest. I'm much more in favor of what I would call international cooperation and what a specialist calls "building a network to be the network."

I'm not sure any of the Special Forces to be flown in would have handled it that much better.

Probably one of the key lessons that needs to be learnt is not how to handle a crime scene-the bigger issue is-what does this activity mean? Why was it undertaken, who has done it, who benefits from it and what are the interests of those who perpetrated it? And if course these are in addition to technical improvements that will no doubt be considered. I think there is a need to have concerted strategic sense of where the fight against terrorism is going and I'm yet to hear that explicated not only in the Indian arena but anywhere else.

And what are your thoughts on "Islamic terrorism" a phrase that seems to rear its ugly head all over the media when something like this happens? Then the US role and the so called war on terror, the blunder and anti America sentiment invariably comes into the picture.

At the G8 Summit a day before the 7/7 bombing in London, I remember the then Prime Minister Tony Blair said that G8 is pledging 50 billion to assist the poor countries. The implication then is that just because someone is poor they have a justification to become a terrorist. That is atrocious and a tremendous mistake to suggest that. One has to look at political interests, ideologies, who benefits, what are the strategies; just because someone is poor they become terrorists is simply not backed by any facts.

The first distinction is that all terrorist groups have local interests, though I hesitate to say that about Hamas and Hezbollah because if you look carefully at their writing and ideology they clearly veer into the globalization of terrorist objectives.

After the two blocs finished infighting after the cold war, the Soviet Union faded away in the late 80s and that created a vacuum. So in steps China that is clearly going to take the place of the Soviet Union and I think the second one is India partly because of its size, because it's a nuclear power, and a democracy along with its heritage and economy. All these combine into third party influences.

Then there are the other players and there are the radicals and the extremists of the Islamic world that want to bring back the golden era of Islam, with the understanding that there is a limit to resources like oil. The Bin Ladens-not the person but the phenomenon that he represents have two options-one is join the rest of the world and work on science and technology and see the production or if the ship has left the dock try to destroy it. I think that is really the bigger picture.

"Everybody is talking about global terrorism, Jihadi networks but, not all of the power struggle is religion, and not all of it is ideology."

Everybody is talking about global terrorism, Jihadi networks but, not all of the power struggle is religion, and not all of it is ideology. When you look at the history of wars, it's the control and domination and the desire for hegemony that is the key issue. It's going to be very costly and most of the countries of the world, probably including Israel do not understand the nature of the fight. I think there is an understanding that Iran as a nuclear power is a threat but I'm not sure even the Israeli leadership understands how serious the nature of terrorism is.

It's not like vehicular fatalities that society lives with. In the US its about 40,000 a year which is double the rate of homicide, and a person will say oh you know accidents happen-but society cannot afford to let terrorism become a part of normal living and treat it like vehicular fatalities and do not do too much about it.

If the world believes that having a set number of incidents a year is going to satisfy the terrorists, that won't be the case. The terrorists know exactly what they want, they know exactly how to reach it and if they are left to do that-they will.

I think Europe has lost its will to fight. I'm not sure where USA is going with its war on terrorism. It started as a war and now its nation building. In Afghanistan it is an attempt to root out the emerging Taliban and the US seems to be, though it's not true, the only one left in the fight.

It is not the US's fight-it is the fight of the free world; it's the fight of those Muslims who do not want to be dragged into this kind of extremism. Truly we are not just on the cusp of World War 3, but a shift of the Tectonic plates if you will allow a geological metaphor.

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Muslims who do not want to be dragged into this kind of extremism."

As far as the US is concerned, since that last helicopter on the roof in Saigon, the US has not done well in terms of the fight against clearly declared enemies. In Iraq the war was won in 3 weeks but when the US started to address nation building, that's where the failures started to come in. That nation building should have been done in those first three weeks when there were a large number of officers that were better equipped. The intent was right, the carrying out wasn't as good as it should have been, but it isn't something that people can wish away.

I don't believe that US, Europe, South Africa or Australia, for that matter anyone else can influence Islam and I don't think it's their duty either. I would shy away from religion or religious wars. I think what needs to be done is to let moderate voices within Islam carry that battle inside and not to have outsiders tell the Muslims what to do.

The difference between Islam and other religions is that we have not heard to date, any equivocal condemnation, whether it is the US or the UK. There was condemnation but all of it was contingent on some exit strategy that was trying to understand and justify why there is terrorism in the first place.

Unfortunately that is no longer acceptable because killing people for any cause is a no no-other than in self defense. I go back to the Judeo-Christian and modern epic sixth commandment which says Thou shalt not murder-it does not say thou shalt not kill and there is a huge difference between the two. What the terrorists are committing is murder-not killing.

Dealing with it is not easy because it has to be on the plate of everyone, every national leader, every country, every bloc because yesterday it was in Bali, then it was in Islamabad, and now in Mumbai. Tomorrow it will be somewhere else. Today there is no safe place in the world. I'm not saying this to scare people but to say that looking at the reality is much better than wishing things away. And it can happen in New York again. While the public safety community understands the threat, I don't think the public does, in any part of the world-even in Israel. And every time the solution is tactical and not strategic and that was obvious by what happened just recently in Israel. There were some rockets from Gaza that came into Israel and the minister of defense one day shut the border crossing only to reopen it again and the rockets continue to fall. Any country that allows this to happen doesn't protect its citizens.



So what would you suggest as someone who is an expert in this field?

People need to ask themselves what is it that the terrorists want because every time there is an incident the same questions will be raised all the time. I have been interviewed since the 7/7 bombings in 2005 and I'm saying the same things over and over again after every incident.

I heard President Bush talking about (after the Mumbai attacks) bringing the terrorists to justice. With all due respects, bringing the terrorists to justice is not going to solve this problem because the judicial system is not one that has the answers to the challenges these terrorists pose.

If you look at the scope of who is doing it and its really not important if its Al Qaeda or if its Lashkar-e-Taiba and if they are related by a loose or tight network. What is relevant is that there are enough organizations and people and they get enough support to continue and do this almost to immunity; they don't care about their own lives and they obviously don't care about the lives of other people and that needs to be changed and the only way to change is through enough internal pressure to say this is unacceptable. If that is not going to happen, its only going to get worse.

The challenge is much harder than its ever been before in World History. I have said this challenge is greater than Nazism and communism put together and people are shocked when I say that. They ask-what are you talking about? Don't you know how many people the Nazis and Soviets killed and we are not even reaching a miniscule percentage of that. And I reply that I don't want to have an academic seminar 20-30 years from now when this count will equal that count because we all know where this is headed.

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Look at the glorification these terrorists are getting not just from groups and organizations but from States that support it. As unpleasant as it may be to admit it, Laskar e Taiba is a Pakistani product, Hezbollah is an Iranian product, Hamas as well. If you look at the PLO in the 60s and 70s version, its an Egyptian-Soviet product and these are not exactly entities who came out serendipitously because they have some goal. Look at the Taliban who were trained by the US to fight the Soviets. What the CIA did not realize then was that it was not the Taliban working for the CIA; it became the other way around. That is what is happening all over, The terrorists may be working in the service of these countries such as Iran and to some extent Saudi Arabia that always tries to play both sides against the middle and then when they will realize that even they are a target it may be too late.

So the scope and the challenges are unprecedented in history and to deal with it and recognize it as such takes a lot of courage and changes in policies.