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Boaz Ganor, *Global Alert: The Rationality of Modern Islamist Terrorism and the Challenge to the Liberal Democratic World*, Columbia University Press, 2015, 218 pp., \$35.00 US (hbk), ISBN 9780231172127.

In this book, Boaz Ganor, head of the Institute for Counter-Terrorism (Herzliya, Israel), argues that “Islamic terrorist organizations” pose an “insidious threat” to liberal democracies in the West and, more generally, to social order and peace throughout the world. Ganor shows how these organizations adopt varied strategies in pursuit of their goals, ranging from suicide bombings and rocket attacks targeting civilians to nonviolent tactics such as providing social services and endorsing cultural and academic boycotts against the states they oppose. He thinks that the West must be apprised of the strategies and of the peculiar cost-benefit calculations that terrorist organizations adopt, and develop effective methods of counter-terrorism unfettered by the “anachronisms” and “lacunae” of international law.

In his introductory chapter, Ganor notes that while terrorism is generally viewed as “a strategy for political action that utilizes violence against civilians,” there is no agreement on a definition of the term (5-6). Since freedom fighters of national liberation groups also use this strategy—e.g., Jewish underground groups in “the Land of Israel” under the British Mandate—the notions of *terrorist* and *freedom fighter* are not contradictory (7). However, because the expression “freedom fighting” refers to a goal of violence (freedom) while “terrorism” refers to an illegitimate means of achieving that goal, Ganor concludes,

Therefore, the proposed working definition of “terrorism” is that it is a type of political violence in which a non-state actor makes deliberate use of violence against civilians to achieve political (national, socioeconomic, ideological, or religious) ends. (8)

The term “terrorist organization” slips into the narrative without definition, but judging from Ganor’s usage any non-state or subnational group using terrorism, regardless of its goals, may be so labeled.

Two red flags should immediately be raised. First, despite the occurrence of “Therefore” in the cited passage, the restriction to *non-state* actors is introduced without explanation or justification. Three pages later, confronting the fact that states also deliberately use violence

against civilians to achieve political ends, Ganor writes that “one need not apply the term ‘terrorism’ to the illegitimate actions of states in the time of war” since such acts are already classified as “war crimes,” and the purpose of restricting terrorism to non-state actors is to apply to such groups the same standards that now obligate sovereign states (11). This logic is baffling; not only is there historical precedence for describing war crimes as “state terrorism,” but no reason is given why the terminology of “war crime” couldn’t be extended to the actions of non-state groups. Of course, that only non-state agents can commit terrorism has become a commonplace assumption in contemporary mainstream media, government publications, and the vast amount of literature on terrorism and counter-terrorism. But if the concern is to understand the motivations and justifications for contemporary political violence, the restriction is a subterfuge; like it or not, the term “terrorism” is the *nom de siecle* for *illegitimate* politically motivated violence, and its pejorative connotation renders use of the adjective “terrorist” prejudicial. The effect is that Ganor is able to portray non-state groups as the real threats to social order and world peace rather than states which, with their powerful weapons and command of territory, cause social disruption and civilian casualties on a far greater scale than anything non-state groups typically do.

Second, because of the negative connotation it is very easy to claim, without argument, that terrorism is “immoral” (107) and cannot be justified by any political goal (8). More importantly, using “terrorist” in labeling an organization tends to delegitimize it prior to any serious consideration of its grievances and goals.¹ Ganor himself points out that there are many activities that terrorist organizations engage in, so why not describe them by reference to their social, political, informational, educational, or national liberation activities, using adjectives like “political,” “educational,” or “freedom fighting”? By comparison, why not describe states like Israel, Syria, Russia, the United States, etc., or their militaries, as “war crime organizations” since their agents have frequently committed war crimes?

These two points question the objectivity of Ganor’s approach. Further doubts are raised by inconsistent usage—attacks on American and French military forces in Lebanon are also described as “terrorist” (25)—and by a failure to clearly explain why terrorism is always illegitimate whereas state violence against civilians is in some cases permissible (Chapter 3). Even more telling is the manner in which he describes the goals and operations of the organizations he is concerned with. Thus, a terrorist organization is “unbound by any prohibition, a David who accepts no norm, convention, international law or restriction.” Particularly dangerous are the “hybrid” terrorist organizations like Hamas and Hezbollah with social and political wings that provide medical, educational, and other services as well as political leadership. To achieve this they must embed themselves within civilian populations, so that when the “besieged state” they oppose retaliates with counter-terrorism operations, they can use civilians as “human shields” by fighting within or behind places of worship, schools, hospitals, refugee camps, and aid facilities (4, 83, 177). Citing liberal democratic values in their propaganda campaigns, they effectively portray themselves as underdogs within the “Western-liberal” media and present their terrorist activity as self-defense (123). By engaging in social and political spheres they gain the appearance of legitimacy, allowing them to enter into “alliances” with human rights organizations to create a fictitious picture of their “plight” by inflating civilian casualties figures and blaming besieged states, e.g.,

¹ See my “The Terrorism of ‘Terrorism’” in *Terrorism and International Justice*, James Sterba, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 47-66.

Israel, for using forbidden means and methods (175-177). No wonder, then, that these groups pose an “insidious threat” to world peace (5-8).

Such descriptions are reminiscent of writings by Ariel Sharon and Benjamin Netanyahu, men for whom objectivity was never the concern.² The fact that so much of it occurs in the opening chapter of Ganor’s book poisons the waters at the outset, indicating that while the remainder might be a welcome read for the devotees of Fox News or, at best, the counter-terrorism “experts” of American think tanks, it will be an annoying bore for scholars of the Middle East and Islam.

Having set the stage, Ganor turns his attention to organizations that justify their activities by recourse to Islamic doctrine, notably, al-Qaeda, Hezbollah, and Hamas. The ideology of Hamas, for instance, calls for establishment of a Palestinian state in all of Palestine that is governed by Islamic law. A “root goal” in implementing this vision is the eradication of Israel, a goal shared by Hezbollah. Military jihad—that is, terrorism [*sic*—is an instrumental goal that confers a “personal obligation incumbent on every Muslim” (155-156). Al-Qaeda, on the other hand, aims to establish a global Islamic caliphate governed by Islamic law (102). Its instrumental strategies are to establish local proxies that deal with grievances and conflicts in different parts of the Islamic world, “misusing” ethnic, national, and territorial struggles in an effort to unite Muslims around the root goal. For example, since support for the Palestinians is a cause that unites most Muslims, al-Qaeda cited the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in its rationale for the attacks of 9/11, even though this conflict had no more to do with 9/11 than did territorial disputes in places like Kashmir, Chechnya, or the Philippines. Nor did al-Qaeda attack the United States because of anything the United States *did*, but, rather, because of what the United States *is*, namely, “the spearhead of Western society, a symbol of liberal freedoms, civil society, human rights, women’s liberation, and enlightened democracy—all of which are anathema to al-Qaeda and its allies” (116).

There is a complex rationale behind the jihadists’ use of terrorism (Chapter 8). Ganor realizes that terrorism is not designed to inflict serious damage upon the military capacities of the “besieged states,” though it might succeed in damaging their tourism industries. Primarily, a group uses terrorism to: (i) attract adherents, gain status, and weaken opposition within the “internal community” it purports to represent; (ii) create fear in the “attacked community” so that pressure will rise within opposed states for political concessions; and (iii) influence public opinion in the “international community.” Through its 9/11 attacks, for instance, al-Qaeda hoped to present the United States as a common enemy of Muslims and inspire young Muslims to join its ranks. Hamas used terrorism to scuttle the Oslo Peace Accords and create fear among Israelis, killing 457 and wounding 3008 between 2000 and 2009 in a war of attrition (157). Suicide attacks are particularly effective in gaining world attention, even though Western observers find it difficult to grasp the cost-benefit calculations of its perpetrators (144-145). Ganor’s explanation is that although suicide is prohibited by Islam, a suicide attacker will be viewed as a religious martyr (*shahid*), thereby gaining personal prestige and the rewards of heaven while bringing benefits to family and peers (145).

² See, for example, Ariel Sharon, “It’s Past Time to Crush the Terrorist Monster,” *The New York Times*, September 20, 1986; Benjamin Netanyahu, ed., *Terrorism: How the West Can Win* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1986); and Benjamin Netanyahu, *Fighting Terrorism: How the West Can Defeat the International Terrorist Network* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2001).

To oppose terrorist organizations, the liberal democracies of the West must operate on three fronts: military, psychological (media), and legal, and be willing to curtail civil liberties and democratic values in counter-terrorist operations (179). In particular, the proportionality rule of just war theory, namely, that “a military objective should be achieved with as little harm as possible to uninvolved civilians” (37), must be recognized as “anachronistic” in modern asymmetric warfare since it is unenforceable and relies on ill-defined categories (38). Ganor tries to remedy its vagueness through a refined system of classification which grades civilian involvement in terrorist campaigns, observing that civilians “who knowingly put themselves in harm’s way” become “legitimate military objectives” (47). The lengthy discussion of proportionality in Chapter 3 culminates in a pair of equations to guide the estimations of proportionality of premeditated military operations and targeted killings (51-61).

These equations—interesting enough in their own right—might prove useful as a guide to liberal democracies in their counter-terrorism operations, and this refinement of the rules of just war is Ganor’s principal example of the legal steps that might be taken. His final chapter summarizes other political and propaganda measures that should be followed. Of particular interest are the claims that “appeasement” is a dangerous response to Islamist-jihadist-terrorism (176), that a media-propaganda campaign is needed to foil a terrorist organization’s attempt to win hearts and minds and gain international legitimacy (177), that terrorists must not to be allowed to develop social and political wings (175), and that every effort be taken to block the terrorists’ exploitation of international law in undermining the legitimacy of counter-terrorist operations (177-178). The book concludes by summarizing the principles that liberal democracies should follow in confronting the global threat of Islamist jihad (178-180).

I have already indicated that Ganor’s use of the word “terrorist” is typical of the prejudicial rhetoric used to describe violence originating from political instability in the Middle East. What is really bothersome is the fact that Ganor makes no serious effort to understand the circumstances that have given rise to the emergence of Islamic jihadist groups over the past 30 years, or why these groups should resort to terrorism. He says nothing about the past century of Western intervention in Islamic lands and support for autocratic regimes, the forcible establishment of a militarized Jewish state in Palestine, and the more recent American-led invasions of Muslim countries which have resulted in massive civilian casualties and the disintegration of states. He does not mention that there was no Hezbollah prior to the Israeli invasions of Lebanon in 1978 and 1982, or that Hamas emerged only in 1988, after right wing Israeli politicians gained power in Israel in the late 1970s, rapidly accelerated Jewish settlement in the occupied territories, and intensified military repression of Palestinian dissent. Ganor might claim that al-Qaeda attacked the United States on 9/11 because of what it *is* rather than because of what it *does*—a fantasy reminiscent of President George W. Bush’s statement that America was targeted because it is “the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world”³—but the fact is that there was no al-Qaeda prior to the stationing of American troops in the Arabian peninsula and the Gulf War of 1991. If a hatred of “democracy” motivates these Islamic groups as Ganor alleges (15-20, 63), why has this passion taken so long to emerge within the Islamic world given the considerable history of modern democracies?

³ Speech by President George W. Bush on September 12, 2001, as printed in *The Boston Globe* <http://www.boston.com/news/packages/underattack/globe_stories/0912/_Today_our_very_freedom_came_under_attack_+.shtml>, (accessed on October 15, 2015).

As for terrorism, it is easy enough to understand how this tactic comes to be used when other strategies have proven futile against a more powerful state that regularly uses its weaponry against civilians. While the extreme expedient of suicide attacks is indeed remarkable, people do not usually kill themselves for personal prestige, benefits for the family, or the rewards of heaven. More believable is the explanation given in Robert Pape's insightful study of eighteen suicide terrorism campaigns and 315 attacks from 1980-2003, namely, that desires for national self-determination and an end to military occupation were at the root of every instance of this form of terrorism.⁴

Ganor's treatment of the genesis, rationale, and strategies of Hamas is particularly distorted (153-155). In discussing Hamas terrorism in the 1990s, for instance, he fails to mention that it was the February 1994 massacre of 29 Palestinian civilians in Hebron by a Jewish settler that set off a wave of reprisals and counter-reprisals. After the Israeli government did not respond to its May 1994 offer of an armistice in which civilians would be removed from the area of struggle, Hamas renewed its suicide missions against Israelis.⁵ Again, in early 2003 a Hamas official reported that, "Hamas is sticking by its proposal formulated a year ago by recommending an end to attacks on civilians on both sides," pledging that, "Hamas would stop attacking Israeli civilians without distinction for geographic boundaries if Israel stops attacking, killing and arresting Palestinian civilians and blockading their towns and villages."⁶

Ganor does not cite the IDF's use of high-powered weaponry against Palestinian civilians in Gaza and the West Bank, or the Palestinian casualty figures from the late 1980s to the present day. Nothing is said about the nearly fifty year occupation of the West Bank, the brutalization of the Palestinian population at the hands of the IDF and Israeli settlers, or the blockade of Gaza for the past decade. The reader will look in vain for any mention of Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon in which some 18,000 Lebanese and Palestinians were killed, the vast majority of whom were civilians, not to mention the massacre in Sabra and Shatilla that took place under the eyes of the Israeli military, or its 22 year occupation of southern Lebanon. One would think that a serious study of the motivation of groups like Hamas and Hezbollah would consider such things.

While Ganor accepts that warfare against Islamist organizations will involve civilian casualties, he does not show whether counter-terrorist operations have been proportional. For example, his proportionality equations were not put to work in defending Israel from the charge of using disproportionate force in Gaza during the 2008-2009 Israeli invasion of Gaza (168-169). He refers to the Goldstone Commission's Report on this operation (28), but only to highlight Justice Goldstone's subsequent misgivings about its conclusion that Israel deliberately harmed civilian targets. He conveniently overlooks the fact that the other members of Goldstone's Commission reaffirmed the Report.⁷ He omits the fact that the

⁴ See Robert Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005), 79. Ganor mentions Pape's work only in passing (144), as one of three alternative explanations of suicide terrorism, without discussing it further.

⁵ See Khaled Hroub, *Hamas: Political Thought and Practice* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2000), 246.

⁶ "Hamas urges mutual Palestinian-Israeli halt to attacks on civilians," *Agence France Presse*, January 19, 2003, <<http://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/hamas-urges-mutual-palestinian-israeli-halt-attacks-civilians>>, (accessed on October 15, 2015).

⁷ The other three members of the Goldstone Commission accused Goldstone of misrepresenting facts in order to cast doubt on the credibility of their joint report. See: "UN Gaza report co-authors round on Goldstone," *The Guardian*, April 14, 2011, <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/apr/14/un-gaza-report-authors-goldstone>>, (accessed on October 15, 2015).

only documented use of civilians as “human shields” in Gaza was by Israeli soldiers on direct orders from their commanders.⁸ At a more abstract level, Ganor fails to point out that passing a *jus in bello* proportionality test confers no legitimacy upon a military operation if the provisions of *jus ad bellum* have not been satisfied.

There is really nothing new in this book. One will learn nothing about the emergence of Islamist groups that oppose the policies of Western states and Israel. One will pick up no information about the history, culture, or politics of the Islamic world, and one will gain no insights about ways of dealing with the grievances of “Islamist terrorist organizations” in a way that might actually end the cycle of violence. There is not even a new brand of *hasbara* here, since substantially the same points have been made by Israeli and American propagandists ever since the 1970s and are echoed on an almost daily basis in the American media.

Should one take *Global Alert* seriously then? Certainly not as a piece of scholarship; it is little more than propaganda parading under the banner of academic respectability, and it should never have passed the review board of a university press. Its appearance on the shelves of bookstores should be taken seriously, however, for it is designed to sustain acceptance of continual warfare against forces in the Islamic world that oppose Western invention, under the banner of a “war on terrorism.” Ganor’s emphasis on the need to rethink the rule of proportionality and civilian support for terrorist activities, and his emphasis on the dangers of hybrid organizations “embedded” within civilian populations, are designed to render acceptable the inevitable civilian casualties in counter-terrorism operations. To paraphrase Voltaire, this volume might very well succeed in causing the unsuspecting reader to “believe absurdities” and, thereby, acquiesce when its government “commits atrocities.” If there is any “global alert” it sounds, it is that states like Israel and its Western allies intend to continue their war against the Islamic world with explosives, propaganda, and callous disregard for the human rights of its inhabitants.

Tomis Kapitan
Emeritus Professor of Philosophy
Northern Illinois University

⁸ See the accounts of 26 Israeli war veterans that were collected by *Breaking the Silence*, an organization of Israeli army reservists critical of their country’s treatment of Palestinians. “Sometimes we would enter while placing a rifle barrel on a Palestinian civilian’s shoulder, advancing into a house and using him as a human shield,” said one Israeli soldier with the Golani Brigade. “Commanders said these were the instructions, and we had to do it.” This was reported by Dion Nissenbaum in “Israeli soldiers in Gaza describe a ‘moral Twilight Zone,’” *McClatchy Newspapers*, July 14, 2009, and by Steven Weizman, “Israeli soldiers: ‘No clear red lines’ in Gaza war,” *Associated Press*, July 15, 2009. See also the report issued by B’tselem, “Guidelines for Israel’s Investigation into Operation Cast Lead,” at <<http://www.btselem.org>>, as well as the UN report on the Gaza Conflict, September 23, 2009, <<http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/25184E52D3E5CDBA8525763200532E73>>, (accessed on October 15, 2015).

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