



Psychology of Terrorists

Dr. Eric A. Zillmer (Zillmer@drexel.edu)

Athletics Director, Carl R. Pacifico Professor of Neuropsychology, Drexel University

Friday, July 8th, 2016

These most recent terror attacks against our country have changed the collective psychology of our nation and our perception of the threat of terrorism. This threat has led to many questions for psychological science that include an understanding of the psychological pre-requisites for such terrorist acts.

Given that terrorism has become increasingly frequent it is important to understand the terrorist's frame of mind, the terrorist's decision-making process, the social context under which terror acts occur, and the specific personalities that may be involved in terrorist atrocities. As the stories unfold in Paris, Brussels, San Bernardino, and Orlando, the motivation of the shooters are often difficult to understand. This conversation on the Psychology of Terrorists will examine the terrorist's mindset ranging from Nazis, Baader-Meinhof, Taliban, and suicide bombers, to al Qaeda and ISIS. Preliminary findings include:

Terrorists commit acts of terror for what they believe are entirely justifiable and logical reasons.

Alienation is common among those who engage in terror as they often feel isolated from society and removed from their culture, family, and friends of origin. A feeling of frustration, which then leads to action, is common among terrorists.

Terrorist cells are often developed either through friendships formed in childhood or at cultural or religious institutions.

“Lone wolf” crimes often represent copycat crimes and define a new normal in terms of targeting soft targets and a new phenomenon, terrorism by proxy.

Bio - Dr. Eric A. Zillmer is the Director of Athletics and Carl R. Pacifico Professor of Neuropsychology at Drexel University in Philadelphia. A licensed clinical psychologist who received his BA from Rutgers-Camden, his doctorate in clinical psychology from Florida Tech, Zillmer completed internship training at Eastern Virginia Medical School and a postdoctoral fellowship in clinical neuropsychology at the University of Virginia Medical School. Now in his 19th year as Director of Athletics, Dr. Zillmer oversees all components of the Athletics Department. Dr. Zillmer was instrumental in the creation of the Drexel athletics logo, extensive renovations at the Vidas Athletic Complex, the creation of a new 84,000 square foot Rec Center, the transfer of the Armory to Drexel University, and securing the winning bids for the 2008 Olympic Trials in Table Tennis, the 2011-2024 US Open in men's and women's squash, as well as the 2012 NCAA men's lacrosse quarter finals at PPL Park and the 2013, 2015, 2016 Final Four men's lacrosse at Lincoln Financial Field.

Dr. Zillmer is a Fellow of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia, the American Psychological Association, the Society for Personality Assessment and the National Academy of Neuropsychology for which he has also served as President. Zillmer has written extensively in the area of international terrorism having published more than 100 journal articles, book chapters, and books, and he is a frequent contributor to the local and national media including CNN, TIME, MSNBC, New York Times and the Wall Street Journal on topics ranging from sports psychology, forensic psychology, to the psychology of terrorism. Dr. Zillmer's books have been translated to an international audience including Czech, Chinese, Turkish, Korean, and Portuguese. The 2nd edition of Principles of Neuropsychology (2008) has been used in over 500 Universities worldwide. Dr. Zillmer is also the coauthor of the Tower of London-Drexel and the English version of the d2 Test of Attention. Military Psychology (2nd edition, 2012) examines the psychological contexts involved in the most recent military initiatives and geopolitical events. Related to this publication Dr. Zillmer was invited by the Pentagon as a Distinguished Visitor to travel to the naval base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba and by the Pennsylvania National Guard to visit war-torn Bosnia.

