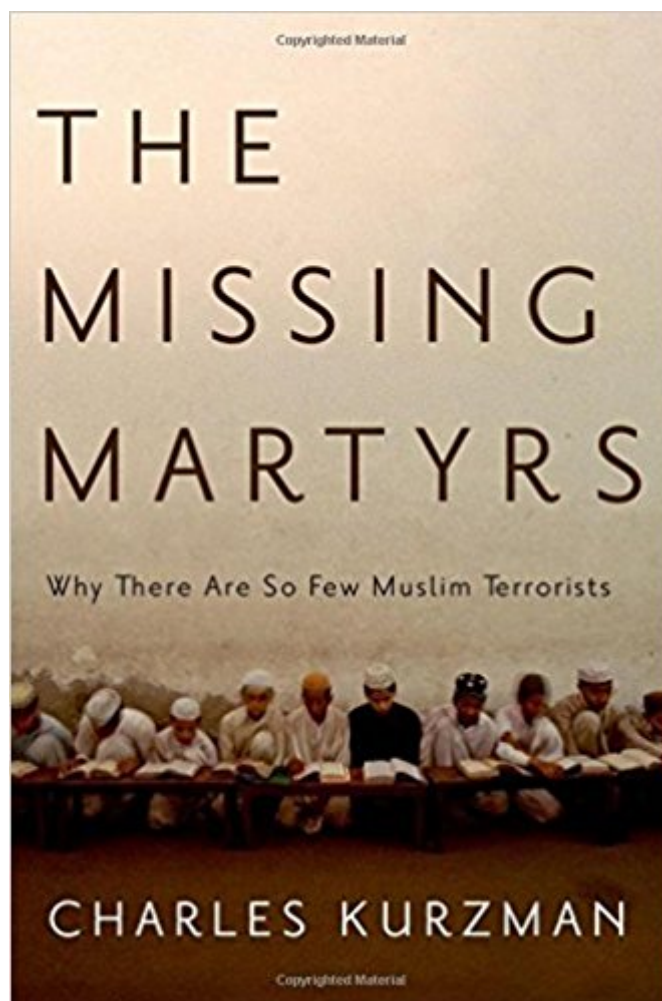


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# The Missing Martyrs: Why There Are So Few Muslim Terrorists



## Synopsis

Why are there so few Muslim terrorists? With more than a billion Muslims in the world--many of whom supposedly hate the West and ardently desire martyrdom--why don't we see terrorist attacks every day? Where are the missing martyrs? In this startlingly counterintuitive book, a leading authority on Islamic movements demonstrates that terrorist groups are thoroughly marginal in the Muslim world. Charles Kurzman draws on government sources, public opinion surveys, election results, and in-depth interviews with Muslims in the Middle East and around the world. He finds that young Muslims are indeed angry with what they see as imperialism--and especially at Western support for local dictatorships. But revolutionary Islamists have failed to reach them, as can be seen from the terrorists' own websites and publications, which constantly bemoan the dearth of willing recruits. Kurzman notes that it takes only a small cadre of committed killers to wreak unspeakable havoc. But that very fact underscores his point. As easy as terrorism is to commit, few Muslims turn to violence. Out of 140,000 murders in the United States since 9/11, Islamist terrorists have killed at most three dozen people. Of the 150,000 people who die each day, worldwide, Islamist militants account for fewer than fifty fatalities--and only ten per day outside of the hotspots of Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan. The real bulwark against Islamist violence, Kurzman finds, is Muslims themselves, who reject both the goals of the terrorists and their bloody means. With each bombing, the terrorists lose support among Muslims. Incisive and authoritative, *The Missing Martyrs* provides much-needed corrective to deep-seated and destructive misconceptions about Muslims and the Islamic world. The threat of Islamist terrorism is real, Kurzman shows, but its dimensions are, so far, tightly confined.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"[A] hard-headed empirical approach to an issue so often locked in emotion-fueled back and forth...a must read." - Mother Jones  
"Kurzman's book is a contribution to the study of Al Qaeda and Islamism." - New York Times Book Review  
"Kurzman provides a significant answer to a question that needs to be addressed: in a world of more than a billion Muslims, why are there so few Muslim terrorists? So much attention is given by policy makers and media experts to the small number of extremists that Kurzman's crucial question is too often ignored. For anyone interested in reducing the threat of global terrorism, this study is required reading." -John Voll, Professor of Islamic History, Georgetown University  
"The best scholarship asks uncomfortable questions, and then attempts to provide trenchant answers. Charles Kurzman has asked: why does fear of terrorism persist, despite the meagre number of actual casualties caused by those who claim to be Islamists or violent jihadi warriors? His answer is as bracing as it is counterintuitive: media need to tune down the obsession with violent episodes, but the American public also needs to clamor for an open, honest debate about terrorism. This book is a hard-headed manifesto, calling for a return to pragmatism, with more reliance on academics and less on interest-driven think tanks engaged with Middle East politics."  
-Bruce B. Lawrence, co-editor, with Aisha Karim, of *On Violence: A Reader*

Charles Kurzman is a professor of sociology at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. His books include *Democracy Denied* and *The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran*.

Excellent narrative and a good read as well.

I just heard the author discussing this book on television. He starts out by saying that there are Islamic terrorists who want to kill you. Then he puts the threat in perspective. He says there were 37 deaths in the United States that can be attributed to Islamic terrorism in this country besides the approximately 3000 on 9/11. There were over 100,000 murders not attributed to Islamic terrorism in the same time period. He says that there are several areas in the world where Islamic terrorism is of great concern but not here. He also points out that the terrorists are having great difficulty recruiting people. The reason, he says is that many Muslims consider terrorism un-Islamic. This author did not diminish the possibility of Islamic terrorism that could be of concern to us in the United States, but he put the threat in perspective while agreeing that we need to remain vigilant. His voice seems to

be reasoned, calming, yet realistic. I am only adding this comment because of another review whose author neither read the book nor listened to the author, yet attempted to add fear-mongering to the discussion. This book could be a good antidote if he would only read it.

The ostensible question this book tries to answer is this: given that there are so many Muslims, why are there so few Muslim terrorists? Of course, there are very few terrorists of any kind. By nature the work is lonely, unremunerative, frustrating, and dangerous. There are even fewer Christian terrorists or Jewish terrorists, although the author does not inquire about this. Supposing the public attitude to terrorism to be merely simple-minded, he switches to an inquiry into the attitudes of Muslims toward themselves and the world. Being a sociologist, his usual tools of inquiry are the interview and the public opinion poll, making for dull reading when he multiplies examples to prove a point. He seems to be talking down to his audience in a relaxed presentation that often takes too long. The inquiry begins with his finding that Muslim resentment of the US is "symbolic, not strategic." "As Middle East expert Gary Sick suggests, Muslims refusing to accept Muslim participation in 9/11 may be "a healthy form of denial," a way of distancing themselves from acts they consider so heinous that they do not believe their co-religionists could have been responsible." (p.48) I don't understand Sick's statement, but the attitude behind it is clear. Many Muslims exist in a highly defensive relation to the non-Muslim world. "Americans will just have to learn why the world hates them so much," says one of the interviewees. (When Muslims see the mangled bodies of 9/11 victims the reaction is more sympathetic.) The author has decided, based on interviews and polling, that the great majority of Muslims are liberals. They appear to believe in individual rights, economic development, and national self-determination. But he admits that meanings are slippery: "Islamists are openly hostile to certain elements of modernity in its Western forms, such as gender-neutral laws and the separation of church and state, which they see as signs of the West's moral decadence." (p.69) I thought they were integral parts of modernity, not just Western forms. But the author's own conception of modernity means "more efficient technologies of control", and "ever-more egalitarian ideologies of liberation," (p. 61). These sound Western to me. Egalitarianism does require gender neutrality. To avoid a conceptual bog, let's just say that general concepts such as "individual rights" can be interpreted in more than one way, in a Western way and in a Muslim way. The author, not mentioning this duality, later quotes the seventeen points of a legal defense statement by Abdullah Nuri, a Iranian dissenter. They cannot be presented in any detail here, but note the first point: "1. No fallible human can claim to be the only one in possession of the truth." (p. 104) An eloquent acknowledgment, but given that certain statements of Muhammad -- those in the Quran, for

example -- must be presumed infallible, Muhammad's message must be infallible, even for those Muslims who are not Islamists. In most Western societies, Muslims are just one small group among many. In most of the Middle East, they are the overwhelming majority. The Muslim position on apostasy is left untouched. The author mentions this conceptual clash but does not consider its implications for non-Muslims who are not in the majority. Having satisfied himself that most Muslims are liberals, the author then goes on to tell us why US foreign policy alienates Muslims. He introduces us to Shirin Ebadi, a dissident Iranian human rights lawyer. He states: "In her [Nobel] acceptance speech, Ebadi repeated her condemnation of the repressive rule of the Islamic Republic of Iran. As a Muslim, she decried the dangerous claim "that democracy and human rights are not compatible with Islamic teachings. On the contrary, she insisted, the message of Islamic revelation "cannot be in conflict with awareness, knowledge, wisdom, freedom of opinion and expression and cultural pluralism." (p. 155)(Different peoples have different ideas of awareness and so on, but every nation wants to survive and if possible to thrive, which sometimes means thinking in a selfish way. Foreign policy is a rather complex subject.) The author continues:"Ebadi condemned the US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq, the American detention center at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and other US actions that she said "violated the universal principles and laws of human rights by using the events of 11 September and the war on international terrorism as a pretext." (p.156)Whether the actions were merely a pretext is not simply a question of sincerity. My threshold for danger may be different from yours, and elected leaders feel obliged to provide the maximum of protection to their people. The author (Kurzman) does not explain why it is so important to please Muslim nations, nor even why the Nobel judges find it so important. He notices that often Muslims do not show awareness of US actions that ought to please them. It seems that the Muslims we should try to please are "reformists" (p. 160). Their judgment may be wrong in some cases but on the average they will be right. This book appeared before the "Arab Spring." I would be interested in seeing a second edition so that the author has the opportunity to explain what went wrong with this regional pro-democracy uprising, which was neither helped nor hindered by the US except to some degree in Egypt, and ended with hardly anything changed except in Tunisia. I don't think most Muslims are really liberals.

It's easy to worry about Islamic terrorism, especially since 9/11. It's frightening to think Al Qaeda and other extremists are out there training a new generation of terrorists. But rather than fanning the flames of our fears, THE MISSING MARTYRS puts the treat of Islamic terrorism in context. The author understands that one fatality from terrorism is too many. At the same time, he challenges us

to let go of emotional logic in favor of fact. He describes the comparatively low level of terrorism in recent years, compared with all other forms of violence (outside a handful of civil war zones). He presents evidence that most Muslims consider terrorism un-Islamic. He also reports the frustration of terrorist leaders over their significant recruitment failures, and the frequent incompetence among those they have recruited. Kurzman does a beautiful job reporting on the complexity of the response to Islamic terrorism, including the way that Bin Laden is sometimes treated as "chic" (or "sheik" ) by Muslims who do not support or engage in terrorism, much the way Western leftists might use Che Guevara as an icon, (perhaps on a T-shirt) far removed from revolutionary politics. The premise of the book is audacious. That his book generates objections is evidence of the strength of people's fears. However, Kurzman's argument is seeping into public consciousness. It is worth reading this to see the extent of the evidence he has pulled together on this subject.

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