

[*The Lessons of Terror: A History of Warfare Against Civilians: Why It Has Always Failed and Why It Will Fail Again*, Caleb Carr, Random House, 320 pages]

## Worse than a Crime

By John Zmirak

ON THE FACE of it, novelist and military historian Caleb Carr ought to be anathema to conservatives. His skillful murder mystery *The Alienist*, set in late 19th-century New York, is politically noxious in a dreadfully predictable way. Its heroes are reforming politicians and a pioneering psychologist, and the chief villain is a corrupt Catholic prelate. Like so many historical novels, *The Alienist* panders to the present-day reader and his prejudices. Instead of bringing to life the mindset of people in the past, rendering credible and sympathetic older worldviews so as to deepen our understanding of how these change over time, it sets up as heroes the radicals of its era. We're invited to cheer on their Manichean struggle against hidebound reactionaries and bigots who stand in the way of Progress—which always tends, of course, towards the very mores and ideology of enlightened postmodernists. Remember how Hegel saw the absolute culmination of the entire history of the universe—matter and spirit and God's own unfolding of His divine nature—in the Prussian state of his day? How silly of him. We know so very much better today, now that we've reached the real End of History. Reading about the past rendered this way amounts to a protracted act of self-congratulation—like liberals chuckling and cooing over their own baby pictures.

A shorter work Carr published not long before Sept. 11, 2001 is far more troubling—and surely proved embarrassing. Called *Killing Time*, the novel imagines a suffocating anti-utopian

future, one dominated by a globalist capitalist world empire based in North America. The heroes of the novel are a cult of cyber-terrorists—a kind of hipster's al-Qaeda—fighting the Great Satan from their base in ... Afghanistan. Ahem. You can see how Carr might be anxious to distance himself from this particular novel—for instance, by drawing on his training in military history to write a book on how to respond to terrorism.

And yet, for all that, *The Lessons of Terror* is an important book. Because of the volume's vast ambitions, Carr makes some significant mistakes, and he indulges in various distortions imposed by his (thick) ideological filter. But the central point of his short historical study ought to be taken seriously—indeed, it should inform our future discussion of terrorism and the “war” launched against it. Carr defines terror not as asymmetrical warfare, nor as the struggle of non-state elements against established governments, nor even as a species of guerrilla combat (which he rightly distinguishes from terror *per se*). Nor is terror the outgrowth of religious fundamentalism, nor even of a potent ideology, as would suit neoconservative thinkers, who try to paint contemporary politics in stark black and white as a confrontation between the forces of civilization, freedom, and democracy and the evil proponents of fanaticism and savagery. Instead, Carr uses a definition drawn from the morally richer vocabulary of traditional Western Christian Just War teaching: he describes terror simply as warfare waged against civilians, either intentionally or indiscriminately, with the goal of breaking their will to fight.

Terrorism is a tactic, not an abstract moral category or an outgrowth from the dark underbelly of a particular religion. It's a technique of fighting wars, one that has been used by governments as well as guerrilla and revolutionary movements—in fact, much more frequently and viciously by the former. Carr goes back as far as the history of Rome, pointing to the “punitive” wars undertaken by the late Republic and the Empire against Carthage and the

German tribesmen across the Rhine. But it would be easy to go further—think of the slaughters recorded in the *Iliad* and the Old Testament, and depicted graphically in the artworks of Assyria and Egypt. Since the dawn of man's bloody history, it has been rare indeed for warriors to distinguish between combatant and non-combatant; in fact, as one may read between the lines in Carr's account, this distinction is one more artifact of the Christian West—although one that has far too often been disregarded even by soldiers bearing the banner of the cross.

This conceptual clarification is extremely important, recasting the issue of terror in a coherent moral framework that can be applied across historical contexts and to a wide variety of military antagonists: Roman soldiers, Viking raiders, Norman crusaders, guerrilla warriors, resistance fighters, illegal combatants, British air force generals, and American counterintelligence agents alike—whoever targets civilians intentionally as a means of making war falls under the same scrutiny. And opprobrium. Commendably, Carr agrees with the Just War teachings of Christianity that civilians can never be justifiably attacked as primary targets—not even when they are engaged in producing armaments or materiel which contributes to a war effort. Nor can cities be bombed indiscriminately, either to break the fighting spirit of their inhabitants or to pummel an enemy's infrastructure into oblivion and starve its army of weapons and supplies. Applying such a standard, a consistent moralist must condemn the Allied bombing campaigns conducted against German population centers such as Dresden and the destruction of Tokyo, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki—air assaults which one of their chief authors, Gen. Curtis LeMay, admitted to his subordinate Robert McNamara, “would get us tried as war criminals if we lost.” (This quote, along with profound, rueful reflections about the nature of modern conflict, can be found in the stunning recent documentary “The Fog of War,” a feature-length interview with

McNamara conducted by filmmaker Errol Morris.) As Carr makes clear, the willingness of Westerners to exempt their own governments from the obligation to spare civilians from harm whenever possible empowers the cynical murderers of al-Qaeda, giving credence to their charge that we are a pack of hypocrites—weeping copiously when our office workers and firemen die but serenely shrugging off the sufferings of our enemies' innocent bystanders.

The historical perspective Carr provides shows that the modern concept of "total war" is in fact nothing new, certainly not the logical or necessary outcome of centuries' experience, much less the result of intellectual "progress." Instead, it is an archaic throwback, an atavistic abandonment of the West's own moral heritage. I wish that Carr had chosen to examine more fully the origins of "total war," particularly of strate-

gic bombing; he would have found them in the 1920s, as military theorists examined the experience of World War I for lessons in how to avoid another draining conflict of attrition. As West Point historian Williamson Murray demonstrates in his history of the Luftwaffe, *Strategy for Defeat*, these elite thinkers looked to Czarist Russia, Imperial Germany, and the Habsburg Monarchy—all of which collapsed politically long before their forces were comprehensively defeated on the field—and concluded that the way to end a war in the modern era was to demoralize the civilian population so that it lost the will to fight and thus force a surrender. Conveniently (for their theories), the rapid development of aircraft made it practical to target population centers and to test this theory on a grand, destructive scale.

Everywhere it was tried, this strategy failed. The Nazi devastation of Holland

and Poland, the Battle of Britain, the German siege of Leningrad; on the Allied side, the massive bombing of German and Japanese cities—in no case did strategic bombing or other measures aimed at civilians produce a popular revolt against the military that brought down the government. In fact, the principal usefulness of aircraft in World War II was in close combat support—a fact that the Germans overlooked, massively wasting resources on city-busting strategic bombers instead of the short-range dive bombers that had actually helped them conquer much of Europe by disrupting and demoralizing troops.

It's important to make this point. Those who reject traditional moral strictures on the conduct of combat and embrace total war tend to do so under the rubric of realism and pragmatic necessity. But as Carr makes abundantly clear in case after case—starting with Rome, but proceeding

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episodically up through the Irish Civil War, the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, and the second, self-destructive Palestinian intifada—targeting civilians is almost always completely counterproductive. It is worse than a crime; it's a blunder. Drawing on the evidence of history, Carr shows again and again that whatever harm is done to enemy morale by assaults on civilians quickly diminishes, replaced by moral outrage and a commitment to revenge. The reaction of Americans in the wake of Sept. 11, 2001 is only the most recent and vivid example. There are literally dozens adduced throughout Carr's book, and it is hard to find many counter-examples. In the course of his book, Carr shows that the decision to spare noncombatants, though it finds support in the moral injunctions of St. Augustine and other Just War theorists, only began to be practiced widely when soldiers themselves saw the uselessness of their attacks on innocents. It turned out that the very military discipline required to keep soldiers from devastating civilians also produced a much more effective fighting force—while generating far less popular resistance from conquered populations.

Ironically, Carr was a prominent supporter of the recent invasion of Iraq, and a cheerleader for Donald Rumsfeld's attempt to create a smaller, more disci-

plined American military that could fight wars that—theoretically—could conquer our enemies without devastating their infrastructures. In the wake of the scandal of Abu Ghraib, with its incalculable consequences for Arab public opinion, it is likely that Carr has re-examined his admiration for the secretary of defense. Clearly the small, professional force required for defeating the wretched Iraqi army was nothing like the massive security and social-services Leviathan needed to remake

Carr nor most American politicians dares embrace: restricting immigration from nations that generate terrorism as one of their chief exports and controlling our national borders. With America's southern frontier virtually ungarded, the elaborate visa restrictions and airport security installed after 9/11 are an expensive charade.

Carr has many such blind spots—including an abiding prejudice that leads him to minimize atrocities committed by Protestant regimes and exaggerate those

# THE MILITARY DISCIPLINE REQUIRED TO KEEP SOLDIERS FROM DEVASTATING CIVILIANS ALSO PRODUCED AN EFFECTIVE FIGHTING FORCE.

Iraq into an American democratic ally—if such a thing were ever possible in the first place. It is also increasingly obvious that the most effective weapon against terror is not the pre-emptive invasion of potential sponsor states, followed by prolonged and ugly occupation, but rather the careful infiltration and prosecution of terrorists by domestic intelligence agencies—the very approach that has been taken by nations with much more experience of dealing with terrorism, namely the Europeans. Of course, there is one more measure that neither

of Catholic rulers, and to portray the Crusades as a clerical conspiracy to deflect Western aggression onto a mostly innocent Islamic world. He neglects the fact that the territories over which most of the Crusades were fought were still majority Christian when the First Crusade was launched; they were occupied territories, subjugated by Arab warlords who conducted a centuries-long, ultimately successful policy of cultural genocide. (For documentation, see Bat Ye'or's unmatched history *The Decline of Eastern Christianity Under Islam*.) For all their flaws, the Crusades began as a legitimate war of liberation, every bit as justified as the invasion of Normandy.

Nevertheless, this is a worthy book. Carr makes a powerful case that the carefully developed, highly artificial "laws of war" that emerged from the Christian Just War tradition are not abstract ethical injunctions that impede the successful prosecution of an attack; instead, they represent good sense, the practical wisdom distilled by generations of soldiers and statesmen who together came to see both the evil and the stupidity of aiming to kill women and children first. ■

*John Zmirak is the author of the upcoming A Bad Catholic's Guide to Good Living.*

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# Rediscovering Belloc's Verse

By Jonathan Chaves

This is the faith that I have held  
and hold,  
And this is that in which I mean  
to die.

—Hilaire Belloc

ACROSS THE STREET from the entrance to Princeton University stands one of my favorite bookstores, Micawber Books, and I visit there late each August when I go to Princeton to address the Luce Scholars, a group of young graduate students and professionals preparing to spend a year in Asia.

On a recent trip, a sober tan volume beckoned to me from the shelves of the poetry section, which I always go to first, and it proved to be a first edition of Hilaire Belloc's *Sonnets and Verse*, published in 1924. It is now a prized possession.

Conservatives know Belloc (1870-1953) primarily as the author of the classic *The Servile State* (1912), listed as one of the "Great Books of the Conservative Tradition" by Jeffrey O. Nelson in his pamphlet, "Ten Books that Shaped America's Conservative Renaissance." In this work, Belloc laid out the principles of Distributism—the "third way" between large-scale, "plutocratic" capitalism and socialism—championed by Belloc and his friend and associate G.K. Chesterton, a system by which private property would be sacrosanct but would remain small-scale, as it had been for centuries before the emergence of modern corporatism.

I was also aware that Belloc was a superb essayist and had penned some of the finest travel writing in modern literature, such masterpieces as *The Path to Rome* (1902) and the miniature gems in *Hills and the Sea* (1906). And then I knew Belloc's *The Great Heresies*, in which he had written with a foresight

that today seems nothing less than prophetic, "Millions of people ... of Europe and America have forgotten all about Islam .... They take for granted that it is just a foreign religion which will not concern them. It is, in fact, the most formidable and persistent enemy which our civilization has had .... [T]he story is by no means over; the power of Islam may at any moment re-arise." Can we read these words, written in 1938, without a chill today?

Like Chesterton, Belloc turns out to have been a poet of distinction, today largely ignored as such because, again like Chesterton's, his poetry is metrical and rhymed and utterly at odds with the modernist mainstream of the day that the academy has long since established as the only stylistic option worthy of respect. Very recently, R.J. Stove has, happily, recalled attention in these pages to Belloc's accomplishment in verse. But when I came upon this book three years ago, virtually no contemporary writer seemed to have noticed this aspect of his *oeuvre*. Of course, Belloc's hilarious comic poems in *The Bad Child's Book of Beasts* (1897) are still in print with Dover Books and are still fairly widely read. I had known of them before finding *Sonnets and Verse*, and considered "The Hippopotamus" to be perhaps the finest couplet ever written:

I shoot the Hippopotamus with  
bullets made of platinum,  
Because if I use leaden ones, his  
hide is sure to flatten 'em.

But even in this delightful book, and the follow-up volume, *More Beasts for Worse Children* (1898), Belloc had used humor to make quite profound points about the errors of modernity, as in my favorite, "The Microbe":

The Microbe is so very small  
You cannot make him out at all,  
But many sanguine people hope  
To see him through a microscope.  
His jointed tongue that lies  
beneath

A hundred curious rows of teeth;  
His seven tufted tails with lots  
of lovely pink and purple spots  
On each of which a pattern stands,  
Composed of forty separate  
bands;  
His eyebrows of a tender green;  
All these have never yet  
been seen—  
But Scientists, who ought to know,  
Assure us that they must be so ...  
Oh! let us never, never doubt  
What nobody is sure about!

This must be one of the first expressions, if not the very first, of the key insight that scientists, driven more by scientism than by true science, have dogma of faith themselves, allowing mere hypotheses to take on the coloration of established facts.

But it was with true astonishment that I read my new purchase and discovered that not only was Belloc a good serious poet, he was outstanding! Of course, the satiric poems were consistent with the great sense of humor displayed in the books of beasts; and so such a poem as "Lines to a Don," defending Chesterton against an attack by a contemporary academic, was not as much of a surprise as others:

Remote and ineffectual Don  
That dared attack my Chesterton,  
With that poor weapon,  
half-impelled,  
Unlearned, unsteady, hardly held,  
Unworthy for a tilt with men—  
Your quavering and corroded pen;  
Don poor at Bed and worse  
at Table,  
Don pinched, Don starved,  
Don miserable;  
Don stuttering, Don with  
roving eyes,  
Don nervous, Don of crudities ...

And this is only the beginning. The poem goes on for three pages, drawing a devastating portrait of a type all too familiar to us today, the academic who hides, beneath an exterior of effeminacy and mincing politeness, a smoldering