

# How Safe is Atlanta

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The London terror atrocity of July 7 raises the question of how safe are we in Atlanta (or for that matter in any urban area)? We are as safe in Atlanta today as London was on July 6, Madrid on March 10, 2004, New York on September 10, 2001, Oklahoma City on April 18, 1995, Israel on any day without a terrorist attack, and Atlanta on July 26, 1996. The assumption is that if we prepare well we can either detect, prevent or thwart a terror event before it happens. If that would have been the case then Israeli security forces would not have been successful 90%-95% but rather 100% of all attempts to foil terror threats.

Terrorism is not a simple crime that has a motive, a modus operandi, and a victim. It has all that and more. The "product" of terrorism, its very success, depends on the amount of damage inflicted on human beings and to significantly symbolic property. Post-modern terrorism does not need an exit strategy. It does not need an alibi, it does not need a getaway car, and it does not need an escape route. The human "smart bomb" selects the target and then "exits" the scene never to come back. That is a formidable challenge that separates the crime of terrorism from most other crimes: The rewards of the crime are inherent in its very commission.

Terrorism is also not over with the latest attack. We do not need "reminders" of what terrorists are capable of but the mere thought that after about 4 years without a "major" terror attack another one will not take place in the US, is a grievous error. It took 8 years from the first to the second attempt on the Twin Towers and it is a matter of a strategic decision by the terrorist organizations to send suicide bombers to sensitively vulnerable spots in any of our urban centers.

After 30 years of "fighting crime" the figures have decreased significantly... to the level they were at 40 years ago (the decline lasted about 10 years). Yet we have a level of crime we learned to "live" with. If not the individual victims, certainly societies have learned to tolerate it. However with terrorism, the threat is not only to the individual victims but to the very fabric of society and country. Yet saying that we have to learn to live with terrorism is insufficient. The Israelis have done so rather successfully but at what horrendous cost? No society and no individual should be expected to carry such a burden.

Critics on the war on terrorism are too quick to argue that terrorism cannot be defeated by the use of military force. This may be true if we only rely on sheer power. But that does not mean that the West has exercised its military power to its fuller extent and it does not mean that military power should not be used (which is the real intent of the critics). The problem is that modern day terrorists have developed an ideology that glorifies murder not only as legitimate but as a heavenly commandment. Thus, hate, vilification, dehumanization, incitement, and violence are the weapons of the terrorist but in the fight against it we focus mostly on the violent atrocity and not on the elements that precede it on this continuum. We know about terrorists occurrences but most of us do not bother to read the "literature," watch the videos, or review the sermons that precipitate such atrocities. Terrorist propaganda and ideology is treated like small print in a contract. Most do not bother to read it but then are deeply affected by its language. We are as safe in Atlanta today as London was on July 6.