

SUICIDE MISSIONS: POWER OF THE POWERLESS AND POWERLESSNESS OF THE POWERFUL

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Abstract:

Suicide attacks have clearly become the most effective modus operandi of modern insurgencies, in a sense, that, the very act of the attack is reliant upon the death of its executor. However the argument that suicide attacks is solely a religiously inspired phenomenon is completely misleading. This paper thoroughly examines the misperceptions about and motivations behind suicide attacks. It uses the multidisciplinary approach to support the argument that suicide attacks are essentially used to meet the secular and strategic goal of compelling the withdrawal of foreign military forces from illegally occupied lands.

Introduction

Suicide mission or suicide attack¹ is an “operational method in which the very act of the attack is dependent upon the death of the perpetrator”.² Suicide attacks have clearly become the most dangerous modus operandi of modern insurgencies, and in a sense, the suicide attack is the insurgents “smart bomb”. It is a reaction against brutal occupation & exploitation. The suicide attacker is no more than a platform that carries the explosive charge to its target. However, this platform can think and, therefore, see to it that the explosive charge is detonated at the optimal location and timing so as to create maximum carnage and destruction.³ It is a rare phenomenon of 1980s⁴ that has gone widespread during the last two decades and acquired a new dimension and impetus in the 21st century. Since 9/11 it has come to be known as the ‘*power of the powerless and powerlessness of the powerful*’⁵. Suicide missions differ

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from other insurgents or freedom fighter's tactics in that the success of a suicide mission solely hinges upon the death of the attackers *who willingly die to kill or die to win*. The suicide attacks are no more aliens, rather these attacks have come to be widely accepted, and even supported by the masses especially in some of the world's conflict zones crying under foreign occupation. The resemblance between the suicide missions undertaken in Palestine, Iraq, Kashmir, Afghanistan and even tribal areas of Pakistan is evident in the presence of occupying military forces mainly dominated by other religion, and armed uprising motivated with the spirit of getting rid of the foreign occupation.

Notwithstanding the historic traces of the phenomenon, the emergence of the idea can be attributed to the Middle East power politics, which introduced a new kind of weapon for the oppressed. However, the ownership of the idea no more rests with the Muslims or the Arabs and the weapon has earned wide spread acceptance from the oppressed and deprived communities across the globe. The thinking behind the suicide bombing in Beirut in 1983⁶ made its way to Sri Lanka in 1987; in 1990s it was known in Turkey, Kashmir, Chechnya, Oklahoma, Kenya and elsewhere in the world. However, September 11 witnessed a new edge of it, when (allegedly) nineteen suicide bombers armed just with box cutters provided an excuse to the winners of the Cold War to wage a new global war under the guise of 'War against Terrorism'. And since then most of such suicide missions are routinely unleashed against the US and its political and military allies committed to protecting and promoting American interests with all their brutalities. The new global war by the imperialists – camouflaged as 'War against Terror' has toppled the established regimes of Afghanistan and Iraq and

expressing their desires to replicate the same in Iran, Syria, and host of other states; grouped as 'Axis of Evil'. The war has flouted the international law at will, made the UNO redundant, challenged and repudiated the sovereignty of the nations and revived the practices of Ghangezian / Alexanderian era of destroying civilizations, spreading terror, raising heaps of dead and disgraced the humanity in occupied territories. To bring an end to the suicide bombing and culminate the war at their desired note has provided them the further pretext to unleash their more brutal force, display un-matching arrogance through their preemptive aggressions. However, one thing that all agree to in the East and the West that 'War against terrorism' as it has been fought till now has not only failed in controlling the suicide bombing, rather it has enflamed it further. In fact, similar other acts of violence have increased manifolds. It has widened the already simmering intra-civilizations conflicts distanced many Western allies from America, eroded the credibility of America and its friendly regimes in the Muslim World, aroused anti Americanism and fear of new form of colonization amongst the already oppressed third world countries.

What is the difference between Suicide and Suicide Missions?

There is a difference in suicide and suicide missions, in terms of motivation, execution, and social response. The famous sociologist Durkheim differentiated between four types of suicide in his classic book *Suicide*.⁷ Egoistic suicide occurs in a society where the individual is poorly integrated with the society, and ending his or her own life will have little impact on the rest of the society. In other words, social ties prevent the individual from taking his or her own life. Altruistic suicide takes place in a state opposite to egoism, in which the individual is extremely attached to the society and thus has no distinct life of his or

her own. Individuals who commit suicide based on altruism die because they believe that their death and departure can bring about a benefit to the society. Durkheim saw this as occurring in two different ways: Firstly; where people consider themselves as worthless or a burden upon society and would therefore opt for suicide. Secondly; where people saw the surrounding world as meaningless and would sacrifice themselves for a greater ideal. Durkheim saw this as happening in 'Eastern' religions, such as the Sati in Hinduism. Some contemporary sociologists have used this analysis to explain Kamikaze pilots and the cult of the suicide bomber. Anomic suicide happens when the social norms and laws governing the society do not correspond with the life goals of the individual. Since the individual does not identify with the norms of the society, suicide seems to be a way to escape them. Fatalistic suicide: Fatalism is a state opposite to anomie in which social regulation is completely instilled in the individual; there is no hope of change against the oppressive discipline of the society. The only way for the individual to be released from this state is to commit suicide. Durkheim saw this as the reason for slaves committing suicide in antiquity, but saw it as having little relevance to modern society.

A suicide mission is an attack on a military or civilian target, in which an attacker — either an individual or a group — intends to kill others and knows that he or she will most likely die in the process. The means of attack have included vehicles filled with explosives, passengers planes carrying large amounts of fuel, and individuals wearing vests filled with explosives. Synonyms include suicide-homicide bombing, martyrdom operations, predatory martyrdom. Strictly speaking, an attack may not be considered a suicide attack if the attacker is not killed (although they plan and hope to be) or if there is some question as to

whether their intention is to be killed (even if the attack is certain to kill them).

There is no single motive for engaging in suicide missions. The motives may be multiple and complex expressions of historical, political, economic, social and psychological dynamics. A commonly held view is that people going for suicide are mostly mentally disordered, frustrated, psychologically broken, coward and weak persons unable to face the circumstances or hardships. People favouring suicide believe that it provides an escape from suffering. However, research offers little evidence that suicide attackers suffer from psychopathology. Existing research reveals a marked absence of major psychopathology among “would-be” suicide attackers; that the motivation and dynamics for choosing to engage in a suicide attack differ from those in the clinical phenomenon of suicide; and that there is a rational “strategic logic” for the use of suicide attack campaigns in asymmetric conflict or fourth generation warfare. Almost all of the suicide attacks undertaken in Israel, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka or elsewhere were having political or social underpinnings, politically motivated, and leashed against the foreign occupiers or their allies. Personalities of suicide attackers are usually quite stable and remarkable, at least within their own cultural context. There is also no single profile of suicide terrorists. For example most, but not all, suicide terrorists are aged between 16 and 28. Most are male, and the proportion of female missions is rising. A vast majority is well educated with even some have university degrees. For example the presumed 9-11 hijackers came from generally middleclass backgrounds, were older, and many had university level education. In an alarming recent example, a 64-year-old Palestinian

grandmother blew herself up on a suicide-homicide mission in November 2006.

Evolution of the Concept of Suicide Mission

Suicide attacks did not begin with 9/11 rather this have been tactics evolved over many decades in conflicts around the world as a strategy of guerilla warfare, and one that has succeeded as often as it has failed. Suicide has been committed by people from all walks of life since the beginning of known history. In ancient times, suicide sometimes followed defeat in battle, to avoid capture and subsequent torture,⁸ mutilation, or enslavement by the enemy.⁹ Among the famous cases who have taken their own lives are Socrates, Hannibal, Nero, Adolf Hitler and Eva Braun etc. The main classification of suicide could be military, personal honour, and in social protest, or political goal oriented. Similar to suicide, the suicide attack is also not a new phenomenon. From the Assassins of 11th century to the Japanese kamikaze pilots of World War II and Vietcong who blew up themselves and the U.S. soldiers in Vietnam, many people have proven their willingness to perish while carrying out attacks in pursuit of their political goals. However, modern expressions of the suicide-bombing phenomenon surfaced with the appearance of the first suicide attacks began in Lebanon in 1983 (some say 1981, when a sole suicide attack hit the Iraqi embassy in Beirut). Six months after an attack on the U.S. Embassy in Beirut, simultaneous truck bombings killed 241 U.S. Marines and 58 French paratroopers; just four months later, U.S. troops left Lebanon. Five other organizations (most of them not religious) in Lebanon carried out about 50 suicide attacks before this modus operandi was exported to other areas of the world. The use of suicide attacks garnered considerable prestige for the perpetrators and their organizations -- particularly in light

of the withdrawal of foreign troops from Lebanon, which many attributed to the bombings -- and turned the act into a symbol of martyrdom and a source of inspiration for other terror organizations worldwide. Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka; the Palestinian fundamentalist organizations of Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and later other non-religious groups such as Al Aqsa Martyr Brigades and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine; and the Kurdish PKK in Turkey have adopted and refined suicide attacks as their "strategic weapons" against their adversaries. However, under Osama bin Laden's leadership, al Qaeda and its affiliated groups and networks have given a global dimension to what usually appeared to be national, religious, or local conflicts. Bin Laden's fundamentalist Islamic ideology and his grand strategy have spread the suicide terror phenomenon throughout the world. For bin Laden and his like-minded disciples, suicide terrorism has served as a weapon of defiance and as a symbolic tool to prove the supremacy of their moral cause over the moral bankruptcy and decadence of their rivals. Following the September 11, 2001 attacks, where for the first time an unprecedented number of suicide bombers were used in four simultaneous suicide missions, al Qaeda and others have been leading a global suicide campaign. Through May 2004, al Qaeda and its affiliates had carried out about 80 suicide attacks by about 150 perpetrators. These numbers do not include almost 70 suicide bombers that have operated in Iraq since March 2003 (at least some, if not most, of them belong to the "Global Jihad" movement) and almost the same number of Chechen separatist suicide bombers, who started to operate in 2000. In brief, philosophy of *Shahada* (or martyrdom) is very simple. A main scarifies his life with full consciousness that there are ends & values which are higher in value than

the value of life itself. In other words, it is presumed that life should be lived for the realization of certain values. And if these values can be preserved by the sacrifice of one's life, one shouldn't hesitate to do so.

What made these actions unprecedented was their scale: driving cars or trucks filled with explosives, an individual (or individuals) could kill scores, if not hundreds, of people. After 1983, many terror groups adapted the concept, giving bombers explosives to carry on their bodies. The resulting bombings were smaller, though more precise, allowing the bomber to be a "guided human missile". Therefore, modern suicide attacks can be defined as violent, politically motivated actions executed knowingly, actively, and with prior intent by individuals who scarifies themselves while destroying their chosen civilian or military targets. Terrorists often choose this tactic because they have no other option against a formidable enemy. A suicide attack, like all other attacks is meant to traumatize & terrorize the occupiers, demonstrating the powerlessness of the powerful and let the powerless feel as powerful, while magnifying the "power image" of the perpetrating organization. In fact, it is a clash between the force of arms" & the "force of faith & conviction"; it is a clash between brutal forces & the people at large & history testifies that armed forces have never been able to crush the will of the people.

A glance over the contemporary suicide missions reveals that such attacks have mostly used explosive materials such as a bomb (a suicide bombing), and are often carried out with the help of vehicles. The strategic rationale may be military, political, or both; the target may be military, in which case the bombing is usually classified as an act of war, or civilian, in which case it is usually considered terrorism. Some of the examples from recent past are:

- Suicide attack on foot: explosive belt
- Attempted suicide attack with a plane as target: Richard Reid on American Airlines Flight 63
- Suicide car bomb: 1983 Beirut barracks bombing, Sri Lanka Central Bank bombing, numerous incidents in Iraq since 2003
- Suicide attack by a boat with explosives: USS *Cole* bombing, attacks in Sri Lanka by the LTTE Sea Tigers.
- Suicide attack by a submarine with explosives (human-steered torpedo): Kaiten, used by Japan in World War II
- Suicide attack by a plane with explosives: kamikaze
- Suicide attack by a hijacked plane with fuel: September 11, 2001 attacks, possibly Air France Flight 8969 and attempted by Samuel Byck
- Suicide attack by diverting a bus to an abyss: Tel Aviv Jerusalem bus 405 massacre
- Suicide attack with guns: Kashmiri insurgents on the Indian Parliament in December 2001 killing 15 people.

Is Suicidism the Product of Islamic Fundamentalism?

Since many attacks, including September 11, have presumably been perpetrated by Muslim suicide attackers, therefore, many in the West presume that ongoing campaigns of suicide missions are mainly a product of Islamic fundamentalism. Prof. Robert Pape of University of Chicago, who studied every suicide terrorist attack around the world from 1980 to early 2004 rejects the presumption and calls it misdirected determinant in Western foreign policy making process that are making international peace fragile rather worse.¹⁰ Pape claims that most suicide bombers are driven by resistance to occupation, not Islam. Other characteristics Pape found were a difference in religion between the

attackers and the occupiers and grassroots support for the attacks. He points out that more than half of all suicide attacks were carried out by secular people and world's leader in suicide terrorism, Tamil Tigers of Sri Lanka, is completely secular and recruits from Hindus. More than a third of all suicide attacks by Muslims were also carried out by secular groups, such as the Kurdish PKK in Turkey and the Communist Party in Lebanon.¹¹ Pape further cites that these attacks are political or socially driven and not religiously construed as the central objective of every suicide terrorist campaign since 1980 has been to compel the foreign forces out of their territory.

So if Islamic fundamentalism is not necessarily a key variable behind these groups, what is? The central fact is that overwhelmingly suicide-terrorist attacks are not driven by religion as much as they are by a clear strategic objective: to compel modern imperialists to withdraw their military forces from the territory that the terrorists view as their homeland. From Lebanon to Sri Lanka to Chechnya to Kashmir to the West Bank, every major suicide-terrorist campaign—over 95 percent of all the incidents—has had as its central objective to compel the occupying state to withdraw or an illegitimate regime to step down. Robert Pape, in his well documented book; *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*, argues that the connection between suicide attacks and religion is exaggerated, and that suicide terrorism is “mainly a response to foreign occupation.” Pape argues that ordinary people living under foreign occupation by a nation of another religion especially tend to support violent resistance, including suicide terrorism. Nearly every suicide terrorist attack has occurred in conflicts involving a combination of military occupation and religious differences. When devout people believe their way of life is threatened by a foreign army,

they accept whatever means promise results, not unlike cynical statesmen. As Franz Fanon observed about the Algerian War for Independence, people support the most extreme tactics when they feel their existence is threatened. Whether right or wrong – and the killing of innocents is always wrong – the situation nonetheless reappears with depressing regularity. In such situations, people may cultivate a culture of martyrdom / suicide attacks.

Since 1990, the United States has stationed tens of thousands of ground troops on the Arabian Peninsula, and that is the main mobilization appeal of Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda. People who make the argument that it is a good thing to have them attacking us over there are missing that suicide terrorism is not a supply-limited phenomenon where there are just a few hundred around the world willing to do it because they are religious fanatics. It is a demand-driven phenomenon. That is, it is driven by the presence of foreign forces on the territory that the terrorists view as their homeland. The operation in Iraq has stimulated suicide terrorism and has given suicide terrorism a new lease on life.

If Islamic fundamentalism were the pivotal factor, then we should see some of the largest Islamic fundamentalist countries in the world, like Iran, which has 70 million people—three times the population of Iraq and three times the population of Saudi Arabia—with some of the most active groups in suicide terrorism against the United States. However, there has never been an al-Qaeda suicide terrorist from Iran, and we have no evidence that there are any suicide terrorists in Iraq from Iran. Sudan is a country of 21 million people. Its government is Islamic and fundamentalist. The state of Sudan was quite congenial to Osama bin Laden and he spent three years in Sudan in the 1990s. Yet there has

never been an al-Qaeda suicide terrorist from Sudan. Another point in this regard is Iraq itself. Before American invasion, Iraq never had a suicide-terrorist attack in its history. The research endorses that there are more suicide terrorists or potential suicide terrorists today than there were in March 2003. The suicide missions have been escalating rapidly with 20 attacks in 2003, 48 in 2004, and over 50 in just the first five months of 2005. What is happening is that the suicide terrorists have been produced by the invasion and foreign military presence appears to be a necessary condition for suicide missions. Hizbullah is another noteworthy case. Israel invaded Lebanon in June 1982 with 78,000 combat troops, and Hizbullah was born one month later. Once, Israel unilaterally abandoned territory in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip the attacks against Israel went down considerably. The British Home Office conducted a detailed survey of the attitudes of the 1.6 million Muslims living in Britain in April 2004, and found that, while 85 per cent condemned suicide terrorism, 13 per cent believed that more suicide attacks against the US and the West were justified. The survey went further to identify the specific reason: Iraq. In other words, the principal factor driving support for suicide terrorism among British Muslims was not the Islamic ideology, but deep anger over British military policies on the Arabian Peninsula.¹² Shazhad Tanweer, one of the 7 July 2005 London bombers, apparently had expressed frustration with UK foreign policy, particularly the conflict in Iraq.¹³

Foregoing rational in view, the research opines that Islamic fundamentalism is not as closely associated with suicide terrorism as many people think. The world leader in suicide terrorist attacks is the Marxist, secularist, and Hindu Tamil Tigers, who have perpetrated more suicide terrorist attacks than Hamas or Islamic Jihad. What nearly all

suicide terrorist attacks have in common is a specific secular strategic purpose- overthrowing of foreign occupiers and attainment of self determination through other means.

Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism

Terrorists don't target America or American interests or its cronies because "they hate our values" but for more strategic reasons. The reason lies in the presence of American military contingents in more than 130 countries of the world, illegal and unjust occupation of Iraq, and Palestine, destruction of Afghanistan through collateral damage, widespread use of torture or indiscriminate violence across Iraq, Afghanistan, Ghaza and West Strip. The logic may be found in the pictures of naked prisoners standing on boxes and being mauled by dogs in abu Ghraib (Iraq), snaps of the raped Iraqi girls by the rapist belonging to the American occupying forces, shooting of Taliban prisoners in Qila Jangi (Afghanistan) with tied hands and legs, in the incidents of abusive treatment and insults to Holy Quran in Guantanamo bay and elsewhere, and unheard prison of the Muslim prisoners caged in the Guantanamo bay during the last six years and so.

Over the past three decades, suicide attacks have been rising largely because terrorists have learned that it pays. Suicide bombing prospers because it has been seen to succeed in forcing the occupying forces to depart from occupied territory. The research conducted to trace out the strategic logic of suicide attacks across the Arabian peninsula, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Turkey, believes that religious fervor, poverty, or low education are sufficient to explain the phenomenon. Besides, the political objective of ending foreign occupation, relief from socio-cultural invasion and recipe to religious freedom seems the vital cause for the strategy and tactics. Thereby this

paper recognizes the importance of the underlying strategic logic that animates the campaigns, of the behavior of the enemy that provides the targets, and of foreign occupation as a motivating factor. Following snaps suffice to justify this thesis:

- Suicide terrorists succeeded to compel American and French military forces to abandon Lebanon in 1983,
- Hizbullah forced Israeli forces to leave Lebanon in 1985,
- Hamas launched suicide terrorist attacks in May 1994 and December 1995 so as to improve Hamas' bargaining position in negotiations with Israel and compel Israeli forces to quit the Gaza Strip and the West Bank in 1994 and 1995. Once their immediate objective was attained, Hamas leaders pulled back.
- Tamil Tigers forced the Sri Lankan government to create an independent Tamil state from 1990 on,
- Turkish government decided to grant autonomy to the Kurds in the late 1990s.
- Suicide bombings in Iraq, daily toll of mounting body counts of Americans has forced American to conclude that continued occupation of Iraq would result in American disaster and humiliation therefore, they brought democrats to ask for time table for withdrawal from Bush.
- Karazai in Afghanistan is urging Taliban to reconcile and offering immunity and share in government.

What Motivates the Mission?

The research finds that nearly all suicide bombers (whose record could be traced) volunteered, and that their families tend to be proud of their choices. They tend to be educated, politically involved individuals from

middle class families. They share none of the characteristics of 'typical' suicidal young people. Indeed, ordinary suicide is least prevalent where suicide attack occurs. Cultures of martyrdom do not develop where local communities do not believe that the terrorists' cause is just and their methods justifiable. It matters little what outsiders think about the morality of the tactic. The fact is that those who support these operations will continue to do so as long as the conditions that make for conflict do not change. Saying the terrorists are evil may influence ordinary people from occupying nations like the US and Israel, but holds little sway among the militants' own constituencies and common masses in Muslim World i.e. Palestinian territories, Iraq, Afghanistan, and other occupied places. As US and Israeli condemnations of the Hamas escalated in the 1990s, so did the popular support it enjoyed among Palestinians.

Today for most of the resistance movement in Muslim World, the world is divided into two camps: the Islamic community (Ummah) and the enemy, that is led by the United States and other Western 'crusaders' and their Zionist allies.¹⁴ In the judgment of bin Ladin, these sinister forces seek nothing less than the destruction of Islam and the United States after the end of the Cold War escalated its campaign against the Muslim World in its entirety, aiming to get rid of Islam itself.¹⁵ In their views, the persecution of Muslims in Chechnya, the Palestinian territories, Kashmir, Somalia, Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere offers ample evidence that the Muslim Ummah is facing an existential threat, and that the United States, through its regional satraps, is working toward the eradication of Islam. This conceptualization leads resistance movements and their volunteers as a theoretical legitimization and motivation of their suicide missions. The United States and its interests in the Muslim World have become most wanting target because

of creating “an ocean of oppression, injustice, slaughter and plunder,” and has thus merited responses like the 9/11 attacks.¹⁶ The Muslim World is in a state of survival, lingering for its freedom, independence, sovereignty and identity, therefore waging defensive jihad is not simply the obligation of the few groups but the solemn obligation of every Muslim.

The research goes into greater depth on this question of what motivates these people. It does not believe the question can be answered with the usual rationalism of political science and economics. It is a decision influenced primarily by alienation and unswerving belief in a cause and employed as part of a broader politico-military strategy. This new form of martyrdom reflects the despair of individuals who feel oppressed by occupying armies that are undeterred from morality of international law and stocked with seemingly unlimited resources. The phenomenon has gone into a form of “holy rage”, and became an instrument to meet power with faith through a combination of self-assertion and resignation to death. Suicide bombers are praised as heroes of the faith, willing to make the ultimate sacrifice to fight injustice. It is the act itself that matters – almost, but not quite, as an end in itself. However, Islam legitimizes sacred death in the service of the community or *Ummah* by making it part of the fabric of a war that enjoys religious legitimacy, namely *jihad*.” Faith and religious sanction help young fighters overcome their fear of death and justify such missions to ensure preservation of their freedom, their socio-cultural and religious values and norms, protection of their natural resources and realization of their natural right to govern themselves and their land. . Heavy-handed tactics may kill a few militants here and there, but the suffering it imposes can only make the resistance movement stronger in the long run – especially

when it is done by a foreign power that most ordinary people view with distrust, and that has no real interest in repairing the damage done by its bombs and blockades.

The public and the government in the US are only beginning to understand the insuperable difficulties of transforming the Middle East through military force. American leaders gave a blank check to Israel as it launched a disastrous campaign of air-raids on southern Lebanon this summer that killed over 900 Lebanese civilians but less than 100 Hizbullah militants – and all on the slim pretext of two kidnapped Israeli soldiers. The plain message is that an Israeli or American life is worth a hundred dead Lebanese or Iraqi civilians – just the sort of idea that makes such devalued people support armed resistance.

As Pape concludes in *Dying to Win*, “The bottom line, then, is that suicide terrorism is mainly a response to foreign occupation. Isolated instances in other circumstances do occur. Religion plays a role. However, modern suicide terrorism is best understood as an extreme strategy for national liberation against democracies with troops that pose an imminent threat to control the territory the terrorists view as their homeland.”

Did US Succeed in Controlling Suicidal Activities

A “CRUSADE” against” evil were the words that George W. Bush used to define his “war on terrorism” after September 11, and since then all his actions show that he and his fellow hawks believe that the “evil” stems from Islamic fundamentalism. Despite, allout use of force and all coercive means for more than six years or so the US and his carronies have failed in controling or marginalizing or weakening suicidal acts of shadowey character al-Quaida and like minded revolutionaries or protesters, or what so ever one may call them.

History testifies that the presence of foreign combat forces is the principal recruiting tool to mobilise suicide attacks. Therefore, as long as the war on terrorism ignores the actual psychological motives. Suicide attacks is likely to end up helping terrorist leaders recruit many more suiciders to kill.

Countering Suicide Terrorists (Homicide Bombers or Martyrs?)

Suicide attacks have appeared throughout the history of the world. Most contemporary researchers mark the 1983 suicide attack on the U.S. embassy in Beirut, as the beginning of a modern era of suicide terrorism. Indeed, the term suicide attack or bomber is controversial because the main objective is not suicide but mass homicide carried out by means of self-destruction designed expressly to inflict lethal harm on others. The suicide terrorists who planned and executed the 11 September 2001 attacks would not conceptualize the acts as suicide but instead as acts of martyrdom rationalized and justified as a legitimate struggle in a conflict of national and religious dimensions.

The goal of all terrorism is psychological; its aim is to create fear and psychologically debilitate a targeted civilian population. Given the psychology of terrorism, it is clear that understanding and countering suicide terrorism is a pressing need. Terrorism is usually goal-directed behavior. Political, social and ideological goals help drive the decisions of terrorists as well as their organizational goals. Profiling suicide terrorists is in many ways analogous to profiling criminals. Criminal profiling describes the processes of inferring distinctive personality characteristics of individuals responsible for committing criminal acts from physical and/or behavioral evidence. Criminal profiling does not provide a discernable profile of all criminals, but does provide insight into violent criminal acts of serial rape and serial sexual homicide.

While there is no specific terrorist profile that expresses itself psychologically, there is potential for identifying discernable psychological attributes for suicide terrorists. Such profiles are essential to understanding and countering terrorist threats.

Conclusion

Despite the Bush administration's recent election-time comparisons of the Al Qaeda to Nazi Germany or Soviet Russia, terrorism remains a very different sort of threat – one that Israel's bombing of Lebanon or America's invasion of Iraq have probably made worse. There is no military solution to the tactic of terrorism because it is a political weapon whose proponents tend to become stronger when governments overreact and innocent people get killed. In fact, tricking governments into overreacting or getting tied down in places like Iraq is part of their strategy.

End Notes

- ¹ . This paper uses the terms suicide attacks or suicide missions interchangeably in preference to the term “suicide terrorism”.
- ² . Dr. Boaz Ganor, “The Rationality of the Islamic Radical Suicide attack phenomenon”,
Countering Suicide Terrorism, Institute of Counter Terrorism, Herzilya, Israel,
- ³ . Hoffman Bruce, “The logic of suicide terrorism”, *Terrorism and Counter Terrorism – Understanding the New Security Environment*, (Ed. Hoeward & Sawyer), p. 262.
- ⁴ . Presumably the first recorded suicide bombing with explosive took place on April 18, 1983 in U.S. Embassy in Beirut when a 400-pound suicide truck-bomb attacked, killing Sixty-three people, including the CIA’s Middle East director, and injuring 120.
- ⁵ . Reportedly the phrase was firstly used by Christoph Reuter in his book *My Life is a Weapon*.
- ⁶ . Another horrifying suicide bombing with explosive took place on 23rd October 1983 in Beirut, Lebanon when truck filled with explosive was smashed with American marines barrack, turning over 300 dead including the truck driver.
- ⁷ . Durkheim, *Suicide*, The Free Press reprint 1997, ISBN 0-684-83632-7
- ⁸ . The Caesarean assassins Brutus and Cassius, for example, killed themselves after their defeat at the battle of Philippi.
- ⁹ . Insurgent Jews died in a mass suicide at Masada in 74 CE rather than face enslavement by the Romans.
- ¹⁰ . Robert Pape, “Why the bombers are so angry at us”, July 23, 2005. Available at: <http://www.theage.com.au/news/opinion/why-the-bombers-are-so-angry-at-us/2005/07/22/1121539145036.html#> (15-7-2007)
- ¹¹ . *ibid*
- ¹² . *ibid*
- ¹³ . Paul Temelty, “An In-Depth Look at the London Bombers,” *Terrorism Monitor*, Vol. 3, No. 15, July 28, 2005.

¹⁴ . “Usamah Bin-Ladin, the Destruction of the Base,” al-Jazeera (10 June 1999), Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS).

¹⁵ . “Mujahid Osama Bin Ladin Talks Exclusively to Nida’ul Islam about the New Powder Keg in the Middle East,” Nida’ul Islam (October–November 1996), www.islam.org.au/articles/15/LADIN.HTM, accessed 1 September 2004.

¹⁶ . See, Maha Azzam Exclusive: Letter from Osama Bin Ladin to the American People,” Waaqiah (Internet) (26 October 2002), FBIS.

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