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Who Are the Palestinian Suicide Bombers?

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The current study uses the content analysis method while focusing on identification of repeated patterns of behavior by suicide terrorists and the society within which they grow and develop. The present study presents a typology—a classification into categories, each represented by a prototype, of suicide terrorists in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It also identifies prerequisite factors (as without these factors, there is little opportunity for a particular prototype to emerge) and supporting factors (which may assist in the emergence of the prototype, but are not essential) for each of the suicide terrorist prototypes. The suggested typology is based on a convenient sample: details which have been published in the literature describing suicide terrorists. The typology suggests four categories of suicide bombers: religious fanatic, exploited, avenger, and nationalist fanatic. This typology is based on the main motive of the perpetrator, and different trajectories which each suicide bomber undergoes from recruitment to detonating the bomb. The major difference among the four categories lies in the prerequisite factors and their relative importance in comparison to the supporting factors.

While nothing is easier than to denounce the evildoer,
nothing is more difficult than to understand him.

– Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky

The above quote is frequently cited in papers dealing with terror, and it summarizes a major problem facing terror researchers: it is easy to denounce acts of terror, but it is much more difficult to understand them. This article focuses on suicide terror, which is perhaps even more difficult to understand.

The aim of suicide terror, as in any other kind of terror, is to achieve political goals by the use of violence. However, it is possible to indicate some unique characteristics of suicide terror. First, the human body is used as a “walking bomb,” which allows for activation of explosives more efficiently (choosing time and place) and it inflicts more damage and higher casualties. Second, suicide terrorists do not need to

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prepare an escape which makes the act easier. Third, due to the fact that it is very difficult to deter a suicide terrorist since s/he already intends to die, s/he can change his/her target and/or explode when security forces try to stop him/her. Fourth, the suicide terrorist does not risk being taken prisoner, which means that there is little chance that s/he will give information and betray his/her colleagues if captured. Fifth, suicide terror has a strong and frightening psychological effect, as the aim of the suicide bomber is to die with his victims.

Suicide terror, like other types of terror, is not a new phenomenon in human history.¹ It existed among Moslem Hashishiyun in the eleventh century² and various groups in Asia during the eighteenth century.³ In the twentieth century, suicide attacks occur in many regions of the world, including Hizballah in Lebanon, the Tamil Tigers (LTTE) in Sri-Lanka, the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) in Turkey, the Jama'a El Islamia (IG) in Egypt, the Chechens in Russia, the Jaish Mohammad in India, and suicide attacks by organizations in Iraq following the fall of Saddam Hussein.⁴

Modern suicide terrorism in the Middle East started in 1983 in Lebanon, when a Shiite organization, unknown at the time, Hizballah, attacked U.S. Marine and French military headquarters in Beirut. These troops had been sent to Lebanon after the 1982 war ("Peace in the Galilee") as part of the multinational forces. 241 American and 58 French nationals were killed and this led to the withdrawal of American and French forces from Lebanon. Afterwards, suicide attacks were directed against the IDF in Southern Lebanon until the Israeli withdrawal of Israel in May 2000.⁵

Suicide terror has received worldwide attention since the events of 11 September, and accordingly, many see 11 September as a turning point in the history of terror, and one of the most significant events of the beginning of the 21st century.⁶ A number of experts and researchers have come to the conclusion that suicide terror should be considered a global threat with the potential to spread to other areas in the world.⁷ The present research focuses on suicide bombers in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with special efforts to shed light on two main topics: the salient motives of the suicide bombers themselves, and the various social factors which encourage this kind of terror. Other important aspects of suicide terror, such as different organizations world wide which use suicide terror, organizations which send perpetrators; motivations of these organizations; successes and failures of suicide terrorism; the technical process of suicide attacks are all beyond the scope of this article.

According to current research, an act of suicide terror is defined as a planned act of terror that employs individuals who take their own lives willingly in order to kill as many civilians as possible. This definition does not include, for example, a shooting attack where the perpetrator has no chance of survival, termed a "no-escape attack," or an "act of sacrifice," according to Palestinian organizations. In other words, our definition refers only to those attacks in which the perpetrator, fully aware, deliberately takes his/her own life in order to kill his/her target (or has planned to but was captured).⁸ This definition means that the death of the perpetrator/s is necessary in order to define the act as a suicide attack. However, the use of the term "suicide attacks" for those against military targets is in dispute. For example, according to some approaches, suicide attacks against military forces are not usually defined as terror attacks, while attacks against non-combatant forces might be considered by some as legitimate acts, and by others as acts of terror.

Suicide Terror in the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict

On 16 April 1993, Tamam Nabulsi, a member of the Hamas organization (Islamic Resistance Movement) blew his car up beside an Israeli bus parked near the settlement of Mechola, in the Jordan Valley. Two passengers were killed and five wounded. This was the first suicide attack perpetrated within the borders of Israel by a Palestinian organization. No one knew that this attack would mark a new era of brutal terror: suicide bombing in Israel.

Seemingly, the Palestinian suicide attacks have become the main cause of loss of life in the current conflict. Moreover, in the last few years, some experts have defined suicide terror as a strategic threat to Israel, that is, a threat to Israel's ability to maintain the routine of daily life, and to implement its social and economic goals. The Palestinians perceive these suicide attacks as strategic weapons which may create a balance of power between the Israeli military technological superiority and Palestinian capabilities.⁹ It is no wonder that suicide terror is called the "smart bomb of the poor" by some correspondents and Palestinian sources.¹⁰

The suicide perpetrators do not act independently, but are well-organized by terrorist organizations.¹¹ These organizations have a political and military leadership, and an infrastructure that facilitates the preparation of explosive belts.¹² The act of suicide bombing is the final one in a long organizational chain, involving many people who must transform the decision made by the leadership into concrete action.¹³

Suicide terror attacks in Israel can be divided into two sub-periods: preceding and following the El-Aksa Intifada:

- (a) From April 1993 until the beginning of El-Aksa Intifada (29 September 2000), there were sixty one suicide terrorist acts carried out by the following organizations: forty one by Hamas, twenty by Islamic Jihad (that is, only by Islamic organizations). Out of the sixty one acts, forty three (70 percent) actually blew themselves up; the rest were captured before they acted.
- (b) From the beginning of the El-Aksa Intifada up to the beginning of May 2004, there were 274 suicide terrorist acts carried out by the following organizations: ninety nine by Hamas, seventy by Fatah-Tanzim, sixty seven by Islamic Jihad, ten by National Front, and twenty eight by other organizations. Out of the 274 acts, only 142 (52 percent) actually blew themselves up (in 132 suicide attacks); the rest were captured before they acted. These figures indicate a very high rate of successful prevention by Israeli Security Forces. It is important to note that suicide attacks constituted less than 1 percent of the overall terror attacks that took place against Israel during that period, but they resulted in the majority of casualties (statistics were obtained from personal contact with IDF sources).

The data also shows the following:

- (a) most of the suicide perpetrators are young (aged 17–23, eighty one percent).
- (b) most of them came from Judea and Samaria (84 percent) and only fifteen percent came from the Gaza Strip (one came from Israel).
- (c) most of them were single (Ninety three percent) and only seven percent were married.
- (d) most of them were educated: elementary-fourteen percent, high school-fifty one percent, and higher education-thirty two percent. Thus, as many as one third of

- the suicide terrorist had an academic education. This is a higher rate of education than the academic rate in the entire Palestinian population.
- (e) all suicide perpetrators have been Moslems, and so far, there have been no suicide bombings by Arab Christians.¹⁴
 - (f) another characteristic of suicide terror in Israel is the use of teenagers under the age of eighteen.¹⁵

Until December 2001, all of the perpetrators belonged to the Hamas and Islamic Jihad. In November 2001, the Fatah Tanzim and “National Resistance” joined the organizations using suicide terror. (Their first attack was on 29 November 2001 in Hadera). In addition, the variety of suicide perpetrators widened, and women joined the list. (By January 2004, there were seven women who had actually exploded.¹⁶ As of January 2003, there were twenty four women who had been captured before committing suicide attacks.¹⁷ An extreme example of a woman who tried to commit suicide terror is Patan Dragma, a mother of seven from the village of Loben A-Sharkia, who was captured while carrying a large bomb of 15–20 kilograms on her way to explode in the city of Ariel.¹⁸

The transition to the second stage (El-Aksa Intifada) is characterized not only by a great increase in suicide attacks and higher numbers of casualties,¹⁹ but also by greater support for suicide attacks against Israeli civilians by Palestinian public opinion.²⁰ It seems that there is also a change in the Palestinian perception of terror: suicide attacks are now considered a legitimate answer to Israeli terror.²¹ Among other factors, this change can be seen in the fact that the Palestinian education system encourages children to become martyrs.²² The Palestinians are well aware of the high price they pay for suicide attacks, but most of them see these actions as great successes which damage the Israeli economy and tourism, and have a destructive effect on Israeli morale.²³

The present study has three main objectives:

- (a) to present a typology—a classification into categories of suicide terrorists, based on their salient motive and unique trajectory, as an alternative perspective to understanding this phenomenon.
- (b) to identify prerequisites and supporting factors which characterize each of the suicide terrorist categories,
- (c) to compare this typology with explanations suggested in the literature, while making distinctions between the various suggested explanations and their ability to be generalized.

The Various Explanations of Suicide Terror: Literature Review

The literature review on suicide terror reveals that, relative to the large scope of this phenomenon, there is little research on the subject. It is reasonable to assume that one of the main reasons is the lack of accessibility to potential perpetrators: the candidates keep their intentions to themselves before the operation, and, in most cases, following a successful act, no one is left to be investigated. The exception is any perpetrator who is caught before succeeding in his/her mission; s/he is then jailed and investigated. Even in this case, there are methodological problems, such as the prisoner’s willingness to cooperate, and the sincerity of their answers. One example is an Arab-Israeli security prisoner, who, while in prison, interviewed apprehended

Palestinian suicide bombers and claims that, under these conditions, no Palestinian will candidly cooperate in such research.²⁴ Moreover, the small group of apprehended candidates does not represent the larger population of suicide bombers. (Some of these changed their minds at the last minute, or were not completely determined). It is difficult to generalize based on such a group.

In spite of so little research, many articles deal with the subject of suicide terror, and many of them focus on the question of the suicide bomber's motives: what causes these individuals to blow themselves up? This question became imminent after the attack of 11 September and the three years of bloody struggle between Israel and the Palestinians, with no end in sight. We may assume that the readiness of a person to die in order to harm his enemy, as well as the indiscriminate killing of civilians, and the threat to society that this terror poses, produces added effort in trying to understand this phenomenon.²⁵ However, different authors present different perspectives in attempts to answer the question. The majority agrees that suicide terror is a multi-causal phenomenon, which cannot be explained by one factor; yet, they offer different factors as key explanations. The literature dealing with suicide bombers demonstrates agreement regarding the political motives of organizational leaders behind these attacks.²⁶

Based on the literature concerning suicide terrorism, it is possible to classify the various explanations into four major approaches: psychological, religious, sociological, and political, with variations of explanations within each approach. This classification is somewhat artificial: to some degree, there is overlap among the various explanations, and some of the writers point to more than one explanation. Yet the suggested classification is based on one major motive as an explanation.

The Psychological Approach

Psychological approaches to suicide terror are based on a number of different explanations. However, there is a tendency to agree that there is no psychological profile of a suicide terrorist. Merari (1990), who studied the background of suicide terrorists in Lebanon, concluded that there is no common psychological or sociological characteristic of a suicide terrorist. The view that there is no psychological profile of a suicide terrorist, but rather a wide range of social and psychological factors, is widely accepted by terror researchers.²⁷ We have chosen to classify these explanations into five sub-categories.

Psychological Damage: Trauma, Desperation and Revenge

According to this group of explanations, suicide terror is mainly a result of psychological harm: trauma, problems with personal identity, humiliation, and victimization.²⁸

Suicide Terror as Deviant Behavior

Some authors concur that mental disease or psychotic situations cannot explain suicide terrorism.²⁹ However, others present explanations in which suicide terror is seen as a result of: mental disorders;³⁰ an authoritative personality and its tendency to extreme conformity;³¹ or two overlapping brain conditions: depression and aggression, intrinsic conditions which express themselves extrinsically,³² depression;³³ borderline personality.³⁴

Group Processes

The authors of this group explain suicide terror as a result of group processes, in which the person loses his personal independence to that of the group. Group leaders manipulate the group process in order to recruit candidates for suicide actions.³⁵ This is similar to the group process characterizing cults, in which cult members obey leaders indiscriminately.³⁶

Honor

Honor is a concept mentioned by some writers dealing with terror and specifically suicide terror.³⁷ According to this explanation, Palestinians under the Israeli occupation, feel humiliated to the extent that retaliation, using suicide terror, is perceived as a legitimate and preferred way to bring back their lost honor, both at the individual level (the perpetrator), as well as at the social level (Palestinian society).

Psycho-Evolution

The psycho-evolutionary approach suggests that the phenomenon of self-sacrifice can be found in other beings, including those that have no developed brain, and which are obviously not influenced by religion or brainwashing.³⁸ A similar, more comprehensive, biological approach attempts to explain the phenomenon from a physiological perspective, emphasizing the tendency of certain individuals to react aggressively due to secretions of neurotransmitters.³⁹

The Religious Approach

Religious reasoning infers that the interpretation of Islam and its decree of fulfilling God's will perceives suicide terrorism not as suicide per se but as self-sacrifice—*Istishhad*—sacrifice in the name of Allah. These sacrifice missions are seen as part of the Jihad (the sacred war in the name of Islam). Furthermore, those who sacrifice themselves ensure a place in heaven for themselves and their families, (as well as 72 virgins). Colberg⁴⁰ presented the history of Islam and the development of the term 'shahid' (martyr) as central to understanding the suicide terrorism phenomenon. Lev Zion⁴¹ offered a similar explanation. He claims that a political imperative exists to expand the Islamic areas of the world "This is the role of Jihad." Expansion is a permanent state.

Kushner⁴² also emphasized the historical background of suicide terrorism in Islam and the belief that the suicide bomber will reside with other heroes of Islam beside Allah.⁴³ Paz suggested a different emphasis on the cause of terror in Islam and the legitimacy of suicide terrorism in Islam, adding that the perception of the endless and inevitable struggle between Islam and Judaism is the main justification for the general use of terror and, specifically, suicide terrorism.⁴⁴ Nasra Hassan, a Pakistani journalist who lived in the Gaza Strip for several years, strengthened the religious perception.⁴⁵ She interviewed close to 250 members of Hamas and the Islamic Jihad, who had volunteered to become "Shahid" (martyrs) by blowing themselves up, as well as recruiters and assistants. She concludes that their first and foremost mission is fulfilling the will of God, while the other rewards are secondary.⁴⁶

In addition, since the beginning of the recent Intifada, many important religious leaders have issued proclamations in favor of suicide missions. For example, Yusuf Al-Qaradhawi, the director of the local university of the Research Centre for Sunna

Studies in Qatar, and popular preacher on the satellite television station Al-Jazeera, gave these missions religious validity⁴⁷ as did religious Palestinian leaders, such as the Mufti of Jerusalem, Akhram Sabari.⁴⁸ However, the dispute continues even among religious authorities in Palestinian society.⁴⁹

The Sociological Approach

The sociological approach offers a range of social explanations that cause individuals to join extremist groups, including suicide terror activators. These explanations ascribe the sources of terrorism to a list of factors such as poverty, lack of education, social oppression, lack of social mobilization, no hope of social amelioration.⁵⁰ One of the salient, yet controversial, explanations is the speculation that suicide terrorism results from poverty and inequality. Many political leaders and journalists use poverty and illiteracy to justify the existence of terrorism.⁵¹

Resistance groups in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank frequently use economic justifications. Research⁵² exploring the connection between terrorism and education⁵³ contradicts this conjecture; it seems that the “average” terrorist comes from a middle-class, educated background rather than the lowest stratum of society.⁵⁴ (One possible explanation for this might be that this segment of the population resembles Jewish Israelis more closely and may be more fluent in Hebrew.) Research carried out in Israel found that, contrary to the stereotype of the suicide attacker, suicide bombers, compared to other terrorists, are: young, uneducated, religious, and unmarried.⁵⁵ Within the wide range of socio-economic explanations, there are those who ascribe the source of terrorism to the globalization process.⁵⁶ According to this approach, there exists a clear connection between the global distribution of uni-culturalism (the culture of consumption and modernity) and ethnic tension and the rise of fundamentalism.

The Political Approach

Political explanations ascribe the source of terrorism to the political situation. Accordingly, the occupation, the struggle for national liberation and independence are the main motives for suicide terrorism. Political leaders, who see a political solution as the remedy for suicide terrorism, commonly use this explanation. An example can be found in the argument that the source of suicide terrorism is the despair of the Palestinians whose government is incapable of doing much to liberate them from humiliation and improve their situation.⁵⁷ Similar explanations claim that hatred of the enemy is not sufficient to explain this phenomenon and once Palestinians have hopes for their own state, suicide terrorism will diminish significantly.⁵⁸ Others say that Israel’s occupation policy has created this phenomenon.⁵⁹

Pape examined suicide attacks in the world between 1980 and 2001 and concluded that suicide terror acts according to the strategic logic of organizational leaders, whose main goal is to force democratic liberal states into extensive concessions.⁶⁰ Moreover, the rise of suicide terror is due to the fact that it brings results.

Similarly, along that line, Hoffman, and McCormick⁶¹ suggested that suicide terrorism can be thought of as a form of strategic “signalling.” The signal the terrorists intend to transmit is that the state would be better off striking the necessary

bargain today rather than holding out in the hope that it will be able to deter, contain, or eliminate the threat of even greater violence in the future. The authors concluded that suicide tactics have been adopted by growing number of terrorist organizations around the world because they are shocking, deadly, cost-effective, secure, and very difficult to stop.

Bloom⁶² emphasized two supporting and encouraging factors of suicide terror in Israel: competition among the various terror organizations for prestige and popularity, and the wide support for suicide terror among the Palestinian population. For Palestinian organizations, suicide terror is the ultimate form of opposition to the occupation. The occupation and its negative effects are an inseparable part of the motivation of suicide terrorists. The author concluded that there is no military solution to the problem, but only a political solution, and until that solution is achieved, she predicts that suicide terrorism will only increase.

Political explanations rely on examples from different regions of the world. Dale⁶³ concluded that suicide terrorism in Islamic Asia is only part of the anti-colonial struggle of minorities in these Moslem states; it is part of a general sense of desperation and military impotence. Esposito⁶⁴ claimed that radical Moslems not only despise everything the United States represents, but repudiate the US presence in the Middle East, as well. Other authors reject oppression as a reason for terrorism. Laqueur,⁶⁵ for instance, claimed that the correlation between an oppressive regime and terrorism in our era is not at all clear, and evidence shows that the more oppression exists in a state, the less terrorism there is. Terrorism does not exist in a dictatorship while democratic states are never free of it.

Summarizing the literature review, some arguments stand out:

- (a) Despite differences of opinions,⁶⁶ most researchers tend to agree that a single profile of a suicide bomber cannot be demonstrated and that suicide terror is a multi-factorial phenomenon.⁶⁷ The various explanations for suicide terror include personal and group motives, environmental conditions, and their interactions.
- (b) Many authors try to explicate the motives of suicide terrorist by presenting one major reason for the entire phenomenon and employing it universally without limiting the explanation to any one group of suicide terrorists.⁶⁸
- (c) There is almost unanimous agreement that suicide terrorism is essentially different from psychologically termed suicide which is usually tied to depression and lack of hope.⁶⁹ These elements do not characterize most suicide terrorists—they have different motives and do not see their acts as suicide;⁷⁰ nevertheless, this term will continue to be used in this article.

Research Method

The current study uses the content analysis method while focusing on identification of repeated patterns of behavior by the suicide terrorist and the society within which they have grown up.⁷¹ The methodology comprises three steps: collection, classification, and construction.

Collection

The first step includes collections of written texts dealing with suicide terrorism as reported in the literature, and including one or both of two main issues:

The Personal Aspects

Any information which includes a description that enables the researchers to attempt to identify a main motive, or motives behind the suicide attack, whether it has been indicated by the suicide terrorist himself or herself (as in a will left behind) or by his/her close friends or family. This material includes information revealing background details, including the trajectory of recruitment leading to the actual suicide attack.

The Social/Cultural Aspects

Such information contains diversified material regarding palestinian society and its support for suicide terrorism. Based on the material, we have identified the prerequisite and the supporting factors for each of the suicide bomber categories (i.e. reaction of the public towards the families of the suicide bombers, various ceremonies of commemoration, religious sermons supporting the act of suicide terror, etc.).

Classification

Information is classified into content categories according to salient motives and/or prerequisites and supporting factors (including the information regarding the different aspects of social support for suicide terrorism). Such information (to be referred to as a 'unit of information') may be one paragraph, a number of paragraphs, or even a full interview. In order that a unit of information be included in the analysis, it was necessary to have a mutual agreement (separately) between the two researchers that it was possible to identify a main motive.

Qualitative Content Analysis

Qualitative content analysis includes three steps: First, based on the main motives and different trajectories, as they became evident from the material, a typology of suicide terrorists was constructed. Second, prerequisite and supporting factors for each category were identified. Our definition of a **prerequisite** determines that, without this factor, there is little opportunity for a certain prototype to emerge, and prerequisites are usually unique to each prototype. **Supporting factors** may assist but are not essential. Third, we constructed a hypothesis regarding dominant personality characteristics. The limitation of material available only allowed us to present a hypothesis of these characteristics

Typology of Suicide Terrorists: Prototype, Prerequisite, and Supporting Factors

The suggested typology in this research is based on content analysis of information that has been published in the media concerning sixty suicide bombers (about fifteen percent of whom are terrorists who have been captured on their way to suicide attacks and are presently incarcerated): interviews with captured terrorists, interviews with family members, reports of close friends, wills that were left by the suicide bomber, and so on. This is not necessarily a representative sample, and that is why we perceive this research as **exploratory** and **preliminary**, intending to provide a theoretical framework for further research in this area. The term **prototype**—a typical example representing the category—suggested in this paper is defined as a representation of a theoretical group (or category) which includes various suicide

Table 1. Categories of suicide terrorist

Category	N
Religious	27
Exploited	15
Retribution for suffering	13
Social/nationalist	5
Overall	60

bombers who have similar main motives, and, as a result in most cases, a similar trajectory from their recruitment until the suicide attack.

Content analysis of the material revealed four prototypes of suicide terrorists (see Table 1): religious, exploited (by terrorist organizations), retribution for suffering, and social/nationalist. Each prototype represents a main personal motive and a different trajectory. As in every prototype classification, this is only **theoretical**, since, in reality, there are many coexisting factors. Therefore, even though some of the suicide terrorists included in the final analysis were motivated by more than one motive, their classification to one specific prototype was based on the more salient motive, as well as their specific trajectory (see Summary Table of the four prototypes in Appendix 1).

The results suggest that, in any case of suicide attack, there are three conditions shared by all prototypes:

- (a) an individual who has at least one motive and is prepared to commit the act.
- (b) a technically based system enabling the preparation and execution of the suicide attack, and
- (c) the decision of a leading political figure to confirm the use of suicide terrorism.

The common supporting factors that were found are:

- (1) a sympathetic public atmosphere that praises the sacrifice
- (2) media encouragement, ensuring wide coverage both in the Palestinian community and internationally,
- (3) spiritual leadership that praises martyrs, and
- (4) financial support of the family of the deceased suicide terrorist.

The major difference between the various prototypes, in addition to the primary motivating factor and a different trajectory, lies in the unique prerequisite factors and the relative importance of the supporting factors.

Religious

This prototype represents suicide terrorists whose main motive is religious: achieving an act of martyrdom, Jihad, a place in paradise (including places for the perpetrator's family). Those belonging to this category usually have a religious background and belong to Islamic organizations (e.g., Hamas, Islamic Jihad). They are generally young and single, and have received religious guidance and active training up until the recent Intifada (but not necessarily at present). It must be taken into consideration that the relatively high representation of suicide terrorists from this category

is a partial result, of the publication of interviews with family members and the bombers wills by the Islamic organizations. At the same time, it is reasonable to assume that this category would be the most frequent one.

For example, in an interview with a would-be suicide terrorist, he described his preparation: "In the spring of 1993, I began to pester our military leaders to let me carry out an operation. It was around the time of the Oslo accords, and it was quiet, too quiet. I wanted to carry out an operation that would incite others to do the same." He continued, "We were in a constant state of worship. We told each other that if the Israelis only knew how joyful we were, they would whip us to death! Those were the happiest days of my life. The power of the spirit pulls us upward, while the power of material things pulls us downward," he said. "Someone bent on martyrdom becomes immune to the material pull. Our planner asked, 'What if the operation fails'?" We answered, "In any case, we get to meet the Prophet and his companions, inshallah. We were floating, swimming in the feeling that we were about to enter eternity. We had no doubts. We took an oath on the Koran, in the presence of Allah—a pledge not to waver."⁷²

Prerequisite factors:

- (a) religious interpretations encouraging terror, and
- (b) charismatic and influential leadership.

Supportive factors:

- (a) sympathetic atmosphere within the community that reveres shahids, including commemoration and admiration,
- (b) membership in a group characterized by intensive groupthink, and
- (c) support by the community for the family of the deceased. The hypothesis about dominant personality characteristics in this group: They are religiously determined, believe in fate, and are influenced by people in whom they put their faith.

This prototype usually fits the explanations of the religious approach, mentioned in the literature. In the testimonies there is certain support for the approach which perceives the idea of the Shahid as the most powerful among the various religious motives⁷³ and accords relatively minor importance to the ideas of rewards awaiting the Shahid in paradise. However, we found support for the claim that group dynamics, in many cases, characterize the religious prototype.⁷⁴

Exploited

This prototype includes individuals exploited by terror organization leaders and recruited for suicide missions. Exploitation can be based on the candidate's young age (any youngster under eighteen can belong to this category) or a situation which does not enable him or her to refuse. It is possible to identify a number of sub-categories within this category:

Personal problems—Adults who have personal problems that cause a feelings of worthlessness and desperation (in some cases involving depression). An example might be a woman whose husband left her for another woman, because she had remained childless. The recruitment of such persons (sometimes the person is the initiator; other times the organization initiates) enable them to find "a solution" to their problems.

Redemption from sins—Persons accused of collaborating with Israel or those who transgress the cultural code (e.g., homosexuality, prostitutions, drugs, a love affair outside the family) may receive an “irrefusable” offer from the organization, to commit a suicide attack in order to obtain full forgiveness, to regain their honor, to receive help for their families, and to avoid embarrassing publicity bringing disgrace to their families. An example might be a homosexual who has gotten a threat that if he does not enlist, his sexual deviance will be publicized.⁷⁵

Minors—According to our definition, every recruit whose age is less than 18 is considered a minor. In some cases described in the media, the would-be suicide bombers were less than 15 years old.⁷⁶ One of the latest examples: a fourteen-year-old boy was captured at the Hauvara Check Point (near Nablus), wearing an eight kilogram explosive belt. The soldiers stopped him and asked him to take off his shirt, and discovered the belt. The soldiers told a reporter that the child had told them that he had gotten NIS100 to blow himself up.⁷⁷

Sharin Abu Raviaa, aged fifteen, from Bethlehem, completed her Ninth grade studies and almost became a Shahida. She was apprehended by the Israel Security Forces (“Shabak”) before she could put on an explosive belt. While being interrogated, she admitted she was about to commit a suicide mission, but because of her young age, she was released from custody. “I love life and had I committed suicide, I would have ended up in pieces in a black garbage bag.” Sharin, the youngest of fifteen children, explained the reason she was chosen, “Why me? . . . Because I am young and unmarried.” Sharin agreed to commit suicide without any ideological background and without belonging to any terror organization. “I agreed because a family member convinced me that I would reach a better place in Paradise.” When asked what awaited her there, she answered, “Men get seventy two virgins and women, what do they get?” and laughed aloud.⁷⁸

Prerequisite factors of the exploited prototype are:

- (a) suicide terrorists who cannot refuse or cannot resist pressure by the organizations “volunteering” him/her for suicide missions, such as, children and youth, or adults under stress (e.g., collaborators, homosexuals, moral offenders), and
- (b) personal and/or family problems of all kinds which cause the person to feel worthless and depressed.

Supportive factors:

- (a) Sympathetic atmosphere within the community that reveres Shahids.
- (b) a promise that all his/her sins will be redeemed. Conjectures about the dominant personality characteristics in this group: dependent, anxious, cannot resist pressure, seeks recognition.

This prototype is mentioned in the literature as having his/her loyalty to the group manipulated and exploited by recruiters,⁷⁹ making use of problems in his/her individual identity,⁸⁰ or exploitation of children and adults simply because they cannot refuse. Some of the explanations in the literature are in accord with the personal problem sub-category. However, we did not find reference in the literature to the use of minors, or people who cannot refuse to commit suicide attacks. The only reference to using manipulation in the literature is that of group processes, as described above.⁸¹

Retribution for Suffering

This prototype represents suicide terrorists whose motive is psychologically based: the desire for revenge. Revenge can take place on a personal level—for a family member or friend, or in general—against Israel and its actions towards the Palestinians. Based on some of the examples, it seems that the source for the desire for revenge is often personal trauma (resulting from personal injury or that of someone close), and in other cases, a result of publicized cases of people who were killed or wounded (An example might be a baby who was killed and whose death was publicized in the media). In other cases, there is a general intention to punish the Israeli occupiers for the occupation and humiliation, and the many Palestinians casualties.

For example: Four months before the attack, Hanadi Jaridat had stood at her brother's fresh grave and had promised to avenge his death. "Your blood has not been shed in vain," the Jordanian newspaper, *El Arab El Yom* quoted her as saying. "The killer will pay the price . . . If our people cannot . . . live in freedom and dignity, then let all the world be destroyed."⁸² Hanadi fulfilled her promise and blew herself up in Maxim's, a popular Haifa restaurant, causing many casualties.

Relatives of Hanadi, interviewed in the Arab press, gave additional information. "She committed the operation in revenge for the killing of both her brother and her cousin by Israeli Security Forces, and in revenge for the crimes Israel commits in the West Bank, killing Palestinians and appropriating their land."⁸³ According to her relatives, Hanadi had been planning to marry one of her cousins who was killed in a clash with the Israeli Army.

Prerequisite factors: This prototype has a desire for revenge based on one or more of the following events:

- (a) death or injury to a family member or to someone close to the retribution for suffering,
- (b) Difficult trauma related to the Israeli occupation (personal humiliation or witnessing humiliation of someone close), and
- (c) Difficult experience (physical or mental) sustained for many years and related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Supportive factors:

- (a) sympathetic atmosphere within the community that reveres Shahids, including commemoration and admiration, and
- (b) Financial support for the family of the deceased. Conjectures about the personality characteristics in this group: despair, seeking vengeance, feelings of worthlessness.

This prototype fits the psychological approach presented in the literature as one of psychological damage resulting from trauma and despair.⁸⁴ In the present sample, there was no evidence for suicide attacks to maintain honor, or due to deviant behavior, or caused by the desire for excitement. Unlike some of the explanations in the literature, our analysis reveals that the desire for revenge can be both personal as well as general.

Social/Nationalist

This prototype represents suicide terrorists whose main motive is social, national, or political. Members of this group explain their actions, first and foremost, citing

a desire for national liberation, the failure of the peace process, the Israeli occupation, and the struggle for a Palestinian state. Usually individuals in this group belong to secular organizations (such as Fatah) and are “idealistic” politically, but less personally motivated.

For example: Teoria Hamori, aged twenty six, a single woman from the Jenin area, hoped to become Shahida and to blow herself up in Jerusalem and kill dozens of Israelis. She was captured, and sentenced to six years in jail. In an interview she said:

Unfortunately I did not succeed in committing the attack. I am sorry that I did not die. I failed, and, for me, this is a significant failure. I did not dream of spending time in prison, I wanted to be a “Shahida”. I wanted to sacrifice myself for Palestine, for our land, and to kill many Jews. You use Apache helicopters, F-15 aircraft, and tanks against us and you have all the weapons. For us, the only weapon available is people like me, who take explosives and commit suicide. Since I was a baby, all I have seen is war, dead people, hatred, and blood. From the beginning of the Intifada I have followed what is happening and I have seen only blood and killing and Palestinian children who are being killed. I told myself that, just as you pay taxes to your country, my tax will be my body. I will give my body for the Palestinian cause.⁸⁵

Prerequisite factors of this prototype are:

- (a) a developed political awareness accompanied by a sense of uncompromising struggle for the liberation of Palestine, and
- (b) a definite feeling that armed struggle and suicide missions are valuable weapons, essential for the achievement of political gains.

Supportive factors:

- (a) participation in suicide missions of the organization to which they belong,
- (b) sympathetic atmosphere within the community that reveres self-sacrifice, and
- (c) a media outlet ensuring that this action will occupy the international, as well as the Palestinian arenas, to ensure that the Palestinian issue is not removed from the international agenda.

Conjectures about the dominant personality characteristics in this group: determined, secure in his/her acts, willing to sacrifice him/herself for a cause (idealistic).

This prototype fits some of the sociological explanations (such as, the national liberation struggle) presented in the literature, but it should be noted that little material—compared to other prototypes—was available, so caution is warranted.

Culture of Martyrdom

It is clear that none of the suicide bombers operates in a vacuum, and they are influenced by the social environment in which they are living. The components of social support can be described as a “culture of martyrdom.”⁸⁶ The salient components of this culture, as extracted from the material gathered for this research, are diverse and the following are the most prominent:

Social Support

It is possible to identify both social support directed by the terror organizations, and spontaneous support of people in the street (although it is not always possible to differentiate between the two). Examples of social support for suicide terror are: public assemblies; public funerals; posters in the street containing the photos of the suicide terrorists (shahids); announcements from suicide bombers who explode in the format of a wedding; mourning booths where people come to express condolences; joyful parades after a successful suicide attack; dressing very young children as suicide terrorists wearing explosive belts; and this is only a partial list. Such social support expresses a high degree of solidarity with the suicide perpetrators and their families, and, at the same time, creates clear encouragement for more people to join the circle of suicide perpetrators.⁸⁷

Education for Suicide Terror

The culture of martyrdom finds many expressions in the formal education of children and youth, to support suicide attacks and, when the day comes, to volunteer for them. Formal education includes supporting suicide attacks in textbooks, official Palestinian television broadcasts, ceremonies at school, and writing essays and poems in class. The common denominator of these activities is portraying the suicide attack as self-sacrifice for Allah and the Palestinian people. Other examples include media interviews with parents of suicide terrorists after attacks, in which the parents praise their child's act and call for others to follow. It seems that these educational methods have influenced many Palestinian children who express their wish to become Shahids.⁸⁸

Financial Support

Financial support to the suicide terrorist families, and sometimes re-building the family house in place of one that was destroyed by the Israelis (as punishment for the suicide attack), have become major ways of identification and support for families of suicide bombers. This financial support is but one element of creating a sense of solidarity with the families of bombers. In many cases, the source of money comes from abroad, such as Iraq during sa'addam Hussein's regime, but it comes from various Palestinian organizations as well.⁸⁹

Great Honor and Commemoration

Great honor and commemoration are other ways that builds the Palestinian ethos and emphasizes the central role of the suicide terrorist in the "heroic" struggle with Israel. Commemoration activity includes, for example, building monuments, naming a football tournament after a suicide terrorist, public assembly at schools in memory of suicide bombers, distribution of the cassette made by the suicide bombers before the attack, and this is only a partial list. These actions help to stabilize suicide terror in the Palestinian collective consciousness, as a legitimate act of national liberation.⁹⁰

Media Support for Suicide Attacks

The media supports the attacks by praising the perpetrators and their acts and strengthening their legitimacy as the preferred way to fight the Israelis. Some of the media which publicly support suicide attacks belong to Islamic organizations, but others are controlled by the Palestinian authority. Media support comes in many

ways; for example, descriptions of suicide attacks as acts of heroism and nobility; calling suicide attacks acts of sacrifice; broadcasting religious ceremonies from mosques where preachers encourage volunteering for suicide attacks, praising and glorifying these acts; and declarations of Chairman Yasir Arafat who called the terrible attack on a youth disco in Tel Aviv (in which nineteen young people were killed) “an act of sacrifice for Allah and for the homeland.” The messages which emanate from the Palestinian media reflect the prevailing mood of the leadership (political, religious and social) and their preference for direct action from the ordinary Palestinians.⁹¹

Political Leaders Supporting Suicide Terror

Political leaders have frequently praised suicide perpetrators as people who sacrifice themselves for the Palestinian nation. This support can be direct or indirect (for example, a eulogy after the death of a suicide bomber⁹²).

Religious Interpretations

Religious interpretations that support the suicide attacks as not only legitimate weapons in the necessary struggle against Israel, but also as an Islamic commandment.

In general, it is possible to conclude that there are overlaps between the various elements contributing to the establishment of the culture of martyrdom, and the result is a public atmosphere of support and sympathy for the use of suicide terror. This atmosphere intersects the various organizations and is directed toward the whole Palestinian population; it has become a major factor abetting the phenomenon of suicide terror.⁹³

Discussion

The attempt to answer the disturbing question of what motivates suicide terrorists leaves the reader perplexed. Different approaches suggest different reasons but each reason seems to cover only part of the phenomenon and leaves many questions unanswered. This article tries to classify suicide terrorists into different categories and proposes a new approach: not only is suicide terror a complex multifactorial phenomenon, but it also seems to be a phenomenon of multiple trajectories. Four prototypes of suicide terrorists emerge from our research. Therefore, approaches that focus on one (or two) of them, but not others, offer only partial explanations. The present research supports explanations cited in the literature, but only as they relate to a certain prototype and not as a general explanation of suicide terror. In addition, identification of suicide terrorist prototypes enables classification of other explanations in order to determine which prototype is relevant.

Even if most types, in reality, may be mixed (i.e., perpetrators who present characteristics of more than one prototype), we can make a few assumptions:

- (a) In most cases, this research shows that a mixed type does not include more than two prototypes (for instance, religious-retribution for suffering);

- (b) More thorough research may show that even in mixed types, there are inclinations towards a certain direction. Moreover, future research may identify subtypes of the main prototypes that have been proposed in the article; and
- (c) Even if most perpetrators belong to mixed types, this does not waive the need to make an attempt to identify what the necessary and supportive conditions are. Identifying these conditions may serve as a possible basis for dealing with the phenomenon of suicide terrorism.

There is a wide agreement among researchers that it is not possible to identify a single profile of a suicide terrorist in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.⁹⁴ Moreover, many terror experts agree that there is a composite of motivations, including three major ones which are difficult to distinguish from one another: religious, social/nationalistic, and a wish for revenge. The present study suggests adding to this list the exploited terrorist whose motivation is rooted in a specific situation of no alternative, or no option to resist being enlisted by terror organizations.

Moreover, in contrast to the model of wide (or almost total) overlaps among the various motives, the current research suggests a different model (see Figure 1) according to which there is a certain amount of overlap (that is, each of the four prototypes is not mutually exclusive) among the various motives, yet, at the same time, it is possible to see each prototype (including main motive and certain trajectory, and sometimes background variables) as representing a distinct group. A relevant example might be a suicide terrorist whose parents stated that he had committed the act in order to fulfill the commandment of Jihad and to avenge his cousin's death. Such information is not enough to determine whether he belongs to the religious or the retribution for suffering category, but if there is background information (i.e., was he religious before the death of his cousin? Did he pray daily in a mosque before the incident? What was his life style? Did he have long-term goals, such as planning for higher studies?) If background information reveals that his life style was not religious and he clearly intended to adjust to life, while a clear change took place after the death of his cousin, it is reasonable to assume that he belonged to the retribution for suffering type rather than the religious. All this is true considering the assumption that some of the suicide terrorists do belong to more than one category.

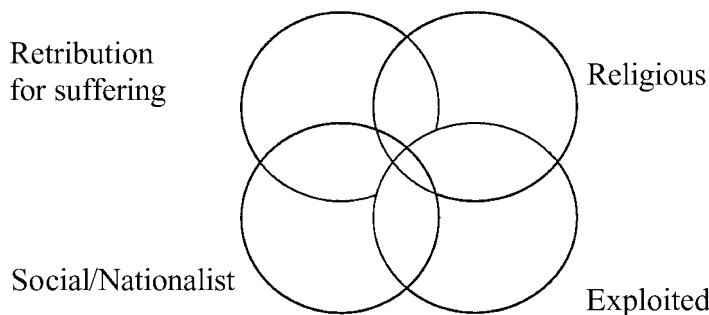


Figure 1. Suggested model for 4 categories of the Palestinian suicide terrorist.

It might be possible to assume that some of the prototypes share more similar psychological characteristics and some share less. For example, it can be assumed that the religious and social/nationalistic prototypes are idealistic, dogmatic (i.e., they cannot consider any alternative mode of operation), and tend to have more authoritarian personalities compared to the two other prototypes. However, current research cannot test these hypotheses, and further research needed.

As explained, in light of the difficulties of collecting data on suicide terrorists (by interviews or other common psychological tests), we suggest viewing the current typology as a primary theoretical proposal. It should be added that the data for this research is not sufficient to determine the relative frequency of each category, and that is why, in Figure 1, all the circles are the same size, and they are not representative of numbers of suicide terrorists. In reality, it may be assumed that the religious category is the most common one in the Israel-Palestinian conflict. The main limitations of the current study are rooted in the information gap regarding the population of Palestinian suicide terrorists (i.e., a convenient sample and not a representative one) and reliance on secondary sources (information given by other people regarding the suicide terrorist). Regarding these limitations, there is no doubt that there is need for additional research to support the typology, as well as the prerequisite and supportive factors we have proposed for each of the prototypes.

In the current research, as in other typological research, there is tension between the researcher's desire to identify "each of the trees" (i.e., the personal aspects), on the one hand and, on the other hand, the desire to see "the whole forest", (i.e., the social aspect). Identification of various prototypes, as this research proposes, allows for a combination of both approaches.

The Social Approach

The present research indicates that the social aspect is more prominent in the social/nationalist and religious prototypes. These are greatly influenced by an environment which encourages a candidate to commit suicide terror for the "good of the community," while assisting with extensive social support by both local and national elements (labeled the culture of martyrdom). These two prototypes do not see themselves as desperate, but rather, as fighters who sacrifice themselves for the cause, and by doing so, in his/her perception, he earns recognition and great respect, as well as rewards in eternity. These perpetrators show the enemy that they have no intention of compromising for their goals and there is nothing that will deter them.

The Personal Approach

The present research indicates that the personal aspect is more prominent in two prototypes: the retribution for suffering and the exploited prototypes. Candidates are characterized by personal qualities which make them more susceptible to recruitment as suicide terrorists (such as weak personalities who submit to social pressure or personal trauma).

Based on the prerequisite and supportive factors that are identified in this study, it is possible to suggest that both the social and the personal aspects of suicide terror

require different non-military strategies (in addition to the military ones). The social aspect requires, first of all, a struggle against the legitimacy and encouragement given to suicide terror by the Palestinian Authority. Such legitimacy and encouragement are both formal (statement of encouragement by political leaders, or video clips on Palestinian public television praising the martyrs) and informal (i.e., officially ignoring the preachers in the Mosque, calling for suicide attacks as the way of Jihad, permission for Islamic organization to organize gatherings of support for the suicide bombing perpetrators in public schools).

The personal aspect requires different messages that will be directed towards potential suicide candidates from the four categories (for example, publication and criticism of recruiting minors and children, in order to strengthen parents to be able to resist such recruitment, or publication of religious experts who object to the interpretation encouraging suicide terror). In addition, limiting or removing the checkpoints and any other causes of humiliation, might affect the category of retribution for sufferings. It is possible to conclude that the picture that emerges from this study indicates, as in other studies, that suicide terror is not only a military struggle, but also psychological warfare. To deal with such a struggle, there is an advantage in identifying different prototypes of suicide terrorist and their common as well as unique characteristics.

Conclusions

It must be remembered that, although this article is dealing with the psychological aspects of a much wider political phenomenon, our conclusions are based on personal psychological motivations of the suicide bomber and we have not examined other important aspects of the problem.

- (a) The scope of suicide terror in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the possibility that there are different prototypes with different trajectories and various necessary factors and supporting factors, strengthen the perception that there is no single solution to this problem. It is possible to assume that stopping suicide terror depends on many factors, and what is good for one prototype is not necessarily good for other prototype (e.g., ending the occupation will not necessarily stop suicide terror by the religious prototype).
- (b) It is possible to consider various steps to be directed towards specific prototypes which, in the long run, will decrease the number of potential candidates for suicide terror. Accordingly, developing strategies of psychological warfare directed to each of the suicide terrorist prototypes is recommended.
- (c) It is possible to plan long-range steps directed towards the supporting factors which are common to all four prototypes. The first steps should refer to the wide social support for suicide terror. Such steps obligate creation of conditions that will give the Palestinians hope that there is a future chance for a political solution, and, at the same time, that there is no chance for achievement by using suicide terror.
- (d) Israel should be prepared, based on the assumption that suicide terror is not going to disappear soon, for a long struggle. The culture of martyrdom that has developed in Palestinian society is deep and wide-ranging. Therefore, there is need for action to reduce it, while preparing for the struggle, both psychologically and militarily.

Appendix 1. A typology of suicide terrorists acting against Israel

Prototype	Prerequisites	Supporting factors	Hypotheses as to the prototype's dominant personality traits
Religious	<p>Religious indoctrination encouraging and urging suicide attacks.</p> <p>Charismatic religious leaders with great influence on candidates for suicide operations.</p>	<p>A sympathetic public atmosphere within the religious community that praises martyrs, which includes publicity, great honor, and commemoration.</p> <p>A group that is characterized by intensive processes of collective thought.</p> <p>Community support of the family of the deceased suicide terrorist.</p>	<p>Faithful, steadfast, goal-focused, belief in divinely determined fate, influenced by people whom s/he reveres, belief in the world to come.</p>
Social/nationalist	<p>Well-developed political consciousness, along with a sense of an uncompromising struggle to liberate Palestine.</p> <p>A clear feeling that the armed struggle and suicide attacks are an effective and necessary weapon in achieving political goals.</p>	<p>Participation of the organization to which the individual belongs in the suicide attack.</p> <p>A sympathetic public atmosphere that praises the sacrifice.</p> <p>Media that ensures wide coverage both in the Palestinian community and internationally.</p>	<p>Steadfast, sure in his/her ways, willing to sacrifice him/herself for the general public (idealist).</p>

Retribution for suffering	psychological injury based on one or more of the following events: death or serious injury of a family member or another close individual Trauma related in some way to the Israeli occupation (personal humiliation, or witnessing the humiliation, or witnessing (culminating in or including depression))	A sympathetic public atmosphere that praises the martyrs, including publicity of names, great honor, and commemoration. Financial support for the family of the deceased suicide terrorist.	Hopeless, vengeful, tendency to see their lives as worthless.
Exploited	Suicide terrorists who are unable to refuse others, or unable to withstand the organizations' pressures to "volunteer" for a suicide operation, such as: children and youth adults in social distress (collaborators, homosexuals, moral offenders) people with weak personalities.	A sympathetic public atmosphere that praises the martyrs. The suicide terrorists' belief that all their sins will become "white as snow" and that they will be granted full atonement for their past.	Dependent, anxious, difficulty withstanding pressure, recognition-seeking.

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