



Suicide Terrorism

The History of Terrorism
as a Strategy of Political
Insurgency

March 2011

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Most credit goes to
Chaliand, Gerard and Blin, Arnaud The History of Terrorism: From Antiquity to Al
Qaeda University of California Press, Berkley, California 2007

Terror Goals and Publicity

Different Groups use Terror to achieve different goals

- Remake Society
- Divinely inspired Millennialism
- Ethnic homelands (Separations)
- Reunification of a homeland
- Specific issue oriented actions

Actions are NOT random or senseless

- Maximum publicity
- Terror as theater
- Communication through shock

Media plays a vital role

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Review of Media and Terrorism - big part of what the suicide guys are after

Different Groups use Terror to achieve different goals

- Remake Society along fundamentalist or politically doctrinarian lines
- Divinely inspired Millennialism imperatives
- Ethnic homelands
- Reunification of a divided homeland (perceived or otherwise)
- Specific issue oriented actions (Abortionist, Environmentalists, animal rights)

Actions are NOT random or senseless

They want Maximum publicity – violence draws attention to generate publicity to communicate a message

Terror as theater - they are playing to an audience, and will tailor the message for that audience.

Communication through shock

The Media plays a vital role in reaching their target audiences, and they will fashion the event to meet the needs of the media.

They also can provide intelligence to terrorists through their coverage of events.

What is a Suicide Attack?

It is the **intentional** killing of the self

It is designed to achieve a **political** or strategic objective

It can be an act of conventional war (kamikazes) or an act of terror (9/11)

Goals of Mass Destruction, or Mass Disruption

More common when there is an asymmetry of power

Altruistic quality of the Attacker

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Suicide attacks involve human beings intentionally killing themselves to achieve a political or strategic objective. Chaliand and Blin see it in two contexts, deliberately to separate an act of war from an act of terror:

- Declared open war where combatants sacrifice themselves (think Kamikaze pilots) against enemy targets
- Undeclared targets (possibly military targets but also civil, ethnic, religious targets) where the attacker can be indistinguishable from those he/she attacks
- Suicide attacks involve an altruistic choice by the individual to sacrifice him or herself for a cause (the greater good). The development of dynamite allowed the suicide to become “guaranteed”, eliminating the chance that the would be altruist was caught, tortured, turned, etc.

Explosives simply changed the tactical and technical equation. When you absolutely, positively want to kill yourself for a cause, dynamite is the right choice for you!

So factors to consider include:

- Suicide attackers and their access to weapons (including of mass destruction/disruption)
- The Islamic world’s return focus on the concept of sacrifice – the rise of an expansionist, transnational, cultural force that sees violence as a tool to gain power over oppressors, and is unlikely to fade after a generation like many groups do.

Suicide Attacks in History

Altruism and the “Greater Good”

- Diminishment of Self

Sicari, Assassins, and Anabaptists

Conventional War versus Unconventional War

Asymmetry of Power

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So what about Suicide Attacks in History?

A lot of them involve the “Yes I will most likely die because I am so altruistic”. But not so many want to die as part of the purpose of the act
Certainly, a number of examples where death was preferred to slavery exist, including the Berserkers of the Germanic tribes and Masada Zealots

The Sicari would kill their victim in the market, and often not flee, but wait until the Romans came to die fighting

Vikings liked to think dying in battle was cool, and Romans certainly thought falling on their swords was necessary at times. Roman Generals would charge into enemy hordes rather than watch their boys get trounced.

How about those Assassins?

Anabaptists?

Sectarianism in the middle ages produced both suicide and murder suicide, with the intentions of hastening a new age

Suicide as a Conventional War Tactic – WWII and Viet Nam

Kamikaze Pilots and the Oka gliders

Viet Minh and the Bangalore tubes

1979 and the Entry of Religion

Islamic Revolution in Iran The concept of Martyrdom The change in tactics in Lebanon

- Disproportionate damage to enemies
- Political impact on the enemy and the enemy public is gained through publicity
- Recruitment increased for Hezbollah, as did its standing
- Ongoing propaganda, including bill boards, video games, celebratory death announcements and events for martyrs, and the constant indoctrination in the mosque by the Imam



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In 1979, the Islamic Republic rose in Iran and the movement to martyrdom began in earnest in Islam. Militant, impassioned, revolutionary in ever means of the word, radical shi'ites embraced the concept of self sacrifice and martyrdom. This was reinforced weekly and vigorously in the mosque by the Imams, and by the Ayatollah, in a manner that had never existed before.

When the war with Iraq broke out, many boys 15 years of age were recruited and mass groups of suicide volunteers were deployed on the battlefield to augment the depleted (by the revolution) armed forces. This exploited the tendencies of you to be passionate, and at times rebellious, as well as exploiting the adolescent libido with promises of great rewards in the afterlife. While the military benefits of suicide attacks appears limited in large theater operations, the imbedding of the suicide attack concept, particularly with the shi'ites, was very significant, and a slight variation would make it much more successful.

The change was simple. Instead of mass suicide attacks, use a limited number of people, even one or two, to get close to your target and cause a disproportionate amount of damage. This tactic was used against the US and French troops in Lebanon in September 1982 where two attackers killed over 300 western troops.

Politically, the impacts were even more significant, in that it started the move to US and French withdrawals. Key observations for the attackers:

- Disproportionate damage to enemies
- Political impact on the enemy and the enemy public is gained through publicity
- Recruitment increased for Hezbollah, as did its standing
- Ongoing propaganda, including bill boards, video games, celebratory death announcements and events for martyrs, and the constant indoctrination in the mosque by the Imam, maintained the recruitment and the cultural enshrinement of martyrdom



This site pulls together a number of Palestinian Videos, from groups I would call extremist (that's just me). Note the children's show (with callers from Holland), then happy clapping, etc., and the fun girl band singing that summer favorite "Kalashnikov-Let your bullets fly".

Also, if you wish to donate, there is an easy link.

The point here is the combination of indoctrination, poverty, real and imagined injustices, and religious paradise should guarantee more, and more suicide terrorist volunteers. Their affectivity may change, but the pool will only grow.

Hezbollah and Lebanon

Hezbollah makes a strategic decision to use Suicide Bombers

- Cost effectiveness
- The precision of the attack (the ultimate smart bomb would self navigate to the most crowded part of the bus station)
- Destructive capacity
- Psychological impact

The PLO jumps in too!



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This is a good time to ask anyone if they have heard of Hezbollah. Most will not have heard of them probably, but get their ears open, because these guys are not going away and if they listen to a decent news show or read a paper, they will hear of them.

Hezbollah, radical and supported by Iran, was also able to establish itself into a state within a state in southern Lebanon, running TV and radio stations, and providing many services of the state, such as medical and educational services, and social aid. They also receive significant propaganda credit for Israel's 2000 withdrawal from Lebanon, following sustained 4G conflict utilizing a variety of \$G tactics, with the addition of the suicide bomber (at least 36 suicide attacks were used from 1982 to 2000).

In Palestine, the technique and apparent success was duly noted, and copied, by the increasing Islamized Palestinians influenced by Hamas and Islamic Jihad. The strategic decision was based on:

Cost effectiveness

The precision of the attack (the ultimate smart bomb would self navigate to the most crowded part of the bus station)

Destructive capacity

Psychological impact

Between April 1994 and April 2002 96 suicide volunteers caused 334 deaths and

2,7000 injuries to Israeli soldiers and civilians. After the 2nd Intifada began, the PLO felt it needed to get in on the action and they launched the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, particularly after it became apparent the 2nd Intifada was not going well from a conventional perspective for the Palestinians or the PLO. The bombing intensified, and so did Israel's response, with a "lull" developing in 2003, either do to fatigue, Israel's response, of Mahmoud Abba's election as Prime Minister in the Palestinian authority.

Sri Lanka and the Tamil Tigers

Sinhalese have political power over minority Tamils
Tamils are marginalized
Resistance breaks out and becomes more radical
Suicide attackers used
Cult of Personality around leader
Tigers crushed in brutal war
Tamil grievances not resolved



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Sri Lanka and the Tamil Tigers

It is worth talking a bit about this conflict in Sri Lanka. The Tamils had/have legitimate grievances, resistance became violent, and although crushed, the thing seems far from over in the sense that the Tamils are worse off now than before.

I also want to emphasize a non-muslim, non-religious suicide terror campaign.

The Black Tigers were the suicide unit of the Tamil Tigers. At its peak, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam controlled 15,000 troops, had a small Navy, a minute air force, and control of northern Sri Lanka. The leader used extensive psychological controls and propaganda to develop a very ruthless force, very willing to die for him and the cause. The small Navy lent itself to the development of suicide swimmers, who would target Sri Lanka ships, as well as traditional suicide bombers. The Tigers were early with prototypes of vest bombs, using one to kill Rajiv Gandhi in 1993, and also employed child soldiers in the conflict. These guys were really unpleasant.

Although not officially a religion, devotion to Velupillai Prabhakaran and the concept of a Free Tamil Nadu sparked religious like emotion. Extensive control of the local Tamil population allowed them to have a fairly effective range of control and to operate with a large degree of autonomy.

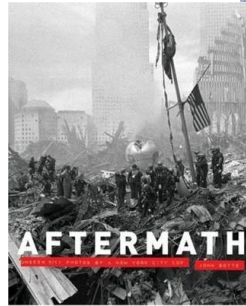
The Tigers were crushed in 2009, when following the collapse of peace talks in 2006,

the Sri Lankan army went on the offensive. During the peace talks the Sri Lankan army effectively doubled its size, and when they went on the offensive, it was total war. The Tigers kept civilians with them at all times, and while the government gave opportunities for them to leave, and relocated many hundreds of thousands to government controlled refugee camps, it certainly did not back off at all, and significant civilian casualties occurred.

Just a note, that in spite of the Sri Lankans complete military victory over the Tamil Tigers, the legitimate grievances of the Tamil community that led to the efforts to secede have not been mediated, so the door is still open to insurrection, and it most certainly will start with terror attacks.

Al Qaeda and 9/11

Deliberate, Strategic
Plan
Asymmetry of power
Great symbolism
Great Publicity
Excellent Cost Benefit
trade off



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Al Qaeda and the Septembrists of 9/11

A point that Chaliand and Blin bring up that is interesting is that suicide operations were not used with any frequency by the Mujahedeen in the Afghan-Soviet war. The suppose that although there was an asymmetry in the power of the Mujahedeen compared to the Soviets, that having one over the civilian population, and by being able to move relatively freely inside the country, there simply was no need to pursue this tactic. This does not mean self sacrifice was not present, it just means as a tactic, suicide attacks were not commonly used.

After the Afghanistan war, the Arab jihadists who were remember foreign to Afghanistan, had some internal debate over what to do next. Osama Bin Laden thought about helping to create an Islamic state in Sudan, but eventually attacks on the US and the Jews, both who were seen as occupiers of Islamic lands, became a priority. Since the power gap was so large between the two terrorism as a tactic became essential to the struggle, although most events prior to 9/11 were the more standard car bomb, non-suicide variety.

After 9/11, suicide operations continued in Palestine, in Iraq after the US invasion, in Afghanistan after the US invasion, in Saudi Arabia, now in Pakistan, and in Chechnya, as well as in Long, Madrid and other western cities targeted.

Ideology and Psychology

Self Sacrifice – in every good WWII Hollywood movie

- Suicide Terrorists have the sense of self sacrifice with an indifference

Inspirational leaders and Teachers

- Celebrants at the ceremony

Control Techniques

- Isolation and rituals

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Ideology and Strategy

Ever good Hollywood war movie features someone heroically sacrificing themselves for the greater good of the unit. The concept is clear. Suicide bombers need the same sense of self sacrifice, but they also have to start a process negating themselves and others as human beings. They need to see themselves as part of an arsenal, to smite the enemy pestilence. A certain quality of indifference is a factor in what makes them so frightening.

The Social Psychology of the leaders and their troops

Two kinds of leaders: Inspirers and teachers. Inspirers keep their distance, but symbolize the cause. Trainers are the “hands on” type. Neither typically comes from lower social levels, and in general enjoy at least two or three generations of privilege in their society. There is often a fundamental feeling of a lack of compatibility between cultures and social groups that contributes to the problem. Many are exposed to the west, often with some education in the west.

Leaders use many techniques to control their followers, including techniques such as oath taking, ritual pledges, leader as father figure, and guarantor of the community. He is the celebrant at ceremonies, and uses schools as the recruiting and indoctrination centers he requires. Secluding the recruits to isolate them from their own support networks, and submerging them in the new group mission, is common.

It is interesting to note that in Palestine the society, or at least significant portions of it, has embraced suicide terrorism enough so that the suicide obituaries have more of a wedding announcement flavor. The celebration of the suicide is even published in newspapers. How screwed up is that? And what does it say about the future of a society so rooted in despair, poverty, unemployment, etc., that this becomes a festivity?

Cost Benefit Analysis

Financial cost small compared to the cost of the governments response

Suicide Bombings result in fewer terrorist or guerilla deaths

\$3,000,000,000,000 vs. \$500,000 look at all the zeros...\$6 million to \$1 trade off

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Cost Benefit Analysis

Suicide terrorism is quite simply a great idea at least in the sense of the economics of it. Take one unemployed youth, strap \$500 worth of explosives to him, drop him off at a bus station, and let him navigate himself to a group of people, pull the string, and BAM, 30 dead, 500 injured, \$5 million in train station damage, mass disruption to workers, future drop off in tourism, and a billion dollar increase in security costs. This is a great deal for terrorists.

And the overall cost of one life, especially an unemployed youth, can pale in comparison to the costs of conventional war. The Iraq-Iran war claimed 800,000 lives. Algeria's 1992 and sort of still going civil war claimed 150,000+. Most of us never heard of the 1992 to 1998 Algerian conflict, but we all heard of the suicide bombers in Palestine.

The estimated \$500,000 spent on the 9/11 attacks has resulted in a US expenditure of between 1 and 3 trillion dollars (depending on how you get the numbers). This would equate to 30 to 100 years of national health (and I maybe making this up, so go ahead and fact check). 2011 Defense spending is pegged at \$700 billion, while we have a deficit of almost the same amount.