

## The Logic behind Suicide Terrorism and its Connection to Islam

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### Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze suicide terrorism and to examine the logic behind it. The thesis will examine recent Islamic suicide terrorism and why it is so successful.

This paper will also attempt to define suicide terrorism and explain how it functions.

The first half of this thesis reviews a short history of suicide terrorism to show the logic behind it. It will begin with the Old Testament and continue throughout history until the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City. This thesis will discuss the motivation for terrorist organizations to encourage, and individuals to commit, suicide attacks within their certain causes. It will also examine the mental thought process behind suicide terrorists.

The second half of this thesis will examine the Islamic use of suicide terrorism to show that they follow the rational pattern of other suicide terrorists. It will discuss Islam and the violence of the religion. It will also examine martyrdom along with the goals and rewards of the jihadists. This thesis will look at the way the Western world, Christians, and Jews view Islamic suicide terrorists. Finally, the thesis will discuss the difference between historical and current suicide terrorism and how it will continue.

### The Logic behind Suicide Terrorism and its Connection to Islam

Suicide as a means to intimidate a population has been used by terrorist groups for many years. Throughout history, and in recent times, many different terrorist organizations with a wide variety of beliefs and goals have used suicide terrorism to further their cause. The use of suicide terrorism is a rational and thought-out process and there are logical reasons why someone would commit acts of suicide terrorism. One of the most current and widespread uses of suicide terrorism is by Islamic terrorists. The religion of Islam is a belief system that encourages people to become “martyrs,” known commonly to the world as suicide terrorists. The acts of these martyrs will be examined and discussed in the light of religious and cultural views, including those other than Islam. Suicide terrorism is a rational action that Islamic terrorists use in support of their cause.

### **Defining Suicide Terrorism**

The definition of terrorism varies across organizations; but, generally defined, terrorism is “premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience” (Atran, 2003, p. 1534). Pedahzur (2006) writes that people often broadly label suicide attacks as terrorism even when they are actually not. He places emphasis on the noncombatant status of the target and says that any attacks against uniformed officers are warfare rather than terrorism. Terrorists refuse to be bound by rules of warfare or codes of conduct (Hoffman, 2006). Unlike war, which is limited in time and space, suicide terrorism reaches all around the world and can happen at any time, making the expectation of an emergency the norm (Kuntzel, 2008). With suicide terrorism there is always the threat of “more attacks to come” (Zaidi, 2009, p. 412).

Furthermore, in its most narrow definition, terrorism can only be conducted by private groups and not government actors (Weinberg & Pedahzur, 2010). As will become apparent, it is essential to understand even the broadest definitions of terrorism to assist with understanding the mentality and reasoning of those who are willing to die for their cause.

Suicide terrorism is when combatants use their own lives as a means of making a statement. The aim of suicide terrorists is to disrupt a people's way of life. They do this through the killing of civilians, as well as by destroying important national or religious landmarks and other important infrastructure (Asad, 2007). Their overall intention is psychological, to cause fear in a nation. To accomplish this they never act in private, nor do they use a secret weapon such as poison. Instead, suicide terrorists act in a way that demands personal violence (Weinberg & Pedahzur, 2010). Their aim is to draw attention to their act because when they receive more attention they cause more terror. When there is more threat and more damage caused, the news of the attack spreads farther both nationally and internationally, and is talked about for a longer time period due to media attention (Hoffman, 2006). For example, the effects of 9/11 are still felt and discussed even years later while there are more small-scale recent attacks that are barely remembered and not discussed. Suicide terrorism "is a form of political theatre in which the audience's reaction is as important as the act itself" (Pedahzur, 2006, p. 26). One terrorist stated that he would rather kill one man in front of a camera than one hundred men with no one around to witness it (Hoffman, 2006). A terrorist's purpose is to influence an audience. Without anyone to be influenced by a terrorist act there is no point in committing such an act.

## Logic of Suicide Terrorism

### History

**Samson.** Suicide terrorism has a long history that goes back to biblical times. Judges chapter 16 tells the story of Samson and how he became a suicide terrorist. He was captured by the Philistines and taken to the temple to entertain the people there. He was chained to the pillars and at that time asked God to renew his strength so he could get revenge. He said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" He then pushed on the pillars, destroying the temple and killing everyone inside of it, including himself. It is then written that "he killed many more when he died than while he lived" (Jdg 16:30, New International Version). Samson was not a soldier and the majority of the people he killed were rulers and civilians. Therefore, Samson is a suicide terrorist in the narrowest definition. He is one of the earliest reported suicide terrorists.

#### **Single death terror.**

**Holy warriors.** Those termed as "holy warriors" use terrorism for religious reasons. During the European Middle Ages a Shiite sect, known as the Assassins or Ismailis, desired to purify Islam. They would gain the confidence of Sunni leaders, then, at a favorable moment, stab them to death (Weinberg & Pedahzur, 2010). After they killed the leader they were expected to wait patiently to be killed by bystanders. Behavior similar to this occurred on the Sulu archipelago of the Philippines. Spain was ruling the area and the "holy warriors" were fighting against the Christian domination of the area (Weinberg & Pedahzur, 2010, p. 235). In both of these situations the suicide terrorists were acting on the basis of religion.

***Russian revolutionaries.*** The case has been made that Russian revolutionary assassins were suicide terrorists. They used weapons such as short range firearms and bombs that had to be thrown at their target. Therefore, to succeed in their mission, they had to get close enough that they would ultimately be killed themselves. This was an instance of a non-religious act of suicide terrorism. They did not have any belief that they would be rewarded in an afterlife, nor that there would even be one. Their desire was to be remembered as heroes for their cause (Weinberg & Pedahzur, 2010, p. 235). Despite their lack of religious affiliations, these terrorists hold a similarity to the holy warriors as they were mainly targeting one singular, but powerful, person.

***Then and now.*** The aim of some historical attacks was to kill one high-ranking person. In these instances the person killed was still a noncombatant and the purpose was still to influence an audience. Therefore, it can still be considered terrorism. However, these historical suicide attacks were different than those of today. In more recent times the aim of suicide terrorism is generally to kill as many people as possible (Weinberg & Pedahzur, 2010, p. 235). This is because when more people die it affects more of the population of a country or area. It also leads to more international or worldwide outrage. Western civilizations generally react more strongly to a higher number of people killed than when it is only a few as it often attracts more media attention than other events. Terrorist attacks create drama, which the news media uses to gain ratings and social media latches onto (Hoffman, 2006). Due to the media attention people see terrorism often and “what you watch and listen to is what you become” (J. Pelletier, personal communication, September 2018). People are influenced by and become desensitized to the things that they see and hear all of the time. The more often people see others being

beheaded or killed in a terrorist attack the less they are affected by it in the long run. This is true despite any attempts to resist the desensitization (J. Pelletier, personal communication, September 2018).

**Kamikaze.** Kamikaze pilots are rarely considered terrorists due to the fact that they were acting in war at the behest of their government (Pedahzur, 2006). However, examining the kamikaze attacks gives insight into why people kill themselves for their cause. The Japanese knew that it was highly unlikely that they could win the war acting as a traditional fighting force. Thus, they sent pilots to fly on suicide missions as a way of fighting the enemy. Most kamikaze pilots were young and fairly educated and they recognized that non-conventional means had to be used if there was any chance of Japan winning the war. Also, despite assertions to the contrary, as kamikaze became more common there was pressure and expectations from peers and leadership that it was what should be done (Atran, 2003). This shows that rational thinking can lead to suicide terrorism, as in contemporary times.

**Contemporary.** It is widely agreed that the first contemporary suicide attacks began in 1980 in the Middle East (Pape, 2003; Weinberg & Pedahzur, 2010). The first major attack occurred in December of 1981 and was the destruction of the Iraqi embassy in Beirut (Atran, 2003). According to Pape (2003), there were 186 suicide terrorist attacks from 1980 to 2001. Pedahzur (2006) believes that Pape is overstating these numbers as he is using suicide terrorism in the broadest sense and including attacks against uniformed military personnel in his report. Despite these conflicting opinions there is no question that suicide terrorism is becoming more common, while at the same time, the amount of non-suicide terrorist attacks is decreasing (Pape, 2003). This trend



continued after the September 11 attacks on the United States. This can be illustrated by the fact that 78% of all suicide terrorist attacks between 1968 and 2005 occurred between 2001 and 2005, and after 2005 the rate of suicide attacks continued to increase (Hoffman, 2006; Santifort-Jordan & Sandler, 2014).

**What history reveals.** The use of suicide terrorism has been used all throughout history and is by no means a new method for terrorists to attempt to affect change. History also shows the effectiveness of suicide terrorism. Even before there were weapons of mass destruction suicide terrorism was a valuable way to affect social change. With the advent of modern weapons and media, suicide terrorism became an even more effectual way to draw attention to a cause.

### **Reasons for Using Suicide Terrorism**

Suicide attacks are most commonly used by a weaker foe against a stronger enemy. Terrorists understand that it is highly unlikely that they can succeed in their cause by using conventional means. Instead, they turn to suicide. This rationality was recognized by the Japanese and their use of Kamikaze pilots, most notably during the Second World War. This is also illustrated by external pressures put upon pilots to commit these suicide missions, as even those not going to die encouraged it (Atran, 2003). This shows that rational thinking can lead to suicide terrorism, which terrorist groups profit from.

Suicide terrorism contributes unique advances to terrorist campaigns that cannot be attributed to terrorism in which the terrorist is intended to survive. Suicide terrorist attacks have a much higher civilian mortality rate than non-suicide terrorism; killing approximately four times as many people worldwide (Hoffman, 2006). From 1980 to

2001 suicide attacks accounted for over half of the deaths caused by terror attacks while only accounting for three percent of all terrorist attacks worldwide (Atran, 2004).

Suicide terror is much more effective at killing people than other forms of terror.

For many terrorist organizations, using human capital as suicide terrorists is a much cheaper and generally more reliable way to succeed in their attacks (Atran, 2003). This is because a human can guide the weapon to a specific target, similar to a missile attack. Humans however, function even better than missiles because if there is an obstacle blocking their way, or if unexpected situations cause a minor change in location, the human can change routes to the location that will cause the most damage (Hoffman, 2006). For this reason suicide attacks are useful in cases of well defended targets that are unlikely to be destroyed using conventional means (Nilsson, 2018). Additionally, suicide attackers require no escape plan, and, if successful, do not have to be concerned about being captured and interrogated, decreasing the potential risk to the terrorist organization (Hoffman, 2006). For terrorist organizations, human lives are cheap and using them in this manner can produce the terrorists' desired results of the attack.

Another perceived outcome to suicide terrorism is that it gives the terrorists a perception of "moral high ground." By killing themselves to make a statement, even if it involves killing innocent civilians, they make themselves the victim. Suicide terrorism gives the appearance that the state the terrorists are fighting against is so awful there is no other way out of oppression than to commit an act of suicide terror (Pedahzur, 2006). According to Hezbollah's spiritual leader, the group believes that violence should only be used as a last resort when a person finds his life imperiled, and feels "stirred to shatter some of that enveloping powerlessness for the sake of liberty" (Hoffman, 2006, p. 91).

These are only a few of the reasons that terrorist organizations would support the use of suicide terrorism.

### **Who Are Suicide Terrorists?**

Suicide terrorists often are intelligent people with reasonable, nonreligious explanations for why they desire to carry out a suicide attack (Atran, 2004). However, this profile is not the sole identity for suicide terrorists: “Suicide terrorists can be college educated or uneducated, married or single, men or women, socially isolated or integrated,” and any age (Pape, 2003, p. 344). Despite the fact that there is no one profile for suicide terrorists, all have two things in common: “a willingness to kill and a willingness to die” (Pedahzur, 2006, p. 17). These two conditions are often brought about by a population’s belief in violence, or the belief that other more peaceful strategies have failed (Pedahzur, 2006). However, these two conditions are not what suicide terrorism is solely about. A suicide terrorist must also have a force that drives them to commit terror. They act because there is a “broader significance for achieving multiple purposes,” with the ultimate result being change enacted in favor of the terrorist (Hassan, 2010, p. 341). Mia Bloom writes that “the suicide bomber goes to his/ her death knowing that this death is a part of a campaign to achieve a political purpose” (Zaidi, 2009, p. 414).

Terrorists can be anyone, at any stage of life, with any belief system, as long as they are willing to kill and die for their cause. However, it has been found that an older and better educated suicide bomber will have more success in killing a greater number of people (Nilsson, 2018). Additionally, religiously motivated terrorism has often led to more intense acts of violence with higher levels of fatalities than secular terrorists who

chose their targets with more discrimination and do not have the goal of wanton destruction as religious terrorists do (Hoffman, 2006). As will be discussed, jihadists are religious terrorists who are certainly willing to die for their cause and in fact believe that it is an honor to do so.

### **Who Suicide Terrorists Are Not**

There is no single defining quality for all suicide terrorists. In the past, researchers have studied many different characteristics of suicide terrorists in an attempt to discover one similarity that would connect all or most suicide terrorists. They have looked at many different psychological and sociological factors. They considered affective disorders, trauma, and violence. However, none of these factors was distinguished among suicide terrorists when compared to their peers (Zaidi, 2009). Despite what may be believed based on the title “suicide terrorist,” suicide terrorists are not inherently suicidal people (Gray & Dickins, 2014; Townsend, 2007). The researchers also looked at age as a factor and, while terrorist groups seemed more likely to recruit young unattached males, both male and female persons of all ages become suicide terrorists (Zaidi, 2009). Suicide terrorists do not have one defining characteristic because, as previously mentioned, anyone can become a suicide terrorist as long as they are willing to die for their cause.

## **The Religion of Islam**

### **Nature of Islam**

There is wide debate today about whether Islam is a religion of peace or violence. Many proponents of Islam claim that it is by nature a religion of peace and those that would commit acts of terrorism are radicals who misinterpret the Quran. On the other

hand, there are those who say that the Quran demands violence against unbelievers. David Marshall writes in his book *God, Muhammad, and the Unbelievers* that in the Quran it states that infidels will be destroyed as punishment for their unbelief. In earlier times the authority to punish was limited to God alone; however it became the role of believers to punish the unbelievers at God's behest (Stewart, 2001). Many scholars and experts say that Islam is an evil ideology (B. D. DeVold, personal communication, September 2018). However, no matter the perspective taken one cannot say that all Muslims are violent. Those who believe Islam is evil say that those who believe Islam is a peaceful religion are the ones who are misled and misinformed, rather than the radicals.

According to Robert Spencer (2008) the Quran is just the "prophet" Muhammad justifying himself. When he wanted to fight a war he used Allah as a reason to do so. He claimed to be "innocent of those killed because they were associated with those that had to be fought" (Hoffman, 2006, p. 92). They must fight, as all governments not ruling by Islamic law are illegitimate (Hoffman, 2006). For example, radical Muslims desire that the United States Constitution be replaced with the Quran. Furthermore, according to a radical Muslim leader, "those who dispute the book of Allah are enemies of Allah" (Kopping, 2009). Thus, as Spencer (2008) states, the Quran teaches believers three options for unbelievers. First they offer a chance to convert. If they do not convert they are offered status as second class citizens who must pay a high tax to the Islamic state (Erb, 2014). If unbelievers do not accept either of the first two options, believers have a duty to wage war against them. Accordingly, warfare is part of Islamic religion; most traditional schools of law and orthodox sects support this interpretation. There are many

verses in the Quran where it advocates or even commands the killing of unfaithful people (Kuntzel, 2008; Quran 4:76, 89; 9:30).

It is true that there are verses of peace in the Quran. However, according to some scholars, the peace that it speaks of is when the entire world is united under an Islamic State after the death of the infidels, or Jews and other non-believers (Spencer, 2008; Hoffman, 2006). The Muslims who follow this way of thinking see the need for dramatic changes in the world. Ayatollah Baqer al-Sadr, a Shi'a theologian, said that the world has been shaped by others and Muslims have two choices when it comes to this world. They can "either accept it with submission, which means letting Islam die, or destroy it so that [they] can construct the world as Islam requires" (Hoffman, 2006, p. 90). Speaking about these same Muslims, Mustafa Chamran stated: "We are not fighting within the rules of the world as it exists today. We reject all those rules" (Hoffman, 2006, p. 90).

### **Martyrdom**

**Culture of death.** Islamic terrorists have adopted a culture of death. Al Qaeda, an Islamic terrorist organization, uses the catchphrase "you love life, we love death" (Kuntzel, 2008, p. 227). They teach that if someone dies for their Muslim belief all of their family and friends should be grateful. Hezbollah has broadcast media where children pray for their father's death in a battle for their faith and thank Allah when he dies. Also, mothers of suicide bombers happily say goodbye to their sons and wish them success in their actions (Kuntzel, 2008). Mariam Farhat, also known as Umm Nidal, and 'Mother of Martyrs,' lost three of her six sons to Hamas suicide attacks in Israel and would have gladly lost more (Yardley, 2013). In a video posted on a Hamas website she

is shown sending her son off to die, rejoicing and claiming that it is the happiest day of her life (Coyne, 2013). In an interview with National Geographic she said that she raised her sons “to be martyrs for the name of Allah.” She also told her grandson, the son of one of the “martyrs,” that he would also be a martyr one day and be reunited with his father (Yardley, 2013).

The Quran says that those in a fight with unbelievers should sacrifice their lives rather than surrender (Kuntzel, 2008). Those that die in this manner are not to be thought of as dead for they are alive and well cared for by their Lord (Berko, 2007). For many it is a joy to sacrifice their lives and according to a sheikh, or a religious elder, those that aren't martyrs should ask Allah why he has deprived them of the honor (Hoffman, 2006).

### **Rewards.**

*Earthly.* The sacrifice of Islamic suicide terrorists has benefits for both the terrorists and their families. The families of suicide terrorists in the Middle East are given an elevated status and are highly respected. In some areas they also receive a yearly stipend (Hoffman, 2006). The Palestinian Authority pays stipends to “Palestine prisoners in Israel, their families and the families of Palestinians killed or wounded in confrontations with Israelis” (Kershner, 2018). Some call this a “pay to slay” policy as some of the funds, estimated to amount to more than 300 million dollars, go to the families of suicide bombers (Kershner, 2018). Other evidence suggests that in 2014 these families were receiving payments of \$5,300 per year which, at the time, was approximately four times the average annual Palestinian income (Attkisson, 2014). This is an incentive for people to commit acts of suicide terrorism as they know that their family will be well looked after once they are gone. It is also an incentive for families

and mothers, such as Umm Nidal, to encourage their relatives and sons to commit such acts.

**Heavenly.** Another perceived benefit to suicide terrorism is the entrance granted into heaven. Heaven is described as a place of “eternal joy, beauty, and happiness” (Hoffman, 2006, p. 160) and “everything that is forbidden in this world, [such as drinking], is allowed in paradise” (Berko, 2007, p. 159). It is believed that “anyone who is with Allah is in better circumstances than if he were in this world” (Berko, 2007, p. 50). Therefore, Muslims desire to get to heaven as quickly as possible. The act of martyrdom allows the martyr to ascend straight to heaven and gaze on the face of Allah, without having to suffer through the painful purification stage. He will also get a crown of honor worth more than everything on earth. Furthermore, the martyr is allowed to select 70 family members who will also enter heaven without the need for purification (Hoffman, 2006). These benefits are available for both male and female martyrs. Additionally, male martyrs will have 72 virgins waiting for them when they get to heaven (Berko, 2007).

**Jihad.** Jihad is the Islamic belief that it is a religious imperative to wage a holy war against infidels, or enemies of Islam (Weinberg & Pedahzur, 2010). “For militant jihadists, crisis is constant and unabating, and extreme sacrifice is necessary as long as there are nonbelievers in the world” (Atran, 2004, p. 83). Jihadists use suicide terrorism to prove that they are dedicated to their cause (Horowitz, 2015). Another way they show dedication is to take an oath. Jihadists take an oath that “affirms that by their sacrifice members help secure the future of their family of fictive kin” (Atran, 2004, p. 79). They secure this future by fighting those that “have to be fought” and dying in the process



(Hoffman, 2006, p. 92). They do not commit suicide, they become martyrs. Suicide is selfish and not allowed in Islam, but dying for the cause is honorable and an occasion for celebration (Kuntzel, 2008). Jihad is the Muslim doctrine that requires obedience and violence to bring the entire world under Islam.

**Old violence.** According to Matthias Kuntzel (2009) Islamic suicide terrorism is a new phenomenon that was not around in the first 1,360 years of Islam. However, just because suicide terrorism at the time was not as large-scale it does not mean that it was not around earlier. In fact, Muslim suicide terrorists were recorded as far back as 1090 to 1272 A.D. lasting during the time of the Christian Crusades (Atran, 2003). The “Assassins,” literally translating to “hashish eater,” were a radical offshoot of the Shi’a Ismaili sect. For the Assassins violence “was a sacramental act, a divine duty, commanded by religious text and communicated by clerical authorities” (Hoffman, 2006, p. 177). The violence of the Assassins was to both vanquish their Christian enemies as well as to “hasten the dawn of a new millennium” (Hoffman, 2006, p. 177). The Assassins, following what is written in the Quran, believed that if they were killed while carrying out their attack they would “ascend immediately to a glorious heaven” (Hoffman, 2006, p. 177). The belief that violence and suicide terrorism are new to Islam is an incorrect one. There were suicide attacks in the past, there are suicide attacks in the present, and suicide attacks will be in the future.

### **Islamic Suicide Attacks**

There have been numerous suicide terrorist attacks worldwide since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City. In the United States there have been many Islamic motivated terrorist attacks both successful

and unsuccessful. While none of the successful attacks have been attacks where the terrorist is sure to die, such as a suicide vest, some of them have resulted in the death of the attacker, which the attacker was likely to predict due to their subsequent actions, like continuing to threaten people after law enforcement arrived (Aisch et al., 2016). To attempt to list all attacks in this paper would be much too extensive and rapidly out dated as terrorist attacks will continue to happen. However, a couple examples will be reviewed.

### **Examples.**

*The Underwear Bomber.* The first attack that will be reviewed is the attempted bombing on Christmas Day of 2009 by Umar Farouk Abdulmuttalab, also known as the underwear bomber. His goal was to explode a bomb on Northwest Airlines flight 253 killing the 289 people on board the plane. He was unsuccessful, as the bomb that he had hidden in his underwear failed to detonate, simply catching him on fire. Based on his actions he was tried and sentenced in U.S. District Court in Detroit and will serve a life sentence in prison for eight charges including attempted murder (Finn, 2012; ‘Underwear bomber,’ 2012). While he failed in his mission, Abdulmuttalab is still an example of an Islamic suicide terrorist.

Abdulmuttalab was acting for al-Qaeda when he attempted to blow up the plane in the name of Islam. He was following the instructions of Anwar al-Awlaki, a Yemeni affiliate of al-Qaeda. Awlaki tested Abdulmuttalab to make sure he was committed to jihad, arranged for him to meet a bomb maker, and showed him how to get through security, onto the plane, and detonate the bomb. Once the plane was in the air and close to the United States-Canada border Abdulmuttalab prepared to detonate the bomb. To

purify himself he washed, brushed his teeth, and put on cologne, and then he attempted to detonate the bomb. Three months before the attack he texted his family saying that he hoped Allah would make his martyrdom a happy event for them all (Finn, 2012). During his sentencing he showed no signs of remorse, repentance, or any other emotion and he previously had made his intentions clear that if given the chance he would attempt another terrorist attack ('Underwear bomber,' 2012). Abdulmuttalab is one illustration of the determination radical Muslims in their pursuit of jihad.

***Omar Mateen.*** Omar Mateen was a Muslim American man who killed 49 people at the Pulse Nightclub in Orlando, Florida before being killed himself. Mateen entered the nightclub and began shooting. He then was involved in a hostage situation where he held patrons of the nightclub at gunpoint, all the while pledging allegiance to ISIS, before being killed in a shootout with police (Aisch et al., 2016). While not a suicide bomber, Mateen knew that he was going to die in the attack, thus he was a suicide terrorist. It is a similar situation to suicide terrorists in the past who committed their acts of violence knowing that there was no way they would be able to escape. Instead of attempting to run or surrender when the police arrived he took hostages and when the police entered to rescue the hostages he was killed by the officers (Aisch et al., 2016). This follows the Islamic belief, as written in the Quran, that one should die in the holy fight rather than surrender to unbelievers (Kuntzel, 2008). Another way it was clear he was planning on dying is based on a statement made by his wife, Noor Salman. She told investigators that Mateen "had spent a lot of money on her." This shows that he was not planning on living to spend the money on other expenses for much longer (Lenenson, & Shepherd, 2018).

Mateen had been previously investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) on suspicion of being a terrorist. However, they could not find any evidence to suggest that he was a terrorist so the FBI removed him from their watch list (Mazzetti, Lichtblau, & Blinder, 2016). According to his wife though, Mateen was clearly planning something. In a statement she made she said: “Mateen watched violent jihadi beheading videos [and] that he purchased a rifle before the shooting.” She also said that a week before the attack Mateen had asked her which was worse, a shooting at Disney world or a nightclub. He also asked her how bad it would be if a nightclub were attacked (Lenenson, & Shepherd, 2018). This is another recent example of a suicide terrorist attack in the United States.

### **Western View**

The US government administration, as well as the majority of the US media, portrays suicide terrorists as “evil, deluded, or homicidal misfits who thrive in poverty, ignorance, and anarchy” (Atran, 2004, p. 73). This leads people to believe that there is no hope in ever stopping suicide terrorist attacks. There appears to be no way to solve the causes of suicide terrorism because some people will always be “desperate or deranged enough to conduct suicide attacks” (Atran, 2004, p. 73). Thus, most military actions target the terrorists themselves in an attempt to eradicate those that would be willing to commit acts of suicide terror, without focusing on the real reason they choose to commit such acts (Atran, 2004).

Additionally, suicide terrorists do not pick random targets but rather rationally choose targets to strike (Nilsson, 2018). This can be shown by Omar Mateen, who drove

around picking out possible locations before making his decision and attacking. Zaidi (2009) writes:

Contrary to popular Western belief, suicide bombings are not random acts of violence by zealots unable to restrain uncontrollable drives; suicide terrorism today is mainly an organizational undertaking, and consists of actions planned by some kind of organizational structure which has an effective network of recruiters, handlers and planners of suicide terrorism, which operates over a certain period of time. (p. 412)

People also tend to believe that those who commit suicide terrorism are naïve, irrational, or brainwashed. They believe that anyone who would act in such a way was influenced by others to do so. However, what these people don't see are the perceived logical reasons behind the actions as have been previously mentioned in this paper. Furthermore, it depends on your perspective. For example, Islamic extremists would likely look at those who follow and convert to Christianity and believe them to be naïve. They are following their Muslim belief the same as any Christian and those that die for their beliefs are similar to Christian martyrs. The comparison has also been made that suicide terrorists are similar to those who go to war willing to die for their brothers and sisters in arms. Some terrorist organizations are formed in a family-like group and Gray and Dickens (2014) claim that this makes the terrorists strongly bonded. They state that to discount the validity of suicide terrorists is not taking into regard the similarities they have to military heroes who sacrifice for their country and fellow soldiers.

It is also thought that economic conditions impact suicide terrorism. There is an attempt to make economic improvements in countries with the goal of ending terrorism.

It is believed that poverty and a lack of education will lead to anger and social estrangement, which in turn leads to terrorism (Flannery, 2016). However, there is no proof that a person with a low income is more inclined to become a suicide terrorist (Atran, 2004). Instead, many suicide terrorists come from a wealthy family, such as Umar Farouk Abdulmuttalab who is the son of a wealthy Nigerian businessman (Profile, 2011; Berko, 2007). Overall, the American view on terrorism is not completely accurate and instead the wrong beliefs about suicide terrorists are bolstered by government and news reports.

### **Christian and Jewish View**

Islam is often wrongly categorized together with Christianity and Judaism. Some believe that all three claim the same God; they simply have different beliefs about the current state of the world based on how they view the status of Jesus of Nazareth (Berko, 2007). Jews believe that the savior has not yet come and that Jesus was just a man. Christians believe that Jesus was the Son of God and man, and Savior of the world. Muslims believe that Jesus was a prophet of God, or Allah. Because Islam is grouped with these other two religions people often compare them to each other when talking about violent actions. Therefore, Islamic suicide terrorism will be examined through a Christian and Jewish perspective using the Old Testament, known as the Tanakh to the Jews.

### **Being Attacked**

The purpose of terrorism is to cause terror. In some cases terror can be a part of God's judgment. Isaiah 13 speaks about judgment on the nation of Babylon saying that;

. . . The Lord Almighty is mustering an army for war. They come from faraway lands... to destroy the whole country . . . the day of the Lord is near; it will come like destruction from the almighty . . . every heart will melt with fear [and] terror will seize them . . . (Is 13:4-8)

Isaiah 24:17 says that “Terror and pit and snare await you people of the earth.” In Deuteronomy it says that terror “that will fill your hearts” is part of a curse for disobedience (28:67). When people are treacherous and disobedient they will be judged by God. Suicide attacks, used to cause terror, might occur because of this disobedience.

However, Christians and Jews have cause for hope. In Isaiah it is asked why they “fear mere mortals” and “live in constant terror” when it is God who has made them and controls everything (51:12-13). Instead Christians and Jews should believe that they have no cause for terror. Psalm 91 says, “Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High... will not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day” (vv. 1, 5). In the future, after Jesus returns, Christians and Jews will never have to fear as “terror will be far removed; it will not come near you” (Is 54:14). Despite terror being used as divine punishment, Christians and Jews will have nothing to fear as they can rest in God.

### **Attacking**

Most Christians and Jews would say that suicide terrorism is innately evil; however, as previously mentioned, Samson, an Old Testament warrior, could be considered a suicide terrorist. There have also been other instances of Christian and Jewish suicide terrorists throughout history. For example, Jewish Zealots in Roman occupied Judea committed acts of suicide terrorism (Atran, 2003). Additionally, while there have not been Christian suicide attacks from Christian groups, Christians have

committed suicide attacks, such as three attacks in Lebanon in the 1980s (Pape, 2005). There have been both Christian and Jewish suicide terrorists, and some Christians and Jews may struggle to understand what is right and what is not.

For both Christians and Jews there are some instances where violence is necessary, but the situation must be carefully examined beforehand. For example, violence may be necessary to protect the innocent. As illustrated in Exodus 1:17-21, those who protect the innocent are rewarded, although suicide terrorism is rarely used for this purpose. Additionally, Proverbs 21:15 says, “When justice is done, it brings joy to the righteous but terror to the evildoers.” When evil people feel terrorized by God ordained terrorism, then it may be an appropriate situation. However, those who hold to a Jewish or Christian faith must be careful when labeling an act “God ordained,” as many people, whether they adhere to the same or different beliefs, would disagree with this declaration. Suicide terrorism is a violent action that, for most, is impossible to justify.

## **Discussion**

### **History vs. Now**

Unlike many terrorists in history, who were fighting to affect political change within a country, Islamic terrorists are fighting for domination. Hussein Mussawi, a former leader of Lebanon’s Hezbollah, said that they “are not fighting so that the enemy recognizes [them] and offers [them] something. [They] are fighting to wipe out the enemy” (Hoffman, 2006, p. 90). The Islamic state desires to have a world under Sharia law (Spencer, 2008). Islamic terrorists today will not stop until the entire world is ruled by Islam. Sometimes terrorists are influenced by this ideology and work towards this goal without being part of a terrorist organization.



**Lone wolf terrorism.** Unlike other suicide terrorists, who belong to an organization, a lone wolf terrorist is someone who operates alone. Zierhoffer (2014) writes that a lone wolf terrorist:

does not belong to an organized terrorist group or network, and the plan is conceived and conducted solely by the individual with no direct outside guidance or command. The ideology behind a terrorist group and an individual engaged in terrorism may be the same, a lone offender may sympathize with the ideology of a terrorist group and may have once belonged to and/or been trained by a group, but the attack was neither directed nor supported by any organization. (p. 49)

However, lone wolf terrorists do not necessarily have to be one person as there are some terrorists who act as a pair or group but still do not directly contact a terrorist group (Pitcavage, 2015). Many lone wolf terrorists can find information online about their cause and how to build devices and inflict harm, such on as Jihadist and Hezbollah websites or social media. Terrorist organizations like ISIS often encourage this kind of attack because they are difficult to track beforehand and are highly successful at little or no cost (Zierhoffer, 2014).

Lone wolf terrorism is a recent conceptualization and dangerous threat. This is because ‘to date, there is no profile that would predict a terrorist attack by a lone offender’ (Zierhoffer, 2014, p. 48). As illustrated by the aforementioned Omar Mateen, lone wolf terrorists can be impossible to detect. Mateen had been investigated twice and interviewed three times by the FBI. However, both times, after strict scrutiny, he was removed from the terrorist watch list (Mazzetti et al., 2016). Despite this evidence of

failure the FBI has been successful in stopping other lone wolf terrorists (Zierhoffer, 2014).

### **Sustainability**

While it may seem the opposite, the system of suicide terrorism is sustainable for Islamic terrorist organizations. They have almost unlimited human resources between those born in Islamic nations as well as those who were born elsewhere and radicalized. Most notably, ISIS (or ISIL) has used social media to recruit suicide terrorists, even when they do not have any direct contact with the recruits (Zierhoffer, 2014). Furthermore, the cost is much greater to the defending countries, such as the United States, than it is to the terrorists. The former U.S. Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, lamented that “[o]ur cost is billions against the terrorists' cost of millions” (Atran, 2004, p. 69). Terrorist organizations, despite their sometimes limited physical, geographical, and financial resources, can maintain the pressure that they put on societies for an almost indefinite amount of time, despite the better financed states that are opposing them.

### **American Society**

Another important issue is the lack of a permanent and established definition for suicide terrorism. It is very difficult to fight something when one does not even know what they are fighting against. It is also hard to gain support from citizens when they are not given a definition. Furthermore, it is difficult to combat suicide terrorism as many Americans do not understand the logic behind using suicide as a way to influence society. However, many other cultures around the world view it as a noble and worthy death. Russian revolutionaries wanted to be seen as heroes. In Japan acting as a kamikaze pilot was considered honorable as service to their country. Muslim jihadists believe that

killing themselves to kill others is one of the highest honors and they will be rewarded for their actions. They have intelligent and thought out reasons for acting as they do. Until Americans can comprehend that people who are willing to die for their cause are not suicidal, desperate, or insane they will not be able to understand suicide terrorism. As mentioned previously, it is hard to combat an issue when it is not fully understood. Americans need more exposure to the sanity of suicide terrorism from news and government organizations if they will ever even begin to believe that suicide terrorism is a rational action.

Americans must also learn to accept that suicide terrorism is a real threat. Some people, such as Michael Moore, the writer and director of *Fahrenheit 9/11*, says “that there is no terrorist threat,” and just because there have been horrific acts it does not mean that there is a large group threat (Kopping, 2009). John Loftus, a former federal prosecutor said that “the world is in denial—they don’t want to believe that someone has declared war on them” (Kopping, 2009). People often want to believe that everyone can get along peacefully, regardless of cultural and religious differences. However, “you can’t coexist with an enemy that wants to destroy you” (J. Pelletier, personal communication, September 2018). Additionally, Islamic terrorists claim that the reason for attacking is because of America; they blame all of their problems on America and say it is “the original root of depravity” (Hoffman, 2006, p. 91). Americans need to understand that, while terrorist groups may use America’s invasion of “their” land as a reason for attack, it is because of no act of America that they do attack. According to Nonie Darwish, the daughter of a Shahid; “they are here with an agenda to make Islam

the law of the land” (Kopping, 2009). Americans must know what suicide terrorism is and that it is a real threat if they are ever to effectively combat suicide terrorism.

### **Conclusion**

The ultimate goal of suicide terrorism is to influence society. Within this goal suicide terrorism has been used for many different purposes throughout history, beginning in the Old Testament. Suicide has been used as a means of revolution and anarchy. In the 1980s contemporary suicide bombings started in the Middle East. Since 1980 the use of suicide as terrorism has been increasing in frequency. This is due to the fact that it is a reliable and inexpensive way to commit terror acts. There are also many other benefits suicide terror has to terrorist organizations. There are many reasons why a person would desire to become a suicide terrorist and, though one might expect it, they are not desperate or deranged.

Islam is a religion of violence, which correlates well with the use of suicide terrorism. The Quran encourages death to infidels and martyrdom as a way to establish an Islamic world where everyone is under Sharia law. Because of this, and the perceived rewards of suicide terrorism, there have been many suicide terrorist attacks throughout history, especially recently. However, there is a difference between historic and more recent suicide terrorist attacks based on motivation and weapons. There is also a great disparity between different cultures and religions and how they view suicide terrorism. There is much that would have to change culturally and much for Western civilizations to consider before there would be any understanding of suicide terrorism. Overall, suicide has been used as an act of terror throughout history and as a way of influencing society, most recently in an attempt to form a worldwide Islamic state.

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