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Haider Naqvi
Aga Khan University

Syed Faraz Kazim
Aga Khan University

Shafqat Huma
Aga Khan University

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Suicide Bombing: A Geopolitical perspective

Haider Ali Naqvi,¹ Syed Faraz Kazim,² Shafqat Huma³

Department of Psychiatry,^{1,3} Department of Surgery,² Aga Khan University, Karachi.

Abstract

Suicide bombing is a very complex phenomenon. It has been a focus of research in recent times. However inherent biases of researchers muddle the picture: researchers from western countries focus the issue around political liberty and notion of democracy, while those from Islamic countries tend to take the afterlife-reward notion as an incentive for suicide bombing. However in order to understand this complex phenomenon it is important to consider the contextual factors. In this review we have attempted to highlight various geopolitical factors which contribute to increased incidence of suicide bombing in South East Asia.

Introduction

It is difficult if not impossible to examine the issue of Suicide Bombing (SB) in an impassionate manner. The topic is shrouded in speculations and assumptions. With the deceased no longer there, examination of motives becomes difficult. Inherent biases of researchers also distort the picture: researchers from western countries focus the issue around political liberty and notion of democracy, while those from Islamic countries tend to take the afterlife-reward notion as an incentive for SB. However in order to understand this complex phenomenon it is important to take a geopolitical perspective.

The watershed event in the current era of SB could very well be the Lebanese civil war (1975 - 1990); Hezbollah suicidal bombers destroyed a building in Lebanon killing 241 United States marines and 58 French parachutists in 1983 and successfully forced Israel to abandon Lebanon in May 2001. Hezbollah derived their inspiration from the (Islamic) Revolution in Iran led by a cleric Ayotallah Khomeini (1902-89). In essence his idea of political struggle in Islam could very well be described as the defining feature of modern day power-struggle in the Muslim world. Inspired by Hezbollah, the Tamil Tigers (LTTE) adopted the tactics of suicide bombing in Sri Lanka and India.¹ Suicide bombings—a lethal form of terrorism— are becoming a symbol of militant resistance and deadly violence between the state and non-state actors in the modern world. More recently, suicidal assault as a weapon has been used by organizations such as Al - Qaeda against Western countries. In most cases, the preferred method used by a suicide bomber is to detonate an explosive carried on or close to the assailant's body in a

crowded area.

The most devastating episode of suicide bombing was the collision of hijacked airplanes into Twin Towers, New York, USA, on September 11th 2001, leading to over 3000 casualties.² Subsequent to this there has been a rise in the global conflict fueling suicide bombing. South East Asia has found itself at the nexus of this conflict. This sharp rise in the incidence of SB has also been related to 'induction' of Pakistan as a frontline state in the US- lead war against terrorism. However there are other reasons for the increasing popularity of suicide bombing among various factions: its major psychological impact and high media coverage; its symbolic significance and appeal as an act of exceptional dedication, commitment, sacrifice for one's political community; its importance for the political and financial mobilization of the sponsoring groups in the community and finally, its potential to aid in the recruitment of potential suicide bombers.

Pakistan has seen a steady rise in the incidence of suicide bombing. Various government departments give contradictory statistics on suicide bombings. According to Federal Investigation Agency, in 2007 there were 32 suicide attacks, while the Interior Ministry claimed there had been 43 attacks.³ According to data released by the US government, 1,335 Pakistanis and 19 US citizens lost their lives in terrorist attacks in 2007. This number is the third highest after Iraq and Afghanistan.⁴ In general SB attacks increased from 22 between 2002 and 2006 to 71 in 2007 alone. Though the number was less in 2008 (67) the mortality statistics was higher; there were 973 deaths related to suicide bombing events.⁵ In 2009 around 1,286 individuals were killed across the country involving 171 events of suicide-terrorism.⁶ The situation is not that different in neighbouring Afghanistan. According to one estimate around 160 people have been killed in various incidences of suicide bombing in Afghanistan from 1981 to 2006. Though there has been a recent surge in the frequency of suicide bombings in recent times, the mortality statistics remain low. The low casualty rate in Afghanistan is most likely due to the poor planning and execution of suicide bombings. The mortality statistics are based on various factors; how efficient the emergency health care services are, how difficult it is to target the victim — vigilance of security apparatus and finally and how well-trained and motivated the operatives are. In conclusion, one

cannot ignore the fact that there is a rapid rise in the incidences of suicide bombing.

Psychological Profiling of Suicide Bombers:

A review of medical literature reveals that psychological perspective on SB examines the issue from a particular frame of reference; concepts are distilled through a prism of Psychoanalysis, Psychopathology and Social-Psychology, at best.⁷ Literature in psychology looks to develop a psychological profile of a suicide bomber. Table projects the views of social scientists and psychologists on the psychological traits of suicide bombers. Suicide has traditionally been seen as a characteristic of individualistic societies, resulting from lack of integration of the individual into society (Durkheim, 1951). Durkheim's concept of altruistic suicide inspired by religious sacrifice seems too simplistic to explain the issue of suicide bombing in current times.⁸

Fathali M. Moghaddam (2003) has used a staircase metaphor in order to develop a psychological profile of a suicide bomber. He argues that it would be less feasible to

focus on individuals who have climbed the staircase of terrorism — leading to suicide bombing. He cites contextual factors at the ground level which lead to a sense of deprivation and alienation in masses. Under these conditions, he states that people climb the staircase to terrorism, in order to fight perceived unfair treatment or attempt to open doors for societal mobility. He argues that, ultimately, society will collapse if upward movement of talented individuals is blocked through unfair means, similar to downward movement of those who lack talent but are offspring of those who are in power. If this 'free circulation' is blocked then people will climb to the second level in order to displace aggression. However, support of such institutions which support strict authoritarian, us-versus-them thinking is of paramount significance. As people move up the staircase they profess morality which condones terrorism. The third level on this staircase is the 'moral engagement', while the fourth level has to do with the solidification of categorical thinking and perceived legitimacy of terrorist organizations. On this stage, the individuals' options are narrowed and they find themselves trapped in an organization.⁹

Table: Key themes regarding suicide bombing in social science/ psychology literature.

S. No	Author (year)	Key themes
1	Hassan (2001)	Terrorism is proportional to youth.
2	Gupta et al (2002)	Suicide Bombers are young men with little hope, who have lived with violence all their lives, are recruited and indoctrinated with the idea that this is the one good thing they can do for their society.
3	Krueger (2002)	Suicide bombers are not motivated by personal gain, although financial benefit to family is a strong exception. Primary motivation instead results from their passionate support for the ideas and the aims of their movement.
4	Haddad (2004)	Socio-economic variables are not correlated to tolerance for suicide operations.
5	Atran (2003), Hassan (2001), Merari (2002)	Suicide terrorists span their population's normal distribution in terms of education, socio-economic status and personality type. Further studies should focus on the societies that furnish a recruitment potential for these militants.
6	Berrebi (2003)	Terrorists are completely different than the classic characteristics of a suicidal individual. Suicide bombers tend to be younger, of higher economic status, and higher educational attainment than their counterparts in the population.
7	Fathali M. Moghaddam (2005)	There are background contextual factors which enable individuals to climb a narrowing staircase to terrorism. Vast majority of individuals, even feeling deprived and alienated, remain on the ground floor, some individuals climb up and are eventually recruited in terrorist organizations.
8	Jerrold M. Post et al. (2009)	It is difficult to discern a psychopathology in an Individual suicide bomber. The phenomenon of suicide terrorism could be better explained by the concepts of social psychology. This however requires multidisciplinary approach of anthropology, psychology, sociology, economic and geo-political factors.

- Hassan, N. Letter from Gaza: An arsenal of believers. *The New Yorker* [on line], 2001, November 19. [Cited June 15, 2010] from www.newyork.com/fact/content.
- Gupta, D., Mirari, A., Crenshaw, M. & McCauley W. Selfish Selfless? *The chronicles of higher education* 2002; 48: B4.
- Kreuger, A., & Maleckova, J. Education, poverty, political violence and terrorism: Is there a causal connection? (National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper No. w9074) [On line] 2002 [cited June 15, 2010] from, <http://papers.nber.org/papers/W9074>
- Haddad, S. A comparative study of Lebanese and Palestine perceptions of suicide bombing: the role of militant Islam and socioeconomic status. *International Journal of comparative sociology* 2004; 45: 337-363
- Atram, S. Mishandling suicide terrorism. *The Washington Quarterly* 2004; 27(3):67-90; Merari, A. The readiness to kill and die: Suicide terrorism in Middle East. In W. Reich (Ed.), *Origins of terrorism* (pp. 192-207). Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press.
- Berrebi, C. Evidence about the link between education, poverty and terrorism among Palestinians [On line] 2003 [cited June 15, 2010] from <http://www.Cprspalestine.org/polls/94/poll>.
- Moghaddam, F. The staircase to terrorism - A psychological Exploration. *American Psychologist* 2005; 60(2): 161-
- Post J., Ali F., Henderson S., Shanfield S., Victorof J., Weine S., *The Psychology of Suicide Terrorism*. *Psychiatry* 2009; 72(1): 13-31.

Some Psychoanalysts emphasize the concept of Narcissism and Narcissistic injury as a basis for understanding terrorist behaviour.⁸ Pearlstein noted evidence of Narcissistic injury in many first-generation and some-second generation terrorists, namely, massive and lasting damage to self-image and self-esteem severe enough to force the discredited self to seek a new, positive identity.¹⁰ However, Moghadam argued that if religious fervor alone could explain the phenomenon of suicide bombing, then acts of suicide bombing would be expected to occur more frequently in countries where deep religious beliefs, let alone religious fundamentalism, is a powerful force.¹⁰ Vamik Volkan, has traced the powerful connections between a hurt and victimized country and the spiritual-warrior leader who himself feels personally victimized. A large group or country thus claims a leader to focus its collective hate, revenge, and hopes for triumph.¹¹

Profiling of suicide bombers from Afghanistan reports that suicide bombers are motivated by despair. A study from Afghanistan, conducted in 2007 reports that 80% of suicide attackers had some kind of physical or mental disability. A study of the remains of 110 suicide bombers revealed that 80% were missing limbs. Such cross-sectional surveys and reports can be misleading.¹² In an essay 'A Million Deaths since 1979: Who cares for Afghanistan?' Jamila Luijckx et al. report that "the occupying forces (Soviet Union) use a number of arms that do not kill but rather mutilate. Those who are wounded are a greater care for survivors than the dead, particularly when medical aid is lacking."¹³ Clearly any study conducted in the region has to keep the geo-political perspective in context.

Historical Background:

The region of South East Asia - Afghanistan and Pakistan - is placed at the cross road of civilizations. History is witness to a fact that for centuries, armies invading the Indian sub-continent came through the Khyber Pass, in the Mountain regions which span the North West Frontier Province. Geology of this region is such that it provides access to the plains in the Asian continent within the span of few hundred kilometers. Inhabitants of this region and the folklores attest to the history of this region — from Alexander's invasion to the Red Army's insurgence.¹⁴

History reveals that Afghan Society in general and the Pashtun tribes in particular are decentralized communities. Despite the fact that Islam binds them together, in sociological terms, the social structure is tribal and semi-tribal with many political and local rivalries. All historians are witness to this political development that whenever a central government has tried to curb their traditional freedom, Pashtuns have reacted aggressively.¹⁵

It is believed that all Pashtun tribes have a tribal code of conduct called "Pashtunwali".¹⁶ This means that the Pashtun tribes neither accept the sovereign authority of the central government nor create centralized institutions. Although the code of "Pashtunwali" covers all aspect of the Pashtun tribal social values, an important aspect which needs attention is the legal codes and punishments in case of a murder. Among Pashtun tribes' revenge is a common phenomenon. Nobody has the right to kill another without reasonable justification. If one does so, then the heirs of the murdered person have the right to take revenge.¹⁶ Each clan has its elders and they are chosen by the clan members for their family background or for their personal merits. The clansmen listen to their notables and the heads of the clans receive different responsibilities for their own people. The 'jirga' of the elders is considered a decisive or determining organ of the tribal organization. They determine the punishment and fines for wrong-doers and decisions are out into practice without delay. Jirga system of Pashtun tribe is based on ademocratic procedure. Every one of the participants has the right to express him-self freely and the concerned issues are solved by general consensus. To fulfill the decisions of the leaders, "Arbaki" or tribal militiamen are recruited. Four or five persons are elected as commanders.¹⁶

Politicization of Religion:

There is enough empirical evidence to support the fact that the zealous 'Islamization' during the eleven years rule of General Zia conferred a specific religious tone to various social and political phenomenon's in that era. Agencies in Pakistan government operated with many factions in order to distribute ammunitions and train individuals which was instrumental in defeating the ambitions of expanding communist government. The resistance fighters were called Mujahedeen and the struggle was called Jihad.¹⁷ A systematic effort was made in order to confer Islamic radicalism to institutions like the Madressah.¹⁸

At the time of independence of Pakistan there were 245 'Madressah'- these were seats of religious education, housing orphans, educating them in the ways of religion, moral behaviours and righteous living. There was rapid growth of this institution during the Afghan conflict with the number increasing 27 times: from 245 at independence to 6870 in 2001. This free Islamic education system exists parallel to the increasingly dilapidated state sector, in which a mere 1.8 per cent of Pakistan's GDP is spent on government schools. The statistics are ominous: 15% of schools are without a proper building; 52% lack a boundary wall; 40% are without water and 71% have no electricity. There is frequent absenteeism of teachers and indeed, many of these schools exist only on paper.¹⁸

Islam and Suicide Bombing:

The word Islam and Jihad has come to be abhorred for right and wrong reasons. Islam condemns violence; there are various injunctions on maintaining peace and harmony, discouraging fighting and hostility. Jihad, when translated literally means a struggle - a sustained effort in order to achieve one's objective. Annals of history reports that once Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) sent a faction of 400 Muslims to defend a border incursion on a nascent Muslim state. Upon getting the news of their return, Prophet of God remarked: What can be said of a Nation which has done the Jihad-e-Asghar (minor jihad) but the Jihad-e-Akbar (Major Jihad) is still pending. When asked about it, he replied: To cleanse oneself of bad character traits, like greed, vice, injustice, etc is the Jihad-e-Akbar (the Major Jihad).¹⁹

Islam has nothing to do with sponsoring terrorism while Muslims have everything to do with it. They are the victims as well as the perpetrators of this terrible form of violence. The fact cannot be denied that most of the suicide attacks in this time are carried out by Muslims, against non-Muslims and in case of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iraq mostly against the individuals who belong to their own religion. Majority of Muslims, when asked will detest suicide-terrorism. Islam is described to be the religion of peace, however practical demonstration of this seems to be lacking. Critical question in this discussion is what's so different about the groups which believe in suicide bombing? If their agenda is to "fight the forces against Islam" then how are they not commanding the majority-opinion? The answer is provided by Islamic history, which is replete with conflicts between mystical and orthodox interpretation of Islam. This will be discussed briefly in the following sections.

Sufi Tradition in Islam:

Sufi tradition in Islam believes that in our day to day life opposites play out their part. Every single human being experiences illumination and darkness, pain and laughter, love and hate, malevolence and benevolence and in midst of it they are required to establish a balance. Everyone has the skill to discern between the two extremes.²⁰ Contrarily orthodox interpretation of Islam has taken over the mystical side, leaving the followers to make their own agenda. Muslim world has struggled with the interpretation of Islam since the time of Khulaf-e-Rashideen, the rightly guided Caliphs. Head of Islamic State, after the demise of Prophet in 632 A.D, was considered successor of the Prophet (Caliph), the interpreter and promulgator of Islamic law (Mujtahid) and a leader (Imam).²¹⁻²³

The debate about the two interpretations of Islam is an old one. It has acquired a new dimension in recent times. It is receiving an extraordinary attention due to extremism which

has threatened to diminish the true face of Islam. In this paradox of interpretation it is apparent that the orthodox side is gaining grounds; they are enlisting many loyalists and volunteers for their cause who are eager to carry out the mission of suicide bombing. In Sufi tradition of Islam, concept of love is an overbearing theme - described vividly in poetry of Mawlana Jalal-ad-Din Muhammad Rami (1207-1273) and other mystics.²⁴ In order to love, one needs to experience (divine) love. A person brought up in an environment, where all he sees and experiences is hatred, suffocation and discrimination, will not learn to respect other peoples' 'freedom', or will not be able to understand the word 'peace'. In a loving and nurturing environment one can even teach a carnivorous beast to be gentle, taming it to follow the will of its master.

A fault line becomes evident in this discussion; it's easily discernable that most conflict zones are the places where either Muslims' have been forced to leave their own land and/or places where dictatorial regimes have never given the freedom of choice. The right to live, as people see fit, has been taken away from them. Governments, in Muslim countries, on account of being kingdoms and dynasties lack legitimacy among masses. People lacking voice in the matter of politics and religion turns to religious leaders who formulate an orthodox interpretation of Islam. Vamik Volkan (2004), has traced the powerful connections between a hurt and victimized country and the spiritual-warrior leader who himself feels personally victimized. A large group or country thus claims a leader to focus its collective hate, revenge, and hopes for triumph.¹¹

The State, lacking legitimacy has no influence on the dynamics of faith and practices. In fact essence of religion has divorced itself from the lives of people. In places where there is an uncomfortable union — suicide bombing is sponsored quite un-thoughtfully. Doctrine of afterlife reward for suicide bombing in Salafi version of Islam has received patronage from Arab countries. Pakistan, under the leadership of General Zia imported this doctrine of hate, along with massive aid in cash and kind.

In the context of Pakistan, the conflict between two interpretations of Islam was epitomized by an act of terrorism in which shrine of Sufi Mystic Rahman Baba was blown away on 8th March, 2009. He was an 18th-century poet and mystic. He preached that divinity can best be reached through the gateway of the human heart - that we all have paradise within us, if we know where to look. For centuries, his shrine at the foot of the Khyber Pass has been a place where musicians and poets have gathered, and his Sufi verses in the Pukhtun language made him the national poet of the Pathans. An Orthodox religious interpretation was aimed to vengefully resurrecting the past glory of Muslim 'Ummah'. This was done through radicalizing the madrassa — the seat of

religious training for Muslims. Across Pakistan, the religious tenor has been correspondingly radicalized: the tolerant, Sufi-minded form of Islam is now out of fashion in northern Pakistan, especially in the NWFP, overtaken by the rise of the more hard-line and politicized Wahhabism.¹⁸

Political struggle and Islamic world view:

Critical to our discussion is the fact that the concept of political struggle in Islam was propagated without much thought. The dark pent up forces, suppressed from time innumerable, delivered itself under the guise of 'Jihad'. The Muslim 'Ummah' was convalescing from the long struggle of Colonial rule, in various countries. Impervious to the fact that there can be no Muslim renaissance without concurrent development in science, culture and ethics, the ill-fated fight led to further downfall of people in Muslim countries. Muslims dominated the world during the dark ages of Europe, not in just the sense of being rulers of land but also in the field of inventions and literature. Contrarily, there are no noteworthy examples of excellence in science and literature in the current era - the fairy tale of Muslim glory tends to end with Jabir ibn-Haiyan (721-815), al-Razi (865-925) and similar Muslim scholars of the past. Therefore the realm of such glory, after its downfall was threatened by globalization, fearing that it might lose its identity. Perceived threat to identity is of central importance in case of religious fundamentalists because of the unique ability of religion to serve identity needs (Seul, 1999). The orthodox interpreters of Islam, because of their closed mindset and biased attitude towards accepting innovation, used globalization as an instrument to gain support from the lost souls - suicide bombers of this era. Where bridging of souls was needed across the time-span and places, the already existing roads to enlightenment within the community were demolished. The understanding of religion was lost and only the practice was left.

According to Sufi tradition, there is a calling inside everyone, at times restrained and at times overt. The inner-universe which is bigger than the outer one scuffs his soul for attention. This inner calling has the potential to change the person. It requires courage to destroy the barriers of thought, which wraps this inner universe, to think and behave differently from the past conditioning and exercise the innate human prerogative of free will. The people who do not move beyond the spiral staircase, as Fathali M. Moghaddam states, are those who do not want to move forward and delve into their thoughts.¹⁰ Suicide bombers are not just killing but they are dying too, which gives an indication that they don't have any desire to live. One of the reasons could be that they were raised in an environment which didn't provide them with the (intellectual) space to identify with evolving ideas. The mystical side of Islam stands for tolerance, love and acceptance. Given the deteriorating state of affairs in the

Islamic world, intellectuals in the Muslim world need to be aware of cultural transformation, which would take years before settling down in to a stable and peaceful community.

Political economy of Suicide-terrorism:

The rise of Taliban movement in Pakistan in 1995 has a long history. One view is that decades of violence and war has pushed a generation of Afghan immigrants, and their Pushtoon counterparts in Pakistan, towards such extremism. History is witness to a fact that nothing unites a community than a common enemy; in fact South Asia is witness to this fact at the end of British Colonial rule.²⁵ Another view is that there are economic variables behind this scourge of terrorism.

On account of ongoing conflict, Pakistan and Afghanistan has struggled to develop stable internal systems of economic prosperity. This economic instability pushed the underemployed to look outward for opportunities. Agrarian districts with little irrigation and limited rainfall in Afghanistan (and NWFP, Pakistan) produced surplus workers looking outside the immediate village economy for sustenance and opportunity.²⁶ Markovits et al. commenting on society and circulation proposes ecological differences in Indian regions, ranging between dry, semi-dry, and wet zones. In Pashtun homelands, 'this interaction was manifested through a regular pattern of circulation of manpower, including military manpower, goods, capitals, expertise, ideas, techniques, etc., from the 'dry' areas to the 'wet' zones...'²⁷ This phenomenon could explain massive immigration of work-force to Oil rich Gulf States. In addition to income, new cultural, intellectual, and religious influences circulated. A returned worker might occasionally be observed conversing in Arabic with another returned labourer. In this context it is extremely difficult, if not impossible to separate local 'Taliban' from elements of 'Al-Qaeda'.

Phenomenon of migration, in itself, cannot explain the geo-economic perspective on terrorism. History is a witness to a fact that an immense narcotic and arms trade developed and flourished in the shadow of the Afghan resistance during the decade after 1980, leading to development of an undocumented, black economy.^{28,29} United Nation's Anti-narcotics chief warned that Afghanistan burgeoning opium production was leading to the emergence of new "Golden Triangle" of lawlessness on the country's borders with Pakistan, Iran and Turkmenistan. "Illegality is very pervasive and trafficking (is) going on," said Antonio Maria Costa, executive director of the UN's Office on Drugs and Crime. Reports show that Afghanistan saw a record harvest of 8,200 metric tons of opium in 2007, a 34% increase over 2006. The export value of the country's opium is estimated at \$4 billion (Euro 2.73 billion), up 29% on last year and equal to more than half of Afghanistan's legal gross domestic product.³⁰

Mia Bloom, a research scholar and political analyst, in

her book 'Dying to Kill' examines various contextual factors which could explain the theory of suicide terrorism.³¹ She cites political economy as an important contextual factor perpetuating suicide terrorism. During the first decade of twenty first century we saw a growth in economy without development. This may seem bewildering at first. Pakistan enjoyed the status of front line state in the 'war on terror', with a GDP Growth of 6.4 per annum. Pakistan received \$ 17 Billion in civilian assistance and unaccounted security assistance from United States of America (USA). Led by the consumption boom, the growth collapsed in front of everyone. Instead of taking off in to self-sustained growth, the country faces insurmountable threats of militancy and extremism.³² We are witness to the fact that conflicts between nations are not over territory, alone. Wars are motivated by economic interests and a desire to seize control of the resources of the world. These are skirmishes to test the strength of tariffs, territorial conflicts to seize markets and regional alliance to protect economic interests. Less developed countries of South East Asia - Pakistan and Afghanistan - are finding themselves at the cross road of this conflict involving Industrialized powers of the world.³³

Attitude towards Suicide Bombing: research surveys:

The report of Pew Global Attitudes Project released in July, 2005 showed that the support for suicide bombing has declined significantly in Muslim countries. The support has dropped since 2002 by 34 percentage points in Lebanon, 12 points in Indonesia and 8 points in Pakistan (USA Today, 2005). In most majority - Muslim countries surveyed, support for suicide bombings and other acts of violence in defense of Islam has declined significantly. When it comes to suicide bombings in Iraq, nearly half of Muslims in Lebanon, Jordan, and Morocco, say suicide bombings against Westerners are justifiable. However, substantial majorities in Turkey, Pakistan and Indonesia take the opposite view.³⁴

In a study exploring the attitude towards suicide bombing 215 individuals were interviewed using a predesigned questionnaire.³⁵ In this study an overwhelming majority of participants (n=182; 84.7%) denied the support for suicide bombing. Interestingly, all those people who supported the concept of political struggle in Islam also supported the phenomenon of suicide bombing. Despite the fact that 84.7% of the respondents did not support suicide bombing and 81.4% also denied that Islam or any other religion supports suicide bombing, 37.2% considered suicide bombing a martyrdom activity, exemplifying conflict in interpretation of 'Shari'ah'. Authors concluded that more research is needed from a demographically representative sample in order to assess the attitudes towards suicide bombing.

Conclusion

The seminal description of Altruistic suicide by Durkheim seems too simplistic in terms of sociological explanation. This is specially so in the context of contemporary world. Chronic stress can be detrimental in terms of its neurobiological effects; individuals could behave in such ways which may not be rationale. Biology predisposes people to behave in a similar manner when confronted with environmental stress. The word suicide bombing in itself is a misnomer; the confinement of this area to the domain of psychiatry might not be the best way forward. A multidisciplinary approach is required in order to unravel the complexities of human behaviour.

It is exercise in futility to tackle terrorism by force alone. An indigenous strategy needs to be devised keeping in view the local scenarios; the American constitution rests in part on Europe's acceptance that matters of religion and state should be kept separate. This differs from Islamic view which is the predominant religion, enshrined in the constitution of the state. The Quranic law, and 'Shari'ah', the codified law as practiced and defined by the last of the prophets - Muhammad (PBUH), gives Muslims a code of conduct covering every aspect of human activity. Minorities, those following other faiths and living in Muslim state are protected under Shari'ah. According to most sects of Islam, Shari'ah is subjected to interpretation and redefinition by appropriately qualified religious authorities to cover situations that arise as result of scientific developments and socio-cultural transitions of fundamental nature. However, Seminaries and religious institutions need to develop their capacity for such interpretation of the injunctions of the Quran in light of changing times - called as 'Ijtihad'- abandoning the rough and crude interpretations reminiscent of Muslim dark ages, period of 'Jahiliya'.³⁶

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