

Suicide Bombers: Examining Why They Do What They Do

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Abstract

This study explores the motivations and structural underpinnings of suicide bombers, examining why individuals choose to participate in acts of self-sacrificial violence. Through a detailed analysis, the research dissects suicide terrorism as both a psychological commitment and a calculated strategy leveraged by extremist organizations to inflict fear and attract attention. Key factors shaping this phenomenon include ideological devotion, social alienation, and personal grievances, all of which can render individuals more susceptible to recruitment by terrorist groups. The study outlines the roles of various actors—*The Founders*, *The Evangelists*, *The Prisoners*, and *The Aristocrats*—who collectively fuel the operational and ideological machinery of suicide terrorism. This network works synergistically to recruit, indoctrinate, and sustain operations that keep suicide terrorism a viable tactic within extremist groups. Special attention is given to the evolving role of women in these acts, with analysis on how gender dynamics have led to their increased involvement as suicide bombers. Women are often viewed as less suspicious and more mobile in restricted areas, making them valuable assets in executing these attacks. Additionally, cultural narratives surrounding martyrdom are used to shape perceptions of sacrifice and honor among female recruits, reinforcing their commitment to the cause. The findings suggest that effective counterterrorism efforts must consider the psychological and social dimensions of suicide terrorism. Addressing underlying issues such as socio-economic disparities, ideological indoctrination, and the glorification of martyrdom may help weaken the appeal of extremist recruitment.

Keywords: Suicide bomber, Ideological devotion, Recruitment, Martyrdom, Counterterrorism strategies

Introduction

This is about suicidal terrorism and the men and women involved in this act. This is an exploration into the mind of the average Islamic radical whom we need to get to know first as a human being, before we can possibly psycho-analyse why they do what they did and what factors propel them or motivates them to do what they did. Suicidal terrorism; that is, the readiness or willingness to die in the process of killing or committing a terrorist act, has attracted a lot of media, academic and intellectual curiosity and attention in recent years. The high numbers of casualty and lives this act alone has taken had evoked a high sense of horror and significant strategic decisions. For instance, the death tolls and occurrence of this act, particularly on American and French targets (personnel and structures) had informed the decisions by the two to withdraw from Lebanon for a time. The palpably fear this have also evoked has now been a global phenomenon, seeing that it is no longer restricted to the Middle East, where the most publicized suicidal attacks have been recorded. The emergence of Al-Qaeda and the many cells it has birthed in Maghreb and others such Boko Haram, Al-Shabab, ISIS, etc. have ensured its internationalized as a veritable form of attack and modus operandi of terrorist groups. The inclusion of women as suicide terrorists have further accentuated and exacerbated this mode of terrorist attacks.

In recent times, suicide has become a weapon of choice for virtually every insurgency although mainly, the Middle Eastern variety has been attributed to religious fanaticism, sometimes with political and strategic implications and conclusions deriving from this attribute. Thus, religious fanaticism has not only been attributed as a main reason for the adoption of this Middle Eastern variety, but a particular Islamic religious group has been identified as using suicide as a proven choice of weapon. As an Israeli military commentator has put it;

One of the sources of the strength and attractiveness of Shi'ite fanaticism is the absolute disregard with which its followers view death and earthly vanities. This is proven by Shi'ite suicidal terrorism which was directed against the IDF (Israel Defense Forces) and against the Americans while they were in Lebanon. This fact sheds doubt on the utility of another mode of operation against the Shi'ite terrorism now under consideration (by this he was referring to an American military operation that was on-going), (Ben-Yishai 1987).

The regularity and total adoption of this mode of attack by subsequent terrorist groups including Boko Haram, has made scholars and analysts to regard it as basic characteristic of contemporary terrorism in general, arguing that this has will necessitate a complete revision and adoption of counter terrorist measures. Kidder (1986), had been quoted as reporting that;

The whole time that I have been involved in terrorist operations, which now goes back to 30 years, my enemy has always been a man who is very worried about his own skin. You can no longer count on that, *because the terrorist [today] is not just prepared to get killed, he wants to et killed*. Therefore, the whole planning, tactical doctrine and thinking behind antiterrorism measures is fundamentally undermined.

The prevalence of this choice of weapon as both strategic and tactical has necessitated the need for an indepth understanding of the sources, nature and scope of suicidal terrorism far exceeding pure academic interests but also as a security issue because such an understanding may trigger off measures and decisions that have far-reaching political and strategic consequences.

What is Suicide Terrorism?

Current attempts to define terrorism can be grouped into two; official and academic definitions. Schmid and Jongman (2005) have compiled a number of official definitions of terrorism. According to them, the U.S. Vice President's 1986 Task Force defined terrorism as "the unlawful use or threat of violence against persons or property to further political or social objectives. It is generally intended to intimidate or coerce a government, individuals or groups to modify their behaviour or policies." A British legal definition as given by Schmid and Jongman has terrorism as "the use of violence for political ends, and includes any use of violence for the purpose of putting the public or any section of the public in fear."

Three commonalities can be discerned from these definitions; (1) the use of violence, (2) political objectives; and (3) the intention of sowing fear in the target population. However, the definitions offered by academics are rather more complex, all-embracing and more diverse. Hoffman (2006; p. 40) has defined terrorism "as the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence in the pursuit of political change, while Combs (2003; p. 11) has defined it as "a synthesis of war and theatre, a dramatisation of the most proscribed kind of violence – that which is perpetrated on innocent victims – played before an audience in the hope of creating a mood of fear, for political purposes." Nicholson (2003) had defined terrorism as "the deliberate killing of non-military personnel in order to pursue a claimed political goal through exertion of pressure on a society".

While most scholarly definitions focus on the end result of terrorism as the achievement of a political goal, Kittrie (1981; p. 300) had suggested that for an act of violence to qualify as being a

“pure political offence”, it must “challenge the state but affect no private rights of innocent parties”. For this clause to be achievable, it implies that perpetrators must take serious and extreme cautions as to the recipients of their attacks. Since terrorists are not wont or known to take these precautions, then a definition of terrorism need not include the consideration of a political aim or goal. This, therefore, limits the major qualifying elements of terrorist violence to attacks on innocent victims. In this respect, we consider terrorism as an act of violence perpetrated on innocent persons or people in order to evoke fear in them.

Viewed this way, terrorism is different from other types of violent actions primarily because of the illegality accorded it as a result of its deliberate choice of victims who are innocent or deliberate disregard for the innocence of its victims. Thus, in essence then, and by its very nature, terrorism involves the deliberate disruption of norms, the violation of generally accepted standards of decency, including the laws of war as they apply to innocent and helpless victims (Friedlander, 1979; p. 286). It is in this respect that terrorism becomes acts of violence deliberately perpetrated on innocent victims (third parties) in an effort to or with an intention to coerce or force the opposition or persons to act in a desired way. Victims are not chosen because of their involvement or guilt but because their death or injuries are determined to create not only fear but also to shock the sensibilities of normal people such that pressure can be made to bear on the opposition or in most cases on the government to concede to the demands or make some concessions to the terrorists.

Deriving from the various definitions of terrorism, it is generally agreed that terrorism involves three basic components: the perpetrator(s), the victim(s) and the target(s) of the violence (Badey, 2007; p. 1). The perpetrators are seen as fanatics, disaffected groups or minorities who employed terrorism as a tool to oppose the rule and the oppression of an established and militarily superior power (Nicholson, 2003). The victims are seen as innocent people who have no part or are directly involved in the struggle and the struggle or target is political. Terrorism can be seen as acts of violence deliberately perpetrated on innocent victims (third parties) in an effort to or with an intention to coerce or force the opposition or persons to act in a desired way. Victims are not chosen because of their involvement or guilt but because their death or injuries are determined to create not only fear but also to shock the sensibilities of normal people such that pressure can be made to bear on the opposition or in most cases on the government to concede to the demands or make some concessions to the terrorists. If this is the case, then it means that terrorist violence is merely a means to an end. Violence, mass deaths and injuries caused by terrorists’ attacks are basically geared towards achieving an end. Within a state system, the end can only be a political goal. However, much controversy attends the admission of a political goal for terrorists’ attacks.

However, as Hoffman (2006; p. 65) and Lewis (2003; p. 147) have noted, the recourse to terrorism as a strategy became profound when the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) founded in 1964 discovered that regular warfare could not win the war in 1967 after the defeat of the combined Arab armies in the Six-Day War. Thus, there was need to try other method which were not necessarily military or other government establishments but public places where civilians are wont to gather. In this case, the victims need not necessarily have a connection to the declared enemy. This, therefore, formed the basis and focus of modern terrorism. Merari (2007) had attempted to differentiate terrorism from other forms of insurgency available for prosecuting a struggle.

A religious fanatic is one that holds firmly to the tenets of his faith, observing all its laws and ordinances but without attempting to use force to convert others to his way. He may live a solitary life, may be isolated and worse still, live in seclusion from the rest of the world but he would never use extra-legal means to turn, convince or force others into accepting his faith. On the other hand, religious fundamentalists or radicals are not averse to using every means possible including violence and force to make others accept their faith. Fundamentalists are anti-Western in the sense that they regard the West as the source of the evil that is corroding Muslim society although their

primary attacks are directed against their own rulers and leaders. Fundamentalists overthrew the Shah of Iran in 1979 and killed President Sadat of Egypt two years later. In one, they murdered the ruler and in the other they destroyed the regime and imposed their own. Today's scholarly discussion of fundamentalism tend to focus not on what the fundamentalists believe but rather more on the means they use; hence the notion of fundamentalism has become inextricably associated with not just violence alone but a peculiar type of violent insurgency; terrorism. This raises a fundamental question: Of all the forms of insurgency available to prosecute a cause (riots, revolution, coup d'état, guerrilla war, terrorism or a combination of any of these), why have Islamic fundamentalists opted for terrorism? The answer can only be found in the nature or end to which terrorism is usually applied.

Between 800 B.C.E. and 300 B.C.E., the world has witnessed four great systems of thoughts and religions which have, consequently, imparted on the history of world. First was the Chinese who provided us with a combination of philosophy and religion emanating from three schools; Confucianism, Daoism and Legalism. The religious doctrine derived from each of these three was concerned with issues of how individuals can interact with each other while attempting to answer the question of how to lead an ethical life that would be in harmony with nature and the cosmos. Second were the Indian religious doctrines which emerged from Jains, Buddhism and Hinduism and which viewed existence as an endless cycle of birth and rebirth (*samsara*). The core belief system presented here is that how one lives his life while here on earth may determine how he will return at rebirth. If one has been good while on earth, he may be reborn at a higher state, even as a god. If one had been bad or evil, he may be reborn at a lower state or even as an animal. This belief rests on the concept of Karma which says that every good or evil action has its effects. The third was existence of an all-powerful God which characterised the Hebrews or Israelites religious philosophy such that they were the first people in history to base their identity as a nation on faith in a single God who made ethical demands and placed responsibilities on them as individuals and as a nation. Finally, is Islam which "in one sense denotes a religion, a system of belief and worship; and in the other, a civilisation that grew up and flourished under the aegis of that religion" (Lewis, 2003; p. 3).

Thus, the fusion of political and religious leadership under Mohammed thereby uniting them under one inseparable authority, as Lewis (2003; p. 7) has noted, has led to religious truth and political power been indissolubly associated in Islam: "the first sanctified the second, the second sustained the first." While the idea of a nation based on religion may seem anachronistic, it is not so to Islam and its adherents. This is what gave birth to Islamic fundamentalism that makes it quite different from other religions and these differences are quite substantial. The first is its affirmation and demand for a holy war or Jihad. While the willingness to sacrifice for one's religious faith may be a common tenet of all religions, it is only in Islam that an explicit declaration of fighting for the faith is made a part of the doctrine of a religion.

Jihad is one of the most visible elements of Islamic fundamentalism and can be understood at two levels. At the intellectual level, both the *hadiths* and the Qur'an clearly state that a jihad can be declared only by a competent religious authority and only after taking into account not only the chances of victory, but also the risks to the integrity and the well-being of the Islamic community in general (Lewis, 2003; Ben-Dor and Pedahzur, 2005; p. 75). This implies that it is only in few cases that a jihad can be legally and formally declared and therefore, it ought not to be the first option whenever a Muslim is confronted by an enemy or an external enemy threatens Islamic land and resources. It is a shame that these sets of qualifications are not generally known to many Muslims basically because it has become the exclusive proprietary rights of the few educated elites. However, what is generally known at the popular level is that a Jihad can be invoked and once it is done, it becomes the duty of every Muslims to enforce it. This explains the importance of jihad in

the mind of many Muslims and its implications for the Islamic ideology and politics of fundamentalism (Watt, 1968).

Secondly, of importance to Islamic fundamentalism are the notions and acceptance of an afterlife and martyrdom. The reward system tied to martyrdom as something direct and immediate makes many to embrace death rather than to avoid it. The very existence of this belief and phenomenon is almost unique to the Islamic faith and especially the Shi'ite sect. Martyrdom or suicide or what Gere (2007; p. 363) has called "homicidal self-sacrifice," can occur in two contexts: in declared open war in which regular combatants are involved, targeting other uniformed enemy soldiers, equipment and installation; and in undeclared conflicts which can be civil, ethnic or religious in nature. Thus, it becomes important to distinguish between wartime suicide operations made popular by the Japanese kamikaze during World War II and terrorist suicide operations such as those carried out by Palestinian Islamist organisations and made more desirable by Al Qaeda.

The prevalence of this method of asymmetry war among Islamic jihadists and religious terrorists had made Raphael Israeli to coin the term "Islamikaze." He justified the term by arguing that Islamic suicide attackers are not suicides...they are similar to kamikaze pilots in their motivation, organisation and ideology in the way they perform their task" (Gere, 2007; p. 364). Gere (2007; p. 365) has alluded to the fact that the term "suicide volunteers" better described these practitioners of self-sacrifice/homicide. He took his reference from the Indochina war of 1946-54 when French soldiers used the term *volontaires de la mort* to describe those voluntarily caused death through self-sacrifice. In the same vein, Gere (2007; p. 365) also opted for the use of "suicide homicide" as a term that "perfectly describes the nature of the act: to kill oneself while bringing death to adversaries, with a view to causing a favourable change in the relationship among material and moral forces within a conflict."

Third is the activist attribute of proselytising of Islam and the commandment to convert infidels everywhere and at any time. According to Islamic laws, it is lawful and legitimate for Muslim faithful to wage war anywhere and everywhere against four types of enemies; infidels, apostates, rebels and bandits. Of these four only the first two counts as a religious obligation for all Muslims, hence a jihad. An infidel is an unbeliever in the Islamic faith which can be converted either through peaceful means or through war and conquest. An apostate is a former believer who has either left the faith or renounced it for other religious beliefs. A fundamental of Islamic faith is that proselytising is accompanied by or could be achieved through wars. In this regard, therefore, and as Lewis (2003) has noted, classical Muslim jurists have made a distinction between offensive and defensive wars. It is only in offensive war that jihad becomes mandatory and an obligation to all Muslims and may therefore be performed by volunteers and professional soldiers. The defensive war becomes an obligation of every able-bodied individual to defend Islam everywhere and anywhere.

It is this principle that Osama bin Laden invoked in his declaration of a universal war against America and its allies. According to the Muslim tradition, the world is divided into two houses; the House of War (*Dar al-Harb*) and the House of Islam (*Dar al-Islam*). In the House of Islam where Muslim governments rule in accordance with Islamic laws and principles, there is no need for a jihad, but in the House of War where the world is still ruled and governed by infidels, then jihad becomes an imperative and an obligation. The presumption here is that jihad becomes a continuous duty until the whole world has accepted the Muslim faith. The willingness and tenacity of Muslims to fight and die is derived from the perceived benefits which accrued to martyrs. The word martyr is derived from the Greek meaning 'Witnesses', those who are prepared to suffer torture and death rather than renounce their faith. The Arabic word for this is *shahid* which also means 'witness.' So Muslim warriors can operate anywhere and everywhere as long as there is *Dar al-Harb*, the continued existence of which provides a basis and justification for continued attacks and killing.

Fourth is the protest attribute of Islam. Islam as a religion has joined the protest movement against western education, imperialism and colonialism and in particular, the spread of Judaeo-Christianity. By joining the protest movements, "Islam has contributed its strength, its numbers and its activist to the protest ideology" (Ben-Dor and Pedahzur, 2005; p. 77). The need to understand this fact may lead us to historicise the trajectory by which we have arrived at this phenomenon. The present crisis of religious terrorism can be better understood within the rubric of the process of modernisation. It is a historical fact that Islam had once been a religion of success. Within the first hundred years after the death of Prophet Muhammed in 632 AD, the Muslims had conquered and had control over a territory that extended from the Himalayas to the Pyrenees. By the 15th century, Islam had become the greatest world power. However, the expansionist programme of the Western powers led to a collision between it and Islam and the decline of the latter in 1798 when Napoleon defeated the reigning Muslim Mamelukes of Egypt, a stronghold of Islam in Northern Africa. Other Muslim strongholds soon fell to the military supremacy of the Western nations such that between 1830 and 1915, the European powers have effectively ousted Muslim occupation in places such as Algeria, Aden, Tunisia, Sudan, Libya and Morocco but not the Islamic religion. Like all former Western colonies, these states were exploited as sources for raw materials which fed European industries.

While the evil effects of colonialism may not be exclusive to the Muslim nations alone, the nations of the Middle East had always had autocratic rulers which had not provided them with the conditions to fully develop a modern democracy along the lines of their closest neighbours in Europe. Thus, in the Muslim nations, modernity did not bring freedom and independence rather; it came in a context of political subjection. The baton of power shifted after World War II with the relegation of Britain and France to secondary powers and the emergence of America as the leader of the Western world. As Armstrong (2007) had noted;

Even though the Islamic countries were no longer colonies but were nominally independent, America still controlled their destinies. During the Cold War, the United States sought allies in the region by supporting unsavoury governments and unpopular leaders, largely to protect its oil interests.

Many Muslims resented America for its support of unpopular rulers such as President Hosni Mubarak of the Egypt, the Saudi royal family and the State of Israel. In their frustration, many have abandoned Westernisation and adopted religious fundamentalism as an acceptable alternative. Fundamentalism therefore represents their rejection of western secularism and modernism (Lewis, 1993).

Fifth is what Ben-Dor and Pedahzur (2005; p. 77) have called the 'totalistic' attribute of Islam. As a religion, Islam demands total adherence from its believers. Deriving from the above historical excursion, Islam could be seen not merely as a religion but as a civilisation encompassing every aspect of life of the individual as well as the community. A Muslim in Saudi Arabia is deemed as one with any other Muslim from any other part of the world. The bond that binds them all together is the religion and this is irrespective of nationalities. This makes it easier for Muslims to refer to their opponents not in territorial or national terms but simply as infidels (*kafirs*). Similarly, Muslims never referred to one another as Arabs or Pakistani or Nigerian, they simply identified themselves by their religion. This perspective helps explain why, for instance, Pakistan is concerned with the Taliban and their successors in Afghanistan. That is why, for instance, the Taliban could fund religious insurrections and violence in Nigeria and Saudi Arabia would want to finance an Islamic bank in Nigeria. Conversely, an Afghanistan or Turk or Nigerian identified by his religion would be a natural ally to a Muslim from any parts of the world. As Lewis (2003) has noted; "the very idea of such a grouping, based on religion, in the modern world may seem anachronistic and even absurd. It is neither anachronistic nor absurd in relation to Islam." Thus, Islam is not only a matter of faith and practice, it is also an identity and a loyalty, for many, it is an identity and loyalty that transcend all others.

The sixth issue that marks the uniqueness of Islamic fundamentalism is its ability to expand and spread irrespective of national boundaries or any other physical delimitation. The fifth point above offers a background explanation for why Islam among the three major monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam), is in a unique position to expand across national boundaries. While other religion rarely expands outside of their immediate geographical territory, Islam has not had such limitation. Islam has acquired the characteristics of a universal ideology that is readily accepted by states that have been able to harness it and its establishment to their own purposes (Ben-Dor, 1987; pp. 1-35).

However, when Islam became active and radical, it found the necessary support, resources and legitimacy to both challenge the basis of the secular state powers and capture the machinery of the state itself thereby blurring the distinction between secularity and religiosity. While secular politics and religious piety are separated in other nations and religions, in the Muslim nations, there is no such separation. Both religious truth and political power are indissolubly associated; the first sanctified the second, the second sustained the first. Ayatollah Khomeini was once recorded as saying that “Islam is politics or it is nothing” (Lewis, 2003; pp. 7-8). This statement, more than anything else, determines the dual character of the Islamic or Muslim nations. On one hand, it was a polity; a chieftaincy that successfully became a state and an empire, and on the other hand, it was a religious community, founded by the Prophet and ruled by his appointed deputies who were also his successors.

Finally, and deriving from the above, is the political revolutionary attribute of Islam. For the Muslims, the existence of a separate secular state is unacceptable especially if it is not to serve the purposes of the Islamic community. Leaders are considered legitimate only to the extent to which they uphold the principles of Islamic jurisprudence. They are expected to govern on behalf of God on earth and so are to represent perfection in order to merit their continued stay in power. To do this, they must model themselves after the perfection of the first leader, the Prophet Mohammed. Failure to achieve this lofty objective has always led to incessant struggles and change of leadership and tyrannicide which is the assassination of a tyrant political (secular or religious) leader.

The first advocate of the doctrine of tyrannicide was a Spanish Jesuit scholar Juan de Mariana whose principal work *De Regis Institutiones*, was banned in France (Zasra and Lewis, 1957). The practice of tyrannicide, as Jansen (1986; pp. 159) has noted could only mean that, “the first battlefield of the jihad is the extirpation of these infidel leaderships and their replacement by a perfect Islamic order, and from the will come the release of our energies.” Thus, the lack of separation between religion and the secular state can only portend a strong collectivist orientation and which makes the state machinery pregnable or porous to Islamic fundamentalism subversion.

Fueling the Fires of Revival.

In understanding why, they did what they did, we equally need to focus on the key writers/philosophers whose ideas and writings influence the fundamentalists into doing what they did. An understanding of their writings and philosophies would also assist in comprehending the impact which these have on the present and perhaps future would-be suicide terrorists. Gabriel (2006) has divided them into four groups – the founders, the evangelists, the prisoners and the aristocrats.

The Founders: Majorly these were scholars which through their great gifts for writing, coupled with organizational skills, have spread and inspired people to return to Islamic fundamentalism by calling for jihad. Technological innovation has helped to spread their writings and teachings through Muslim web sites in many languages especially Arabic and English. Their call for jihad is clear but sophisticated enough to influence youths of Arab origin born in the West to join.

Prominent among these scholars and writers are Hasan al-Barna, Sayyid Abul ala-Mawdudi and Sayyid Qutb.

The Founders

| | Hassan al-Barna | Abul ala Mawdudi | Sayyid Qutb |
|------------------------------|---|--|--|
| Birth/Death | 1906 – 1949 | 1903 – 1979 | 1906 – 1965 |
| Nationality | Egyptian | Indian | Egyptian |
| Education | Studied to be an elementary school Arabic language teacher. Memorized the entire Qur'an by age 10 | Religious education focused on Islamic languages – Arabic and Farsi. His native language is Urdu. | Religious education at Al-Azhar. Memorized the entire Qur'an at age 10. |
| Name of group | Founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, the first modern Muslim radical group in 1928 | Founder of Jema'at e - Islam, 1941 | Member of the Muslim Brotherhood, 1950 |
| Key Publication | <i>Al Aqaa'id</i> (The Principles), <i>Our Message</i> . | 150 Books including <i>Understanding the Qur'an</i> , <i>Toward Understanding Islam</i> , <i>Let Us Be Muslims</i> | <i>Milestone Along the Road</i> (1964, written from prison) and others |
| Crimes | Assassination of enemies of the Muslim Brotherhood, culminating in the assassination of Egyptian Prime Minister, Nuqrashi Pasha, 1949 | Leading rebellion against secular leaders of Pakistan in order to establish Islamic government | Attempted overthrow of Egyptian government. |
| Type of death | Assassination presumably by Egyptian Secret Service, 1949 | Old age | Execution by Egyptian government, 1965 |
| Age at death | 43 | 76 | 59 |
| Status of group today | Still working to establish Islamic government and law, but have abandoned violence and using preaching and politics instead | Supported the Taliban in Afghanistan, Osama bin Laden and AL Qaeda. Killed journalist Daniel Pearl. | Still working to establish Islamic government and law, but have abandoned violence and use preaching and politics instead. |

Source: Gabriel (2006)

Their writings led to the “great awakening of Islam” which affected the entire Islamic world and led to the urge to return to the teachings of the Qur'an. Islam experienced a fundamentalist revival and Islamic fundamentalism became a powerful movement through their teaching and writings; especially Hasan al-Barna who became one of the most famous names in Islam; a primary school teacher who became the grandfather of modern Islamic terrorism.

The Evangelists: After the pace had been set through the fiery writings of the founders, the evangelist took over the baton. They internalized the writings of the founders and set themselves to put them into practice during the 1970s and 1980s. the evangelists set an agenda for themselves to become committed to radical Islam by founding their own radical groups, write manifestoes to affirm their position, carried out attacks against the government, get captured, go on trial and be

executed. Although their writings are rarely available in English or analysed, nevertheless, they succeeded not only in fueling the next generation of radicals but to lay down justification for their radicalness.

The Evangelists

| | Dr. Salah Sariah | Shokri Mustafa | Abdul Salam Faraj |
|------------------------------|---|--|--|
| Birth/death | 1933 – 1975 | 1942 – 1978 | 1954 – 1982 |
| Nationality | Palestinian | Egyptian | Egyptian |
| Education | Doctorate in Scientific Education | Studied Agricultural Sciences | Electrical engineer |
| Name of group | Started the Egyptian branch of Hizb al – Tahir (Islamic Liberation), 1974 | Founded al – Takfir wal-Hijra (Emigration and Flight), 1971 | Helped to start Egyptian Al-Jihad (branch of Al-Gama’a al-Islamiyyah) 1979 |
| Key publications | <i>The Message of Faith</i> , 1973 | <i>Al Kalafa</i> (The Leader) transcript of legal defense, 1978 | <i>The Abandoned Duty</i> 1981 |
| Unique Message | Detailed argument that Muslims in general have fallen into apostasy | Separation from infidel Muslim society, intolerant of anyone not involved in al-Takfir wal-Hijra | Detailed argument that jihad is the only effective way to establish Islamic government and law |
| Crime | Invaded Military training school in Cairo 1974 | Kidnapped and killed moderate Muslim preacher, 1977 | Helped to plan assassination of Egyptian President Sadat, 1981 |
| Type of death | Executed by Egyptian government | Hanged by Egyptian government | Executed by Egyptian government |
| Age at death | 41 | 36 | 28 |
| Status of group today | Banned in Egypt, legal in England. Arabic web site in 2005 called for “physical battle against the infidel rulers in the Islamic world”. British branch claims to reject violence | Active in most Arab nations. Al Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri and Iraqi terrorist leader al-Zarqawi are thought to be linked to these sects. Considered extreme | Egyptian Al-Jihad merged with Al-Qeada under the leadership of Ayman al-Zawahiri |

Source: Gabriel (2006)

The Prisoners: This group were so-named because unlike the other groups, members were not executed but imprisoned. However, they were notable for their attacks against the government and while in prison, they continued proselytizing by writing manuscripts in the 1980s to defend their views and beliefs of jihad against the Egyptian government. Their imprisonment and torture did not break their spirit or fervency in their beliefs, but rather further hardened them. Imprisonment gave them all the time needed to write and out of anger and bitterness, they drafted the *Constitution of Al-Jihad*.

| | Abod Zoummar | Karam Zohdy | Assim Abdul Maghed |
|--------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| Birth | 1946 | 1952 | Unknown |
| Nationality | Egyptian | Egyptian | Egyptian |
| Education | Military | Agricultural engineer | Civil engineer |
| Group | Al-Jihad, Al-Gama’a al- | Al-Jihad, Al-Gama’a | Al-Jihad, Al-Gama’a al- |

| | | | |
|--------------------------------|---|--|---|
| Affiliation | Islamiyyah | al-Islamiyyah | Islamiyyah |
| Key publications | <i>The Strategy of Al-Jihad</i> , co-author of the <i>Constitution of Al-Jihad</i> , 1986 | Co-author of the <i>Constitution of Al-Jihad</i> , 1986 | Co-author of the <i>Constitution of Al-Jihad</i> , 1986 |
| Original Message | Overturn immoral ruler, fight those who oppose sharia, establish caliphate | Overturn immoral ruler, fight those who oppose sharia, establish caliphate | Overturn immoral ruler, fight those who oppose sharia, establish caliphate |
| Crimes | Planning assassination of Sadat, acts of terrorism | Planning assassination of Sadat, acts of terrorism | Planning assassination of Sadat, acts of terrorism |
| Length of incarceration | Since 1981. Not released as of July 2005 | 1981 – September 2023. He was 51 years when released | 1981 – September 2023 (22 years) |
| Current philosophy | Ran for president of Egypt on a 50-point program, still committed to original goals | Leading Al-Gama'a to reject violence in favour of nonviolent persuasion. Still committed to original goals | Leading Al-Gama'a to reject violence in favour of nonviolent persuasion. Still committed to original goals. |

Source: Gabriel (2006)

The Aristocrats: In the late 1980s, two new leaders of radical and fundamentalist colouration emerged from the evangelists' stock but birth in fiery furnace of the founders' fervor to become prominent in radical Islam. But unlike their predecessors, the men were from privilege class. After successfully pushing the Soviet from Afghanistan, they were to turn their sight to a new target and masterminded the 9/11 attacks on USA.

The Aristocrats

| | Osama bin Laden | Ayman al-Zawahiri |
|--------------------------|--|---|
| Birth date | July 30, 1957, the 17 th of 52 brothers and sisters borne by multiple wives | June 1, 1951 |
| Birth place | Saudi Arabia | Egypt |
| Family background | His father came from Yemen to Saudi Arabia around 1930 as a labourer. From that simple beginning, the bin Laden family built the largest construction company in the kingdom and was awarded contracts to renovate the three holiest mosques in the Islamic world. | Zawahiri family was distinguished both on his father's and mother's side. His grandfather was the imam of Al-Azhar mosque in Cairo and his father was a professor of pharmacology. His maternal grandfather was president of Cairo University and ambassador for the Egyptian government. |
| Education | Public administration degree from King Abdul-Aziz University in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, 1981. | MD degree from Cairo University, cum laude, 1974, Master degree in surgery, 1978 |
| Name of group | Founded Al-Qaeda in 1988 to channel fighters and funds to jihad in Afghanistan | Second in command of Al-Qaeda, leader of Egyptian Al-Jihad which began to merge with Al Qaeda in 1998 |
| Imprisonment | None | Arrested and imprisoned in 1981 after assassination of Sadat. Released in 1984. He was hardened and radicalized by torture and |

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| | | poor conditions in prison. |
| Key publications | <i>Fatwa Against Jews and Crusaders</i> , 1998, <i>Letter to America</i> , 2000. Although these documents were authorized by him, they may not necessarily be written by him entirely. | <i>Knights under the Banner of the Prophets</i> (his memoirs, 2001), <i>Healing the Chest of the Believer</i> , 1986, <i>The Prohibiting Word</i> |
| Unique Message | Attack the far enemy instead of the near enemy | Use of suicide bombers as a primary method of attack |
| Jihad activity | Started at the age of 22 in Afghanistan till his death | Started at the age of 16 in Egypt till his death |
| Personal life | Three or four wives (at least) with 15 children | One wife, 4 daughters and a son. |

Source: Gabriel (2006)

These two were the aristocrats of radical Islam and are reckoned as the ‘infamous duo’ of jihad. Bin Laden turned 48 in 2005, and al-Zawahiri turned 54 years. Between these two, they have been active jihadists for 64 years. Jihad had been their career all their adult lives and they were hardened, seasoned, paranoid and extreme.

Constituents of Suicidal Terrorism

By implications, fundamentalists and radicals would never, knowingly, go against the doctrines and tenets of their religious beliefs. Hence, they will refrain from using a strategy that is against the teachings of Islam. For the most vociferous advocate of suicide bombing, al-Zawahiri must justify this weapon of choice and this he did in his book – *Healing the Breasts of the Believers*. His justification of suicide bombing was based on two very popular stories which have been dubbed into video for children in both Arabic and English. Interestingly, these two stories can now be found in English on the Web site for the Muslim Student Association of the University of Saskatoon in Canada and in the collection of Hadith on line at the University of Southern California.

I will summarise these two stories for want of page. The first story is about a boy called Obaid who was being trained to be a magician in the palace of a king. The boy became famous for healing (in the name of Allah) but refused to give the king credit (but Allah). For this affront, every means was tried to kill the boy, but all failed. The boy was later to give the king the only means by which he could be killed. The king was to crucify him in the presence of all the people but not before taking an arrow from the boy’s quiver and shouting ‘In the name of Allah, the lord of this boy’. When the people saw this, they all confessed in the lord of the boy, while the king insisted that they must renounce their faith. When the people refused, the king ordered them thrown in the fire.

Al-Zawahiri interpreted this story as justifying suicidal attack; “the believer can sacrifice himself for the benefit of his religion. This killing took place for one purpose, to bring victory to the message of the boy and to prepare the way for the people to come and accept the religion of Allah. And this death was absolute victory for the revelation and the religion of this young boy.” Therefore, suicide missions are justified.

The other story Al-Zawahiri used to justify suicide killing and death is the story of the poor man who too up the sword. Islamic history records the story of a poor man who went to greet his friends farewell, then broke the sheath of his sword, threw it away and advanced with the unsheathed sword to fight the enemy until he was slain. The interpretation is that the man went to war fully knowing his fate, hence he said farewell to his friends and broke the sheath of his sword. The implication is that suicide bombers go into battle knowing that he will not come out alive, but because he is doing

this for the good of Islam, he will earn Paradise. Hence the popular dictum ascribed to Mohammed – “the gates of Paradise are under the shadow of the swords.”

Al-Zawahiri justified the death of both the suicide bombers and unintended victims or other Muslims by the suicide acts by alluding first to the fact that, although;

According to the law of Islam, it is one of the biggest sins for a Muslim to kill his Muslim brother, but is there is no way to kill the enemy without killing the Muslims in the middle of them, we should kill them and the enemies will go to hell and the Muslims will go to Paradise.

Given this explanation, it is easy to understand how Al-Zawahiri rationalized suicide attacks and both the believers and unbelievers as justifiable collateral damages.

Women as Suicide Bombers

The examples and concrete evidences derived from the experiences of Sri Lanka, Iran, West Germany, Italy and Japan have shown that women have historically participated in terrorist groups although scholarly attention are now been paid to this phenomenon. This has led to certain pertinent questions such as (1) why women join these groups and the type of roles they play, (2) why terrorist organisations recruit and operationalise women, and (3) how this process proceeds especially within societies that are usually highly restrictive of women's public role.

Nevertheless, certain propositions have been made. First is that those women who joined and played active roles in such organisations do so for personal reasons which may be either as a result of a personal relationship with a man who is a member of the organisation or because of some personal tragedy such as the death of a family member or rape or some other personal grievances. As Cunningham (2007, p.164) has suggested, “because a woman's place is ‘naturally’ private, her motivation to become ‘public’ would have to be personal.” But this also implies “that once this personal reason has been resolved she will willingly and naturally return to her normal, private, role.”

Second is that because they are likely to be least suspected of such acts, because they are not generally considered credible or likely perpetrators of terrorist violence, they can more easily, carry out attacks and assist their organisations. Women's gender status naturally accords them many lee ways not offer to men. For instance, as women they project a non-threatening mien which may preclude them from more intense scrutiny at the most basic level. Until the use of female security agents, male sensitivities regarding women's bodies exclude them from stricter scrutiny and this hamper thorough searches of their persons. Of more important is the woman's ability to get pregnant and the attendant changes to her body facilitate concealment of weapons and bombs using maternity clothing or in the case of Muslim women, wearing traditional hijab and the veil.

Finally, the popular conception of women as victims rather than perpetrators of violence have led to little or no attention being paid to them. Given these factors therefore, terrorist organisations have tended to be more adaptive by altering their techniques and targets. As Crenshaw (1998, p. 15) has aptly noted “the history of terrorism reveals a series of innovations, as terrorists deliberately selected targets considered taboo and locales where violence was unexpected. These innovations were then rapidly diffused, especially in the modern era of instantaneous and global communications.” Thus, the use of women and suicide campaigns is an example of one type of tactical adaptation employed by terrorist organisations.

While the use of women as explosive baggage and their active participation in perpetuating terrorism is no longer novel in Nigeria, a cursory look at other regions will show that women have also been fully incorporated into numerous terrorist organisations and have functioned as leaders, recruiters, fund-raisers as well as carrying out the deadliest suicide bombing missions. In Europe, women have been drawn more to leftist than rightist terrorists' organisations such as the Euskadi

Ta Askatasuna (ETA, Basque Homeland and Unity), the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the Italian Red Brigades (RD). Particularly in Italy, although women generally are not more than 20% of the total membership, however, majority of the women were drawn specifically to leftist nationalist organisations where they were able to function as regulars and in leadership roles (Weinberg and Eubank, 1987, pp. 250-252). The Italian example seems to find correlates in other regions in which women generally seem to favour leftist organisations because of their ideological message for political and social change clamouring for female equality and emancipation. However, male domination of rightist organisations in Norway had prompted the creation of Valkyria, an all-female rightist organisation that allowed members to develop leadership skills and opinions (Fangen, 1997).

In the North American region, women have played a central and important role in the Puerto Rican nationalist movement, particularly the Puerto Rican Armed Forces of National Liberation (FLAN) and the *Los Macheteros* (the Machete Wielders or the Puerto Rican Peoples' Army). To date, women affiliated with these organisations have played mixed roles in a variety of capacities including leadership positions. In Latin American nations such as Cuba, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Mexico, and especially in two of the notorious terrorist organisations in this region; the FARC and Shining Path, women are ascending through the groups' ranks, with women bearing the title "Commander."

In these two organisations, women join while young, undergo similar training as their male counterpart and often remain as members for life. The South Asian experience of female terrorism shares some parallel with Middle East and North Africa (MENA) especially in their use of women as suicide bombers and socio-cultural norms that idealises sacrifice and martyrdom. Roughly half of the membership of the Liberation Tigers for Tamil Eelam (LTTE) is women who are recruited as children into the Black Tigers as an elite bomb squad. The 1991 assassination of Rajiv Gandhi by a young Tamil woman provides proof of the power of this terrorist weapon. The LTTE is not the only organisation known for the use of women as suicide bombers, among the Sikh militants, women have participated in a number of roles including armed combat. The importance and ready inclusion of women in Sikhs' campaigns is derived from the fact that Sikhism does not draw a straight line between male and female equality, the religion does preclude women from the struggle and as Mahmood (1996, pp. 230-231) has emphasised, "while virtues of courage, bold action and strong speech are consonant with masculinity as understood in the West, among the Sikhs these qualities are treated as neither masculine or feminine, but simply as Sikh values. Women may be bound to the kitchen and may have babies in their arms, but they are still fully expected to behave as soldiers, if necessary."

Women and the Culture of Martyrdom

Martyrdom which is the voluntary acceptance of death as a demonstration of some religious truth is a central concept in Islam which fundamentalists agreed is the equivalent of using a gun against one's enemies. As Kramer (1990) noted it, in both cases "the struggle is much the same, the only difference being one of chronology: the bomber dies while killing several enemies rather than after doing so." The examples of Wafa Idris (detonated 27/01/02), Dareen Abu Aysheh, aged 21 (detonated 27/02/02), Ayat Akhras, aged 18 (detonated 29/03/02), Andaleeb Takafka, aged 20 (detonated 12/04/02), Hiba Daraghmah, aged 19 (detonated 19/05/03), Hanadi Tayseer Jaradat, aged 29 (detonated 04/10/03) and Reem Salih al-Rayasha, aged 21 (detonated 14/01/04) have helped to nullify the accepted caricature, the depiction of women terrorists and suicide bombers as (1) extremist feminists, (2) only bound into terrorism via a relationship with a man, (3) only acting in supporting roles within terrorist organisations, (4) mentally inept, (5) unfeminine in some way; or any combination of the above....She is seldom the highly reasoned, non-emotive, political animal that is the picture of her male counterpart; in short, she rarely escapes her sex (Talbot, 2001).

Rather the examples above actually show that women terrorists and suicide bombers are strong believers in a belief system that actually uphold and encourage them to accept the rhetoric of martyrdom, strong believe in a belief system that sustains the cultural values that encourage individuals to sacrifice themselves for personal or family honour. More important is that the decision to become or volunteer to become a suicide bomber is a reflection of a lifetime of immersion in a culture that regards terrorism as a way of life, as an acceptable behavioural choice and is as voluntary as any culturally-influenced choice may be. If anything, women are seen as been more committed to the 'cause' than men, possibly due to the emotive soul-searching that shapes their decision to participate (Patkin, 2007, p. 173). While not all women who applied are accepted, the few accepted are "likened to a lioness protecting her cubs; it is said that the woman views her cause as a surrogate child" (Patkin, 2007). Ironically, the perceived weakness of women can increase their effectiveness in terror operations. It is easier for a female to exploit the usual male perceptions about their being a weaker sex or 'innocent woman' to evade search or gain entry into places where men would naturally be suspected.

However, to a large extent, suicide bombers are to be seen as victims not only of their terrorist organisations, but more of the cultural milieu and conditioning that lures them into believing that their ultimate life purpose lies in dying to kill. The situation provides us with an irony – "the more training a soldier receives, the more skilled he is at avoiding death, whereas the opposite is true for a suicide bomber" (Stern 2003, p. 52). The downside to asymmetric war of terrorism is that the routinisation and reliance on suicide bombers makes planning and confrontational war less attractive and to be avoided by terrorist organisations. After all, what is required to be a suicide bomber is little training and the supplies are readily available and inexpensive – gunpowder, nails, a light switch, a battery, mercury, acetone, a wide belt or bag and transportation to the target site - than to be a combatant. On the government side it means more vigilance and getting people more aware of their surrounding than before and not taking anything for granted. Suicide bombing also eliminates the need to make elaborate plans for exfiltration or escape which is often the most challenging part of any mission. Thus, from an economic point of view, the female suicide bomber is a much better investment than even her male counterpart (Patkin, 2007, p. 177). They generally need less training period and time, at least far less than the months-long male course (Cunningham, 2007), and they require less persuasion because they are considerably less inclined to be swayed by promises of 70 virgins and lots of drinks in paradise, and the simplicity of their mission demands little technical expertise (Tierney, 2002).

The irony of female suicide bombers is that in radical Islam, women's status as subordinate is fundamental and rigorously maintained; they are considered as unclean, they must be kept hidden and their bodies covered and made subordinate to men (Elshtain, 2003). So, the few that have bridged the societal norms by appearing in public are better used as cannon fodder, explosive baggage or suicide bomber. It is a general irony to note that the leaders of terrorist movements who urge other to give their lives in pursuit of the goal of the movement usually have their children not been involved in suicide missions but kept far away from the trauma and danger of the intifada. The female suicide bomber becomes a victim in the midst of what she considers the most empowered act of her life; even at death, she cannot escape from the stigma of her sex as a woman impose on her by the religion which now places demands on her life. Thus, in a society that restricts options and opportunities available for women, where children at early age are socialised into terror and where martyrs attain the status of celebrities, where daily life is fraught with endless examples of humiliation and deprivation in a culture where honour has historically been among the most salient values, where religious leaders provide the most elaborate theological justification for martyrdom, it should be no surprise then that there will be endless volunteers among young people, both male and female, for martyrdom.

Conclusion

Suicide terrorism is a form of asymmetrical warfare used by non-state actors to gain attention, inflict significant damage, and create psychological impact on a targeted population. Beyond its immediate violence, it symbolizes a broader ideological struggle, aiming to convey a message of commitment to the cause. This tactic, chosen for its high visibility and devastating outcomes, leverages the element of sacrifice to imbue the act with symbolic power, often resonating deeply within a sympathetic audience.

The structures that sustain suicide terrorism involve various roles. *The Founders* craft the ideological and operational frameworks; *The Evangelists* recruit and indoctrinate followers; *The Prisoners* are often disaffected, easily influenced individuals who find purpose in extremist ideologies; and *The Aristocrats* provide the financial and logistical support that allows operations to thrive. Together, these roles establish a robust network that nurtures and perpetuates suicide terrorism, making it both a personal and organizational mission. The motivations of suicide bombers are shaped by an interplay of ideological commitment, social alienation, and personal grievances. Factors such as socio-economic hardship, lack of educational opportunities, and a desire for belonging render certain individuals vulnerable to radicalization. The promise of honor, martyrdom, and respect within their communities further solidifies their commitment.

In conclusion, suicide terrorism is a deeply complex phenomenon rooted in individual vulnerabilities and societal pressures. By addressing these drivers, counterterrorism efforts can move toward more preventive strategies that disrupt recruitment and diminish the appeal of extremist ideologies, thereby weakening the grip of suicide terrorism on global security.

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