

“Explaining Suicide Terrorism: A Review Essay”

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- Mia Bloom, *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).
- Joyce M. Davis, *Martyrs: Innocence, Vengeance and Despair in the Middle East* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).
- Diego Gambetta, ed., *Making Sense of Suicide Missions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).
- Mohammed M. Hafez, *Manufacturing Human Bombs: The Making of Palestinian Suicide Bombers* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2006).
- Raphael Israeli, *Islamikaze: Manifestations of Islamic Martyrology* (London: Frank Cass, 2003).
- Farhad Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers: Allah's New Martyrs*, translated from the French by David Macey (London: Pluto Press, 2005).
- Anne Marie Oliver and Paul F. Steinberg, *The Road to Martyrs' Square: A Journey into the World of the Suicide Bomber* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).
- Robert A. Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005).
- Ami Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005).
- Ami Pedahzur, ed., *Root Causes of Suicide Terrorism: The Globalization of Martyrdom* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).
- Christoph Reuter, *My Life is a Weapon: A Modern History of Suicide Bombing*, translated from the German by Helena Ragg-Kirkby (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).
- Shaul Shay, *The Shabids: Islam and Suicide Attacks* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2004).

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I thank Richard Boyd and the past and present editors of *Security Studies* for their helpful comments.

Barbara Victor, *Army of Roses: Inside the World of Palestinian Women Suicide Bombers* (Emmaus Pa.: Rodale [distributed by St. Martin's Press] 2003).

THE PROBLEM OF "SUICIDE TERRORISM"

The current trend toward suicide bombings began in Lebanon in the early 1980s. The practice soon spread to civil conflicts in Sri Lanka, the Kurdish areas of Turkey, and Chechnya. Palestinian attacks on Israeli civilians in the 1990s and during the Al Aqsa intifada further highlighted the threat. Al Qaeda's adoption of the tactic brought a transnational dimension. Interest in the phenomenon then surged after the shock of the 2001 attacks, which involved an unprecedented number of both perpetrators and casualties. Since then, suicide bombings have expanded in number and geographical range, reaching extraordinary levels in the Iraq War and spreading around the world to countries such as Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Tunisia, Kenya, Indonesia, Turkey, Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, Egypt, Jordan, Bangladesh, and Britain.¹

This review covers thirteen of the books published on the subject since 2002. Three analyze the Palestinian case and four others focus on Islamist violence. The other six, including two edited collections, intend to be comprehensive. This review also refers to a few selected publications that discuss the arguments presented in the sources listed above. It aims to give readers a glimpse of the content of the different volumes as well as offer a critique.

These works make important contributions, although explanations are still at an early and uneven stage. The concept remains imprecise, the facts are not well established, and neither explanations nor policy recommendations distinguish sufficiently between suicide and other terrorist or insurgent attacks or account for variations within the phenomenon. Specifications of what is to be explained vary by author. Findings are often based on incompatible datasets, and references to cases or examples do not always fit the stated definition of the concept. Contradiction, ambiguity, and error are particularly consequential because the overall number of suicide attacks is quite small compared to total numbers of attacks on similar targets using other means. Inclusion or exclusion of a few events can thus shape the conclusions that are drawn.

In addition, many accounts are being overtaken by events. Suicide attacks in Iraq outnumber all other campaigns and challenge some of the

¹ They also resumed in Sri Lanka in 2006. Nevertheless, few analysts would agree with Shay's depiction of modern suicide terror as "a strategic threat against the security and stability of Western society, and perhaps against the security of human society as a whole." See Shay, *The Shabids*, xiii.

explanations offered by general studies.² For example, Mohammed Hafez lists 443 suicide attacks in Iraq from 22 March 2003 to 20 February 2006.³ The Brookings Iraq Index as of 24 January 2007 reports 1,188 multiple fatality bombings, including at least 403 suicide bombings.⁴ In comparison, fewer than 200 incidents were associated with the next most consequential campaign, Palestinian violence against Israel from 1993 to 2006.⁵

The review is organized as follows. I first ask what it is that the authors are trying to explain and then compare their answers to three questions: why sponsoring organizations would see suicide attacks as effective, why a community would support them, and why individuals would engage in them. Last, I review the resulting policy recommendations.

THE CONCEPT: WHAT IS SUICIDE TERRORISM?

Research is plagued by the lack of a common definition of the concept. As a start, is the unit of analysis a special form of terrorism or a politically neutral suicide mission or attack?⁶ Some authors avoid the term terrorism altogether, adopt the terrorism label without defining it, or expand the range of applicability of the definition well beyond terrorism so as to include, for example, the Japanese kamikazes. Among those who resist the term terrorism, some focus on the subjective interpretations of the perpetrators and the idea of martyrdom in specific cultures and thus avoid the term suicide as well, because both labels are objectionable to those who practice or condone such

² Of the works that discuss Al Qaeda and Iraq, note the time periods they cover: Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers* and Reuter, *My Life is a Weapon* end in 2002; Pape, *Dying to Win*, Israeli, *Islamikaze* and Shay, *The Shabids* conclude at the end of 2003; Gambetta, ed., *Making Sense* ends in summer of 2004; Bloom, *Dying to Kill* about January 2005; and Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism* and Pedahzur, ed., *Root Causes* through June 2005.

³ Hafez, "Suicide Terrorism in Iraq: A Preliminary Assessment of the Quantitative Data and Documentary Evidence," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 29 (2006): 1–27. An extended analysis of Iraq will be published as a monograph by the United States Institute of Peace in 2007.

⁴ See www.brookings.edu/iraqindex, esp. 19. The report notes an American military estimate that 96 percent of suicide bombers are not Iraqis. Brookings ceased to track car bombs in the fall of 2006 because of data inadequacies.

⁵ From October 2000 to February 2005, during the Al Aqsa Intifada, approximately 116 attacks occurred with an overall 1993–2005 total of 142 attacks. See Hafez, *Manufacturing Human Bombs*, 19–20. According to the National Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism (MIPT) Terrorism Knowledge Base (TKB), Palestinian Islamic Jihad was responsible for 10 suicide attacks from February to June 2006, leading to a total of 152 suicide attacks by Palestinian groups against Israel. Robert J. Brym and Bader Araj count 20 attacks between 1993 and 1997, and 138 from 2000 to July 2005. They use Arabic press accounts as well as the standard sources. They list 832 total deaths from 1993–2005. See Robert J. Brym and Bader Araj, in "Suicide Bombing as Strategy and Interaction: The Case of the Second Intifada," *Social Forces* 84, no. 4 (June 2006): 1969–86. On the other hand, Shay concludes that over 900 Israelis were killed between 2000 and 2003 alone. See Shaul Shay, *The Shabids*, 62.

⁶ Assaf Moghadam also raises some of these issues. He settles for suicide attack. See Assaf Moghadam, "Defining Suicide Terrorism," in Pedahzur, ed., *Root Causes*, 13–24. In Gambetta et al., *Making Sense*, they also emphasize the lack of uniformity in definitions of the phenomenon.

violence. Others use the term terrorism to refer exclusively to attacks on civilian, not military, targets. Sometimes the reader has to tease out a definition by implication.

Diego Gambetta and contributors stick largely to suicide missions (SM). However, other social scientists (for example, Mia Bloom, Hafez, Robert Pape, and Ami Pedahzur) refer explicitly to suicide terrorism.⁷ Shaul Shay, a historian who heads the Israeli Defense Forces Department of History, uses the terms suicide attack and suicide terrorism interchangeably. Historian Raphael Israeli is adamant in insisting that the term terrorism be used to describe violence associated with Islam; he implies that relatively neutral terms such as suicide bomber are too weak and insufficiently condemnatory.⁸

The English translation of Khosrokhavar's *Les Nouveaux Martyrs d'Allah* adds the title *Suicide Bombers*, relegating *Allah's New Martyrs* to a subtitle, and a prefatory *Note on Terminology* explains that terrorism and jihadism will mean the same thing. His focus is on the concept and practice of offensive martyrdom in Islam.

Anne Marie Oliver and Paul Steinberg, who document the culture that supports Hamas, refer to suicide bombings and to murder-suicides. They do not use the term terrorism at all; the only reference in the index is to a picture of a poster displaying the late Palestinian cleric Abdullah Azzam, whose text reads: "If preparation is terrorism, then we are terrorists, and if defense of the land is extremism, then we are extremists, and if jihad against enemies is fundamentalism, then we are fundamentalists."⁹

Barbara Victor and Joyce Davis, respectively, use interviews and biographical vignettes to present the subjective side of martyrdom in the Palestinian and Islamic contexts. Victor's scope is further narrowed to women martyrs.

Christoph Reuter, also a journalist, defines his topic as modern suicide bombing, although he includes chapters on the Assassins of medieval Islam and the Japanese kamikaze, the historical precedents that most studies cite. He criticizes the indiscriminate labeling of groups as terrorist. His interest, too, is in the lived experiences of individuals and societies rather than theoretical explanation.¹⁰

Gambetta's edited collection compares political suicide that kills others to that which does not (for example, self-immolation) and also asks why

⁷ Hafez, *Manufacturing Human Bombs*, 4. It is hard to escape the term. For example, although Hafez states that he will use the terms "suicide bomber" or "human bomb" because they are not highly charged normative terms like "suicide terrorist," he then devotes a chapter to explanations of suicide terrorism.

⁸ Israeli, *Islamikaze*, 5.

⁹ Oliver and Steinberg, *The Road to Martyrs' Square*, fig. 12. Azzam, who was assassinated in 1989, is also notable as the mentor of Osama Bin Laden.

¹⁰ Reuter, *My Life is a Weapon*, 10. Reuter's caution makes it ironic that Walter Laqueur, in his endorsement of the book, praises it as an account of suicide terrorism.

some groups refrain from suicide tactics.¹¹ However, the authors who define their subject as suicide terrorism are typically less sensitive to the need to compare suicide attacks to other forms of terrorism or political violence. Pape is the most explicit, although the facts he uses to support his argument do not always fit the requirements of his definition. He defines the phenomenon as the most aggressive form of terrorism, compared to demonstrative or destructive terrorism, and proposes that its purpose is to kill the maximum number of people from the opposing community.¹² Pedahzur similarly says that such attacks are intended to create an atmosphere of terror and to harm as many people as possible, in most cases civilians.¹³

However, suicide attacks have been used to assassinate individuals and to strike specific military targets and killing civilians does not distinguish suicide attacks from other forms of violence.¹⁴ In several well-known cases, suicide attackers did not target civilians indiscriminately or did so rarely. Nevertheless, three such cases are included in both Pape's and Pedahzur's studies.¹⁵

First, Hezbollah, the originator of the tactic in 1980s Lebanon, targeted embassies (American and Israeli), military headquarters (American, French, and Israeli), military convoys (Israeli), and on one occasion the Jewish Cultural Center in Buenos Aires. Some of these attacks were extremely lethal, but overall most were against military targets. Shay describes Hezbollah attacks on Israeli targets in Lebanon as follows: "With the exception of the 1983 attack against the IDF [Israeli Defense Forces] headquarters in Tyre, all of the attacks were directed against IDF convoys."¹⁶

Second, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka adapted the tactic from Hezbollah as a precise tool for assassinating government officials and political rivals. The 1991 assassination of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was probably the LTTE's most famous effort.¹⁷ Like Hezbollah, the LTTE primarily attacked military targets, often to stop or thwart Sri Lankan army offensives against LTTE-held territory or to damage the Sri Lankan Navy.

¹¹ See, respectively, Michael Biggs, "Dying Without Killing: Self-Immolations, 1963–2002," in Gambetta, *Making Sense*, 173–208, and Stathis Kalyvas and Ignacio Sanchez-Cuenca, "Killing Without Dying: The Absence of Suicide Missions," in Gambetta, *Making Sense*, 209–32.

¹² Pape, *Dying to Win*, 9–10.

¹³ Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism*, 10–11.

¹⁴ Acknowledged by Pedahzur and Arie Perliger in "Introduction: Characteristics of Suicide Attacks," in Pedahzur, ed., *Root Causes*, 1–12.

¹⁵ Jeff Goodwin also makes this point about Pape. See Jeff Goodwin, "What Do We Really Know About (Suicide) Terrorism?" *Sociological Forum* 21, 2 (June 2006): 315–30. His review also considers the Bloom and Gambetta volumes.

¹⁶ Shay, *The Shabids*, 43.

¹⁷ Pape, *Dying to Win*, 227. Pape says that this was the first use of a belt bomb, but Shay lists one in Lebanon in 1987.

Hopgood contends that in Sri Lanka “there are no clear examples of civilians being directly targeted by SMs [suicide missions]. . . .”¹⁸ “In none of these examples was damage to civilians, or the spreading of ‘terror,’ a principal motivation.”¹⁹ Reuter agrees that the LTTE aims not to terrorize the enemy population, but to strike the nerve center of the state.²⁰ This does not mean, however, that the LTTE has clean hands. Even if Hopgood argues that civilians were not the intended target and that the LTTE could have attacked restaurants and shops to much greater destructive effect, the LTTE’s suicide bombing of the Central Bank in downtown Colombo, in January 1996, killed around 90 people and injured over a thousand. The January 1998 suicide truck bomb attack on the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy targeted a major Buddhist shrine.²¹

Third, the PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party) in 1996 and again in 1998–99 targeted Turkish government buildings and military assets, killing around twenty people all told.²² The PKK killed thousands of Kurdish civilians, so precision and restraint were not the organization’s hallmarks.

Readers might assume that suicide attacks would necessarily involve the death of the perpetrator—and the dominant image is of the bomber who dies in a single explosion along with his or her victims—but that is not necessarily the case. On the one hand, Bloom, Hafez, and Shay think so. As Bloom states it, the perpetrator’s death “is the precondition for the success of the attack.”²³ However, Pedahzur requires only that the odds of returning alive are “close to zero,” and Pape specifies that “the attacker does not *expect* to survive the mission” and “*often* employs a method of attack. . . .that requires his or her death in order to succeed.”²⁴ Such a definition could include, for example, the assassination of Indira Gandhi by her body guards, who were then immediately killed by other security forces. These definitions also raise the question of how we can know what a perpetrator expects.

More refinements further expand the scope of the concept. Gambetta relaxes his initial assumption that the attacker’s death is a requirement to

¹⁸ Stephen Hopgood, “Tamil Tigers, 1987–2002,” in Gambetta, ed., *Making Sense*, 55.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 43–76, esp. 59. The record of the LTTE in Sri Lanka is also disputed. Hopgood puts the number of LTTE suicide attacks as “probably somewhere between 100 and 200. We simply cannot be more accurate than that.” See *Ibid.*, 44. Pedahzur lists more than 170 attacks between 1987 and 2003. Thus, as Hopgood charges, Pape’s count of 75 is far too low. See Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism*, 88–89.

²⁰ Reuter, *My Life is a Weapon*, 161.

²¹ According to the MIPT Terrorism Knowledge Base, eleven people were killed, including three or four attackers, and 25 people were injured. In July 1996, two bombs on a commuter train killed at least 70 and wounded several hundred, although these were not suicide attacks. See *New York Times*, 25 July 1996.

²² Pape, *Dying to Win*, 162, 257–58. He cites 22 people killed in 14 or 15 attacks. Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism*, 89. He describes 15 successful and 7 failed operations.

²³ Bloom, *Dying to Kill*, 76. She defines her subject as suicide bombings, although she does not restrict her scope to explosives and her examples in the introduction are eclectic. Citing the Thugs in colonial India is particularly curious; they strangled unsuspecting fellow travelers and took few personal risks. They certainly were not suicide attackers and they probably were not even terrorists.

²⁴ Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism*, 8. Pape, *Dying to Win*, 10. Italics mine.

include missions that were possible without the perpetrator's death.²⁵ Gambetta, Pape, and Pedahzur include no-escape attacks, but Gambetta excludes high-risk missions.²⁶ Israeli implicitly includes no-escape incidents and is silent about high risk. The rest simply do not tell us.

Another question is whether unsuccessful attempts are included. Both Pape and Pedahzur include them, and Shay, although he says that he will not, does sometimes include what he calls work accidents. Victor specifically includes failed and foiled attempts. In fact, she suggests that since 2000, Palestinian women were involved in 250 cases of which only four succeeded.²⁷ Hafez notes that in 2004 Israel thwarted 74 percent of planned attacks and arrested 365 militants.²⁸ Excluding unsuccessful missions limits the numbers of incidents and perpetrators. It also results in the omission of a number of chilling plots, such as the August 2006 plan to bomb multiple airliners over the Atlantic. One reason for excluding failures, of course, is a lack of information. Researchers may not be aware of them because governments resist disclosing sensitive information about their capacity to disrupt operations. On the other hand, knowledge of intentions at the group or individual level is incomplete without them.

Yet another point of contention is whether or not the suicides must be acts of free will, which is also something that is not always easy to know. To Gambetta, the perpetrators must be neither deceived nor blackmailed. Coercion cannot be part of the process.²⁹ Both Shay and Hafez name willingness to die as the key element of their definitions. Bloom refers vaguely to "a deliberate state of awareness."³⁰ Victor and Davis include cases where bombers were duped or manipulated. Victor believes that Palestinian women bombers were subjected to intense social pressures that pushed them in the direction of martyrdom. Similarly, Farhad Khosrokhavar finds that in Iran the

²⁵ Gambetta, ed., *Making Sense*, vi–vii.

²⁶ It is interesting that contemporary veneration of martyrdom in jihad got its start with no-escape or high risk attacks on military targets during the Iran-Iraq war, 1980–1988, when Iran employed human wave attacks to clear mine fields and charge Iraqi battle formations. Some of the tens of thousands of untrained youngsters, exhorted to go into battle wearing their shrouds and with keys to paradise around their necks, saw themselves as martyrs, but others thought of their actions as high risk with a correspondingly high potential pay-off in terms of socio-economic status. See Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers*.

²⁷ Victor, *Army of Roses*, 239. She cites an interview with Liat Pearl, a spokesperson for the Israeli Border Police.

²⁸ Hafez, *Manufacturing Human Bombs*, 72. He quotes an Israeli General Security Services report. Many analyses of the characteristics of suicide attackers are based on interviews with those who failed, so excluding these attempts would severely limit this line of research.

²⁹ *New York Times*, 26 October 2005, A12. The bombings of the Palestine and Sheraton hotels in central Baghdad on 24 October 2005, involved three car bombs. According to a hotel guard who saw them, one was a cement mixer driven by a man whose hands were handcuffed to the steering wheel. In Reuter, *My Life is a Weapon*, 165, he describes the case of a teenaged PKK recruit who blew herself up in 1996, after another young woman in the PKK refused to volunteer for a suicide attack and was shot dead in front of her.

³⁰ Bloom, *Dying to Kill*, 76.

prototypical martyrs, nominally volunteers, were “systematically manipulated by the state.”³¹

The case of the train bombs in Spain in March 2004 illustrates some of the problems of classification. The bombings caused 191 deaths, making them one of the most destructive terrorist attacks since 9/11 and they involved the coordination of multiple bombs by a relatively large conspiratorial group. The initial bombings were conventional, since the bombs were left on trains. Most of the group members, however, later blew themselves up when cornered by the police. The group may have been planning a second attack that would have involved their deaths. Were the Madrid bombings and/or the subsequent self-destruction of the perpetrators acts of “suicide terrorism”?³²

Readers might think that these distinctions are arcane or trivial, but they matter not only for analytical clarity and consistency and data collection but also for the policies of state actors. For example, Shay describes the support provided to Hamas and Hezbollah by Iraq, Iran, and Syria.³³ Saddam Hussein’s regime consistently supported Palestinian suicide attacks, and after 2001 “Iraq clearly differentiated between the categories—which was not customary among other Arab nations that transferred funds to the families of the shahids—to distinguish between the financial grant transferred to the family of a ‘regular’ martyr and that bestowed upon a martyr who died during a suicide mission.”³⁴ Iraqi authorities apparently also made a fine distinction between suicide and no-escape attacks.³⁵ Saudi Arabia has also supported radical Islamic causes and provided financial assistance to Hamas and the families of martyrs, but they apparently do not discriminate between suicides and other martyrs who die in battle.

EXPLANATIONS

Both Gambetta and chapter author Ricolfi reject the idea of a general explanation for suicide attacks.³⁶ Considering how difficult it is to define the concept, modesty may be the wisest course of action. It is possible to discern the outlines of a preliminary framework of analysis, although answers

³¹ Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers*, 79.

³² For details and a positive answer, see Rogelio Alonso and Fernando Reinares, “Maghreb Immigrants Becoming Suicide Terrorists: A Case Study on Religious Radicalization Processes in Spain,” in Pedahzur, ed., *Root Causes*, 179–97. Yoram Schweitzer, in “Al-Qaeda and the Global Epidemic of Suicide Attacks,” in Pedahzur, ed., *Root Causes*, *Ibid.*, 132–51, 144–45, also says yes, due to their plans. Pedahzur, however, does not include the bombings in his list.

³³ Shay, *The Shahids*, 141–87. He often does not distinguish between suicide and non-suicide attacks, instead referring generally to all terrorism.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 156.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 157–58.

³⁶ Luca Ricolfi, “Palestinians, 1981–2003,” in Gambetta, ed., *Making Sense*, 77–129, esp. 104–5, 259.

to central questions will vary. Not surprisingly, most accounts focus on the interaction of individuals, organizations, and societies.³⁷

There is an emerging consensus that suicide attacks are instrumental or strategic from the perspective of a sponsoring organization that represents the weaker party in an asymmetrical conflict. They serve the political interests of identifiable actors, most of whom are non-states opposing well-armed states. The method is mechanically simple and tactically efficient and it possesses high-symbolic value as well as versatility. The suicide bomber can gain access to well-guarded targets, kill a lot of people, terrify the enemy, and signal resolve and dedication to a cause. Common wisdom holds that such a strategy cannot be deterred because of the perpetrator's willingness to die.

Presumably suicide attacks also mobilize sympathetic constituencies and attract recruits and financial support. The death of the perpetrator is thought to legitimize the action. These influences are reciprocal; organizations use suicide attacks to generate support, but at the same time they respond to popular demand. Religion can motivate both support and participation, because of its emphasis on redemption and martyrdom, but it is not required.³⁸ When present, it is often mixed with nationalism and communal solidarity.

There is no single profile of the individual suicide attacker, even within the same context. A range of emotions, including pride, anger, rage, frustration, humiliation, shame, hopelessness, and despair, can be powerful driving forces, as is the desire for revenge or personal glory and honor. Suicide attacks can demonstrate power and overcome feelings of helplessness: They convey the message "we may be materially weak, but we are more powerful because we do not fear death." Loyalty to a group, leader, or comrades and family further strengthens individual commitment.

EFFECTIVENESS

Suicide attacks are presumed to pay off for the political organizations that use them in two possible ways: by coercing an adversary and/or by giving an organization an advantage over its rivals in terms of support from constituencies. Many authors also think that the method is a last resort, used when other means have failed.

³⁷ See Israeli, *Islamikaze*. Israeli's lengthy disquisition in *Islamikaze* is an exception. He blames Islamic ideology and society as a whole. His book is basically a condemnation of the Muslim world. On frameworks of causation, see Assaf Moghadam, "The Roots of Suicide Terrorism: A Multi-Causal Approach," in Pedahzur, ed., *Root Causes*, 81–107.

³⁸ The LTTE is usually cited as the preeminent secular case, but Leonard Weinberg reminds readers that the Viet Cong also practiced suicide attacks, although they were a relatively minor tactic. See Leonard Weinberg, "Suicide Terrorism for Secular Causes," in Pedahzur, ed., *Root Causes*, 108–21. In Kalyvas and Sanchez-Cuenca, "Killing Without Dying," in Gambetta, *Making Sense*, they also cite anarchist attacks in Russia in the early-twentieth century.

Coercing the Adversary

Pape makes a strong claim that campaigns of suicide terrorism are successful in compelling democracies to withdraw from the military occupation of a territory that terrorists consider their own.³⁹ “Every group mounting a suicide campaign over the past two decades has had as a major objective. . .coercing a foreign state that has military forces in what the terrorists see as their homeland to take those forces out.”⁴⁰ “The target state of every modern suicide campaign has been a democracy,” because democracies are vulnerable to coercion.⁴¹ Presumably, suicide attacks magnify “the coercive effects of punishment”: they are more destructive than other types of terrorism, they effectively signal future attacks, and they deliberately violate norms.⁴²

This argument relies on a rather arbitrary determination of what constitutes a campaign, which is especially significant because Pape excludes isolated attacks.⁴³ It is possible that incidents that would be inconvenient to explain are thus omitted. For example, although a campaign can consist of only one incident,⁴⁴ the 1995 suicide truck bombing of the Egyptian Embassy in Islamabad is treated as isolated⁴⁵ despite the fact that Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ, later merged with Al Qaeda) organized a series of attacks against the Egyptian government in the 1990s, one involving an unsuccessful suicide attack against a former interior minister. Furthermore, Pape lumps different groups together in a common campaign, such as Iraqi rebels and does not distinguish between Al Qaeda and local affiliates or start-ups.

Another ambiguous case is the Armed Islamic Group (Groupe Islamique Armée, or GIA) in Algeria. If the GIA practiced suicide terrorism it would undercut Pape’s thesis, since the Algerian government was neither democratic nor foreign. The record, however, is in dispute. Reuter says the GIA never perpetrated a suicide mission, and the Memorial Institute for the Prevention

³⁹ Pape, *Dying to Win*, 4–38. Note that only six democracies are included in the analysis. Goodwin also directly challenges Pape’s thesis, which has received a great deal of attention. He notes that it is based on two claims that cannot be shown to be true: that all campaigns of suicide terrorism are aimed at ending foreign occupation and that all such occupations provoke suicide terrorism. See also Assaf Moghadam, “Suicide Terrorism, Occupation, and the Globalization of Martyrdom: A Critique of *Dying to Win*,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29 (2006): 707–29.

⁴⁰ Pape, *Dying to Win*, 21.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 28–29.

⁴³ Campaigns are described as organized and coherent, but not further specified. See a similar critique of Pape and Bloom in the review by Clark McCauley, “The Politics of Suicide Terrorism,” *The Middle East Journal* 59, no. 4 (Autumn 2005): 663–66. Brym and Araj comment that Pape’s description of the entire second intifada as one campaign lumps too much together. See Brym and Bader Araj, in “Suicide Bombing as Strategy and Interaction: The Case of the Second Intifada,” *Social Forces* 84, no. 4 (June 2006): 1976.

⁴⁴ Pape, *Dying to Win*, 44, 100, 257. For example, the Sikhs versus India, although Pape admits that this is a borderline case. See *ibid.*, 154 ff. Pape lists two Hamas attacks as a campaign in 1994, four in 1996, and three in 1997. Overall Hezbollah is credited with three separate campaigns, the LTTE also with three, the PKK with two, and Hamas and Hamas/PIJ with five.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 264.

of Terrorism (MIPT) Terrorism Knowledge Base does not list any missions.⁴⁶ However, the GIA certainly tried. In 1994, the group threatened to crash a hijacked airliner in Paris, but a French commando team seized the plane while it was on the ground in Marseille. Furthermore, Pedahzur argues that the GIA organized at least two suicide attacks in 1995.⁴⁷ Shay lists four attacks between 1994 and 1998, including the hijacking.⁴⁸ Kalyvas and Sanchez-Cuenca assert that although the GIA did not hesitate to massacre civilians, they only engaged in one suicide attack. Pape also lists one attack as an isolated incident and not a campaign.⁴⁹ Gambetta says that the GIA committed one attack and then renounced the practice.⁵⁰

Did suicide campaigns actually pay? Pape qualifies his argument by saying that suicide terrorism is successful only when occupying powers have “limited or modest” goals as opposed to those “central to their wealth or security.”⁵¹ He concludes that six of thirteen completed campaigns from 1983 to 2001 resulted in “no change” in the foreign occupation (four other campaigns were considered ongoing).⁵² However, he argues that “even a 50 percent success rate is remarkable” since, in general, coercion only works in international politics a third of the time.⁵³ His conclusion that Sri Lanka would grant Tamil autonomy in 2001 was premature, so by his own measure the success rate is under 50 percent.⁵⁴ Even if we accept (1) the idea of a campaign as the unit of analysis, (2) the coding of the outcomes of completed campaigns, and (3) the calculation of advantageous cost-benefit ratios as something under fifty-fifty, the odds do not seem encouraging, especially considering the risks.

The fact, for example, that Hamas claimed that Israel withdrew because of their attacks does not mean that it is true or even that Hamas leaders believed that it was true.⁵⁵ Jon Elster notes that Pape’s argument that suicide attacks in 1994–95 caused Israel to speed up its withdrawal from the occupied territories is not persuasive because it “rests exclusively on ambiguous statements by the then Prime Minister Rabin and self-serving statements by Hamas spokesmen,” although he finds it not implausible.⁵⁶ However, Brym and Araj disagree with Pape entirely: “During the second intifada, the results,

⁴⁶ Reuter, *My Life is a Weapon*, 10.

⁴⁷ Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism*, 105.

⁴⁸ Shay, *The Shabids*, 94–96.

⁴⁹ Pape, *Dying to Win*, Appendix.

⁵⁰ Gambetta, ed., *Making Sense*, 289.

⁵¹ Pape, *Dying to Win*, 75.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 40.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁵⁴ Moghadam, “Defining Suicide Terrorism,” in Pedahzur, ed., *Root Causes*. He finds that the success rate is significantly lower, 24 percent. He disagrees with Pape’s judgment that Hamas gained important concessions from Israel.

⁵⁵ Pape, *Dying to Win*, 66–73.

⁵⁶ John Elster, “Motivations and Beliefs in Suicide Missions,” in Gambetta, ed., *Making Sense*, 249.

objectives and precipitants of suicide bombing reveal little of the strategic logic that, according to Pape, lies at its core.⁵⁷ They point instead to revenge and retaliation in response to specific Israeli actions. In their view, suicide tactics had high costs (arrests, assassinations of leaders, collateral damage, destruction of houses, roadblocks, and checkpoints) that were not offset by Israeli concessions.

Further disputing the contention that suicide attacks are effective instruments of coercion against democracies, Pedahzur and Arie Perliger argue that actually more than one-third of suicide attacks from 1982 to June 2005 were against undemocratic regimes. Examining the five countries that suffered more than 80 percent of all suicide attacks worldwide, they conclude that most campaigns are directed at weak democracies.⁵⁸ Moreover, the proposition that only democratic foreign occupiers are the target of campaigns of suicide attacks is particularly questionable with regard to post 9/11 Islamist violence. For example, Scott Atran comments that "Pape's basic data, correlations, and conclusions about the causes of terrorism are problematic, outdated in the wake of the September 11 attacks and sometimes deeply misleading."⁵⁹ Reviewing events in Indonesia, the Philippines, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, Pedahzur concludes that "for the most part, suicide actions performed under the flag of the jihad and attributed to Al-Qaeda were, in effect, local initiatives stemming from Islamic organizational interests operating within the borders of a given country and whose aspirations principally amounted to a change of rule in that same country."⁶⁰ Another contradictory piece of evidence is that in 2005, radicals in Bangladesh seeking to establish an Islamic state organized a series of suicide attacks against the government, targeting particularly the judicial system.

It is impossible to say whether discrepancies in findings are due to differences in definitions, data collection, or key variables (for example, campaigns versus number of incidents). Pedahzur and Pape helpfully provide a list of events in appendices to their volumes. Without examining each incident, one cannot reconcile Pedahzur's worldwide database from March 1977 to February 2004, containing 418 incidents, with Pape's data from January 1980 to December 2003, listing 315 attacks.⁶¹ More research thus needs to be done to resolve this empirical question and to specify a causal mechanism by

⁵⁷ Brym and Araj, in "Suicide Bombing," *Social Forces*, 1982.

⁵⁸ Pedahzur and Perliger in "Introduction," in Pedahzur, ed., *Root Causes*. However, Gambetta accepts Pape's claim that suicide attacks are only used against democracies. See Gambetta, ed., *Making Sense*, 265.

⁵⁹ Scott Atran, "The Moral Logic and Growth of Suicide Terrorism," *The Washington Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (Spring 2006): 130. See Moghadam, "Defining Suicide Terrorism," in Pedahzur, ed., *Root Causes*.

⁶⁰ Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism*, 109.

⁶¹ Pape, *Dying to Win*, 3, 4. Pape claims that his database at the Chicago Project on Suicide Terrorism (University of Chicago) is "the first complete universe of suicide terrorist attacks worldwide" and "the most comprehensive and reliable survey...now available." Pedahzur's database is held at the National Security Studies Centre at the University of Haifa. Neither is yet available online although Pedahzur's will be

which suicide terrorism is effective as coercion against democracies, if this is indeed the case. Moreover, if it does not target democracies exclusively, has it been successful against nondemocracies or weak democracies?

Gaining an Edge Over the Competition

Bloom agrees that resorting to suicide terrorism is meant ultimately to end foreign occupation and secure autonomy or independence. However, she thinks that suicide terrorism is also, or even more, attractive because it enhances an organization's prestige and gives it an advantage in intra-movement competition by attracting recruits, publicity, and money.⁶² Effectiveness, then, is dependent on mobilizing constituencies in order to dominate the competition in a local power struggle. Atran tends to support this interpretation, as do Gupta and Mundra.⁶³ Elster notes generally that game-theoretic and econometric analyses of the intentions of the organizers of suicide attacks are "doomed to fail" not only because the organizers may not be as rational as theory requires, but also because "game theory has very little to say about the equilibrium outcome of strategic interaction among more than two actors."⁶⁴ A comprehensive model would have to take into account not only divisions within the parties to the conflict—government and dissident organizations—but also foreign supporters of both sides.

Bloom's argument is probably most persuasive regarding the Palestinian case. Victor, for example, provides anecdotal support for it. Ricolfi, however, concludes that each of the three Palestinian campaigns that he identifies had different causes and that internal politics were dominant only during the post-2000 Al Aqsa intifada wave, when secular and religious organizations competed for control over the Palestinian insurgency.⁶⁵ The recourse to

accessible shortly through the University of Texas. In the meantime, he will provide the data in electronic form to researchers on request. Several authors (for example, Ricolfi, "Palestinians," in Gambetta, *Making Sense*, 309, Hopgood, "Palestinians," in Gambetta, *Making Sense*, and Moghadam, "Defining Suicide Terrorism," in Pedahzur, ed., *Suicide Terrorism*, 15 find that Pape underestimates numbers of attacks. For example, Pape lists 110 suicide attacks by Palestinians vs. Israelis from April 1994 to December 2003, whereas Brym and Araj, who use Arabic press accounts, count 158 attacks between 1993 and July 2005. Because of the twin difficulties of measuring what it is to be explained and finding accurate and comprehensive data, Ricolfi created a new integrated database. In his view, the main databases are incomplete and differentially selective. They include the Institute for Counter Terrorism (ICT) in Israel, the Terrorism Research Center, and the MIPT. The Terrorism Research Center's website www.terrorism.com states that it was founded in 1996 and maintains its database as a public service. It is located somewhere in northern Virginia. It does not list the names of its Board of Directors. Ricolfi discusses his methodology in great detail in an appendix to the chapter.

⁶² Bloom, *Dying to Kill*, 3, 16–17, 76–77.

⁶³ Dipak Gupta and Kusum Mundra, "Suicide Bombing as a Strategic Weapon: An Empirical Investigation of Hamas and Islamic Jihad," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 17, no. 4 (2005): 573–98. Pape, however, disagrees.

⁶⁴ Elster, "Motivations and Beliefs," in Gambetta, ed., *Making Sense*, 257–58.

⁶⁵ Ricolfi, "Palestinians," in Gambetta, ed., *Making Sense*, 94, 96, 98, 104.

suicide missions was cyclical. He also points out, quite rightly, that Palestinian factions cooperate as well as compete, a point that Pape also makes.⁶⁶

Moreover, Bloom's analysis of Sri Lanka, one of her three major case studies (in addition to Palestinians and the PKK), is contradictory. She indicates that when the LTTE began its suicide attacks in 1987, the other Tamil militant groups had largely been destroyed and she accepts the conclusion that the systematic elimination of rivals culminated in 1986, a point that Reuter confirms and Pape also supports.⁶⁷ In a footnote, she says that the process of competition began then.⁶⁸ If her interpretation of organizational strategy is correct, the suicide attacks should have occurred between 1983 and 1987, when the LTTE faced the most competition. In fact, whereas Pedahzur lists the first LTTE attack as 1987,⁶⁹ Pape says that the actual campaign only began in 1990, which places it after the withdrawal of Indian peacekeeping forces and well after the elimination of rivals.⁷⁰ Hopgood agrees that it is not entirely sure that the attacker intended to die or that the LTTE had settled on the tactic of suicide attack by 1987.⁷¹ (One problem complicating research is that the LTTE rarely comments or accepts responsibility. The government, on the other hand, tends to over attribute.)

Furthermore, Al Qaeda's actions are hard to explain in terms of competition with rivals. Yoram Schweitzer is more convincing in arguing that Al Qaeda's ultimate goal is to pressure the West into changing its policies toward the Muslim world, and to that end the organization deliberately promotes suicide terrorism in order to become a role model for Islamic militancy worldwide.⁷² Sacrificing one's life has deliberately been made into the exclusive symbol of global jihad, intended to inspire imitation in affiliate groups and thus augment organizational resources. It furthers transnational cooperation, coordination, and unity of purpose, not local competition.

If suicide attacks are effective in either or both of these ways, why are they infrequent? Kalyvas and Sanchez-Cuenca note that suicide attacks can be counterproductive if they kill civilians indiscriminately. They suggest that international audiences regard suicide bombings as "particularly repugnant."⁷³ They conclude that "the trend in suicide bombing that has been observed in the early years of the twenty-first century may be more of a temporary aberration than a sign of things to come."⁷⁴ Hafez contributes a

⁶⁶ Ibid., 100.

⁶⁷ Reuter, *My Life is a Weapon*, 159. Pape, *Dying to Win*, 139–40.

⁶⁸ Bloom, *Dying to Kill*, 217.

⁶⁹ Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism*, 73, 242.

⁷⁰ Pape, *Dying to Win*, 254, Appendix I.

⁷¹ Hopgood, "Tamil Tigers, 1987–2002," in Gambetta, ed., *Making Sense*, 50.

⁷² Schweitzer has also constructed his own database at the Jaffe Center for Strategic Studies at Tel Aviv University. Atran, too, has a separate database.

⁷³ Kalyvas and Sanchez-Cuenca, "Killing Without Dying," in Gambetta, *Making Sense*, 218.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 232.

practical discussion of restraint during the first Palestinian intifada: it was difficult to acquire weapons; it was easy to attack Israeli military forces because they were omnipresent; Palestinian casualty rates were moderate; the public lacked access to news coverage; and the PLO provided effective leadership.⁷⁵ To generalize, lack of resources for high levels of destruction combined with ample opportunity for low-level and low-risk resistance, an absence of inflammatory rhetoric, and control over the use of violence by local authorities inhibited suicide terrorism.

The Issue of Timing

Is suicide terrorism a weapon of last resort? Pape says that it is not the province of “tiny bands of ordinary terrorists” but of national liberation movements that have failed at guerrilla warfare.⁷⁶ Bloom asserts that “non-state actors tend to resort to atrocities in the second iteration (or more) of conflict after the other strategies have failed to yield the desired results, and when faced with a hurting stalemate.”⁷⁷ However, Gambetta counters that the last resort hypothesis does not apply universally.⁷⁸

In some cases, such as the Chechen resistance, suicide terrorism did appear to be a desperate last measure.⁷⁹ Similarly, Hafez argues that Palestinian suicide terrorism followed the low-intensity violence of the first intifada.⁸⁰ Note, however, that the point at which Palestinians began suicide attacks is disputed. It could be that suicide attacks began in 1993 (according to Pedahzur, Shay, and Hafez) or it could be later, in April of 1994 (Pape).⁸¹

Pedahzur finds that both the LTTE and PKK “committed suicide attacks in situations where they felt powerless or were pushed into a corner, most often as a result of protracted military pressure.”⁸² However, Hopgood sees the LTTE’s actions as a strategic decision—a way to reach difficult targets and a response to the government’s military offensives—and not a last resort.

⁷⁵ Hafez, *Manufacturing Human Bombs*, 53–57.

⁷⁶ Pape, *Dying to Win*, 93.

⁷⁷ Bloom, *Dying to Kill*, 89. With regard to last resort, she distinguishes between on-battlefield and off-battlefield use; in the latter, suicide attacks are ends in themselves rather than a last resort tactic of desperation. This premise requires further explanation.

⁷⁸ Gambetta, ed., *Making Sense*, 261.

⁷⁹ See Kalyvas and Sanchez-Cuenca, “Killing Without Dying,” in Gambetta, *Making Sense*, 218. They suggest that the timing is evidence of recognition of the method’s counterproductiveness, not its effectiveness. Suicide attacks were a sign that the Chechens were losing the war.

⁸⁰ Hafez, *Manufacturing Human Bombs*, 53.

⁸¹ April 1993 according to Pedahzur and Shay. See Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism*, 54–55 and Shay, *The Shabids*, 52. Hafez lists the first attack as September 1993. See Hafez, *Manufacturing Human Bombs*, 79. Shay says that before April 1993 there were several unsuccessful attempts, which he does not include. See Shay, *The Shabids*, 88. Pedahzur notes that Hamas publicly advocated their use as early as 1989. See Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism*, 55. Ricolfi notes some sporadic attacks earlier. See Luca Ricolfi, “Palestinians, 1981–2003,” in Gambetta, ed., *Making Sense*, 11, 77–129.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 96.

There are other well-known cases where suicide attacks did not seem to be a last ditch measure after alternatives failed. For example, it is most likely that Hezbollah launched its campaign with suicide attacks in 1983, a year after the Israeli invasion, although, yet again, the facts are unclear. Many accounts (for example, Pedahzur, Pape, and Ricolfi) list the first suicide attack in Lebanon as a car bombing of the Iraqi Embassy in 1981 (although Pape says that Hezbollah's first attack was in 1982). Yet Nasra Hassan, who has researched the case for a forthcoming book, finds the evidence still inconclusive as to whether it was a suicide attack at all.⁸³ Ricolfi also says that the Israeli military headquarters in Beirut was bombed in 1982, killing 75 soldiers and 15 Palestinian prisoners.⁸⁴ Shay recounts: "The first suicide attack perpetrated by the Hizballah against an Israeli target was on November 4, 1983 when a car bomb driven by a suicide terrorist exploded near the IDF headquarters in Tyre."⁸⁵ It killed 28 soldiers and 33 detainees.⁸⁶ Pedahzur agrees with Shay.⁸⁷

The authors' discussion of the onset of Al Qaeda violence is also extremely problematic. In 1995 and 1996, the bombings of two American military installations in Saudi Arabia made a large impact on American policy. Bloom, Pape, and Pedahzur count both as suicide attacks. Pedahzur blames Al Qaeda for the first attack; Bloom blames them for the second;⁸⁸ and Pape attributes both to them. If contemporary press reports and government documents are right, neither was a suicide attack.⁸⁹ Only the first might plausibly be linked to Al Qaeda. The second, the Khobar Towers bombing, was the work of Saudi Hezbollah and connected to Iran and to Hezbollah in Lebanon. It proved a major impediment to Bill Clinton's administration's effort to improve relations with Iran. It is most likely that the suicide bombings of the embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 initiated Al Qaeda's offensive against American targets.

In Iraq, suicide tactics and insurgency have been simultaneous, not sequential. Suicide attacks are also on the rise in Afghanistan, associated with the resurgence of the Taliban. In 2005, there were 27, and in 2006, 139 such incidents.⁹⁰

⁸³ Nasra Hassan, personal communication.

⁸⁴ Ricolfi, "Palestinians," in Gambetta, ed., *Making Sense*, 86–87.

⁸⁵ Shay, *The Shabids*, 41.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁸⁷ Pedhahzur, *Suicide Terrorism*, 48.

⁸⁸ Bloom, *Dying to Kill*, 166.

⁸⁹ Elaine Sciolino, *New York Times*, 14 November 1995. She reported that Clinton administration officials said that the 1995 bomb, placed in a van, was detonated by remote control. Douglas Jehl, *New York Times*, 16 November 1995. He quotes the American Ambassador as saying that the device was set off by a timer. Steven Erlanger, *New York Times*, 27 June 1996. He quotes eye witnesses who said that the driver of the truck that carried the bomb in the Khobar Towers attack fled in an accompanying car. The U.S. government's annual report, *Patterns of Global Terrorism*, does not refer to either as a suicide attack.

⁹⁰ *New York Times*, 17 January 2007.

SOCIAL SUPPORT

Suicide attacks are not generally supposed to occur in the absence of public support for them. This assumption guides the U.S. war of ideas, which stresses public diplomacy as a component of the global war on terrorism. However, Kalyvas and Sanchez-Cuenca argue that an organization's sensitivity to public opinion varies. They propose that suicide terrorism occurs when there is minimal or maximal popular support, thus where there is dependency or indifference, not in intermediate cases.

A key question is how religion affects support. The burning issue today, of course, is the relationship between Islam and suicidal violence, framed as martyrdom. Other than Israeli and Shay, the authors reject the idea that religion alone is a necessary or sufficient cause for suicide terrorism.

In Lebanon, for example, suicide attacks were not the exclusive province of Hezbollah. Secular political parties were equally engaged. Reuter describes 1980s Lebanon: "Religion, patriotism, and the willingness to sacrifice oneself can easily blend together when the challenge is to resist a foreign occupier of a different faith."⁹¹ Pape argues that it is not religious doctrine per se, but religious difference between occupier and occupied.⁹² "The taproot of suicide terrorism is nationalism," but it is inflamed by religious difference.⁹³ In such zero-sum conflicts, occupied populations support suicide terrorism because the consequences of a successful conquest by a foreign invader would be too sweeping. It is easy to demonize the enemy, killing enemy civilians is morally acceptable, and suicide can be framed as martyrdom.⁹⁴

Later Pape acknowledges that religious difference is not a "hard, necessary condition for suicide terrorism."⁹⁵ In its absence, terrorists will still be tempted because the technique works, but the campaigns will apparently be short, as in the case of the PKK versus Turkey. Pedahzur disagrees: the PKK's restraint was due not to religious affinity with Turks but to the PKK's ideological remoteness from its Kurdish constituency.⁹⁶ Turkish army offensives made the PKK unpopular. Bloom thinks that lenient Turkish policies moderated the suicide campaign.⁹⁷

Atran finds, however, that Salafi ideology is independently important to suicide terrorism.⁹⁸ He contends that Pape underestimates the influence of Salafism (in part because his analysis concluded in 2003, when both its

⁹¹ Reuter, *My Life is a Weapon*, 60.

⁹² Pape, *Dying to Win*, 22.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 79–80, 88–92.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 88–92.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 167.

⁹⁶ Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism*, 96.

⁹⁷ Bloom, *Dying to Kill*, 92.

⁹⁸ Atran, "The Moral Logic and Growth of Suicide Terrorism," 32–34.

appeal and the incidence of suicide attacks were growing rapidly). Atran also questions Pape's focus on Salafist ideology in the countries where terrorist groups might have originated (such as Morocco for the 2004 bombers in Spain), rather than its influence in diasporas.

Interpretation of the role of religion in the Sri Lankan case is also disputed. Hopgood contends that "religion is not a feature which can explain the emergence of SMs in the Tamil case."⁹⁹ "Given the absence of any powerful transcending political or religious ideology, and the ubiquitous statements of attachment only to the cause of national liberation, the best explanation for the adoption of SMs at the collective level is as a tactic in a wider military strategy for victory in a war of uneven force."¹⁰⁰ Pedahzur and Reuter agree with Hopgood.¹⁰¹ Pape attributes the LTTE's suicide terrorism to "fear of religious persecution" and contends that "the most prominent factor driving Tamil community support for individual self-sacrifice is fear of Buddhist extremism."¹⁰² This is despite the fact that "the LTTE is a secular group that disavows Tamil religious motivations as a driving force behind national resistance."¹⁰³ Pape argues, for example, that the LTTE's restraint toward Indian forces in Sri Lanka was due to a shared religion, although he admits that the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi was an exception.¹⁰⁴ Contemporary sectarian violence within the Muslim world, primarily in Iraq but also in Pakistan, raises more difficult questions about the role of religion. Are Sunni and Shia considered different religions? Would the Salafist takfiri strain of condemning fellow Sunnis as apostate qualify as a religious distinction? Why have Sunni factions used suicide attacks in Iraq when Shi'ite militias have not? Furthermore, if nationalist resistance to foreign occupation by a democracy is the cause of suicide terrorism, why is it that Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia and Ansar al-Sunnah are the main actors in Iraq? Why are most of the suicide bombers in Iraq foreign? Why is the tactic directed primarily against Shia civilians rather than the occupying military forces?

Another complication for understanding social support for suicide attacks is the question of what foreign occupation means. Bloom argues that an occupier's specific strategy, particularly whether or not the use of force causes excessive civilian casualties, helps determine whether suicide attacks resonate with a given population.¹⁰⁵ Pape is much more sweeping: it is the fact of occupation, not the degree of severity measured by civilian deaths.¹⁰⁶

⁹⁹ Hopgood, "Tamil Tigers, 1987–2002," in Gambetta, ed., *Making Sense*, 76.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 65–66.

¹⁰¹ Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism*, 24. Reuter, *My Life is a Weapon*, 13.

¹⁰² Pape, *Dying to Win*, 140, 146.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 151, 153–54.

¹⁰⁵ Bloom, *Dying to Kill*, 82, 91.

¹⁰⁶ Pape, *Dying to Win*, 69.

At one point, he specifies the presence of “heavy combat troops,”¹⁰⁷ yet later he contends that troops need not be physically present: American occupation can be either a military presence or “an explicit or widely understood security guarantee that could be implemented using its [American] forces in an adjacent country.”¹⁰⁸ He excludes advisers and joint training. In his view, Saudi Arabia, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Turkey, Afghanistan, and Uzbekistan qualify as territory occupied by the United States, but Jordan, Yemen, Pakistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan do not. He categorizes attacks on U.S. allies in the Iraq War as resistance to U.S. occupation. In fact, all attacks associated even loosely with Al Qaeda or with jihadism are defined as targeted against the United States (for example, attacks on tourist targets by Jemaah al Islamiya in Indonesia).

Atran is highly critical: “It is quite a stretch to identify the common thread as a secular struggle over foreign occupation of a homeland, unless ‘secular’ covers transcendent ideologies, ‘foreign occupation’ includes tourism, and ‘homeland’ expands to at least three continents.”¹⁰⁹ Goodwin also disagrees, arguing that the issue is not military occupation but U.S. support for unpopular local governments.¹¹⁰ Neither theory explains cases such as Bangladesh in 2005, which involved local opposition to local authority in the interest of instituting a different form of government.

Bloom suggests that social support depends not just on the nature of the occupation but also on “how the tactic [of suicide attacks] is used, against whom, and for what purpose,” particularly when “hatred for the other side is very high.”¹¹¹ When is hatred high? Bloom says that “the explanation is somewhat endogenous to the cases and results from a variety of personal, economic, structural and organizational issues” such as the “interplay of domestic politics and external factors like the ongoing conflict, a ‘hurting stalemate’ or the counter-terror strategies employed by the opposing side.” “The success of the strategy. . . will depend on the existing domestic political backdrop,” which “explains both how suicide terror becomes popular in some cases and why it is rejected or repudiated in others.”¹¹² She adds that suicide bombing spreads in countries where the population is receptive to terrorists targeting civilians, but this hypothesis cannot explain suicide attacks that do not target civilians or why non-suicide attacks on civilians would not be

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 79.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 108–9.

¹⁰⁹ Atran, “The Moral Logic,” *The Washington Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (Spring 2006): 134.

¹¹⁰ Goodwin, “What Do We Really,” *Sociological Forum* 21, no. 2 (June 2006): 322.

¹¹¹ Bloom, *Dying to Kill*, 81.

¹¹² Bloom, *Dying to Kill*, 90. In the Palestinian case, she refers to deadlock when the peace process appeared to be stalled. See *ibid.*, 25, 26, 28. For Sharon’s tactics of attacking civilians, see *ibid.*, 26–27. For the unpopularity and weakness of the Palestinian Authority and Arafat, see *ibid.*, 34. For economic hardship, see *ibid.*, 28. For lack of success with other tactics, see *ibid.*, 27. For an emphasis on martyrdom that captured the Palestinian imagination, see *ibid.*, 29.

equally gratifying and thus equally contagious.¹¹³ Furthermore, as Kalyvas and Sanchez-Cuenca emphasize, suicide attacks can occur where there is little to no popular support.

Pedahzur is more inclined to attribute support to deliberate cultivation by an organization rather than self-generated demand: "Social support for suicide terrorism...is very rarely a grass-roots phenomenon. In fact, it is a highly calculated top-down phenomenon."¹¹⁴ Nevertheless, he thinks that communities that have experienced a long and painful conflict with a more powerful enemy eventually react to perceived inferiority and the failure of other efforts by supporting suicide attacks.¹¹⁵ It is not so much religion as attitudes acceptant of death, stemming from hopelessness after long suffering.¹¹⁶ He stresses that political organizations give populations an outlet for expressing feelings of deprivation, injustice, despair and hostility. An enemy's brutal response reinforces these feelings.

Hamas deliberately framed suicide attacks in terms of a culture of martyrdom that was previously unfamiliar to Palestinian society. Hafez finds that Palestinians came to venerate martyrdom because of a "confluence of perceived threats and a sense of victimization."¹¹⁷ The public sought both revenge and empowerment in response to harsh Israeli actions. He also emphasizes that while Islam presented a cultural opportunity to frame suicide attacks as martyrdom, the failure of the secular Palestinian Authority (PA) and religious leaders to counter this framing gave Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad the political opening they sought. Like Khosrokhavar, Hafez is sharply critical of the PA's failure to halt or even to condemn attacks on Israeli civilians.

Oliver and Steinberg present a vivid picture of "the world of the suicide bomber" in Palestine.¹¹⁸ Their study of Hamas is memoir, rather than political analysis, focused on the scripts, rhetoric, texts, documents, posters, martyr cards, graffiti, video statements, and films that institutionalized and inspired a culture of martyrdom. They discuss a barrage of media, permeated by references to historical myths and narratives. They describe rituals and images as well as discourse (poems, songs, and speeches). They see striking fear in the enemy as an end in itself, not a path to a political objective.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 192.

¹¹⁴ Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism*, 159.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 31, 159.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 180. Some authors (for example, Pape) also note high rates of suicide in Sri Lanka, indicating a societal tolerance of death as a solution to problems.

¹¹⁷ Hafez, *Manufacturing Human Bombs*, 61.

¹¹⁸ Not all reactions to the work have been positive. See Lori A. Allen, Review of "Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism" and "Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror" and "The Road to Martyrs' Square: A Journey into the World of the Suicide Bomber," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 35, no. 2 (2006): 110–13. Reviewing this book, Allen calls it "an extended anti-Palestinian rant" that portrays "Palestinians as backwards, dirty, murderous and sadistic, offering no account of the history or presence of Israeli occupation."

Social support might be due to a variety of factors: religion, a mixture of religion and nationalism, foreign occupation in general (defined narrowly or broadly), specific practices of opposing governments (for example, excessive brutality and civilian casualties), deliberate cultivation by political organizations, the failure of other organizations to effectively counter the tactic, or long experience of suffering and deprivation (which could be related to the length and severity of the conflict and perhaps to the failure of alternatives). We do not know how much weight to accord each factor or how we might measure them.

INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPATION

Very few of those exposed to even the most intense pressures become suicide attackers. Schweitzer estimates that there were a total of 1,300 individual suicide terrorists between 1983 and July 2005.¹¹⁹ Why would an individual choose to die killing others for a political cause? Such behavior is exceptional rather than routine. Small numbers of recruits may be one of the most important explanations for the comparatively low frequency of suicide attacks, despite their notoriety. Analysis of individual motivation leads to comparisons in other contexts; for example, with the Japanese kamikaze, who left behind extensive correspondence, and with individuals who have practiced self-immolation, or simply with those who have died heroic deaths in battle.¹²⁰ The search for a profile of the suicide attacker seems to be as hopeless as the search for a typical terrorist. Organizations channel diverse personal motivations.

Clearly the act is not just about dying and killing. The expectation of gaining status and respect as a martyr for the cause is important, so that individual action is linked to anticipation of both popular approval and collective political success. Gambetta, Pedahzur, Pape, and others refer to altruism. Sacrifice for the cause is both personally redemptive and a mark of honor, a way of becoming a hero and part of an exalted elite, as much as a way of seeking death. It involves an aspiration to live on after death and to give lasting meaning to an otherwise insignificant or disappointing life. In some cases, the choice to become a martyr is followed by elaborate rituals that reinforce commitment and prevent backsliding.

Pedahzur finds the individual level too complex to explain in psychological terms. Elster also concludes that attackers may not act out of a stable set of motivations based on beliefs and that if they do, we may not be able

¹¹⁹ Schweitzer, in "Al-Qaeda and the Global Epidemic," in Pedahzur, ed., *Root Causes*, 134.

¹²⁰ See Peter Hill, "Kamikaze, 1953–5" and Michael Biggs, "Dying Without Killing: Self-Immolations, 1963–2002" in Gambetta, ed., *Making Sense* and Reuter's chapter "Bushido Replaces *Allahu akbar*: The Japanese Kamikaze," in Reuter, *My Life is a Weapon*. It is curious that none of the authors reviewed here discusses the IRA or Turkish hunger strikers.

to identify them.¹²¹ Motivations are highly context-dependent, and critical information is lacking. Pedahzur categorizes suicide attackers as either members of an organization or social network or volunteers for a specific mission. The first type is motivated by commitment to the group and its cause, and the second is driven by a personal or family crisis.¹²² Isolation, indoctrination, and peer pressure also figure in decisions.¹²³ Suicide attackers do not have to be highly religious or ideological or to have been active members of an organization. Palestinian suicide bombers of the 1990s were likely to be individuals devoted to the organization and its goals, whereas after 2000 individuals volunteered because of the acute political crisis.¹²⁴ After 2002, many attacks were local initiatives, not directed by the leadership, due to intense Israeli pressure.¹²⁵

Only in Sri Lanka was there a professional cadre of Black Tigers trained and prepared for suicide or other high-risk missions, according to Pedahzur, who says that “the majority of terrorist organizations do not recruit candidates specifically for suicide missions.”¹²⁶ As a chosen elite, they are carefully screened. In his view, mental preparation is key in this case.¹²⁷ As in all group situations, socialization and peer pressure are relevant. Hopgood also describes the careful process by which Black Tigers are formed.

Hafez offers propositions drawn from the Palestinian case, which are potentially applicable elsewhere.¹²⁸ Religious redemption is linked to identity and supported by the following: the concept of jihad as individual obligation, selective references to religious texts, historical narratives based on the life of Muhammad, euphemistic labeling (suicide becomes martyrdom), and the use of ritual and ceremony. The martyr’s videotaped statements stress redemption, both personal and collective, the necessity of martyrdom, and reward in the afterlife. Hafez stresses that nationalism is also critical, interwoven with religion and community solidarity; the individual intends his or her act to arouse the consciousness of the people.

Khosrokhavar agrees: “Martyrdom in Iran, Algeria and Palestine obeys an internal logic born of the frustrated ambition to have a nation whose existence has been denied.”¹²⁹ Religion can frame loss of dignity as a sin, and then offer redemption through martyrdom.¹³⁰ Like Pedahzur, he emphasizes

¹²¹ Elster, “Motivations and Beliefs,” in Gambetta, ed., *Making Sense*, 256–57.

¹²² Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism*, 125–51.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 181.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 153–54.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 170.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 170.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 171.

¹²⁸ See also Hafez, “Dying to be Martyrs: The Symbolic Dimension of Suicide Terrorism,” in Pedahzur, ed., *Root Causes*, 54–80.

¹²⁹ Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers*, 109.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 133.

loss of dignity and personal or family crisis.¹³¹ In Palestine, he notes that the degradation of everyday life becomes intolerable. Constant Israeli military presence, boredom, anxiety, and the impossibility of leading a normal life combine: “The explosive mixture of prison, exile, living on the run, the instability of life and the constant need to keep moving to avoid being arrested. . . give rise to an extremism that can even overcome fear.”¹³² The alternative to humiliation is utopia,¹³³ and Oliver and Steinberg describe some intended bombers as ecstatic about their fate. He adds to the mix an element of defiance—suicide attacks show Israelis that they are vulnerable.

Thus, in explaining Palestinian actions, social scientists seem not to have gone far beyond what journalist Barbara Victor calls the “fatal cocktail”: religious doctrine that promises eternal life, deprivation that offers no hope, nationalism, and the hardships of living under a military occupation.¹³⁴

Khosrokhavar also addresses the more disturbing case of Al Qaeda or Islamist inspired suicide outside of conflict zones. Here the experiential intensity of the Palestinian, Chechen, or Sri Lankan cases is absent. Discrimination, while real, is milder and the grievance felt represents a more abstract and mediated form of identification. Why, for example, would British citizens who have never been to Iraq or Palestine blow themselves up on London buses? Why would foreigners travel to Iraq or Afghanistan to become suicide bombers? Globalization, the tensions of diaspora life, and crises in Muslim societies in the Middle East and the former Soviet Union contribute to identification with a “transnational neo-umma” or community of believers that is imaginary and virtual.¹³⁵ Desperate young men are motivated by feelings of humiliation, which may be “humiliation by proxy” generated by media coverage of conflicts involving Muslims, particularly in Palestine. They share hatred of perceived Western arrogance, immorality, and hostility toward the Islamic world. As in Palestine, the act of martyrdom is also an act of defiance in the face of an enemy’s vast superiority. Gambetta suggests that the Islamic tradition of aggressive martyrdom helps to rationalize suicide attacks and remove constraints that might otherwise operate.¹³⁶

Holmes argues that non-religious motives may have driven the nineteen perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks. In Mohammed Atta’s behavior, Holmes sees a possible mix of personal frustration, political protest, and religious conviction.¹³⁷ Marc Sageman also argues that the 9/11 leaders were not particularly

¹³¹ Ibid., 113.

¹³² Ibid., 116.

¹³³ Ibid., 119.

¹³⁴ Victor, *Army of Roses*, 117–18.

¹³⁵ Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers*, 149–223, esp. chap. 3. Some of his findings are based on interviews in French prisons. The chapter focuses particularly on Britain and France, with some attention to the U.S. and to converts to Islam.

¹³⁶ Gambetta, ed., *Making Sense*, 293–95.

¹³⁷ Stephen Holmes, “Al Qaeda,” in Gambetta, ed., *Making Sense*, 140.

religious when they became radicalized.¹³⁸ Overall, only 13 percent of the 394 jihadists that he analyzed attended madrassas. Along with Khosrokhavar, Sageman sees the global Salafi jihad as a diaspora phenomenon derived from “loneliness, alienation, marginalization, underemployment, and exclusion from the highest status in the new or original society.”¹³⁹ Individuals drift to mosques for companionship and then develop a collective religious identity. Friendship and kinship bonds predate ideological commitment. Personal resentment is translated via Islamist doctrine into hatred of society and devotion to the group. Then, as Schweitzer noted, martyrdom becomes the ultimate test of personal conviction.

Are women a special case? Victor argues that Palestinian women suicide bombers suffered personal problems that made their lives unbearable. Marginalized in Palestinian society and denied appropriate social roles, they were then recruited by male relatives who pushed them to redeem the family name. A cynical leadership exploited their despair. Bloom agrees that Palestinian women were empowered by their participation.¹⁴⁰

Reuter says the opposite about the LTTE, which is sixty percent women in its special commando units.¹⁴¹ He thinks the explanation is practical; the few men of fighting age are needed for combat operations. Women are better at concealing bombs than fighting. He accepts that female PKK bombers might have sought liberation from a conservative society.¹⁴²

Bloom refers to women suicide bombers in the Middle East, Sri Lanka, Turkey, Chechnya, and, oddly, Colombia.¹⁴³ In general, she sees men as motivated by religion or nationalism, but, like Victor, she attributes women’s behavior to personal reasons.¹⁴⁴ Bloom comments that it is striking that “so many of these women have been raped or sexually abused in the previous conflict either by the representatives of the state or by the insurgents themselves.”¹⁴⁵ The evidence presented in support of this charge is weak. It consists of a rumor reported by a senior advisor to Russian President Putin and undocumented charges of rape in Sri Lanka.¹⁴⁶ The other cases—Palestine, Lebanon, Turkey—are not substantiated.

¹³⁸ Marc Sageman, “Islam and Al Qaeda,” in Pedahzur, ed., *Root Causes*, 122–31, esp. 126.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 128.

¹⁴⁰ Bloom, *Dying to Kill*, 147.

¹⁴¹ Reuter, *My Life is a Weapon*, 160.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 164–65.

¹⁴³ Bloom, *Dying to Kill*, 143. As evidence of this assertion she cites a *New York Times* article that makes no mention of Colombia.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 145.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 143.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 158–64. Bloom claims that the LTTE killed two potential interviewees while they were en route to talk to her. See *Ibid.*, 236. Much other correspondence and interviews that she cites are anonymous. However, Christian Caryl accepts as fact the assertion that Rajiv Gandhi’s assassin had been gang-raped by Sri Lankan soldiers. See Caryl, “Why They Do It,” *The New York Review of Books*, September 22, 2005. Pape also refers to women suicide bombers in Sri Lanka as reportedly or believed to be victims of rape. See Pape, *Dying to Win*, 226, 230. Sexual violence has been prevalent in the Sri Lankan conflict,

Speckhard and Ahkmedova dispute both Bloom's and Victor's arguments.¹⁴⁷ After conducting systematic interviews in Chechnya, they conclude that "the importance of traumatic loss and avenging deaths of family members...likely plays the greatest role in women's decisions to become 'martyrs.'"¹⁴⁸ Motivations for men and women are the same. Despite often lurid Russian press reports, Chechen women did not act in order to redeem their honor after being raped, nor were they coerced. Speckhard also interviewed the same Palestinian families that Victor did and found no support for the claim that women became suicide bombers because they were unable to fulfill expected social roles or because they had been disgraced.

Individuals are motivated differently. There is no single pattern. The organization that recruits and directs the suicide bomber remains the most important agent.

POLICY PRESCRIPTIONS

Considering the level of disagreement about the nature of the problem, it would be unreasonable to expect a clear consensus about what to do. To Pape the answer is simple and entirely consistent with his diagnosis of the problem: offshore balancing. The United States should withdraw from foreign military occupations, particularly of countries with different religions (presumably including abandoning security guarantees). However, if weak oppositions launch suicide attacks because they are effective in compelling foreign powers to retreat, surely withdrawing rewards them and provides incentives for future use. Pape says that it does not matter that Al Qaeda's leadership would interpret withdrawal from Iraq as appeasement, but Bin Laden frequently refers to Lebanon and Somalia (and the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan) as encouraging precedents for his anti-American campaign.¹⁴⁹ Most analysts think that a major goal of Al Qaeda in Iraq is to create another base to replace Afghanistan. This solution would simply leave Iraqi victims to their fate, since there is no reason to think that an American withdrawal, especially a precipitate one, would end sectarian violence. Hafez disagrees with the withdrawal option in the Palestinian case. He thinks that the Palestinian public learned the wrong lessons from Israel's withdrawal from south Lebanon in 2000 (and so, too, did Hezbollah) and concludes

but I can find no concrete evidence of a link with suicide bombings. See www.tamilnation.org. A similar conclusion can be found in Arjuna Gunawardena, "Female Black Tigers: A Different Breed of Cat?" in Yoram Schweitzer, ed., *Female Suicide Bombers: Dying for Equality?* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, August 2006).

¹⁴⁷ Anne Speckhard and Khapta Ahkmedova, "The Making of a Martyr: Chechen Suicide Terrorism," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29, no. 5 (2006): 429–92, esp. 468–77. On the other hand, the essays on Palestinian women in Schweitzer, ed., *Female Suicide Bombers* tend to support Victor's interpretation.

¹⁴⁸ Speckhard and Ahkmedova, "The Making of a Martyr," *Studies in Conflict*, 468.

¹⁴⁹ Pape, *Dying to Win*, 249.

that granting major concessions is a mistake. Furthermore, what are we to make of the fact that suicide attacks have ended in Chechnya although Russia has not withdrawn? In any case, the United States is not likely to abandon its commitments to Saudi Arabia, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Turkey, Afghanistan, and Uzbekistan, as Pape's prescription would require.

The authors mostly agree that governments are not defenseless against the tactic. They can protect their home territory. Pape considers Israel's abandoning the Gaza Strip and building physical barriers to be an "optimum strategy" and he recommends accordingly that the United States augment border and immigration controls. Hafez also thinks that governments can erect better defenses, even though they are costly, citing Israel's impressive successes in foiling suicide attacks. Hafez thinks Israel's construction of the wall should be halted because it is a provocation. Pedahzur and Shay agree that much can be done physically to impede suicide tactics. Shay especially recommends border protection and the establishment of buffer zones. Davis, however, warns of the potentially negative effect of defensive measures, as she cites the alienation produced by overzealous Federal Bureau of Investigation tactics toward American Muslims.

Changing popular attitudes to reduce support for suicide attacks is another solution that is often proposed. Such a response would involve political processes to resolve conflicts and ameliorate the social and economic conditions that produce anger, humiliation, and despair (see Bloom, Hafez, and Pedahzur). In particular, the Palestinian conflict is a key source of grievance among Muslims worldwide and a resolution would have a moderating effect extending well beyond Palestine. Hafez thinks that ending the Palestinian-Israeli conflict would erode the cultural underpinnings of suicide attacks there. He argues that the international community must be committed to the peace process and condition assistance to both parties on their working for a negotiated settlement. In his view, the United States above all should stay out of cultural debates and avoid calls for educational reform in the Muslim world. At the same time, Palestinian political and religious authorities should make every effort to delegitimize suicide attacks. Khosrokhavar agrees that it is up to Muslim thinkers to challenge radical Islam and that revitalization of thought and discourse requires democratic openings. "The current obstacles to the democratic opening up of Muslim societies are the conflicts in the Middle East, Kashmir, and Chechnya, the presence of the nepotistic or even corrupt ruling classes in their midst that are monopolizing power and repressing the democratic demands of the emerging new classes."¹⁵⁰ Schweitzer also argues that the answer to Al Qaeda is to provide an ideological alternative, a moderate and pragmatic interpretation of Islam, which cannot be imposed from the outside.

¹⁵⁰ Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers*, 228–29.

Davis blames American foreign policies, referring to support for Israel, a military presence in Saudi Arabia, alliances with corrupt and despotic leaders in the Middle East, earlier economic sanctions against Iraq, and exploitation of oil resources.¹⁵¹ She criticizes American policy for its inflammatory rhetoric, inept efforts to win over Muslim public opinion, and inadequate attention to intelligence needs.

Even if it could be accomplished, would a reduction in popular support end suicide attacks? Unfortunately we have far too many counter-examples to be able to assume that organizations cannot or will not act without public approval. If change does occur, it will be gradual and suicide attacks or the potential for them will be with us for some time.

In the immediate, what should governments do? With the exceptions of Shay and Israeli, the authors considered here are generally critical of offensive military responses to the challenge of suicide attacks, whether at home or abroad. Gambetta, for example, calls for “astute policing” as opposed to war.¹⁵² Davis faults the United States for over-reliance on military means, as does Pedahzur, who also criticizes Israel, Russia, Sri Lanka, and Turkey.

Once governments are committed to a military response, as these countries are, how should they manage the conduct of operations? Shay thinks that militaries can ensure their safety reasonably well, so the issue is protecting civilians by disrupting or deterring attacks. Bloom and Pedahzur stress the need to avoid civilian deaths or collateral damage. Hafez criticizes Israel's excessive use of military force in the first months of the Al Aqsa intifada. Pedahzur finds that targeted assassinations are particularly counterproductive and empirical research by Kaplan, Mintz, Mishal, and Samban supports his conclusion.¹⁵³ Their analysis suggests that preventive arrests reduced suicide bombings inside Israel after March 2002, while targeted killings only increased the terror stock, that is, they sparked recruitment. Interestingly enough, they also find that killing specific terror suspects caused more of an increase in recruits than killing civilians. On the other hand, Gupta and Mundra conclude that acts of political provocation best predicted future suicide attacks and they warn that Palestinians interpreted the building of the wall as provocation rather than self-defense.¹⁵⁴ It is worth recalling in this context that the death of Zarqawi in 2006 did not reduce suicide terrorism in Iraq.

Whether or not to negotiate with the organizers of attacks (as opposed to isolating them from their base) is a controversial question. Hafez calls for creating disincentives for organizers and offering alternatives to violence as

¹⁵¹ Davis, *Martyrs*, chaps. 8 and 9.

¹⁵² Gambetta, ed., *Making Sense*, 299.

¹⁵³ Edward H. Kaplan, Alex Mintz, Shaul Mishal, and Claudio Samban, “What Happened to Suicide Bombings in Israel? Insights from a Terror-Stock Model,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 28, no. 3 (2005): 225–36.

¹⁵⁴ Gupta and Mundra, “Suicide Bombing,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 591.

well as options for exit. He thinks, for example, that Israel was mistaken to insist on unconditional surrender when Hamas offered cease-fires in 2001 and 2003: "Such a victory is not possible against fragmented and decentralized militant groups living among a sympathetic population with national, regional, and international support."¹⁵⁵ On the other hand, Shay concludes that a negotiated solution is only possible with secular organizations. They are willing to adopt alternative methods, which Islamic organizations are not. He calls for "an ongoing and uncompromising battle, while employing every available defensive and offensive means."¹⁵⁶

CONCLUSIONS

These studies have not produced a consensus or even clearly demarcated schools of thought, but they amply demonstrate that the process involves complicated and contingent social, psychological, and political interactions. There is no longer any need to introduce an analysis of suicide attack by explaining to the uninitiated that it is not rooted in psychopathology or fanaticism or indeed in any single cause such as deprivation, religious belief, or frustration. It is an adaptable and controllable tactic. It has an instrumental value for an organization. Despite impressions of ubiquity, its popularity and effectiveness are limited. Very few individuals actually become suicide bombers. Based on these studies, my estimate is that the total number of suicide attacks worldwide since the 1980s is under 1,500, although figures from Iraq increase by the day. The number of terrorist incidents in the MITP Terrorism Knowledge Base is over 20,000 (and this total does not include domestic incidents before 1998).

Even though the numbers are low, data remain problematic. There are multiple incompatible datasets rather than a common standard, and not all are accessible to other researchers. References to the facts can be inconsistent and contradictory. Assertions are not always supported by evidence. Researchers need better information and more coordination in order to understand the phenomenon, and to have confidence in their findings.

Even with perfect information, however, we still need to develop better explanations of cause and effect. Two changes of approach might help. First, most accounts do not systematically compare suicide to non-suicide attacks committed by the same organization.¹⁵⁷ Many of the reasons and motivations proposed for suicide attacks apply equally to violence that does not require the death of the perpetrator. None of the groups employing suicide tactics

¹⁵⁵ Hafez, *Manufacturing Human Bombs*, 71.

¹⁵⁶ Shay, *The Shabids*, 221.

¹⁵⁷ For a start on this task, see Bruce Hoffman and Gordon H. McCormick, "Terrorism, Signaling, and Suicide Attack," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 27, no. 4 (2004): 243–81.

uses them exclusively. Compared to other methods, is a suicide attack necessarily more effective than a non-suicide attack in satisfying popular demands for revenge or competing with rivals? Why would suicide bombings be more resonant than other types of bombings, rocket attacks, shootings, beheadings, kidnappings, torture, or snipers? The urban bombing campaign of the *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN) during the Algerian war did not involve suicide attacks, but it was effective in provoking the French and inspiring Algerians. Why would a state be more sensitive to the cause of casualties than to the volume? The assertion that suicide tactics are a superior demonstration of resolve and elicit pity and admiration as well as shock and horror is not implausible, but it is not supported by comparative empirical research. Here analyses need to do more to account for the role of the news media (especially television, the internet, and videos) as an amplifier of reactions. Undoubtedly publicity is an incentive.

In terms of analyzing audience reactions, most attention has focused on constituencies, not adversaries. The issue is not just how opposition organizations frame the message of suicide tactics, but how those who are the object of coercion frame them and thus receive them. Why are audiences swayed by people who will simultaneously die and kill for a political cause? The public, the policy community, scholars, and journalists seem much less affected by the two acts if they are undertaken separately. What is the source of our fascination? Why does the combined mode of violence seem distinctive and unique, making it apparently more effective than other forms in signaling superior motivation and spreading fear? Why should we be astonished by or afraid of adversaries who claim to demonstrate that they do not fear death? Surely the answer has to do as much with our own predispositions as with those of the community that produced the suicide bomber.

Comparing suicide to non-suicide attacks would also contribute to explaining timing and sequencing. We do not yet understand onset and duration. If suicide tactics are effective in coercing the adversary and outbidding rivals, why are they thought to be a last resort? Why not the first resort? Why are some campaigns brief (PKK) and others prolonged (LTTE)? The tactic cannot be explained independently of its strategic context, meaning its place in the group's overall conception of ends and means as well as its role in government-challenger interactions in a given environment. We know little of the details of group decision making and planning.¹⁵⁸ Suicide tactics cover a continuum: they can be an integral part of insurgency or civil war (Iraq, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka) or isolated attacks on the inhabitants of the capitals of major powers (Britain and Spain) or tourist centers in Asia or the

¹⁵⁸ One effort in this respect is Alex Mintz, J. Tyson Chatagnier, and David J. Brulé, "Being bin Laden: An Applied Decision Analysis Procedure for Analyzing and Predicting Terrorists [sic] Decisions," in Pedahzur, ed., *Root Causes*, 152–78. They conclude that bin Laden's decisions are determined by concern for his personal prestige, honor, and standing among the public.

Middle East. As it stands, analyses are inconsistent in linking the sequencing of attacks to specific actions by governments or changes in public attitudes and there is little empirical evidence for the relationships that are frequently suggested (for example, that suicide attacks diminish when the public disapproves, competition among groups decreases, or occupiers withdraw from a disputed territory).

A second analytical problem is over-aggregation. The tactic is usually treated as though it were a single unified method of violence. All types of suicide attacks are merged together, despite their serving different instrumental purposes: destroying military targets, assassinating public figures (both opponents and collaborators), killing enemy civilians, or massacring co-religionists in factional struggles. The users range from tiny groups to large and complex organizations such as Hamas. Is their common feature, the death of the perpetrator (more or less willing or intended, depending on the definition), sufficient to produce conceptual coherence? What explains variations within the phenomenon? For instance, why do some groups target civilians and others military assets or individual officials? Why should the manner of violence matter more than the target or the purpose? It is by no means clear that all varieties of suicide attack would have the same origins and outcomes.

Perhaps governments do not need a specific political response to suicide tactics. They could concentrate simply on guarding against all manner of acquiring, transporting and detonating explosive devices broadly construed; a task that will vary according to where attacks are expected to occur. Suicide attacks are no longer surprising, even in Western democracies. At the most basic, they increase the opportunities for attacking an adversary and governments will find it hard to prevent all opportunities. The response should be attentive to the place of suicide tactics in an organization's overall strategy and employ a broad conception of the threat. Governments also need to be alert to substitution effects. Preventing suicide attacks could stimulate adaptation and innovation, not the abandonment of violence. Governments should also look to the future, in that the purpose and instigation of suicide attacks might change. Today's threat stems from the powerful association between jihadist beliefs and suicide tactics, but radical Islamists do not own the method.