Suicide Terrorists: Are They Suicidal?

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**Headnote**

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Interest in understanding the psychological and psychiatric underpinnings of suicide terrorism has increased dramatically in recent years. Suicide attacks are a deadly practice most commonly carried out by extremist and fundamentalist groups (Atran, 2003; Dale, 1988; Salib, 2003; Silke, 2003). The scale of the acts of suicide terrorism on September 11, 2001, ensured that the devastating results of such attacks are now viewed as world-wide phenomena and have deeply affected many of those who live in western societies (Lerner, Gonzalez, Small, & Fischhoff, 2003). Unfortunately, suicide terrorism appears to be on the rise across the globe (Pape, 2003, 2005) and understandably the academic community, across disciplinary boundaries, has been galvanized into action to try to elucidate the key factors that underlie such violent and hostile behavior. Recently it has been suggested that (a) suicide terrorists are similar to altruistic suicides, and that (b) suicide terrorists, owing to their altruistic nature, share similar characteristics to others who die by suicide (i.e., not just altruistic type suicides) (Leenaars & Wenckstern, 2004).

It is widely acknowledged that there is no such thing as a typical suicide. Suicides occur as a result of diverse interacting social (e.g., unemployment), personal (e.g., relationship problems), and clinical (e.g., depression) factors. Clearly, this complexity makes both the investigation and treatment of suicidal behavior a very challenging task and leading researchers in the area have suggested that the study of subgroups of the suicidal population is a useful future direction for research (Hawton & van Heeringen, 2000). So, to some extent, it is understandable that some researchers wish to treat suicide terrorists as a subgroup of the general suicide population.

The aim of this study was to review the available literature to try to determine the degree to which suicide terrorists are actually suicidal, and to examine whether such terrorists should be considered as a subgroup of the general suicide population. Accordingly, a comprehensive literature review was conducted. The following databases were searched to identify papers that had investigated suicide terrorism: PubMed (1950-September 2005), Psychlnfo (1872-September 2005), and Web of Science (Science Citation Index Expanded 1945-September 2005; Social Sciences Citation Index 1956-September 2005; Arts and Humanities Citation Index 1975-September 2005). The following search terms were used "suicid\* and bomb\*," "suicid\* and terror\*," "suicid\* and altrui\*," "suicid\* and marty\*," and "suicid\* and attack\*." An Internet search was also conducted using Google Scholar to identify related materials pertinent to this issue using the search terms specified above. Reference lists of articles identified in the database searches were checked.

The search of the available literature yielded few empirical studies of suicide terrorism, which is understandable given the practical difficulties involved with studying the behavior of these individuals. Just five of the published reports uncovered were empirical studies that had examined suicide terrorism in a direct way with human participants involved with suicide terrorist activity (Fields, Elbedour, & Hein, 2002; Hassan, 2001; Meloy, 2004; Post, Sprinzak, & Denny, 2003; Schbley, 2003), and only three of these studies appeared in peer-reviewed journals (Meloy, 2004; Post et al., 2003; Schbley, 2003). Brief details about the five empirical studies identified in the review are found in Table 1.

As most of the very scarce evidence uncovered during the literature search related to suicide terrorism in Palestine or by Islamic fundamentalists around the world, the scope of this article is focused on this type of suicide attack (though there is likely to be overlap with other types of suicide terrorism-such as those carried out by the Tamil Tigers). Moreover, this focus is also warranted given that the attention of scholars around the globe has understandably turned to uncovering the psychology of Islamic fundamentalist groups (Victoroff, 2005). In the sections that follow, a number of important issues which emerged repeatedly in the suicide terrorism literature are discussed in relation to existing knowledge about, and theoretical perspectives on, suicidal behavior. These issues, along with the similarities and differences observed between terrorist suicides and other suicides, are summarized in Table 2.

IS SUICIDE TERRORISM AN EXAMPLE OF ALTRUISTIC SUICIDE?

Recently, some authors have suggested that suicide terrorists should be considered to be the same as other suicides-especially altruistic suicides (suicide based on sacrificing oneself for the good of others) (Leenaars & Wenckstern, 2004; Stack, 2004). Leenaars and Wenckstern note that "suicidology is not alone in wrestling with the question, 'who are the altruistic suicides?'-the suicide bomber, the terrorist, the martyr, the soldier who dies to save his friends, the Hindu woman who climbs on the funeral pyre to be with her husband forever" (p. 131). They highlight the paucity of evidence relating to altruistic suicide (they identified just one paper-a qualitative study by Park [2004]), and used evidence (two martyrdom notes) from that study to claim that these notes were the same as other suicide notes they have studied. However, the martyrdom notes used to support their similarity claim are actually those of self-immolators-individuals who have burned themselves to death as a protest but without harming others (B.C.P. Park, personal communication, November 2, 2005). Hence, this is insufficient evidence on which to base the claim that suicide terrorists should be considered as the same as other suicides, altruistic or otherwise. What Park's (2004) study does reveal is that self-immolators may fit the model of an altruistic suicide, but it is not appropriate to extend these findings to the case of suicide terrorists who kill both themselves and others. Indeed, a crucial omission from both the notes analyzed by Leenaars and Wenckstern was the intent of the self-immolators to take other lives at the same âme as taking their own life. In suicide terrorists this has been revealed in the form of a martyrdom note; for example, the preact video (also known as video testaments) (Atran, 2003). A further consideration that separates the acts of self-immolators from suicide terrorists is that self-immolation is rarely even considered a terrorist act since the act is not intended to cause terror but rather to elicit sympathy and understanding from a target audience (Niebuhr, 1960).

Recently it has been suggested that although suicide terrorists may fit the altruistic type of suicide, they also possess elements of fatalistic type suicide in that the persons carrying out these acts are subject to political totalitarianism (Pedahzur, Perliger, & Weinberg, 2003). This assertion is based on the concepts of altruistic and fatalistic suicide from Durkheim's typology using data gathered from reports from the Israeli newspaper Ha'aretz, which, as the study authors acknowledge, are likely to be both censored and biased according to the viewpoint of the editor or the writer of the articles. Thus, results of this study are unlikely to accurately reflect the cases they report on.

It is important to question how plausible it is to equate suicide terrorists, who take not only their life but also the lives of many others, with other altruistic suicides, where physical harm is reserved solely for the person carrying out the suicidal act. Most classic examples of altruistic suicide do not involve the death of others in the altruistic act (with the exception, perhaps, of Kamikaze pilots). Even if we do accept the notion that suicide terrorists may possibly belong to a new category of altruistic suicide, it is unlikely that altruism will be the sole cause for the behavior. Even a brief glance at the suicide literature reveals that suicide is a truly multifaceted problem. It has been characterized as a "multidimensional malaise" (Leenaars, 1996) involving a complex interaction and sequencing of events, each having social, biological, and psychological influences. There is no one cause for suicide (e.g., O'Carroll, 1993), meaning that altruism is unlikely to be the only factor contributing to a so-called altruistic suicide. Moreover, a number of authors claim that the actions of terrorists are stimulated by a wide set of motives (Moghadam, 2003; Salib, 2003; Silke, 2003). If altruism alone does not motivate suicide terrorism, the question remains: What does? Importantly for this paper, we need to examine whether motivations for suicide terrorism and other suicides are similar.

MOTIVATIONS FOR SUICIDE AND SUICIDE TERRORISM

Empirical research from suicide notes, psychological autopsy studies, and interviewbased studies of survivors of suicide attempts highlight the diverse reasons given for suicidal behavior; including problems with money, relationships, employment, mental health, drugs, and alcohol, to name but a few.

It is impossible to describe a "typical suicide." Neither is it possible to describe a typical suicide terrorist (Silke, 2003); however, Merari (2005) has discussed the profile that many suicide terrorists share across a range of demographic, social, and psychological variables. For example, we do know that generally suicide cells prey on young, unattached men (Atran, 2003; Merari, 2005) and that these young men have deeply held religious beliefs in common (Hassan, 2001). Some authors argue that religious beliefs are absolutely crucial in understanding motivations for suicide attacks (Orbach, 2004; Salib, 2003). One Muslim psychologist rejects the idea that suicide terrorism involves suicide at all, suggesting instead that it is an act of martyrdom, based on the Islamic principles of Jihad (holy war), which, as such, is considered as legal behavior (Abdel-Khalek, 2004). It is important to note here that Islam forbids suicide-it is not sanctioned under any circumstance (Abdel-Khalek, 2004; Taylor & Ryan, 1988). A terrorist interviewed in one study became angry when asked a question about suicide saying, "This is not suicide. Suicide is selfish, it is weak. This is istisbad [martyrdom or self sacrifice in the service of Allah]" (Post et al., 2003, p. 179).

Hassan (2001), who interviewed nearly 250 individuals from various militant Palestinian camps in Gaza between 1996 and 1999, claims that suicide terrorists are all extremely religious and believe their actions to be sanctioned by Islam. Indeed, some research on suicide terrorist groups suggests that suicide terrorists are indoctrinated into believing in their own immortality. They are convinced of this (Hassan, 2001; Orbach, 2004), and convinced that the paradise into which they will ascend manifests itself as an actual physical presence for them. Belief in gaining entrance to such an afterlife has been cited as a likely motivating factor in suicideterrorist behavior (Williams, 1997). This is confirmed by evidence from an interview with a 2 7-year-old man selected for a suicide attack. When asked how he felt about being selected he replied: "It's as if a very high, impenetrable wall separated you from Paradise or hell. Allah has promised one or the other to his creatures. So, by pressing the detonator, you can immediately open the door to paradise-it is the shortest path to heaven" (Hassan, 2001, ¶6). An interview with an Imam affiliated with Hamas corroborated these beliefe: "the first drop of blood shed by a martyr during jihad washes away his sins instantaneously. On the Day of Resurrection, he can intercede for seventy of his nearest and dearest to enter heaven; and he will have at his disposal seventy-two houris, the beautiful virgins of Paradise" (Hassan, 2001, ¶25).

Taylor and Ryan (1988) describe the bassamat al-farah-the so-called smile of joy of religious martyrs worn at the time of martyrdom. They note that "martyrdom, because of its promise of merit hereafter, is an act of joy, symbolized by this smile" (p. 102). Using postmortem interviews with the families and friends of deceased suicide terrorists, one study showed that eight of the nine terrorists were described as being very religious (Fields et al., 2002). Such findings clearly highlight the importance of religious beliefe in suicide terrorism. Some of the research conducted to date demonstrates that religious beliefs are crucial in understanding the willingness to become a suicide terrorist. On the basis of a content analysis of texts about suicide terrorism, Kimhi and Even (2004) suggest that a religious prototype of suicide terrorism exists. And, worryingly, it is thought that religious fundamentalist suicide terrorists may pose the greatest danger to society (Post et al., 2003). However, others claim that not all Islamic suicide terrorism is religiously motivated and that political forces are more important in the development of suicide terrorism (Merari, 1998, 2005; Sprinzak, 2000). Of course, a range of motivations for suicide terrorism exist and these have been discussed by Moghadam (2003), who proposed a twophase model of suicide terrorism encompassing individual and organizational goals.

Nonetheless, having established that religion is a key factor in motivating many suicide terrorists, we must now consider whether such religiosity is a factor in other types of suicidal behavior. The very latest research demonstrates that religious beliefs may actually protect against suicidal behavior (Dervic et al., 2004; Nonnemaker, McNeely, & Blum, 2003). A study of depressed inpatients found that patients who reported no religious affiliation had more lifetime suicide attempts than those who reported having a religious affiliation (Dervic et al., 2004). Data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health in the United States demonstrated that private religiosity (measured by frequency of prayer and the importance of religion) was associated with a significantly lower probability of having had suicidal thoughts or having engaged in suicidal behavior (Nonnemaker et al., 2003). While protective against suicide in the general population, strong religious beliefs may actually be a significant risk factor in becoming a suicide terrorist.

Another motivation that may be prominent here is vengeance (Beck, 2002; Moghadam, 2003; Rosenberger, 2003), especially at those in authority (Pape, 2003). Rosenberger (2003) argues that the idea of vengeance in suicide terrorism is crucial to understanding the suicide attacker, and Adbdel-Khalek (2004) reports that the notion of vengeance appears to be a central element of the philosophy of martyrdom in relation to what is called the Palestinian cause.

Personal revenge also is a possible motivation for a suicide mission (Fields et al., 2002; Kushner, 1996; Moghadam, 2003). It appears that suicide terrorists nearly always have a relative or close friend who has been wronged or even killed by the perceived enemy, and so join terrorist organizations in a vengeful frame of mind (Kushner, 1996). Fields et al. (2002) report that five of the nine suicide terrorists they studied in a casecontrolled postmortem study had been injured as a result of the intifada in Gaza. Eight of their subjects had been imprisoned and tortured during this time, and five of eight families of the terrorists were reportedly beaten and humiliated by soldiers. Seven families of the deceased suicide terrorists felt one motivation for the bomber had been a response to the injustices they had perceived to be perpetrated by Israeli occupation.

In contrast, the explanations of suicidal individuals for their behaviors rarely relate to vengeance or coercion-the reasons most commonly chosen by the suicidal include loss of control and escape (Bancroft et al., 1979). Vengeance, though not common, is found to be a motivator for some completed suicides. For example, some data support the notion of revenge via suicide by women suffering abuse (Counts, 1987; Meng, 2002); however, it is important to note that this sort of suicide does not involve physical harm to others as part of the suicide act.

A final, yet crucial, point to make about the potential motivational differences between terrorist suicides and other suicides is that there is a strong instrumental element to the motive of the suicide terrorist. After all, the real goal of suicide terrorism is to create terror (Pape, 2003), with the ultimate aim of effecting religious or political change, which is certainly not the case with suicides in general. So, to summarize, the motives of suicide terrorists appear to be very different indeed to other suicides, which concurs with the latest writings of at least one expert on political terrorism (see Pape, 2005).

MURDEROUS, NOT SUICIDAL, INTENT

The preceding sections suggest that suicide terrorists differ from the vast majority of other suicides in a number of ways. A large discrepancy between suicide terrorists and nonterrorist suicides is that suicide terrorists are murderers. Their own suicide act deliberately takes the life of another, or many others. And the primary intention of the act carried out is murder rather than suicide; in fact, the terrorist's suicide can be viewed as a byproduct of the attack (B.C.B. Park, personal communication, November 2,2005). Whedier for religious, moral, vengeful, or altruistic reasons, the fact is that in most suicides there is an absence of murderous intent and this factor in itself separates most suicides from suicide terrorists.

Perhaps then, the subgroup of the suicide population which could be thought of as most closely related to suicide terrorists is homicide-suicides (formerly called murdersuicides). These suicides are very rare indeed. One study found that of the 600,000 deaths that occur in England and Wales each year, an average of 60 occur in homicide-suicide incidents (Barraclough & Harris, 2002). If we consider this figure in the context of the number of suicides in 2002 (N= 4,755) (National Statistics, 2005), it becomes clear that these kinds of suicide are indeed extremely rare-constituting around 1.3% of all suicides. In the U.S. the rate of homicidesuicides appears to be very similar (accounting for around 1.5% of all suicides) (Marzuk, Tardiff, & Hirsch, 1992).

Yet even within this tiny subgroup of the suicide population a clear difference exists between homicide-suicides and suicide terrorists. In homicide-suicides the majority of incidents involve one victim and one suspect, and approximately 90% of the incidents involve family members as victims-usually the female partners of male suspects (Berman, 1979; Barraclough & Harris, 2002; Chan, Beh, & Broadhust, 2003; Marzuk et al., 1992). In contrast, suicide attacks typically involve many victims and one suspect, where the victims are unknown to the killer. Moreover, it is interesting to note that the overwhelming majority of homicide-suicide acts involve enmeshment and vengeance between the victim and the perpetrator (Berman, 1979); whereas, for the suicide terrorist, it is likely that enmeshment occurs with his or her peer group (Lachkar, 2002), not with the victims of the attack. Another significant difference between many homicide-suicides and suicide attacks is the temporal spacing of the acts of homicide and suicide. In suicide terrorism the acts are simultaneous, while homicide-suicide has been defined as "a person [who] has committed a homicide and subsequently commits suicide within one week of the homicide" (Marzuk et al., 1992, p. 3,179). (It should be noted that this is not the only definition of homicide-suicide and other researchers do not apply the one week criterion when defining homicide-suicide see Herman [1979], for example).) Thus, even if we try to take homicide-suicides as the closest relative to suicide terrorists from the general suicide population, it is clear that there are large and important differences between key characteristics of the two types of behavior, and between the victims of these acts.

Moreover, there is little evidence to suggest the existence of suicidal intent in most suicide terrorists. Atran (2003) claims that suicidal symptoms are completely absent in suicide terrorists. In fact, suicidal intent is actively and emphatically denied by those involved in carrying out such attacks (Post et al., 2003; Schbley, 2003). This is perhaps unsurprising given the belief that the suicide terrorist's act is meant to ensure an afterlife which manifests itself as a real physical presence, and that suicide is forbidden in Islam (Abdel-Khalek, 2004). Recall the sentiments expressed by participants in the studies quoted earlier in this paper, where the vilification of suicide was apparent and the notion that suicide terrorists are suicidal was completely denied (Hassan, 2001; Post et al., 2003).

IS THERE A COMMON PSYCHOLOGY?

It has been hypothesized that suicide terrorists may be psychologically similar to other suicides in terms of their desire to remove themselves from an intolerable situation "due to unmet emotional needs" (Leenaars & Wenckstern, 2004, p. 134). Indeed, Salib (2003) claims that anger and hopelessness may be primary motivations for the suicide terrorist. Is this at least one area of overlap between the general suicide population and suicide attackers? Do these terrorists exhibit the common features of important psychological models of suicidal behavior, such as that described so elegantly by Williams in his "cry of pain" theory (Williams, 1997; Williams & Pollock, 2000)? According to Williams, suicidal acts are the cries of pain from individuals who are defeated in some important aspect of their lives and feel trapped in that situation without hope of escape or rescue. Leading suicidologists suggest that suicidal acts must be understood fundamentally as behaviors "aimed at obtaining relief from an unbearable mental state" (Michel, 2000, p. 666). For example, Shneidman (1996) claims that suicide is caused by psychological pain, which he terms "psychache." Are the psychological features of entrapment, defeat, and unbearable mental pain common features of suicide terrorists? By all accounts they feel quite the opposite. Due to their strong belief in their cause they go to their death feeling hopeful rather than hopeless, believing that their death will bring about certain specific gains such as achieving entrance to an afterlife, being an inspiration to others and thus advancing their cause, and delivering others from suffering (Williams, 1997). Atran (2003) claims that suicide terrorists do not demonstrate hopelessness or a sense of "nothing to lose" (p. 1,537).

Another psychological feature of violent suicides is aggression (Apter, Brown, Korn, & van Praag, 1990). Anger and aggression certainly seem to be important factors in suicide attacks (Atran, 2003), but it crucial to note that the available research suggests that the majority of suicide terrorists are likely to have been skillfully manipulated into feeling the way they do largely as result of intragroup and inter-group processes fuelled by religious beliefs (Atran, 2003; Beck 2002; Hassan, 2001; Post et al., 2003; Salib, 2003). This is very different to the aetiology of anger in other suicides which seems to be mediated by biological mechanisms (namely, the serotonin system [Apter et al., 1990]) and exacerbated by interacting personality, social, and psychological factors (Mann, Waternaux, Haas, & Malone, 1999; Williams, 1997). Suicides involving violent methods are known to have a strong impulsive component that is biologically mediated by the serotonin system (Bertolote, Fleischmann, & Wasserman, 2005; Träskman, Asberg, Bertilsson, & Sjostrand, 1981). The impulsive element of such violent suicidal acts appears to be completely absent in the suicide terrorist where careful, meticulous plans are made. Furthermore, given the rich rewards believed to be awaiting the terrorist, it is unlikely that he or she goes to his or her death feeling negative emotions. Indeed, this hypothesis is supported by empirical research with would-be suicide attackers (Hassan, 2001; Post et al., 2003).

Another point of potential psychological commonality is the prevalence of mental illness in suicide terrorists-as compared to other suicides. The incidence of diagnosable mental illness is high in both attempted (Haw, Hawton, Houston, & Townsend, 2001) and completed suicides (Arsenault-Lapierre, Kim, & Turecki, 2004; Bertolote et al., 2005; Cavanagh, Carson, Sharpe, & Lawrie, 2003; Lonnqvist, 2000). Depression is a particular problem in both completed and attempted suicides; however, this does not seem to feature in suicide terrorism. Atran (2003) claims that suicide terrorists are "non-pathological" and that the problem faced by researchers is to determine why so many of these individuals are recruited in order to carry out the wishes of the organizations who prepare suicide terrorists. It is not clear whether the incidence of mental illness in suicide terrorists is higher than in the general population (Lamberg, 1997). Neither is it known whether the incidence rate is equivalent to that observed in the suicide population. To the best of our knowledge suicide terrorists do not carry out their terrorist acts as a result of mental illness (Bond, 2004; Colvard, 2002; Gordon, 2002; Hassan, 2001; Merari, 2005; Williams, 1997). Williams (1997) described the potential clinical and psychological differences between suicide attackers and other people who commit suicide: "Most people who commit suicide are depressed when they do so; they see death as the end to their suffering. One of two feelings usually predominates in the mind of the person who is suicidal in this depressive sense, both stemming from hopelessness. The first is that have been abandoned by everyone; the second that they are a burden to everyone, especially to those they love. Contrast this with the martyr. They see hope and believe in a cause" (p. 111).

THE ROLE OF GROUP PROCESSES AND INDOCTRINATION

Perhaps a major motivational and psychological difference between suicide terrorists and other suicides is whether the decision to act is made at the level of the individual or at the level of the group, mediated by those in authority. A number of authors have noted that the decision to act as a suicide attacker is not arrived at in isolation (Atran, 2003; Burdman, 2003; Moghadam, 2003; Rosenberger, 2003; Volkan, 2002); rather, it seems that the terrorists are coached to their deaths (remembering that death is probably not the perceived end point for the suicide terrorist). Indeed, Atran (2003) notes that, "No instances of religious or political suicide terrorism stem from lone actions of cowering or unstable bombers" (p. 1,536). It seems that the decision to send out a suicide terrorist is almost always made by others (Poland, 2002). Perhaps then, such terrorist behavior is better explained by group processes than by mental disorder (Colvard, 2002).

Atran (2003) draws a comparison with Milgram's famous obedience to authority experiments in which ordinary individuals obey orders and perform actions that are detrimental to others in the right circumstances (Milgram, 1974). He claims that it is the sense of obligation in response to authority that drives suicide attacks rather than murderous intent. Indeed, murderous intent may not exist at the level of the individual, but rather in relation to those in authority organizing the suicide attacks (Merari, 1998, 2005; Rosenberger, 2003). Rosenberger (2003) argues that "The leaders, in fact, are murdering their suicide bombers pure and simple" (p. 17). However, it is extremely doubtful that the indoctrination experienced by a suicide attacker means that they lack murderous intent altogether.

An interview study with 35 incarcerated Middle Eastern terrorists revealed that the major reason for joining a terrorist group in the first place was peer influence-because it seemed that everybody was joining up (Post et al., 2003). Moreover, Atran (2003) claims that "loyalty to [an] intimate cohort of peers, which recruiting organizations often promote through religious communion" (p. 1,537) is crucial to understanding suicide terrorism. Meticulous plans are made, often in groups or cells of about three to six individuals who are lead to death by a charismatic leader (Atran, 2003; Poland, 2002). In some cases the individual is carefully selected and prepared for suicide attacks but in other cases extreme coercive measures are used (Ergil, 2001; Post et al., 2003; Silke, 2003).

Of course group and individual processes must interact in order to produce a suicide attacker. Once selected for a suicide terrorism mission, a process of indoctrination occurs to strengthen motivation for carrying out the attack and to prevent it from dissipating. Indoctrination typically takes place in a number of stages and each stage relies on cognitive, emotional, and social psychological processes. Moreover, certain personal characteristics may increase the likelihood of an individual's susceptibility to indoctrination, including religious or political values that resonate strongly with the indoctrinating organization (Baron, 2000). For example, in suicide terrorism indoctrination may be driven by religious (e.g., the reward of martyrs in the afterlife) or nationalist themes (e.g., the humiliation of Palestine by Israel) (Merari, 2005). One member of Hamas explained the preparation of a suicide terrorist as follows (Hassan, 2001): "We focus his attention on Paradise, on being in the presence of Allah, on meeting the Prophet Muhammad, on interceding for his loved ones so that they, too, can be saved from the agonies of Hell, on the houris and on fighting the Isralie occupation and removing it (Hassan, 2001, ¶30). Two assistants stay with the would-be suicide attacker at all times in the week before an attack and they report any wavering or doubts to a senior trainer, who can be called in to provide inspiration and support (Hassan, 2001). However, Silke (2003) notes that it is "increasingly recognised that it is a mistake to view suicide bombers as brainwashed pawns" (p. 94). Worryingly, it appears that there is a surfeit of would-be recruits to suicide cells who are virtually beating down the doors of those in power to get involved (Hassan, 2001).

Nonetheless, would-be terrorists have described how membership of the terrorist group served to fuse their personal identity with the collective identity and goals of the group (Post et al., 2003). Volkan (2002) claims that vulnerabilities in a person's identity permit the imposition of a wider group identity. Israeli (1997) has suggested that suicide attackers may suffer from low self-esteem, which increases vulnerability in relation to powerful peer influences and reactions to those in authority. However, in a roughly case-controlled postmortem interview study of a small group of suicide terrorists, no evidence of lowered self-esteem was uncovered (Fields et al., 2005).

Hence, crucial to understanding suicide terrorism is an appreciation of the group processes in indoctrinating organizations (Atran, 2002; Merari, 1998, 2005; Moghadam, 2003; Schbley, 2003). Some authors have argued that these processes are more important in determining suicide attacks than religious beliefe (e.g., Merari 1998, 2005), yet a recent psychometric study administered opportunistically to over 300 potential suicide terrorists (members of Hizbullah attending a parade to celebrate the Day of Jerusalem) demonstrated that respondents who were high school educated, who had the highest level of religious training, and who had the highest levels of religiosity were most willing to become suicide attackers (Schbley, 2003).

Psychology and psychiatry have a pivotal role to play in furthering the understanding of group and individual processes that contribute to terrorist attacks, and may ultimately contribute to the prevention of future attacks. We know something about the factors underpinning hostility between groups in terms of the influences on inter-group bias (Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002; Reed II & Aquino, 2003; Tzeng & Jackson, 1994), and what can be done about such biases and conflict (Beck, 2002; Hewstone et al., 2002). But specific research on in-group/out-group hostility and other group processes that influence the development of suicide terrorism is now required. Green and Seher (2003) recently highlighted the fact that academic literatures on prejudice and ethnic conflict have developed separately and that an integrated research synthesis in this area is now needed.

The role of the media in fostering outgroup hostility and reinforcing the impact of suicide attacks must also be explored. To some degree, by highlighting the impact of such attacks, the media may serve to promote both recruitment to suicide cells and copycat terrorist behavior. The widely documented influence of media portrayals on suicidal behavior has lead to the development of media guidelines to help prevent contagion effects. Guidelines may now be required for handling media reports of suicide attacks.

Another factor that warrants discussion in relation to group processes is the need to understand why some individuals are more likely to become influenced sufficiently to be willing to die as suicide attackers. Two factors emerge as crucial in this review. First, the possibility that individual differences in personality may be important; and second, the role of strong religious beliefs (it is possible, of course, that these factors may interact in the development of a suicide attacker).

In terms of possible personality foundations to suicide terrorism, Lachkar (2002) proffers a theory outlining the personality characteristics of suicide terrorists based on a psychoanalytical approach. The theory highlights the role of parenting, particularly in relation to the terrorist's relationship with his/ her father. Dysfunctional parenting is thought to contribute to the development of borderline-type personality traits. Lachkar argues that this ultimately leads to suicide cells developing gang-like group dynamics such that the terrorist cell becomes enmeshed with the terrorist's sense of identity. Her assertions are not, however, backed up with empirical evidence, though this claim is supported by the work of Post et al. (2003) who report that membership of terrorist groups for 35 incarcerated Middle Eastern terrorists involved the melding of individual and group identity. Thus, a possible risk factor for becoming a suicide terrorist exists at the level of individual personality. However, some authors insist that there is no such thing as a suicide terrorist personality type, and claim that suicide terrorists come from a variety of backgrounds with diverse personalities and motivations (Hassan, 2001; Schbley, 2003; Silke, 2003; Victoroff, 2005). As noted above, it is likely that certain personal characteristics lead certain individuals to be more susceptible to indoctrination techniques than others (Baron, 2000). It seems, then, that although strong empirical evidence is currently lacking, psychology and psychiatry could play a vital role in the future investigation of the influence of personality, personality disorders, and psychiatric disorders in the development of suicide terrorist behavior.

The group processes described above are entirely absent in most other cases of suicide, who somehow arrive at the decision to die on their own, and who die alone. Most notably, the degree of planning observed in suicide terrorists is not apparent in most other suicides. As Stengel (1964) once noted, "Carefully planned acts of suicide are as rare as carefully planned acts of homicide" (p. 74). There are some other examples of suicides involving group (e.g., cult suicides) and dyadic (e.g., suicide pacts) processes; but these are very rare. And, as before, a fundamental difference between these acts and suicide attacks is that innocent victims are not killed as part of the suicidal behavior.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The first thing to note about the results presented here is the lack of empirical work that has been conducted on psychological and psychiatric underpinnings of suicide terrorism. On the basis of the sparse evidence uncovered in this review it appears that there are few, if any, factors that are truly common to both suicide terrorists and other suicides. Neither is it clear whether the suicide terrorist should be considered as a type of altruistic suicide-I am not alone in questioning this postulation (see, for example, Abdel-Khalek [2004]). It is possible that the suicide terrorist could be considered an atypical variant of the category of altruistic suicide (Leenaars & Wenckstern, 2004) or as a new type of fatalistic-altruistic suicide (Pedahzur et al., 2003), but the data that support these claims are potentially misleading in important ways and lack strong empirical evidence to validate them. It is also possible that the notion of altruistic suicide requires adjustment to permit a distinction to be made between those who harm others and those that do not.

A number of authors have questioned whether suicide terrorists should be viewed as cases of suicide at all (Israeli, 1997; Spencer, 2002), indeed those carrying out such acts deny absolutely that what they are doing involves suicide (Post et al., 2003; Schbley 2003). Rather, these acts should be viewed as a form of martyrdom (Abdel-Khalek, 2004; Kushner, 1996; Post et al., 2003; Schbley 2003), largely driven by religious beliefe, social pressure, and group processes (Atran, 2003; Gordon, 2002; Moghadam, 2003). Having considered some of the key factors that underlie suicidal behavior and how these factors apply to suicide terrorists, it is probably more profitable to view the actions of suicide terrorists as a different class of behavior altogether, rather than as a subgroup of the general suicide population. That is to say, suicide terrorists do not appear to be truly suicidal in the sense that suicidal behavior is usually defined and understood.

Importantly, significant differences appear to exist between suicide terrorists and other suicides in terms of key factors known to underpin suicide in the general population (including social, biological, psychological, and psychiatric problems). Even the characteristics of the closest related subgroup, that of the homicide-suicide, are shown to differ markedly with what (little) is known about suicide terrorist behavior. An important feature of the suicide terrorism process that is absent in the general suicide population, with the exception of a small number of mass suicides and suicide pacts, is the coercive processes used by those in authority.

On balance, the available evidence demonstrates that suicide terrorism has a range of characteristics which, when examined closely, are shown to be very different from other suicidal behavior. Even where overlap appears to exist, significant and important differences are found that suggest that treating suicide terrorists as a subgroup of the general suicide population is unlikely to increase our understanding of suicidal behavior. Instead, it is more useful to consider suicide terrorism as a dimension of terrorist behavior and the suicide terrorist as belonging to a subgroup of the terrorist population.

Nonetheless, researchers wishing to understand the behavior of suicide terrorists could profit from adopting commonly used methods in suicidology, such as the psychological autopsy method, which has been used to great effect to increase our understanding of key psychological, medical, and psychiatric factors associated with suicide. Such research has helped us understand the importance of listening seriously to, and providing adequate support for, those who disclose suicidal feelings, plans, and ideas (see, e.g., Houston, Hawton, & Shepperd, 2001). The psychological autopsy technique could be an important tool in the study of suicide terrorists, though there may be significant pragmatic and cultural barriers to carrying out this type of research. Medical records may be difficult to access and those close to the suicide attacker may be unwilling to be interviewed about the perpetrator (though Hassan, 2001, demonstrated that diose in militant camps are willing to be interviewed about suicide terrorists). This approach may yield important insights into the mind of the suicide terrorist and help to identify those young people at risk of becoming indoctrinated into acting as suicide attackers. One researcher has started the ball rolling in this respect by researching, in some depth, the case of hijacker Mohammed Atta (Meloy, 2004). This research represents an important step in the right direction; future studies need to investigate a number of cases and compare them with a suitable control group (e.g., nonsuicidal terrorists or another group who had died by violent means). For example, Fields et al. (2005) used what they term "postmortem interviews" with families and friends of a small group of Palestinian suicide terrorists, and recruited a control group of males roughly the same age and background as the terrorists.

Methodologically robust empirical studies of suicide terrorism are lacking and the lack of attention paid to suicide terrorism in the academic literature has been noted by others (Moghadam, 2003). Victoroff (2005) has suggested that future research may highlight the crucial and potentially modifiable social and psychological factors that contribute to the development of the "terrorist mind set." Robust, theory-driven empirical studies are now desperately needed and must be developed in methodologically sound ways. Those wishing to adopt the psychological autopsy method would do well to adopt the recommendations of Hawton et al. (1998).

The results of this review strongly suggest that suicide terrorists are not truly suicidal and that attempting to find commonalities between suicide terrorists and others who die by suicide is likely to be an unhelpful path for any discipline wishing to further understanding of suicidal behavior. Equating the actions and motivations of suicide terrorists with those of other suicides perhaps does something of a disservice to those individuals who die quietly, alone, and with no murderous intent. This is not to say that we should not try to understand the motivations and the psychological, social, and psychiatric factors associated with suicide terrorism. Indeed, as I have noted, this research is now urgently needed and some of the methods used by suicide researchers, such as the psychological autopsy, will prove extremely valuable in furthering our understanding of suicide terrorism.

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