

A Multi-Dimensional Approach to Suicide Bombing

Paul Gill, School of Politics and International Relations, University College Dublin, Ireland

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A Multi-Dimensional Approach to Suicide Bombing

Paul Gill, School of Politics and International Relations, University College Dublin, Ireland

Understanding suicide bombing entails studying the phenomenon on three different dimensions: the suicide bomber, the terrorist organization, and the community from which suicide bombings emerge. Political and social psychology allow us to establish the reciprocal relationships that underpin the exchanges between the three dimensions. This method increases our theoretical understanding of suicide bombing by moving away from the unidimensional models that have previously dominated the terrorism literature.

1. Introduction

Late on the night of Friday June 1, 2001, Saeed Hotary left the Palestinian West Bank city of Kalkilya by car. Two colleagues, who also made the journey, dropped him off at the promenade in Tel Aviv. According to eyewitness reports, Hotary joined a long queue of people awaiting entry into the Dolphinarium nightclub. He mingled with some of the teenagers in the queue and flirted with one girl in particular. Without warning, Hotary detonated an explosive device strapped to his body, which held a large number of metal objects including ball bearings and screws. Within an instant, both Hotary and the girl evaporated. In total, twenty-one people died and one hundred and twenty were injured, the vast majority of whom were teenagers gathering on Tel Aviv's promenade to socialize at the weekend (O'Reilly 2001).

Condemnation from world leaders followed the next day. Despite that, Palestinian terrorist organizations competed for claims of responsibility. Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and the little known Palestinian Hezbollah claimed the bomber as their own (MIPT Database). Dozens of Palestinians in Ramallah reportedly celebrated the act. Hotary's family and neighbors also celebrated. His father stated he wished he had twenty more sons to become suicide

bombers (Khalaf 2001). His neighbors hung pictures of the new martyr holding seven sticks of dynamite around the neighborhood and arranged flowers in the shapes of a heart and a bomb to display. His picture adorned an elementary school entrance in his hometown (Kelley 2001). Two weeks later, an opinion poll showed 68.6 percent support for suicide bombings amongst a sample of over one thousand Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza (JMCC Poll no. 41). In a separate poll 82.3 percent of respondents did not view this incident as an act of terrorism (PCPSR Poll no. 3).

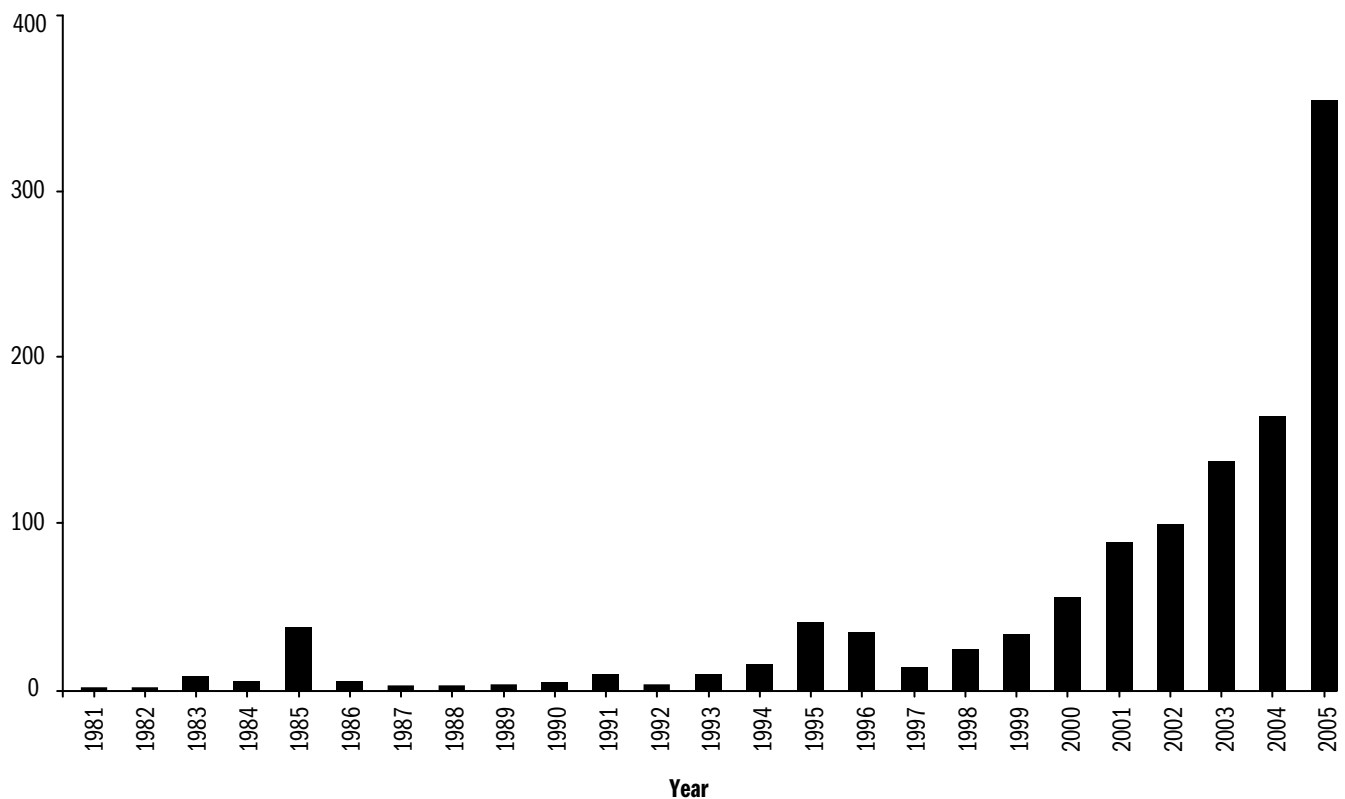
Many questions arise from this story. Why would an otherwise normal twenty-one-year-old electrician blow himself up? Why do terrorist organizations use this tactic? Is the death of the perpetrator instrumental to the success of the act? What role do the bomber's colleagues play in the facilitation of suicide bombing? Why do terrorist organizations compete to claim such a violent attack against innocents? How can a suicide bombing and actors involved receive such levels of support from the wider community?

These questions have become more important over the last few years. The Iraqi insurgency has produced more

suicide bombings than the previous twenty-five years.¹ Between 1980 and 2004, suicide bombings accounted for 48 percent of all deaths through terrorism despite its use in only 3 percent of incidents (Pape 2005).² Sustained suicide bombings occurred in various Lebanese groups' campaigns to drive American, French, and Israeli forces out of Lebanon, attempts by various Palestinian groups to coerce Israel into leaving Gaza and the West Bank, the Tamil, Chechen, Kashmiri, and Kurdish separatist movements, al Qaeda's sustained efforts against the United States and its allies, and the Iraqi and Afghan insurgencies. Suicide bombers have also emerged from Britain, Belgium, Somalia, Mali, Iran, Syria, Egypt, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Jordan.

Current research on terrorism in general, and suicide bombing in particular typically focuses on one of three possible dimensions; the terrorist/suicide bomber, the terrorist organization and to a lesser extent, the community from which suicide bombings emerge. Studies on individual terrorists and suicide bombers seek to ascertain factors driving individuals to engage in terrorism. Various analyses have focused on pathological disposition to violence (Gordon 2002; Post 1990), an authoritarian personality (Lester, Yang, and Lindsay 2004), general socialization factors (Atran, 2003; Post 2005; Sageman 2005; Silke 2003), altruism (Azam 2005), rational choice (Gupta 2004), religious fanaticism (Pipes 2004), cognitive dissonance (Maikovich 2005), revenge for personal suffering (Margalit 2003), and despair (Prusher 2005).³

Figure 1: Number of suicide bombing by year



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¹ See figure 1. Data is derived from my database of incidents of suicide bombing. This database synthesizes information from online internet databases such as MIPT and ICT with general chronologies (Pape 2005; Pedahzur 2005) and LexisNexis searches.

² This figure excludes 9/11.

³ For a general review of the psychological literature on terrorism, see Horgan (2005) and Victoroff (2005).

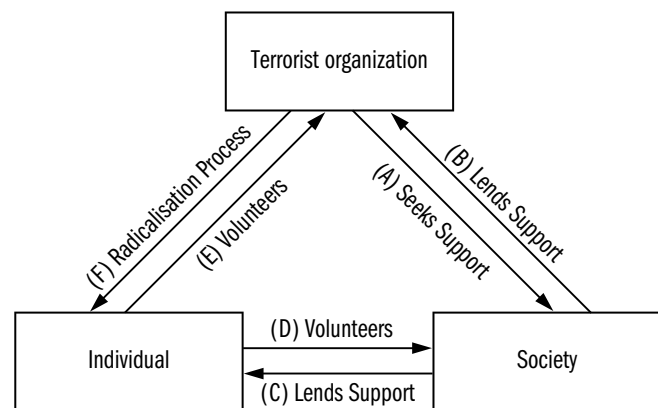
Studies on the organizational dimension of suicide bombing generally offer rational-choice explanations. Examples include cost-benefit analyses (Harrison 2001; Pape 2005), suicide bombing's ability to balance power in an asymmetric war (Gupta and Mundra 2005; Luft 2002), domestic political competition and outbidding by different organizations for public support (Bloom 2005), and other strategic motives such as the efficiency with which the terrorist can still activate the charge when captured (Ganor 2000).⁴

Studies on the societal dimension of terrorism and suicide bombing focus on factors such as the degree of political freedom and poverty in a given society (Abadie 2004), frustration caused by social injustice (Bloom 2005; Khashan 2003; Merari 1990), and an attachment to political Islam (Haddad 2004).⁵ Hafez (2006a) outlines that a sense of victimization and threat combined with symbolic narratives that venerate martyrdom and legitimate leaders consenting to violence lead to societal support for suicide bombing.

These studies have all contributed to our knowledge of suicide bombing but the literature lacks a framework that ties all three dimensions together to explain the interaction between them.⁶ Unidimensional explanations are unconcerned with the wider process that enables suicide bombing. Without incorporating other dimensions, the studies mentioned can often be misleading. Studies focusing on the individual suicide bomber cannot explain organizational motivations and societal support. Organizational approaches concentrating on strategic and tactical advantages cannot explain how a culture of martyrdom is socially constructed. Societal approaches cannot take into account fully the complexity of individual and organizational processes. The point of this article is not to present new empirical data, but instead to synthesize the wealth of existing data into a broad conceptual framework.

Political and social psychology provide insights into behavior within groups, decision-making by individuals, political socialization, conformism, group conflict, and symbolic attachment. These insights underpin the reciprocal relationships outlined in figure 2. They occur unsystematically and can begin on any dimension. (A) depicts the observation that terrorist organizations are ultimately dependent on the social, political, financial, and moral patronage of the constituency they claim to represent. With this in mind, the terrorist organization must calibrate its tactics and the timing of its operations, and its leaders must wield material and/or non-material resources to maximize societal support. (B) + (C) start with the proposition that when feelings of threat are salient, individuals are more likely to be submissive toward certain types of leaders and symbolic narratives. Aggressive policies ostensibly aimed against those who cause the threat and anxiety become more readily acceptable. (D) + (E) focus on how societal support coupled with catalysts and familial and friendship ties are behind the process of an individual joining a terrorist organization. (F) focuses on how the would-be-bomber radicalizes further through the internalization of relevant organizational norms.

Figure 2: Multi-dimensional model



⁴ For a general literature review of the organizational dimension to terrorism, see Cronin (2003, 8–12).

⁵ For a general review on the societal literature, see Turk (2004).

⁶ Hafez (2006b) and Moghadam (2006) have both put forward their own multi-causal frameworks but have not focused upon the interactions between dimensions. Pedahzur's model (2004) does account for some interactions but is too systematic

and fails to propose an interpretive lens through which these interactions can be explained.

With slight alterations most of the processes described above for this model also have the potential to explain other (non-suicidal) acts of terrorism. However, in explaining suicide bombing this model contains three major differences from a model explaining ordinary terrorism. Firstly, the social construction of a “culture of martyrdom” is not necessary to explain non-suicidal terrorism. Secondly, as will be outlined later, in the Palestinian case, support for orthodox acts of terrorism remained more or less constant over the period examined whereas support for suicide bombing fluctuated. This fluctuation negatively correlated with optimism for the future. Therefore, a sense of threat correlates with support for suicide bombing. Perhaps, the surrounding political conditions are enough for support for orthodox acts of terrorism. Threat salience leads individuals toward escalatory tendencies in conflict and suicide bombing corresponds with this tendency for both normative and strategic reasons. Normatively, suicide bombing violates almost every predominant ethical norm in societies in which it takes place (i.e. not to kill innocents and not to commit suicide). Strategically, suicide bombing causes more casualties. Thirdly, the radicalization process for a suicide bomber within the group setting is a longer and more intense one. Preparation to kill and be killed simultaneously requires a more nuanced psychological conditioning.

2. The Interactions Between Dimensions

2.1 The Terrorist Organization Seeks Societal Support by Creating a Culture of Martyrdom (A)

Prominent in terrorism studies is the argument that all terrorist acts are a rational strategic move vis-à-vis a more powerful opponent (Pape 2005, Crenshaw 1990). This is only partly correct. Terrorist acts are not only an attempt to communicate to the political elites and public opinion of the targeted state. Terrorist organizations also aim to communicate to the community they claim to represent (Hoffman and McCormick 2004). Taking this into consideration, Weinburg and Pedahzur (2003) likened terrorist organizations to political parties because they are both ultimately dependent upon the moral and economic patronage of their supporters. For example, Richardson (2006, 84) argues that the IRA was always mindful not to disaffect the Catholic population of Northern Ireland for fear of losing support. These concerns were reflected in

its targeting strategies. Pape (2005) may be correct in asserting that suicide terrorism is a strategy to compel foreign occupiers to withdraw but he fails to recognize that this is just one part of the strategy. He fails to clarify that, as Tilly (2005, 11) points out, terror is a strategy that involves interactions among political actors at different levels, “and that to explain the adoption of such a strategy we have no choice but to analyze it as part of a political process.” This section deals with how terrorist groups use their resources (both material and non-material) to promote suicide bombing by creating a culture of martyrdom. In creating a culture of martyrdom, leaders of terrorist organizations seek to generate support from their constituency of supporters. In the Palestinian, Tamil, Iraqi, Afghan and Chechen cases, this constituency is large and surrounds the organization itself. For al Qaeda and one-off cases such as 9/11, the Bali bombings, and the 7/7 bombings in London in 2005, the constituency mainly entails a “virtual constituency” consisting of global supporters on the internet and a small minority from within their own country holding similar sentiments. Resources utilized by terrorist organizations include; the use of propaganda, charismatic leaders, epistemic authorities, agency-laden institutions, framing justifications, and using euphemistic language. I will now approach each of these resources in turn. The aim is to show that in spite of the heterogeneous political or religious motivations espoused by organizations using suicide bombing, the tactics used to garner support are very similar.

2.1.1 Propaganda

Propaganda is one obvious method by which the terrorist organization seeks support. This includes; communiqués, media coverage depicting suicide bombers as martyrs, websites, public discourses, street posters, pamphlets, and attendance by respected public officials at the funerals or memorial ceremonies for suicide bombers. A full state funeral was held for a suicide bomber in Palestine in 2000. Tamil Tiger suicide bombers have orphanages named after them. A Palestinian suicide bomber had a youth football tournament held in his honor. Hamas calendars herald the “martyr of the month” (Hassan 2001). The Tamil Tigers, PKK, and Hezbollah commemorate the anniversary of their first suicide bombers each year. Chechens commemorate the first Chechen suicide bomber in a popular song.

Together, these acts produce an informal communication network that venerates suicide bombing. They supply the public with moral justifications for suicide attacks and help create a culture of martyrdom.

2.1.2 Leaders and Epistemic Authority Figures

Most terrorist organizations using suicide bombing possess either leaders revered by their followers or epistemic authority figures. Godlike leaders include Osama bin Laden of al Qaeda, Vellupillai Prabhakaran of the Sri Lankan Tamil Tigers, Abdullah Ocalan of the PKK in Turkey, and al-Zarqawi in the Iraqi insurgency. Other groups rely on epistemic authorities in the construction of societal knowledge. Religious leaders are one example (Bar-Tal 2000, 65). For example, Hamas, Hezbollah, al Qaeda, Islamic Jihad, Iraqi and Afghanistan insurgents, and other suicide bombers such as those involved in 9/11 and 7/7 rely on the religious rulings of Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, Sayid Muhammad Hasayn Fadlalla, Shaikh Yusuf Qardawi, and others to provide a legitimating ideology for suicide bombing.

2.1.3 Agency-Laden Institutions

Utilizing agency-laden institutions, defined as “cultural or organizational resources that can be mobilized to launch collective action” (Morris 2000, 450), is critical for a mass movement to be successful. Coupled with charismatic leadership, these institutions provide fertile ground for the mobilization of a mass movement. Leaders frame the necessity for, and means of, mobilization within these institutions. These institutions are often long-standing resources:

Such institutions are configurations of cultural beliefs and practices that permeate and shape their social networks. Their cultural materials are constitutive in that they produce and solidify the trust, contacts, solidarity, rituals, meaning systems, and options of members embedded in their social networks. Endemic to some agency-laden institutions is a transcendent and coherent belief system that shape its actors’ moral and political views about the kinds of relationships that ought to exist between individuals and social groups. These politically relevant beliefs inspire ... actions geared toward the realization of group interests. (Morris 2000, 447)

Some terrorist groups dominate such institutions and exert an informational influence to aid in political socialization. This is important in shaping behavioral compliance. Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Tamil Tigers capitalized on the lack of state structures to set up their own quasi-state systems. For example, Hamas founded hospitals and paid for funerals, medical care, dentistry, scholarships, prenatal care, and other social services. Hamas spokesman Ismail Abu Shanab explains the logic of this well: “The political level is the face of Hamas, but without the other divisions Hamas would not be as strong as it is now... . If nobody supports these needy families, maybe nobody would think of martyrdom and the resistance of the occupation” (cited in Bloom 2005, 27–8). Hamas leader Ibrahim al-Yazuri considered Hamas’s intention as “the liberation of all Palestine from the tyrannical Israeli occupation... . This is the main part of its concern ... social work is carried out in support of this aim” (cited in Human Rights Watch 2002, 103–4). Other material resources include subsidies and apartments given to the families of suicide bombers (Human Rights Watch 2002, 16 and 100).

2.1.4 Public Discourse and Framing Justifications

Edelman (1971) argues that public discourse is central to evoking cognitive arousal and radicalization within the public. He explains behavior by focusing on what people expect of the future. Readily available evidence does not shape expectations. Instead, expectations based upon cues from legitimately perceived groups are absorbed more easily. This effect strengthens when cues include emotionally persuasive information and when they connect current events to a historical narrative (McDermott 2004, 64–5; Della Porta and Diani 1999, 184). This is especially true in ambiguous situations. Actions by groups perceived as legitimate help to shape and create beliefs and norms, help create perceptions of what is true, and help shape expectations of the future. For example, Prabhakaran, the leader of the Tamil Tigers, instrumentally justified suicide bombing because “with perseverance and sacrifice, Tamil Eelam can be achieved in a hundred years. But if we conduct Black Tiger (suicide) operations, we can shorten the suffering of the people and achieve Tamil Eelam in a shorter period of time” (cited in Richardson 2006, 157). Without competing narratives from other sources, the cue effects strengthen further. In

these circumstances, they are a persuasive influence upon behaviour (Edelman 1971, 7).

Language is a key element in the construction of a legitimating ideology or myth. “Language is capable not only of constructing symbols that are highly abstracted from everyday experience, but also of ‘bringing back’ these symbols and appresenting them as objectively real elements in everyday life. In this manner, symbolism and symbolic language become essential constituents of the reality of everyday life and of the commonsense apprehension of this reality” (Berger and Luckmann 1966, 55). Terrorist groups consistently use euphemistic language when referring to suicide bombing. This portrays suicide bombing as heroic and deflects attention from the human suffering on both sides of the conflict. Prior to the attack, the would-be-bomber is a “living martyr” (*al Shahid al hai*). Afterwards, the funeral of the “martyr” is referred to as a “wedding.” In Palestinian Arabic, the phrase for a suicide bombing attack is an *amaliyya istishadiyya*, a “martyrdom operation,” or an *amaliyya fida’iyya*, a “sacrificial operation” (Human Rights Watch 2002, 36). The Tamil phrase for suicide bombing is *thatkodai*, meaning “to give yourself” (Richardson 2006; 140, Hopgood 2005, 74). Those who have given themselves to the cause are *mahaveera*, meaning “brave one,” and their mother is *veeravati* or “brave mother” (Richardson 2006, 141).

Leaders of terrorist organizations and prominent politicians frame justifications for suicide bombings in a number of ways. All attempt to cast the blame onto the other side or accentuate the success of the suicide bombing. Firstly, leaders frame suicide bombing as a response to state provocation. Hamas labeled one set of bombings “the natural retaliation by a people slaughtered day and night, whose dignity is humiliated by the Zionist enemy’s war machine” (cited in Human Rights Watch 2002, 27–8). Hafez’s analysis of propaganda emanating from Iraqi insurgents (2007) details how they often present a problem (the United States), a cause of the problem (the subordination of existing Muslim regimes to the United States), and a solution (pious faith and martyrdom). Secondly, suicide bombing is framed as a tactic that balances power in what is an otherwise asymmetric war. Hamas spokesman ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Rantisi stated: “We don’t have F-16s, Apache

helicopters and missiles... . They are attacking us with weapons against which we can’t defend ourselves. And now we have a weapon they can’t defend themselves against... . We believe this weapon creates a kind of balance, because this weapon is like an F-16” (Human Rights Watch 2002, 56–7). Similarly, al-Zarqawi, leader of the Iraqi insurgency until his death, stated that his men “faced the strongest and most advanced army in modern times... . When the holy warriors noticed this huge disparity in numbers and armaments between them and the enemy, they looked for alternatives to amend this deficiency” (cited in Hafez 2007, 98). Suicide bombing reduced the deficit. Thirdly, suicide bombing is framed as an act of national struggle. ‘Abd al-Rahman described suicide bombings to al-Jazeera as “the highest form of national struggle. There is no argument about that” (cited in Human Rights Watch 2002, 37). Fourthly, death under occupation is framed as inevitable anyway. Al-Rantisi also claimed that “to die in this way is better than to die daily in frustration and humiliation” (cited in Soibelman 2004, 180).

The examples provided show a remarkable similarity between organizations using suicide bombing in terms of leadership, how leaders frame justifications for suicide bombing, and the use of propaganda, euphemistic language, and agency-laden institutions. Organizational leaders harness these non-material resources effectively in creating a culture of martyrdom.

2.2 Societal Support for Bombers and Terrorist Organizations (B + C)

The previous section introduced means by which leaders of terrorist organizations seek societal support for suicide bombing. This section depicts the process whereby audiences become susceptible to symbolic anxiety-reducing narratives and to the influence of leaders who promote the use of suicide bombing. I propose that key to accounting for this is the theory of terror management.

Greenberg et al. (1986, cited in Hogg and Vaughan 2005, 138, and in Gordan and Arian 2001, 208) developed terror management theory. They argue that knowledge of the inevitability of death is the most fundamental threat that people face. Therefore, it is the most powerful motivating factor in human existence. Experimental studies strengthened the concept. When a sense of threat is

salient, positive feelings toward one's belief system and those holding similar beliefs increase while negative feelings toward those perceived to be a threat also increase. The strategy adopted to combat the threat is likely to be inflammatory (Castano et al. 2003, Voci 2006, Gordon and Arian 2001). Under conditions of threat decisions are based on emotion, but when feelings of threat are low decisions made are based on both logic and emotion. Therefore, when one is in a conflict situation, the course of action chosen is more likely to escalate and continue the conflict. Threat salience increases the likelihood of a reliance on stereotypes to characterize the threatening outgroup (Schimmel et al. 1999, Arndt et al. 2002). Importantly, Greenberg et al. (1990) and Lavine et al. (2002) found a positive correlation between threat salience and the likelihood of resorting to authoritarian modes of thinking. This may result in a search for an outgroup, thinking in black-and-white terms, and the need for strong leaders to lessen the anxiety produced by the situation (Montuori 2005, 22–24). In other words, under conditions of threat, people are more likely to follow certain types of leaders espousing authoritarian values and symbolic narratives perceived to be legitimate and aggressive toward those who cause the threat and anxiety.

Sustained conflict brings a sense of threat to the fore. This impacts strongly upon the behavior of both individuals and collectives. Bar-Tal (2004) argues that in a conflict situation, individuals and collectives behave in particular ways. From an Israeli perspective, Bar-Tal (2004, 684–90) found that:

- Individuals perceive information supplied by the ingroup's epistemic authorities about the threatening outgroup as valid.
- Violence increases threat perception and feelings of fear and mistrust.
- Violence and threat perceptions cause delegitimization of the rival group.
- Violence, threat perception, and fear increase support of violent means to cope with the rival.
- During times of violence and perceived threat, people support a leader who projects forcefulness.
- Violence, threat perception, and fear lead to group mobilization, patriotism, and unity, cause self-percep-

tion as a victim, increase internal pressure for conformity and a readiness to impose sanctions on dissenting members of society.

The above points indicate that experiences of sustained conflict lead societies toward authoritarian mindsets.

Terror management theorists posit that individuals search for self-esteem through their social identity to counteract feelings of threat. Any act can increase positive ingroup status if members of the ingroup attach a positive role to the act itself (Rubin 2004, 825). Jerusalem Media and Communication Center (JMCC) and Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PCPSR) survey data show that many forms of violent action toward Israel have a positive value attached to them in Palestinian areas. They show strong support for military actions against the Israeli Defense Forces, Israeli civilians, and settlers in the West Bank and Gaza. Over the course of 16 surveys, undertaken between May 1997 and February 2006, JMCC survey data average 60.9 percent support for military operations against Israeli targets. The PCPSR findings average 88.1 percent support for any military operation against Israeli military targets over 13 surveys between August 1995 and March 2005. Support for armed attacks against Israeli civilians average 51.7 percent over nineteen surveys between August 1995 and June 2006 (PCPSR). Support for armed attacks against Israeli settlers in the West Bank and Gaza average 86.6 percent over twelve surveys between August 1995 and December 2004 (PCPSR). Support for these acts was consistently higher amongst those who were educated, young, female, living in refugee camps, earning a higher income, and Hamas supporters.

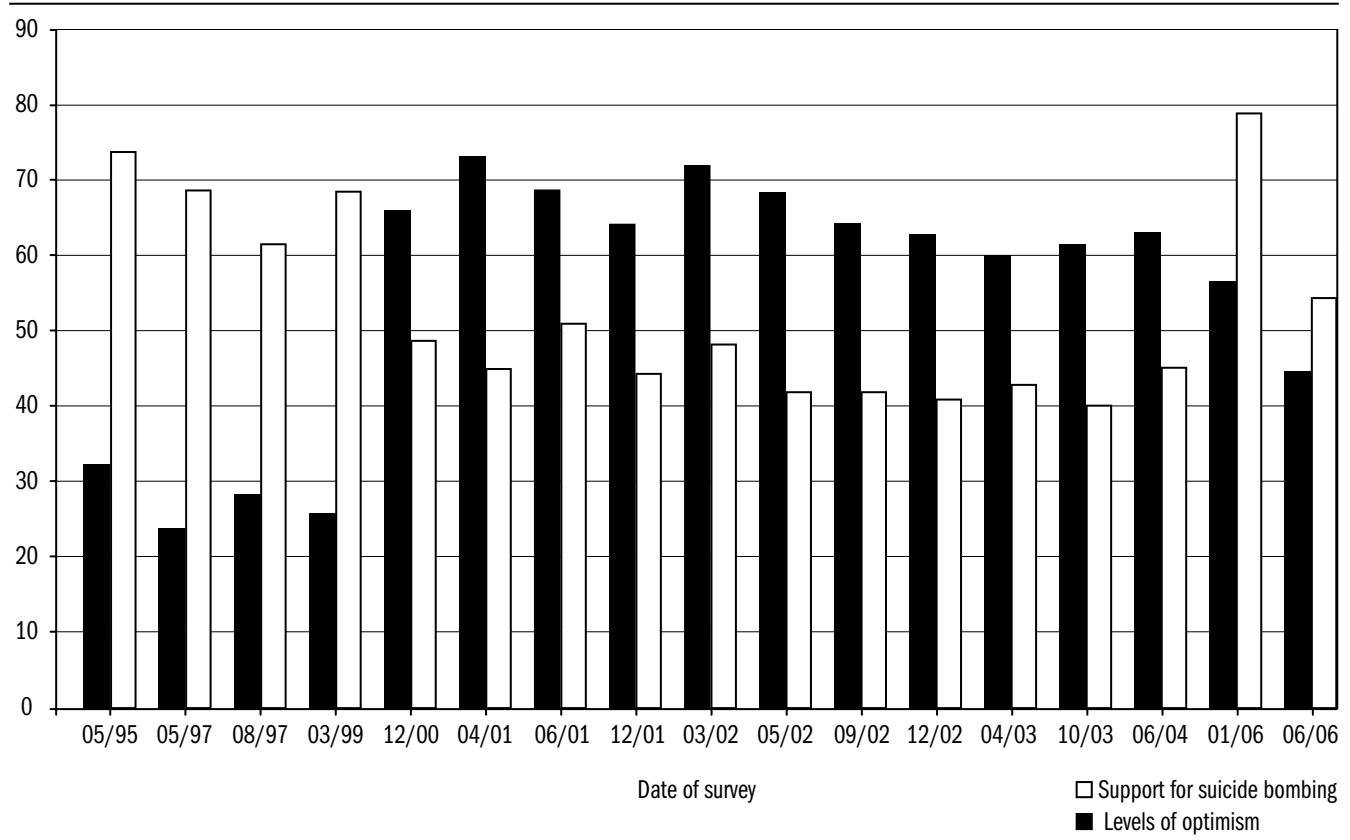
As stated earlier, for al Qaeda, and one-off cases such as 9/11, the Bali bombings, and 7/7, the constituency mainly entails a "virtual constituency" consisting of global supporters on the internet and a small minority from within their own country holding similar sentiments. The work of Sageman (2005) and Hafez (2007) reveal the ubiquitous extent of propaganda for suicide bombing on the internet. Opinion polls in many states reveal evidence of small minorities justifying suicide bombings. For example, ICM opinion polls undertaken for the British *Guardian* newspaper reveal that in March 2004, 13 percent of Muslims

polled in Britain were willing to justify future al Qaeda attacks on the United States while in July 2005, 5 percent of Muslims polled were willing to justify future attacks by British suicide bombers in the UK. Populus opinion polls undertaken for the British *Times* newspaper reveal that of the British Muslims polled in December 2005, 7 percent were willing to justify suicide bombings in the UK, 16 percent in Israel, 13 percent in Chechnya, and 15 percent in Iraq. A separate Populus opinion poll in June 2006 showed 13 percent of polled British Muslims considered the 7/7 perpetrators to be martyrs. In the same poll 16 percent were willing to justify suicide bombings in the United Kingdom against military targets, 11 percent against government buildings/workers, 10 percent against the police, and 7 percent against civilians. A major Pew Research Center poll of sixty thousand Muslims living in the United States found that 5 percent justified suicide bombings. Of those aged under thirty, 15 percent saw justification. Pew’s “Global Attitudes Project” in May 2006

asked “Can suicide bombing of civilian targets to defend Islam be justified?” Muslim respondents from states in which suicide bombers have emerged showed a small, but significant in its implications, minority who justify suicide bombing. Examples include Jordan (29 percent), Egypt (28 percent), Turkey (17 percent), Great Britain (15 percent), Pakistan (14 percent), and Indonesia (10 percent).

Support for suicide bombings in the Palestinian regions is even higher. Over the course of nineteen surveys undertaken between June 1995 and February 2006, JMCC survey data averaged 52 percent support for suicide bombings against any Israeli target. Support for specific suicide bombings in PCPSR surveys garnered even higher levels. The Maxim Restaurant bombing in 2003, which killed twenty Israeli civilians, received 74 percent support. The Beer Shiva suicide bombing in 2004 received 77 percent support, while 69 percent supported the suicide bombing in Tel Aviv in April 2006 that killed eleven civilians.

Figure 3: Levels of support for suicide bombings versus optimism levels



Source: Collated JMCC survey data

Support for orthodox (para)military operations against Israeli Defense Forces, Israeli settlers, and Israeli civilians remained more or less constant over the period examined. Support for suicide bombing, on the other hand, fluctuated. JMCC survey data reveals a negative correlation between support for suicide bombing and optimism about the future (see figure 3). This finding corresponds with the terror management hypothesis that anxiety about the future turns individuals toward authoritarian and escalatory tendencies. Suicide bombings correspond with this escalatory tendency for both normative and strategic reasons. Normatively, suicide bombing violates almost every predominant ethical norm in societies in which it takes place (i.e. not to kill innocents and not to commit suicide). Strategically, suicide bombing causes more casualties. Since the first Palestinian suicide bombing in April 1993, suicide bombing has accounted for 78 percent of Israeli deaths through terrorism despite its use in only 12 percent of incidents.⁷ Seventeen JMCC surveys included both of the following questions: “Are you optimistic or pessimistic about the future?” and “Do you support suicide bombings?” When optimists outnumbered pessimists, support for suicide bombing averaged 40 percent. When optimists were in the minority, support averaged 65.6 percent.

To sum up, the variables listed in section (A) detailed how terrorist organizations seek to alter public opinion to elicit support. This section, on the other hand, proposed one major variable that stipulates the conditions under which audiences may become susceptible to these tactics. This is not to suggest however, that one psychological variable (sense of threat) by itself determines support. Instead, surrounding political conditions such as harsh anti-terrorism policies, poverty, a sense of relative deprivation and/or the initiation of peace processes may also contribute toward individuals increasing or decreasing support for terrorist organizations or, at the very least, agreeing or disagreeing with their justifications. An example of surrounding political conditions lessening societal support for suicide bombing occurred in Palestine in February 2005. Journalists reported that the suicide bombing

by Abdallah Badran was not celebrated. The surrounding community did not print posters of the new martyr. No social event was planned for his funeral. One local stated; “Things were getting better and then no sooner do we have money coming in again then it is stopped by this suicide bombing” (cited in Urquhart 2005). No suicide bombings emerged from Palestine in the following sixteen months. In other words, surrounding political conditions, coupled with a shared sense of threat (or lack thereof) can contribute toward either increasing or decreasing support for suicide bombing.

2.3 The Individual Volunteers (D + E)

Studies focusing on motivations for joining terrorist organizations have evolved over the past three decades. Early research in the 1970s and 1980s searched for a “terrorist personality.” This entailed the search for a deviant personality characteristic within some individuals using psychoanalytic theories. Essentially, the argument was that terrorist group members are born and not made by the surrounding social and political conditions and group processes. Studies of this nature usually contained no empirical data, neither primary nor secondary, and were often condemnatory in nature.

Academic work on terrorism improved in the 1990s. Empirical work increased and there was a shift away from focusing on the terrorist as being deviant in nature. Group processes, the role of leaders, surrounding political conditions and organizational motivations became incorporated into the literature. Despite this improvement, research on individual motivations has been overly simplistic and deterministic. Typically, this work focuses upon a very small number of group members (if any at all) and extrapolates these findings onto the wider terrorist community. Various analyses have focused on pathological disposition to violence (Gordon 2002, Post 1990), an authoritarian personality (Lester, Yang, and Lindsay 2004), general socialization factors (Atran, 2003, Post 2005, Sageman 2005), altruism (Azam 2005), rational choice (Gupta 2004), religious fanaticism (Pipes 2004), cognitive

⁷ Mipt database of terrorism incidents (www.mipt.org).

dissonance (Maikovich 2005), revenge for personal suffering (Margalit 2003), and despair (Prusher 2005). Although the above-mentioned studies have all contributed somewhat to our understanding of individual motivations, their generalizations are problematic. The diversity of demographic backgrounds of suicide bombers alone is striking. Bombers are between fifteen and seventy years old, overly educated and uneducated, male and female, from all socio-economic classes, Christian, Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim, religious and secular, single and married. These studies also only focus on the “supply side” and fail to account for the “demand side” of joining a terrorist organization. In other words, by focusing on the underlying conditions that may create a large pool of potential recruits, they ignore the impediments to membership. Organizational leaders carefully choose who can join. This is essential due to the secretive nature of their work. The risk of any new recruit becoming a state informant or reneging on their task is too large. As will be outlined later, the role of familial and friendship ties is key to understanding how a person becomes a member. Motivation to become a suicide bomber should be viewed as a process (depicted in figure 4). The socialized individual is aware of potential increases in social status from membership of the organization. Although this awareness is usually longstanding, it is only after the experience of a catalyst when compulsion to join becomes salient. Pre-existing familial and friendship ties mediate the recruitment process.

Despite the heterogeneity in the demographic backgrounds of suicide bombers, all suicide bombers do share two common characteristics. One is membership in a terrorist organization. Never has a lone suicide bomber carried out an operation in a bout of heavenly revelation or vengeance. Instead, all suicide attacks are coordinated, designed, premeditated and organized by a terrorist organization. Kimhi and Even’s typology of suicide bombers (2004) illustrates the second common characteristic. They operationalized sixty Palestinian bombers into four categories: religious, exploited, retribution for suffering, and social/nationalist. Support of the community that

reverses martyrdom was a supportive factor in each ideal type. It was the only common factor included in all four ideal types. By acknowledging the important role a “culture of martyrdom” plays, they strengthen the argument that it is the surrounding social environment rather than a personality flaw that compels people to join terrorist organizations.

The influences mentioned in connection with interactions A, B, and C also affect the would-be-bomber. The role of propaganda, proclamations supporting suicide bombing from leaders perceived to be legitimate, and a sense of threat because of the ongoing conflict may create a pool of willing recruits for terrorist organizations. Propaganda that makes a celebrity of the suicide bomber may play a large role in helping others to make the same decision. Range et al (1997) provide persuasive sociological evidence that “suicidal contagion” exists following an extensively publicised celebrity suicide. Other factors may also play a role and are outlined below.

Through interviews with terrorists, Silke (2003) describes the process of becoming a terrorist as primarily an issue of socialization. Fields (1978) came to a similar conclusion. Her eight-year longitudinal study found exposure to terrorism as a child produces a tendency toward terrorism as an adult. Bloom (2005, 1) points out that suicide bombing campaigns usually occur in the second iteration of violence, citing examples such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Israel, Chechnya, and Sri Lanka. When socialized into a society where violence is a regular, highly publicized, and visible experience, one may start to think of violence as a normal part of everyday life. Post et al’s interviews with captured terrorists (2005) reveal awareness of the potential of increased social status as a prime motivator in joining a terrorist organization.

Silke (2003) also outlines that catalysts usually precipitate the compulsion to join a terrorist group. This is very true for would-be suicide bombers. The catalyst could be a response to personal suffering,⁸ revenge for imprison-

⁸ Wafaa Nour E’Din (23), female. Carried out bombing for Hezbollah on May 9, 1985.

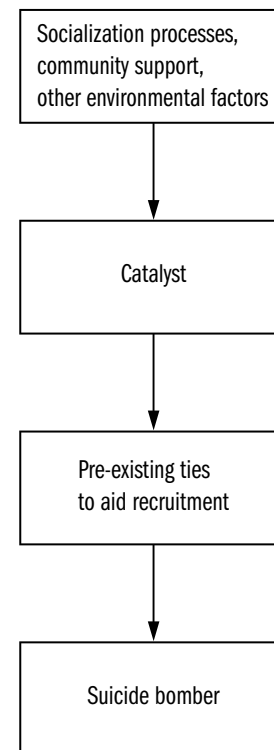
Her husband had been killed in conflict by the IDF earlier that year.

ment,⁹ a recent conversion to Islam,¹⁰ an act of violence by opposition forces,¹¹ a response to restrictions on movement¹², a response to personal desperation,¹³ or frustration of personal goals.¹⁴ The list of catalysts and examples of bombers are endless.

Empirical studies of recruitment processes in terrorist organizations highlight the important role of pre-existing familial or friendship ties. Familial ties aid recruitment in the IRA (Toolis 1995), and the recruitment of female ETA members (Reinares 2004). Friendship ties are important for enrolling Italian and German left-wing militants (Della Porta 1992). Mixtures of both are important to the recruitment process of Palestinian groups (Post et al. 2005), global jihadists (Sageman 2005), and Colombian groups (Florez-Morris 2007). Plenty of evidence exists to show the importance of pre-existing familial and friendship ties in recruiting would-be-suicide bombers. Examples include husband and wife teams of bombers in Palestine, Chechnya, Iraq, and Jordan, a father and daughter team in Chechnya in November 2002, two Chechen sisters in August 2004, a sister of a top aide to al-Zarqawi in Jordan in November 2005, a sister of a deceased Islamic Jihad militant in October 2003, a sister of an imprisoned Fatah operative in May 2003, a nephew of a prominent leader of Hamas in March 2001, and a nephew of a prominent Fatah leader in May 2005. Of the twenty-one Chechen suicide bombers I have identified, fourteen had direct family members taking part in the conflict. Of the 220 Palestinian suicide bombers I have identified, there is clear evidence of pre-existing familial and friendship ties within the organization in 56 of the cases. Among the 9/11 hijackers there were many pre-existing friendship ties, two sets of brothers, and three hijackers who shared tribal affiliations. One would-be-bomber in the Iraqi insurgency claimed he had fifteen friends who had become suicide bombers themselves (Ghosh 2005). Examples of best friends carrying out

double suicide bombings include Palestine in December 2001, January 2003, September 2003, March 2004, and Chechnya in August 2004. Seven members of the same Palestinian football club carried out a wave of suicide attacks in late 2002, early 2003 (Hammer and Zidan 2003).

Figure 4: The path to becoming a suicide bomber



2.4 The Individual Radicalizes Within a Group Setting (F)

Munir al-Makdah, a trainer of suicide bombers, outlines, “much of the work is already done by the suffering these people have been subject to... . Only 10 percent comes from me. The suffering and living away from their land has given the person 90 percent of what he needs to

⁹ Yusef Ali Mohammed Zughayer (22) and Suleiman Musa Dahayneh (24) both served time in Israeli prisons. They conducted a double suicide bombing on November 6, 1998, in Jerusalem.

¹⁰ Sergey Dimitriyev, former Russian soldier, who converted to Islam and conducted a suicide truck bombing on June 11, 2000, for the Chechen separatist movement.

¹¹ Taysir Ahmed Ajrami (22) carried out a suicide bombing on the November 26, 2001. The bomber's suicide note said the attack was in response to the killing of five Palestinian children the previous week by an Israeli mine.

¹² Abdel-Basset Odeh (25), carried out bombing on March 27, 2002. Restrictions on movement prevented him from seeing his fiancée in Baghdad.

¹³ Ala Araeshi (17) was a victim of AIDS. He targeted Israeli police using a belt bomb.

¹⁴ Three bombers carried out three separate acts over the course of one weekend in Israel. All three had attended Hebron Polytechnic University, which had been closed by IDF forces months beforehand.

become a martyr. All we do is provide guidance and help strengthen his faith and help set the objectives for him” (cited in Davis 2003, 154). This section deals with the extra 10 percent that al-Makdah refers to. Upon joining the group, what behavioral and psychological characteristics of the individual alter?

Social identity theory (SIT) explains how individuals define themselves by their social group memberships. SIT accounts for two dual processes: social comparison and categorization. Both processes have their own underlying motivations – to feel positive about oneself and to reduce the complexity of the surrounding world (Hogg and Grieve 1999, 81). Self-perception of group membership creates psychologically distinguishing effects. From a SIT perspective, groups vie to be different from one another in positive ways because this provides individual group members with positive social identities (Hogg and Vaughan 2005, 410). The improvement of self-esteem in the group setting strengthens the individual’s group identification.

Stereotyping within the group creates a group prototype that specifies the mindsets, sentiments, perceptions, norms, and codes of conduct that characterize the group. The stereotype aids in the social categorization process whereby the individual assimilates others into relevant in- and outgroups. This depersonalizes the self, fellow ingroup members, and outgroup members because they are all viewed no longer as idiosyncratic individuals but as members of groups. The individual stereotypes the ingroup as homogenous and coherent. This accentuates the similarities of ingroup members while simultaneously accentuating the differences between ingroup and outgroup members. This also increases subjective certainty and “renders existence meaningful and thus gives one confidence in how to behave, and what to expect from the physical and social environment within which one finds oneself” (Hogg and Grieve 1999, 81). Trust, mutual aid and compassion extend to fellow ingroup members but not to those in the outgroup.

Group norms deepen group bonds by increasing group solidarity and aiding the internalization of a group identity. When this occurs, the individual views the newly acquired norms as normal and therefore legitimate. The effects

strengthen if this “sub-universe” of thought and knowledge contains influential leaders. One obvious example is the influence of religious figures. These leaders may replace significant others who played a role in the individual’s primary socialization. In other words, “the socializing personnel take on the character of significant other vis-à-vis the individual being socialized” (Berger and Luckmann 1966, 165). Significant others and group norm acquisition ultimately facilitate the suicide bomber throughout his training, the final process of which is acquiring the willingness to sacrifice oneself for the beliefs and norms internalized.

Group norms include coping strategies for the terrorist to insulate himself from the human suffering of his actions. Bandura (1990) outlines four commonly used strategies. Firstly, they may imagine themselves as saviors. “The Israelis, the enemy itself, they are the ones who caused me to do what I did” argues a failed suicide bomber in an interview. (Schechter 2004). Secondly, they displace responsibility onto the leader or other members. Thirdly, they minimize or ignore actual suffering. “I do not accept responsibility for their deaths. I feel pain, of course. They are little children. But the government of Israel is solely responsible” a captured bomb-maker stated (Schechter 2004). Finally, they dehumanize their victims. Palestinian propaganda is full of imagery of Israelis depicted as pigs, dogs, monkeys, and donkeys (Oliver and Steinberg 2005, 101–2).

Group identity overrides individual identity upon the acquisition of group norms. This leads to a tendency toward group polarization, defined as a propensity for groups “to make decisions that are more extreme than the mean of individual members’ initial positions, in the direction already favored by that mean. So, for example, group discussion among a collection of people who already favor capital punishment is likely to produce a group decision that strongly favors capital punishment” (Hogg and Vaughan 2005, 342). With group identity overriding individual identity, the group, if highly cohesive, will tend toward a state of mind known as groupthink. Hogg and Vaughan (2005, 340) list the antecedents of groupthink as being:

- Excessive group cohesiveness
- Insulation of group from external information and influence

- Lack of impartial leadership and of norms encouraging proper procedures
 - High stress from external threat and task complexity
- They also list the symptoms of these antecedents as;
- Feelings of invulnerability and unanimity
 - Unquestioning belief that the group must be right
 - Tendency to ignore or discredit information contrary to the group's position
 - Direct pressure exerted on dissidents to bring them into line
 - Stereotyping of outgroup members

The antecedents and their symptoms (which have all been discussed in this paper) show how a commonly held group identity can radicalize the individual group members toward a state of mind that they may not reach independent of a group setting. In terms of suicide bombing, terrorist cells “canalize disparate religious or political sentiments of individuals into an emotionally bonded group of fictive kin who willfully commit to die spectacularly for one another” (Atran 2003, 1534). Suicide bombing, in this light, is a form of Durkheim's (1953) concept of altruistic suicide whereby, due to the deep integration of the individual in the group, the suicide is carried out for the group rather than for the individual himself.

Social psychologists argue that conformity is a big factor in explaining behavior in a group setting. Conformity to group norms is a less direct manner of social influence than Milgram's famous experiments (1974). Conformity to an authoritative figure does not explain the behaviour but “the subjective validity of social norms; that is, a feeling of confidence and certainty that the beliefs and actions described by the norm are correct, appropriate, valid and socially desirable” (Hogg and Vaughan 2005, 245). Leaders of terrorist organizations ensure norm conformity until moments before the suicide bombing. Fellow terrorist group members closely guard the bomber. This facilitates suicide bombing by guarding against the bomber reneging. In Palestine, if the would-be-bomber does show signs of weakness, a senior trainer will be called for to reinforce his determination (Hassan 2001). Eyewitness reports of suicide bombings in Israel consistently include the description of three or four men dropping the bomber off at his destination. Other organizations use multiple bombers at the

same time to build more pressure to conform. Al Qaeda, the Tamil Tigers, and the Chechen and Iraqi insurgents regularly use more than one bomber. Iraqi and Palestinian suicide bombers are constantly subjected to videos of past suicide bombings in the days before their operation (Hassan 2001, Ghosh 2005). Would-be bombers write and record their last wills and testaments, the effect of which may create a point of no return. The charismatic leader of the Tamil Tigers, Pirabhakaran, has a final meal with would-be bombers the night before their operation. On one occasion, Anita Pratap, an Indian journalist was present. She described the would-be bombers as “utterly emotionless ... they could have been lobotomized for all I knew ... the only time they showed some emotion was when they talked about Pirabhakaran” (Pratap 2001, 102–104).

Some Palestinian areas frequently produce bombers in intermittent phases. This may be because the bombers are trained and socialized into the group together, and are set down a path dependent process whereby the first bombing produces a pressure on the next in line to become a bomber. There are many examples of this. Three university students from Hebron all carried out separate attacks in Israel over the course of three days in May 2003. A fourth Hebron resident followed four weeks later. Twelve suicide bombers came from Nablus between December 2, 2001, and March 30, 2002. No Nablus residents carried out a suicide bombing in the following five weeks. Ten suicide bombers broke this phase between May 7 and August 6. Again, no bombers emerged from Nablus for another two months before four more carried out their operations between October 27, 2002, and January 5, 2003. What is striking is that when no bombers emerged from Nablus, plenty came from Jenin. For example, between 25 May, 2001, and 12 August, 2001, there were seven Jenin suicide bombers. No Jenin bombers materialized for almost two months. Between October 7, 2001, and December 9, 2001, three Jenin residents blew themselves up. No Jenin bombers emerged until March 5, 2002, and there was a further five before June 5. Again, there was a two-month spell with no Jenin suicide bombers but four bombers followed in the space of two months between August 4 and October 21. Of the eighteen months covered here, there is only eight weeks of overlap between the two towns producing suicide bombers. This pattern of intermittent phases also occurs in

Bethlehem, Hebron, Tulkarem and Kalkilya. The same may also be true of bombers within the Iraqi and Afghanistan insurgencies but data is too sparse at this moment in time.

Table 1: Bombers from Nablus and Jenin, May 25, 2001 – January 5, 2003

Dates	Town	No. of bombers
May 25 – July 22, 2001	Jenin	5
August 2 – 8, 2001	Nablus	2
August 9 – 12, 2001	Jenin	2
October 7 – December 9, 2001	Jenin	3
December 2, 2001 – March 30, 2002	Nablus	12
March 5 – June 5, 2002	Jenin	6
May 7 – August 8, 2002	Nablus	10
August 4 – October 21, 2002	Jenin	4
October 27, 2002 – January 5, 2003	Nablus	4

This pattern of intermittent phases may be reinforced by domestic competition factors between Palestinian factions. Palestinian terrorist organizations are not as hierarchically structured as, for example, the IRA, or ETA. Because of the restrictions on movement and communication, and the targeted assassination of their leaders, these organizations rely on a high degree of autonomy of local leaders and activists (Pedahzur and Perliger 2006). A Hamas suicide bombing by their Nablus cell, for example, would create a pressure on the rival Nablus cells of Fatah, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and the PFLP to carry out a similar operation for fear of losing local support. This finding coupled with Pedahzur and Perliger's social network analysis of Palestinian terrorist organizations (2006) supports Bloom's thesis (2005) of domestic political competition factors driving suicide bombings except at a local rather than national level.

3. Conclusion

This paper has proposed a theoretical prism to view suicide bombing by incorporating the interactions between the suicide bomber, the terrorist organization and the surrounding society from which suicide bombing emerges. By synthesizing empirically rich unidimensional approaches, this multi-dimensional model provides us with a broader understanding of suicide bombing. Leaders of terrorist organizations use material and nonmaterial resources to venerate suicide bombing. Resources include the use of

charismatic leaders, epistemic authority figures, agency-laden institutions, framing justifications, euphemistic language, and monetary rewards. Under conditions of threat, societies accept the proclamations of authoritarian charismatic leaders as authentic and resort to authoritarian mindsets. Threat salience coupled with, and caused by, surrounding political conditions facilitate support for suicide bombing. The individual, in search of a positive identity, joins the terrorist organization with the support of a surrounding community. Experiencing catalysts and recruitment through pre-existing familial and friendship ties drive the process of becoming a suicide bomber forward. Within the group, the new recruit radicalizes further. Relevant norm internalization, group polarization, group conformity, group identity overriding individual identity, the use of multiple bombers and other techniques are used by group leaders to facilitate the individual becoming a suicide bomber.

This model is stronger than others in the current field of research for many reasons. By focusing on organizational and individual motivations as two distinct processes, the models proposed by Moghadam (2006) and Hafez (2006) ignore why and how leaders of terrorist organizations socially construct a "culture of martyrdom" and under what conditions audiences become susceptible to such narratives. The radicalization process of the would-be-bomber within the group setting is also largely ignored. Insights from social and political psychology provide an effective interpretive lens to understand these symbiotic processes. By his own admission, Pedahzur's model (2004) is too systematic. Various interactions have shown dissimilar causal weights in each case of a terrorist organization resorting to suicide bombing. Elites within Hamas, Hezbollah and Palestinian Islamic Jihad resorted to suicide bombing after carefully crafting a "culture of martyrdom." The Tamil Tigers spent three years radicalizing and training cadres to become suicide bombers. This followed the apparent accidental suicide bombing of Captain Miller in 1987, which LTTE supporters celebrated as the highest form of martyrdom. In this case, grass roots support for suicide bombing preceded the social construction of a "culture of martyrdom" and the training of members. When these conditions converged from 1990 onwards, the LTTE became the most prolific users of suicide bombing until the Iraqi insurgency began. Fatah's

declining support in the Palestinian regions led them to undertake suicide bombing campaigns to boost support. Lower-level members of the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) resorted to suicide bombing following the imprisonment of their leader in Turkey. Self-starter suicide bombers such as the London bombers make their own decisions but are heavily motivated by pre-existing calls to arms by al Qaeda leaders, “virtual” supporters, and ultimately group radicalization.

Focusing on organizations that have not resorted to suicide bombing also confirms this model. Kalyvas and Sánchez-Cuenca (2005, 211) provide details of Colombian terrorist organization FARC’s attempt to recruit suicide bombers. Despite offering a \$2 million reward to the families of potential bombers, FARC was unsuccessful. The model outlined in this paper provides two reasons for this failure. Firstly, FARC does not possess charismatic leaders or epistemic authority figures, nor does it control social institutions. This makes it impossible to successfully create a “culture of martyrdom” to garner support for suicide bombing from the wider community. Secondly, offering substantial amounts of money does not overcome the unwillingness of potential recruits to become suicide bombers. Without a “culture of martyrdom” and support for suicide bombing amongst their constituency of supporters, FARC found it impossible to radicalize recruits to the point of becoming a suicide bomber. ETA never resorted to suicide bombing, also for these reasons. A further reason may explain the IRA’s unwillingness to use suicide bombing despite possessing a historical narrative of martyrdom to rely upon. Kalyvas and Sánchez Cuenca (2005) provide examples of how the IRA marginalized themselves within their community after indiscriminate acts of violence. Suicide bombing causes more deaths than any other terrorist method. Possessing this knowledge through social learning, the IRA knew it could not afford the costs of losing more support. The examples, provided by Kalyvas and Sánchez Cuenca, also suggest that ETA’s and the IRA’s supporters were considerably more moderate than the members of the organizations themselves. The IRA perhaps were also mindful not to disaffect their American support base. Utilizing a tactic originally developed to kill American forces in Lebanon might have isolated the IRA from their lucrative fundraising contacts in America.

Further research will be required to refine the model. Is there a relationship between acts of suicide bombing and counter-terrorism techniques such as targeted assassinations and incursions? Is there an association between societal support for suicide bombing and counter-terrorism techniques? In what way do some counter-terrorism techniques influence the target society? Interviews with failed suicide bombers may further our knowledge of the group radicalization process while more detailed case studies of individual terrorist organizations and campaigns would allow for a comparative approach to this model.

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