

The Multilevel Analysis of the Suicide Terrorism

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Suicide terrorism is becoming a political and strategic problem with far reaching political consequences. The presence of suicide attacks throughout the history is noticed always when there are two parties standing against each other and one of them is financially and technologically more advanced than the other. Suicide attack gives the weaker side a chance to succeed, while there is no sophisticated technology needed to manage the attack. The suicide bomber brings the weapon right to the target and detonate at the very right moment.¹

The concept of fear appeared in the modern history for the first time in France, during the French Revolution. It was used by Maximilian Robspiere. Similar regimes could be found in the 20th century as well (Russia, Kambodia, Iran...)²

The systematic use of suicide attacks started in the 20th century in the beginning of 1980' However most of them took a place after 2001 (more than 99%). This method is mostly spread among so called terrorist groups, mainly in the Middle East and Sri Lanka.

The objective of this paper is to define an analysis of suicide terrorism in Islam and variables that influence this phenomenon. I would use this predefined analysis in my further research and focus on some levels of the analysis.

I used the analysis by Assaf Moghadan, who uses 3 levels of analysis to describe suicide terrorism:

Individual Level

Organizational Level

Environmental Level³

“If sufficiently adaptive, such a multi-level, integrative framework may shed further insight into the causes and characteristics of suicide attacks, but can also serve as a framework for the assessment of risk for the occurrence of suicide missions in a particular environment. Hence, the contribution of this multi-causal framework is not limited to the realm of theory, but extends to the area of policy-making. Many analysts seem to acknowledge the need for research on terrorism to take place on multiple levels, few researchers have put such a method to systematic use.” (Moghadam)

¹ PAPE, *The Strategic logic of Suicide Terrorism*: www.amconmag.com/2005_07_18/article.html, (15.5.2007)- Department of State, 1983-2001, *Patterns of Global Terrorism*, Washington, DC: DOS

² Genesis and Future of Suicide Terrorism, <http://www.interdisciplines.org/terrorism/papers/1> (10.5. 2007)

³ MOGHADAM, *The Roots of Suicide Terrorism*, Chelsea House Publications (June 12, 2006), ISBN-10: 0791083071

All three levels of the above mentioned analysis are connected and influenced by each other. All three levels should be considered as a system, not just one by one. There are the same variables influencing more than one level, giving a different perspective to the problem.

For example Individual and Environmental level are further connected one to another. "Some of the motivations emanating from the individual and organizational level are identical, because they stem from the same environmental context. A country or region that is known to be very religious, for example, is likely not only to produce many religious individuals, but would also tend to lead many organizations to adopt religious guidelines. Similarly, a certain political context, be it a long-standing conflict or perhaps a nation's struggle for national independence, is also likely to have similar effects on the motivations of individuals as it will on those of organizations. A final reason why the individual and organizational level can at times be closely intertwined is that the terrorist or insurgent organization exerts influence on its members in one way or another. Membership in the group itself provides the terrorist with a sense of belonging, purpose, perceived social status, and empowerment that he would otherwise not enjoy. The individual may join the terrorist group because he views the rewards of joining as highly satisfying." (Moghadam)

The level of education can be a variable affecting both individual and environmental level. The level of education achieved by individuals influences their further behavior in the society and motivations. The educational system of the society as a whole can affect the behavior of a state as such in international relations. In our case it is the motivation to use such techniques as suicide terrorism in international politics.

The development of the economics in the society has a multilevel effect as well. The poverty of individuals might motivate them for a certain action. In our case it is the motivation to take a part in suicide campaigns. These people do not see any other option how to increase their and their families' lifestyle.

In the other hand, when talking about the environmental level, poorer societies might use suicide terrorism more often because of its efficiency and low cost. So they would not need the expensive and advanced technologies to compete more developed societies.

Individual Level

Individual level involves personal motivations of the suicide bomber. I added here the generalized characteristics or so called typical profile of a suicide bomber as well.

The question of the possible generalized profile of suicide bombers as well as the possibility of logic of this phenomenon is being discussed among specialists. The profile gives the predispositions for such an act, personal motivation is the accelerator.

The specialist in political violence Ariel Merari has suggested that in cases of suicide terrorism the willingness to kill others is less surprising than the willingness to die. Moreover, suicide terrorism is at one extreme of a continuum of willingness to die. This indicates that the logic of suicide should be at the primary focus of an investigation. We should try to understand suicide as the outcome of a rational choice based on self-interest.⁴

“The recent rise of suicide terrorism is sometimes explained more generally in terms of the hurt religious or national feelings of communities in the Middle East that have been humiliated or shamed by western military alliances, Israeli occupation, or other un-Islamic institutions. Although clearly part of the picture, such explanations are obviously incomplete. They apply first to populations rather than individuals and entirely neglect the question of how the individual suicide attacker is selected or selects himself from the community that is involved.” (Merari)

Motivations could be various. Economists since Carl Shapiro (1983) have analysed “reputation” as an asset.

“Reputation is related to identity in the following way: it covers those aspects of my identity that I make visible to others through my actions. Why is reputation valuable? The Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stigler (1961) wrote: ‘Reputation commands a price [...] because it economizes on search.’ He had in mind the search for products or suppliers of given quality in the market place; the same may be applied to individuals in society as they search for other people of given qualities with whom to engage in social and political transactions. However, when I take into account my reputation not just with others but also with myself, I deal with something deeper, my identity, or sense of myself.

The logic that drives voluntary acts of self-destruction is therefore as follows. Each person who chooses the death of the self does so because at the given moment death will maintain her most valuable asset, the identity that she has selected and invested in

⁴ MERARI, *Suicide attacks as a terrorist tactic: characteristics and counter measures*, Department of Psychology and the Political Violence

through her life, but living on will damage it irreparably. The moment is such that by choosing life she must abandon this identity.”⁵

Among the fact about suicide terrorism the poverty and education as a part of motivation of suicide terrorist has been discussed.

The research by Krueger and Maleckova considers the education as a factor of poverty in case of suicide terrorism. The presumption said that candidates with lower education have higher tendency to become suicide bombers. The same hypothesis was taken in case of poverty, the individuals with poorer background would more likely become suicide terrorists.

The research results show there is no correlation between low education and suicide attacks and if yes, than candidates with the higher education or university degree tend to become suicide bombers more often. The research shows, that only 13% of all Palestinian suicide bombers came from poor families. 57% of these attackers had higher than high school education, while in the whole Palestinian population it is only 15%.⁶

This phenomenon could be explained by losing the comparative advantage of education as the salaries of university educated people during the first intifada lowered by 30% while the salaries of high school educated did not change.

Psychologist Gary Becker explains the phenomenon of criminality by the rational behavior of criminals. They figured out, he says, that being criminals is much more profitable for them than being employed. The benefits from criminality are simply higher than alternative costs. This could not be fully applied to suicide terrorism though, because the financial stability of suicide bomber's family can only be a secondary motivation.⁷

Individual level of analysis includes the question of considered mental health of suicide bomber.

“The importance of psychological factors among suicide bombers, or other terrorists for that matter, has preoccupied many researchers. Some argue that individual psychological reasons—sometimes generated by the socio-political context—account for

⁵ HARRISON, *An Economist look at Suicide Terrorism*,

http://www.securitymanagement.com/archive/library/Suicide_Harrison0803.pdf, 2001

⁶ KRUEGER, MALEČKOVÁ, *Education, Poverty, Political Violence and Terrorism: Is there a casual connection?*, NBER Working Paper no. w9074, National Bureau of Economic Research, Cambridge, MA, July 2002; <http://www.nber.org/papers/w9074>, (15.5. 2006)

⁷ Genesis and Future of Suicide Terrorism, <http://www.interdisciplines.org/terrorism/papers/1> (10.5. 2007)

the behavior of suicide attackers. Eyad el-Sarraj, for instance, argues that *politically, suicide bombing is an act of absolute despair*. Based on personal interviews, psychiatrist Anne Speckhard believes that deep personal traumatization and bereavement, based on humiliating treatment in part explains the resort of some Chechens and Palestinians to suicide attacks. Going a step further, Vamik Volkan believes that potential suicide bombers have disturbed personal identities based on prior humiliating experiences that hindered the formation of a healthy identity. In the other hand according to 3 decades of research by Marc Sageman, there is no proof of mental illness of suicide terrorists. Most researchers agree that terrorists, while clearly highly alienated from society, are sane and relatively 'normal,' i.e., they do not exhibit signs of suffering from a salient psychopathology. Joan Lachkar (2002) has suggested that suicide bombers have a borderline personality disorder, a personality type that she feels is characteristic of many Arabs in the Middle East (as compared to the narcissistic personality of many Israelis). Borderline personality types are dominated by shame, and they use defense mechanisms that involve blaming others. They have defective bonding and dependency needs, they are envious, and they are prone to retaliate. "They are impulsive, have poor reality testing, and impaired judgments. . . . Borderlines suffer from profound fears of abandonment and annihilation, as well as persecutory anxieties". Borderlines tend to distort and misperceive the reality. Lachkar saw the genesis of this personality type in the Islamic child-rearing practices that frustrate the child's dependency needs and view personal desires as signs of weakness and failure. As a result, they revert easily to feelings of omnipotence as a defense against intolerable feelings of helplessness. DeMause (2002) has supported this analysis by documenting the violence, cruelty, and sexual exploitation of children in Islamic societies. The fathers, who are supposed to be in charge of their sons' child-rearing, are usually absent, and the child-rearing is left to the oppressed mothers who inflict their own pain onto their sons. Lachkar argued that boys raised in such a society can easily form an intense identification with a charismatic leader who appeals to the society's mythological fantasies and allows them to act out their anger and aggression. The possibility that many of the suicide bombers are shy and introverted boys who want to be idols and heroes is consistent with this hypothesis." (Moghadam)

How does Mark Harrison, the professor of economics at the University of Warwick, explain some facts about suicide terrorists taken as a part of suicide terrorists' profile.

“Why are suicide terrorists not old?”

Because their choice emerges from a crisis of the young person. Those who take a wrong turn at this point do not grow old.

Why are suicide terrorists mainly men?

Perhaps the range of possible identities available to them was preselected by their gender. Young women are often expected to invest in identities that emphasise their attachment to the rest of humanity through caring and nurture. Young men are limited to more rigid, introverted roles that may inhibit the formation of adult attachments and so prove more fragile and less resilient under the pressures of growing up.

Why has the proportion of women risen recently among Palestinian suicide terrorists?

By hindering normal family life and the normal formation of new families, renewed Israeli occupation may have lowered the opportunity costs facing adolescent women who choose to step outside the caring and nurturing roles prescribed by their traditional identities. Alternatively, with the rising number of male attackers the relative distinction of the identity to be won by young men may have declined, prompting a widening of recruitment to young women for whom the distinction of the first few volunteers may be higher.

Why are suicide terrorists not uneducated?

These young people have sometimes made substantial efforts to get an education but the efforts invested by each have failed to pay off in some way that is valued, which seems particularly likely in an oppressive environment; thus, suicide terrorism may be a specialisation of the partially educated and unemployed.

Why may the shame or humiliation imposed by Israel on its occupied territories become a motive for suicide terrorism?

Because shaming is another word for devaluation of the identity without which an individual has no status in society; this is why death is preferred to dishonour in many cultures.”⁸

The disciplines such as social and applied psychology are very helpful in individual level of this analysis. They help to draw the whole picture and the interactions among different variables of this level. For variables in the individual level are considered as follows: the individual, the society he comes from, the environment and the situation he is in, the

⁸ HARRISON, *The logic of suicide terrorism*

social system and its rules and conditions, other individuals in the same environment. All these factors play a significant role.

The person who pioneered in social, organizational and applied psychology is Kurt Lewin. He studied the dynamics and development of an organization. The research that is most useful for the purposes of this paper is the 3 leaders research. Lewin did an experiment on a group of kids. He used 3 types of leaders – Dictator, Laissez faire, Democratic. The leader should have coached the kids. Children were most productive under the Dictator, but they had most internal fights against each other, they were grumpy and nervous. Laissez faire leader resulted in chaos and the democratic leader was the one when children tend to communicate the most, they were the most creative. The research explains that in the regimes with dictatorship or in the groups lead by charismatic leader (dictator) there is no space for own ideas or creativity. The orders are just followed.

Stanley Milgram brought light to the problem of charismatic leader with his experiment on obedience to authority (1961).

“The experiments began in July 1961, three months after the start of the trial of German Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem. Milgram devised his psychological study to answer the question: ‘Was it that Eichmann and his accomplices in the Holocaust had mutual intent, in at least with regard to the goals of the Holocaust?’ In other words, ‘Was there a mutual sense of morality among those involved?’ Milgram's testing suggested that it could have been that the millions of accomplices were merely following orders, despite violating their deepest moral beliefs.”⁹

The recruiters picked by Milgram were ordinary Americans, who were told they are participating on a study on memory and learning under different circumstances. These people were briefed to play the role of a teacher and examine the learner, who was a part of experiment, acting according to the brief as well. The *teacher* was asked to give an electric shock to the learner for every wrong answer. The voltage increased by every wrong answer. Even though some *teachers* expressed doubts, 60% of them continued after the assurance of a *supervisor* in a lab coat, who was taken as an authority. The learner was a professional actor hired to play the role of student being punished and suffering from the electric shocks which were not real. The conclusion says people

⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Milgram_experiment, (2.8.2010)

would follow the order if it is given by somebody considered as an authority. The results help in the explanation of suicide bomber phenomenon and support the theory of charismatic leader followed by recruited bombers.

Philip Zimbardo developed the obedience to authority study even further by his Stanford prison experiment. 24 randomly picked students were involved in this experiment. Some of them performed prisoners, some of them were guards. The planned two-week investigation into the psychology of prison life had to be ended prematurely after only six days because of what the situation was doing to the college students who participated. In only a few days, guards became sadistic and prisoners became depressed and showed signs of extreme stress. Zimbardo later stressed out the parallels with the abuse of prisoners of Abu Ghraib (Iraq).

As Philip Zimbardo explains the study shows, that the evil happened as he put a good students in a bad situation. He says, that the individuals can have a bad predispositions (bad apples), or you can just put good individuals (good apples) in a bad situation (bad barrel) or you can just blame the wrong system (bad barrel makers). This experiment shows the power of a situation and the role the individual identifies with.

Hage (2003) noted that surveys in the Gaza Strip indicate that over 70 percent of the adolescents reported that they wanted to be martyrs, but he noted that the presence of a disposition is not the same as actually sacrificing oneself. For example, in the field of suicidology, many more people report suicidal ideation (past or current) than go on to attempt or complete suicide.¹⁰

Organizational Level

When talking about the organizational level, the motivations of the terrorist organizations is ment. Terrorist groups believe that violence helps them in achieving their political goals. Terrorist organizations as any other group involved in politics, tries to increase the popularity among the population, they are simply trying to increase their market share.

The success of the terrorist act is, according to Robert Pape, built on five pillars:¹¹

¹⁰ LESTER, *Suicide bombers: Are psychological profiles possible?*, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 27:283–295, 2004, Taylor & Francis Inc, ISSN: 1057-610X print / 1521-0731 online, DOI: 10.1080/10576100490461033

¹¹ PAPE, *The Strategic logic of Suicide Terrorism*: www.amconmag.com/2005_07_18/article.html, (15.5.2007)

Nationalist Goals

Which earn the terrorist group a support by population.

Liberal democracies as the Targets

All the attacks since 1980 were targeted against liberal democracies. They want to achieve a compromise or acknowledgement. Targets usually are self determination, territory gains, military units removal from the territory. According to the level in which the population participate on the political decisions, liberal democracies seem to be the best target.

Coercion works

The increase of the suicide terrorism in the last 30 years is a result of the fact that the terrorists learnt that the coercion works. They explained the achievement of some partial targets as a result of suicide campaigns (Lebanon 1983, Lebanon 1985, Gaza and the West Bank 1994-95, Tamil Tigers - 90', Kurds - 90')

Damages on civilians

Terrorists experienced that the coercion causing the damages on civilians works. Specifically in the liberal democracies, the voice of the population is strong and influences the political affairs.

Suicide attacks, even more than ordinary terrorist attacks, serve the organization's attempt to create extreme fear in the larger population—a key feature of terrorist attacks. This occurs in part due to the group's demonstration of the inefficacy of the targeted government, and in part due to the demoralization of the public and law enforcement. Suicide attacks create not only a disproportionately intense amount of fear among targeted populations, but their effect may be particularly traumatizing and long-lasting.

Wrong security strategy of the democratic states

Liberal democracies invest into armies and units abroad rather than supporting domestic security and security at the borders.¹²

Martha Crenshaw, who pioneered the theoretical formulation of the organizational approach to the study of terrorism, has argued that terrorism can be understood as the

¹² PAPE, *The Strategic logic of Suicide Terrorism*: www.amconmag.com/2005_07_18/article.html, (15.5.2007)

result of a deliberate choice by terrorist organizations which believe that violence is the best means to advance their political goals. In determining when to stage terrorist attacks, and which particular tactic to use, terrorist organizations may be guided by a variety of calculations. The organization may believe that at a particular moment the cost of an attack is low, or the chances of success are high.¹³

“Terrorist or insurgent organizations may also decide to adopt suicide attacks after they have tried a number of other terrorist tactics. Most terrorist groups existed for years or decades before they began executing suicide missions. Some factors connected to the organization may influence the timing of the use of the suicide attack. The organization may possess a rare opportunity to stage a successful suicide attack or it may have a unique opportunity to strike a target of particularly high value, deciding to use a suicide operation to increase the chances of success.

An organizational level of analysis must be conducted because organizations have motives and goals that are distinct from those of individuals. Organizational motives to commit acts of suicide terrorism revolve. First around the need for organizational survival. A minimum degree of violent presence is necessary for terrorist groups to remain effective. Failure to maintain such a degree of violence will eventually lead to the group’s irrelevance and eventual disappearance as a political force.

The organizational strive to persist and remain relevant is closely related to terrorist organizations’ pursuit of political power—a key feature of any terrorist group. As part of their struggle for power, most organizations that adopt suicide tactics, like those who do not, vie for the support of the local population. This struggle for market share, Mia Bloom explains, can lead to the adoption of suicide attacks by groups that have not previously used such tactics, especially when various terrorist organizations are engulfed in a struggle to ‘outbid’ themselves.

An additional reason why some groups prefer suicide bombing tactics is that they believe that such a modus operandi will benefit them in various ways. First, even more than ordinary terrorist attacks, suicide operations are likely to draw attention to a group’s cause, aided in large part by the extraordinarily high attention such operations enjoy in the media—“the terrorist’s best friend,” as Walter Laqueur once described it. In this regard, suicide attacks can be thought of as a form of ‘strategic signaling,’ whereby terrorist attacks are used to communicate a group’s character and goals to the target audience.” (Mohgadam)

¹³ CRENSHAW, *The Causes of terrorism*, Comparative politics, Volume 13, Issue 4, (July 1981), 379-399

“At the same time, military occupation and other repressive measures aimed at weakening a terrorist organization may also raise the background levels of polarization and oppression in society that stimulate the flow of volunteers and contributions and promote the terrorists’ monopolization of power in the locality. To that extent, in the long run they may bolster indirectly the same activities that they are designed directly to curtail. This suggests that regardless of the efficiency of modern methods of intelligence and policing there are limits on the effective power of states to repress suicide terrorism without addressing underlying the fundamental conflicts from which they spring.

What is the role, specifically, of the suicide attacker in this process? For a terrorist leader the suicide attacker is simply an asset of his organization, an input into the process of creating a local monopoly of power. By investing in the recruitment, indoctrination, and training of the suicide attacker, the leader augments his assets. These assets will one day be used up by new symbolic acts of violence. The actions create the payoff to the organisation. The violence intensifies the fear in the community that promotes the power of the terrorist leader. Incidentally it reinforces the oppression that stimulates new ranks of potential recruits. The symbolism draws them towards the organization.”

Another possible mechanism would have the same effect: each new martyr must compete for distinction with all existing martyrs who are currently remembered. Thus the distinction attached to a martyr’s identity may diminish with the number of recent martyrs. Diminishing returns may gradually depress the incentive to invest in a martyr’s identity. As a result, particularly in the absence of political results it may become increasingly difficult to recruit new suicide attackers. On the other hand some responses to suicide attacks, particularly those that increase repression of the whole community, may raise the incentive again and renew the supply.

For the terrorist organization, widening the sphere of recruitment to entirely new communities and categories of recruits such as women and children would seem to be an especially promising response. The number of female suicide attackers may have grown recently because, being few in number in the past, they may expect to attract

special distinction in their communities. Moreover, in a globalizing world the recruitment of suicide attackers may leap community frontiers with increasing ease.¹⁴

Environmental Level

“Whereas suicide terrorism is planned and executed by individuals who are members of organizations, groups, or cells, these two levels are in turn influenced by broader environmental conditions that include the political, social, historical, cultural, economic, and religious context. Clearly, some of these sub-elements of the broader environment are more relevant in some cases than in others. The religious context, for example, is a more important factor to take into account in explaining why some Islamist groups employ suicide attacks than it is in the case of the LTTE, a predominantly secular, nationalist organization.” (Moghadan)

According to Moghadan the both parties, the organization and the recruited suicider are profiting from this “contract”. The benefit for the suicider the identity, the distinction. The suicider would be remembered as a martyr, the warrior. The organization’s benefit is to get closer in achieving its goals.¹⁵

Conclusion

The aspiration of this paper is to create a scheme, or structure for further research. The paper should stress out that it is important to look at the suicide attacks phenomenon by using a multi level structure. Each level of the used analysis (individual, organizational, environmental) brings a different light to the matter. The important part is to connect all three levels and look at the interactions among them.

The paper used the three level structure of analysis by Assaf Moghadam and aspired for further development of the individual level. The aspect of social psychology and the role of leadership were missing in the original analysis by Moghadam.

¹⁴ HARRISON, *An Economist look at Suicide Terrorism*

¹⁵ MOGHADAM, *The Roots of Suicide Terrorism*, Chelsea House Publications (June 12, 2006), ISBN-10: 0791083071

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