

# What Makes a Suicide Bomber ‘Tick’?

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## Introduction

Swirling in the cauldrons of the West Bank and Gaza exist the currents of a cult of death that is permeating the very heart of Palestinian society. The Palestinians have found in the suicide bomb, an act that has shocked the world for its brutal nature, a weapon that has proven to be practically unstoppable. In essence, the suicide bomber is a thinking stick of dynamite, the ultimate “smart bomb.” It is a weapon that can target its prey with accuracy that is unmatched by other conventional weapons. The suicide bomber is a horrifying weapon that has Israeli society truly terrified to visit such everyday places as cafes, discos and shopping malls. The suicide bomber is a chilling reminder of the most fundamental sacrifice that can be made, to kill oneself for the sole purpose of killing others.

What persuasion can be offered to someone to willingly give up his or her own life for rewards in the next? Paradise. Whispered from the lips and seen in the eyes of those about to commit the horrific act that will turn a bus full of people into a fireball of carnage. Soldiers and civilians, women and children have all become legitimate targets in martyrdom operations. To the martyr, or *shahid*, this act is the highest form of piety. A piety that places the youth of Palestine upon the sacrificial altar of Islam and homeland. There is no “purity of arms,” there is only the purity of zealous faith. There is a purity of faith possessed by the suicide bomber who believes that his actions are not only righteous but also blessed. Beyond religious inducements to commit suicide bombings, there are streams of social and peer pressure on Palestinian youths to carry out this act. This pressure manifests itself in a pervasive ethos that exalts martyrdom in the media, educational system and surrounding culture.

To the Palestinians, the practice of suicide bombing is a symptom of the ongoing occupation that takes place in the West Bank and Gaza. Its defenders argue that the deed represents the culmination of the frustrations felt by a people whose freedoms are severely curtailed. The existence of the suicide bomber stems from the desperation and deprivation that Palestinian society faces. Yet suicide terrorism represents more than a defensive weapon, it has become a symbol of empowerment. For the Palestinians, the suicide bomb has become the devastating force that can inflict pain directly at the heart of the Zionist enemy. News of this act sends the people to the streets, dancing for the act they believe will bring about the redemption of Palestine. Support for suicide bombing in the form of posters and murals adorn the streets and alleyways of Palestinian cities. It pervades the airwaves of Palestinian television. Publicly, parents speak in glowing terms for the actions of their children who participated in suicide bombings. Martyrdom is celebrated.

From a tactical standpoint, the suicide bomb has become the most effective weapon that the Palestinians possess in their arsenal. This “arsenal of believers<sup>1</sup>” reaps more destruction psychologically upon Israeli society than any weapon ever possessed by a conventional army of the surrounding Arab states. To the groups that undertake these operations, the suicide bomb is seen as the one force that neutralizes Israel’s overwhelming military superiority. By those who employ it, the suicide bomber is termed the “Palestinian F-16” or the “Palestinian tank.” More effective than its tactical capabilities, the suicide bomb serves as propagandistic fodder for the psychological war that exists between the two sides. Since the suicide bomber targets the public sphere, Israelis are forced to evaluate every trip outside the confines of the home.

The chilling effectiveness of the ability of the suicide bomb to sow terror in Israeli society has had an intoxicating effect on those who harbor maximalist desires for a Palestinian state. Through a baptism of bloodshed, Palestinian militants have sought to force Israel to undertake a unilateral withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza. The suicide bomb has become a means to reach political ends.

However, suicide terrorism has brought severe Israeli retaliations in response that affect Palestinian life on both local and national levels. In response to suicide bombings, Israel has carried out a policy of destroying the homes of the suicide bomber, leaving his family dispossessed. In the face of the numerous suicide bombings, Israel has reoccupied much of the territory that the Palestinian Authority once had control over. The peaceful establishment of a Palestinian State through negotiations between both sides, which once loomed just over the horizon, seems to be slipping away as the conflict continues to escalate. Lately, growing dissent against suicide bombing has begun to surface within Palestinian society. Both officials within the Palestinian Authority and members of the Palestinian intelligentsia have condemned the practice as contrary to Palestinian national aspirations and demanded its cessation. As the practice continues, a debate within Palestinian society is taking shape, questioning the morality, religious legality as well as the overall benefits of suicide terrorism.

The groups that partake in suicide terrorism cover the entire Palestinian political spectrum. On both religious and nationalistic lines, these groups have put forward numerous rationalizations for the use of “martyrdom operations.” From the staunchly secular group Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) on the extreme left, to nationalist *al-Aqsa* Brigades, to the Islamic groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad on the

radical religious right, all have partaken in suicide operations. For these groups, the suicide bomb has come to represent the Palestinian wild card in the battle against Israel.

The practice of suicide bombing played an instrumental role in the failure of the Oslo peace process. It broke fragile cease-fires and helped to topple governments. It has brought the Middle East to the brink of disaster. The continued use of suicide terrorism by the Palestinians has the distinct possibility of transforming the second *Intifada* (uprising) into the second *nakba* (catastrophe). According to David Brooks,

“Suicide bombing is the crack cocaine of warfare. It doesn’t just inflict death and terror on its victims; it intoxicates the people who sponsor it. It unleashes the deepest and most addictive passions- the thirst for vengeance, the desire for religious purity, the longing for earthly glory and eternal salvation. Suicide bombing isn’t just a tactic in a larger war; it overwhelms the political goals it is meant to serve. It creates its own logic and transforms the culture of those who employ it. This is what has happened in the Arab-Israeli dispute. Over the past year suicide bombing has dramatically changed the nature of the conflict.”<sup>23</sup>

The phenomenon of suicide bombing has achieved a status level within Palestinian society that eclipses the popularity of the groups that carry out the act. It enjoys a legitimacy that the Oslo peace process never came close to. Since the breakdown of the Oslo peace process, a tool that was once confined to the realm of religious radicals has catapulted itself into the mainstream. Will the Palestinians poison the very nature of their state if it is born to this world from the womb of terror? What kind of civil society can be created from a nation that actively celebrates the death of innocent civilians?

The practice of suicide bombing brings up a multitude of questions about suicide bombing in general and Palestinian usage in particular. Where did suicide terrorism originate? Why does suicide bombing garner such support in Palestinian society and the surrounding Arab-Muslim world? Does suicide bombing stem from a Palestinian sense

of desperation? How has the phenomenon of suicide bombing been transformed by the *al-Aqsa Intifada*? The purpose of this thesis is to examine the phenomenon of suicide bombing in regard to its usage by Palestinian society in the context of the current Middle East conflict. It is a study in the transformation that suicide bombing has undergone since its initial adoption by Palestinian militants, through the period of the Oslo Peace Process, until the present situation today, and the effects that this transformation has had on both Palestinian and Israeli society.

The purpose of this thesis is to understand what makes the suicide bomber “tick?” This study seeks to address “martyrdom operations” through the lens of the Islamic dogma that both sanctions and opposes its usage, both within the Palestinian Territories and the surrounding Arab and Muslim world. This thesis will focus on the perspective of international law in regard to the practice. Through a comprehensive assessment of the individuals who perform suicide terrorism and the ideology that drives them, the author will examine the impact of suicide bombing on both Palestinian and Israeli society. Furthermore, this text will examine the groups that are the catalysts behind the practice of suicide bombings and its logistical application. In addition, the author will analyze the strategy and tactics in fighting suicide bombing and the effectiveness of these measures. This thesis will probe the quandaries that the suicide bomber and its surrounding culture present to Israel, the Palestinians and a future Israeli-Palestinian peace.

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<sup>1</sup> Nasra Hassan, “An Arsenal of Believers,” *The New Yorker*, November 19, 2001 ([www.newyorker.com](http://www.newyorker.com))

<sup>2</sup> David Brooks, “The Culture of Martyrdom” *The Atlantic Monthly*, June 2002 ([www.theatlantic.com](http://www.theatlantic.com))

## Chapter I: Defining Suicide Terrorism

Suicide attacks as a form of terrorist warfare are not a recent phenomenon. The first known appearance of suicide attacks originated in the 1<sup>st</sup> century by the *Sicarii*. The Sicarii were a zealous Jewish sect who publicly assassinated both Romans and members of their own community who held ties to the Roman Empire. During the 11<sup>th</sup> century, members of the Nizari sect of Isma'ili Shi'ite Islam known as the *Hashashiyun* carried out suicidal assassination missions against their enemies. Under the influence of hashish and driven by promises of paradise, Hashashiyun followers carried out suicidal assassination attempts on figures in mosques and other public places. From this sect, the word "assassin" is derived. In Islamic regions of Asia during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, specifically on the Malabar coast of Southwestern India, in Aceh in Northern Sumatra, and in Mindanao and Sulu in the Southern Philippines used suicide tactics to resist, Muslim warriors utilized suicide tactics to oppose Western domination and colonial rule<sup>1</sup>. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, numerous terrorist organizations undertook attacks that were such high-risk operations they could be essentially be defined as "suicide terrorism." Attacks of this nature include the Japanese Red Army's assault at Lod Airport in 1972, the attack of Abu Nidal's organization on a synagogue in Istanbul in 1986 and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine General-Command's hang-glider operation into an Israeli army barracks in Kiryat Shmona in 1987<sup>2</sup>.

Yet there exists a distinct difference between previous types of suicide terrorism and its present form. What separates "modern" suicide terrorism from its predecessors is the reliance on the "human bomb." Whereas in previous forms of suicide terrorism, the death of the perpetrator was not a foregone conclusion, no matter how minute the chance

for escape, it still theoretically existed. With the suicide bomb, the operation is intrinsically linked to the death of the participant. The suicide bomber transports explosives either on his person or in a vehicle driven by the individual. For the suicide bomber “the death of the perpetrator is the key to the success of the attack; and he knows in advance that success depends entirely on his death.”<sup>3</sup> This “human time bomb” becomes the medium for the attack.

However not all suicide bombings can be considered suicide terrorism. Suicide attacks that are directed at military installations should not be considered acts of terrorism. The Japanese use of the kamikaze serves as case-in-point. Japan employed the use of suicide fighter pilots to attack American military installations in the Pacific Ocean. The kamikaze attacks did not target civilian populations; instead they were suicide attacks used as a military weapon. The main objective of terrorism is to target civilian population precisely because they are vulnerable non-combatants. Acts that are directed against military personnel in uniform must be judged by different standards. To term every suicide bombing as an act of terrorism dilutes the meaning and significance of the act when it is perpetrated against civilians. Not all suicide attacks in general and suicide bombings, in specific, should be considered as an illegal or illegitimate form of warfare or as terrorism. The term “terrorism” must be reserved for the calculated and conscious targeting of a civilian population.

### **First instances of suicide bombing:**

The suicide bomb first appeared in the annals of modern warfare during the Lebanese Civil War. In April 18, 1983, an Iranian-backed Lebanese Shi’ite group known

as Hizbullah unleashed a suicide car bomb outside the United States Embassy in Beirut. A suicide bomber rammed a Chevrolet pickup truck through the front doors of the American Embassy, and then detonated the vehicle. More than 60 people were killed in the event.

Later that same year, another far more devastating suicide bombing took place. On October 23, 1983 a suicide bomber drove a dump truck packed with over 12,000 pounds of dynamite into the US Marine Barracks located near the Beirut airport. Minutes later a second suicide bombing went off at the French paratroop headquarters in West Beirut. 241 American Marines and 58 French paratroopers, respectively, were killed in the twin blasts. The following month, an Israeli Military government building in Sidon, Lebanon was the target of a similar operation in which 67 persons were killed. These operations were seen as instrumental factors in driving Western peace keeping forces from Lebanon and causing Israel to withdraw to a narrow security zone in Southern Lebanon.

The tactic of suicide bombing was picked up and refined by the organization Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (“LTTE” or “Tamil Tigers”) in their separatist struggle against Sri Lanka. Beginning in July 1987 and lasting until the agreement of a cease-fire between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government in December 2001, the LTTE carried out more than 200 suicide bombings. The period of terror took the lives of thousands of civilians, political and military officials in Sri Lanka, including President Premadasa of Sri Lanka and the Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. The driving force behind the Tamil Tiger’s struggle was nationalistic sentiment not religious ideology.

From Argentina to Yemen, suicide bombing has spanned the globe. Around the world numerous other groups have imitated the method of suicide bombing. Groups that have used the tactic include the Kurdish PKK in their struggle against Turkey, the Islamist Egyptian groups “al-Gama’a al-Islamiyya” and “Jihad al-Islamiyya al-Misriya” against the secular Egyptian government, and Chechen militants against the Russian army. The most infamous use of the suicide bomb was perpetrated by Osama Bin Laden’s organization “Al-Qaida.” In August 1998, al-Qaida carried out simultaneous suicide bombings on American Embassies in Nairobi, Kenya and Dar e-Salam, Tanzania that killed nearly 225 people. Al-Qaida was responsible for the most deadly suicide strike to date with the September 11, 2001 attacks. As many as 3,000 lives were taken when three hijacked airplanes were flown into the World Trade Center in New York, the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., and a fourth crashed in a field in Pennsylvania. The suicide bomber recently made his debut appearance in Iraq. An Iraqi soldier driving a taxi detonated himself at an American army checkpoint, sending chilling signals of what possibly lays in store for an American campaign in Iraq.

### **Entering the Palestinian lexicon:**

The first to publicly promote the Palestinian adoption of suicide bombing tactics against Israel was the Dr. Fathi Shikaki, a founder of the Palestinian Islamist group Islamic Jihad. In 1988, Dr. Shikaki called for a strategy of “exceptional” martyrdom to be carried out by Palestinian militants, the likes of which the enemy would be unable to prevent. He stated:

“these results can be achieved through the explosion, which forces the

*mujahid* [holy warrior] not to waver, not to escape; to execute a successful operation for religion and *jihad*; to destroy the morale of the enemy and plant terror into the people.<sup>4</sup>

However it was the radical Islamist group Hamas that was the first to carry out suicide bombings in the early 1990's. A man nicknamed "The Engineer" laid out Hamas's decision to use the suicide bomb in terms of human economics. Hamas's chief bomb-maker, Yihye Ayyash encouraged the organization to "make the cost of the [Israeli] occupation that much more expensive in human lives, that much more unbearable." The first suicide bombing took place in April 1993, in the West Bank and continued sporadically throughout the period of the Oslo peace process. From the first attack until the beginning of the second Intifada, Hamas and Islamic Jihad successfully carried out 14 suicide bombings against civilian targets and attempted many more.

### **Why the Suicide Bomb?**

"Modern" suicide terrorism, exemplified by the Palestinian usage of the suicide bomb, is a form of psychological warfare. By nature, the operation is a political tool. The goal is to cause overwhelming physical destruction on a civilian population, in turn creating fear and panic among the broader population. Suicide bombing targets the "soft underbelly" of society, the focus of the attacks is aimed at the most vulnerable segment: civilians. In explaining why suicide bomber target civilian centers, a Hamas spokesman noted in clear-cut logic that it was foolish to hunt tigers when plenty of sheep were available.

Yet the intended target extends far beyond the victims of the attack. Suicide bombing is a pre-meditated act, with each location carefully chosen to inflict that maximum amount of physical and psychological damage. A central goal of suicide

terrorism is to target locations that will ensure a widespread media coverage. In *Jane's Terrorism and Security Monitor*, John Daly writes,

“Suicide attacks serve other purposes besides inflicting damage...they generate the maximum amount of publicity for the cause. The emergence of 24-hour global news networks such as CNN and the explosive growth of the internet have enabled virtual global awareness.<sup>5</sup>”

The suicide bomb is a grisly attempt to create publicity for the cause. In addition, the media spectacle associated with the suicide bomb is enhanced by video wills created by suicide bombers before they carry out the operation, coupled with the interviews of bomber's parents who speak with great bliss at the actions of their child and the celebrations, and rallies that take place following each attack.

Beyond its fearsome application, the suicide bomb stands as the most cost effective weapon in the arsenal of Palestinian radicals. The suicide bomb is a relatively inexpensive weapon to produce. Besides needing a willing participant to carry out the bombing, all that is required are some fairly common household objects and assorted chemicals. To concoct the bomb for a suicide attack, the ingredients that are necessary consist of: “nails, gunpowder, a battery, a light switch and a short cable, mercury, acetone, and the cost of tailoring a belt wide enough to hold six or eight pockets of explosives.<sup>6</sup>” Often the bomb is packed with screws and other assorted metal shrapnel pieces to increase the lethality of the bomb. The most costly thing is transportation to the target in Israel. In total, the price for carrying out a suicide operation is about \$150 dollars. In addition, the family of the bomber receives a payment from the sponsoring organization and foreign patrons. In comparison to the costs of conventional weaponry, the price of the suicide bomb is practically nothing.

The suicide bomb is the prime example of the phenomenon known as “asymmetric warfare”. Asymmetric warfare is defined as the “use of unconventional tactics or weapons to counter the massive conventional superiority of one’s enemy.”<sup>7</sup> The suicide bomber is viewed as a way to offset the military imbalance that Palestinian forces possess in comparison to Israel. Yet as a military operation, the effectiveness of a suicide bomb is unmatched. As a weapon, the suicide bomb combines human intellect with brute explosive force. Israeli Defense Force spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Olivier Rafowicz observes,

“When you attach 15 kilos of explosives to a man with a brain it becomes an extraordinarily lethal weapon, much more lethal than anything we use. That man can wait around 20 to 30 minutes just to choose the right moment to kill as many people as possible. Suicide bombing is perceived as the weapon of the weak, but it is the most lethal weapon in the conflict.”<sup>8</sup>

A suicide bomber can determine the precise time and place to detonate the charge, ensuring the maximum number of casualties. Boaz Ganor, Director of the International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT), writes, “In this regard the suicide bomber is no more than a sophisticated bomb- a carrier that brings the explosive device to the right location and detonates it at the right time.”<sup>9</sup> This sentiment is further elucidated by Muhammad, a Palestinian engineer from Jenin, “Israel has its smart bombs...but ours are smarter because they can think, see and change direction.”<sup>10</sup>

On an operational level, the suicide bomber has the advantage that he needs not to formulate any escape plan. There is no risk to the group sponsoring the attack that the bomber will be apprehended upon completion of his mission; the executor’s death ensures that he cannot divulge secrets about the organization. In the event the bomber is

detected before reaching the desired site, he is still capable of detonating the charge and carrying out the suicide strike.

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Frederic Dale, "Religious Suicide in Islamic Asia," Ohio State University (In Yoram Schweitzer, "Suicide Terrorism: development and main characteristics," from Countering Suicide Terrorism: An International Conference February 20-23, 2000, *The International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism*, Herzliya: Israel 2001, p.75)

<sup>2</sup> Yoram Schweitzer, "Suicide Terrorism: development and main characteristics," Countering Suicide Terrorism: An International Conference February 20-23, 2000, *The International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism*, Herzliya: Israel 2001, p.76

<sup>3</sup> Yoram Schweitzer, "Suicide Bombings: The Ultimate Weapon?," *The International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism*, August 7, 2001, p.1 ([www.ict.org.il](http://www.ict.org.il))

<sup>4</sup> Nasra Hassan, "An Arsenal of Believers," *The New Yorker*, November 19, 2001 ([www.newyorker.com](http://www.newyorker.com))

<sup>5</sup> John Daly, "Suicide Bombing: no warning, and no total solution," *Jane's Terrorism and Security Monitor* September 17, 2001 (<http://jtsm.janes.com>)

<sup>6</sup> Nasra Hassan, "An Arsenal of Believers," *The New Yorker*, November 19, 2001 ([www.newyorker.com](http://www.newyorker.com))

<sup>7</sup> *The Estimate*, "Suicide Bombing as a Problem of Asymmetric Warfare," April 19, 2002, vol. XV, no. 8 ([www.theestimate.com](http://www.theestimate.com))

<sup>8</sup> Sylvana Foa, "Targeting Toddlers," *The Village Voice*, June 5-11, 2002 ([www.villagevoice.com](http://www.villagevoice.com))

<sup>9</sup> Boaz Ganor, "Suicide Terrorism: an Overview," *The International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism*, February 15, 2000, p.1 ([www.ict.org.il](http://www.ict.org.il))

<sup>10</sup> "Where causing pain is an end in itself," *The Economist*, April 15, 2002 ([www.economist.com](http://www.economist.com))

## Chapter II: Profile of a Suicide Bomber

In suicide bombings during the Oslo period, the vast majority of suicide bombers corresponded to a certain demographic profile. However, with the coming of the second *Intifada* the general characteristics of the suicide bomber changed. Since the outbreak of the current Israeli-Palestinian conflict, segments of the Palestinian population such as women and children, who had previously not engaged in suicide terrorism, have begun to take part (to be discussed later). On the whole, those who carry out suicide bombings usually are young males between 18 to 27 years old. Nearly two-thirds of suicide bombers were between the ages of 18-23. The majority of suicide bombers received a high school education and close to half took part university studies. The bulk of *shahids* were unmarried.

To categorize the suicide bomber in socio-economic terms, they predominantly come from relatively large, lower middle-to-middle class families; none were destitute. From his numerous interviews with the families of suicide bombers, Pakistani journalist Nasra Hassan found that, “They all seemed to be entirely normal members of their families. They were polite and serious, and in their communities they were considered to be model youths.<sup>1</sup>” Prior to the outbreak of the second Intifada many of those who took part in suicide operations had previous run-ins with Israeli security services. Many had previously spent time in administrative detention or had been imprisoned for their ties to Islamic Jihad and Hamas. This imprisonment frequently comes to be seen as a defining period in the martyr’s life. In prison, the martyr’s religious beliefs and sense of nationalist obligations were enhanced<sup>2</sup>.

Suicide bombers do not correspond to the standard profile of a suicidal individual, even during the second Intifada. They are neither depressed individuals nor are they desperate. The suicide bomber does not exhibit the behavioral patterns of someone who is psychologically unstable. Troubled or suicidal persons are rejected as candidates to carry out suicide bombings. The Palestinian organization Islamic Jihad elucidates, “If there were a one-in-a-thousand chance that a person was suicidal, we would not allow him to martyr himself. In order to be a martyr bomber, you have to want to live.<sup>3</sup>” The bomber is chosen precisely because he is not suicidal; unstable individuals are not chosen because it is unlikely that they could achieve the same results from the act. The most common misunderstanding about suicide bombing is that it stems principally from the desperation felt by Palestinian society at their plight under the Israeli occupation. The Western notions of suicide correspond to the feelings of depression or anguish; these conceptions do not fully apply to the suicide bomber.

Many have argued that the suicide bomber is a product of the hopelessness and despair that Palestinian society is experiencing under Israeli occupation. They cite that the despondency is a consequence of the closures, roadblocks and daily humiliations faced by Palestinian society. While it is true that Palestinian society is feeling collective despair from the present situation, this does not automatically mean that suicide bomber is despondent just because he is a member of the Palestinian community. Israeli philosopher Avishai Margalit notes,

“I have never seen a public or private statement by a suicide bomber that mentions his own economic situation or that of the Palestinians generally as a reason for his action.... The despair of the Palestinian community explains the support for the suicide bomber but it doesn’t explain each person’s choice to commit suicide by means of a bomb.<sup>4</sup>”

A more apt reason for the suicide bomber is that he is a product of indoctrination in religious theology and nationalistic sentiment, plus often a stated desire for revenge against Israel.

On numerous occasions, the suicide bomber declared that his motive for carrying out the attack was revenge. Salah Abed El Hamid Shaker, a suicide bomber who blew himself up at Beit Lid in January 1995, stated in his will, “I am going to take revenge upon the sons of the monkeys and pigs- the Zionist infidels and the enemies of humanity.<sup>5</sup>” The suicide bomber perceives his act as a logical means of extracting revenge on the Zionist enemy.

### **Training the Suicide Bomber:**

Before the transformation of suicide bombing in the second Intifada, the main characteristic that the suicide bombers shared was their deep religiosity. In the majority of cases, the *shahid* was recruited, most often by an Islamic cleric from a mosque that he attended or from a Hamas-run Islamic education center in Gaza or the West Bank. The basis of his recruitment was the religious zeal he displayed. Today, it is far more common for the *shahid* to volunteer to carry out the suicide bombings. One of the most fundamental changes that taken place with regard to the practice of suicide bombing within Palestinian society has been the number of individuals ready and willing to become suicide bombers. Hamas asserts that there is no shortage of volunteers for suicide bombings and that they have to turn away the vast majority of those who come to them seeking to carry out a martyrdom operation. According to one Hamas leader, “It is difficult to select only a few. Those who we turn away return again and again, pestering

us, pleading to be accepted.<sup>6</sup>” During the period of the Oslo Accords, Hamas and Islamic Jihad had to actively recruit volunteers to carry out suicide bombings. Now with the seemingly intractable conflict between Israel and the Palestinians and the concomitant closures, curfews, rising body count and economic decline, Hamas and Islamic Jihad claim they do not need to bother recruiting.

Although the indoctrination of a suicide bomber is not as intense and drawn-out as it used to be, all of the major elements remain. First, the bomber participated in long training sessions. The purpose of these sessions was to scrutinize the intended martyr’s character and to ascertain if he was mentally capable of carrying out the attack. If he was chosen, the potential bomber was placed in a small cell, a training group that inculcated him on the spiritual intricacies of martyrdom. This “living martyr” received hours of religious lectures, spent his nights in prayer, and carried out lengthy fasts. The candidate was encouraged “to read six specific chapters from the Qur’an: *Bagra, Al Imran, Anfal, Tawba, Rahman, and Asr*, which feature such themes as *jihād*, the birth of the Islamic nation, war, Allah’s favor, and the importance of faith.<sup>7</sup>” As well, the martyr repaid all outstanding debts and requested forgiveness for any offenses he had committed during his life. All of these measures were undertaken to ensure his physical and mental purification.

During the training, the *shahid* was assured that his family would be provided for in the form of cash payments that had been donated by supporter of the struggle. In some instances, to dissuade the potential martyr from the fear of death, the *shahid* was brought to a graveyard and instructed to lie down inside an open grave for several hours to illustrate the peaceful nature of death. Moreover, he was “reminded that life will bring

sickness, old age, and betrayal.<sup>8</sup> Most importantly, the *shahid* was constantly reminded of the rewards that would await him in paradise.

In the days preceding the endeavor, the bomber composed either a written or video will. In this will, the martyr emphasized that he was carrying out the act out of his own volition. The *shahid* instructed his family not to grieve for him. The scenery of the video will was usually replete with the sponsoring organization's banners and slogans. The bomber poses with weapons or bombs and recites from the Qur'an. He read passages from the Qur'an and encouraged others to join him in his path to martyrdom. Repeatedly, the bomber is required to watch his own video will, in addition to videos done by those martyrs who have preceded him. The video will made by the bomber was circulated throughout the community by Hamas and Islamic Jihad to rally support for both their cause and the practice of suicide bombing. The video will also created psychological pressure on the suicide bomber to carry out his act because once the will was made, it was very difficult for the *shahid* to back down.

Before setting off for his target, the bomber performed the ritual of ablution and visited the mosque for a final time. On the rituals Nasra Hassan reports, "He says the traditional Islamic prayer that is customary before battle, and he asks Allah to forgive his sins and to bless his mission."<sup>9</sup> With a Qur'an placed- in his left breast pocket, above the heart, the suicide bomber set off on his mission.

### **Suicide vs. Martyrdom:**

The fervent religiousness of the suicide bomber creates an inherent contradiction within Islam over the practice of suicide. Suicide is *haram*, an act that is strictly

forbidden by Islam. Suicide ranks among one of the worst deeds a Muslim can do. In the Qur'an it is written,

“O Ye who believe!...[do not] kill yourselves, for truly Allah has been to you Most Merciful. If any do that in rancor and injustice, soon shall We cast him into the Fire. (Qur'an 4:29-30)”

The Muslim intellectual Abu Ruqaiyah reiterates this notion,

“The Prophet [Mohammed] stated that the one who commits suicide is eternally in Hell. According to Abu Huraira, the Prophet says:  
‘The one who throws himself from a mountain and kills himself will be eternally in Hell.<sup>10</sup>”

In spite of the deep aversion within Islam to committing suicide, suicide bombing is considered by those who support it as being an act of “martyrdom.” Organizations that carry out suicide terrorism do not classify their actions as “suicide.” To those who carry out this “sacred explosion,<sup>11</sup>” the preferred terminology is *amaliyya istishadiyya* or martyrdom operation.

In Islam martyrdom is not only justified, but also praised. Martyrdom is considered to be the highest of virtues; it is the greatest fulfillment of the religious duty of *Jihad*, or holy war. On martyrdom, the Qur'an states,

“If you are killed in the cause of Allah or you die, the forgiveness and mercy of Allah are better than all that you amass. And if you die or are killed, even so it is to Allah that you will return. (Qur'an 3:157-158)”

The Arabic word for martyr, *shahid* also means “witness.” Islamic scholar Prof. John Esposito notes that according to the Qur'an, “To die for one's faith is the highest form of witness to God.<sup>12</sup>” Hamas leader Dr. Abd al-Aziz Rantisi argues that the distinction between committing suicide and committing martyrdom is that, “suicide depends on

volition. If the martyr intends to kill himself, because he is tired of life—it is suicide. However, if he wants to sacrifice his soul in order to strike the enemy and to be rewarded by Allah—he is considered a martyr.<sup>13</sup>” However, the true importance of martyrdom in Islamic society is debatable. According to the *Hadiths*, or sayings of the Prophet, the Prophet Mohammed stated that, “The ink of the scholar is holier than the blood of the martyr (Hadith *Kashf al-Khafa'*, no. 2276)”

### **Religious Justifications:**

There is no shortage of declarations by Islamic scholars regarding the legitimacy of suicide bombing. There are numerous *fatwahs*, religious rulings issued by Islamic scholars, that both condone and condemn the practice. These declarations are made both by Palestinian religious leaders and Muslim religious leaders in the Middle East and other places in the world. As there is presently no higher Muslim council or supreme body in Islam whose rulings are considered binding on all Muslims, there are numerous opinions on the institution of suicide bombing. The spectrum of opinions on suicide bombing generally ranges from outright dismissal to full-fledged justification, with an area in the middle for acceptance of the practice but with caveats.

The most prominent critic to come out against suicide bombing has been the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, Sheikh Abd al-Aziz al-Sheikh. In an interview with the magazine *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, conducted April 21, 2001, the Grand Mufti issued a *fatwa* asserting that suicide bombing was possibly un-Islamic. He stated,

“I am not aware of anything in the religious law regarding killing oneself in the heart of the enemy [‘s ranks], or what is called ‘suicide.’ This is not a part of Jihad, and I fear that it is

merely killing oneself. Although the Qur'an permits and even demands the killing of the enemy, this must be done in ways that do not contradict the *Shari'a* [Islamic Religious Law].<sup>14</sup>

This has been the most definitive denunciation of suicide bombing by a high-ranking Muslim clergy, and his ruling sparked much debate over the legitimacy of the practice.

The median argument is illustrated by the cleric Sheikh Mohammed Sayyed Tantawi, one of the most influential clerics in the Muslim world and the Imam of the Al-Azhar Mosque in Cairo. They have argued that martyrdom operations against Israel were acceptable as long as they do not target civilians. At a conference hosted by Al-Azhar in April 2002, Sheikh Tantawi stated, "Whoever blows himself up in the middle of [Israeli] aggressors, will attain the highest level of martyrdom. But whoever blows himself up amid innocent civilians is not a martyr."<sup>15</sup> So far, Sheikh Tantawi has made a nuanced difference between supporting the suicide bomber while opposing his the targeting of the civilian population.

Many clerics have given their unconditional support for suicide bombers. One prime example of these clerics is Sheikh Yusef al-Qaradawi, an influential Egyptian-born cleric and leader of the Muslim Brotherhood who resides in Qatar. Sheikh al-Qaradawi has consistently praised and legitimized "martyrdom operations" against all Israelis. Sheik Qaradawi has stated on numerous occasions that these attacks "represent the highest level of martyrdom, because there are no civilians in Israel. It's a militarist society."<sup>16</sup> Even if the life of children and the elderly will be taken, Sheikh al-Qaradawi sanctioned the operation. He declared, "If a child or an elderly is killed in such an operation, he is not killed on purpose, but by mistake, and as a result of military necessity. Necessity justifies the forbidden."<sup>17</sup>

Among Palestinian clergy, it has been rare to find statements by religious leaders denouncing the practice of suicide bombing or classifying it as suicide rather than martyrdom. In response to the statements of the Saudi Mufti al-Sheikh, Sheikh Muhammed al-Jamal, the Palestinian Authority's Mufti of Jericho, issued his own fatwa asserting the difference between suicide and martyrdom, arguing that the former led straight to the "torments of Hell on Judgment Day<sup>18</sup>," and the latter which was permitted and desirable in Islam. An analogous attitude was displayed by Palestinian Sheikh Abd al-Halim Ayyash, who declared "a Shahid has a high rank and value in Islam, both in this world and the Hereafter. The strive for Martyrdom is a desired virtue in Islam.<sup>19</sup>"

#### **Heavenly Rewards and Earthly Reactions:**

For the *shahid*, the reward for committing their martyrdom operation is the immediate entry into heaven. The bomber feels that he is carrying out an act that is a deeper religious obligation. This religious obligation is something that is sanctioned by numerous religious leaders in Islam. Bombers possess the unwavering faith that their acts of martyrdom will gain them entry into the highest levels of paradise. The *shahid* believes he is absolved of all previous sins that they had committed and his deed will allow him to gaze at the face of Allah. On the rewards waiting for the *shahid*, the Palestinian Mufti Sheikh Abd al-Salam Abu Shukheydem stated, "From the moment the first drop of his blood is spilled, he does not feel the pain of his wounds and he is forgiven for all his sins; he sees his seat in Paradise; he is saved from the torment of the grave.<sup>20</sup>" On the Day of Reckoning, the martyr is believed to be able to intercede on behalf of 70 his relatives.

Upon entry into heaven, the martyr is believed to be rewarded with 72 “black-eyed” virgins (one question that so far has remained unanswered is whether female suicide bombers are rewarded with 72 male virgins). This “heavenly marriage” between the bomber and his brides manifests itself in the events following the bombing. The announcements in the local papers resemble wedding invitations rather than funeral notices. The funeral of the suicide bomber, paid for by the sponsoring organization, holds the trappings of a wedding. Instead of mourning at the bomber’s death, processions take place celebrating the *shahid’s* wedding to martyrdom. There are jubilant celebrations and candies are passed out. Instead of the normal bitter coffee given out at funerals, sweet coffee is given out to those celebrating the acts of the bomber.

Many Palestinian parents of suicide bombers have spoken with enthusiastic support of the actions of their children. The father of Sayeed Hotary, the suicide bomber who on June 1, 2001 blew himself up outside the Dolphinarium Discotheque in Tel Aviv, stated that he was pleased of his son’s actions that killed 22 Israeli youngsters. Hassan Hotary declared that, “I am very happy and proud of what my son did, and frankly am a bit jealous... I wish I had done it myself.<sup>21</sup>” This sentiment of pride was echoed in the statements of Umm Nidal, who appeared in her son Muhammad’s video will, sending him off to commit a suicide attack. In an interview following her son’s deed, she stated, “Because I love my son, I encouraged him to die a martyr’s death for the sake of Allah...After the martyrdom [operation], my heart was peaceful about Muhammad. I encouraged all my sons to die a martyr’s death and I wish this even for myself.<sup>22</sup>” The One reason for this adoration of martyrdom by Palestinian families is the belief that the martyr’s act bestows honor, *sharaf*, upon the family. To have a family member sacrifice

himself for the dignified cause of the liberation of Palestine reflects positively upon the family.

Trapped behind a façade of joyous celebration, many families suffer tremendously at the loss of their sons and brothers who serve as suicide bombers. The ritual of celebrating martyrdom is the only socially acceptable outlet for the family of the bomber. Palestinian psychologist I'tidal al-Jairi notes on the celebration rituals, "The jubilation and calling Shahids' funerals weddings is a kind of deception of emotions in order to adapt to the common social position."<sup>23</sup> On this celebration of martyrdom, Palestinian author Ghasan Zaqtan expounds further, "[The celebration process is] a defense mechanism invented by man in order to turn the sad loss into a faked happiness in an attempt to evade great loss."<sup>24</sup>

Since celebrating martyrdom is the social norm and displaying grief is not a socially acceptable response, the grieving process remains in arrested development until after the celebration process is finished. It is only afterwards that feelings of grief are able to arise. Psychologist al-Jairi explains, "Psychologically, the Shahid's mother feels deep sorrow and the signs of her loss become apparent after a while, when the social solidarity surrounding her disappears."<sup>25</sup> However, not all parents have accepted this silent grieving process. The sorrow has also manifested itself in outward actions.

Slowly more parents are coming forward to speak against the sacrifice of their children in suicide bombing. In October 2002, the London-based Arabic daily newspaper *Al-Hayat* ran a letter to the editor of a Palestinian father whose eldest son carried out a suicide bombing. In the letter, Abu Saber pours out his grief at the loss of his son for such callous reasons and was enraged at the attempted recruitment of another of his

children to be a martyr. In his letter, he addresses the Islamist groups and calls into question the practice of suicide bombing. He writes:

“I ask on my behalf and the behalf of every father and mother informed that their son has blown himself up: ‘By what right do these leaders send the young people, even young boys in the flower of their youth, to their deaths? Who gave them religious or any other legitimacy to tempt our children and urge them to their deaths?’<sup>26</sup>”

Abu Saber goes on to castigate the leaders of Hamas for not sending their own children out as suicide bombers.

The suicide bomber cannot be simply dismissed as a crazed fanatic. The suicide bomber is seen as a symbol of social status that reflects positively on the family of the martyr. There exists the social and religious framework that endorses martyrdom. He is not motivated by poverty or mental desperation; instead the suicide bomber is compelled by deep ideological and religious motivations.

### **Financial Compensation For the Families of Suicide Bombers:**

Beyond the theological justification and social reward that families attain from having a relative who served as a suicide bomber, they receive actual monetary compensation for the death of their relative. The families of the suicide bomber receive monetary compensation from the sponsoring organization in the form of cash payments. All families that lose a family member in clashes with Israel, either in armed attack or in carrying out suicide bombings, receive compensation from either the Islamist groups or the Palestinian Authority. Yet those families whose family members carry out a suicide bombing receive considerably more compensation than a family whose relative died in an alternative situation.

Hamas pays the families of bombers a permanent pension of \$300 to \$600 a month and finances the families' healthcare and educational expense if the bomber had children. In addition, Hamas furnishes a one-time payment of \$10,000 to the family. On the rationale behind supporting the families of suicide bombers, Hamas spokesman Isma'il Abu Shanab stated, "If nobody supports these needy families, maybe nobody would think of martyrdom and the resistance to occupation."<sup>27</sup> Likewise, the Palestinian Authority provides a comparable monthly stipend and smaller one-time payment of \$5,000.

The money donated by Palestinian groups is also supplemented by direct donations by third party sources including charity organizations in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States as well as foreign governments such as Iraq and Saudi Arabia. Iran and Syria indirectly fund suicide bombing by financially supporting Hamas and Islamic Jihad, but there has been no evidence that they contribute directly to the families of suicide bombers.

The Iraqi government of Saddam Hussein had been the most outwardly supportive of suicide bombers and their families, both vocally and financially. Iraq provided financial compensation to the families of suicide bombers that has increased from \$10,000 to recently as high as \$25,000. Iraqi President Saddam Hussein stated the increase was to help encourage more young men to "choose the path of martyrdom." The money is distributed locally in the West Bank and Gaza through the Arab Liberation Front, a pro-Iraq party with Ba'ath party-affiliations. With the American war to oust Saddam Hussein just getting underway, it is too early to tell what the effects of a regime

change in Iraq will have on the practice of suicide bombing. However, the disappearance of the financial and verbal support emanating from Iraq could prove significant.

Saudi Arabia has been involved in rewarding the families of suicide bombers as well. Under the “Saudi Committee for Support of the Al-Quds Intifada,” which is presided over by the kingdom’s interior minister Prince Nayeef bin Abdulazziz, the Saudi government has distributed more than \$30 million to “deserving Palestinians,” including the families of 358 martyrs.<sup>28</sup> The committee reportedly pledged more than \$5,000 to the martyrs’ families<sup>29</sup>. In addition, a Saudi press release from April 2001 announced that the kingdom had already distributed \$40 million “to the families of those martyred.<sup>30</sup>”

Palestinians have argued that the assistance provided is necessary to support the families on purely humanitarian grounds. Palestinian psychologist Dr. Eyad el-Sarraj notes,

“I myself am deeply opposed to suicide bombing, yet I support the families. As a Palestinian, as an Arab, as a Muslim, and as a human being, I feel obliged to support them. I cannot leave their children in poverty—I have to do what I can to leave them some hope and dignity. That is why we support the families- certainly not to encourage suicide bombings.<sup>31</sup>”

However, there remains a difference in supporting families and providing assistance, and putting a premium on the act of suicide bombing. In total, families of suicide bombers receive a combined sum of close to \$33,000 from all sources that contribute; based on average salary in PA areas, it would take the average person six years to earn this<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Nasra Hassan, “An Arsenal of Believers,” *The New Yorker*, November 19, 2001 (www.newyorker.com)

<sup>2</sup> Aluma Solnick, “The Shuhada Cult of Martyrdom in Islamic Jihad,” *MEMRI, Inquiry and Analysis Series-No.25*, February 24, 2000, p.2

<sup>3</sup> Daniel Pipes, “Arafat’s Suicide Factory,” *New York Post*, December 9, 2001 (www.nypost.com)

<sup>4</sup> Avishai Margalit, “The Suicide Bombers,” *The New York Review of Books*, January 16, 2003

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- <sup>5</sup> *Ma'ariv* (Israel) January 23, 1995 (In Boaz Ganor, "Suicide Attacks in Israel," from Countering Suicide Terrorism: An International Conference February 20-23, 2000, *The International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism*, Herzliya: Israel 2001, p.139)
- <sup>6</sup> Nasra Hassan, "An Arsenal of Believers," *The New Yorker*, November 19, 2001 (www.newyorker.com)
- <sup>7</sup> *ibid*
- <sup>8</sup> David Brooks, "The Culture of Martyrdom" *The Atlantic Monthly*, June 2002 (www.theatlantic.com)
- <sup>9</sup> Nasra Hassan, "An Arsenal of Believers," *The New Yorker*, November 19, 2001 (www.newyorker.com)
- <sup>10</sup> Abu Ruqaiyah, "The Islamic Legitimacy of the 'Martyrdom Operations,'" *Nida'ul Islam* magazine, Australia: December-January 1996-1997 (www.ict.org.il)
- <sup>11</sup> Nasra Hassan, "An Arsenal of Believers," *The New Yorker*, November 19, 2001 (www.newyorker.com)
- <sup>12</sup> John L. Esposito, Unholy Terror, Oxford University Press: New York 2002, p.69
- <sup>13</sup> *Al-Hayat* (London), April 25, 2001 (In Yotam Feldner, "Debating the Religious, Political...part I", *MEMRI*, no.53 May 2, 2001, p.1)
- <sup>14</sup> *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* (London), April 21, 2001 (In Yotam Feldner, "Debating the Religious, Political and Moral Legitimacy of Suicide Bombing," *MEMRI*, no. 53, May 2, 2001 p.1)
- <sup>15</sup> Agence France Press, "Muslim cleric praises suicide bombings against any Israeli," April 16, 2002
- <sup>16</sup> *ibid*
- <sup>17</sup> *Al-Ahram Al-Arabi* (Egypt), February 3, 2001 (In Yotam Feldner, "Debating the Religious, Political and Moral Legitimacy of Suicide Bombing Part 1," *MEMRI*, no. 53, May 2, 2001 p.2)
- <sup>18</sup> *Al-Hayat Al-Jadida* (Palestinian Authority), April 27, 2001 (In Yotam Feldner, "Debating the Religious, Political and Moral Legitimacy of Suicide Bombing Part 1," *MEMRI*, no. 53, May 2, 2001 p.1)
- <sup>19</sup> Voice of Palestine Radio, May 25, 2001 (In Aluma Solnick, "The Joy of the Mothers of Palestinian 'Martyrs,' *MEMRI*, no. 61, June 25, 2001, p.1)
- <sup>20</sup> *Al Hayat Al Jadida* (Palestinian Authority), September 17, 1999 (In Aluma Solnick, "The Joy of the Mothers of Palestinian 'Martyrs,'" *MEMRI*, no.61, June 25, 2001, p.1)
- <sup>21</sup> Daniel Pipes, "A father's pride and glory," *Jerusalem Post*, August 15, 2001 (www.jpost.com)
- <sup>22</sup> "An Interview with the Mother of a Suicide Bomber." *MEMRI*, no.391, June 9, 2002
- <sup>23</sup> *Al-Ayyam* (Palestinian Authority), March 21, 2001 (In Aluma Solnick, "The Joy of the Mothers of Palestinian 'Martyrs', *MERLA*, no. 61 June 25, 2001, p.3)
- <sup>24</sup> *ibid*
- <sup>25</sup> *ibid*
- <sup>26</sup> "Suicide Bomber's Father: Let Hamas and Islamic Jihad Leaders Send Their Own Sons," *MEMRI*, no. 426 October 8, 2002, p.2
- <sup>27</sup> Megan Goldin, "Hamas feeds the struggle against Israel with charity," Reuters, January 4, 2001
- <sup>28</sup> David Tell, "The Saudi-Terror Subsidy," *The Weekly Standard*, May 20, 2002 (www.weeklystandard.com)
- <sup>29</sup> *ibid*
- <sup>30</sup> *ibid*
- <sup>31</sup> Interview with Dr. Eyad El Sarraj, "Suicide Bombers: Dignity, Despair, and the Need For Hope," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, no.4 i.124, Summer 2002, p.75
- <sup>32</sup> Figure taken from: [www.idf.il/saudi\\_arabia/site/english/main\\_index.stm](http://www.idf.il/saudi_arabia/site/english/main_index.stm)

### **Chapter III: International Law and the Suicide Bomber**

Representatives for groups that carry out suicide bombings offer a variety of rationalizations to try to defend the practice. These rationalizations are often contradictory. The most common justifications are as follows: a) suicide bombing attacks do not target civilians, b) international humanitarian law does not regulate the conduct of Palestinian armed groups, c) Palestinian reprisals against Israeli civilians are valid because Israel targets Palestinian civilians, d) those targeted by suicide bombing attacks do not possess civilian status, and e) suicide bombing attacks are justifiable due to the discrepancy of military force possessed by Palestinian militant organizations vis-à-vis the Israeli military. In their report on suicide terrorism, the transnational human rights organizations Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International categorically dismisses all of the aforementioned justifications and classify suicide bombing as being contrary to international law as underlined by the Geneva Conventions and considered it to be a war crime. As well, the United Nations has taken a stand against the practice. Following a suicide bombing against Israeli civilians on May 20, 2002, United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan stated, “[suicide bombing] attacks on innocent civilians are morally repugnant and contrary to international law.<sup>1</sup>”

For Palestinian groups to deny that suicide bombing attacks do not target the Israeli civilian populations is a glaring falsehood. The numerous malls, commuter buses and cafes that have been hit by suicide bombers clearly prove otherwise and unconditionally negate the argument that the suicide bomber is not targeting civilians. To consciously target civilians in any condition of armed conflict is unreservedly a war crime. Common Article 3 of the 1949 Geneva Conventions specifically prohibits,

“violence to life and person, in particular murder of all kinds, mutilation, cruel treatment, and torture” when knowingly committed against individuals not actively engaged in the fighting<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, as the suicide bombers knowingly target civilians, they are committing a blatant war crime.

Often militant Palestinian groups argue that their tactics, including suicide bombing are not covered by international law which define and regulate war crimes because of the special status accorded to groups, such as theirs, conducting national liberation struggles. Hamas spiritual leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin affirmed to Amnesty International this belief held by the organization, stating, “under all international declarations and laws, Palestinians are entitled to defend and liberate their land by all means and to redeem their integrity.<sup>3</sup>” Strikingly similar sentiment was stated by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. The PFLP declared that under international law the Palestinian people are permitted to adopt, “all types of struggle in order to rid itself of the occupation and to attain its independence.<sup>4</sup>”

Essentially Palestinian spokesmen argue that because of the “illegality” of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, they are beyond the human rights norms that pertain to normal civil society. Under the 1977 Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions, the issue was specifically addressed regarding the validity of international law norms to non-state armed groups engaged in conflicts of national self-determination. The Additional Protocols emphasized that international law norms are binding on “armed conflicts in which people are fighting against colonial domination and alien occupation...in exercise of their right of self-determination.<sup>5</sup>” Both Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International flatly deny these contentions as being erroneous.

Amnesty notes, “attacks on civilians are not permitted under any internationally recognized standard of law, whether they are committed in the context of a struggle against military occupation or any other context.”<sup>6</sup> The assertion that Palestinian armed groups are not held to international law is incorrect.

Another argument put forward by Palestinian militants is that they only direct suicide attacks against Israeli civilians in retaliation for Israeli attacks on the Palestinian civilian population. This justification has been backed by popular Palestinian public opinion. However, this justification is also a rationalization that is contrary to international law. The practice of reprisal killings against a civilian population is explicitly forbidden by the Geneva Conventions, under the article 33(3) of the Fourth Geneva Conventions. This issue is further addressed in the Additional Protocol I, which states under article 51(8) that reprisals attacks against civilian populations are prohibited. Even if the enemy commits a violation of international law, under Article 51(8), armed groups still do not possess consent to target civilians in response.

Regarding the issue of who constitutes a civilian, Palestinian proponents of the suicide bomber have argued that because Israel conducts universal conscription, there are no civilians, save children and the elderly, in Israeli society. In this vein, all reserve or off-duty soldiers are legitimate targets. When asked in an interview if there were civilians in Israel, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin replied:

“They are all in the military, men and women...They wear civilian clothes inside Israel, and military clothes when they are with us...The 20,000 or 30,000 reserve soldiers, where did they come from? Are they not part of the Israeli people? Were they not civilians?”<sup>7</sup>

However, under international law anyone who is not directly involved in armed conflict is considered as a civilian and is accorded the protectional norms. According to Human

Rights Watch, “civilians lose their civilian protection if they directly participate in armed hostilities; they regain civilian status once they are no longer directly engaged in hostilities.”<sup>8</sup> Therefore, if a reservist is not on active duty he or she is not classified as an enemy combatant. The same human rights norms apply to Israeli civilians who serve as reserve soldiers in the Israeli army. Suicide bombings that target bus stations and other areas where off-duty soldiers congregate still remains illegal under international law; the mere presence of a soldier at a café or on a bus does not make the scene a valid target.

Additionally, militant groups have contended that Israeli settlers lose their civilian status because they dwell in the territories and because they are often armed. They argue that the illegality of settlements under international law means that settlers are legitimate targets for the suicide bomber and other attacks. Although the settlements might be considered illegal by international law\*, the settlers’ civilian status remains unchanged. The legality of the settlements is secondary to the human rights of the individual; just because a person is a settler does not make them a military target. As for their bearing arms, settlers as well as any other part of the civilian population only lose their protection if they are actively engaged in hostilities.

The final rationale offered by Palestinian militants in justification of the targeting of Israeli civilians through the suicide bomber is the asymmetrical nature of the conflict and inequality of forces. On the discrepancy of weaponry possessed by Palestinian armed groups, Hamas leader Dr. Abd al-Aziz Rantisi commented,

“We don’t have F-16s, Apache helicopters and missiles..They are attacking us with weapons which we can’t defend ourselves. And now we have a weapon that can’t defend

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\*Under Article 49 (6) laid out by the Fourth Geneva Convention, the transfer of civilians from the occupying power’s territory into the occupied territory is prohibited

themselves against...We believe this weapon creates a kind of balance, because this weapon is like an F-16.<sup>9</sup>”

Yet inequality of force is also not a valid argument under international law. There is no statute under international law that states that both sides in a conflict must have equal forces. Since most wars are fought between combatants with uneven resources, adoption of this rationale would create a carte blanche for any group that possessed a lesser military capacity to engage in whatever conduct they saw fit. As stated by Human Rights Watch, “The prohibition against intentional attacks against civilians is absolute. It cannot be justified by reference to a disparity of power between opposing forces.<sup>10</sup>”

Furthermore, human rights organizations have been highly critical of the use of children combatants for suicide bombing operations by groups like Islamic Jihad. Islamic Jihad’s use of children combatants, as young as fourteen years old, to carry out suicide bombings is strictly prohibited by the norms of international law.

The arguments put forward by Palestinian groups to attempt to justify the suicide bomber under international law are baseless. There is no ambiguity in international law regarding the use of the suicide bomber to target civilian populations. Those who sanction, plan, and carry out suicide bombings against civilians, for whatever reasons, are committing crimes against humanity.

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<sup>1</sup> “Israel and the Occupied Territories and the Palestinian Authority: Without distinction-attacks on civilians by Palestinian armed groups,” *Amnesty International*, July 2002, p.19

<sup>2</sup> “Erased in a Moment: Suicide Bombing Attacks Against Israeli Civilians,” *Human Right Watch*, New York October 2002, p.49

<sup>3</sup> “Israel and the Occupied Territories and the Palestinian Authority: Without distinction-attacks on civilians by Palestinian armed groups,” *Amnesty International*, July 2002, p.20

<sup>4</sup> Press release issued by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, November 3, 2001 (In “Israel and the Occupied...,” *Amnesty International*, p.20)

<sup>5</sup> Protocol I, Article 1 (4), (cited in: “Erased...,” *Human Right Watch* p.51)

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<sup>6</sup> “Israel and the Occupied Territories and the Palestinian Authority: Without distinction-attacks on civilians by Palestinian armed groups,” *Amnesty International*, July 2002, p.20

<sup>7</sup> Fathi Sabbah, “ Hamas leader to al-Hayat: Resistance not reform, is the Palestinian demand right now,” *Al-Hayat*, May 22, 2002, translated in *Mideast Mirror* (London), May 22, 2002 (“Erased...,” *Human Right Watch*, p.56)

<sup>8</sup> “Erased in a Moment: Suicide Bombing Attacks Against Israeli Civilians,” *Human Right Watch*, New York October 2002, p.54

<sup>9</sup> Molly Moore and John Ward Anderson, “Suicide Bombers Change Mideast’s Military Balance,” *Washington Post*, August 17, 2002 ([www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com))

<sup>10</sup> “Erased in a Moment: Suicide Bombing Attacks Against Israeli Civilians,” *Human Right Watch*, New York October 2002, p.57

## Chapter IV: During the Period of the Oslo Accords

To understand the phenomenon of suicide bombing, it is imperative to understand the groups that support the practice. Beyond each individual bomber is a complex infrastructure and network that backs the institution of suicide bombing. Nachman Tal of the Jaffee Center notes,

“Would-be suicide attackers do not operate in a vacuum. All of them belong to highly institutionalized terrorist organizations...These organizations supply infrastructure that finds, recruits, trains, and arms would be attackers and then transports them to the sites where they carry out their mission.<sup>1</sup>”

These organizations have different motivations for carrying out similar attacks. Hamas and Islamic Jihad, groups from the Islamist side of the political spectrum, initially employed the practice but since the beginning of the second Intifada all groups on the political spectrum carry out martyrdom operations. This chapter focuses on the organizations that carried out suicide bombings during the period that the Oslo Peace Process was taking place. This chapter deals with the ideological and organizational structure of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, the two groups that have been carrying out suicide terrorism since before the Oslo Accords, and follows the practice of suicide bombing during the Oslo period.

### **Hamas:**

The most prolific group to employ the suicide bomb has been the Islamic Resistance Movement (*Harakat al- Muqawama al-Islamiya*), better known by its acronym *Hamas*. As an organization, Hamas is comprised of separate social, political and military branches. The movement was born out of the disenchantment and

disappointment with the secular Palestinian movement and its inability to deliver an end to the Israeli occupation and a liberation of Palestinian land. Hamas, in its present form, was founded at the beginning of the first *Intifada* in 1987. However, Hamas evolved as a militant offshoot of the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, an organization that possessed ties to Palestinian society that preceded the first Intifada.

The Muslim Brotherhood was founded in Egypt in the 1920's by Hassan al-Bana. The Muslim Brotherhood enjoyed a long and complex relationship with the Egyptian state. While the Gaza Strip was under Egyptian military rule from 1948 to 1967, the Muslim Brotherhood's activity was tolerated or repressed along with the policy followed at the time toward the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt itself<sup>2</sup>. The Muslim Brotherhood in Palestinian area of the Gaza Strip focused its energies on building a network of social, religious, educational and cultural institutions. However, it refrained from taking part in political activity and stayed away from the nationalist policy of armed struggle.

The Islamic movement that would later become Hamas was initially established in 1978 as an Islamic association within the Muslim Brotherhood. This association, known as *al-Mujamma al-Islami* (Islamic Association) was founded by its spiritual leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, who was a member of the Muslim Brotherhood. The association carved a niche for itself in the Gaza Strip as the Muslim Brotherhood's leading organization through its social work and religious educational infrastructures. With the outbreak of the first Intifada in 1987, the *Mujamma* shifted its focus from passivity towards Israeli rule to militant opposition. The movement adopted the name *Hamas* meaning "zeal" in Arabic.

Hamas's ideology is a synthesis of Palestinian nationalism and Islamic fundamentalism. This duality of ideological sources is noted by Reuvan Paz, who states,

“[Hamas draws] mainly upon two ideological sources: one is the universalistic Arab Islamic doctrine of the Muslim Brotherhood, which strives to amend Arab-Islamic society toward the reestablishment of a traditional Islamic state. The second is the Palestinian doctrine of popular liberation, which strives to liberate the whole of Palestine with the aim of establishing a traditional Islamic state.<sup>3</sup>”

In its official charter, “The Islamic Covenant,” Hamas describes itself as a section of the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine. In Article 6 of the “Charter of Allah,” the charter that outlines Hamas's platform, the movement states it “owes its loyalty to Allah, derives from Islam its way of life, and strives to raise the banner of Allah over every inch of Palestine.<sup>4</sup>” Its stated goals are to create an Islamic state in all of Palestine, which is considered to be *waqf*, an Islamic endowment. To reach this end, Israel must be destroyed through *Jihad*. Hamas also opposes the secular Palestinian nationalist movement. Hamas maintains that the secular Palestinian Authority must be supplanted with an Islamic government. Yet the movement has been careful to avoid direct challenges to the Palestinian Authority, for fear of creating a fratricidal civil war.

On the social side, Hamas runs an extensive charity, educational and religious network throughout the West Bank and Gaza. Hamas derives a great deal of its support from their community-based programs that deliver vital social services. These institutions include schools, orphanages, mosques, healthcare clinics, and sports leagues,<sup>5</sup> many services that the Palestinian Authority does not provide.

The political division of Hamas exists both inside the Palestinian Territories and in neighboring countries. Hamas's internal leadership committee is based in Gaza, where

support for the group is highest. In addition to their spiritual founder Sheik Yassin, the leadership committee consists of Isma'il Abu Shanab, Dr. Abd al-Azziz Rantisi and Mahmoud Zahar. Hamas's external leadership, or Political Bureau, is based in Damascus. Khalid Mish'al is the chairman of the Political Bureau and his deputy is Musa Abu Marzuq.

The Gaza-based leadership is connected to the West Bank through a subordinate unit. Within the West Bank, Hamas is most prevalent in the northern region, specifically in Nablus and to a lesser extent Jenin. Al-Najah University in Nablus is a center for support for Hamas. In the southern part of the West Bank, Hamas is concentrated around the Hebron region. There is no central Hamas leadership within the West Bank, instead each area receives instructions either from Gaza or from outside the territories.

Hamas's influence is the most pronounced in the Gaza Strip, due to the area's high concentration of refugees. The Institute for Counter Terrorism notes on Hamas, "The large number of refugees, the socio-economic hardships of the population in the refugee camps...enabled Hamas to deepen its roots among the refugees."<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, Hamas is seen as the antithesis of the Palestinian Authority, which is viewed as being riddled with corruption.

Prior to the creation of a separate military wing, Hamas was primarily involved in organizing activities to help subvert Israeli rule, such as strikes, boycotts and street disturbances. The military wing of Hamas, known as the *Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades*<sup>\*</sup>, began carrying out military operations in 1991. At the outset the Izz al-Din al-

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\* The division derives its name from the Muslim military leader Sheik Izz al-Din al-Qassam. Born in Syria, Sheik al-Qassem moved to Palestine where he became one of the first leaders to advocate violence as a form of opposition to the immigration of Jews into Palestine. His death, at the hands of the British Army, helped ignite the Arab community of Palestine into major revolt that began in 1936 and lasted until 1939.

Qassam Brigades resorted to kidnapping and execution of suspected Palestinian collaborators. In addition, Hamas targeted those they considered to be involved in criminal activities like drug dealers and moral offenders or “heretics.” Their *modus operandi* soon changed to attacking Israeli settlers and soldiers. Over time their tactics evolved from the use of explosives, kidnapping, and attacking Israeli settlers and soldiers to suicide bombing. According to intelligence reports, as of mid-2001 Hamas’s military wing had 150 members in the Gaza Strip and between 60-90 members in the West Bank<sup>7</sup>. It is through the military wing that Hamas carries out suicide bombings. The military wing is believed to act semi-independently from Hamas’s political wing, in so far as the military wing, not the political wing chooses the targets. However, Hamas’s political wing does play a key role in the overall decision to use suicide bombers. According to the Human Rights Watch report on suicide bombings, “the political leadership of [Hamas] have at times openly espoused, authorized, encouraged, or endorsed suicide attacks against civilians, and appear to have the authority to initiate or halt attacks as a matter of policy, even if they do not play a role in selecting specific targets.”<sup>8</sup>

Ironically, actions taken by the Israeli government under Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin government would pave the way for Hamas operatives to be trained in the art of suicide terrorism. In 1992, following the killing of five Israeli soldiers during a weeklong period, the Rabin government expelled 365 Hamas militants (as well as 50 Islamic Jihad members) to Southern Lebanon. This deportation allowed Hamas members to strike up closer relationships with Hizbullah and their benefactors, the Iranian Revolutionary Guards. While in Lebanon, the Hamas members were trained in the technique of suicide warfare by Hizbullah.

Since its adoption of suicide bombing, Hamas has carried out more suicide bombings than any other Palestinian group. Hamas first used the suicide bomb in April 1993, but targeted the Israeli military. The following year Hamas began sending suicide bombers to target civilians.

### **Islamic Jihad:**

Similar to Hamas, Islamic Jihad emerged out of the Muslim Brotherhood. In 1982, students at the Islamic University in Gaza created the organization. Fathi Shikaki, Bashir Musa and Abd al-Azziz Awda as a protest against the perceived moderation and lack of political activism by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the Palestinian areas founded Islamic Jihad. Islamic Jihad's founders were deeply influenced both by their contacts with the radical Islamist circles in Egypt and by the Iranian Revolution. The Iranian Revolution played heavily on the thinking of Islamic Jihad's founders and they considered it a model for the Arab world to emulate.

Like Hamas, Islamic Jihad calls for the complete liberation of all of Palestine, not just the West Bank and Gaza Strip. However, whereas Hamas takes an Islamic-nationalist stand on the issue of Palestine, Islamic Jihad views the fight for Palestine in the context of whole of the Arab-Islamic world. Ziad Abu-Amr wrote, "Islamic Jihad sees the Palestinian problem as an Islamic problem and not a national or pan-Arab nationalist problem, but rather a problem that concerns the entire Islamic nation."<sup>9</sup> Islamic Jihad views the liberation of Palestine as the first stage for an Islamic revolution that will take place in the Arab world.

In 1988, Shikaki and Awda were expelled to Lebanon. While in Lebanon, Fathi Shikaki forged close ties with Hizbullah and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard located in Lebanon. These ties were expanded following the expulsion of the 65 Islamic Jihad militants to Southern Lebanon by the Israeli government in 1992 (and as previously mentioned 350 Hamas members).

In contrast with Hamas, Islamic Jihad does not possess a social network, save a small civic component in the Gaza Strip<sup>10</sup>. Instead, the organization views itself as being in the vanguard of Islamic Palestinian society. The organization draws most of its support from students and intellectuals within the Gaza Strip. The organization exists both in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Its presence is most widespread in the Gaza Strip but it holds a significant presence in the Jenin area. Israeli terrorism analyst Reuvan Paz, in an interview with Human Rights Watch, estimated that, at the present time, there were presumably between 300 to 400 Islamic Jihad members in the West Bank and Gaza Strip<sup>11</sup>.

Suicide bombings are carried out by Islamic Jihad's military wing, known as *Saraya al-Quds*, the Jerusalem Brigades. *Saraya al-Quds* was established in 1992, to centralize of the individual military groups that had previously existed within Islamic Jihad. Like Hamas, Islamic Jihad's military wing is semi-independent from the political wing to the extent that the military wing chooses the targets. However, the military wing is still dependent on authorization from the political wing to carry out attacks.

Until the signing of the Oslo Accords and the creation of the Palestinian Authority, there were few links between Hamas and Islamic Jihad. On the contrary, the two organizations vied for support from the same pool and were considered to be rivals in

the Gaza strip. This situation changed following formation of the Rejection Front, the collection of factions within Palestinian society that opposed the Oslo Accords. Cooperation between Hamas and Islamic Jihad increased further when Hamas began employing the strategy of suicide bombing. On numerous occasions, Hamas and Islamic Jihad jointly carried out suicide bombings operations.

**During the Oslo Accords Period:**

On April 16, 1993, Hamas carried out the first suicide bombing by a Palestinian group. This event preceded the signing of the Oslo Peace Accords by nearly six months. Following the historic signing of the Oslo Accords on September 13, 1993, the number of suicide bombings would only increase. Ironically, the introduction of the suicide bomb into the Palestinian-Israeli conflict came at a time when reconciliation was beginning to take place between both sides. Both Hamas and Islamic Jihad vehemently rejected the Oslo Accords, and used the suicide bomb as a way of disrupting the nascent peace process. Hamas and Islamic Jihad called for an Islamic Palestine that encompasses not only the West Bank and Gaza but also Israel proper. The pragmatic nature of the Oslo peace process with its culmination in the establishment of a Palestinian state in only the West Bank and Gaza and not in what they considered “historic Palestine,” was anathema to these groups. Hamas and Islamic Jihad’s embrace of the suicide bomber as a military operation against Israel resulted more out of a desperation for what the peace process represented to their uncompromising ideological views of what constituted Palestine than military retaliation against Israeli aggressions which they claimed fueled the practice.

For Hamas, the Oslo Peace Process represented a crisis of mammoth proportions. The initial support for the Oslo Accords, by nearly three-quarters of the Palestinian population in the territories, left Hamas in a precarious position. Hamas could ill-afford to disrupt an agreement that led to Israeli withdrawals and the creation of Palestinian self-autonomy. Yet with total opposition to the new reality, Hamas ran the risk of becoming irrelevant under the new status quo. Moreover, the Oslo Accords indicated that the Palestinian ruling authority would act against military activity meaning that Hamas and the ruling Palestinian government would likely find themselves at odds. The support for the Oslo accords within Palestinian society forced Hamas to slightly moderate its position. Although still declaring its opposition to the Oslo Accords, Hamas began to signal a faintly more pragmatic stance. While still in prison, Sheikh Yassin penned an open letter published in *al-Wasat* on November 1, 1993 that raised the possibility of a *hudna* or ceasefire for ten, possible twenty years with Israel. This ceasefire was dependent on Israel withdrawing from the occupied territories<sup>12</sup>. Furthermore both sides would refrain from targeting civilian populations. However, the cease-fire offer was essentially a non-starter for Israel. Hamas's minimal demands represented the most extreme Israeli position without even offering a full peace agreement. With the Oslo Accords slowly taking shape, Hamas turned to the suicide bomber as the one tactic that could stall the agreements implementation.

Although Hamas and Islamic Jihad characterized the suicide bombing in terms of retaliation, their actions coincided with the negotiations that were being carried out between the Palestinian Authority and Israel over the fulfillment of the peace process.

For Hamas and Islamic Jihad, the suicide bomber was an effective way of derailing the peace process. On this motive, Nachman Tal comments,

“Foiling the implementation of the Oslo Accords [Hamas and Islamic Jihad believed] would require a more vigorous approach. The goal was...clear - causing severe casualties to Israel, which would disrupt day-to-day life in the country and bring about a collapse of the agreements.<sup>13</sup>”

The political nature of suicide bombing became all the more apparent as negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority intensified.

From the beginning of the Oslo period until 1996, there were four major waves of suicide bombing. All four waves had serious effects on the peace process. The first series of suicide bombings came in September 1993, in the wake of the signing of the Oslo accords. The first major wave of suicide bombings received little to no public support because of high degree of backing in Palestinian society for the Oslo Peace Accords and the expected benefits that the peace process would bring<sup>14</sup>. It also did not have an extreme psychological effect on the Israeli public because the attacks were not directed at the Israeli civilian population. Moreover, since the PLO had yet to take over jurisdiction of the territories, they could not be held accountable for not preventing the attacks.

The second major wave of suicide bombings came as a perceived retaliation for the massacre perpetrated by Baruch Goldstein. On February 25, 1994, the American-born Israeli settler Baruch Goldstein casually walked into the Tomb of the Patriarchs Mosque at prayer time and opened fire on the worshippers. The right-wing zealot killed nearly thirty Palestinians in a barrage of automatic gunfire. The suicide bombings that soon followed came in the context of retribution for the Hebron massacre. These were the first suicide bombings to target civilians.

Under the banner of retaliation for the Hebron massacre, Hamas unleashed a barrage of suicide bombers to major Israeli population centers. The first attack came on April 6, 1994, when a Hamas suicide bomber carried out a suicide bombing in the Israeli city of Afula. The attack killed eight civilians and wounded 34. A second attack followed a week later in Hadera when a suicide bomber boarded a commuter bus and detonated his charge.

Despite Hamas's claims that these attacks were meant as retaliation for the Hebron massacre, the attacks had an inherent political nature. The April attacks came shortly before the signing of the Cairo Agreement between Israel and the PA over the implementation of autonomy for Gaza and Jericho. Beyond Hamas's declarations that the attacks were revenge, "the suicidal attacks meant to undermine the peace process manifesting Israel's vulnerability as well as enhancing Hamas prestige as the real Palestinian political leadership, and force Arafat's authority to come to terms with Hamas as a legitimate opposition."<sup>15</sup>

Similarly during the third wave of suicide bombings that took place in October of 1994 and during the summer of 1995, came as a concerted effort to derail the peace process. Hamas, along with Islamic Jihad, unleashed a series of suicide bus bombings that struck at the very the heart of Israel. The attacks that took place in downtown Tel Aviv, Ramat Gan and downtown Jerusalem, came as negotiations between Israel and the PA were intensifying. The latter attacks coincided with negotiations between Israel and the PA over Israel's withdrawal from Palestinian population centers in the West Bank and the general elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council scheduled to follow. These suicide bombing tore at the very fabric of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's

assurances to the Israeli public that the peace agreement and subsequent separation by the two sides would bring Israel more security.

However with the signing of the Oslo II Agreement on September 28, 1995, Hamas decided to shelve their use of the suicide bomber as well as other military operations against Israel to insure that the stipulated Israeli withdrawal from Palestinian population centers would be carried out. With their support dwindling, Hamas could not afford to be seen as the cause for perpetuating the occupation. Hamas and Islamic Jihad bided their time for an opening to resume suicide bombings; this opportunity would present itself following two assassinations.

For Islamic Jihad, this came after Israeli forces assassinated their leader and founder Dr. Fathi Shikaki on October 25, 1995 in Malta. Although Islamic Jihad would take revenge for Shikaki's assassination, in the form of two suicide bombings, the organization lost a key figure to the organization that could not easily be replaced. Islamic Jihad saw their military means reduced by the assassination of their leader.

The fourth major wave of attacks, a spate of suicide bombings following the assassination of Hamas's premier bomb maker Yiyhe "The Engineer" Ayyash, would play a critical role in destabilizing the peace process. The retaliatory attacks took the form of three suicide bombings in late February and early March 1996. The first two suicide bombings took place on February 25, 1996 and March 3, 1996, respectively; on the Egged bus number 18 in the center of Jerusalem. The third bombing happened in Dizengoff Square in Tel Aviv. Altogether, 55 people were killed (25, 17, and 13) and hundreds were wounded. This brutal surge of suicide bombings terrified the Israeli electorate and helped deliver a narrow victory in June 1996 to the hard-line Benjamin

Netanyahu of the Likud Party over the Labor Party's Shimon Peres. The consequence of Netanyahu's narrow victory ultimately led to a slowing down of the peace process, an outcome that suited the desires of many in Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

### **The Crackdown:**

Following the vicious fourth wave of suicide attacks, Israeli and international pressure forced Chairman Arafat and the Palestinian Authority to make a more concerted effort to combat Hamas and Islamic Jihad. In response to these bombings, Arafat sent the Palestinian security forces to round up and imprison Hamas and Islamic Jihad activists. Nearly 1,200 Hamas and Islamic Jihad leaders and activists were detained. In addition, PA security forces confiscated large caches of weapons belonging to both organizations. Most importantly, the Palestinian Authority took control of mosques that were under the control of the radical organizations.

In light of the Palestinian Authority's crackdown on Hamas and the security coordination between Israeli and Palestinian security forces, overseen by the American Central Intelligence Agency, the militant organization found its military capabilities stifled. In an interview in the Jordanian newspaper *Al-Urdun* in October 1998, Hamas spokesman Ibrahim Ghosheh spoke about the difficulties that Hamas's military wing faced at the hands of the cooperative Palestinian and Israeli security services. He stated,

“For two years, almost since I took over in June 1996, the [Israeli] security organs have not stopped tracking down al-Qassam operations and foiling operations daily....they [the Palestinian security services], too, have not stopped hunting down our mujahidin...The fact is, the Palestinian security organs know every detail. They are the ones which laid their hands on the explosive factory for the mujahidin in Nablus and before that the ones in Bayt Sahur and Hebron.

It was the PA security organs which seized the materials which the mujahidin use in their struggle.<sup>16</sup>

The joint security forces broke down Hamas's ability to carry out military operations to the point that the organization was essentially forced to give up suicide bombing and focus on other means of attacks.

The effects of the crackdown undertaken by Israel and the Palestinian Authority severely hindered Hamas and Islamic Jihad's ability to carry out suicide bombings. From this period until the resumption of hostilities between Israel and the Palestinians in September 2000, there was a dramatic decrease in the number of suicide attacks. During 1997, five suicide bombings total took place. The following year, that number would decrease to just three. Not a single suicide bombing took place in 1999 and in 2000 until the resumption of hostilities.

There are multiple reasons for this decrease. One factor was that the joint military actions of Israeli and Palestinian security forces that effectively stifled Hamas and Islamic Jihad's military capabilities. Another factor was that the progress in the peace process, albeit slow, kept support for suicide bombing at a low level. While the peace process remained in motion during the mid 1990s, suicide bombing, and the organizations that performed them, possessed far less support within Palestinian society. Polls conducted in 1995 showed that Hamas and Islamic Jihad were supported by less than a quarter of the Palestinian population in the territories<sup>17</sup>.

Yet by the late 1990's, the radical Islamist organizations saw their popularity steadily increasing within Palestinian society. This rise was due to the frustration by Palestinian society with both the perceived stagnation of the peace process coupled with the corruption and misrule by Yassir Arafat and his Palestinian Authority. While a

negotiated political solution seemed imminent, support for suicide bombing waned. All of this dramatically changed with the breakdown of the peace process at Camp David in July of 2000 and the ensuing resumption of violence in September 2000.

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<sup>1</sup> Nachman Tal, "Suicide Attacks: Israel and Islamic Terrorism," Strategic Assessment, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv: Israel, volume 5, number 1, p.7

<sup>2</sup> Shaul Mishal and Avraham Sela, " Hamas: A Behavioral Profile," *International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism*, January 1997, p. 2

<sup>3</sup> Reuvan Paz, "Sleeping with the Enemy," *International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism*, June 25, 1998, p. 2

<sup>4</sup> "The Charter of Allah: The Platform of Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas)" (translated by Raphael Israeli, Hebrew University: Israel)

<sup>5</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, [www.terrorismanswers.com/groups/hamas/](http://www.terrorismanswers.com/groups/hamas/)

<sup>6</sup> Institute for Counter Terrorism report on Hamas, p.2 ([www.ict.org.il](http://www.ict.org.il))

<sup>7</sup> "Erased in a Moment: Suicide Bombing Attacks Against Israeli Civilians," *Human Right Watch*, October 2002, p.65

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*, p. 63

<sup>9</sup> Ziad Abu-Amr, Islamic Fundamentalism in the West Bank and Gaza, Indiana University Press: Bloomington, 1994, p.105

<sup>10</sup> "Erased in a Moment: Suicide Bombing Attacks Against Israeli Civilians," *Human Right Watch*, October 2002, p.75

<sup>11</sup> Human Rights Watch Interview with Reuvan Paz, Herzliya, June 9, 2002, ("Erased..." *Human Rights Watch*, p.75)

<sup>12</sup> Wendy Kristianasen, "Challenge and Counterchallenge: Hamas's Response to Oslo," Journal of Palestine Studies, vol.28, no.3 Spring 1999 p.23

<sup>13</sup> Nachman Tal, "Suicide Attacks: Israel and Islamic Terrorism," Strategic Assessment, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv: Israel, volume 5, number 1, p.2

<sup>14</sup> Dr. Khalil Shikaki, "The Views of Palestinian Society on Suicide Terrorism," Countering Suicide Terrorism: An International Conference February 20-23, 2000, *The International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism*, Herzliya: Israel 2001, p.153

<sup>15</sup> Khalid al-Kharub, 'Harakat Hamas Bayn al-Sulta al-Filistiniyya wa Isra'il,' *Majallat al-Dirasat al Filistiniyya*, no. 18, p.28-29, (In Shaul Mishal and Avraham Sela, "Hamas: A Behavioral Profile" The Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research: Tel Aviv 1997, p.9)

<sup>16</sup> Ely Karmon, "Hamas' Terrorism Strategy: Operational Limitations and Political Constraints," *MERIA Journal*, v4, no. 1, March 2000 p.2

<sup>17</sup> Glen Frankel, Beyond the Promised Land, Simon & Schuster Books: New York 1996, p.380

## Chapter V: The Explosion of the al-Aqsa Intifada

The outbreak of the second Intifada, the *al-Aqsa Intifada*, effectively transformed the situation as well as the organizations that performed suicide terrorism. With the failure of both sides to reach an agreement at the Camp David summit in July 2000 and the eruption of violence surrounding the visit of Ariel Sharon to the Temple Mount on September 28, 2000, the Oslo Peace Process collapsed in a storm of violence and bloodshed. This chapter concentrates on the rise of groups that began carrying out suicide bombings after the breakdown of the Oslo accords as well as the transformation of the groups that had previously partaken in the practice.

As the violence between Israel and the Palestinians escalated, the security coordination between Israel and the Palestinian Authority was terminated. Meanwhile, the Palestinian Authority moved to clear its jails of Hamas and Islamic Jihad militants, which further exacerbated the situation. Close to 1,200 activists from Hamas and Islamic Jihad were released from detention in the Palestinian Authority's jails. Islamic Jihad was the first to renew the use of the suicide bomber on October 26, 2000, less than a month after the resumption of hostilities. Hamas soon followed suit two months later.

From the ensuing chaos, a new reality concerning suicide bombing would emerge. The suicide bomber has transformed the conflict in many ways. Although suicide bombings took place during the Oslo period, they did not occur in the sheer volume that exists today. According to Human Rights Watch, "the scale and intensity of the current wave of attacks is unprecedented<sup>1</sup>." While the peace process was in effect, support for suicide bombing remained on the fringe of Palestinian society; now in the light of the

second Intifada support for the suicide bomb has seeped into the Palestinian political mainstream.

Hamas and Islamic Jihad have seen a drastic rise in popularity since the eruption of the current conflict, stemming from their use of the suicide bomb. Hamas has deftly been able to use the suicide bomber on multiple levels. First, the suicide bomber has been a military operation against Israel. This has gained them support by the Palestinian public who views Hamas's operations as the only thing that affects Israeli society. More importantly, Hamas has deftly been able to use the repercussions from Israeli retaliatory incursion and closures to the benefit of their social network. The ruin of the Palestinian economy because of the closure and curfew on Palestinian territories has driven many Palestinians into the open arms of Hamas's social services, and led them to Hamas's mosques. Hamas has positioned itself to benefit from every aspect of suicide bombings.

Moreover, Hamas and Islamic Jihad continued to use suicide bomber as way to affect real or prospective Israeli-Palestinian political negotiations. The prime example of the use of the suicide bomber as a tool to disrupt political negotiations is apparent in Hamas's attempt to disrupt the Arab Summit in Beirut in late March 2002. This summit was intended to discuss the Saudi peace proposal, which offered full normalization of relations by the Arab League for a full Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Golan Heights. To disrupt the Arab Summit, Hamas carried out a suicide bombing on March 27, 2002 at the Park Hotel in Netanya at a Passover Seder. The gruesome attack killed twenty-nine and wounded more than one hundred. The Hamas communiqué following the attack clearly stated, "Our operation coincided with the Arab Summit in

Beirut...[and] is a clear message to our Arab ruler that our struggling people have chosen their road and know how to regain lands and right in full, depending only no God.<sup>2</sup>”

Since the outbreak of the al-Aqsa Intifada, three main transformations have taken place with regard to the suicide bomber: a) the secularization of the suicide bomb, b) the diversification of the suicide bomber, and c) the change in the role of the Palestinian Authority.

### **Secularization of Suicide Bombing:**

One of the most distinct transformations of the suicide bombing within the current conflict has been the secularization of suicide bombing. Suicide bombing no longer exists solely as a tactic of the Islamist organizations, secular-nationalist groups like the al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades and the nationalist-Marxist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. In the face of the growing support for suicide bombing among Palestinians, groups like the Al-Aqsa Brigades and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine found that they had to adopt the tactic of suicide bombing or risk losing out on their support from the “Palestinian street.”

### **Al-Aqsa Martyr’s Brigades:**

The Al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades were formed in wake of the second Intifada as “self-defense” militias. Members of Fatah, specifically a group of militants from the Balata refugee section of Nablus<sup>3</sup>, created the group. Unlike Hamas and Islamic Jihad, which are rivals of the Palestinian Authority, the al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades has links to the Palestinian Authority through its ties to Fatah, the leading faction of the Palestinian

Authority. Fatah is the leading political faction of the Palestine Liberation Organization; it is the group over which Yassir Arafat is commander. The Brigades declare that they are loyal to Fatah's ideology of confrontation with Israel as a course to the fruition of a Palestinian state; the liberation of Palestine will be achieved only through the means of armed struggle. As an extension of Fatah, the Brigades ideology is based on secular nationalism rather than Islamism. However, the Brigades have incorporated religious motifs and symbols into their rhetoric, their name being a prime example.

Yet the links between the al-Aqsa Brigades and Fatah are complicated. The Human Rights Watch report on suicide bombing notes that the both the letterhead for the al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades and their website displays the symbol of Fatah, with the website furnishing links to Fatah's central documents and communiqués. In addition, posters that celebrate suicide attacks carried out by the Brigades and the statements of responsibility exhibit the al-Aqsa Brigades' emblem side-by-side with Fatah's own insignia<sup>4</sup>. The Brigades have claimed to be the military wing of Fatah and under the leadership of Chairman Arafat. Maslama Thabet, the al-Aqsa Brigades commander in Tulkarem, declared in an interview, "The truth is, we are Fatah itself, but we don't operate under the name Fatah. We are the armed wing of the organization. We receive our instructions from Fatah. Our commander is Yassir Arafat himself."<sup>5</sup> Other members have been adamant that, while they respect Chairman Arafat, they do not receive orders from him regarding individual attacks. Fatah has denied that the group constitutes their military wing but has never publicly distanced itself from the actions of the al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades. The furthest that Fatah has gone to dissociate itself from the Brigades

has been to claim that there is no supervisor-subordinate relationship between the two groups and that they do not and have not exercised authority over the group.

The al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades organizational structure is based on loose organizational cells in the main West Bank cities. These cells consist of security and military units, the former planning attacks and the latter carrying out the campaign. With the outset of the second Intifada, the al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades conducted guerilla-style tactics based on the model employed by Hizbullah against the Israeli Defense Force in southern Lebanon. These operations were carried out alongside Fatah's official paramilitary units, the Tanzim, and segments of the Palestinian Authority's security service such as Force 17. Through a combination of ambushes, drive-by shootings and attacks on IDF military outposts, these groups sought to create a "Lebanonization" of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. It was believed that, in light of the deteriorating security situation, the Israeli public would compel the government to withdraw, the same way the IDF had withdrawn from southern Lebanon earlier that year.

However, as the guerilla campaign failed to produce the desired Israeli retreat, Fatah and the al-Aqsa Brigades found itself losing popular support on the Palestinian street to the Islamists, specifically Hamas, on account of Hamas's use of the suicide bomber. In order to reverse this trend, the al-Aqsa Brigades carried out their first suicide bombing on January 27, 2002. A Fatah spokesman summed up this sentiment, "When the al-Aqsa Brigades started [suicide bombing] operations, it was the decision of all districts...The political leaders feared they would lose their influence in the street."<sup>6</sup> More importantly, the Brigades used a tactic that was sure to distinguish them from the

Islamists; the attack was carried out by a woman, Wafa Idris, marking the first time a female participated as a suicide bomber in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Unlike the Islamists, who advocate suicide bombing on theological grounds, the Brigades have advocated suicide bombing on the basis of the national struggle. They have portrayed suicide bombing as an act of self-sacrifice. The al-Aqsa Brigades have sought to justify their utilization of the suicide bomber as the outcome of Palestinian suffering at the hands of the Israeli occupation. Israel and many others regard the al-Aqsa Brigades' attacks against civilians through the suicide bomber point toward an official policy of support for suicide attacks by the leadership of Fatah, and consequently of the Palestinian Authority.

### **Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine:**

The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) is a Marxist-oriented organization that has been engaged in terrorism since its foundation in 1967, but only recently has it adopted the use of the suicide bomber as a tactic. Following the Six-Day War in 1967, the Palestinian Greek-Orthodox Christian Dr. George Habash established the PFLP. The PFLP sought to bring down conservative Arab regimes, wipe out Israel, and tied Marxist ideology and principles to the Palestinian struggle, which it viewed in the context of the greater proletarian struggle. The group enjoyed the height of its popularity in the late 1960's and early 1970's, when it gained notoriety for its part in the hijacking of commercial airlines.

The PFLP's influence on the Palestinian political state of affairs has been in steady decline for quite some time. With the downfall of their main patron, the Soviet

Union, and the rise of the Islamist groups, the PFLP lost its place as the main Palestinian opposition to Yassir Arafat and Fatah. The organization rejected the Oslo Accords between Israel and the PLO and in protest suspended its membership within the PLO; during this period, the group's status reached its nadir. Following a rapprochement between the PFLP and the PLO in 1999, the organization's deputy secretary-general Abu Ali Mustafa was allowed to return to PA-controlled territories. Mustafa would succeed Habash in July 2000 as leader of the organization. Abu Ali Mustafa would later be assassinated by the IDF in a missile attack on his office in Ramallah on August 21, 2001.

The PFLP and its military wing, the Abu Ali Mustafa Brigades, have played only a minor role in the current conflict, save the incident surrounding the assassination of Israeli Tourism Minister Rehavam Ze'evi on October 17, 2001<sup>\*</sup>. Like the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, the PFLP's decision to adopt suicide bombings seems more a response to the popularity of the practice and a fear of becoming an irrelevant factor in the conflict than an adoption of the religious and theological motives for carrying out suicide bombings. Following the assassination of Abu Ali Mustafa, the PFLP made its first reference to the adoption of suicide bomber tactics. PFLP central committee member Abu Ali Tallal stated, "Our riposte will be hard and target American and Israeli interests, wherever they are found. We have no choice but to transform ourselves into human bombs and pursue the Israeli enemy everywhere in the interior and overseas."<sup>7</sup> To date the PFLP has carried out three suicide bombing attacks against civilians.

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<sup>\*</sup> On October 17, 2002, the Abu Ali Mustafa Brigades assassinated the Israeli Tourism Minister Rehavam Ze'evi, in what they claimed as a response to the assassination of Abu Ali Mustafa. This marked the first time that an Israeli Minister has been killed by a militant group. The act brought a temporary increase to the PFLP's status, but its support has since decreased

The first suicide attack by the PFLP took place on February 16, 2002, in a shopping mall in Karnei Shomron, a settlement in the West Bank. Three people were killed and more than thirty were injured when a suicide bomber entered a pizza restaurant and set off an explosive belt. The second attack took place three weeks later in a lobby of a hotel near the West Bank settlement of Ariel. The third suicide bombing attack carried out by the PFLP occurred on May 19, 2002, when a suicide bomber, disguised as an Israeli soldier blew himself up at an open-air market in Netanya, within Israel proper. The attack, which killed three and wounded close to sixty, was also claimed by Hamas and was apparently carried out in coordination by both organizations.

Despite the PFLP's adoption of the suicide bomber, the group still holds little prominence in Palestinian society. The organization possesses approximately 800 members in the territories and enjoys approximately three percent support from Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza.

### **Diversification of the Suicide Bomber:**

The use of women and children in suicide attacks is a new phenomenon of the al-Aqsa Intifada. In the wake of the adoption of suicide bombing as a tactic by the secular groups, a chilling game of one-upmanship broke out between organizations to see who could come up with the most creative way of carrying out suicide bombing to rally support. The al-Aqsa Brigades resorted to using women as suicide bombers, a practice which had previously frowned upon by the Islamist groups. In apparent response to the use of female suicide bombers, Islamic Jihad allowed adolescents as young as age thirteen to carry out martyrdom operations.

The al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades have been the only group so far to use female suicide bombers. Their adoption of the female suicide bomber was done to distinguish their suicide bombing tactics from that of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, who had rejected the notion. Thus far, four women have carried out suicide attacks and more have attempted.

The rise of the female suicide bomber led to a debate among the Islamists over the role of women carrying out suicide bombings. Numerous leaders from Hamas leaders like Isma'il Abu Shanab, put forward their approval. Shanab stated, "Jihad against the enemy is an obligation that applies not only to men but also to women. Islam has never differentiated between men and women on the battlefield."<sup>8</sup> The resounding view that came forth was an overall acceptance of female suicide bombers.

However some within Hamas expressed their reservations and stipulations to the participation of females in martyrdom operations. Hamas spiritual leader Sheikh Yassin was not opposed to the idea of female suicide bombers but argued that, since Hamas had so many male volunteers, there was no need. Sheikh Yassin went on to add that if a woman was going to participate in martyrdom operations, she should be accompanied by a *mahram*, an unmarriageable male relative-chaperon, if she would be away from the home for longer than a full day.

### **The Role of the Palestinian Authority:**

The most crucial transformation that has taken place since the eruption of the current conflict has been the role of the Palestinian Authority vis-à-vis suicide bombing. Whereas during the Oslo period, the Palestinian Authority actively participated in

stopping suicide terrorism, now at the very least, the PA does nothing to prevent it, to possessing outright culpability for the attacks.

Since the outbreak of violence, the Palestinian Authority has taken little action against organizations responsible for suicide bombings. During the Oslo period, the Palestinian Authority would bring those who planned and authorized suicide bombings to justice. Now, no such efforts take place. This inaction has been due to an unwillingness of the Palestinian Authority to confront the organizations that carry out suicide bombings because of the high level of popularity that both groups and practice has attained. In times when the Palestinian Authority has taken steps against terrorist groups, it has only been after a large suicide attack against Israeli civilians, in response to heavy Israeli and international pressure to do so. In a few cases, members of Palestinian Authority security services have participated in suicide attacks carried out by the al-Aqsa brigades. Moreover, many Palestinian Authority officials attend funerals for martyrs, even those that were affiliated with Hamas.

Although Chairman Arafat has denounced suicide bombings on multiple occasions, he has done so only after suicide attacks when he was compelled to do so. Meanwhile, in numerous speeches he has extolled the virtues of martyrdom. The continued inaction of Chairman Arafat against suicide bombings has led Israel to declare him “irrelevant” and the United States has called for an alternative leadership to take over the Palestinian Authority as a precursor to a Palestinian state.

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<sup>1</sup>Human Right Watch, “Erased in a Moment: Suicide Bombing Attacks Against Israeli Civilians,” October 2002, p. 14

<sup>2</sup>“Erased in a Moment: Suicide Bombing Attacks Against Israeli Civilians,” *Human Right Watch*, October 2002, p. 66

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<sup>3</sup> Institute for Counter Terrorism report on “Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade,” (www.ict.org.il)

<sup>4</sup> “Erased in a Moment: Suicide Bombing Attacks Against Israeli Civilians,” *Human Right Watch*, October 2002, p.78

<sup>5</sup> Mathew Kalman, “Terrorist says orders come from Arafat,” *USA Today*, March, 14, 2002 (www.usatoday.com)

<sup>6</sup> “Erased in a Moment: Suicide Bombing Attacks Against Israeli Civilians,” *Human Right Watch*, October 2002, p.29

<sup>7</sup> John Daly, “Suicide Bombing: no warning, and no total solution,” *Jane’s Terrorism and Security Monitor*, September 17, 2001(<http://jtsm.janes.com>)

<sup>8</sup> Middle East News Online, January 28, 2002, (In “Wafa Idris: The Celebration of the First Female Palestinian Suicide Bomber- Part I,” *MEMRI*, no.83, February 12, 2002)

## Chapter VI: Effects on Palestinian Society

What separates the Palestinian practice of suicide terrorism from all other examples has been the momentum that the culture of martyrdom has acquired. According to Rand Corp. terrorism expert Bruce Hoffman,

“Groups there succeeded in what terrorist organizations have rarely been able to do, and that’s transform their campaigns into almost mass movements, not dependence on a hard-core cadre of fighters but rather with people from the population readily stepping forward to replenish the terrorist ranks.<sup>1</sup>”

The indoctrination of the suicide bomber is no longer a process confined to the sponsoring organizations but the society as a whole.

The suicide bomber is a product of his environment that not only sanctions his actions but also nurtures it. The incitement that takes place within Palestinian society nourishes support for suicide bombers and the culture of martyrdom. Israeli political scientist Ehud Sprinzak notes, “Within Palestinian society, in the past year, a very broad mechanism of social approval has been created that makes it possible for even less religious people to commit suicide [bombings].<sup>2</sup>” Palestinian culture now seeps with support for martyrdom in all facets of society: in the media, in schools and universities, at summer camps and in Palestinian Authority-sponsored sporting events. No realm of civil society remains untouched by the culture of martyrdom.

The Palestinian media is infected with this disease. On Palestinian television programs, directed specifically at children, extol martyrdom in the form of suicide bombing as a virtuous act. On a Sesame Street-style television program for children, a young boy sings, “When I wander into Jerusalem, I will become a suicide bomber.<sup>3</sup>” Cartoons beckon children on to martyrdom to redeem Palestine from the occupiers.

From kindergarten through college, the culture of martyrdom is prevalent. Kindergarten walls declare that today's children are tomorrow's shahids. Middle school children are commended for their desires to become martyrs; boys in the midst of puberty are reminded that the pleasures of 72 virgins await them in paradise. At Al-Najah University in Nablus, signs proudly exclaim that, "Israel has nuclear bombs, we have human bombs." Al-Najah was also the site of an exhibition recreating the Sbarro pizzeria bombing, complete with fake limbs, blood and pizza. The Hamas school system tries to cultivate martyrs literally from cradle to grave.

For what children aren't taught in school about martyrdom, there exist summer "paradise" camps to instruct Palestinian youth further. Children ages 11 to 15 years old are given lessons on the virtues of suicide bombing. According to camp counselor Mohammed el-Hattab, the children are taught that the suicide bomb is the only thing that frightens Israel and Palestinians are entitled to carry it out.

In January 2003, the Palestinian Authority announced that it would observe the memory of Abdel Baset Odeh, the Hamas suicide bomber who blew himself up at the Passover Seder in the Park Hotel in Netanya, by holding a soccer tournament in his memory. The soccer tournament took place in the bomber's hometown of Tulkarm. Each of the seven teams in the tournament was named for different suicide bombers from the city, and Odeh's brother presented trophies with the tournament's culmination<sup>4</sup>.

Within Palestinian society, the martyr has achieved celebrity status. The effect of the culture of martyrdom is the "heroization" of the suicide bomber. Martyrs' pictures are on posters, key chains and other paraphernalia. For children, the suicide bomber has taken a place on the hero's pedestal. Young people imagine that they are building their

society's future on the sacrifice of their own lives. In a survey conducted on nearly 1000 children aged nine to seventeen, 73% expressed their desire to become martyrs. The Palestinian psychologist Dr. Fatsil Abu Hin, offered an explanation on this trend, "The word 'martyr' has many meanings for the Palestinian child, particularly within Islamic society. Palestinian children understand that becoming a martyr means earning respect."<sup>5</sup> The culture of martyrdom has led Palestinian children to view suicide bombing as the greatest way of achieving respect.

Recent polls conducted of Palestinian public, carried out by the Gaza-based Palestinian Society for Culture Science, and Development, show support for suicide bombing stood at nearly 70%. Shockingly, this is twenty points lower than it had been in a poll conducted months before. Why does suicide bombing receive such high levels of support? In the simplest of terms, because militarily it works better than any other weapon that the Palestinians can bring to bear against Israel, and the Palestinians know it. To the Palestinians, suicide bombing is the ultimate in *schadenfraude*, taking pleasure in others' misery. Palestinians are acutely aware of the suffering that has been meted out upon them in retaliation for suicide bombings, yet the element of solace has been gained in the angst that suicide bombing has caused on Israeli society. Former Israeli Defense Force Lieutenant Colonel Gal Luft notes, "The Palestinians view the [suicide bombing] campaign's greatest achievement as not just the killing of so many Israelis but the decline of Israel's economy, the destruction of its tourism industry, and the demoralization of its people."<sup>6</sup>

If the current trend of support for suicide bombing continues, Palestinian civil society is bound to suffer an internal implosion once the conflict finally ends. One needs

look no further than the current situation in Algeria to see the later effects on a society when the struggle consumes civil society for too long. The fight between the Islamists and the nationalists in Algeria should stand as a warning to the Palestinians for the fate that awaits their society once the enemy has finally withdrawn. Societies forged from the fires of nihilistic rage ultimately implode upon themselves.

Palestinians have paid a heavy price for the actions of the suicide bomber. Territories that were once under the rule of the Palestinian Authority are now under Israeli control. There are strong currents within Palestinian society that wholeheartedly reject the practice of suicide bombing. Yet these segments are found primarily in the upper echelon of Palestinian society. The Palestinian intelligentsia has been more outspoken in its criticism of suicide bombings. According to the Palestinian intellectual Professor Edward Said, “[Suicide bombings have] disfigured and debased the Palestinian struggle. All liberation movements in history have affirmed that their struggle is about life not about death. Why should ours be any different?<sup>7</sup>” During the summer of 2002, a communiqué was circulated that called for a cessation of military attacks targeting Israeli civilians, specifically the suicide bomb. This communiqué was the brainchild of Palestinian Professor Sari Nusseibah. Published in the Palestinian daily newspaper *Al-Quds*, the communiqué included the signature of fifty-five prominent Palestinians including leaders like Hanan Ashrawi and Ziad Abu Zayed. The petition that followed collected more than 900 signatures. Yet the debate surrounding suicide bombing often has been more focused on the political consequences that the suicide bombing does to the Palestinian cause, not the morality of the act. Furthermore, the petition did not ignite any broader societal debate.

Professor Nusseibeh has been the most outspoken critic of suicide bombing and its counter-productivity to the Palestinian cause, but thus far his voice has fallen on deaf ears. One reason for this is that Professor Nusseibeh has not been able to offer concrete political gains for the cessation of the practice; perhaps the new Palestinian Prime Minister Abu Mazen will be able to. It has yet to be determined if Prime Minister Abu Mazen will be able to shoulder this immense burden.

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<sup>1</sup> Amanda Ripley, "Why Suicide Bombing Is Now All The Rage," *Time Magazine*, v. 150 i.15, April 15, 2002 (www.time.com)

<sup>2</sup> ibid

<sup>3</sup> Daniel Pipes, "A father's pride and glory," *The Jerusalem Post*, August 15, 2001 (www.jpost.com)

<sup>4</sup> Khaled Abu Toameh, "PA tournament named for bomber," *The Jerusalem Post*, January 22, 2003 (www.jpost.com)

<sup>5</sup> Margot Dudkevitch, "PA intensifies campaign of incitement against Israel," *Jerusalem Post*, September 4, 2002 (www.jpost.com)

<sup>6</sup> Gal Luft, "The Palestinian H-Bomb," *Foreign Affairs*, v.81 n.4, July/August 2002, p. 3

<sup>7</sup> "Israel and the Occupied Territories and the Palestinian Authority: Without distinction-attacks on civilians by Palestinian armed groups," *Amnesty International*, July 2002, p.6

## **Chapter VII: Israeli Responses to Suicide Bombing**

After more than three years of acrimonious conflict, Israeli society is utterly despondent. The breakdown of the peace process came as a tremendous shock to much of Israeli society. The suicide bomb has been paramount in creating an overall feeling of insecurity in Israel. The indiscriminant nature of the attack has battered Israeli society's most basic sense of assurance. According to the Economist magazine, "The visitor to Israel finds a sad and frightened nation. Life goes on, but in the knowledge that any bus, café or university campus could be the target of the next suicide bomb.<sup>1</sup>"

The culture of martyrdom, which is so alien to a western-oriented society like Israel, makes it much harder to humanize the enemy. Why should Israel place any value on Palestinian life when they themselves apparently place so little on it themselves? The political repercussion of the suicide bomber has been an overall rightward shift of the Israeli electorate. Whereas many in Israel thought a two-state solution was possible between the two parties, suicide bombings that take place inside Israel proper have led many in Israel to think that the conflict is no longer about '67 borders but '48 borders. Despite the havoc that the suicide bomber causes in Israeli society, it cannot be viewed as a strategic threat to Israel's existence. Suicide bombing can hurt and cripple Israeli society but it cannot destroy the state like a conventional army could.

### **Israeli Tactics in Fighting the Suicide Bomber:**

As it stands, Israel is truly in a bind. What defense is capable of stopping an enemy that is so devoted to its goal of inflicting pain that it is willing to invite suffering and death on itself in the process? How can you deter an attacker who considers his

death a foregone conclusion? Further retaliation only exacerbates the already fragile situation; retreat will embolden those who support suicide bombing. How can Israel make the human time bomb stop ticking?

Israel has thus far relied on intelligence information and counter terrorism tactics to combat the suicide bomber. This has been effective but far from perfect; even if Israel stops 9 of 10 suicide bombers, the one that gets through is devastating. Israel has been primarily focused on rooting out and destroying terrorist infrastructure. They have been focused on fighting suicide terrorism by targeting militant leaders, the engineers behind the bombs and the handlers of the suicide bombers.

Since suicide terrorism is inherently psychological warfare, Israel often employs psychological measures to counter it. There are a number of tactics and deterrent methods that Israel currently utilizes to combat suicide bombing. One such method is house demolition. In response to a suicide bombing, the Israeli Defense Forces demolished the home of the relatives of the suicide bomber. On one level, this method serves as an effective deterrent. There are several instances in which a would-be suicide bomber backed out of their mission on account of such a threat. The Israeli security service Shin Bet announced in the beginning of August 2002 that they had taken two would-be suicide bombers into custody, who had surrendered because they did not want their families' home to be destroyed. This has been the exception more than the rule. However, house demolitions are at best a short term deterrent, and at worst, a measure that causes further incitement to an already tense situation.

In some cases, Israel has followed up the house demolition with the expulsion of the suicide bomber's relatives. In certain instances where the bomber's family was

determined to have aided the attack, the relatives were expelled from the West Bank to the Gaza Strip. Deportation has been infrequent because of the lengthy appeals process that goes with it.

Another proposed tactic has been the idea to defile the body of the suicide bomber. The suicide bomber's body would either be wrapped in pig fat or pig flesh, or have his blood mixed with pig's blood. The theory behind this is that since the pig is considered by Muslims to be ritually unclean and impure, the suicide bomber would be prevented from ascending into heaven. Israel has not carried out this tactic and it is unlikely that it ever will because of its highly provocative nature.

There have been some calls within Israeli society for unilateral withdrawal from the territories. Unilateral withdrawal from the territories should not be considered a viable option. The effects of such an event would be to increase the status of the suicide bomber and its use as a weapon by both Palestinians and others in the region. The suicide bombers would be perceived as the only effective catalyst for producing Israeli withdrawal. Unilateral separation might be a different story.

In the short term, there are certain measures Israel can undertake to fight suicide bombing. The first such measure is to accelerate the building of the security fence to separate Israel proper from the West Bank. The majority of suicide bombers are able to infiltrate into Israel through the West Bank because there is no boundary separating the territory from Israel. The area between Israel and the West Bank is porous and permeable and subject to infiltration by would-be suicide bombers. On the other hand, there have been few, if any suicide bombers to come from the Gaza Strip; the reason for this is that a fence surrounds the Gaza Strip.

A similar situation where a security fence has changed the dynamic of a conflict is the Western Sahara conflict between Morocco and the Polisario. In the face of a losing campaign against more mobile Polisario guerilla forces, Morocco built over 1,200 kilometers of heavily fortified security walls in the desert of the Western Sahara in the early 1980s. These security walls or “berms,” were equipped with trenches, barbed wire and cutting edge radar technology effectively changed the course of the war. Whereas the Polisario had previously enjoyed freedom of movement, they were now cut off from the wide-open territory that gave them their blessed mobility. Furthermore, after the installation of the berms, if the Polisario concentrated their forces to break through the security wall, the Moroccan army could engage them in a decisive battle that would ultimately play to the conventional Moroccan army’s strengths.

The same situation is plausible for Israel. The security fence, once fully erected will make it much harder for the suicide bomber to infiltrate into Israel and allow the Israeli army to take advantage of its superior weaponry. So far, where the fence has been erected, there has been a noteworthy impact on terrorist attacks. According to Consul Hillel Newman of the Consulate General of Israel to New England,

“Our statistics show that where there has been a wall or a fence, it has a significant impact on the success of terrorist attacks. It doesn’t mean that there are less attempts... in some cases there are less attempts, in some cases there are the same amount of attempts but they have less chances of success.”<sup>2</sup>

But even unilateral separation has many drawbacks. Leaving the issues of where the lines of separation would exist and the settlements out of it, there are still problems with the idea; the security fence will do nothing to stop the use of mortars and rockets, like Hamas’s Qassam rocket, fired from Palestinian territory into Israel. What the security

fence is capable of is reducing the number of suicide bombers that are able to penetrate into Israel and ending some of the trauma that the suicide bomber brings.

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<sup>1</sup> “Where causing pain is an end in itself,” *The Economist*, April 15, 2002 (www.economist.com)

<sup>2</sup> Personal interview conducted with Consul Hillel Newman of the Consulate General of Israel to New England, May 28, 2003

## Conclusion

There are a number of factors that make the suicide bomber “tick.” The suicide bomber is driven by a combination of theology and ideology; desperation and retaliation. Financial, cultural, social and political motives all play a part. The suicide bomber is able to thrive in an environment where his actions are considered to be both beneficial and sanctified. The existence of the suicide bomber and the culture that surrounds it poses major dilemmas for Israel, the Palestinians and the peace process between the two communities.

“Lies, damn lies and statistics.” The words spoken by Mark Twain are apt in trying to assess the degree to which Palestinian society truly supports suicide bombings and what it feels about the ongoing conflict; the same rings true for Israeli society. Polls taken represent the prevailing mood to some degree but they are not a fully accurate way of judging the attitude of two societies that have been caught up in more than thirty months of conflict; if one judges on polls alone, both societies would be diagnosed as schizophrenic. In two respective polls released the same week, one poll found that 70% of Palestinians support suicide bombings<sup>1</sup>; the other found that 43% of Palestinians wish these attacks to stop and 52% want the violence to end<sup>2</sup>.

It is equally difficult to judge the support of suicide bombing among the Palestinian public then it would be to judge how many Israelis really support the notion of “transfer.” Recent polls have indicated that 40% of Israelis support the idea of forcibly removing the Palestinian population from the West Bank and Gaza and that 40% of the Israeli population supports a renewal of the peace process. Like suicide bombings, “transfer” was a marginal idea that remained on the fringes of Israeli society until the collapse of the peace process and the return of the cycle of violence.

At best, the polls indicate that both sides are searching for a panacea, some cure-all solution to pull them out of the ongoing conflict. From a Palestinian perspective, this magical cure appears to have taken shape in the form of a dream that suicide bomber will terrify the Israeli public to such a degree that the Israeli public will prevail upon their government to withdraw from the territories. The

Palestinians will then wake up one day and Israel will be out of their lives. The flip side of this has manifested itself in the dream for some Israelis that the Israeli government will “transfer” the Palestinians from the territories, and Israelis will wake up one day with the Palestinians no longer there.

The fact that suicide bombings enjoy support hovering around the 70% range, while the groups that commit them have support ratings of roughly 30%, is a significant phenomenon. It means that Palestinians support the tactics more than they support the ideologies of the groups that use the tactics. In this sense, the support for the suicide bomber comes from desperation. The Palestinians are desperate for a weapon that empowers them against Israel and this is represented in the suicide bomber.

Although the suicide bomber does not pose an existential threat to the State of Israel, it does have political ramifications. The suicide bomber, more than any other form of attack, has a deep influence on numerous facets of Israeli life. It affects Israel’s national psyche and collective sense of well-being. It influences the political process and undermines support for the peace process. Suicide bombings even have an effect on the Israeli economy and the quality of life Israelis are able to enjoy. The adoption of the suicide bomber has been a strategic choice by the Palestinians; so far Israel has adopted a military strategy in response. Up to this point, Israel has employed a military strategy in response to signal to the Palestinians that the suicide bomber will not lead to the realization of the collective aspirations of the Palestinian people. Unfortunately, the suicide bomber cannot be defeated through military measures alone; to rely on Herculean military measures alone to defeat suicide terrorism is a Sisyphean task. Israeli Lieutenant Colonel Gal Luft notes,

“If history is any guide, Israel’s military campaign to eradicate the phenomenon of suicide bombing is unlikely to succeed. Other nations that have faced opponents willing to die have learned the hard way that, short of complete annihilation of the enemy, no military solution will solve the problem.<sup>3</sup>”

Suicide bombing can be slowed by military measures but it is unlikely that the phenomenon of suicide bombing can be defeated solely through military measures. So far, Israel’s best defense against the suicide bomber appears to be the continued construction of the security fence.

In all previous examples of suicide terrorism, whether by the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka or the PKK in Turkey, it was a changing political reality that made the suicide attacks cease. As long as suicide bombing continues, the chance for peace between Palestinians and Israelis is unimaginable. Getting the suicide bomber to cease ticking does not guarantee that peace will arise; the two sides were fighting long before the suicide bomber emerged. However, if the suicide bomber does stop ticking there is at least a glimmer of hope for peace, the question is how can this be achieved. The suicide bomber, and the culture that surrounds him, poses a real dilemma for Palestinian society. As the suicide bombing continues, Palestinian life grows increasingly more miserable. The Palestinians have paid a steep political price for the actions of the suicide bomber. The establishment of a Palestinian state has been hindered not helped by the ongoing suicide bombings.

It is imperative for the Palestinian public to decide which is more important, the suicide bomber or a Palestinian state because the two cannot both exist. In the post-9/11 reality, much of the world has decided that suicide bombing constitutes an act that is beyond the pale of acceptable warfare. President George W. Bush made this clear in a speech in early April 2003, when he stated, “Blowing yourself up does not help the Palestinian cause. To the contrary, suicide bombing missions could well blow up the best and last hope for a Palestinian state.<sup>4</sup>” The recently released plan for Middle East peace, known as the “road map,” calls upon the Palestinian Authority to act against terrorism, and specifically groups that sponsor the suicide bomber, as the only path towards Palestinian statehood.

The situation is slowly changing. Within the Arab world, leaders are beginning to pressure the Palestinians to reexamine the practice of suicide bombing. Jordanian Foreign Minister Marwan Muasher recently stated in a New York Times editorial, “Arab leaders must finally take a public stand against suicide bombing. The truth needs to be clearly stated: suicide bombings have only hurt the Palestinian cause.<sup>5</sup>” For the first time, the Palestinians have, in their Prime Minister Abu Mazen, a leader who has spoken against suicide bombing as detrimental to the Palestinian cause. It is easy to

condemn suicide bombing; it is another thing entirely to take concrete solutions to stop the practice. First, the Palestinian Authority must reign in on groups that it is closest to, namely the al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades. More specifically to help combat the suicide bomber, the Palestinian Authority must not only stop rewarding the families of suicide bombers, it must also ensure that the families of suicide bombers who target civilians do not receive large-scale payments from supporting organizations. A total freeze on compensation must take place as a meaningful first step to showing its opposition to the practice. Furthermore, the Palestinian Authority must actively combat the sources of incitement that feed into the culture of martyrdom. For the Palestinian Authority to be considered a relevant partner for peace, it must make a break with the incitement that fills the print and television airwaves of Palestinian Authority-backed media outlets. Moreover, the Palestinian Authority needs to be held accountable for religious leaders with ties to the regime that offer support for suicide bombers. After cleaning up its own institutions, the next step is for the Palestinian Authority to make determined effort to reign in on groups like Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

Israel possesses a keen ability to empower Prime Minister Abu Mazen by creating tangible gains for responsible leadership that is willing to reign in on terror. Israel can offer the Palestinians concrete gains by offering a complete cessation of settlement growth, in return for a full cease-fire; a policy of no bullets-no bricks, no more suicide bombs-no more settlement houses. This policy would recreate the concept of land-for-peace on a much smaller scale. Prime Minister Sharon has spoken of a series of interim agreements rather than a comprehensive peace plan, this should satisfy the initial notion of an interim cease-fire.

If the Palestinian leadership can refocus the current widespread public support for suicide bombing to support for independence through negotiations, the desirability of becoming a suicide bomber should decrease significantly. The road map forces Palestinians to both realize and internalize the fact that the suicide bomber will never lead to independence; it will only extend the occupation and cycle of violence. The road map is centered on the Palestinians deciding which is more important,

martyrdom or independence. According to Palestinian minister Nabil Amir, “In the history of Islam, when has becoming a martyr ever been a goal? The goal is independence.<sup>6</sup>”

The suicide bomber remains the ultimate deal-breaker and groups that employ them know this fact. There is no coincidence that there has been a recent string of suicide bombings just as Prime Minister Abu Mazen was taking over his post and the road map was being introduced. An Israeli-Palestinian peace process will not end the practice because the suicide bomber is meant to impede a political solution between the two sides. Hamas and Islamic Jihad carried out suicide bombings while the peace process was thriving. However, political progress helps to ensure that support for the suicide bomber will return to the fringes of society. Just as support for the suicide bomber gained momentum within Palestinian society as the peace process collapsed, a resumption of the political process should make the support diminish. Political progress is the best way to combat the mainstream acceptance of the suicide bomber culture. With a resumption of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and public opinion squarely behind the process, the culture that has sprung up in support of the suicide bomber should recede back into depths from which it came.

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<sup>1</sup> Khaled Abu Toameh, “70% of Palestinians support suicide bombing,” *Jerusalem Post*, March 23, 2003, p.1

<sup>2</sup> Khaled Abu Toameh, “Most Palestinians say they want to stop the violence,” *Jerusalem Post*, March 28, 2003, p.1

<sup>3</sup> Lt. Col. Gal Luft, “The Palestinian H-Bomb,” *Foreign Affairs*, p.5

<sup>4</sup> Terry Eastland, “The Palestinian Culture of Death,” *Weekly Standard*, April 9, 2002 ([www.weeklystandard.com](http://www.weeklystandard.com))

<sup>5</sup> Marwan Muasher, “A Path to Arab Democracy,” *New York Times* April 26, 2003

<sup>6</sup> PA minister for parliamentary affairs to Voice of Palestine Radio, December 2001 (<http://web.mit.edu/jeremyp/www/quote.html>)

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