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Terrorists and Suicide Attacks

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name redacted
Specialist in Terrorism
Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade Division

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Summary

Suicide attacks by terrorist organizations have become more prevalent globally, and assessing the threat of suicide attacks against the United States and its interests at home and abroad has therefore gained in strategic importance.

This report focuses on the following questions: What are suicide attacks? What have been the patterns and motivations for terrorist organizations using suicide attacks in the past? What terrorist groups and other organizations are most likely to launch such attacks? How great a threat are terrorist suicide attacks to the United States, at home and abroad? How can the United States counter such a threat? It analyzes the key lessons of the international experience with suicide attacks and examines their relevance to the United States.

Important conclusions include evidence that suicide attackers generally make choices and are not impulsive or “crazy.” They are usually carefully recruited, indoctrinated and then targeted by organizations. It is important, therefore, to concentrate on analyzing the culture and structure of the organization when fashioning a response. Historically, suicide attackers have been used by both secular and religious groups. The Tamil Tigers, a secular group, carried out the most ruthless campaign of suicide attacks in the 20th century; but there has been an increasing number of casualties internationally, notably as a result of attacks by Palestinian groups against Israelis and by organizations in various countries believed associated with or incited by Al Qaeda. The use of women as suicide attackers is not historically unprecedented, but its frequency among groups such as the Sri Lankan Tamil Tigers (or LTTE), the Turkish Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), and now the Palestinian Fatah-affiliated al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades and the Chechens, may indicate a social broadening of the phenomenon. While the organization is predominant in the execution of the attack, over time it cannot recruit and sustain itself without the acquiescence of the larger society.

The greatest threat to U.S. citizens comes from the possibility of further attacks orchestrated or inspired by Al Qaeda, either in the U.S. or abroad. Furthermore, suicide attacks on U.S. citizens and civilians in Iraq are a mounting concern. To counter the threat, the United States may use both offensive and defensive measures. Offensive measures include counterterrorism efforts such as preemptive strikes against terrorist organizations, vigorous intelligence collection, and longer term efforts to reduce the ability of terrorist organizations to recruit suicide candidates. Defensive measures include physical protection of U.S. assets, psychological preparation of the population, and the full range of anti-terrorism efforts required for a robust homeland defense.

The report concludes with a discussion of the implications for Congress of the increase in suicide attacks, and a range of options for meeting the threat. It will not be updated.

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Terrorists and Suicide Attacks

Introduction

Suicide attacks by terrorist organizations have become more prevalent globally, and assessing the threat of future suicide attacks against the United States has gained in strategic importance. While suicide attacks have been employed internationally for centuries, the degree to which this tactic could be used to carry out operations against Americans was more widely appreciated after 9/11. The vulnerability of the U.S. homeland to suicide attacks was amply demonstrated: virtually all previous such attacks by foreign actors against U.S. citizens had happened on foreign soil, leading to a mistaken belief that Americans were only vulnerable when they were abroad.

Adding to the concern about suicide attacks is their potential connection to increasingly available new technologies. Although so-called “weapons of mass destruction” were not used in the September 11th attacks, the destruction was nonetheless unquestionably “massive.” The prospect of combining modern weapons technology (especially chemical, biological, nuclear or radiological weapons) with an age-old willingness to die in the act of committing an attack could be unprecedentedly dangerous. The degree to which Al Qaeda and other groups have recently stepped up their public advocacy of so-called martyrdom operations, combined with captured evidence of their interest in these weapons, is also worrisome.¹ With increasing numbers of casualties from suicide attacks occurring globally in places such as Israel, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Russia/Chechnya, and post-conflict Iraq, a focus on the threat of future suicide attacks against Americans and their interests, in the United States and elsewhere, merits consideration.

This report focuses on the following questions: What are suicide attacks? What have been the patterns and motivations for terrorist organizations using suicide attacks in the past? What terrorist groups and other organizations are most likely to launch such attacks? How great a threat are terrorist suicide attacks to the United States, at home and abroad? How can the United States counter such a threat? In short, the goal of this report is to summarize the key lessons of the international experience with suicide attacks in the modern era and examine their relevance to the United States in the current threat environment.

¹On Al Qaeda’s interest in chemical and biological weapons, see CRS Report RL31831, *Terrorist Motivations for Chemical and Biological Weapons Use: Placing the Threat in Context*.

Definitions

Some argue that the language used to describe terrorism plays a role in how it is perceived, so words used in describing it must be very carefully chosen. For example, there are many phrases used to describe the phenomenon to be discussed here. Some people use the phrase “suicide bombings,” but that is too restrictive for this report, as it seems to refer only to attacks that are carried out with the use of explosives. Suicide attacks can occur with other types of weapons, including jetliners. “Genocide bombings” and “homicide attacks” are phrases frequently used by those who identify with the unwilling victims of attacks; these terms emphasize the criminal nature of the violence and de-emphasize the self-inflicted death of the perpetrator. On the other hand, “martyrdom operations” places the emphasis upon the cause of the perpetrators, implying a connection to the notions of “holy war” and/or self defense, even in the killing of civilians.² Finally “suicide operations” places the emphasis on the organization’s role in staging the episodes, implying a military-type character to them.

None of the currently used terms is perfect. For the purposes of this report, the phrase used will be “suicide attacks,” by which is meant, in the sense used here, events where the “success” of the operation cannot occur without the death of the perpetrator, and he or she is apparently aware of this in advance.³ Likewise, this report concentrates on suicide attacks that are carried out by “terrorists,” by which is meant nonstate actors whose goal is the threat or use of violence for political ends against noncombatant or civilian targets.⁴ These are off-the-battlefield episodes, with the attackers not integrated into units in a formal military sense. Therefore, specifically excluded are high risk military operations, where, although the perpetrator may expect his chances of survival to be virtually nil, he or she is not deliberately seeking his or her own death. And this report also does not include self-inflicted deaths that occur without any violence directed outward, like hunger strikes or cult suicides.⁵

²Haim Malka, “Must Innocents Die? The Islamic Debate over Suicide Attacks,” *Middle East Quarterly* (Spring 2003), p. 26.

³*Ibid.* See also Scott Atran, “Genesis of Suicide Terrorism,” *Science*, 7 March 2003, Vol. 299, p. 1534.

⁴The question of a definition of terrorism is much-debated, but the central elements of the concept are generally agreed. For more information, see (name/redacted), “Behind the Curve: Globalization and International Terrorism,” *International Security*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (Winter 2002/03), pp. 32-33. On the challenges of defining terrorism, see also Omar Malik, *Enough of the Definition of Terrorism!* Royal Institute of International Affairs (London: RIIA, 2001); and Alex P. Schmid, *Political Terrorism: A Research Guide* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1984).

⁵Yoram Schweitzer, “Suicide Terrorism: Development and main characteristics,” in *Countering Suicide Terrorism: An International Conference* (Herzliya, Israel: the International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism, 2001), pp. 75-76.

Historical Background

The phenomenon of suicide attacks cannot be fully understood without placing it within its broader historical context. Self-sacrifice in the interest of a broader cause is not unusual in human history, especially in military settings; but terrorist suicide attacks as they are defined here also have a lengthy pedigree.

Members of premodern groups without access to dynamite did not have the immediacy and certainty of their own demise that is currently the case, nor could they expect the publicity for their attacks that is seen today; but they did engage in deliberate, calculated self-sacrifice in the act of killing civilian targets for symbolic effect.

For example, among the earliest groups that have been thoroughly studied, the Muslim Assassins (also known as Ismailis-Nazari) operated from 1090-1275, C.E. They prepared their members to die in the execution of an attack, deliberately seeking martyrdom as they used daggers to kill their victims.⁶ The Assassins assured themselves publicity by attacking prominent officials in public places, usually on holy days when there were many witnesses.⁷ The group's description of the assailants as "fedayeen" (meaning consecrated ones or dedicated ones) and their admiration for martyrdom in the course of killing is an often-cited historical precursor for some of the suicide attacks by Islamic terrorist organizations seen today.⁸

Another historical example of the use of suicide attacks is found among Muslim communities in Asia during the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly on the Malabar coast of Southwestern India, in Atjeh in Northern Sumatra, and in Mindanao and Sulu in the Southern Philippines. Muslims in these regions engaged in suicidal jihads aimed at inflicting punishment and instilling fear among the European colonial powers. In all of these places, the perpetrators engaged in religious rituals prior to carrying out the attacks, aspired to a perceived heroic status of martyrdom, and carried out their killings as religious acts intended to serve the interests of their own community. In each case, a shift to the use of suicide attacks followed a period of unsuccessful open warfare against the militarily much stronger Europeans. The suicidal jihad against civilians was seen as a means of desperate counterattack and even a means of keeping awareness of the cause alive.⁹

⁶David C. Rapoport, "Fear and Trembling: Terrorism in Three Religious Traditions," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 78, No. 3 (September 1984), pp. 658-677, and Bernard Lewis, *The Assassins: A Radical Sect in Islam* (New York: Basic Books, 1968).

⁷Rapoport, p. 665.

⁸*Ibid.* See also W. B. Bartlett, *The Assassins: The Story of Medieval Islam's Secret Sect* (London: Sutton Publishing, 2001).

⁹Stephen F. Dale, "Religious Suicide in Islamic Asia: Anticolonial terrorism in India, Indonesia, and the Philippines," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (March 1988), pp. 37-59, and Martha Crenshaw, "'Suicide' Terrorism in Comparative Perspective," Chapter 2 of *Countering Suicide Terrorism: An International Conference* (Herzliya, Israel:

(continued...)

The employment of suicide attacks as a terrorist technique is not exclusive to one culture or religion: with the invention of dynamite in the late 19th century, the use of bombs in terrorist attacks became a generally favored method, and this also applied to suicide tactics. For example, the Russian radicals of the late 19th century, in putting themselves close enough to the target to assure success, usually also consciously sought their own demise. Proximity was important to the successful targeting of the crude explosions. In those instances where the terrorists survived and were captured, they often refused offers of clemency and were executed.¹⁰ Dying for the cause was a highly valued fate, a source of legitimacy for the cause, and a rallying point for future recruits. It was not, on the other hand, an effective long-term strategy in this case: the Russian regime successfully rooted out such well-known groups as *Narodnaya Volya* (People's Will) well before the Russian revolution, and they were not admired by the Bolsheviks.

Ironically, with the development of better explosives and means of detonating them, suicide attacks became less common in the twentieth century. More advanced technological means meant that it was not necessary to sacrifice a member of the organization. Favored methods in the mid-twentieth century included pre-placed or remotely detonated explosives, hostage-taking, and attacks on airliners. As counterterrorist methods began to improve, however, methods of terrorist attack began to evolve as well. Faced with metal detectors at airports, increased security perimeters around valuable targets, and many other antiterrorism measures, terrorist organizations began to innovate tactically. The reintroduction of the use of suicide attacks, especially by ethno-nationalist groups or religiously-motivated groups, was one of the results.

Although it was not the first such attack, many people date the initiation of a wave of contemporary suicide attacks to the October 1983 destruction of the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut by a truck bomb, a watershed particularly for Americans.¹¹ The explosion lifted the entire building off its foundation and caused it to implode upon itself, killing 241 off-duty U.S. soldiers and injuring more than 100 others.¹² At almost precisely the same time, a similar truck bomb exploded at the French peacekeeping compound nearby, killing 58 soldiers and wounding 15 others.¹³ The 1983 Beirut attacks resulted in the withdrawal of U.S. and French forces from Lebanon. These withdrawals have subsequently been pointed to by Al Qaeda and

⁹(...continued)

The International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism, 2001), pp. 27-28.

¹⁰Crenshaw, pp. 26-27.

¹¹The American Embassy in Beirut had been attacked by a suicide bomber in April of that year, killing at least forty people, including the bomber. There was also a Hezbollah suicide attack against the Israeli military headquarters in Tyre even earlier, in November 1982.

¹²*Report of the DoD Commission on Beirut International Airport Terrorist Act*, October 23, 1983; completed on 20 December 1983, unpublished U.S. government document, 141 pages.

¹³*Ibid.* There is some debate among experts about whether the Beirut barracks attacks were "terrorist" incidents, since the targets were military soldiers. Most people argue that the fact that they were off-duty means that they were "noncombatants" but this remains a point of some contention, especially outside the United States.

other groups as important signs that suicide attacks can be extremely effective against Western democratic powers.

Between 1983 and 1986, the apparent success of the Beirut suicide attacks against the U.S. and France was followed by a redirection of targeting toward the Israeli Defense Forces in Lebanon and then South Lebanese Army posts.¹⁴ The 1983 Marine barracks bombing also led at least indirectly to the initiation of perhaps the most ruthless and bloody suicide campaign in modern history by the Tamil Tigers (LTTE). Their first attack occurred in Sri Lanka in May 1987.¹⁵ The Tamil Tigers, whose leader Velupillai Prabhakaran later claimed that he was inspired by the 1983 attacks, have since been responsible for more than half of all suicide attacks carried out worldwide.¹⁶

While the technique was by no means historically unprecedented, the 1983 attacks signaled the beginning of a growing use of suicide attacks in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. In modern times, suicide attacks have been employed by a large variety of groups, including Muslim (both Shi'ite and Sunni), Christian, Hindu, Sikh, Jewish and secular organizations, especially in the Middle East but also many other regions of the world.¹⁷ A partial list of terrorist groups that actively use suicide attacks includes Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades of Yassir Arafat's Fatah movement, Al-Ansar Mujahidin in Chechnya, the Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ), Hezbollah, Lashkar-e-Taiba of Pakistan/Kashmir, the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) of Algeria, Barbar Khalsa International (BKI) of India, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE or Tamil Tigers) of Sri Lanka, the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) of Turkey, and Al Qaeda.¹⁸ It is the apparently growing use of suicide attacks internationally and the increased targeting against Americans that concerns counterterrorism experts. The trend may have important implications for future U.S. security.

Personal Motivations for Suicide Attacks

One perception about suicide attacks is that they are carried out by individual deranged fanatics but this is almost never the case. Research on suicide attacks indicates that most terrorist operatives are psychologically normal, in the sense that psychological pathology does not seem to be present, and the attacks are virtually

¹⁴Yoram Schweitzer, "Suicide Terrorism: Development and Main Characteristics," Chapter 7 of *Countering Suicide Terrorism*, p. 77.

¹⁵Amy Waldman, "Masters of Suicide Bombing: Tamil Guerrillas of Sri Lanka," *The New York Times*, 14 January 2003, p. A8.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷Walter Laqueur, *No End to War: Terrorism in the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Continuum, 2003), p. 78.

¹⁸Jane's Intelligence Review, "Suicide Terrorism: A Global Threat," 20 October 2000; accessed at [<http://www.janes.com>] on 16 October 2001; and other various sources.

always premeditated.¹⁹ There have been instances of coercion or deception in recruiting suicide attackers and/or executing the attacks,²⁰ but most perpetrators are as aware of their imminent fate as they are of the fate of their victims.

Why would anyone choose to engage in such an attack? The answer to this question requires an insight into the psychological and cultural aspects of terrorism. The motivations for suicide attacks are not so different in many ways from the motivations for other types of terrorism, including attention to a cause, personal notoriety, anger, revenge and retribution against a perceived injustice.²¹ From the perspective of the individual attacker, the act of “martyrdom” may offer an opportunity to impress an audience and be remembered, an act that may be a powerful incentive for individuals who perceive their lives as having little significance otherwise.²² Suicide attackers are sometimes widows or bereaved siblings who wish to take vengeance for their loved one’s violent death. In the case of widows, for example, the death of the spouse may cut the woman off from productive society and/or leave her with a sense of hopelessness, especially in very traditional societies. Increasing numbers of women seem to be carrying out suicide attacks in recent years, a development that may be partly traced to this factor and will be discussed further below.

A longing for religious purity and/or a strong commitment to the welfare of the group may drive individuals to engage in suicide attacks. The role of the central religious, political, or ethnic culture or ideology is important. Suicide attacks among Palestinian groups, for example, seem to have inspired a self-perpetuating subculture of martyrdom.²³ Children who grow up in such settings may be subtly indoctrinated in a culture glorifying ultimate sacrifice in the service of the Palestinian cause and against the Israeli people. There are social, cultural, religious, and material incentives presented in such a context, sometimes including spiritual rewards in the after life, vast celebrity, cash bonuses, free apartments and/or the guarantee of a place with God for the attackers’ families.

Other attackers seem to be driven apparently by a sense of humiliation or injustice, a worrisome development that has appeared for example among young Egyptians.²⁴ Some argue, for example, that perceptions regarding the plight of the Palestinian people may have had an influence upon the willingness of young Egyptians to participate in suicide attacks, especially among those who are

¹⁹Jerrold Post, “The Mind of the Terrorist: Individual and Group Psychology of Terrorist Behavior,” testimony prepared for the Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities, Senate Armed Service Committee, 15 November 2001; and Ehud Sprinzak, “Rational Fanatics,” *Foreign Policy*, September/October 2000, pp. 66-73.

²⁰See, for example, the PKK, below.

²¹Crenshaw, p.25

²²*Ibid.*, p. 26.

²³David Brooks, “The Culture of Martyrdom,” *Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. 289, No. 6 (June 2002), pp. 18-20.

²⁴Tim Golden, “Young Egyptians Hearing Calls of ‘Martyrdom’ For Palestinian Cause,” *The New York Times International*, 26 April 2002, p. A1.

unemployed and frustrated for other reasons.²⁵ Indeed, desperation is often mentioned in press reports: Palestinians in particular are quoted as saying that suicide attacks are the “weapon of last resort.”²⁶

In some conflicts, increasing use of suicide attacks is seen widely as a potential sign that the struggle is being “Islamicized.” The historical connection to the Muslim Assassins groups is often mentioned. Al Qaeda’s use of suicide attacks is well-known, and growing links between that organization and many other, more local indigenous groups are sometimes demonstrated at least in part by a shift in the local group’s tactics.²⁷ For example, the recent use of suicide attacks by Chechen militants is seen by some as a worrisome indicator of growing influence of radical Islamist factions within Chechnya and/or links with radical groups like Al Qaeda.²⁸ Recent suicide attacks in Morocco are likewise viewed this way.²⁹ The August 2003 suicide attacks on the Jordanian Embassy and the UN Headquarters in Iraq may also reflect a shift from local nationalistic resistance to the more active involvement of outside Islamist fighters.

So-called “martyrdom” is not just a religious concept, however. The tradition of heroic martyrdom, where the hero sacrifices to save the life of his community, nation, or people, is a powerful element in many secular traditions. Among Palestinian groups non-religious nationalist motivations are sometimes dominant, especially with respect to groups such as the al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades, which is an offshoot of militant elements of the essentially secular PLO’s Fatah faction. Indeed, globally, an apparently larger proportion overall of the suicide attacks of the last twenty years has been carried out by secular groups like the Tamil Tigers and the PKK, who both appeal primarily to traditional concepts of nationhood and sacrifice, than by religiously-motivated groups.

Following the September 11th attacks, one of the important developments among those who study terrorism has been the reexamination of the concept of a “profile” or typical characteristics of suicide attackers.³⁰ Some people had argued on the basis of research done especially on Hamas members, that suicide terrorists were typically male, aged 18-27 years, unmarried, relatively uneducated, and highly susceptible to

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶Daniel Williams, “Where Palestinian ‘martyrs’ Are Groomed; West Bank City of Jenin Emerges as Suicide Bomb Capital,” *The Washington Post*, 15 August 2001, p. A1.

²⁷For more on the evolution of Al Qaeda’s tactics and organization, see CRS Report RS21529, *Al Qaeda after the Iraq Conflict*.

²⁸Reuven Paz, “Suicide Terrorist Operations in Chechnya: An Escalation of the Islamist Struggle,” International Policy Institute for Counterterrorism, accessed at [<http://www.ict.org.i>] on 10 July 2003; and Nabi Abdullaev, “Suicide Attacks Take Rebel Fight to a New Level,” *The Moscow Times*, 16 May 2003, p. 3; accessed at [<http://www.themoscowtimes.com>] on 17 July 2003.

²⁹See CRS Report RS21579, *Morocco: Current Issues*.

³⁰For a survey of previous research on terrorist profiling, see Rex A. Hudson, *Who Becomes a Terrorist and Why: The 1999 Government Report on Profiling Terrorists* (Guilford, Connecticut: The Lyons Press, [2001]), especially pp. 67-108.

suggestion.³¹ This description proved to be inadequate, however, especially after the 9/11 attacks in which older, well-educated operatives like Mohammed Atta participated. In the Palestinian intifada, as well, previous assumptions are being reexamined, with suicide attacks being carried out by operatives as diverse as a college student, a middle-aged married men with children, and the son of a wealthy businessman, not to mention increasing numbers of women and children.³² Some have argued that there is no pattern to these “profiles” at all.³³ In any case, as we move into the twenty-first century, stereotypes about who is likely to carry out terrorist suicide attacks are evaporating.

Although research indicates that individual suicide attackers make choices and are not technically “crazy,” according to experts they are often manipulated by the pressures and belief structures of the group.³⁴ Because of this, it is important to study the role of the organization in the phenomenon.

Organizational Motivations for Suicide Attacks

The organization is crucial in the execution of most suicide attacks, in planning, acquiring weaponry, choosing operatives, targeting, and carrying them out.³⁵ Indeed, most terrorism experts argue that the role of the organization is a much more powerful factor than is the nature of the individual, since the individual has often yielded his or her identity to the group.³⁶ With very few exceptions, suicide attacks in the modern era have involved a fairly well developed organization, and historically they have been employed by terrorist groups when they are both strong and weak.³⁷ There is a chilling logic in the choice of suicide operations by terrorist organizations. From an organizational perspective, there are arguably numerous advantages in using such attacks as part of a terrorist campaign.

³¹See, for example, Boaz Ganor, Executive Director, International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism, “Suicide Terrorism: an Overview,” “Who is the shahid?” p. 3, 15 February 2000, [<http://www.ict.org.il/articles/articledet.cfm?articleid=128>] accessed on 27 July 2001.

³²Rebecca Trounson and Tracy Wilkinson, “Analysts Rethink Image of Suicide Bombers,” *The Los Angeles Times*, 20 September 2001; accessed at [<http://www.latimes.com>] on 22 July 2003.

³³James Bennet, “Rash of New Suicide Bombers Exhibit No Patterns or Ties,” *The New York Times*, 21 June 2002, p. A1.

³⁴Post testimony, Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities, Senate Armed Service Committee, 15 November 2001.

³⁵Atran, p. 1537; and Ehud Sprinzak, “Rational Fanatics,” *Foreign Policy*, Issue 120, September/October 2000, pp. 66-74.

³⁶Shankar Vedantam, “Peer Pressure Spurs Terrorists, Psychologists Say,” *The Washington Post*, 16 October 2001, p. A16.

³⁷“Suicide Terrorism: A Global Threat,” *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, 20 October 2000; accessed at [<http://www.janes.com>] on 22 April 2003.

First, suicide attacks generally result in a larger number of casualties on average than do other types of terrorist attacks. From 1980 to 2001, suicide attacks reportedly represented only 3% of all terrorist attacks but accounted for 48% of total deaths due to terrorism.³⁸ Looking just at Palestinian attacks between 2000 and 2002, suicide attacks represented only 1% of the total number of attacks but they caused about 44% of the Israeli casualties.³⁹ The larger number of casualties causes more physical and psychological damage to the targeted state or community and, especially in a democracy, arguably increases the likelihood that the government will be compelled to respond.

Whether that response takes the form of concessions or retaliations, it can potentially serve the interests of the terrorist campaign. Concessions may advance the terrorist organization's goals and increase its psychological leverage against a militarily stronger foe; retaliations may draw international condemnation and increase the pool of recruits from which the organization may draw. If an organization is at a significant military disadvantage, this may be a calculation it is willing to make. Or the organization may engender a more specific reaction such as disrupting negotiations in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, for example.

Second, suicide attacks usually attract more publicity than do other types of attacks. The fate of the bomber him- or herself is part of the story, and the large number of victims, again, ensures public attention. Sometimes the goal of an organization is simply to draw attention to itself and to its cause: in an age of ubiquitous media, suicide attacks are more likely to be noticed. Since the main effect of the violence is intended to be impressed upon an audience, the shocking nature of the attack is part of the calculation. From the perspective of the victims and their sympathizers, on the other hand, the media coverage that is a natural part of the terrible tragedy does help to publicize the terrorists' cause.

A related aspect is the symbolic value of martyrdom for a cause, not only in Islamic cultures but in other cultures as well. Even in secular groups, the death of a member contributes to the sense of legitimacy and dramatic community investment in a cause. The message is that there is no going back. Some groups engage in glorification of the act, deliberately hyping a "culture of martyrdom" that may include posters, songs, legends, etc., lionizing the attacker.⁴⁰ This celebrity can be powerfully attractive to potential recruits, and with the suicide often comes greater general attention as well to the motivation for the act.⁴¹

³⁸Robert A. Pape, "The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism," unpublished manuscript dated February 18, 2003, p. 13. Pape's calculations are drawn from data published in U.S. Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism*, 1983-2001.

³⁹Assaf Moghadam, "Palestinian Suicide Terrorism in the Second Intifada: Motivations and Organizational Aspects," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (March-April 2003), p. 65.

⁴⁰Brooks, pp. 18-20; and Crenshaw, p. 28.

⁴¹"The Making of a Martyr: When Death Means More Than Life," ABCNews.com: Inside the Mind of a Suicide Bomber, 6 December 2001; accessed at [<http://abcnews.go.com/>] (continued...)

Third, suicide attackers are sometimes seen by sponsoring organizations as assets whose loss generates a net gain.⁴² The gains can be political or monetary. As for political gain, in situations where groups are competing for power, there is evidence that suicide attacks are seen as a means of gaining relative advantage vis-à-vis rival groups; according to one report, this may have been the case for Palestinian groups such as Hamas and the Islamic Jihad.⁴³ The organization's role in the attack is made obvious in the style and content of the videotapes that attackers usually make on the eve of their operation: typically, the so-called "living martyr" is standing in front of the terrorist group's flag, holding an assault rifle and perhaps also a copy of the Koran, as he or she explains the motivation behind his or her attack.⁴⁴ The image of the now-deceased becomes a powerful tool for winning adherents. Suicide attacks are also used to boost morale, engendering greater cohesion among members of a group; the PKK and the Tamil Tigers apparently used suicide attacks in this way. Indeed, the Tamil Tigers have even filmed some of the suicide attacks themselves and used them for recruitment and motivation.⁴⁵

In cost/benefit terms, suicide attacks are financially inexpensive: according to one expert, the price of materials used in a suicide attack in Israel is about \$150.⁴⁶ Monetary rewards for terrorist organizations, on the other hand, can be large. Suicide attackers sometimes draw sympathy from sources distant from the location of the attacks, especially donors who are willing to enable *others* to die in the service of a cause. For example, following a supermarket bombing by an 18-year-old Palestinian girl, a Saudi telethon reportedly raised more than \$100 million for the Palestinians.⁴⁷ Support from the diaspora is also common: the Tamil Tigers have been funded by 800,000 Tamils living abroad, in Canada, Australia, and elsewhere, who have sent back as much as \$150 million annually, according to one estimate.⁴⁸ Payments and other benefits are given to the individual families of the dead Palestinian attackers.⁴⁹ In cold cost/benefit terms, the organizational incentives seem to be far more compelling than the personal ones.

⁴¹(...continued)
sections/primetime on 14 July 2003.

⁴²Atran, p. 1537.

⁴³Mia M. Bloom, "Palestinian Suicide Bombing: Public Support, Market Share and Outbidding," unpublished paper.

⁴⁴Rory McCarthy, "War in the Gulf: Five Killed by Car Bomb at US Checkpoint," *The Guardian*, 5 April 2003, p. 3.

⁴⁵Amy Waldman, "Masters of Suicide Bombing: Tamil Guerrillas of Sri Lanka," *The New York Times*, 14 January 2003, p. A1.

⁴⁶Bruce Hoffman, "The Logic of Suicide Terrorism," *The Atlantic Monthly*, June 2003.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*

⁴⁸Laqueur, p. 80.

⁴⁹"Palestinians get Saddam funds," BBC News, 13 March 2003, accessed at <http://news.bbc.co.uk> on 21 August 2003; and Joshua Kurlantzick, "Palestinians Lament Lack of Iraqi Cash for Terrorist Acts," *The Washington Times*, 21 May 2003.

Fourth, the use of suicide operatives helps to control the timing and placement of attacks. If there is no need to provide an escape route for the attacker, the complexity of the plan is greatly reduced. Suicide attackers can often get closer to the target at the desired time than can other terrorist methods. The human being is in control until the moment of detonation. The human being is the delivery system, and the attacker together with his weapon is the ultimate “smart bomb.” The suicide attack may be less dangerous to an organization’s viability, as there is no risk that intelligence will be leaked. Likewise, for his or her part, the attacker does not need to fear capture, interrogation, trial, imprisonment and the accompanying humiliation–fates that, in some settings and some cultures, may seem worse than death.

Finally, suicide attacks can be especially intimidating for the target population. There is a perception that suicide attacks are unstoppable, an impression perpetuated not only by the logistical challenges of detecting and repulsing the threat but also by the impression that the attacker is driven by a desperate determination. While many suicide attackers may be normal psychologically, there is benefit to be gained on the part of the terrorist organization in perpetuating the stereotype that they are fanatics. Likewise, the message (true or not) that there are dozens more recruits waiting to take the dead attacker’s place serves the organization’s interests and is often difficult to verify, one way or another.

There is often a sense of desperation or almost inhuman determination on the part of a suicide attacker. The rituals in which the prospective attacker typically engages are designed to make it virtually impossible to back out of an attack without losing honor and a place in society. Sometimes prospective attackers are encouraged to lie down in graves to have the feeling of peace that they are told they will experience after death.⁵⁰ The relationship with other recruits can be very close, with the “living dead” competing to be the first to be sent on a mission. They often write letters or make video tapes for relatives left behind. Secular groups use such techniques as well. Members of the LTTE typically enjoy a meal with their leader and are photographed on their last night before the attack. With nowhere to turn, captured operatives who have failed to carry out their mission have consigned themselves to ignominy as “half martyrs” and may consider themselves as good as dead. After such elaborate psychological preparation, the attack is meant to seem almost an afterthought.⁵¹

Another aspect to the intimidating nature of suicide attacks, particularly among Palestinian groups, is the deliberate effort to maximize human suffering not only in

⁵⁰Neil MacFarquhar, “Portrait of a Suicide Bomber: Devout, Apolitical and Angry,” *The New York Times*, 18 March 1996, p. A1; and Boaz Ganor, “Suicide Attacks in Israel,” chapter 12 of *Countering Suicide Terrorism*, pp.140-141.

⁵¹All of these rituals are described in numerous sources, including *Ibid.*; *Countering Suicide Terrorism* (passim); Shankar Vedantam, “Peer Pressure Spurs Terrorists, Psychologists Say; Attackers Unlike Usual Suicide Bombers,” *The Washington Post*, 16 October 2001, p. A16; “Mind of the Suicide Bomber,” CBSNews.com, 26 May 2003; Waldman, “Masters of Suicide Bombing,”; Charu Lata Joshi, “Sri Lanka: Suicide Bombers,” *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 1 June 2000; and others.

the immediate explosion but also in the minutes, days, and even years following it. Planners of suicide attacks in Israel have often packed explosives with foreign objects. Long after the attack, victims can have imbedded in their bodies pieces of shrapnel, nails, bolts, screws, ball bearings and other projectiles that were built into the bombs. Another recent innovation is the addition of chemicals such as rat poison, which is an anticoagulant and makes it much more difficult for rescue workers to stem the bleeding from injured victims.⁵² Over time, suicide attacks that incorporate such elements can be psychologically more punishing, not only to the victims but to the population at large.

Finally, trying to stop a suicide attack can result in a premature detonation of the explosive that kills the defenders and the attacker. This can lead to increased wariness on the part of police or soldiers, who then may be more inclined to shoot otherwise innocent-looking civilians who could conceivably be carrying explosives. This is a particular problem if the suicide attackers are identifiable as members of a different race or ethnicity than the target population. The result can be deep polarization and a cycle of violence that may destabilize the target society and perpetuate the goals of the terrorist group.

Women and Suicide Attacks

The role of women in carrying out suicide attacks has been the focus of increasing concern. The use of women in suicide attacks may point to a broadening to include members of society not usually recruited by contemporary terrorist organizations for this type of mission. Although female participation in terrorism is not historically unusual (notably among left-wing groups), participation in suicide attacks is less common. Growing numbers of female suicide attackers may reflect a number of different factors.

The most prominent examples of female suicide attackers have been among the members of the Tamil Tigers (LTTE). In the conservative societies of the Middle East and South Asia, there is more reluctance to search a woman, which gives such attackers an advantage over men. They are also assumed to be potentially less dangerous and may be able to approach the target with greater ease. Among the Black Tigers, as the Tamil suicide attack squad is known, both male and female children as young as 10 years old are chosen to be prepared to carry out missions. About a third of the suicide operations carried out by the LTTE have been conducted by women.⁵³ Most famously, a female suicide bomber killed Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1991 while he was campaigning for reelection. The attacker was wearing an explosive device under her robes that made it appear that she was pregnant. In December 1999 another woman blew herself up at a rally for Sri Lankan

⁵²Tracy Wilkinson, "The World Lives Forever Scarred After Suicide Bombings in Israel: Survivors Labor to Recover Physically and Mentally; Some Still Have Shrapnel in Their Bodies," *The Los Angeles Times*, 21 July 2002, p. A1.

⁵³Jane's Intelligence Review, "Suicide Terrorism: A Global Threat," 20 October 2000; accessed at [<http://www.janes.com>] on 16 October 2001.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga; the blast killed 23 people and wounded the president, who lost the sight in her right eye.⁵⁴

In the Middle East, it is often forgotten in the focus on the very recent past that women engaged in suicide missions years earlier, during the 1980s. In southern Lebanon, women who were fighting as part of the National Resistance Front engaged in suicide attacks against Israelis. On 9 April 1985, for example, San Mheidleh, a 16-year-old Shi'a school girl, drove a car packed with 450 pounds of dynamite into an Israeli check point, killing herself and two Israeli soldiers. Just before the attack, she made a video tape explaining her mission which was later shown on Lebanese television. A number of other women followed her example. Since these attacks were technically against military targets, they do not fit our definition exactly; however, the form of the attack and the organizational planning are directly reflective of the phenomenon occurring among Palestinian groups attacking Israeli civilians today.⁵⁵

The use of female suicide bombers in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been seen by some as an act of desperation on the part of Palestinian women.⁵⁶ Others consider it a result of calculated evolution in the terrorist organization's tactics; as the Israelis began to frisk young Palestinian men, for example, reportedly older men and then women began to step forward.⁵⁷ The first confirmed use of a Palestinian female suicide attacker in Israel occurred in January 2002.⁵⁸ Wafa Idrees, 28-year-old Palestinian woman, blew herself to pieces outside a shoe shop in Jerusalem on 28 January 2002, killing an 81-year-old Israeli man and injuring more than 100 people.⁵⁹ Among the injured was an American lawyer from New York who had

⁵⁴Dilip Ganguly, "Female Fighters Used in Sri Lanka," *Associated Press*, 10 January 2000.

⁵⁵Rima Salameh, "Lebanon's Militia Women fight and Become Suicide Bomb 'Martyrs,'" *The Associated Press*, 6 April 1986.

⁵⁶Libby Brooks, "Women: 'We just want to live normally': As the Intifada produces its first female suicide bomber, Libby Brooks reports on the daily life of Palestinian women," *The Guardian*, 29 January 2002, p. 8.

⁵⁷James P. Pinkerton, "Suicide Bombers May Be Shocking, but Dying for the Cause Is Not New," *The Los Angeles Times*, 11 April 2002, Part 2, p. 15.

⁵⁸A female suicide attacker may have struck an Israeli bus in August 1995, killing five people (including an American tourist) and injuring more than 100 others. Hamas claimed responsibility for the attack; however the identity of the woman and her role as the attacker was not confirmed. "Suicide Bombing Again Rocks Israel: Attack is 7th in Past 18 Months; Woman May have been Responsible for Blast," *The Virginian-Pilot*, 22 August, 1995, p. A1.

⁵⁹Peter Beaumont, "Woman Suicide Bomber Strikes: Two Dead and 100 Wounded in New Twist to Middle East conflict," *The Guardian*, 28 January 2002, p. 1; Peter Beaumont, "From an Angel of Mercy to Angel of Death," *The Guardian*, 31 January 2002, p. 11. One early account gives the name of the bomber as Shahanaz Al Amouri, which seems to be a mistake. Inigo Gilmore, "Woman suicide bomber shakes Israelis," news.telegraph.co.uk, filed 28 January 2002.

survived the September 11th attacks.⁶⁰ Following that incident, other attacks by women have occurred, including by Daria Abu Aysha, a Palestinian student who killed herself and wounded three soldiers at a West Bank checkpoint in February 2002; and 18-year-old Ayat Akhras, who killed herself and two Israelis near a Jerusalem supermarket in March 2002.⁶¹ All of these women were prepared and armed by the al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, which, according to one source, has set up a special unit for female suicide bombers.⁶²

Another group with a history of using women for suicide attacks is the PKK, whose campaign of suicide attacks began on 30 June 1995 and ended on 5 July 1999. About two-thirds of the attacks--eleven of fourteen--were undertaken by women.⁶³ The large majority of attackers did not volunteer but were chosen by the leadership for their missions, a distinguishing feature of the PKK. Much coercion was reportedly used in forcing PKK members to participate: one of those selected who then refused the 'honor' was said to have been killed in front of another who had been chosen; a different person who tried to escape was turned over to the police. According to interviews, the PKK's preference for using female suicide attackers reflected a number of causes, including the belief among the leadership that the presence of the women was burdening the men in their hit-and-run operations, and the general perception in the group that the women were more expendable than the men.⁶⁴

Although the act of committing suicide and the participation of women in combat are both contrary to Chechen social tradition, increasing numbers of Chechen women are participating in suicide attacks against Russian targets. There have been numerous attacks involving women perpetrators, including two apparently Chechen female suicide attackers who detonated themselves outside a rock concert in July 2003 on the outskirts of Moscow, killing more than a dozen young people.⁶⁵ The motivations for female Chechen suicide attackers are reported to be often related to the deaths of husbands, brothers, fathers and sons at the hands of Russian forces; indeed, the Kremlin calls them "black widows."⁶⁶ Some argue that the traditional nature of Chechen society pushes women into suicide missions because they are

⁶⁰James Bennet, "A September 11 Survivor is Hurt as Man Dies in Jerusalem Attack," *The New York Times*, 28 January 2002, p. A1.

⁶¹Cameron W. Barr, "Why a Palestinian Girl Now Wants to be a Suicide Bomber," *The Christian Science Monitor*, 1 April 2002.

⁶²Graham Usher, "At 18, Bomber Became Martyr and Murderer: Warning of a 'Million More' after suicide attack kills two at Supermarket," *The Guardian*, 30 March 2002, p. 5.

⁶³Dogu Ergil, "Suicide Terrorism in Turkey; The Workers' Party of Kurdistan," in *Countering Suicide Terrorism*, p. 105-128.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*

⁶⁵Since previous such attacks had been directed mainly at Russian military or government targets, this attack is seen as a worrisome sign of a possible shift in Chechen strategy toward targeting strictly civilians.

⁶⁶Fred Weir, "Chechen women join terror's ranks: Three recent suicide bombings mark a desperately violent trend," *The Christian Science Monitor*, 12 June 2003.

excluded from joining regular guerrilla units.⁶⁷ The unprecedented prominence of women suicide attackers among Chechen fighters is also seen as a sign of desperation in the struggle, and a transition to a “Palestinization” of the so-called war of independence from Russia.⁶⁸

Over the long term, terrorist organizations would not use women or children if the population at large did not actively or at least passively support it. There is polling data that clearly indicates support on the part of most Palestinians for the terrorist organizations carrying out these operations, support that seemed to grow immediately after the increase in suicide attacks using both male and female perpetrators, although enthusiasm for the violence then later declined.⁶⁹ Longer term acquiescence of the broader population, particularly in Chechnya and among the Palestinians, would be most concerning and could be indicative of the staying power of this phenomenon.

The Threat to the United States

Until very recently, most of the groups engaging in suicide attacks have been interested in pursuing a cause that is geographically distant from the United States, usually limited to territory that is connected somehow to the origin of the group. The groups that were most likely to use suicide attacks, including Hamas, Islamic Jihad, the PKK, the Tamil Tigers and others described here, had no interest in directly targeting a suicide attack against U.S. citizens or interests at home or abroad.

But suicide attacks are no longer primarily a local phenomenon. Looking at the evolution of the use of suicide attacks globally, the geographical distribution of the phenomenon seems to be widening, as is the targeting of the attacks. In recent years, suicide attacks have been perpetuated across borders and even continents, for example in Croatia, Argentina, Algeria, Panama, and now the United States.

The most effective globalized network of terrorist organizations is associated with Al Qaeda--the only organization that has successfully used suicide attacks on U.S. soil. Indeed, the most likely future use of suicide attacks against Americans would come from Al Qaeda and its many associated groups. Al Qaeda's global networking of militant Islamic groups derives from its genesis in the struggle against

⁶⁷*Ibid.* Although not technically engaged in a suicide attack, Chechen women dressed in black veils with Arabic writing, carrying guns and with explosives strapped around their waists helped to carry out the siege of the Moscow theatre in October 2002 ; the 18 or so women were shot point-blank by Russian special forces when they gassed and then stormed the theatre. See Christina Lamb and Ben Aris, Russians probe al-Qa'eda Link as Moscow Siege Ends with 150 Dead,” *The Daily Telegraph* (London), 27 October 2002.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*

⁶⁹Mark Lavie, “After Top Palestinian Leader Criticizes Violence, Poll Shows Palestinians Favor Crackdown on Militants,” *Associated Press*, 28 November 2002. See also Khalil Shikaki, Special Policy Forum Report: Palestinian Attitudes During the Bush/Sharon Era, Number 319, 20 April 2001, p. 2.

the Soviet Union in Afghanistan and the subsequent development under the Taliban regime there of numerous training camps, where attendees were schooled in many different techniques of fighting, including the use of explosives and suicide attacks.

Al Qaeda has relied upon suicide attacks frequently, especially as the organization has evolved from a primary focus on supporting Islamist insurgencies throughout the world to an increasingly widespread and direct role in attacking American and other Western targets through any available means. Notable suicide attacks include the 1998 truck bombings of the U.S. Embassies in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and Nairobi, Kenya. (Twelve Americans died and 7 were wounded in those attacks, while 291 Africans were killed and about 5100 wounded.⁷⁰) The October 2000 attack on the U.S.S. Cole in Yemen was a suicide operation, albeit clearly directed against a military not civilian target. (Seventeen American sailors died and thirty-nine were wounded.) And finally, the September 11th attacks, in which more than 3,000 people were killed, were carried out by nineteen Al Qaeda suicide operatives. There have been numerous other planned but thwarted apparent suicide attacks directly or indirectly attributable to Al Qaeda. And suicide assaults in Saudi Arabia and Morocco in May 2003 also appear to have had ties to Al Qaeda.⁷¹ Suicide tactics seem to be gaining importance in the organization's arsenal.

At this point there is no evidence that Palestinian groups like Hamas and Islamic Jihad have developed ties with Al Qaeda. There is clear evidence, however, of Al Qaeda connections with Chechen militant groups, and, as mentioned above, the increasing use of suicide attacks in Russia and Chechnya is seen as a worrisome sign of potentially growing influence on the part of radical Islamist elements among the Chechens. Al Qaeda has also provided support for Pakistani groups like Lashkar-e-taiba of Pakistan/Kashmir. And there are worrisome indications of outside fighters possibly being responsible for major suicide attacks in Iraq, including the Jordanian Embassy and the UN Headquarters in Baghdad.

While a transition to the use of suicide techniques among groups with Muslim members is often seen as a reflection of Islamist militancy, the role of Al Qaeda in these attacks is becoming blurred by their increasing globalization. The knowledge needed to carry them out is increasingly available and being disseminated internationally through means such as the Internet. Al Qaeda's *Jihad Manual* and its thirteen volume *Encyclopedia of Jihad*, for example, are both available on the world wide web and can be downloaded easily to discs, sent as attachments via e-mail, and transferred to CD-Rom.⁷² The increasing globalization of terrorism also means

⁷⁰Through our Enemies' Eyes, p. 200. The exact figures are not generally agreed. The U.S. State Department's *Patterns of Global Terrorism 2002* cites "at least 301" killed and "more than 5,000" injured, p. 119.

⁷¹For more information on this see CRS Report RS21529, *Al Qaeda after the Iraq Conflict*.

⁷²Bruce Hoffman, "Al Qaeda, Trends in Terrorism and Future Potentialities: An Assessment," paper presented at the RAND Center for Middle East Public Policy and Geneva Center for Security Policy 3rd Annual Conference, 5 May 2003 (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2003), pp. 16-17.

increasing globalization of suicide tactics, because, for all the reasons described above, they are sometimes perceived as being uniquely effective.⁷³

There has been no specific evidence in open literature thus far that Al Qaeda is preparing to use women to engage in suicide attacks. Given Al Qaeda's ideology, some might argue that the organization would consider it difficult to use women in its so-called "jihad." However, a number of factors have led the FBI to warn that female suicide attackers could be used by Al Qaeda against the United States in the future. First, an interview published in an Arabic-language newspaper in mid-March 2003 quotes a woman who claims that Al Qaeda is setting up training camps to prepare women for "martyrdom operations," and specifically cites the successful use of female suicide attackers by Palestinian and Chechen organizations.⁷⁴ Apparently as a result, the FBI has issued notices to law enforcement agencies to be alert to the possibility of a growing role for women in Al Qaeda.⁷⁵ Second, at least in theory, it is possible that the capture of senior leaders and other members of Al Qaeda could increase the likelihood of women operatives being used to carry out missions. Other terrorist organizations have innovated in this way when advances in counterterrorism have forced them to adapt.

Suicide Attacks in Iraq

There are two types of suicide attacks that have been in evidence in Iraq: those specifically directed against U.S. military forces, and those specifically directed against noncombatant targets. These will be dealt with in turn.

Technically suicide operations against military targets such as U.S. soldiers in Iraq do not qualify as "terrorist" operations because the victims are not civilians or noncombatants.⁷⁶ Nonetheless, some of the techniques that have been described here have appeared in both wartime and postwar Iraq, including suicide attacks carried out by Iraqi women.⁷⁷

Techniques for suicide attacks are regularly copied between groups, and this can make it difficult to distinguish between perpetrators, especially in the early hours

⁷³On the globalization of international terrorism, see (name/ redacted), "Behind the Curve: Globalization and International Terrorism," *International Security*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (Winter 2002/2003), pp. 30-58.

⁷⁴John Solomon, "FBI wary al-Qaida may begin using women in attacks," *The Associated Press*, 1 April 2003. There is some reason for skepticism about the accuracy of the claim, since the interview was carried out largely over the Internet and then distributed through chat rooms.

⁷⁵Pete Yost, "FBI Warns of Female al-Qaida Operatives," *Associated Press*, 24 April 2003.

⁷⁶On this point, see Fred Kaplan, "Saddam's Suicide Bombers Aren't Terrorists," Middle East Information Center, 6 April 2003, accessed at [<http://middleeastinfo.org>] on 24 July 2003.

⁷⁷David Johnston and James Risen, "New Signs of Terror Not Evident," *The New York Times*, 6 April 2003.

after an attack. Al Qaeda has called for attacks on U.S. forces in Iraq, and at one point an unknown group calling itself the Armed Islamic Movement for Al Qaeda, the Fallujah Branch, claimed responsibility for attacks on U.S. military targets.⁷⁸ (A connection to Al Qaeda has not been independently verified.) There have also been uncorroborated reports, attributed to the Arab television network al-Jazeera, of training camps for Arab volunteers willing to carry out suicide bombings against U.S. forces.⁷⁹ In April, the British reportedly found a stash of weapons in Basra that was believed to be meant for suicide bombers,⁸⁰ and Americans reportedly found a cache of about fifty explosives vests in a school in Baghdad. Some apparently regular Iraqi soldiers used suicide explosives vests to try to kill more American soldiers, particularly when the Iraqis were ostensibly surrendering.⁸¹

From the end of major hostilities to August 2003, much of the postwar violence in Iraq seemed to have been carried out by Saddam Hussein loyalists, particularly members of the Ba'ath party, and perhaps also members of the disbanded Iraqi army. According to U.S. military commanders, most attacks on U.S. forces displayed characteristics of traditional guerrilla or insurgency campaigns, involving weapons such as rocket propelled grenades, remotely detonated explosives, and gunfire.⁸² There were also attacks on elements of the Iraqi infrastructure, including the water and power systems, ostensibly designed to disrupt postwar rebuilding and stabilization efforts. These types of attacks had not generally involved suicide tactics, although such operations by quasi-military groups are not uncommon in situations of occupation.

But the August 2003 suicide attacks on civilian soft targets such as the Jordanian Embassy and the U.N. Headquarters building in Baghdad seemed to bring an added dimension to the threat. They were classic terrorist suicide attacks using a car bomb and a truck bomb. Many terrorism experts point to the change in targeting and the style of attack as evidence of a possible broadening of the strategy from mainly a guerrilla insurgency against U.S. forces to include a coordinated terrorist campaign that could involve foreign elements. How the threat will evolve is hard to predict.

⁷⁸John Hendren, "Tape Claims Al Qaeda Is at Work in Iraq," *Los Angeles Times*, 14 July 2003, p. A8.

⁷⁹"Iraq 'training volunteer suicide bombers'," *Irish Examiner Breaking News*, 12 March 2003.

⁸⁰"British forces find weapons cache believed stored for suicide bombers," *Associated Press*, 18 April 2003; and "On The Scene: Suicide Bombers," CBSNews.com, 10 April 2003; accessed on 18 April 2003.

⁸¹S. Thorne Harper, "Soldier Alive 'By the Grace of God' Booby-trapped Iraqi Soldier Blows up Nearby," *Columbus Ledger-Enquirer*, 18 April 2003.

⁸²Tom Squitieri and Dave Moniz, "U.S. Troops in Iraq Facing Guerilla Warfare," *USA Today*, 16 July 2003.

How to Counter the Threat

As mentioned above, it is difficult to prevent or counter suicide attacks. Nonetheless, there are both offensive and defensive measures that may reduce the number and/or severity of attacks. Among the offensive measures are preemptive strikes against the organizations that orchestrate suicide attacks (especially their leaders), vigorous intelligence collection, and efforts to reduce the ability of terrorist organizations to recruit suicide candidates.

Since the organization is a crucial element in orchestrating suicide attacks, preemptive attacks are most promising if they undermine the ability of the organization to operate. This can mean, for example, military operations to destroy the physical infrastructure of the group, efforts to cut off funding, and/or preemptive strikes designed to capture or kill leaders. These types of measures are often employed by the Israeli Defense Forces, for example, especially the very controversial policy of targeted killings (also called targeted assassinations). Sometimes preemptive attacks are employed in order to intimidate, harass, or disable a group: the goal can be to keep the organization so worried about staying ahead of potential military or police action that carefully indoctrinating future suicide attackers becomes difficult. According to this strategy, targeting known operatives or training camps disrupts imminent operations and/or reduces the ability of the group to indoctrinate people toward being prepared to kill themselves and others.

Others assert that although capturing or killing a leader can undermine the organization, it can also energize the followers into acting in the name of the “martyr.” Likewise, operations that enrage the surrounding population can result in an increase in recruitment and rapid reconstruction of the group’s capabilities. But this can also work the opposite way: when indigenous civilians are victimized by terrorist attacks, the organization can be marginalized by the local population. It depends upon the group and the political context.

In this regard, the second offensive measure, vigorous human and technical intelligence gathering, is vital. Good intelligence can provide critical information on a terrorist group’s dynamics. Successful intelligence gathering can occur at many points along the process, from the initial contact with individuals, to the indoctrination, targeting, equipping, training and launching of the attackers. These terrorist group activities require such acts as purchases of equipment, reconnaissance of possible target areas, and other potentially observable activities. It is important to have international cooperation in intelligence gathering, especially in regions of the world where Americans are unfamiliar with the culture and language, or may not know the local population well. Intelligence can be crucial to prevent attacks before they occur, and to retaliate effectively in the aftermath, if necessary.

Suicide attacks cannot occur in a population that does not provide individuals who are willing to die for the cause. The last of the offensive measures therefore relates to efforts to reducing the potential recruitment ability of terrorist groups. These measures are the most controversial and can be frustrating to those who are primarily concerned with preventing imminent attacks: they would include policies

that alter the political, cultural and socio-economic contexts that perpetuate suicide attacks, such as improving quality of life, increasing social stability, providing opportunities for productive political expression, employment, education, and so on. Other important means of reducing recruitment include methods to undermine the ideology of the individual attacker, especially his or her dedication and faith in the meaningful nature of his or her death. Historical experience demonstrates that terrorist organizations can not continue to employ methods that alienate actual or potential constituents. The ultimate active measure over time is to remove the constituencies.

Defensive measures against suicide attacks include preventing perpetrators from physically getting at the target. The goal is to make it much more difficult for an organization to achieve a successful attack, increasing the costs in relation to the benefits gained through the attackers' death. These include the full range of measures in homeland defense, from physical barriers to security screening to strict border controls. Some also suggest decreasing the quantity or profile of potentially symbolic targets, by measures such as restricting unnecessary travel in dangerous areas abroad or controlling the availability of sensitive information on the Internet, for example. Preparing the public to respond calmly in the face of an attack is another way to reduce the potential attractiveness of the attack in advance.

Such anti-terrorism means are often greatly underrated in the general discussion of how to stop suicide attackers, but their role can be crucial. The purpose is to deny the terrorist organization its most attractive targets. The cost/benefit calculations undertaken by the organization as well as the individuals must be manipulated to the point where achieving a spectacular symbolic strike with its attendant publicity becomes increasingly difficult and unattractive.

Implications for U.S. Policy

The question of how to reduce the threat of suicide attacks against the United States and its interests at home and abroad is extremely important to Congress. Most central to Congress's interests is determining the appropriate future funding levels for homeland security, the Department of Defense, and foreign operations, especially the balance between measures like homeland security and force protection, and more pro-active measures like targeted foreign aid programs, public diplomacy, multilateral cooperation, military/law enforcement operations, and intelligence for counterterrorism.⁸³ The competing requirements to spend for the operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, for example, as well as on domestic homeland security, are likely to continue to be an area of concern. Additional suicide attacks at home or in the field will affect these calculations, especially if they result in increasing numbers of casualties.

⁸³With respect to funding for homeland security see, for example, CRS Report RS21270, *Homeland Security and Counterterrorism Research and Development: Funding, Organization, and Oversight*.

Another area of concern is the question of instituting better and more comprehensive threat assessments with respect to suicide attacks on U.S. interests in advance of potentially painful episodes, placing such assessments within the historical context of the considerable international experience with this phenomenon. Spending on counterterrorism and antiterrorism measures to deal with the evolving threat will be increasingly difficult to gauge in the absence of better analysis of the threat. This includes not just concentrating upon potential imminent attacks, but also longer-term rigorous, focused and dispassionate evaluation of the terrorist organizations and their constituencies, informed by an indepth understanding of their political, social, and cultural context. Spending on intelligence for counterterrorism will continue to be a serious concern, both in the domestic and international arenas,⁸⁴ as will having a sufficient quantity of well-qualified people to fill counterterrorism positions in the relevant U.S. agencies.

In this respect, the number of people well-trained to analyze terrorist organizations in depth is currently quite small in the United States, especially compared to other major powers who have in the past faced a serious terrorist threat. As mentioned above, suicide attacks usually depend upon an organization to be successful. Traditional academic institutions do not, on the whole, support terrorism studies as a discipline and are wary of devoting resources to a policy-relevant field that has in the past waxed and waned with the perception of the threat.⁸⁵ In an age of globalization, good analysis comes not only from access to classified sources, but also from thorough analysis of open source literature that is often not fully exploited. This approach could involve providing support for additional civilian and/or military training programs, possibly associated with academic institutions or government agencies, to be devoted to the study of terrorist organizations, similar to those that were implemented to face the Soviet threat.

In addition to vigorous military responses, longer-term measures for reducing the constituencies for terrorist organizations and the number of candidates for suicide attacks will continue to be important. Nonmilitary measures can involve both “carrots” and “sticks.” Funding for initiatives such as the recently-created Middle East Partnership Initiative, or other such programs devoted to promoting political, economic and educational development in regions where terrorist organizations recruit, may provide effective alternatives to those who would otherwise engage in terrorism.⁸⁶ Efforts at better public diplomacy may also help.⁸⁷

⁸⁴For more on this issue, see CRS Report RL31292, *Intelligence to Counter Terrorism: Issues for Congress*.

⁸⁵Bruce W. Jentleson, “The Need for Praxis: Bringing Policy Relevance Back In,” *International Security*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (Spring 2002), pp. 169-183; and Cronin, “Behind the Curve,” pp. 54-58.

⁸⁶For further information, see CRS Report RS21457, *The Middle East Partnership Initiative: An Overview*.

⁸⁷For further information, see CRS Report RL31889, *The Al-Jazeera News Network: Opportunity or Challenge for U.S. Foreign Policy in the Middle East?*, and CRS Report RS21565, *The Middle East Television Network: An Overview*.

Other measures to deter or reduce the attractiveness to individuals and their families of suicide attacks might lessen the organizations' ability to find candidates. Some have suggested that payments to families of suicide attackers be specifically outlawed, or that all states from which such payments emerge be held specifically accountable for supporting terrorist activity. Another suggestion is to deny family members of suicide attackers visas to the United States. Other measures may attempt to undercut the ideology of the potential recruit, for example by increasing the profile of moderate Islamic clerics who condemn suicide attacks.

Finally, Congressional oversight of Defense Department activities in Iraq, including funding of reconstruction and stability operations in future months and years, will almost inevitably be affected by the future evolution of the resistance forces there. Continued suicide attacks in Iraq will not only victimize American soldiers, as well as international, U.S., and Iraqi civilians, but could potentially have important larger effects on perceptions of the postwar effort as well. Developing the best possible countermeasures to potential suicide attacks in Iraq and elsewhere may be central to the success of U.S. policy there in future months and years.

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