

Profiling Islamic Suicide Terrorists

A Research Report for the Danish Ministry of Justice

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Part I

Introduction

This report is the outcome of a nine-month research grant from the Danish Ministry of Justice (DmoJ). Although the DmoJ sponsored the study, the findings of the report solely represent the views of the author. I would like to express my gratitude to the Research Unit at the DmoJ for the willingness to support the study, although the topic is controversial. The mutual understanding between the DmoJ and the author suggested that this particular research field was worthy of further enquiry. The idea was to try a new perspective and to see if it would provide some new insights, and this I believe has been successful.

A brief introduction to the sources and material used in this study is appropriate, mainly because previous publications concerned with suicide terrorism have presented figures different from those about to be discussed. The general data collection rested exclusively on open source material. Access to restricted governmental information was not available, nor desired for the scope of this project. The purpose was not to evaluate or comment on current counter terrorism practices, but instead to understand the process of why someone becomes a suicide terrorist.

Data was collected from a multitude of sources, including academic publications, news medias, NGO reports and radical Islamist websites. I have strived to confirm the veracity of the data collected, and have double-checked wherever possible. In those cases where it was impossible to obtain confirmation on actual events from a second and unrelated source, the specific suicide operation was excluded from the data set. This explains the differences between my data and that used by other scholars.

The completed dataset covered all suicide operations carried out by an Islamic terrorist organization between 1982 and through October 2003. The total count of suicide operations then amounted to 193. Because it was the individual suicide bombers that constituted the study object, they were treated separately and this dataset included 247 individual bombers. Some worked in teams, which explains the discrepancy between the two figures. As there is disagreement on exactly how many individuals in a particular operation were actually suicide bombers, I have opted for the lowest figure that could be confirmed. Both of the resulting figures were based on conservative analysis, and the true number would probably included an additional 10%.

As the title implies, I have exclusively focused on suicide terrorists from Islamist terrorist organizations. This means that the suicide operations conducted by the PKK or the Tamil Tigers have not been included in the study. However interesting they might be, they would require a separate analysis because of their distinctly different ideology and motivation.

A considerable number of people have been involved in the project at various stages and for various purposes. It is not possible to list them all here, suffice to say that they all provided invaluable input throughout the process.

Part II

An Overview of Islamic Suicide Terrorism

Historical precedents of Islamic suicide attacks do exist and they have been included in this study for two reasons. Firstly, a couple of the historical examples of suicide attacks motivated through Islam have been lifted out of their historical settings and have grown to mythical proportions. These myths continue to shape and influence current sentiments among radical Muslims in the general religious interpretation of historical events. Secondly, the distressingly overlooked parallels between historical suicide attacks and contemporary events certainly make them worthy of further study.

Although the setting and timing differ considerably there is a straight historical line from the terror of the medieval Assassins of the Middle East to Al Qaeda in terms of ideological reasoning and the use of suicidal attacks. The similarities exist in the ideologies of extremist Islamic sects, but just as important in the societal circumstances that “inexplicably” support the extreme measure of suicide attacks.

These historical examples have no direct relevance in contemporary terrorist profiling. Yet they serve to illustrate the historical conditions in which this practice was considered legitimate by a segment of the population, because there are parallels to be found. Moreover, by including the historical examples it may be possible to understand why these previous campaigns of suicide attacks ultimately failed. While some of the suicide campaigns achieved limited success, in the end they all failed in their objectives.

The first historical example of a suicide attack in the name of Allah is related to one of the most significant events in Muslim history. This was the self-chosen martyrdom of Hussein ibn ‘Ali at the battle of Karbala in 800 A.D. At Karbala, Hussein was fully aware of his battle field inferiority and readily accepted his fate. Not because of political ambition, but to take a moral stand against injustice and tyranny. His personal dedication and ultimately his readiness for personal sacrifice was intended to serve as an example not only for the Shi’as but for all Muslims in the hope that they would finally put an end to the immoral rulers who claimed to be righteous Muslims. (Momen 1985) Though not a suicide attack in a strict sense, the example of Hussein’s martyrdom has inspired a considerable number of contemporary suicide terrorists.

The second example of suicide terrorism is the well-known story of the Assassin sect from the 11th to the 13th century A.D. The small, but very dedicated, following gathered popular support among the local Ismailis, who saw an opportunity to rid themselves of foreign domination and inclusion into a larger empire. The Ismailis had retreated to reclusive strongholds in mountain fortresses in modern Syria and Iran, and it was from here they decided to alter the balance of power between Sunni and Shi’a Islam. Since the Ismailis belonged to the Shi’a minority there was no hope of attaining power through conventional battle tactics and thus decided to resort to suicidal attacks. (Lewis 2003)

In three separate locations in South East Asia did local anti-colonial resistance movements resort to suicide attacks. This occurred on the Malabar Coast of South Western India, in the Philippines and finally in Aceh on Northern Sumatra in Indonesia. Over the span of almost two centuries these campaigns generally lasted a few decades where after they ceased. Suicide attacks only started after the guerrilla war had been won by the European powers, but never during. They were the only means left for fighting back. (Dale 1988).

The modern reader is likely to be fascinated by these stories from the past, but the recent revival of a historical and symbolic gesture of defiance necessitates a re-evaluation of historical perspectives, because important lessons can undoubtedly be learned. It should come as no surprise that

contemporary Shi'a radicals leaned heavily on the martyrdom of Hussein at the battle of Karbala for inspiration as well as legitimacy. In this sense the Shi'a continues the century-long tradition of the liberation of the true believers emphasizing their founding myth as the oppressed of the earth who must accept sacrifices to improve their situation.

Although their ideologies were estranged from accepted traditions they certainly influenced contemporary events and continue to do so. To their victims the Assassins were criminals who were desperate in their attempts to overthrow society and the religious establishment, but to the Ismailis they were a highly respected vanguard.

The historical examples of suicide attacks in South East Asia shared several identical characteristics. Regardless of when, where, and how, the attacks were symbolic gestures of resistance against Western hegemony and colonial rule. They occurred during identical phases of the resistance; always at a point in the conflict when the fight was lost. The suicide attacks were essentially a sign of desperation, and of a Muslim population devoid of any other means of fighting back. Some scholars have dismissed the importance of the earlier suicide attacks and boldly stated that they were not undertaken with the same political awareness that characterizes the modern era of suicide terrorism (Kushner 1996). This could not be further from the truth, because there is a very strong and significant political element in the history of Islamic suicide terrorism.

What these groups have in common, and this concerns both the historical and contemporary ones, is their contempt for the establishment. This means the political structures, the bureaucracies, and the religious institutions in the Muslim world that strayed from the path of the righteous and abandoned their Muslim duties. The representatives of the establishment, and not the people, are the true enemies of modern-day Islamic terrorists.

Suicide Terrorism in its Modern Context

The origin of the modern era of suicide terrorism is often described as the 1983 suicide bombing in Beirut, Lebanon, against the U.S. embassy. This attack was actually the second terrorist operation to make use of human sacrifice, the first had occurred the previous year but also in Lebanon. The ideology supporting this novel approach to modern warfare had originated elsewhere. The legitimisation of suicide attacks and the reinterpretation of the concept of martyrdom within Shi'a Islam is directly related to the Iranian revolution in 1979.

This ideology had rid itself of Western intellectual influences in its desire to realize an original and simple Islamic society. While it certainly became simple for the ordinary Iranian, who basically had two choices, to agree or face serious consequences, it was never a return to anything original. Khomeini's understanding of "original Islam" broke cultural traditions and religious practices established over the centuries. (Hiro 1988) The Shi'a clerics of Iran were saved from internal criticism and civil unrest with the Iraqi invasion on September 22, 1980. Saddam Hussein grossly miscalculated the effectiveness of his armed forces and also considered Iran a country in turmoil that could offer little resistance.

The Iranian leadership quickly realized that the future of Iran was greatly endangered and called on the people to fight the infidel aggressors with all their might. If Iran was to be saved, sacrifices had to be made on a national but also on a personal level. The concept of martyrdom was invigorated, and death on the battlefield would ensure the Iranian soldier his place in Paradise.

In early 1980, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, or the Pasdaran, was created. Its function as a loyal and independent force besides the regular armed forces was to become instrumental in the Iran-Iraq war. The auxiliary volunteer force under the Pasdaran, the Basij-e Mustazafin, was given the task of incorporating the very young and the very old into a people's militia. Basij-e Mustazafin translates into "The Mobilization of the Oppressed," a very apt description since it recruited among

the poor and the desperate (Hiro 1989). The first recorded Iranian deployment of a human wave attack occurred on November 29, 1981, at Bostan. (Wright 1991).

The image of martyrdom was shrewdly projected onto Iranian youths who volunteered as human minesweepers during the critical stages of the war with Iraq. There was no shortage of volunteers for what were in essence suicide missions, the war having become a valve that could release the tension of the pre-revolutionary society. Human waves numbering tens of thousands Iranian children and youngsters swept across the battlefield and the death toll was horrific. In one offensive operation in 1984 alone, more than 20,000 were killed in human wave attacks that achieved no tactical advantage.

At the front the survival rate was five percent, a statistic unsurpassed by any military unit in history known to me. Khomeini's ideological impact on other Shi'a communities in the Middle East should not be underestimated. It was his inflammatory rhetoric and personal charisma that inspired the Shi'as in Lebanon to initiate the modern era of suicide terrorism, with unexpected and absolute success. (Kramer 1991) , (Kramer 1995)

Through Khomeini's radical ideology of revolutionary Islam the concept of human sacrifice was invented and deliberately exported. This ideology represents the beginning of suicide terrorism in the modern era and was later to influence a range of Islamic terrorist groups directly or indirectly. This is not the place to present a detailed outline of the development of suicide terrorism, the focus remains of terrorist profiling. However, a few observations are relevant to underscore the point that suicide attacks are primarily a political phenomenon and not just a religious issue.

It is possible to follow the development of Islamic suicide terrorism since the inception of this practice in 1982 in Lebanon. The Shi'as of Lebanon were impressed by the achievements of the Iranians who had managed to rid themselves of a despised regime. Their example was emulated to improve the conditions of the Shi'as who turned to suicide bombings. These were all attributable to the Shi'a terrorist organizations of Hezbollah, Harakat Amal, Islamic Jihad and the al-Da'waa.

No other Islamic terrorist organization challenged the Shi'a groups during the 1980s, the field of suicide terrorism was the exclusive domain of the Shi'as. This situation changed during the mid-1990s in two separate directions. The first Palestinian suicide bomber occurred in 1993 and Hamas who planned the attack was inspired by the Lebanese terrorists. Up until the eruption of the second Intifada in 2000 only 23 suicide bombings were carried out by the Palestinians groups Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ).

The other development during the 1990s was the gradual emergence of other terrorist organizations that experimented with suicide operations. These terrorist organizations were from Egypt and Algeria but abandoned this operational method after only a handful of attacks. The exception is the Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ) that would later become a part of Al Qaeda.

The situation changed dramatically in 1998 with the declaration of war against the U.S. issued by Al Qaeda. Two American embassies were destroyed in East Africa, but it would take Al Qaeda another two years before they executed the next suicide bombing.

During 2000 other Islamic terrorist organizations joined in. They were based in Chechnya, Palestine and in Kashmir. They have since been joined by the Indonesian Jemaah Islamiyya (JI), Ansar Al-Islam (AaI) and Salafia Jihadia. The past three years have seen a dramatic increase in the number of suicide operations as well as a new range of terrorist organizations actively participating.

This trend can best be illustrated by breaking down the past 20 years of suicide operations into three distinct periods. In the first period from 1982 to 1991, 11% of all suicide operations were carried out. The second period spanning 1992 to 1999 totals 17%. The third and most recent period from 2000 to October 2003 represents no less than 72 % of the attacks registered in my database.

General Observations on Contemporary Islamic Suicide Terrorism

The logic and timing of suicide terrorism

The decision to switch to suicide operations is not arbitrarily. It is important to ask two questions both of them related to the individual Islamic terrorist organisation; when do they start and when do they stop? To establish an overview of the timing aspect of a suicide campaign Figure 1 lists the various Islamic terrorist organizations and the duration of their individual suicide campaigns.

Fig. 1: Contemporary Islamic Terrorist Organizations and the duration of the Suicide Campaign

Al-Dawa (Iraq)	1983
GIA (Algeria)	1994
Gamaa Islamiyya (Egypt)	1995
EIJ (Egypt)	1995*
Harakat Amal (Lebanon)	1984 – 2000
Hezbollah (Islamic Amal/Islamic Jihad) (Lebanon)	1982 – 2000
Hamas (Israel)	1993 - à
PIJ (Israel)	1994 - à
Al Qaeda (International)	1998 - à
JEM (Kashmir)	2000 - à
Chechen Rebels (Chechnya)	2000 - à
Al-Qasa Martyrs Brigades (Israel)	2002 - à
Ansar al-Islam (Iraq)	2002*
Salafiya Jihadia (Morocco)	2003*

*Note: The EIJ merged with the Al Qaeda in 1998, and is still actively involved in suicide operations. The Aal and the Salafiyya are recent entries in the field of Islamic suicide terrorism. Both organizations are very likely to continue operations in the future.

These terrorist organizations are grouped in three distinct entities; those who tried once and stopped. Those who have in the past conducted a campaign of suicide operations and finally those who are still active involved in a campaign. A few examples will serve to illustrate the aspect of timing.

The Egyptian campaign

In the mid-1990s two Egyptian Islamic terrorist organizations conducted a few suicide operations and then stopped. Ga'maa Islamiyya concluded that although this method provided a tactical advantage it would alienate the group from its local support base in Egypt where this extreme measure would not be acceptable. The EIJ took a different view and realized that this was to be a very efficient tool in a global Jihad that was to be formulated together with the Al Qaeda leadership. Interestingly, the Ga'maa Islamiyya has as recently as 2003 disavowed suicide terrorism as un-Islamic and claimed that it counter productive in the furtherance of any Islamic agenda.

The Shi'a campaign

The realization by Islamic terrorist organizations that a spectacular suicide operation is a strategic equalizer has occurred in several phases. Suicide terrorism began as a symbolic act of resistance and defiance by the Shi'as of Lebanon to enable them to fight superior enemies. The concept of martyrdom on the battlefield was part of the cultural and religious heritage of the Lebanese Shi'as, but it took an outsider force to manipulate and invigorate these sentiments into violent action. Both Iran and their Lebanese proxies were surprised at the effectiveness of a few suicide attacks. The Shi'a terrorist organizations ceased to field suicide bombers after Israel withdrew from Lebanon in

2000. This was the result of a decision by the leaders of the organizations who acknowledged that the suicide operations had indeed worked to defeat the enemy, but also that it was a very problematic issue to legitimise from a religious perspective.

The Al Qaeda campaign

The Al Qaeda essentially reached the same conclusions as the Hezbollah, but employed an entirely different approach in its strategic perspective. Over the years suicide operations has become the preferred method of operation for Al Qaeda, and this is the result of the realization that it serves its purpose. Realizing that the network of Islamic terrorist organizations could not change the world on their own, Al Qaeda perceived itself as the vanguard of a global transformation that would lead to a final confrontation between righteous Muslims and everyone else. Because Al Qaeda has limitations, it opted for carrying out high-profile terrorist operations to get the attention of all Muslims, and hope for their support in a general uprising. The developments in international affairs after September 11, 2001, has proved the validity of this argument from the perspective of Al Qaeda that sees a worldwide conflict as inevitable and imminent.

Operational benefits

There are several benefits to the terrorist organization that choose to use suicide operations. (IDF 2002), (Sprinzak 2000). From an operational perspective there is the obvious advantage of not needing an escape plan. The survival of the perpetrator is considered a failure. Other operational tactics carry the inherent risk of capture of the operators by the authorities. A captured terrorist may reveal the identity of other cell members and other information considered vital for the survival of the terrorist organization. Another operational benefit is the accuracy in bomb placement and the flexibility in the timing of the detonation. Virtually no other method of delivery ensures the correct placement of an explosive device in comparison with the adaptability of a dedicated individual. If the chosen target does not have the desired density of civilians, it is possible for the operator simply to move to a better target.

Mass casualties are the norm and extensive damage to structures is virtually guaranteed if proper target surveillance has been undertaken. There is no need for remote control detonators that are prone to faults or detection, as the operator becomes the timing device and detonator. As evidence has shown, it is almost impossible to employ timely and accurate counter-measures to avert a suicide attack. The bomb is usually well hidden and very rarely does the operator display any visible signs of anxiety. A suicide operation is always a spectacular event and wide media coverage is guaranteed. The terrorist organization will get the attention it needs for the cause. The media coverage of the attack also serves to convey an image of extreme discipline, dedication and skill of the terrorists, thus installing fear in the public (Ganor 2002).

State sponsorship

The individual suicide terrorist is controlled by his respective terrorist organization. One level above the terrorist organizations are the countries that support, encourage or legitimise the use of violent action, including suicide operations. For this reason it would be incorrect to look at the terrorist organizations as independent or rogue outlaws. They regularly consult with their benefactors who are quite aware of what is being planned but decides not to intervene for political reasons. These countries think of the terrorist groups as expedient tools who are willing to carry out the dirty work to pressure other governments without having to expose themselves to possible retaliation. State sponsorship plays a very important role in regulating the behaviour of terrorist organizations. Any future predictions on the possible development of Islamic suicide terrorism must take the role of sponsoring states seriously. An understanding of how these states perceive the

legitimacy and expediency of suicide operations would likely indicate how they could be pressured or convinced to abandon their support.

There is no rule without an exception, and the exception in mind is of course Al Qaeda. At various times and in varying degrees the foundation of what was to become the Al Qaeda network was sponsored and supported by the U.S., Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Afghanistan during the Taliban regime. All of these major players, except the Taliban, have come to regret their involvement with an organization whose ideology evolves around their own destruction. The current situation is unprecedented because there is no state that can effectively influence the behaviour of Al Qaeda.

Target selection

It is worth noticing the different paths of development taken by the various terrorist organizations that have employed suicide operations with respect to target selection. During the past two decades a general trend can be observed from the selection of military and diplomatic targets towards the indiscriminate bombings of civilians. In a chronological perspective there has been a clear trend towards an emphasis on civilian and symbolic targets. The Lebanese civil war saw atrocities in abundance, but there was a remarkable self-restraint on behalf of the Islamic terrorist organizations that resorted to suicide operations. The controversial nature of a martyrdom operation ruled out attacks on civilians. This behaviour could not be justified or legitimised in a religious context. There was of course civilians casualties, but they were never the intended target. They just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

During the early and mid-1990s a gradual development took place in which there was a widening of target classes. Palestinian suicide terrorist began to target civilians on public buses and in shopping areas, while at the same time the Egyptian groups concentrate of targets associated with the Egyptian government. This period changed dramatically with Al Qaeda's bombing of American embassies in East Africa in 1998. From then on, both the intensity and the diffusion of targets have escalated dramatically.

However, this trend is only a general phenomenon and should be scrutinized with the developments within each terrorist organization. Target selection is not necessarily a stable factor, but might be highly dynamic. For this purpose it is useful to employ the concept of "the displacement effect" analysed in a terrorist context by Martha Crenshaw (Crenshaw 2002). The displacement effect is an expression that relates to the gradual erosion of what constitutes an acceptable target for the terrorist organization. The widened scope of the target classes may be the outcome of a slackening of moral inhibitions. What may have started as a guerrilla style campaign targeting military installations or foreign embassies could degenerate into an indiscriminate spate of bloodletting. This development can be very difficult to relate to the original motives and purposes of the terrorist organization.

Part III

Profiling Islamic Suicide Terrorists

The first part of this study served to provide a general overview of the history of Islamic suicide terrorism. Hopefully the reader will by now have gained a sense of understanding of the circumstances that leads Islamic terrorist organizations to embrace suicide operations. It should also be clear that the various Islamic terrorist organizations have not followed identical paths, because the rationale for fielding suicide bombers is dependent on a range of factors. Among them is battlefield inferiority in a conventional sense, the sentiments and conditions of popular support and the level of perceived urgency of striking at the enemy.

So far there has been no attempt at profiling these suicide bombers. This sequence is quite deliberate because I firmly believe that it is necessary to have at least a rudimentary idea of the different environments where Islamic suicide terrorism has occurred. The focus of this report remains the profiling of the perpetrators and specifically how it is possible to interpret their motivations. The “when and how” has to some extent been described in the first part, but not the crucial “why”, and this is quite another matter.

A considerable amount of literature has been published over the last three decades on the subject of international terrorism. Most of this literature is concerned with the general nature of terrorism or studies the development from an organizational perspective. However, there has also been studies of individual terrorists, especially those of European origin. (Hudson 1999) Plenty of information is available on the terrorists of Germany’s RAF for instance, and psychological profiles are easy to acquire. These studies, however excellent they may be, have very little relevance for an understanding of the mindset of Islamic suicide terrorists.

Though they appear equally ruthless and single-minded, their motivations and expectations are often opposites. Compared to the secular terrorist of the ETA for example, the Islamic suicide terrorist is significantly different. They inhabit identical clandestine environments but their worldview differs amazingly. The ETA operator will abort a mission if there is any chance of becoming injured and is generally speaking very cautious in his risk taking behaviour. For the suicide bomber, the notion of risk is eliminated as certain death is guaranteed. Differences in ideology, in the definition of the enemy and in the goals of the terrorists, makes a comparison quite meaningless. To understand why an Islamic suicide terrorist decides to blow himself up, an entirely different approach is needed.

Current Status and Research Perspectives

Surprisingly little academic literature exists on the topic of profiling Islamic suicide terrorists. In all, a few books and a dozen articles in academic journals have been authored. While plenty of popular articles have been published, especially after September 11, 2001, they always refer to the same group of academics and studies. However interesting this literature might be, it is not a substitute for thorough analysis.

With the exception of Israel, no other country has in the opinion of the author taken the step further and initiated the much needed profiling on contemporary terrorists. This research is not purely for academic reasons as the situation in Israel illustrates. (Harel and Kra 2002) To understand the current status of terrorist profiling it is necessary to turn to Israel.

Professor Ariel Merari is arguably one of the world’s foremost terrorist profilers. Merari, who is a psychologist at the University of Tel Aviv, has conducted extensive studies on the personalities of the Palestinian suicide terrorists from the time they appeared in the 1990s. Through his studies he was able to conclude that the average bomber was a young male, usually between 18 and 27 years. He was unlikely to be married and had completed high school, and was in one way or another

affiliated with an Islamic fundamentalist organization (Ganor 2002). In the summer of 2001 the profile of the typical Palestinian suicide bomber had become somewhat refined (Shuman 2001). The studies concluded that among 70 suicide terrorists 47% had an academic education, and an additional 29% had at least obtained a high school diploma. Concerning their origin the study showed that 68% were from the Gaza Strip. Most were single, 83%, but that figure still leaves twelve individuals who were married. They were also very young, 64% being between 18-23, and most of the rest under 30. This information, coupled with the renown counter-intelligence skills of the Shin Bet, was valuable to the disruption of suicide operations targeting Israeli civilians.

These indicators have often been cited by scholars and journalists alike in trying to understand who the bombers were. Although Merari has since pointed out that this profiling has ceased to be valid his work still stands as a landmark, largely because of a lack of new perspectives from other profilers. While this type of terrorist profiling certainly represents a much-needed step in the right direction, it does not answer the question of why these individuals decide to blow themselves up. After years of studying their background and motivation professor Merari was able to conclude that it was impossible to create a single profile of the typical suicide terrorist; they were simply too different.

One of the problems associated with this type of profiling was the exclusive use of data on Palestinian bombers, a shortcoming that was to become quite evident shortly after its publication. Merari's profile was published in the summer of 2001, but by autumn everything had changed. Four days after the airborne attacks on America, Ehud Sprinzak, an Israeli expert on terrorism, commented on the available information on the hijackers in an interview in The New York Times.

“What we see here is a totally new pattern.... We have published a book on suicide bombing, but now we'll have to rewrite the book. This is staggering new evidence.”

(Wilgoren 2001)

Sprinzak was referring to the book published by The International Policy Institute for Counter Terrorism at the Interdisciplinary Center (ICT) in Israel “Countering Suicide Terrorism”. Though published in 2000 it is still the only available study to deal with the phenomenon of suicide terrorism. A new situation had developed overnight, and the identities of the hijackers were also examined by other experts. Among them was Dr. Jerrold Post who had been working for the CIA for almost two decades and who is one of the pioneers of political and terrorist profiling. Post would later effectively declare the profile of the suicidal terrorist developed in Israel as obsolete. This was the result his analysis of the information available on the September 11 hijackers. (Post 2003) Even with the information available at the time, it was quite evident that the work of the Israeli profilers had little or no relevance in a post-September 11 setting.

Merari and others did not attempt to understand the depth of the phenomenon of Islamic suicide terrorism that has since become a world wide epidemic. While the Palestinians are still in the lead in terms of the number of suicide operations launched, several other Islamic terrorist organizations have proven to be much more deadly, and none of these suicide bombers had any direct relation to the Palestinian conflict. Although many of them sympathized with the Palestinian people they represent about a dozen different nationalities and very diverse backgrounds. It is of no use to try to squeeze the September 11 hijackers into the Israeli profiling matrix. The hijackers were not fighting for Palestinian independence, although they sympathized with the Palestinian cause. As far as I know none of the 19 hijackers had ever been to the West Bank or Gaza, nor are there any indication they were planning to do so. Their struggle was in essence and method much broader and visionary than that of their Palestinian counterparts. Moreover, their background indicates a relatively comfortable life with no personal experiences with civil war, oppression or deprivation. Except

when they crossed the threshold of internalising the perceived global plight of all Muslim believers faced with annihilation by American evilness. The new generation of suicide terrorists does not fit this pattern. [Asimov, 2001 #266) It is only from an tactical perspective that the Al Qaeda operatives and the Palestinian terrorists display some commonalities. These similarities are however quite superficial, the deeper you dig into their personal characteristics the more their differences become evident.

I share Merari and Post's conclusion about the futile search for a single profile of an Islamic suicide bomber. Instead I have opted for an expansion of the research field to encompass all known perpetrators since the beginning in 1982. Current events have proven beyond doubt that Islamic suicide terrorism is not an exclusively Palestinian phenomenon and profiling must take historical and current developments into consideration.

The fact remains that Islamic suicide terrorists have emerged from a multitude of communities and cultures, and this makes it an international phenomenon. It has occurred in different countries, communities, cultures and under very diverse political circumstances. There has been an incremental development towards the acceptance and use of suicide operations by various Islamic terrorist organizations. Through the literature on Islamic fundamentalism it has been established that the root causes of this ideological trend are related to political, religious, social and cultural issues. Thus, from my point of view, profiling must be multi-causal if we are to understand the depth of the phenomenon. Very little work has been done in this field and it is still in its infancy. Some terrorism experts who have discarded the idea of a single suicide terrorist profile have also stressed the need to look for similarities and patterns. Ariel Merari's colleague Yoram Schweitzer described the current status as of October 2002.

"To summarize, it is likely that the concept of "a profile of a suicide terrorist" is too broad and varied for definition. It is possible to state that there is a row of profiles or joint characteristics shared by some of the suicide attackers in some of the groups."(Schweitzer 2002)

A Multi-Causal Approach

Through discussions with Yoram Schweitzer I became convinced of the validity of applying a multi-causal approach in a search for commonalities and patterns in terrorist profiling. The procedure I opted for will be described briefly to highlight the steps taken in the analysis.

To create a profile of a deceased suicide terrorist the first step is to suspend any form of preconceived ideas of morality. Profiling is not about judgement but about understanding. While a number of topics will be described that are relevant in terrorist profiling, there is really only one question to be answered through this type of study. What kind of personal development occurred in this individual's mind that enticed him to commit suicide in the name of God? The starting point is always to see them as individual human beings without succumbing to an immediate search for a general pattern. It is the accumulation of individual profiles that eventually leads to a sufficient amount of information that can be analysed in search of commonalities or patterns.

We are dealing with a dynamic process in which an individual's perception of himself and of the world changed to such a degree that self-destructive behaviour was considered a necessity. An entirely statistical approach towards terrorist profiling will be misleading. Some experts have compiled datasheets on deceased suicide terrorists and have been able to describe the typical suicide terrorist in statistical terms. But confirming that a certain percentage had completed high school or that young males are a decisive majority in suicide terrorism provide little understanding about their motivation. While this method certainly illustrates the general facts of the life of the terrorist it misses the personal developments that are essential to gain an understanding.

My starting point was a basic study of the individual's life story and to note both the periods of seemingly relative tranquillity but also the deviations from this pattern. An example is useful to highlight this preliminary inquiry. If a terrorist of Pakistani origin who has lived his entire life in Britain and without apparent reason suddenly relocates to Afghanistan there is both a pattern and a deviation in this observation. If there is no obvious explanation, like a new job or marriage, to identify his motive then what would could explain this relocation? Only certain people are attracted to war zones. Another commonly encountered break from an established pattern is the deliberate distancing from the family. Why would someone who was known to his family as a kind and caring person turn his back on his loved ones? This example of behavioural change has occurred in a number of cases and is important because these individuals do share other behavioural traits that set them apart from other Muslims in their respective communities. By slowly filling in the blanks the profiling expands gradually from the singular to the plural.

During the data collection stage it became quite evident that there is a wide disparity between the amount and the quality of background information available on each individual suicide operator. Given the time and the resources available for this study it was not possible to fill in all of the blanks. It was, however possible to identify the development of the phenomenon of Islamic suicide terrorism and to highlight the various categories of individuals who have been attracted to the idea of Martyrdom.

The motivational parameters that have been used in the profiling of Islamic suicide terrorists in this analysis belong to several different categories. They are related to culture, politics, religion, sociology and psychology. There was never any idea of ranking these five parameters because any form of ordering would inevitably result in foregone conclusions. This is a very deliberate distancing on my behalf from the often encountered emphasis on religious issues. It should be stressed that this study was based on a sceptical view of the exclusively religious nature of Islamic suicide terrorism. The purpose was to look for alternative interpretations with an open mind. The complexity related to the importance of these parameters is not related to a hierarchical dimension since it is the interplay between the parameters that produces a suicide terrorist over a period of time. The profiling of suicide terrorists from an exclusively psychological perspective for instance is no longer valid, reality is much more complex. Nor is it just a question of political disagreements. When existing profiling techniques have failed to understand the complex issues that leads an individual to sacrifice his life, it is because of a habit of using a monocausal approach. This is not to say that psychological studies cannot contribute to terrorist profiling, on the contrary, but it is not the only element in the process of the making of a suicide bomber. This multicausal perspective vastly increases the depth of the study because this type of profiling takes on additional aspects that can be analysed comparatively.

According to my data, 247 Islamic terrorists have carried out a suicide operation over the past two decades. They came from very different cultures, from all levels of society and from very different backgrounds. It would appear that they have nothing in common and the search for a single profile would be a noble but fruitless endeavour. It is true that there is no single profile but by applying a multi-causal perspective it is possible to categorize these individuals with some degree of accuracy into five distinct categories according to their particular motivations. Within these five different categories the terrorists share ideological perspectives, religious observances, political grievances and often display identical patterns of behaviour.

The categorization would be premature without a brief outline of what I consider to constitute the motivational parameters. These five elements need some elaboration in order to provide the reader with a general idea of the complexities involved in profiling.

The five motivational parameters

The religious parameter

All Islamic suicide terrorists are Muslims, and this hardly constitutes any revelation. However, it is all important to ask what kind of Muslims they are because they deviate from mainstream society in their interpretation of Islam to such a degree that they are willing to sacrifice their lives for their religious beliefs. Muslims who resort to violence are not representative of Islam. They are by any definition a minority, although they claim to be the rightful interpreters of the divine message of Islam. They legitimate their violent actions by invoking the holy tradition as well as the history of interpretation of the Holy Scriptures. Islam is invoked for legitimizing purposes in a much broader struggle that has to do with political and social realities. When Osama bin Laden declares Jihad, or Holy War, against the U.S. he is independently interpreting the Holy Scriptures and claims a personal right to distinguish right from wrong. He is in no way qualified to do so, as he lacks the proper credentials for interpreting the meaning of Islam in a modern context. In applying a very selective reading of the Quran it is not only commercial airliners that are hijacked but also the meaning of the will of God. Interpreting the message of the Quran is indeed a complex undertaking that has been simplified into the extreme by Islamic militants. Unschooling in the art of interpretation, the militants have succeeded in reducing a peaceful and compassionate religion into a political agenda that serves their own rather worldly purpose. Complex issues are reduced to black and white phenomena that cannot be discussed. One is either in agreement with the terrorists or part of the enemy.

In popular interpretations, both Muslim and otherwise, Jihad is often translated as the duty to engage in Holy War against infidels with no holds barred. This idea has nothing to do with the original concept of Jihad as described in the Quran. (Palazzi 2002) Jihad has different connotations in different contexts. It refers to an external struggle against the enemies of Islam as well as an internal struggle to purify oneself spiritually. The terrorist organizations use the concept of Jihad predominantly as a pretext for fighting the enemies of Islam. These enemies are labeled infidels, imperialists, and bad Muslims. This action represents a drastic simplification of the concept of Jihad. Not only is the concept of Jihad falsely interpreted, it is also described as an individual obligation. This obligation is elevated above other moral standards which may be abrogated. In this way the concept of Jihad is used as an excuse to set aside all traditional moral restrictions to fight with all means available. Through this extreme interpretation the individual terrorist is allowed to lie, steal and kill at will in the name of God, and is in this way far removed from the original meaning of Islam.

Other religious aspects that could be mentioned here are the notion of Paradise and the status of the Martyr. At least some were quite convinced that by performing their religious duties through a suicide operation they would automatically be admitted to Paradise. (IDF 2002) Likewise, the deeds of a Martyr are celebrated in the community because he has shown his absolute submission and dedication to Islam. According to the terrorist logic, the actions of the Martyr place him above everybody else as he has given his life for the safety and well-being of the larger Muslim community.

From these examples it is clear that Islam is a very important motivational parameter in the understanding of the mindset of the suicide terrorist. But it should also be stressed that the specific versions of Islam that are invoked in legitimizing suicide operations are far removed from the notions of mainstream Islam and its traditional forms of interpretations.

The social parameter

The Islamic terrorists are social beings like everybody else, and as this author claims perhaps more so. The anti-social behavior coupled with a black-and-white division of the world does not appear

very social at first glance. But as I will try to explain, the needs of the individual terrorist are closely linked to a desire to form social bonds. When Islamic militants refer to each other as brothers, there is a truism in this deliberately chosen vocabulary. The terrorist organization often takes precedence over family ties and influences individual members to blow themselves up as a symbol of dedication to the cause, but certainly also to impress their chosen brothers.

Social networks and family patterns have been uprooted in many Muslim communities across the world and have been transferred into a new environment. For some this change of habitat has meant the loss of a traditional network of support, and coupled with high unemployment rates, the contemporary Muslim world is left with little possibility of absorbing these newcomers into a social sphere. The needs and desires of these people are often impossible to attain, leaving many alienated and disillusioned about the benefits of modern society. They are not part of the progress they are witnessing, but are left sidetracked and superfluous. Instead of being players, and gradually advancing towards material gain and meaningful relations, they are reduced to spectators with no control over their own destiny. When the existing social structure has little offer in terms of future prospects and meaning, extremist ideologies becomes attractive because they provide answers to difficult questions. Religious extremism, and Islamic fundamentalism in particular, offers new members an identity and a chance of leading a meaningful life in the company of like-minded individuals. (Al-Azmeh 1993)

The process of socialization into a extremist group entails the setting of standards and limitations of thought and action. These dynamics have been described in psychologically oriented terrorist studies (Post 2002). Role models are identified and, not surprisingly, the Martyr represents the very peak of admirable behavior. The willingness to sacrifice oneself is not a normal behavioral trait in any social setting, instead is it formed through the guidance of charismatic leaders. Selection is important in terrorist motivation – being singled out for a martyrdom operation labels the activist as a true Muslim and utterly reliable. It is a badge of honor to be positioned at the vanguard of the Jihad.

The primary factor for controlling the behavior of the members is their own personal conviction and the exhilarating sense of mission. To assure the dedication of its followers the Islamist organization will meticulously try to control all aspects of the member's life. The virtual absorption of all the members time in activities related to the group, such as worshipping, proselytizing, fundraising and training activities. Gradually the members become insulated from mainstream society outside the organization, a fact that is recognized and urged by the organization. Indirectly this development leads to a dependency on the group for spiritual and social needs. At a certain point the members are ordered to desert their families and to sever all relations with the outside world. Ultimately the organization had become the member's total and only world. (Ibrahim 1980)

It would be misleading to think of this social contract as an exclusively Middle Eastern phenomenon. It is by no means restricted to a single geographic entity, but is related to societal conditions. Anywhere Muslims find themselves questioning the social conditions they inhabit, some will be attracted to membership in a group of people who feel in the same way. The intensity of the sense of despair and frustration varies from one social setting to another and also changes over time. As described by Fouad Ajami in his excellent study of the emergence of the Shi'a of Lebanon as a political force, it was a deep-seated sense of despair that served as the foundation for the popular mobilization and later acceptance of terrorism (Ajami 1986).

These observations on social dysfunctions may seem trivial, but they are unfortunately recognizable to many people. In itself, this social parameter does not explain why some choose to blow themselves up, the vast majority of people who experience despair manage to cope with the situation. Instead of studying the social parameter in isolation it must be coupled with the other

parameters mentioned here. It is the accumulated effect of these parameters that drives certain individuals towards self-destruction.

The cultural parameter

Basically there are two types of cultures that is supportive of Islamic suicide terrorism. The first is somewhat traditional in the sense that it draws on existing cultural traits and notions and raises the same to a previously unseen level of cultural centrality. The second is the exact opposite of the first. This culture draws on nothing; it is an artificial construction. Both of these cultures reinforce the belief that self-sacrificial behavior is a cornerstone in Islam. They are equally deadly but are founded on very different cultural constructions within the Muslim communities.

By looking at the Palestinian terrorist organizations and their use of suicide operations it is obvious that Palestinian society is experiencing a most unusual situation. The level of community support for suicide bombings among the Palestinian population has fluctuated since the eruption of the second Intifada but has remained consistently above 50%. This cannot be described as a fringe phenomenon; it is decidedly mainstream. The supportive attitude of the population evolves around two phenomena; traditional cultural elements and a steady flow of propaganda from the militant groups. Used in combination traditional culture and propaganda has become a very effective tool in enlisting popular support. (Watch 2002)

An example of a specific traditional cultural trait that has been invigorated to support suicide terrorism is the concept of family honor. There are numerous cases where a Palestinian suicide bomber has blown himself up to avenge the killing of a family member. The Martyr is then celebrated in the family and praised for his actions and in this way serves to improve the status of the family. In a society where there is a strong prohibition on suicide, suicide terrorism becomes an option for the depressed. In this case a martyrdom operation resembles assisted suicide, yet it preserves the honour of the deceased and his family.

The tradition-related form of martyrdom culture needs to be reinforced on a continuous basis because its traditional cultural roots are vague, and has not normally been associated with self-sacrifice. The weaker the culture the more it needs overt legitimization. For this reason the exploits of suicide bombers appear in television programs, popular music, religious sermons and on posters throughout the Occupied Territories. (Luft 2002) In schools Palestinian children are told that the Martyrs died a heroic death and that they are moral examples for future generations. In this way existing cultural traits are used and reinforced to legitimize suicide terrorism.

The second type of culture that is supportive of suicide terrorism is tied to the absence of a distinct cultural foundation. In my opinion no one has described this development more accurately than the French sociologist Olivier Roy. On writing about on what Roy terms “Europe’s sociological Muslims” the very hollowness of their cultural foundation becomes evident. The best insight on this type of non-culture is related to case studies of European Islamic terrorists.

The development in Europe since the early 1990s shows that the form of Islamic radicalization that leads to terrorism does not occur along a diaspora axis. On the contrary, it breaks with the countries of origin in favor of a de-territorialized and supra-national model. These radical militants pledge no allegiance to their country of origin or their adopted country, but instead swear allegiance to an imaginary community, the Muslim Umma. This radicalization goes along with Westernization as these youths are western educated. They became “born-again Muslims” in Europe and often through the mosque or prison experience according to Roy. (Roy 2002)

What is at stake for these individuals is the definition of a new community that has nothing to do with any particular citizenship. The central question is the definition of a western Muslim and it is an attempt to seal the borders of a community that is in the process of disintegration. A mental

picture of a beleaguered Islam substitutes a realistic appraisal that would confirm the fragmentary nature of Europe's multitude of Islamic communities. (Tibi 2002) The one-ness of the Umma only exists in the minds of the radical militants.

The European Muslim goes through a process of de-culturization, or the loss of an original identity. In its wake follows the adoption of new cultural norms in order to reconstruct a cultural identity. Young born again Muslims are no longer in line with the society of origin of their family, in a cultural sense they are free-floating. This process finds an outlet in neo-fundamentalism, a universal an imaginary Islam completely stripped of customs and traditions and adaptable to all societies. The neo-fundamentalist movements, greatly inspired by Salafist and Wahabist ideology, target individuals in doubt about their faith and identity. It is appealing to an uprooted, often educated and disgruntled youth, and Islam is reduced to a system for regulating behavior. They revel in the destruction of cultural symbols and the rejection of any culture; they are essentially culture-less. The de-culturalization is most significant in the absence of culturally defined moral standards. The acceptance of violence takes place in an environment that is completely decoupled from existing moral structures and the ultimate expression of this re-definition is the suicide operation.

Many other distinct sets of subcultures exist that are supportive of suicide operations. The examples of the Palestinians and the European Muslims were intended to illustrate the complexities involved and also to point out the fact that the culturally defined motivational parameter appears in a variety of forms and influences. There is no single cultural model or pattern that decisively and uniformly influences Islamic terrorists to blow themselves up. In this study it is sufficient to conclude the importance of a cultural element in the individual decision to partake in a suicide operation. The Palestinians and the suicide bombers who originated in Europe had diametrically opposed relations to their traditional culture, but in the end the outcome was identical.

The political parameter

Animosity towards the western world and America in particular has often been cited as a major factor in recruiting militants for the various Islamic terrorist organizations. This strained relationship deserves attention, and especially the specific charges that are leveled against the West. To gain a perception of the depth of anti-western sentiments is important to see how myth and reality has become intertwined. Perhaps the best way to illustrate the political observations of the terrorist mentality is to see current events through their own lenses.

Though extremely biased, Osama bin Laden's interpretation of current world events provides an insight into the mindset that justifies Jihad, and ultimately necessitates suicide operations. (Alexander and Swetnam 2001) His conspirational theory, whatever its foundation might be, should be analyzed carefully and taken at face value. These are the thoughts and words that propels others into suicide operations. To the suicide bombers, bin Laden is one of the very few who has managed to uncover the truth about the intentions of the Western world.

According to the terrorist interpretation the western world lead by the U.S. has embarked on a crusade with the ultimate goal of subduing all Muslims. Evidence presented to support this idea comes from a multitude of events that are interpreted selectively. The U.S. has invaded Afghanistan and Iraq and threatens other Muslims countries, especially Iran and Syria. Under the guise of a war on terrorism America has attempted to justify its meddling in the affairs on sovereign nations with complete disregard for other people. This aggression stems from a western hatred of all Muslims and a desire to control precious resources, most notably Middle Eastern oil. The West has shrewdly enlisted the support of corrupt and immoral regimes of Muslim countries, and these regimes can no longer be considered as Muslim. An example of this logic is the U.S. military presence in the Gulf region that from an Islamist point of view amounts to sacrilege. The Saudi royal family is thus perceived as being controlled by the enemy and for this reason constitutes a legitimate target.

Whether or not this interpretation of the current situation is correct is besides the point. What matters is the fact the members of the terrorist organizations fully believe in the mischievous intentions of the western world. When Muslims all over the world are subjected to unjust aggression the time has come to strike back with all means available. A confrontation in a conventional military sense is not an option, so terrorism is the only realistic option to fight back. The Islamic terrorists do not consider their actions as terror, but as a just and holy war necessary to liberate all Muslims from western oppression.

This radical interpretation of current events is very often coupled with a detailed critique of the governments of the Middle East. They are being accused of neglecting their religious duties that includes attention to the needs of the population. Corruption, unemployment and poverty are just a few of the examples mentioned in their statements, and they are usually correct observations. These inept un-Islamic governments are derived for neglecting their duties towards the people and are considered to be tacit allies of the U.S.

Politics play an important part in the making of a suicide terrorist. This generalized and brief description of the political views of the militant Islamists highlighted the fact that these individuals see the world in a very different light. (Monroe and Kreidie 1997) Far too many people can subscribe to these political views, yet they do not blow themselves up.

The psychological parameter

The perception of the terrorist as mentally ill stems from a predetermined worldview on behalf of the observer. There is no empirical evidence to support this argument. The terrorist who is killing and being killed in the name of Allah is sane by a clinical definition, although his mindset is simplified into the extreme (Hudson 1999). The recruits who display signs of pathological behaviour are automatically weeded out for reasons of organizational security. They are not trusted to follow orders and may jeopardize an operation or the survivability of the entire terrorist cell. By dismissing insanity as a possible model of explanation some other form of psychological conditioning must influence the mindset of a suicide bomber.

By stating that self-destructive behaviour is an abnormal condition there must be a number of characteristics among the group of people who have chosen to blow themselves up. The challenge then becomes one of identifying these behavioural traits. Behaviour reflects personality, and the suicide bombers are certainly self-destructive beyond discussion.

The emotional conditioning that enables individuals to become a suicide terrorist is based on individual circumstances and a controlled process of manipulation. This means that each terrorist organization employs a certain logic in screening potential candidates in which they look for particular personality traits. First of all there must be a willingness on behalf of the suicide candidate to submit to the authority of the terrorist organization. The assimilation into the terrorist cell requires absolute obedience. The trustworthiness of ones comrades in arms is a matter of life and death. But this act of submission curiously brings about a distinct sense of independence. The individual has been freed from the existing structures of morality and social norms. He is actually free to do as he pleases. Being on a mission from God has its benefits. Popularly speaking, the world belongs to the operative and he is beyond asking permission except from his immediate superiors. Al Qaeda greatly emphasizes the psychological stamina required for its Jihad. Religious indoctrination is considered more important than battlefield experience or terrorist training. If the hijackers of September 11 are viewed from this perspective it makes sense. Most of these individuals did not undergo rigorous terrorist-training rather it was the mental preparation that guaranteed the success of the mission.

When they fail to question the logic of a suicide operation it is often because they are unformed as individuals. It has been mentioned that the suicide bombers are usually in the mid-20s, but age is

deceiving. What matters is the level of maturity. Some displayed an immature, adolescent mentality. Others had suffered from periods of depression, followed by a major boost for the ego after the inclusion into the terrorist fraternity. They adapted to this new environment unconditionally to escape their inadequate lives. The escape into a fantasy world of Jihad provided a form of compensation. As sociopaths they lack a concern for the impact of their actions on others. They do not feel restrained by morality as violence is just another means. They have become indifferent to other people's sufferings, only their own cause matters. (Post 2002)

They rarely see themselves as aggressors instead they are the true victims. They have been persecuted, discriminated against or denied access to opportunities. Acquiring the role of the victim, because it is a social construction and thus acquired, is a deliberate undertaking. It has the dual-function of bracing the Jihadist against the evil forces of the outside world, yet at the same time it provides a feeling of communality among the self-proclaimed victims in the terror organization or the cell. The issue of victimization generates a sense of injustice that is constantly being reinforced. This perceived persecution entails either the acceptance of unfortunate circumstances or to fight back against the oppressors. Naturally, the suicide terrorists discussed in this study have all chosen the path of resistance.

The idea of a single profile of a suicide terrorist is obsolete because the diversity in background, religious outlook and political perspectives. The evidence contradicts the existence of a standard model of interpretation. There is no single profile, but instead five general categories defined according to the combination of motivational factors. As has been mentioned before there is never just one motivational parameter, but instead a combination of several at play. The five motivational parameters are always present in the process of the making of a suicide bomber, but in varying degrees. This needs some clarification.

All of the Islamic suicide terrorists were of course Muslims, but some were much more devout than others. In terms of the level of their religiosity there is a wide discrepancy between them.

There is a significant distance in terms of the role of religious convictions between the Lebanese Shi'as and the almost secular Chechen. In both cases did Islam play a role in their decision to blow themselves up, but for the Chechens it is apparent that a personal desire for revenge was the principal motivational factor. For the Chechen widow, cultural traditions coupled with a situation of extreme personal stress were much more influential than religion.

This example shows that while there is always a religious conviction, a social condition, a political grievance, a supporting culture and a personal crisis present, these five parameters are not uniformly influential. There is not an equal distribution in the importance of each motivational parameter. It varies from one individual bomber to another. It is precisely these differences in the motivational make-up of the individuals that leads to the possibility of constructing distinct categories. The categories have been designed to reflect the fact that within this diversity there are also similarities.

The resulting five Categories

Through the systematic analysis of the known suicide terrorists in the project database five categories resulted. The analysis was not based on statistical indicators, such as age, education, gender or country of origin. This data was not discarded however, but was from the outset considered of secondary importance. Instead the suicide terrorists were grouped according to their shared experiences and the similarities they displayed in their specific motivations. The individual suicide terrorists were examined according to a range of important questions and these are listed below.

1. General family relations:

What was the nature of the relationship to their parents? Did they experience close personal relationships with the members of the family? If a positive bond existed, was this later broken in any way?

2. Childhood:

Was there any evidence of suicide bombers having experienced a troubled childhood? Did their upbringing deviate from the standards and traditions of the community? Did domestic violence influence them in such a way that violence became the accepted standard of problem solving? Were they abnormal in their behaviour in any way?

3. Adolescence:

Did they experience a normal adolescence, their cultural background taken into consideration, or was it troubled in any way? Were they different from their peers? Or, another possibility, did their personality match the wallpaper to such an extent that terrorism was the only way for them to gain attention?

4. Female relations:

This parameter was included because of the intensive fixation of the medias on the heavenly rewards of seventy beautiful virgins promised to each Martyr. To what extent did the promise of eternal female company influence the decision to become a suicide terrorist? What was the relation to other women, their mothers, sisters and women in general. Why do seemingly identical Islamist organizations employ female operatives while others would never dream of allowing women to participate in Jihad?

5. Education:

Education was listed to check for patterns. I did not expect to find a distinctive pattern that would i.e. indicate that the majority of suicide terrorists were well educated. More interesting was their personal experiences with the educational system and their level of success. It is a well known fact that a considerable number of the September 11 hijackers had attended university, but this fact does not explain their subjective interpretation of obtaining a higher degree. Their ambitions were also of interest. What did they dream of?

6. Work experience:

Did the suicide terrorist have a working life or were they unemployed? If they did have a job, how did this experience influence their perceptions of the world. Were they well-liked colleagues or were they passed over for promotion because of attitude problems? Were they able to obtain the career and status they had envisioned for themselves?

7. International experience:

Based on the assumption that the individual worldview is related to personal experience with other cultures, it was of interest to investigate whether the suicide terrorists had any international experiences. Since some of the terrorist organizations explain the nature of Jihad in global terms it would be of interest to know if the suicide bombers shared this vision out of personal experiences.

8. Organizational affiliations:

Had the suicide terrorist been involved in terrorist activities prior to his suicide mission? If they were members of the hardcore of a terrorist organization how did they get involved in a suicide operation? Did they belong to the inner circle, the sympathizers or were they essentially recruited from outside the organization? Their history and level of involvement with the sponsoring organization was considered to be extremely important, because this insight would shed some light on the little understood recruiting process. Was the suicide terrorist involved in politics at one time or another, and did he experience disillusion with the legal parties and movements?

9. Religious outlook:

The label “Islamic fanatic” is a subjective term used to describe what is not understood. This question involved the religious perception of the suicide terrorist and if it changed over time. The difficult question was then to answer what type of Muslim they were. Some were Shi’a but most were Sunni and even a dedicated Sufist found his way into the ranks of the suicide bombers. The distinction between Shi’as and Sunni was considered too broad to be meaningful. Some displayed a remarkable personal religious revival, while others remained firmly embedded in their traditional religious culture. What was of interest in relation to their religious perception is how far and under what circumstances they removed themselves from their original cultural context.

10. Situations of personal crisis:

This question sought to identify exceptional events that may have influenced the life of the suicide terrorist. It could be a single traumatic experience but also a gradual downward spiralling resulting in a situation of absolute despair. Could a single event be identified as the “triggering event”, such as the death of a loved one?

11. Political views:

All of the Islamic terrorist organizations that have resorted to suicide operations have a political agenda, but what were the views of the individual suicide operator? Did a political awakening take place as a result of personal experiences with an occupying army? Did they harbour political grievances centred on a singular and specific event or was it rather the deplorable state of the world? I believed it to be significant whether their political views evolved around a specific situation, like the Israeli occupation of Lebanon, or a conspiracy theory about the imperialistic scheming of the western world.

12. Past criminal activity:

If convicted of a crime, then what type of crime was it? Was it a politically defined crime, murder or tax evasion? Had the suicide terrorists served a prison sentence and if so did this experience influence their disposition? Do individuals with a criminal record become attracted to terrorism and eventually a suicide operation?

In trying to answer each of the twelve questions it became much easier to categorize the bombers into separate entities according to their motivations. It is quite evident that the myth of the all-important role of religion in the making of a suicide terrorist is just a myth. The majority of suicide bombers were not fanatical in their religious outlook. Although they were Muslims their primary reason for carrying out a suicide operation was rarely a fanatical religious belief, but instead their decision originated in unfortunate personal circumstances.

The Islamic suicide terrorists can be grouped into two distinct general categories. The first group choose to blow themselves up primarily for ideological reasons, and they are the closest to the popular perception of the suicide bomber as the unwavering fanatic. The terrorists in the second group conducted a suicide operation primarily for personal reasons. Religious conviction, political sentiments and social conditions were of secondary importance, although they influenced the individual’s mindset considerably. This general categorization, and it’s subcategories are illustrated in figure 2.

Figure 2: General and Specific Categorization of Islamic Suicide Terrorists

Idealistically motivated:	Personally motivated:
Category I: The Oppressed Shi’a	Category III: The Frustrated
Category II: The Afghan Arab	Category IV: The Avenger
	Category V: The Uprooted

Category I: The Oppressed Shi'a

The first category of suicide terrorists evolves around Shi'ism. Suicide bombers from Hezbollah, Amal and the Al-Da'waa were primarily recruited because of their religious perspectives. The shrewd transformation of the symbolic universe of Shi'ism meant that the shared experience as an oppressed community provided a common sense of cause.

To the best of my knowledge all category I individuals were recruited in Shi'a communities during times of duress, which in practical terms means Lebanon during the civil war and among exiled Iraqi Shi'as. The feeling of mistreatment and persecution was founded in real circumstances, unlike other suicide terrorists who were later to come from relatively comfortable backgrounds.

This is certainly not to say that all Shi'a are suicidally inclined, but rather that a traditional and dormant myth was reinvigorated to legitimise a particular method of operation. These individuals share quite a few commonalities in terms of their motivations and support of terrorism. Generally speaking, they were young men with modest or no education from a poor or lower-middle class background with no international experience. A few were married with children, but their dedication to the "national resistance" always took priority over family affairs. Those who had a family were carefully screened over a long time to make sure that they were absolutely serious. These family fathers literally had to ask again and again to be sent on a suicide mission.

They did not need persuasion or longer periods of indoctrination because they volunteered fully knowing what they did. They were motivated by a potent combination of Islam and contemporary politics. Their definition of the conflict in which they were part was very simple and precise. They had to rid their country of foreign invaders from a decidedly disadvantaged position. All means had to be used to defeat the IDF and to make the superpowers make a hasty retreat from a conflict where they had no business. It was not just their right to strike back, it was an obligation and the enemy was well defined, visible and patrolling in the immediate neighbourhood. They found inspiration in the Iranian revolution that proved to the Shi'as that self-liberation was possible, but at a cost.

Category II: The Afghan Arab

When describing the second category an important distinction must be made to avoid later confusion. From my perspective there is a significant difference between those aspiring Mujaheddin who spent a few weeks in an Afghan camp to those who chose it as a lifestyle and actually fought in combat. It is a well-known fact that Mohammed Atta also went to Afghanistan, but he never fought there or elsewhere. He was never part of the fraternity that distinguished the Mujaheddin. These circumstances and his personal motivation to partake in a suicide mission place Atta squarely in the fifth category, because there is a difference between the veterans and the visitors of the Afghan camps.

The Afghan Arab category contains a wide variety of individual backgrounds and personalities prior to the Afghan experience. Whatever form of indoctrination they went through or whatever combat experiences they may have acquired, they changed to a degree that their background slipped into oblivion and insignificance. The shared experience of training in an Afghan camp transformed them into obliging and uncritical Mujaheddin who often severed all ties with their previous existence. From this point on they belonged to the Mujaheddin brotherhood with life and soul. Some had signed up for Jihad as teenagers and had stayed on when they realized they had found their purpose in life. These impressionable teenagers were surrounded by like-minded Mujaheddin, whom they admired for their uncompromising stance and reckless courage. The vision of the supreme Mujaheddin provided sufficient guidance for the rest of their short lives and they were

ready to believe that they were part of the Islamic vanguard destined to set the world straight. By enduring hardship in the trenches in Afghanistan, Kashmir, Bosnia and Chechnya in the fight against the unbelievers they acquired self-reliance and faith in a supreme being that continued to keep them alive.

There is absolutely no role for women in this category, and there is no reason at all to expect a change sooner or later. In terms of their religious background they were Sunni Muslims and the majority followed to the Wahabist ideology. Their educational level was above average most had at least some experience at university. They grew up in ordinary and often religiously conservative families, but I have not been able to ascertain a general trend of their family relations.

Regarding their distinct motivational make-up the religious parameter was the most significant. Some were indeed religious fanatics, a term I hesitate to use, but seems appropriate in this connection. This would then constitute the primary motivation, but it was strongly reinforced by political grievances.

The Afghan Arabs emerged in the mid-1990s and has since played a relatively insignificant role in the development of suicide terrorism, but there are signs that this may be changing. Operations have been carried out by category II terrorists on behalf the GIA, Al Qaeda, JEM and the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, and possibly also by the AAI in Kurdistan. Out of a total of about 247 individual suicide operatives category II represents about 12%. While there are literally thousands of Afghan Arabs scattered all over the world that have been either trained or have seen combat in Afghanistan they are conspicuously underrepresented in my statistics.

A possible interpretation could be the very important role played by the Afghan Arabs in a supporting role in the clandestine networks. Although they appear to refrain from self-sacrifice these veterans have been involved in the planning and logistics phases in most of the significant operations. The few Afghan Arabs who became suicide terrorists either returned to their country of origin or were incorporated into the ranks of Al Qaeda.

Category III: The Frustrated

The third category of suicide terrorists is almost exclusively related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

It is a stated fact that the Palestinian groups recruit exclusively in their own immediate neighbourhoods and with this knowledge in mind, profiling them appears to be simplified. Although the Palestinian suicide operations represents an isolated phenomenon that is preoccupied with the Palestinian problem it is misleading to portray the profiling of the perpetrators as straightforward. The escalation of the Palestinian conflict has unfortunately resulted in a widespread popular support for suicide operations. Merari's perspective is no longer valid as middle-aged family fathers, young women and children have joined the ranks of the martyrs.

It can be established beyond doubt that there is no statistical pattern to indicate that a specific and characteristic segment of the Palestinian population would be attracted to suicide terrorism. But a statistical search for a pattern is deceptive because the real profile cannot be quantified. Instead of age, education and so forth, it was a deep personal sense of despair that produced the bombers. The level of depression and frustration is not measurable, yet it is there for all to see, and to experience if you are an Israeli shopper or bus passenger. It has taken on a physical dimension. When the scope of Merari's studies have been widened to include both sexes, children, and university graduates it would appear that any type of similarity has disappeared when in fact there is a common denominator.

The Palestinians in the third category lived ordinary lives until the occupation affected them personally. Barred from pursuing their dreams and making a future for themselves they went through a period of frustration and depression. This dead-end situation was followed by a

questioning on a personal level which basically amounted to “what is to become of me”? The future Palestinian state was important to them, but their fate as individuals had priority. After a while, often spent in contemplation in the Mosque, they merged the deplorable state of the Palestinians with their own situation.

It is difficult to ascertain the degree of religiousness among the Palestinian suicide bombers. Before the second Intifada many were quite religious, but this has changed considerably. Personally I would characterize close to half of the Palestinians in this category as Born-again-Muslims. They took up religion as a means to cope with reality because it provided guidance where there was none. The motivations that drove a category III individual to opt for a suicide operation are complex, but above all of a personal nature. They did not see themselves as being part of a global Jihad nor did they try to save the entire Muslim world. Their grievances originated in a very local context, and as the result of an intractable situation, they felt compelled to act out their frustrations. Religion played the role of a supporting structure because only a minority could be considered religious zealots. The restrictions placed on the behaviour were of a cultural and social nature. In having little space to manoeuvre, Islam turned up as a viable alternative through which they could vent their deep frustrations. This is not in line with the traditional Palestinian culture and reflects a massive collapse in the meaning bearing structures. This has been understood and exploited by the terrorist organizations, especially Hamas who has recast the Palestinian collective identity in an Islamic mould. Through the self-appointed role as saviour of the Palestinians, the terrorist organizations have attracted women, children, wanted men and a host of others who felt vulnerable and frustrated.

Category IV: The Avenger

A category IV suicide bomber originates in a traditional society experiencing a situation of civil war. There is an overrepresentation of Chechen suicide terrorists who have chosen self-sacrifice over other forms of resistance. Whereas the third category experienced personal distress on a general level, the individuals in the fourth category have all suffered a direct and very personal loss. In every case that I have been able to verify did the death of a husband, relative or close friend function as the triggering event. The loss and the trauma they went through were indeed very real, and was much less related to a state of general frustration about their prospects for the future.

The personal desire to avenge family members or relatives killed by an invading force is coupled with a culturally rooted obligation to exact revenge for injustices. Jihad is the vehicle for exacting revenge, not the goal in itself. The Avengers were not known for their radical religious dispositions, they were quite ordinary in terms of their Islamic beliefs. To them, Jihad was the means to get even with those guilty of killing their loved ones, a global and civilizational confrontation was not on their mind. Some of these revenge killings were of a very personal nature, in which the person perceived to be responsible was singled out for assassination by suicide.

All category IV individuals were born and lived their short life in the society where they died. Almost all came from culturally conservative families where honour was a very important guiding principle in the life of the individual and also for the protection of the integrity of the family. The honour of the family had to be protected at all costs, above king, country and God. Thus the loss of a close relative triggered personal and cultural sentiments that dictated that this offence had to be avenged.

Only the third and fourth categories include female suicide bombers. That female suicide operatives would be included in this category is testimony to a less orthodox interpretation of Islam, not the contrary.

Category V: The Uprooted

The fifth category is certainly the most fascinating and also the most complex to analyse. The motivations of the first four categories can be related to with relative ease. They have blown themselves up to defeat an occupying force, to spread the message of a radical Islamic ideology, to escape from a life without future and finally to avenge the death of a loved one. The majority were spiritually and culturally anchored in their original communities and a logical pattern of cause and effect can be discerned. In general, their actions were a reaction to specific circumstances that are comprehensible to an observer outside their environment.

Within the fifth category are the majority of the suicide operatives of Al Qaeda and observed individually it is hard to group them in a definable entity. It is indeed a very diverse group of people with a wide range of nationalities and backgrounds represented. The absence of a discernable pattern regarding their national origin is exactly one of their defining characteristics. They have stopped identifying themselves through traditional nationalistic adherence and have become true internationalists. The majority of these individuals had extensive international experience in both western societies and the third world and proved their capability in living and operating in vastly different environments without striking roots anywhere. It is precisely this rootlessness that unites them and they have met each other in London, Brussels, Peshawar, Hamburg and Kuala Lumpur. They are united in their particular mindset.

Very few were religious zealots from childhood or adolescence, the majority became born-again-Muslims through an international experience. Their identity was tested when they lived among infidels in western countries. Those who grew up in a western society without a notion of what Islam is all about were exposed to religious dogmas they were absolutely unacquainted with, and they had no way of recognizing false prophets.

The cause was important, but probably more important was the desire to be an active participant in current world affairs. To make a difference mattered more than kinship ties, promising careers or starting a family of their own. In identifying with the mission an all-important question would be answered; "Who am I?"

Although quite a few of them were brilliant students and generally well-liked they had few if any friends outside their closed environment. After the cell was formed its members shut themselves off from any other form of intimate or personal contact. The almost complete absence of female companions made the voluntary seclusion in an exclusive male-oriented and male-dominated world a relatively easy decision to make.

They underwent a process of self reflection that was conducted in solitude without the knowledge or guidance of the family. None of the September 11 hijackers are known to have complained about their situation or personal well-being to their respective families. It appears that this process of contemplation was done in isolation and the clandestine life dictated that they lied to their families about their doings.

In a sense these Category V suicide operatives represent the essence of post-modernism. The detachment from previous meaning-bearing structures allows them to wander freely and to search for meaning wherever they see fit. They are men of the world but with nowhere to go. Moreover, they seem incapable of plotting a steady course for their lives and are basically left to their own devices until somebody decides to pick them up and guide them. Very little guidance was apparently needed for the September 11 hijackers who lived under deep cover in a hostile environment for years. Once the preparatory phase was set in motion, they basically took care of themselves with limited contact with their operational handlers. This is a strong indication that they must have experienced a high degree of spiritual comfort from the life in a terrorist cell. There were no defectors or doubters within the cells.

The willingness to carry out any order without question raises them above the crowd. This status is what they craved for all along, being labelled a mass murderer is to them a sign of recognition. Their obedience ensures them a place in history, and this I suspect is the real objective. They gain an identity through Jihad that they did not previously possess. The imaginary world they inhabit is shaped by a twisted form of Islamic ideology that actually breaks just about all the taboos normally associated with Islam. The killing of innocent civilians including Muslims, drinking alcohol, lying, stealing and discarding family obligations are just a number of transgressions committed in the name of restoring Islam to its former glory. The decoupling from their childhood environment has allowed for a selective and freewheeling interpretation of norms and values. The physical detachment from this environment inserts them in a symbolic world in which the interpretation of right and wrong is left unchecked by their previous mentors, be they relatives, friends, teachers and Imams.

In order to provide an overview of the actual distribution of the above mentioned 247 individual suicide terrorists into the five categories, I have included figure 3. This table shows the relationship between the terrorist organizations and the type of suicide operative recruited. The percentages given are accurate only to a certain degree. Due to the lack of data on specific individual bombers I have not been able to verify the correct placement into the categories. However, by knowing which terrorist organization that recruited them and when, it is safe to assume that they did not deviate significantly from the known individuals of the category.

Figure 3: Islamic Terrorist Organizations and the Categories of Bombers they attract

Suicide Operative Category:	Terrorist organization:
Category I: The Oppressed Shi'a 11%	Hezbollah Amal Islamic Jihad Al-Da'wa
Category II: The Afghan Arab 12%	JeM Egyptian Islamic Jihad GIA Al Qaeda Ansar al-Islam Jemaah Islamiya
Category III: The Frustrated Nationalist 56%	PIJ Hamas Al-Aqsa Martyr's Brigades Salafia Jihadia
Category IV: The Avenger 10%	Chechen Rebels Al-Aqsa Martyr's Brigades Hamas PIJ
Category V: The Rootless Internationalist 11%	Al Qaeda

Part IV

The European Dimension and Relevant Case Studies

The fifth category of Islamic suicide terrorist represents a formidable challenge to the intelligence community. They are extremely dedicated and single-minded in the pursuit of their goals. It is not possible to engage in a dialogue with this particular type of terrorist, they are not interested in negotiations. Seized documents have also revealed a profound interest in weapons of mass destruction, and should they acquire the means to launch a terrorist attacks with WMD they will with almost certainty do so.

Although the fifth category includes individuals of many different nationalities there are generally speaking two major clusters. A significant component originated from the Middle East, particularly Saudi Arabia. The other large group includes either European citizens or those who had lived part of their life in Europe. The remainder of this study is focused on the European dimension to Islamic suicide terrorism. In order to understand the significance of the European dimension in contemporary Islamic suicide terrorism a brief overview of the perpetrators is presented here.

December 25, 2000:

Mohammed Bilal. British citizen of Pakistani origin from Birmingham, UK.

Carried out a carbomb attack on the 15th Indian Army Corps headquarters in Srinagar, India.

September 9, 2001:

Dahman Abdel-Satter and Burawi al-Wahir. North African immigrants residing in Brussels, Belgium.

Conducted the assassination of Ahmed Shah Massoud, leader of the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan.

September 11, 2001:

Mohammed Atta, Ziad Jarrah and Marwan al-Shehi. Students from Egypt, Lebanon and UAE residing in Hamburg, Germany.

Hijackers and suicide pilots of the September 11 attacks.

September 13, 2001:

Nizar Trabelsi. Immigrant from Tunisia who lived in Germany and Belgium.

Arrested and subsequently convicted in Belgium for plotting suicide attack against U.S. forces in Belgium. Initial reports stated the intended target was the U.S. embassy in Paris.

December 22, 2001:

Richard Reid. British citizen who converted to Islam.

Arrested after a bomb concealed in his shoe failed to detonate on board a commercial airliner. Later convicted.

April 11, 2002:

Nizar Hawar. Tunisian who resided in France.

Bombed the synagogue on the Tunisian island of Djerba

April 30, 2003:

Omar Khan Sharif and Asif Mohammed Hanif. British citizens from Derby and London.

Bombed a nightclub in Tel Aviv.

This group of eleven individuals constitutes the known suicide terrorists. From a profiling perspective an additional three should be included because their background, motivations and certainly their actions and behavior strongly indicates that they were to take part in the September 11 attacks. Zacarias Moussaoui, Ramzi Bin al-Shibh and Zakaria Essabar all fit into the fifth category, and their associations with the known hijackers coupled with an intense interest in aviation suggests that the original operational plan for the attacks on U.S. landmarks included between five and seven hijackings.

I have selected five case studies to illustrate the individual developments that eventually resulted in a suicide operation. After these brief profiles I will turn to the recruitment environment in Europe that has produced these suicide bombers.

1: Mohammed Bilal, Jaish-e-Mohammed

The Indian Army's 15th Corps Headquarter was targeted on 25 December 2000. Five armed militants hijacked a white Maruti car in Rajouri Kadal and ordered the schoolteacher behind the wheel to get out. By the time he got around to file a complaint about the carjacking it had already been blown apart. The suicide bomber, Mohammed Bilal, was part of five-man team that carried out the attack that killed six Indian soldiers and three Kashmiri student.

Mohammed Bilal was a British national from Birmingham who had left for Pakistan in 1994 where he joined the Harakat ul-Mujaheddin (HuM). The Kashmiri terrorist organization posthumously described him as a "nightclub going lad" until he experienced a religious awakening at the age of 18. (Reuter 2002) He has been described as becoming a born-again-Muslim and focussed his lifestyle in accordance with a strict interpretation of Islam. Bilal abandoned his college studies as well as his family in Birmingham. This particular Pakistani immigrant family was well acquainted with the radical Sheikh Omar Bakri in London. Bakri claimed not only to have recruited Bilal for Jihad, but also his brother and several cousins who joined the same terrorist group in Pakistan. The claims of Sheikh Omar Bakri have not been verified, but Bilal is known to have received training in weapons handling and went through extensive religious indoctrination. In 1995 he returned briefly to Britain, but the purpose of this visit is not known. He returned to Pakistan and crossed into Kashmir where he remained active until his death. He is presumed to have operated with the HuM for a year until he was called back to Pakistan in 1999 where he enjoyed a very close relationship with Maulana Massoud Azhar, the military commander of the Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM).

Bilal's change in lifestyle was remarkable by any standard. Before becoming a born again Muslim he appeared to have been as ordinary as any young Briton, and there was no indication that he would embrace radical Islamism and volunteer for Jihad. Why he returned to Britain in 1995, and to what extent he made contact with his family during this visit I have not been able to ascertain. This particular suicide operation was only the second conducted by JeM. The reason for chosen a foreigner for this mission remains obscure, but I suspect that it was the combination of religious zealotry and organizational considerations. It is quite possible that Bilal volunteered for a suicide mission, having been inspired by the previous JeM operation. He was beyond doubt extremely committed to his perceived plight of participating in Jihad, he was a six-year veteran by the time of his death. Because suicide operations were a novel phenomenon in the Kashmir conflict at the time, it might have been difficult for the JeM to persuade its members of the merits of a martyrdom operation. From this perspective, a foreign volunteer known for his dedication would have been an ideal choice.

#2 Richard Reid, Al Qaeda

On December 22, 2001, Richard Reid boarded American Airlines flight no. 63 bound for Miami at Paris Charles de Gaulle airport. When an explosive device hidden in his shoes failed to detonate he was overpowered and handed over to the authorities. The previous day he had attempted to board an identical flight but was detained by security personnel who became suspicious of his behaviour. Reid was later tried and sentenced for the attempt to blow up a commercial airliner.

Despite the heinous nature of Reid's terrorist action a closer look at his background reveals a number of interesting aspects to this foiled suicide operation. (Elliott 2002) Richard was the only child of a marriage that was problematic from the beginning. His father, Robin Reid of Jamaican origin, worked for British Rail and met Lesley Hughes in 1972. She was the daughter of an accountant and magistrate from North East England. The couple separated when Richard was four years old and divorced in 1984 when their son was 11. The parents remained on reasonable terms, but after the divorce Robin Reid lost contact with his son. When the relationship with his mother became strained, Richard left to live with his aunt (Seaton 2002). Things did not work out well for him, and he left school at the age of 16 with no particular designs for his future. Shortly thereafter he turned to pretty crime, and was quickly caught. After a spell in Feltham Young Offenders Institute, father and son met again. In the meantime Robin Reid had converted to Islam, and tried to convince Richard of the friendships he would make if he became a convert himself. Richard took to the idea and began to worship at the Mosque in Brixton.

Later on Reid stayed a few nights in the basement of the Mosque at Finsbury Park led by the charismatic Abu Hamza. From this point on his life changed for good. His travel activity was certainly beyond the means of an unemployed young man, and his destinations were not regular tourist localities. He reported his passport lost at the British Consulate in the Netherlands and received a new one. Later he used the same procedure to obtain another British passport from the British Embassy in Belgium. It must be presumed that the reason for acquiring new identification was the Pakistani entry stamp in his original passport. This would arouse suspicion and could indicate that he had been to Afghanistan (Gunaratna 2002). Richard Reid was dispatched to Tel Aviv to conduct reconnaissance on possible terror targets. During the second half of 2001 his travels included visits to London, Amsterdam, Tel Aviv, Cairo, Brussels, Paris, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Richard Reid was every inch the "useful idiot" to the terrorist cause. His story shed some light on important aspects that would lead up to a suicide attack. It is quite evident that Reid was incapable of organising and conducting a terror strike on his own. He lacked the contacts, the skill and certainly the discipline to succeed. When his doings are considered in this light it becomes quite apparent that there was a large and comprehensive network behind him at all times except on the actual mission. Somebody told him where to go and how to obtain a new passport. Somebody else provided him with the explosives filled shoes, and others told him where to travel and what to do. Reid was the born loser who was picked up by people skilled in manipulating individuals who had come to a dead end in their lives. His story is remarkable because of the fusion of a lost soul with a very extensive and effective network guiding him through all stages of the process. Being a social outcast, any friendship was consider a gain.

3 Mohammed Atta, Al Qaeda

Sufficient information on Atta's background is widely available but is often presented as trivialities by journalists and academics who seem preoccupied in uncovering the 9/11 conspiracy in its entirety. Just as interesting as the plot is the personality of Mohammed Atta.

Mohammed Atta was a devout Muslim since his teenage years. From early adolescence and throughout his life he prayed and studied the Quran regularly, shunned alcohol and was careful

about not eating unclean food. Atta's relations to his parents was characterized by a stern father and a mother who adored and spoiled him. In Cairo he had obtained a degree in engineering with distinction. This however was considered insufficient and at his father's insistence he went to Germany to complete an advanced degree. "*I told him I needed to hear the word "doctor" in front of his name*", his father later explained when he described why Atta had enrolled at Hamburg-Harburg Technical University. (Brinkbäumer, Cziesche et al. 2002) He was remembered by his professor Dittmar Machule as a very nice young man, polite, very religious and with a highly developed critical faculty. His thesis analysed the best ways to preserve traditional Muslim cityscapes facing modern development. The quality of his work won him the highest possible honours when it was submitted in August 1999.

In 1995 he worked as a part-time draughtsman in the architectural consultancy Plankontor. He was a well-liked colleague, though reserved. His work was beyond reproach, it was meticulous and timely. The only thing that struck his colleagues as odd was Atta's habit of praying in the office at the designated prayer-times. This decidedly un-German approach to a modern work ethic did not cause Atta any problems. His work was what mattered and it was above expectation, so the Germans agreed that everyone should be entitled to a little cultural leeway.

As an illustration of the international dimension of suicide terrorism is the testimony given by Mounir Motassadeq in a German court. Motassadeq was Mohammed Atta's financial organizer and he claimed that Atta's cell had joined Al Qaeda to fight in Chechnya. While training in Afghanistan Atta came to the attention of the Al Qaeda leadership who realized that they had acquired a capable and determined asset (Riebling and Eddy 2002). Atta was simply too precious to be wasted in the rugged hills of Chechnya and was given another assignment. I believe the rest of Atta's short life is fairly well-known to merit any further deliberation in this context.

It seems that Atta was preoccupied with trying to do the right thing throughout his life. The people who met him, either liked him, worked well together with him or did not take much notice of his presence. He was certainly no troublemaker and his conflicts were internalised. At various stages he did his best to please his father, his colleagues, his professor and his Al Qaeda mentors. When the pattern was reversed about 1999 Atta changed considerably in appearance and ideology. The structure of the Hamburg cell evolved around the indisputable authority of Atta. He had carefully screened the prospective cell members and only accepted those who would serve him blindly. Making up for his previous self-depreciation, it can be assumed that he revelled in this newfound and unexpected role of power that was projected towards a sinister purpose. This was likely the only forum in which he was ever to reach the status he craved, and upon this realization he committed himself fully to making a name for himself.

4 Nizar Trabelsi, Al Qaeda

How does a successful soccer player in the German Bundesliga wind up as the candidate for a suicide attack on American forces stationed in Europe? The story of Trabelsi's transformation is the story of a personal deroute and his figure is far more tragic than the popular image of a martyr suggests.

Trabelsi's soccer career began in 1989 when his uncle persuaded the manager of the Fortuna Dusseldorf third division team to give his promising nephew a try. The young Tunisian immigrant was certainly talented on the soccer field and was eager to please his surroundings. His former team-mates remember him as someone not interested in religion or politics. The only peculiar thing about Trabelsi was his habit of placing a tiny Koran into his sock as a shin guard before playing (Rotella and Zucchini 2001). Initially Trabelsi was considered friendly, but he did not socialize with his team-mates or colleagues. His inadequate social skills was soon coupled with an attitude problem. He would show up late for practice and was generally not willing to put the energy needed

into a career as a professional soccer player. His former coach, Alexander Spengler, commented on Trabelsi's problem, "*Nizar had all the qualifications for a soccer career, he just did not make use of his talents.*" (Rotella and Zucchini 2001). A few years later his attitude problem had increased. His new team-mates at the Wuppertaler Sports Club scorned him as a troublemaker because of his habit of blaming others for his problems. His contract was terminated before the season was over in 1993. The following two years he drifted to other soccer clubs dropping to a lower league every year until 1995 when he was definitively out of the soccer business.

Trabelsi's drug abuse had started some two years earlier after he divorced his wife and became separated from his daughter. The divorce broke him and a personal decline combined with drugs and alcohol followed. Trying to finance his expensive habits he tried his hand in the drug smuggling business by ferrying cocaine from Rotterdam to Germany. He also failed in this profession when he was caught by the German police and subsequently sentenced to 18 months probation in 1994. Continuing his downward spiral during the period between 1994 and 1998, Trabelsi resorted to petty crime. Theft, fraud, illegal possession of a gun and a string of other offences characterized this period.

Apparently he realized that Germany had little left in stock for him. It would only be a matter of years, if not months, before he was caught for good and held accountable for his criminal activities. Presumably looking for a place where he could start over he went to his native Tunisia. Whether Tunisia or Trabelsi had changed for good is debatable, but he returned to Germany, obviously having decided against relocation. In 1996 he travelled to Saudi Arabia, but no information is available on this trip. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a decidedly unattractive destination for a criminal drug abuser with an attitude problem. Two scenarios seem likely under these circumstances. Either his religious revival was in full force at this time, and a trip to Mecca would sort him out, or someone had told him that this was the place to go. There were people he should meet who would take of his salvation. Whatever the truth, the real pilgrimage was initiated in October 2000 when he decided to travel to Afghanistan. German investigators have insisted that Trabelsi trained in an Al Qaeda facility, but this allegation has been denied by Trabelsi. When he resurfaced in 2001 it was in Brussels where he rented an apartment in an anonymous neighbourhood. This move was right out of the Al Qaeda manual from the chapter on how to live under deep cover in a hostile environment. (UK/BM 2000) When the preparations for the attack intensified, Trabelsi went to Spain and it is possible that he met Mohammed Atta on this trip.

The leader of Trabelsi's terrorist cell, Djamel Beghal, had been ordered by the Al Qaeda to launch an attack against American targets in Paris. Based on information obtained from Beghal, Belgian police raided Trabelsi's apartment on September 13, 2001. The raid turned up an Uzi submachine gun and a notebook with references to various chemicals used in homemade explosive devices. The owner of the restaurant where the chemicals were stored was arrested with Trabelsi indicating to investigators that the plans were at an advanced state. In standard Al Qaeda fashion it was to be a coordinated strike against two targets. The American Cultural Centre in Paris was to be blown up by a large carbomb while Trabelsi simultaneously detonated himself in or around the U.S. Embassy also in Paris. In another version of the operational plan, the intended target was American soldiers stationed in Belgium, and Trabelsi has later denied that there was any plan of a bombing in France. (CBS 2003)

The manager of the Wuppertaler soccer club, Firedhelm Runge, incidentally bumped into Trabelsi in 1999. He barely recognized his former player who had since their last encounter discarded his rastalook and now sported a shaved head. Runge still remembered the eager youth, and when Trabelsi was arrested in Brussels he found it difficult to believe. The transformation of Trabelsi was

remarkable. After his arrest he claimed that the suicide operation was meant to cleanse him of his sins, but apparently Allah did not want Trabelsi just yet.

From his development it appears that a relatively minor character flaw was allowed to grow up to a point where his team-mates, family and wife have had enough of him. Trabelsi was a Muslim, but no one who knew him in the 1990s ever thought of him as a radical. After a long period of wandering and with trial and a lot of error he finally found a way out of his depression. It must be suspected that Trabelsi had little inclination for saving the world. He appears much more preoccupied with his own salvation and ending his misery. It is not known with any certainty when Trabelsi met Beghal, but it was at a time when Trabelsi's self-esteem was at its lowest and Beghal was a rising star in the international world of terrorism. The bonds between the two merits further inquiry as it must have been either Beghal or Atta who presented the idea of a Martyrdom operation to Trabelsi. Whomever of the two it was, that individual certainly exercised a tremendous influence over Trabelsi's destiny. Again the background of a captured suicide bomber reveals that far from being a mythical figure his real motivation was of a much more personal nature. Trabelsi was picked up at a point in his life where he was incapable of solving his own problems. His handlers promised resurrection through the absolute devotion to the cause, and to Trabelsi the offer must have appeared as an opportunity instead of a sacrifice

5 Asif Mohammed Hanif, Al-Muhajiroun/Hamas

On April 30, 2003 on a Wednesday night in Tel Aviv, two men strolled towards the popular seafront blues club called Mike's Place. Their interest was not in music or socializing with the other guests, instead they were preoccupied by getting undetected by the security guard. Their mission was as simple as it was lethal; to enter Mike's Place and detonate their concealed bombs to maximise civilian casualties. The first man to approach the entrance was Asif Mohammed Hanif but he chose to detonate the bomb, when he was confronted by the security guard. The second bomber realized he would not get inside the club and pressed the switch. It failed to ignite the explosive device, but the bomber Omar Khan Sharif managed to drop his bomb belt and flee in the following confusion. The security guard paid with his life for his vigilance, but to his credit only three others were killed and another 50 injured.

Shortly after the explosion a man who identified himself as Abu Berek called AFP and stated; *"This attack was carried out by a martyr from Tulkarem to avenge Mazen Erapeh (an Al Aqsa member recently killed in Nablus by the IDF) and was jointly planned by the Al Aqsa and Al Qassam Brigades"* (Singer 2003). This particular suicide operation was the first time the Palestinian terrorist organizations had ever used a foreign national brought into Israel specifically to become a martyr. Reportedly, a Hamas operations officer named Imad Al-Alami who was stationed in Damascus controlled the operation and it was him who had been in contact with Hanif and Sharif (Debkafle 2003). The bombers were both British nationals and they had taken an elaborate route to get to Damascus where they had stayed for at least several weeks. A guide took them to Jordan, where they avoided Amman, later to enter Israel through the Allenby Bridge crossing. They aroused no suspicion as they presented genuine British passports and were free to continue to the Gaza Strip where they kept a low profile for about two weeks as special guests of a local Hamas cell. Members of this cell also helped the two bombers cross from Gaza and into Israel without being detected. A week before the bombing they spent a single night at the Hayarkon hostel in Tel Aviv. A popular place with backpackers from all over the world the two men would not have aroused suspicion, and Mike's Place was just down the street. They both returned to Gaza where they were later spotted participating in a protest march to commemorate the death of an American peace activist. Other Hamas or Al Aqsa operatives waited in Israel to ferry them to their target and probably waited to witness the spectacle and assisted Sharif in his escape since he was able to make a clean getaway.

The two men had returned to Hayarkon and checked in to the hostel eight hours before the attack. The receptionist recalls that they were very polite and appeared educated and intelligent and that it was Hanif who did most of the talking (Langley and Bamber 2003). Despite the fact that the target was only two minutes of easy walking away, they left Hayarkon at 00:30, half an hour before the attack. It is not known if they had contact with anybody during this interval or if they just went out for a stroll before a hard nights work.

Most observers to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict were bewildered by the emergence of foreign suicide bombers. It was thought that the Palestinian had plenty of candidates to choose from without resorting to outside recruitment. This confusion was mirrored in Hounslow in the Western part of London where Hanif originated. The 21-year-old suicide bomber was considered a very unlikely candidate for anything violent, and certainly not anything remotely self-destructive.

Asif Mohammed Hanif was born in India in 1981 as the second youngest of four brothers. The family settled in Hounslow where they were noticed for their religious life-style. The modest family home in Hounslow was marked by religious observance, but in a personal and non-political way. Hanif's sister wore the headscarf, but no one who knew the Hanif family seemed to care, they were considered a good family. The children went to school in Hounslow and Hanif wanted to move on after he graduated. Between 1998 and 2000 Hanif worked in a duty free shop at Heathrow Airport's Terminal Three. He was employed as a shop assistant by Alpha Retail and was given the standard security clearance. Besides this part-time job he studied at Cranford Community College in Hounslow focussing on business studies. His co-workers noticed a growing interest in Islam but he continued to perform well.

Hanif was a regular attendee at the Hounslow Mosque and people in the community knew him for two reasons. The most obvious was his size and his matching charm and both earned him the nicknames "Teddy Bear" and "Huggy Bear" (Dodd 2003). The other reason was his teenage passion for Sufism, a very peaceful and somewhat mystical branch off mainstream Sunnism. The devotion Hanif developed for Sufism was not unnatural for in congregation at Hounslow Mosque. It has maintained a good reputation for preaching and encouraging the individual Muslim to connect with his spiritual self in a positive way. The deliberate emphasis on meditation and prayer had led to a clash with followers of the radical Al-Muhajiroun and they were subsequently expelled from the Mosque in 1996. For years Hanif had been an active and popular member of the "Light Study" group, which is an international Sufi group with its head at the Hounslow Mosque. The British Amir of Light Study, Rifat Sheikh, knew Hanif well and remembered him fondly. The Amir had encouraged Hanif's study trips abroad and had detected a gradual change in the young man. *"Every time Asif returned from Syria, the softer and gentler he seemed.... As if he was undergoing genuine spiritual change. He would hear of suicide bombings and say, "God forgive us, this is not the way of our tradition", and he openly condemned it"* (Bright and Alam 2003).

This interest had materialized in a desire of becoming a Hafiz, meaning a protector of the Islamic faith. He had travelled to Morocco, which is the right place to go for Sufi knowledge and insight and later on to Damascus to learn Arabic. Hanif apparently arrived in 2000 and enrolled at the University of Damascus. At this time it would have been impossible for him to dedicate himself to his studies without noticing the atmosphere on campus. The second intifada had erupted and the 20,000 students were outraged by the Israeli aggression. It was during one of his visits to Damascus that he met Omar Khan Sharif from Derby who would later make up the other half of the suicide strike team. Other sources have pointed out that Hanif's travel itinerary also included Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia sometime after 2000 with the purpose of visiting holy sites and familiarizing himself with the culture.

In March 2003 the Italian journalist Claudio Franco was on assignment in Tottenham north of London. The purpose was to interview the controversial leader of the radical Al-Muhajiroun,

Sheikh Omar Bakri. At the Al-Muhajiroun office, Franco was served a meal by a large man. He had a full black beard and wore the traditional Pakistani Qamiz over his jeans. He presented himself as Asif Mohammed Hanif and readily gave his opinion on the discovery in Paris of the powder thought to be deadly toxic substance ricin. Hanif expressed his regret that whoever had possessed the poison had not used it. Franco replied that his sister who was in Paris at the time might have been in danger. To this Hanif snapped that it was entirely his own fault and that he should not allow his sister in dangerous places such as the Paris metro, this was war (Franco 2003).

A close friend of Hanif, Shazad Gill from Hounslow, had difficulties in connecting his friend with the suicide bomber who blew himself up in Tel Aviv. *“He was a nice polite guy, very anti-violence. He had everything to look forward to and wanted to be a teacher. I still think it is possible his passport was stolen”* (Bright and Alam 2003). Hanif’s passport was not stolen, on the contrary, it was a well-guarded treasure that enabled him to infiltrate Israel to carry out his mission. When his friend speculated about stolen a identity the real issue was probably that Hanif lived a double life that only a handful of people knew about. If he was as devoted to Sufism as one would assume then why ever would he travel to Taliban ruled Afghanistan? There was nothing for Hanif and his spiritual development to be found in a lawless place that ideologically was aligned with the most extreme version of Wahabism. The religious distance between Sufism and Wahabism is as far apart as possible in Islam; they are as different as day and night.

Outwardly the transformation was recognizable, as his former mentor of Light Study testified. Yet simultaneously this tranquillity had a double connotation. Hanif was in all likelihood recruited in Damascus at an undisclosed time. He was a valuable asset because of his religiosity and his British passport. The students who go to Damascus are often open to all kinds of spiritual and political influences and the atmosphere must have radicalised Hanif. The mood was decidedly against Israel and the open display of hate, and the praise lavished on the suicide bombers could very well have been infectious to a young and naive Briton. “Huggy Bear” was characterized by friends and neighbours as a quiet and very friendly person. He was easy to get along with and stayed out of trouble. He had never had problems with the police and his friends testified that he kept his distance to the local Al-Muhajiroun troublemakers. If so, then why was he bluntly stating that “this is war” to a curious journalist only a few months before his untimely death? It appears that Hanif lived a double life and was either forced to make a choice about his future direction or did his own contemplation. The mutual incompatibility of Sufism and radicalism dictated a break with either one of them.

Recruitment of suicide terrorists in Europe

To think of recruitment of suicide terrorists as a phenomenon exclusively related to exotic localities in the Middle East, South East Asia or Afghanistan is to underestimate the importance of Europe. The current trend of recruitment for suicide operations in Europe started in 1999 with the establishment of the well-known Al Qaeda cell in Hamburg run by Mohammed Atta. Since then Europe has become an increasingly important region for Islamic terrorists. This is not so much because of logistics, infrastructure or the planning capabilities of the terrorists, but because of demographics.

Britain, together with France and Germany, has experienced the longest established and best functioning recruiting infrastructure of the Islamic militants in Europe. (Gunaratna 2002) Terrorists have specifically been recruited in Europe for suicide operations overseas and within Europe. At the time of writing about a dozen suicide bombers are known to have been recruited of whom three were apprehended before they set out on their final mission.

The tolerant attitude of governments and the population in general has resulted in a systematic effort by radical clerics to preach the virtues of global Jihad from Mosques in Europe. The best

known of these Mosques is the one located in Finsbury Park in North London. Led by the charismatic Abu Hamza Al-Masri since 1996, himself a former Mujaheddin who lost both hands and an eye in an explosion in Afghanistan in 1993. Abu Hamza appears to have been a vital link in sending young Muslims off to the train for Jihad. Richard Reid, Zacarias Moussaoui and Djamel Beghal, who recruited Nizar Trabelsi, were all connected to his congregation (Shameen 2002). Feroz Abbasi, a young Briton now detained at Guantanamo on terrorist charges, revealed that it was people from Finsbury Park who helped him organize his terrorist training in Afghanistan. Abu Hamza was singled out as his mentor. The Mosque at Finsbury Park doubles as a temporary asylum. Young men with nowhere to go are offered to stay a night or two in the basement. Many suspected with links to Islamic terrorism now imprisoned around Europe have spent a few nights at the Mosque, raising suspicions about the people they met and the topics they discussed (Shameen 2002).

By far the most valuable insight into the recruiting process of militant Islamic extremists within Europe is the biography of Abd Samad Moussaoui. He is the older brother of Zacarias Moussaoui who is accused by the U.S. authorities of being the 20th hijacker in the 11. September plot. The book "*Zacarias Moussaoui. The making of a terrorist*" should be on the top of any list on essential reading on Islamic terrorism. The transformation from a dedicated student who planned to start his own import-export business to suicidal terrorist is a startling revelation of a long and sinister change in personality. While Zacarias's problems were indeed many and complex, it required a substantial and dedicated effort to estrange him from his previous life. The recruiters in London who spotted Zacarias recognized his vulnerabilities. By the time they approached him, he was ripe for Islamist propaganda, all he needed was a mentor.

"The recruiters invariably proceed in the same way. First of all, they pick out young people who have been estranged from their families, whether this has been imposed or chosen. These young people, with no adult to guide them, are thus cut off from the strong moral anchors that are their father, mother, brothers and sisters, and even friends. The extremely chaotic personal and family history of Zacarias reveals someone deprived of these anchors. I was his only safeguard. But in London he was far away from me. In the early stages of what can only be called an exile, we talked very often on the phone and he returned regularly to France. On those visits he talked to us about his daily life. Then he changed. Gradually, he became more aloof. He stopped telling me details about his life, he became taciturn. He had always been discreet, but now he became secretive. He no longer told me who he was meeting, or how he spent his days, and even less about what he exactly lived off. A state of non-communication developed." (Moussaoui 2003)

The majority of suicide terrorists, who were European citizens or worked or studied in Europe, volunteered for personal reasons. Reid, Moussaoui and Trabelsi shared a chaotic personal life and had all reached a dead end. As Willy Bruggeman, the former deputy director of EUROPOL stated, many of these people have lived in Europe for a long time and are getting frustrated about the perceived double-standards of the Western world in relation to the Muslim communities. These young men have become radicalised only after living abroad (Fuller 2002). The process of the recruitment of Islamic terrorists in Europe has been refined over the past decade to the extent that it today is very efficient in finding and keeping vulnerable personalities.

Europe is gradually but surely replacing the Middle East and Afghanistan as the recruiting hub of Islamic suicide terrorists. During the 1990s the terrorist networks managed to stay clear of counter terrorist investigations and only a few were uncovered. There is still a significant terrorist presence in Europe organized along mutual ideologies and personal friendships. The significance of a shared ideology is crucial and has allowed radical Muslims to gain entry into an otherwise closed

community of holy warriors. An example is the recruitment of the members of the Hamburg cell. They were recruited by Mohammed Zaydar, a 41-year-old German citizen of Syrian origin. Zammar became a frequent visitor to Mohammed Atta's apartment, and he was the man with the connections. As he told the aspiring terrorists *"if you are serious you need to go there and to see him, tell him I sent you"* (Finn 2002).

These connections are very fluid and it would be impossible and quite meaningless to portray them in any sort of figure. The operatives are highly mobile and frequently move about as they see fit, both for operational reasons but also to slow down any possible counter terrorism effort. These operatives are well aware of the bureaucratic impediments that have effectively hampered a thorough investigation of their doings. Efforts to prevent terrorist recruitment in Europe increased dramatically after 11. September but with limited results. The sudden change in the attitude of the governments meant that the recruiters were prohibited to speak as openly as they had done right up until the attacks in the U.S.

Despite the fear the Afghan Arabs invoke they represent less than 10% of suicide operatives from the 1980s up to the present. This is an intriguing aspect because it runs contrary to common expectations. While perhaps up to 30,000 young Muslims from all corners of the world have been trained and fought in Afghanistan they play a different role than what is expected. They have not been the ones to blow themselves up in spectacular suicide operations but are rather conspicuous by their absence in this type of operations. They do however play a crucial role in maintaining clandestine networks, operating cells, taking care of communications and logistics.

The U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 denied the terrorists access to a safe haven to train and indoctrinate recruits. But considering the number of European nationals who underwent training in the Afghan camps their experiences are worth a closer look. (Shay and Schweitzer 2000) The combat training was coupled with a conditioning of the mindset of the recruits. The steps involved in this gradual process is best described in Zacarias Moussaoui's biography:

"Once in the camp, it is easy, as in any sect to make him loose his bearings. First of all he is put through athletic training, and then training in weapon handling. These are intensive exercises. He is always being set challenges that are increasingly difficult to meet. The young recruit is not well fed. He gradually becomes exhausted. He never manages to completely come up with what is being asked of him. After several weeks or months, he gets the feeling that he's not capable of doing what is expected of him. He experiences a feeling of embarrassment and malaise. In his own eyes, he is completely belittled: he feels guilty because he is incompetent. And yet he is told over and over again that others before him have succeeded and gone on to "great things"..... And if he carries on, it is to the bitter end. Because the only thing he can do to help the cause is to give his life to it. And this will also prove to others that, at the end, he met their expectations. He is now ripe for suicide." (Moussaoui 2003)

The process of selecting a candidate for a suicide operation was not all too difficult once the recruits were in the camp. As the quote illustrates, emphasis was less on technical aptitude than the nurturing of a certain mentality. The desired change in the recruit could only be brought about by an arduous and humiliating experience that would separate the mentally strong from the lesser beings. By exposing the young men to intense rigors those who passed the test would prove their dedication. If they survived the training phase without suffering a break down they would become trusted members of a sacred fraternity. In this respect it should be remembered that bin Laden himself was rather unformed and naïve when he first came to Afghanistan (Post 2003).

An example of a suicide terrorist who went through this training and lived up to the expectations of his trainers was Mohammed Atta. He had left Germany for Afghanistan to train in the camps, but had initially planned to join the Chechen rebels and to fight against the Russian army. The instructors in the Afghan camp quickly realized that they had a very special and dedicated individual in the course. Atta was approached and persuaded to drop the idea of fighting in Chechnya, he was considered too valuable to become another statistic in the Caucasus. The Al Qaeda leaders had great confidence in his abilities to plan and operate on his own, but would naturally support him in whatever way they could. Atta was flattered, yet it is not known at what stage of the operation he realized he was destined to perish. The Atta who returned to Europe was a changed man; in his physical appearance but more strikingly in his personality. He had become more serious than ever and had neither time nor patience for distractions. This self-discipline he had brought with him to Afghanistan had been reinforced and projected into a single purpose.

Up until May 2003 the Palestinian suicide bombers were exclusively recruited in Israel or in the Occupied Territories. This changed after Asif Mohammed Hanif and Omar Khan Sharif, both of them British nationals, were recruited in Damascus by Hamas. A few days after the British bombers had attacked in Tel Aviv, The Sunday Times ran a front page story titled “*50 suicide bombers in UK*” (Hellen and Leppard 2003). The specific number of suicide candidates was given by Hassan Butt, who is a self-styled recruiter of British volunteers for Jihad. He claimed to have been approached by about 50 men, aged 17 to their late thirties. According to Butt about 20 were absolutely serious. They were immigrants with origins in Pakistan, India and Bangladesh. While Butt’s figures must be considered as wildly exaggerated, it underlines a disturbing trend. Even if just two of the candidates were to actually blow themselves up they would be a serious headache for the British government and could provoke a reaction from ordinary Britons.

The eleven suicide terrorists described in this study were all connected to Europe in one way or another. It is not their status as immigrants, students, guest workers or naturalized citizens that it is important to note, but rather the fact that their radicalization took place in Europe. From this perspective their nationality appears irrelevant, they ended up defining themselves as Muslims. This definition was an artificial construction of identity and was intended to provide direction in their individual lives.

Because of their rootlessness and doubts about their identity, they are relatively easy prey for recruiters skilled in manipulation and persuasion. People who fit this profile numbers in the tens of thousands in Muslim migrant communities across Europe, and this phenomenon has become a trans-European issue. When young European Muslims are attracted to extremist ideologies, such as Wahabism, and decide to blow themselves up they are the ultimate proof of profound changes that are taking place. Wahabism means a sense of direction, guidance, identity, a restored personal pride and meaning to a number of very different people. They were however united in their rejection of the standards and lifestyle of Western societies, and showed dedication in its overthrow.

Equally important to understand are the terrorists who recruit those who carry out the actual suicide operation. Far too little scholarly work has been undertaken to shed some much needed light on these individuals. While plenty of information exists on the suicide bombers and the leaders of the terrorist organizations, it is not possible to consult a single authoritative source for background on the recruiters. These recruiters represent the links that connect the ideology of the terrorist leaders with the lethal actions of its members. They are the ones who carry out the vital task of acquiring candidates for suicide operations. The available information on the relationship between recruiter and suicide operatives suggests that it is often a very intimate one, and that the bonds formed takes priority over family relations.

Part V

Future trends

The nature of the current rise in Islamic terrorism is not a matter of a few deranged and disillusioned individuals. Islamic terrorism is only the most visible element of a much wider development that concerns the future of Islam and what it means to be Muslim. Multiple religiously inspired ideologies, often quite contradictory, are simultaneously competing for the essence of Islam. Some of these hold that by engineering a return of society to a previous historic stage all problems will be solved. In order to install this ideal society they are ready to resort to violence which they perceive as a holy duty.

The nature of this Holy War has slowly transformed itself from a specific issue-driven Jihad to a worldwide confrontation between good and evil. The Islamic terrorist organizations and militias that sprung up during the early 1980s and through the mid-1990s in Egypt, Algeria, Lebanon and elsewhere were focussed on restructuring their native societies. The majority of terrorist attacks during this period were related to local conflicts. The terrorist organizations had ideological compatriots around the world, but they were essentially preoccupied with a national struggle of liberation. These organizations still exist but have been eclipsed by a novel trend of a much more diffuse nature.

The emergence of Al Qaeda and its associate groups have infused the terrorist agenda with a sense of a truly global and divine mission. They have taken upon themselves to save all Muslims from infidel aggression. The leaders as well as individual members perceive their terrorist actions as the will of God in the opening phase of the final and epic battle between the forces of good and evil. (al-Zawahiri 2003) They do not have to worry about the feelings of their constituencies because there are none. They answer to no one and are quite eager to see the world fall apart. They have also managed to attract a different type of recruits than those known from the 1980s and 1990s. The war on terrorism that was declared in the aftermath of September 11 has raised the awareness of the conflict and has certainly not diminished the flow of volunteers.

The phenomenon of suicide terrorism legitimised through an extremist Islamic ideology has so far encompassed a period of two decades in its modern era. Will it continue to be an effective weapon in the hands of Islamic militants who perceive it as a strategic equalizer? By studying the various Islamic terrorist organizations that have employed suicide operations, and specifically noticing the rationale behind the attacks, I believe that a certain trend is distinguishable. Each terrorist organization follows its own logic in its use of suicide bombers, and the conclusion drawn by the terrorist organizations about the effectiveness of suicide operations differs. The concept of “lessons learned” has been implemented quite differently throughout the community of Islamic terrorist organizations. While some tried this method, later to abandon it, other came to realize that this was the answer to achieve strategic parity.

The five categories described in this study that have been recruited into Islamic suicide terrorism during the past 20 years show a clear development. The first suicide terrorists were attracted to give up their lives because of a very high level of idealism and religiosity. They volunteered out of a profound sense of duty towards Shi’ism and national liberation.

The second generation of suicide terrorists originated in Palestinian society. Some were coerced into killing themselves, but the overwhelming majority joined the ranks of the martyrs out of a sense of frustration. Their lives had essentially ground to a halt, and they had no realistic possibilities of making a decent future for themselves or their families. To them the terrorist activities of the Palestinian organizations provided not so much hope for the future, but more a valve for their personal frustrations. They could strike back at the hated enemy without having to return to nothingness.

The third generation is decidedly different from the previous generations. Despite all claims of a religious struggle, the real struggle is for a personal identity. They have increasingly been recruited globally and there is sufficient circumstantial evidence that indicates a considerable support network that enable the recruiters to continue their search for lost souls. The third generation is almost exclusively related to a Category V personality, and the potential for recruitment is vast. This generation is primarily recruited outside the sphere of influence of their families, and often in Europe.

Several deductions can be made from this observation and a few examples would serve to highlight the organizational implications of this analysis. For example, it appears inconceivable that a Chechen rebel would wind up detonating himself, or more likely herself, in the Gaza or Kashmir. While there certainly is a flow of intelligence, money and weapons between the various terror organizations, there is no evidence of an interchange of suicide candidates between the terrorist organizations. Al Qaeda is multinational in structure and ideology and relies less on Afghan Arabs than rootless internationalists to undertake its suicide operations.

Islamic suicide terrorism is currently in its third stage and there are no indications that it is likely to stop anytime soon. On the contrary, it can be expected to increase. This prediction is related to two elements. The first is the declared intentions and perceptions of the leadership of the Islamic terrorist organization. They are quite determined to see their project through at all costs, and have stated so repeatedly. Moreover, they perceive their setbacks as inevitable and acceptable in comparison to the gains they have made in their global Jihad. The second element is the profile of the new generation of suicide bombers. They are not recruited for their spiritual purity, that element is installed in their mentality in a later stage. They are recruited because they are frustrated, rootless and without direction in their lives. Unfortunately the prospective candidates number in the hundreds in Europe alone.

Will the Islamic terrorist organizations attempt a suicide operation in Europe? This scenario appears inevitable, because they have already attempted to do so but were fortunately stopped in the planning stage. It is impossible for law enforcement and intelligence agencies to be everywhere at all times. The unravelling of clandestine networks requires substantial resources, and most importantly, time. While operational resources can be increased time is another matter.

This pessimistic perspective is shared by senior intelligence professionals from Britain and Germany. In the view of the British government. *“If Al Qaeda could mount an attack upon key economic targets, or upon our transport infrastructure, they would....If they could inflict damage upon the health of our population, they would”* (Paris 2002)

What would be the effect of a suicide operation in Europe? The answer to that question is dependent on a range of factors related to location, target, death toll and the identity of the perpetrator. However, it is safe to assume that the public response would not be inclined to distinguish between peaceful Muslims immigrants and Islamist terrorists. The evidence supporting this argument can be found in the aftermath of September 11. Europe has very limited direct experience with Islamic suicide terrorism and must look elsewhere to study the effects of this particular type of terrorism.

Israel is the only nation to have experienced a protracted and also very intense campaign of suicide operations primarily directed against civilian targets. From my conversations with Israeli security analysts but also, which I consider to be more important, with ordinary Israeli citizens it became evident that suicide operations had changed the national psyche in a very negative way. A deep seated fear has taken root and it will take years of peace for this effect to diminish. When Israelis

look for bulges under the shirt of fellow bus passengers or decide against eating out, the impact on everyday life is profound. National security has been transformed into personal security. The Palestinian suicide campaign that started in earnest in 2000 is out of control, despite the rigorous efforts of the Israeli authorities. This situation is incomprehensible to citizens of peaceful and stable societies, and when asked how they cope with such an intolerable situation the Israelis usually answer; “*what can we do about it?*”

This answer is as simple as it is relevant in understanding the impact of suicide operations. Israel has since its foundation been preoccupied with national security, and every generation has its war stories. Conflict is unfortunately not a novel phenomenon in Israel, and its citizens have learned to accept it to some degree. Yet the events of the past three years have changed daily life in almost all aspects.

The U.S. experienced a rude awakening on September 11, 2001, and is still trying to come to terms with the implications. This event dictated a change in foreign policy and sparked a debate about the future role of the U.S. But the impact on civil society should not be underestimated, in the words of Bruce Hoffman, “*Perhaps most important, coldly efficient bombings tear at the fabric of trust that holds societies together.*” (Hoffman 2003)

Islamic suicide terrorism will continue to haunt a wide range of different societies in the future. To counter this threat I believe that an understanding of the mindset of the terrorists is essential, and that profiling shows some promising aspects. While terrorist profiling cannot solve the problems, it can point in the right direction.

Appendix A

Recommendations for further study

This study is the only one of its kind that specifically deals with Islamic suicide terrorism and the possibility of profiling the individual bombers. This situation is most regrettable because much more understanding of the nature of the current forms of terrorism is needed. The specific field of terrorist profiling is still in its early stages and more studies need to be undertaken. As in all developing scientific fields future developments will include inconsistencies, flawed analysis and simplified conclusions. However, this should not deter qualified individuals to participate as the possible benefits from this type of research could potentially lead to improved counter-terrorism efforts. It is essential to define and understand the phenomenon, before trying to solve the problem. From my perspective, the list of the most urgent studies includes the following topics, although the list is by no means complete.

- A profiling of the known European militant Islamists.
- Social Network Analysis modeling through purpose designed programs in terrorist profiling.
- The possible uses of terrorist profiling in counter terrorism.
- The significance of religious institutions and informal networks within Europe, being used or exploited in recruiting volunteers.
- Identifying specific measures to counter the further recruiting of Islamic terrorists.
- Multi-disciplinary working groups to explore the possibilities and limitations of Red Cell Teams.
- An analysis of current European practices in counter-terrorism, including best-practices studies.
- Educational efforts directed at those with responsibility of counter-terrorism to enhance the understanding of the phenomenon.

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