Understanding Suicide Terrorism

A. Speckhard

Georgetown University Medical School, Department of Psychiatry, Washington, D.C., USA

Summary

As a terror tactic, suicide terrorism is one of the most lethal as it relies on a human being to deliver and detonate the device. Suicide terrorism is not confined to a single region or religion. On the contrary, it has a global appeal, and in countries such as Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan it has come to represent an almost daily reality as it has become the weapon of choice for some of the most dreaded terrorist organizations in the world, such as ISIS and al-Qaeda. Drawing on over two decades of extensive field research in five distinct world regions, specifically the Middle East, Western Europe, North America, Russia, and the Balkans, the author discusses the origins of modern day suicide terrorism, motivational factors behind suicide terrorism, its global migration, and its appeal to modern-day terrorist groups to embrace it as a tactic.

Zusammenfassung

Der Suizidterrorismus stellt eine besonders grausame Terrortaktik dar, benutzt er doch Menschen – nicht selten Frauen und Kinder – als „lebende Bomben", die sich selbst in die Luft sprengen, um andere mit in den Tod zu reißen. Das Phänomen ist nicht auf eine bestimmte Region oder Religion begrenzt, sondern kommt im Gegenteil global vor. In Ländern wie Syrien, Irak, Afghanistan oder Pakistan gehört es beinahe zur alltäglichen Realität. Einige der weltweit gefürchtetsten Terrororganisationen, beispielsweise ISIS und Al-Qaida, setzen den Suizidterrorismus als bevorzugte Waffe ein. Gestützt auf ihre Erfahrungen aus über zwei Jahrzehnten ausgedehnter Feldforschung in fünf Weltgegenden, insbesondere dem Mittleren Osten, Westeuropa, Nordamerika, Russland und dem Balkan, erörtert die Autorin die Ursprünge des modernen Suizidterrorismus, seine zugrunde liegenden motivationalen Faktoren, seine globale Ausbreitung und die faszinierende Anziehungskraft, die er auf unterschiedlichste Terrorgruppen ausübt und sie veranlasst, ihn in das Spektrum ihrer Taktiken zu integrieren.

Korrespondenzadresse

Dr. Anne Speckhard
Georgetown University Medical School
Department of Psychiatry
Washington, D.C., USA
annespeckhard@icsve.org

As a terror tactic, suicide terrorism is one of the most lethal, as it relies on a human being to deliver and detonate the device, making it the ultimate "smart bomb" while also destroying much of the evidence in the process. Strategically, the use of suicide bombing serves as a relatively cheap and effective way towards achieving a particular political, economic, and military goal and, as such, represents a major threat to global peacekeeping and peace-making efforts. To illustrate, suicide bombers in Madrid who exploded bombs on two trains and hoped to carry on with attacks – ultimately "martyring" themselves – are credited with changing the results of major national elections in Spain. In 1983, suicide bombers attacked a Marine base in Beirut, prompting the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Lebanon. Suicide bombing reached its peak during the 2003 U.S.-led coalition invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq. Abu Musab Zarqawi, leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, used suicide attacks to set off a Shia/Sunni conflict, which in turn exposed the inability of U.S. troops to provide security to the local population ultimately leading to the occupation's unpopularity.

Despite its high prevalence and high mortality rates, policy makers continue to struggle to find the most effective policy responses to the emergence of this new and poorly understood security threat. In particular, difficulties arise due to limited empirical research on the topic, which inhibits our ability to both strengthen our understanding of the genesis of suicide terrorism and generate effective prevention and eradication policies. Understanding and learning to combat suicide terrorism effectively at both the local and international levels is crucial to promoting peace and stability.

This article discusses the origins of modern-day suicide terrorism, motivational factors behind suicide terrorism, its global migration, and its appeal to modern-day terrorist groups to embrace it as a tactic. Drawing on extensive field research in five distinct world regions, specifically the Middle East, Western Europe, North America, Russia, and the Balkans, the author has identified two main differing motivational sets on the level of the individual actors for the genesis of suicide terrorism. The first of these is trauma-based and occurs within zones of active conflict. This motivational set is often considered nationalistic – viewed in terms of self and community defense; expressive – character-

ized by attempts to mete out justice, even symbolic justice to the perceived enemy occupier; and vengeful—encompassing acts of revenge by actors who are often traumatized to the point of becoming deeply dissociative (major functions of the mind are not operating normally), and even referring to themselves as "already dead".

Comparatively speaking, the second motivational set applies in the case of those outside of active zones of conflict, who are nevertheless influenced by them through the Internet, video footage, pictures, propaganda, and so forth, and who frequently develop a deep sense of secondary traumatization. Those falling under this particular category are generally vulnerable to terrorist ideologies due to any combination of the following factors: a sense of alienation; marginalization; lack of a meaningful life, positive identity or employment; and a desire for belonging, personal significance and purpose, adventure, romantic ties, and sense of heroism. In non-conflict zones, recruiters work via both the Internet and face-to-face agents, the latter taking advantage of close-knit family and friendship networks.

It is important to recognize that individuals are generally not motivated to take part in suicide terrorism without an ideology that guides them – although they often taken on the ideology secondary to their needs and vulnerabilities being addressed by joining the terrorist group. Motivations and vulnerabilities to join a terror group that exist in isolation without exposure to a group are also not enough. Individuals generally need exposure to an organization to equip and guide them to carry out their acts, although a rare few have acted on their own (1–4), an ideology that (wrongly) justifies it, and they are generally more willing to take part in suicide terrorism when there is broad-based support for suicide terrorism in the sector of the community in which they find their sense of belonging.

Main Aspects of Suicide Terrorism

Suicide terrorism is thus a function of four main aspects of terrorism: namely the sponsoring group's motivations, the ideology that supports it, the individual motivations and vulnerabilities for enacting it, and the societal support for terrorism. All four factors are generally necessary to make a terrorist – vulnerabilities alone are not sufficient. (1, 5–9) When in support of suicide terrorism, these factors fuel a tactic that can travel the world over as a spark igniting and reigniting a massive fire that we can only hope to extinguish before it consumes us in its flames.

The Origin and Utility of Suicide Bombing

Dying to kill is not new. The origins of modern-day suicide terrorism can be traced back to Lebanon, specifically the 1980s when terrorists used suicide truck bombers to attack and cause governments to remove their troops from Beirut. What is new, however, is that since the mid-1980s the tactic of suicide terrorism has been repackaged and reborn. Since the attacks in Lebanon, the use of suicide attacks has spread to countries such as Palestine, Sri Lanka, Chechnya, Morocco, Indonesia, Turkey, Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria – and now sadly even originating in Europe carried out by Europeans with global ambitions (e.g. the infamous shoe bomber Richard Reid, the Mike's Place bombers in Israel, Europeans going as bombers to Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, etc.) and Europeans attacking at home. Recent events show those trained with ISIS in Syria are now returning home to target Europe itself[1]. In light of such arguments, the big question remains: What combination of factors and conditions have made this tactic suddenly so popular – to the point that citizens of countries with no history of suicide terrorism are willing to even recruit themselves as human bombs, making this a main tactic of choice for many terror groups worldwide?

In the eyes of terrorists, the act of suicide bombing in Lebanon was viewed as a significant strategic victory. Indeed, decades later, the current epidemic of suicide terrorism is directly tied to this perception of success by terror-sponsoring groups. As its use migrated around the world, even many counter-terrorism experts have credited suicide terrorism with, among others, derailing the Oslo peace accords, disrupting the peacekeeping and rebuilding efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq, impacting the election results in Madrid[2], and drawing world attention and concern to political issues that may otherwise have been overlooked. Its effectiveness in achieving any real political gains outside of the community in which it originates – i.e. whether it creates any real political power base for those who employ suicide terrorism–remains debatable, however. Terrorist organizations thrive because of failed political solutions between conflicting parties and their continued existence relies upon their ability to change perceptions and influence the political process in favor of their constituent groups.

It is commonly agreed that suicide terrorism is a tactic that is relatively inexpensive, considering easily accessible equipment and wide availability of ingredients used to build bombs (10). It is also highly effective as the human bomber acting as a smart bomb directs it – going straight to the target and allowing adjustments to be made even up to the last moments before detonation, to avoid detection and to maximize the amount of damage done in the attack. Moreover, it is highly lethal and horrifying as it is used to kill and wound the greatest number of civilians, which not only leads to carnage but also amplifies its affect – through media – causing fear throughout a much wider witnessing audience. Lastly, it is difficult to trace it, nearly impossible to prevent it, and represents an endless supply if the terror group's consti-

---

1   Author interviews during "ISIS Defectors Project," as well as with law enforcement and intelligence officials in North America, Europe, and the Balkans. See also Callimachi R. Available from http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/04/world/middleeast/isis-german-recruit-interview.html?_r=0.

2   Some would argue that the Madrid bombings did not involve suicide terrorists as the attackers left their bombs and detonated them from afar; yet upon imminent arrest, the bombers did explode themselves.

tuent population supports the use of this tactic (11).

The Typology of Suicide Motivations

Organizations provide the means, methods, and group dynamic underlying suicide terrorism operations and often the ideology as well. Researchers of suicide terrorism will attest to the fact that suicide terrorism is nearly always used strategically by organizations and generally resorted to *only* when the enemy is much stronger and better equipped militarily. Likewise, it is often used in later stages of the conflict (12), especially by women[3]. Sometimes it reflects an outbidding process for power among competing groups (12) and finds a receptive base of support in areas where occupation occurs, particularly if the foreign occupier is of another religion than those occupied and is perceived as oppressive and unjust. (8–9, 12–14) When these circumstances exist, suicide terrorism may be deemed an effective choice by terror-sponsoring organizations for forcing concessions from its stronger enemy and thereby achieving its political goals.

Why do most of the main terror groups in Syria, Iraq, Palestine, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Chechnya, and elsewhere state that they have an endless supply of recruits? What are the factors that cause these changes to occur within a human soul? While the answer is multifaceted and impossible to answer in a short article, interviews of bombers, would-be bombers, senders and the family members, and close acquaintances of bombers and their hostages have pointed to several important motivational sets (8–9, 12–13, 15).

Trauma and Revenge Motivational Set

The first motivational set is trauma-based and occurs within zones of active conflict.

3   See for example Speckhard A. The emergence of female terrorists or Speckhard A. Female suicide bombers in Iraq. Available from http://www.academia.edu/10301179/Female_Suicide_Bombers_in_Iraq

It is often nationalistic – that is, viewed in terms of self and community defense; expressive – that is, characterized by attempts to mete out justice, even symbolic justice to the perceived enemy occupier; and includes acts of revenge. Broadly speaking, individuals under this specific category have witnessed first-hand and over the television their neighbors, family members, and loved ones killed by what they view as an occupying force; have grown up witnessing countless acts of violence including rape, killings, and torture and, as a result, have not developed normally and often suffer from posttraumatic stress and dissociative disorders; and many have lost jobs, educational opportunities, been humiliated, and often struggle for basic daily needs and security. While the majority of traumatized individuals in conflict zones will not become suicide bombers, even if invited to do so, an extremely small group will become vulnerable to terrorist ideologies that promote this tactic.

In response to a threat, a normal person moves between a fight or flight response and will also move into dissociative defenses (i.e. shutting down normal features of consciousness such as emotions, logic, and memory – and sometimes physically freezing as well) when the threat becomes overwhelmingly horrific, terrifying, and life-threatening. When this distinction was explained to him, al Aqsa Martyr's Brigade sender of suicide bombers, Zacharia Zubeidi, explained that the individuals he equipped to become human bombs were caught inflexibly over long periods of time in a dissociative mode. He stated that while combatants are flexible in their responses to violent conflict, these victims of the conflict are not. Specifically, "They are completely different than us [fighters]. They have only one decision. We have many options. The thought of running away is always available. We can go and shoot" (17, p.381). In contrast, he described the "martyrs" as locked into an inflexible dissociative mode caused by traumatic stress and the one decision that comes from it. He stated, "They get flashbacks all the time and for them death is a mercy…For the martyr all the cells in his mind are dead except for one" (17, p. 381).

Suicide bombers are often as well, or better-educated, and less poor than their peers – and in other circumstances might have been appealing leaders in their respective communities (6, 17–18). They are acutely sensitive to their own suffering and that of those around them and wish to make a difference, but similar to normally depressed and suicidal persons, they see only very limited avenues of action. They want to escape their psychic pain, but to do so honorably and to use their lives – even if it means dying – to help their communities. They are uniquely vulnerable to an ideology that promises that they will be heroes for the cause and that they can make a difference in the socio-political situation faced by their communities. They often believe that their deaths are only a doorway to a better place and that by dying self-sacrificially they can change things both now and in the afterlife, reuniting now with those gone before and later bringing with them relatives that they left behind. Vulnerable and in pain, they succumb to an ideology that seduces them into sacrificing themselves for what they believe is a greater cause. Just like us, they hope for a more just world in which human dignity and rights will be upheld. However, unlike us, they are deluded into believing that their acts of killing, even innocent civilians, might bring this into being, hence they end up sacrificing themselves.

With groups like the LTTE and the advent of al-Qaeda in Iraq and now ISIS, we have also seen suicide bombers forced into the role. ISIS has sent children as young as six not explaining to them that they will be exploded at their destination, while al-Qaeda in Iraq coerced widows and mentally handicapped individuals into suicide bombing. ISIS also punishes its cadres by sending them on suicide attacks. Similarly, LTTE kidnapped youth and forced them into the group, some to become suicide attackers (16, 20).

Alienation, Marginalization, Loss of Identity, Secondary Traumatization, and Desire for Life Meaningfulness, Belonging, and Heroism

The second motivational set involves actors not living in conflict zones and is more

complex. While one can understand the logic behind why individuals who have seen their family members killed in front of their eyes or feel as though their country has been occupied might choose to seek revenge, one must also ask what can possibly motivate Canadians, Americans, Europeans, Turks, Moroccans, Uzbeks, and others to join violent groups and ultimately agreeing to die in order to kill others? In their cases the main motivational set appears to involve vulnerable actors who are exposed through kin and friendship groups (21) or through Internet and informal recruiting[4] to individuals within a terror network. The recruits are often marginalized, frustrated, and without hope in their societies. In Europe, they are often first, second, or third generation immigrants, or converts to Islam who feel deep sympathy and even kinship (i.e. Muslim brothers) for those in conflict zones. Within the immigrant Muslim community there is often a deep sense of alienation and no secure sense of identity and belonging to either their country of origin or, more importantly, their host culture. Facing discrimination, some well-educated but facing poor job prospects, lacking positive identity and sense of life meaning and having little else to make of themselves, these persons can, once exposed to terrorist ideologies, become attracted to the appeal to become heroes for a cause.

In these cases, nearly always the sponsoring organization makes use of seven powerful motivators. The first two are the idea of belonging and identity—belonging to an important cause and group—and taking on a heroic identity. The third is the use of pictures and graphic video footage of conflict zones that are shown to the potential recruit and interpreted as atrocities against innocent victims – mainly featuring Chechen and Palestinian suffering, but now also featuring footage and references to the US coalition's "War on Terror" in both Iraq and Afghanistan and in more recent years Assad's atrocities in Syria.

Fourth and fifth are the ideas often taken from religion – that one ought to sacrifice on behalf of the brotherhood of believers and one's faith, even to the point of death. In this manner, the ideas of "fictive kin" (18) and "martyrdom" become instilled. The individuals who respond to such calls to action are appealed upon to depart from the frustrations of this life, reject the society that has marginalized or frustrated them, and join a group following a path that promises eternal rewards. This, in particular, was an active motivation in the Balkans where those who had survived the Kosovo war of 1999 felt they must help their Muslim "brothers" fight Assad's atrocities (22). In the European case where distorted Islamic ideologies are being used, often individuals who become terrorist recruits are sensitive and care about the conflicts they learn about; however, they are not able to read in Arabic and fall prey to teachers who tell them they know and can interpret the Koran better for them and teach them based on Islam the proper response to address such suffering. This is not to say they are simple minded – quite the contrary – often it is the well-educated and sensitive individuals who read the news and care about the world and who would be leaders if they felt they had a way of participating in their society and its political discourse.

Six and seventh among the motivators emerged with the advent of ISIS, specifically the dream and promises of the so-called "Caliphate" and its material rewards. Frustrated by a lack of opportunities to help others in need and needing a meaningful role and identity—the young in particular—find answers in the call of ISIS. The dream of having a part in building the utopian "Caliphate" is a very powerful motivator that comes with promises for a

life of dignity, purpose, and inclusion with material rewards of housing, employment, and even wives and sex slaves thrown in. (16)[5].

Dissociative Responses to Taking One's Own Life

On an individual level, there is the issue of how a group and its ideology can convince a person to actively violate his or her self-preservation instinct to carry through with a suicide mission. Multiple reports exist of suicide bombers who were stopped at the last minute and later interviewed, including interviews the author made of failed suicide bombers, in which the bomber reported a sense of euphoria or dissociative disembodiment prior to carrying out the act (e.g. normally active parts of consciousness failing to function as when the person feels separated from her own body, etc.).

To learn more about this issue, the author set up a "thought experiment" in which subjects were asked to imagine themselves in the role of a Palestinian who had been stopped at the last minute from carrying out an attack and was now jailed and giving a research interview about their experiences leading up to the suicide mission. Once deeply in role, these subjects were asked to describe how they felt when donning a suicide vest. Amazingly, this same dissociative quality was manifested in a simple role-play with subjects answering that they felt immensely powerful, euphoric, as if floating above their body, etc. when donning the suicide vest (23).

Dissociative responses are also noted in video and audiotapes recording the last moments of individuals who commit ordinary suicide (24). It appears that the dissociative response may be a normal and necessary psychological defense deployed in the face of willingly violating one's self-preservation instinct in suicide of any type and the euphoria that some report may be endorphin-mediated, operating just as when endorphins are released in the face of other painful experiences where the person needs to push past the pain to keep moving forward. From the point of view of the group, this response can be manipulated and claimed as a mystical calm granted by a God who approves of the terror act. From

---

4   In our experience, such as in Brussels, we have found Internet cafes where if one remained logged on for a half hour or so, pop up ads would appear inviting one to join the worldwide jihadi cause.

5   For supplemental information on terrorist motivations and vulnerabilities see Speckhard A. The lethal cocktail of terrorism: the four necessary ingredients that go into making a terrorist & fifty individual vulnerabilities/motivations that may also play a role. Available from http://www.academia.edu/22453481/The_Lethal_Cocktail_of_Terrorism_The_Four_Necessary_Ingredients_that_Go_into_Making_a_Terrorist_and_Fifty_Individual_Vulnerabilities_Motivations_that_May_also_Play_a_Role

the point of view of the suicide attacker it may also serve as confirmation that exiting life while killing others is cosmically ordained (16).

Ideologies of Suicide Terrorism

Religion is often invoked to send warriors out to battle, as believing that one is dying for a higher cause is highly motivating. Nearly *all major faiths* have in the past been used in this way – and still are. Just as nearly all nations going to war still today make use of religious rhetoric when looking for popular support and to motivate their warriors, so, too, do many of today's terror sponsoring-groups (e.g. consider the rhetoric of the Crusades and the just war debates carried on in the West prior to invading Afghanistan and Iraq and the counter- messaging by ISIS using these same themes labeling Western interventions as "crusades"). While ISIS and the loosely affiliated al-Qaeda terrorist groups do not represent legitimate nation-states, they negate the very idea of nation-states while claiming that they are acting on behalf of a group of beleaguered people (i.e. the Muslim ummah, the "Caliphate" etc.), that they are in a war on behalf of the faith, and that their ideology is aimed to motivate warriors for the battle.

It is important to state, however, that even though groups that make use of distorted versions of Islam are currently highly effective in promoting this cosmic warfare ideology to endorse the tactic of suicide terrorism, this does not mean that Islam alone is the problem. If it were, we would not have seen the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), who are mainly Marxist atheists, making use of this same tactic (although by cultural background the Tigers were Hindu whereas the PFLP Muslim). Although currently being misused to promote suicide terrorism, Islam in itself is not the problem—political issues that groups think they can solve using terrorism are the underlying issue. Terrorist groups that claim to be Islamic use commonly revered scriptures to convince vul-

nerable individuals into self-sacrifice by making calls that resonate with their motivations and vulnerabilities and that address the societal circumstances leading to their despair and defiance; doing so by using a hijacked version of Islam that plays upon sacred scriptures and promotes human sacrifice on behalf of the group. Currently, the main ideology in use among the most active suicide terrorist groups (e.g. ISIS, al-Qaeda, and other Islamic-linked groups) is a hijacked version of Islam calling for would-be "martyrs" from around the world to sacrifice themselves on behalf of a worldwide or nationalist jihad.

Terrorist Ideology as Psychological First Aid and Societal Support for Suicide Terrorism

In both motivational sets, the ideology of the terror-sponsoring group is acting as a psychological first-aid for the victim of perceived or real grievances. This psychological first-aid is, of course, short lived – as is its victim. Yet one sees a powerful transformation take place in the human bomber who, faced with no alternatives to change circumstances, moves from a stance of a powerless victim of societal forces to becoming an actor in a worldwide or nationalistic drama that he or she has been persuaded might bring about a more just and dignified existence for those left behind. In this way, a marriage occurs between a terror-promoting ideology and individual psychosocial vulnerabilities emanating out of traumatic and bereaving experiences in conflict zones and marginalizing and frustrating circumstances in non-conflict zones. When this marriage occurs, all that is left is for the individual to believe that there is some significant portion of society that supports his or her stepping out onto this path (which may be the recruiting group) that enables him or her to take the final steps to "martyrdom". This is where societal support for suicide terrorism plays an important role in putting a "martyr" on the path to becoming a human bomb.

When a society deplores violence as an answer to violence and terrorism as an answer to social problems, it is unlikely that ideologies supporting suicide terrorism will resonate strongly within more than extremely limited groups of vulnerable individuals. However, when a society or significant elements of it begin to embrace an ideology in support of suicide terrorism, then the group of potential recruits will expand exponentially. We witnessed this when a "cult of martyrdom" sprung up among Palestinians during the second Intifada that made their pool of potential recruits seemingly endless. This usually occurs when a society is so offended, and even traumatized, by daily living circumstances resulting from war, conflict, human rights violations, marginalization, frustrations, daily humiliations, and when many individuals feel powerless to change these assaults to human dignity. As a result, the society begins to support terrorist ideologies; especially those that espouse familiar and valued religious ideals, believing that terror acts may bring about the necessary changes.

There will likely always be fringe groups that promote dying to kill. There will also always be individuals who are vulnerable to recruitment by these groups. However, we unwittingly create the circumstances in which the pool of recruits expands exponentially when we fail to address the societal factors leading to individual vulnerability and societal support that make these groups impossible to extinguish, and self-replenishing faster than we can stop them. When strong societal support exists for suicide terrorism, the pool of recruits becomes so large that the terror groups can become highly lethal. Likewise, we must begin to address and take apart the rhetoric of terror-sponsoring organizations, specifically addressing their ideologies by engaging with them in a discourse that can perhaps lead to more people believing that political solutions do exist and that terror acts are neither necessary nor useful in bringing about a just, moral, and dignified existence. Using insiders to debunk terrorist claims, such as the voices of ISIS defectors to debunk claims of the utopian "Caliphate", is also a powerful way to do this (25).

Conclusion

Relying on over two decades of extensive field research in five distinct world regions, specifically the Middle East, Western Europe, North America, Russia, and the Balkans, the author's goal was to briefly discuss the origins of modern day suicide terrorism, depict a model for suicide terrorism, and identify the main motivational factors behind suicide terrorism. Attempts were also made to discuss its global migration and its appeal to modern-day terrorist groups to embrace as a tactic. Although important, general explanations, including psychosocial and religious explanations, do not suffice to fully answer questions such as why suicide terrorism occurs in the first place – as politics are always part of the picture – and why it continues to be a preferred terrorist tactic for many terrorist organizations worldwide to achieve their political objectives. In this regard, suicide terrorism remains a complex psychosocial and political issue that demands thoughtful, just, and carefully carried out responses to end its continued and increasing use to influence worldwide politics.

As far as the involvement of a hijacked version of Islam being present in the majority of the current cases of suicide bombing, we must acknowledge two things. Firstly, Islam is a religion that has always valued the struggle for fundamental values – justice, morality and human dignity – and it is only natural that when a terror group is hoping to motivate recruits it can appeal through Islamic traditions to action on behalf of these fundamental values (especially if it can argue that one is acting in self and community defense). Indeed, this idea of self and community defense has been the basis of nearly all fatwas in support of "martyrdom" (i.e. suicide missions). Secondly, many Muslims in the world continue to live under corrupt and autocratic regimes and face numerous human rights violations, territorial occupations, and/or discrimination; therefore, there are many *political* reasons why they might gravitate towards a terrorist ideology that shares with them the *political* goals of fighting for freedom and human dignity. Equally important, there is also a contagion effect that we must consider that occurs even with normal suicide. Those who are in the family and friendship network of a suicide bomber are often so deeply affected by the act that they, too, begin to consider acting similarly. Research has stressed countless examples of radicalization proceeding through close friendship and relatives' networks (21, 26). Thus, radicalization can increase geometrically once it gets going.

Conflict of Interest

No conflicts of interest.

Acknowledgement

References

1. Argo N. The banality of evil: Understanding and defusing today's human bombs. Unpublished research proposal 2003.
2. Argo N. Culture, society and martyrdom. Unpublished research paper 2004.
3. Also discussed. Argo N 2004b, personal communication.
4. Speckhard A. Unpublished Palestinian militant interviews. April 2015.
5. Hafez M. Manufacturing human bombs: the making of Palestinian suicide bombers. Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press Books 2006.
6. Merari A. Suicide terrorism. Unpublished manuscript 2003.
7. Moghadam A. Palestinian suicide terrorism in the second intifada: motivations and organizational aspects. Studies in Conflict and Terrorism 2003; 26(2): 65–92.
8. Speckhard A, Ahkmedova K. Talking to terrorists. Journal of Psychohistory 2005; 33(2): 1–25.
9. Speckhard A, Tarabrina N, Krasnov V, Mufel N. Posttraumatic and acute stress responses in hostages held by suicide terrorists in the takeover of a Moscow theater. Traumatology 2005; 11(1): 3–21.
10. NATO Defence College. Financial and economic aspects of the fight against terrorism. Immediate Report 2004.
11. Ganor B. The counter-terrorism puzzle: a guide for decision makers. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers 2005.
12. Bloom M. Dying to kill: the allure of suicide terror: New York: Columbia University Press 2005.
13. Pape R. Dying to win: The strategic logic of suicide terrorism. New York: Random House 2005.
14. Speckhard A, Ahkmedova K. The making of a martyr: Chechen suicide terrorism. Journal of Studies in Conflict and Terrorism 2006; 29(5): 429–492.
15. Speckhard A, Tarabrina N, Krasnov V, Akhmedova K. Research note: observations of suicidal terrorists in action. Terrorism and Political Violence 2004; 16(2): 305–327
16. Speckhard A. Taking to terrorists: understanding the psycho-social motivations of militant jihadi terrorists, mass hostage takers, suicide bombers and „martyrs." McLean: Advances Press 2012.
17. Speckhard A. Genesis of suicide terrorism. In: Fink G (ed.) Sress of war, conflict and disaster. San Diego: Academic Press 2010; 376–385.
18. Atran S. Genesis of suicide terrorism. Science 2003; 299(5612): 1534–1539.
19. Atran S. Mishandling suicide terrorism. The Washington Quarterly 2003; 27(3): 67–90.
20. LTTE Interview 2015, personal communication.
21. Sageman M. Understanding terror networks. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvannia Press 2004.
22. Speckhard A. Unpublished interviews 2016.
23. Speckhard A, Jacuch B, Vanrompay V. Taking on the persona of a suicide bomber: a thought experiment 2012; 6(2): 51–73. http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/speckhard-taking-on-the-persona.
24. Bonger B. Suicide terrorism. Paper presented at: Suicide terrorism: strategic importance and counterstrategies, NATO Advanced Research Workshop 2004; Lisbon, Portugal.
25. Speackhard A. The best weapon to defeat ISIS: use testimonials from disillusioned recruits who' ve defected against. New York Daily News[newspaper online]. 2016 July 6 [cited 2016 September 24]. Available from http://www.nydailynews.com/opinion/anne-speckhard-best-weapon-defeat-isis-article-1.2700282.
26. Soldiers for God: a study of the suicide terrorists in the Moscow hostage taking siege [Internet]. Academia. edu. 2016 http://www.academia.edu/8620912/Soldiers_for_God_A_Study_of_the_Suicide_Terrorists_in_the_Moscow_Hostage_Taking_Siege.