Suicide Terrorism

• What are the perceptions?
• What is the reality?
• What is suicide terror?
• Who does it?
• Why do they do it?
• What are the numbers?
• What are the trends?
• Who gets targeted?
• Why is it effective?
SUICIDE BOMBINGS

- Suicide bombings or attacks are “an operational method in which the very act of the attack is dependent upon the death of the perpetrator.”

- “Poor mans” smart bomb-Can be delivered precisely on or near the target through the use of a human being to serve as operator, platform and sensor”.

- Difficult to detect, odds for success high, big pay-off in casualties, material damage, regional/international press coverage.

What Is Suicide Terror?

- Basically a punishment strategy
- Similar to other punishment strategies
  - Airpower
  - Economic sanctions
  - “…the hard hand of war.” – Sherman
  - “…more statesmanship than warfare.” – Sherman
- Does two things:
  - Inflicts immediate punishment against target society
  - Threatens more punishment in the future
- Suicide sends a powerful message
  - Attacker could not be deterred
  - Allows for the act of martyrdom
    - Connects attacker to a broader community
Profile?

Young, unmarried, unemployed, male from a poor background. May have attended religious school. Sometimes seeking revenge for death of relative or friend. **Israeli profile Palestinian Suicide Bomber ca. 2000**

Wide range of characteristics: female married with children or single, student, 19-27 years of age. 2002

“That was shocking to Israel. You’re on the lookout for some young boy wearing bulky clothing, and then suddenly….any woman could be a suicide bomber.” Dr. Charles Kimball, Wake Forest University, Middle East and Islamic Studies

Motivation

*Pick one or more or all…..*

- Religion
- Ideology/nationalism/ethno-cultural
- Perceived or real oppression
- Poverty-material reward for family
- Vengeance-coercion

Religious aspects of motivation are important but can be overplayed. There are secular groups that employ suicide attacks. In any case there is evidence that certain psychological and personal characteristics of the attacker are important.
What are the benefits of the suicide attack for the terrorist organization?

- Suicide attacks result in many casualties and cause extensive damage.
- Suicide attacks attract wide media coverage.
- Guarantees the maximum number of casualties
- Success is virtually guaranteed
- Attacks require no escape plan.
- Since the perpetrator is killed during the course of the suicide attack, there is no fear of him being caught afterwards

What are the benefits for the perpetrator of the suicide attack?

Suicide attacks are considered attractive by groups of religious and nationalistic fanatics who regard them as a kind of “Holy War” and a divine command.

The perpetrator of the suicide attack is not considered either by himself or by other activists to have committed suicide. He is rather perceived to be a “shahid”—a martyr who fell in the process of fulfilling a religious command, the “Jihad” or “Holy War.”
What are the benefits for the perpetrator of the suicide attack?

Suicide attacks may provide the shahid and his families with substantial rewards:
- The majority of the shahids come from a low social status background. The shahid improves his social status after their death as well as that of his families.
- The family of the shahid is showered with honor and praise, and receives financial rewards for the attack (usually some thousands of dollars).

In addition to the religious mission and the family rewards, the shahid also receives some personal benefits (according to his belief), including:
- Eternal life in paradise,
- The permission to see the face of Allah,
- And the loving kindness of 72 young virgins who will serve him in heaven.
- The shahid also earns a privilege to promise a life in heaven to 70 of his relatives.

Why Suicide Terror?

- Perception -- seemingly irrational act
- From the perspective of a terrorist organization it’s a strategy that is:
  - Well planned
  - Logical
  - Designed to achieve specific political objectives
- Suicide attacks have increased over the past two decades
- Why?

Because terrorists have learned they work!!!
What Are The Perceptions?

- What is the profile of suicide terrorists?
- We generalize suicide terrorists to be:
  - Young
  - Single
  - Male
  - Uneducated
  - Religious fanatics
    - Likely Islamic Fundamentalists

Can You Identify the Suicide Bomber?
Identifying the Suicide Bomber

Suicide bomber Dhanu with a sandalwood garland minutes before attacking former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. She is wearing an explosive device beneath her dress, intended to kill her and her target.

What Is The Reality?

• The “profile” is wrong
• Terrorists are:
  • Preteen - mid-sixties
  • Both single and married with families
  • Both male and female
  • Both educated and uneducated
  • Not motivated by religious fanaticism
    • World’s leader in suicide terror are Hindu
    • Tamil Tigers who are conducting insurgency against Sri Lanka
The soldiers made the 14 year old youth remove his sweater and reveal the explosives inside a vest.

The Israelis Disarm a Boy With a Bomb

With a bomb hidden under his sweater, a Palestinian boy in his teens, Hussam Bade, approached Israeli soldiers on Wednesday at the same West Bank checkpoint, near Nablus, where last week another boy was captured with a bomb in his bag.
Suicide Terrorism – Employment Status (percentage)

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<td>1993-1999</td>
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Suicide Terrorism – Type of Education (percentage)

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<tr>
<td>1993-2003</td>
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</table>
Suicide Terrorism – Level of Education

Suicide Terrorism – Targets (percentage)
Profile

Most bombers are educated, many with college or university experience, and come from middle class homes.

Most suicide bombers do not show signs of psychopathology.

Indeed, leaders of the groups who perpetrate these attacks search for individuals who can be trusted to carry out the mission; those with mental illnesses are not ideal candidates.

They often find solace in the ritualistic communion found in extremist circles, which are often headed by charismatic individuals looking for new recruits.
NUMBER OF SUICIDE ATTACKS
BETWEEN 1980-2000

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka and in India 168
Hizbullah and pro-Syrian groups in Lebanon, Kuwait and Argentina 52
Hamas in Israel 22
The Kurdistan Worker’s Party (PKK) in Turkey 15
The Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) in Israel 8
Al Quaida in East Africa 2
The Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ) in Croatia 1
The Islamic Group (IG) in Pakistan 1
Barbar Khalsa International (BKI) in India 1
The Armed Islamic Group (GIA) in Algeria 1

Who Conducts Suicide Terror?

- **Hamas**
  - Palestinians’ major Muslim fundamentalist movement
  - Combines Palestinian nationalism with Islamic fundamentalism
  - Main opposition to Yasir Arafat’s Palestinian Authority
    - Hamas & PLO each have approximately 30% Palestinian support
    - Determined foe of Israeli-Palestinian peace
    - Shadow government with an extensive social service network
- **Palestinian Islamic Jihad**
  - Islamic Jihad is a much smaller, less organized group of Islamist radicals with closer ties to Iran
  - Unlike Hamas, no network of schools, clinics, or mosques -- focuses entirely on terrorism
  - Leadership lives in Syria
  - February 2003 – Justice Department indicted Islamic Jihad leaders, including a Florida college professor—for conspiring to kill and wound people abroad and conspiring to fund a terrorist organization
Who Conducts Suicide Terror?

- Al Aqsa Martyr Brigades
  - A group of West Bank militias affiliated with Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat’s al-Fatah faction and have been one of the driving forces behind the current Palestinian intifada
  - Ideology
    - Rooted in Palestinian nationalism – not political Islam
  - Initially vowed to target only Israeli soldiers and settlers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip
    - Began a spree of terrorist attacks against civilians in Israeli cities in early 2002
    - Have killed more Israelis than any other terrorist organization since 2002
  - Links to Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad & Hezbollah

Who Conducts Suicide Terror?

- Hezbollah
  - Lebanese group of Shiite militants sponsored by Iran
  - Opposes the West, seeks to create a Muslim fundamentalist state modeled on Iran
  - Organized after Israeli invasion of Lebanon -- bitter foe of Israel
  - Operates in Europe, Africa and Americas
  - Links to Al Qaeda for training and logistics

- Chechen Separatists
  - Loosely organized groups, with semi-independent commanders
  - Not all are terrorists, but those who are practice political Islam
  - Ties to Al Qaeda and other fundamentalist Islamic groups
  - Fought with Taliban in OEF
  - Zacarias Moussaoui, the “20th hijacker” was formerly a recruiter for al Qaeda backed rebels in Chechnya
Who Conducts Suicide Terror?

- **Al Qaeda**
  - An international terrorist network led by Osama bin Laden
  - Seeks to rid Muslim countries of what it sees as the profane influence of the West and replace their governments with fundamentalist Islamic regimes
  - Operates in Pakistan since collapse of Taliban
  - Active cells in US, Western Europe, Albania, Uganda & elsewhere
  - Links to at least eight other terrorist organizations, among them: Egyptian Islamic Jihad, Lashkir-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Muhammad (Kashmir), Abu Sayyaf Group (Malaysia & Philippines)

- **Ansar Al Islam**
  - Ansar al-Islam is a Taliban-style radical Kurdish, Sunni Islamic group
  - Located in the pseudo-autonomous Northern Iraq
  - Strong ties to al-Qaeda
  - The most radical group operating in the Iraqi Kurdistan region
  - All recent Baghdad bombing linked to AAI

Who Conducts Suicide Terror?

- **PKK – Kurdistan Workers Party**
  - A Marxist separatist group that seeks to create an independent Kurdish state in southeastern Turkey and parts of neighboring countries inhabited by Kurds
  - Operates in areas inhabited by Kurds and Syria
  - Links to Al Aqsa Martyr Brigades, and left wing Palestinian groups
    - Trained by Abu Nidal (Al Fatah splinter group) and other Palestinian groups in Iraq, Libya and Syria
    - Ideology conflicts with political Islamic groups and
    - Irredentist claims conflict with other groups such as Hezbollah

- **Liberation Tigers of the Tamil Eelam (LTTE)**
  - Tamil Tigers are a separatist terrorist group that seeks an independent state in areas in Sri Lanka inhabited by ethnic Tamils
  - Secular nationalist Hindus in a majority Buddhist country
  - No known current links to other groups
    - Started training with PLO over 20 years ago
    - Innovations such as explosive jacket adopted by other groups
Are These Groups Linked?

Where?

Suicide bombings have occurred in more than 25 countries: Afghanistan, Algeria, Argentina, Chechnya, China, Colombia, Croatia, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kenya, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Pakistan, the Palestinian territories, Panama, the Philippines, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Tunisia, Turkey, United Kingdom, Uzbekistan, and Yemen. (Suicide planes were also used in the United States).

The July 2005 London bombings
What Are the Numbers?

- 1981 - 2002 -- **274** apparent cases of suicide terror
  - Does not include state sponsored terror campaigns
- Starts with Hezbollah in Lebanon
  - 1981 -- attack on Iraqi Embassy -- Beirut
  - 1983 -- killed 384 in six attacks
    - US Embassy -- Feb
    - 241 Marines at Beirut Airport -- Oct
      - Simultaneous attack on French
    - Cars, grenades and explosive belts
- Since 2001
  - Al Qaeda killed >3000 in NYC
  - Chechens
  - Kashmir
  - LTTE
  - Palestinians
    - All conducted suicide missions

Prior to 9/11 Hezbollah responsible for almost all U.S. deaths from terror

What Are the Numbers?

- Approximately 95% of the 274 attacks were part of well-organized, coherent campaigns by terrorist groups
- Why?
  - When terrorist leaders announced end of attacks they ceased
  - April 24, 2003 first attack on Israel since start of OIF
- 16 identifiable campaigns with 5 still ongoing
- Notable campaigns
  - Hezbollah v. Israel -- 16 attacks; 1983 - 1985
  - Palestinians v. Israel -- 44 attacks; 1999 - present
    - Hamas / AAMB / IJ
    - Hezbollah
  - Al Qaeda v. the West -- 28 attacks; 1999 - present
  - LTTE v. Sri Lanka -- **168** attacks; 1987 – present

Cease fire since Jan 2002
What’s The Trend?

- Of 57 attacks in 2001 - 2002:
  - 29 in Sri Lanka by Tamil Tigers (All in 2001)
  - 20 in Israel
  - 3 in Pakistan
  - 5 Misc

Instances of Suicide Terror
2003

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<td>11-Jun</td>
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<td>HA</td>
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<td>8-Jun</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Gaza</td>
<td>HA U AAM</td>
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<td>17-May</td>
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<td>Grozny</td>
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<tr>
<td>16-May</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>AQ</td>
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<td>8</td>
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What's The Trend?

Instances of Suicide Terror
2003

61 Suicides to Date

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<td>1</td>
<td>Hilla</td>
<td>U</td>
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<td>22-Sep</td>
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<td>AAI</td>
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<td>9-Sep</td>
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<td>12-Aug</td>
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<td>5-Jul</td>
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Suicide Terror -- Annualized Rate (By Decade)
What's The Trend?

Suicide Terror -- Annualized Rate (By Decade)

What's The Trend?
What’s The Trend?

Why Do They Do It?

Because terrorists have learned it works!!!

- Every campaign had territorial goals
  - Gain control of their perceived national homeland
  - Eject foreign military forces from that territory

Occupation may not be sufficient cause for suicide terrorism to occur, but...

Military presence does appear to be a necessary condition

Even Al Qaeda’s goals for 9/11 included ridding Saudi Arabia of U.S. troops
Who Gets Targeted?

- Almost every suicide campaign targeted democracies
  - Democracies especially vulnerable to coercive punishment
- Examples
  - Russia
    - Mujahadeen used guerrilla warfare against Soviet Union in Afghanistan in 1980s
    - Chechen rebels employed suicide attacks against democratic Russia
  - Kurds
    - Repressed severely by Saddam Hussein -- far worse than by Turks
    - Used suicide attacks only against Turkey, who moved toward democracy in 1983

Why Is It Growing?

- In 6 of the 11 campaigns that ended terrorists achieved at least partial political gains
- Target states
  - Fully or partially withdrew from territory
  - Began negotiations
  - Released a terrorist leader
- Represents 55% success rate
  - Other punishment strategies such as airpower or economic sanctions work no more 15% of the time
- Suicide campaigns have been successful against a variety of democratic governments -- even hawkish ones
  - Reagan Administration
  - Netanyahu
  - Succeeded despite military raids to kill or arrest terrorist leaders
Why Is It Growing?

- Democratic leaders publicly confirmed suicide attacks pushed them to make concessions
- Example: Israel accelerated withdrawal from Gaza
  - Hamas began a series of suicide bombings
    - Response to Israel missing Oslo Accord withdrawal deadline
    - Hebron Massacre – 29 Palestinians killed and >150 wounded at hands of Israeli settler
    - Hamas suspended campaign seeing suicide attacks had the surprising effect of accelerating Israeli withdrawal

“The current situation creates endless possibilities for Hamas and others.”
--- PM Rabin, address to Knesset

Why Is It Growing?

- Democratic leaders publicly confirmed suicide attacks pushed them to make concessions
- Example: United States left Lebanon in 1983 because of suicide attacks

“We couldn’t stay there and run the risk of another suicide attack on the Marines.”
--- Ronald Reagan, An American Life
Why Are Suicide Attacks Effective?

• Punishment strategies using airpower or economic sanctions are generally ineffective
• With standard military coercion stronger states pressure weaker states
  • Targets rarely submit because nationalist citizens are willing to endure relatively high costs
    • Target governments can minimize punishment
      – Air Defense
      – Social Programs
      – State coercion

Why Are Suicide Attacks Effective?

• Suicide attacks work because they have a different structure
• With suicide terrorism model the weaker acts as coerced and the stronger actor is the target
• Key difference
  • Target of suicide campaign cannot easily adjust to minimize future damage
Suicide Terrorists’ Gains Limited

- Suicide attacks do not achieve goals central to security or wealth
  - Target can retaliate
- Even with a complete gain – US withdrawal from Lebanon – US had only humanitarian interest at stake
- Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon in 1985 troops remained in security buffer
- 1994 – 1995 Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and West Bank
  - Settlements increased
  - IDF had no trouble going back when they thought necessary

“This is a weapon that no power can prevent its production and use” Behruz Saqi

Delivery Methods

Vehicle/s

On foot-wear or carry

Boat/waterborne

Airframe
On foot- “wearing the bomb”

Materials (except explosives) can be purchased off the shelf.

Concealed under clothing.

Being reduced in size and bulk.

Remote capability to detonate 500 meters from bomber.

“Carrying the Bomb”

Item that contains bomb will fit environment:

Briefcase or book bag in business district or university area.

Musical instrument case vicinity of music school, music stores or entertainment district.

Shopping bag in shopping district/market.
Vehicles

- Emergency vehicles or commercial carriers-(ambulance, taxi, fuel truck).
- Ability to remotely detonate as back-up possible.
- Usually, but not always, against a fixed target.
- Multiple vehicle TTP migrating to Iraq.
- Variety of explosives to include artillery shells
- Huge pay-off potential in casualties, material damage and info war.

Airframes

- Tragedy of 9/11 demonstrates what threat is capable of.
- Commercial passenger planes, cargo, light aircraft, military (hijacked) all potential carriers.
- Focus has been on Threat to CONUS but attack on “high density/prestige” target elsewhere possible.
- Attack “terrorist modus operandi” vs insurgent. (So far)
Waterborne

Attack on the USS Cole
Terrorist TTP vs insurgent (to date)

Iraq has major port (Basra) and the smaller Umm Qasr

Suspected Items Possessed by Suicide Bombers

- An oversized jacket.
- A backpack with what appears to be intentionally punched holes or slits.
- A back support brace, when the individual has no indication of back problems.
- Electronic components from disassembled electronic toys, radios, telephones or other electronic devices.
- Hobby or safety fuses.
- Assorted chemicals that may be used in making explosives.
- A newly issued passport.
- A video or written farewell message to family.
Assorted Chemicals Possessed by Suicide Bombers

Suicide Bomb Components

- A trigger or fuse
- An explosive charge
- A container (Contains ball bearings, nuts, or nails)
- The trigger or fuse can be made from any number of variations of switches, batteries, time fuse, or detonators.
- Fabricated vests worn under clothing
- Sewn directly into the garment
Suicide Device Used in June 1, 2001 Bombing of an Israeli Disco Club. The Device Attached to the Bomber's Body Using a Common Orthopedic Belt. This is Typical of the Small, Easily Concealed Devices Used by Palestinian Groups.

Firing Device with Lanyard Port, Two Toggle Switches, and 9V Battery
Examples of Devices Used
Exterior View of Iraqi Suicide Vest Found in Baghdad

Cutaway Showing Packages which Contain Main Explosive Charge and Ball Bearings for Fragmentation.
Suicide Device for the Failed Assassination Attempt Against Afghan Vice-President Fahim Kahn.

Blocks of TNT Explosive are Removed and on the Table.

Photo of the Arrested Operative in Foreground.

An LTTE Suicide Belt.

Note the Small Size, which Easily Concealed Under Clothing.
A policeman examines two denim belt bombs with steel ball bearings embedded in plastic explosives.

A jacket containing plastic explosives with two pull cords - one to arm the device, the other to detonate it.

Such a device would be worn under the outer garments of the suicide bomber.
Eyewitness Account

Extract from International Herald Tribune, dated 19 May 2001

I saw a young man, with an Arab face, a moustache, very well dressed, with a huge blue jacket and I whispered to my father quietly, ‘Look Dad, it’s a terrorist’. The young woman was with her father just across the road from the shopping mall in Netanya, Israel.

Moments later, the man was prevented from entering the mall and he detonated an explosive device which he was wearing. The young woman’s father said that he thought there was something strange about the bomber.

He said that the man was completely calm but had wide eyes and showed tension in his face. He was skinny, neatly dressed, and wearing a huge jacket that looked inflated.

The bomber was later identified as a 21-year-old Palestinian and a member of Hamas. The explosion killed seven people and injured 110 others.

Middle East Trends of Suicide Bombers

⭐ No true profile
⭐ Can be men, women, or older children
⭐ Ages vary (Recent Palestinians Bombers were female teenagers)
⭐ Attempts to blend in with the target environment
⭐ No distinctive or identifiable clothing used
⭐ On occasion have worn military uniforms
⭐ Wearing jacket when wearing an IED
⭐ Typically carry IED in shopping bag or backpack