Life as a Weapon
Making Sense of Suicide Bombings

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- Suicide Bombing emblematic of Modern Wave of Global Terrorism 1980-

- Previous Global Waves:
  -Anarchist (1880-1910)
  -Anti-Colonial (1920-50)
  -New Left (1960s)

Suicide and Suicide Bombings

- What drives human to suicide?
- In sociology and psychiatry, suicide viewed as an END - Exit from intolerable personal pain and adverse social conditions. It only kills the victim.
- Suicide bombing is an act of self destruction in which death of others is encoded
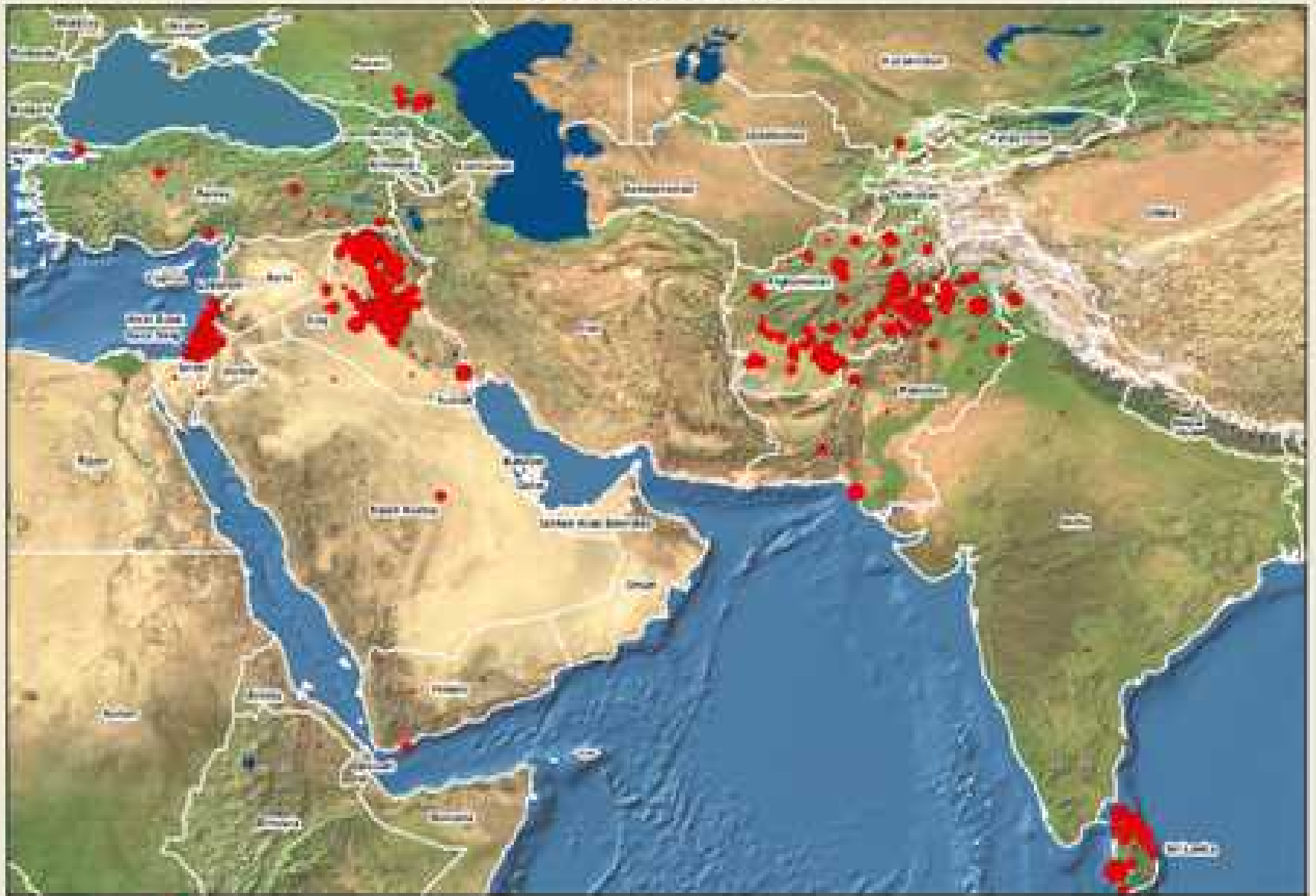
Suicide Bombings: Modern Phenomenon with Ancient Roots

- Use of life/suicide mission as proactive and empowering political act and not a resolution of personal crisis.
- Selected Historical Examples
- Cato's Suicide
- Crucifixion death of Jesus Christ
- Jewish Zealots and Sicarii
- Order of Assassins
- Japanese Kamikaze Pilots

Global Trends 1981-2011

- 2297 Suicide Bombing Attacks which killed 29951 people in 36 Countries

- Suicide Bombing is 4% of all terrorist attacks but accounted for 32% all terrorist fatalities

Suicide Attacks

Incidence of Suicide Attacks in South Asia, 1981-2011

Country	Total suicide attacks	Total death from suicide attacks	Deaths per attack
World	2297	29951	13
Iraq	979	12768	13.1
Afghanistan	545	3604	6.6
India	13	102	7.8
Pakistan	277	4186	15.1
Sri Lanka	107	1544	14.4

Deaths from Suicide Attacks and All Forms of Terrorism*

Year	All terrorist attacks (n)**	Suicide attacks (n)**	Suicide attacks as % of all terrorist attacks	Deaths from all terrorist attacks (n)**	Deaths from suicide attacks* (n)**	Deaths from suicide attacks as % of all deaths
1981-2006	29655	1200	4	45816	14599	32

Source: MIPT database (www.tkb.org) and FUSTD (2008). Data for 1981-2006
*'Deaths from suicide attacks' refers to the minimum number killed.
**n = Number

Lethality of Suicide Attacks*

Year	Average yearly suicide attacks	Deaths per suicide attack*	Average yearly non-suicide terrorist attack	Deaths per non-suicide terrorist attack
1981-2006	46	12	1094	1.1

Source: MIPT database (www.tkb.org) and FUSTD (2008)
*'Deaths from suicide attacks' refers to the minimum number killed

Explaining Suicide Bombing

- Personal Characteristics/Motivations of Perpetrator

- Terrorist Organizations

- Societal Conditions

Personal Characteristics/Motivations of Perpetrator

- Perceptions of Suicide and Terrorism

  -Suicide - Psychopathological Behaviour

  -Terrorism – Criminal Violence
- Suicide Bombers

  -Psychopaths/paranoid personality

  -Sociopaths

  -Religious Fanatics

  -Uneducated

  -Poor
- Neither Rational or Reasonable
- Public Policies

  -Killing, restraining, incarcerating deranged individuals in order to remove them from society

Terrorist Organizations

- Weaker party in asymmetrical conflicts between state and non-state actors
- Strategic Weapon
    -Comparatively lethal
    -Mechanically simple/cheap
    -Versatile and tactically efficient in reaching well-guarded targets
    -High symbolic value – signalling resolve and dedication
    -Mobilise support from sympathetic constituencies.
- Paying off Terrorist Organizations
    -Coercing adversary to make concessions
    -Giving organization advantage over rivals
- Public Policies
    -Targeted killing of leaders (mutation of terrorist organization)
    -Altruistic punishments

Societal Conditions

- Oppressive occupation of "homeland" by powerful enemy.
- Violations of cultural codes of Honour/ Shame
- Humiliation
- Revenge/Retaliation
- Altruistic sacrifice for honorable survival of self-community
- Public policies
  -Conditions of refugee camps
  -Treatment of prisoners

Five Case Studies

- Iraq
- Palestine/Israel
- Afghanistan
- Pakistan
- Sri Lanka

Lessons
Genesis of Suicide Bombings

- Intractable political conflicts over political entitlements, territorial occupation, dispossession
- State sanctioned violence/ repression against non-state/weaker party causing widespread outrage
- Large scale population dislocations /refugee camps
- Incarceration of dissidents/ insurgents/ dehumanizing treatment
- Psychological operations/mutual demonization

Suicide Bombers are not mad

- Studies have failed to find a stable set of demographic, psychological and socioeconomic variables that can be causally linked to suicide bombers' personalities or socioeconomic origins.

- No apparent connection between violent militant activity and personality disorders.

- Becoming suicide bombers is a highly selective process which acts as a screening device to exclude psychopathological individuals as groups recruit members whose behavior appears normal.

- Most suicide bombers are psychologically normal, deeply integrated into social networks and emotionally attached to their national communities.

A Strategic weapon/tactic

- Instrumental and strategic weapon used by well organized terrorist groups representing weaker party in asymmetrical conflicts related to struggle for greater autonomy or liberation of homeland.

- Deployment determined by cost effectiveness, versatility, lethality and tactical efficiency in reaching high value targets.

- High symbolic value due to the willingness of perpetrators to die as symbols of a just struggle, galvanize financial support and inspire new recruits.

- Serve interests of sponsoring organization by coercing adversaries to make concessions and by giving the organization advantage over its rival in terms of support from constituencies.

Driven mainly by politics not religion

- Used in political conflicts over political entitlements, dispossession and territorial occupation.
- Weapon of last resort by sponsoring organizations after long protests, political agitation and other forms of non violent methods have failed.
- In some cases, religion can play a vital role in recruiting and motivating future suicide bombers, particularly when secular ideologies fail to bring about desired change.
- Sometimes religious differences fuel the conflict but invariably in the context of a desire for honorable survival of the political community.
- Between 1981-2003; 43% were by religious organizations while 53% were by political/secular organizations

Driven mainly by politics, not religion

- Participation in suicide missions has multiple purposes:
  -Gaining community approval, personal redemption and honor for survival of community.
  -Political success
  -Liberation of home land
  -Signals unwillingness to subjugation
  -Revenge, guilt, shame and for personal and collective humiliation
  -Acts of religious or nationalistic convictions
  -Material or religious rewards
  -Escape from daily degradations of life under occupation, boredom, anxiety and defiance.

Humiliation aids sub-culture of suicide bombing

- Humiliation: an intense personal and emotional experience arising from destructions of culturally grounded definitions of self worth and dignity
- Means of inflicting humiliations
  - -Violence, torture
  - -Daily degradations of occupations
  - -Sense of collective grievances
  - -Repression, violation of accepted codes of honor and shame
  - -Massive economic and social dislocations
  - -Anxiety and helplessness are powerful means of inflecting humiliations

Humiliation aids sub-culture of suicide bombing

- Humiliation is a potent technique of social control. Modern intuitions play important role in production of humiliation.

- Fear is instinctive response to potential danger, humiliation is an emotional process to lower self worth and respect of the humiliated.

  -Example: Abu Ghraib techniques-forced nudity, simulated sex with another man in front of a female, not intended to inflict physical pain but to create submission and obedience. These practices worked on what it meant to be an honorable, self respecting subject in Iraqi society. The prison practices were designed to make the subject feel unworthy and transform this feeling into total obedience to humiliating authority.

Sometimes driven by revenge and retaliation

- Revenge is infliction of harm in return for perceived injury. Desire for revenge and willingness to carry out violence are tied to self worth of the offended person and to deterrent role against future injustices.

- Revenge fulfills many goals including righting perceived injustices, a response to continuous suffering of an aggrieved community.

- Important element of desire for revenge is willingness to sacrifice in order to carry out act of revenge.

- Motivations of vengeful act actions have a strong altruistic component which manifests itself in the act of self sacrifice for the sake of one's family, community or ideology.

- Personal motivation for revenge is very common aspect of human nature.

  -According to Hanna Arendt to resort to violence when confronted with outrageous events or conditions is enormously tempting because of its inherent immediacy and swiftness.. acting without arguments or speech and without counting the consequences –is the only way to set the scale of justice right again.

Altruistically driven action

- In Durkheim's conceptual map, suicide bombings will fall into category of altruistic suicide. Altruistic suicides involve valuing one's life less worthy than group's honor, religion or some other collective interest.

- In its essence <u>altruism is a costly action that benefits others</u>. It is fundamental condition explaining human cooperation for organization of society and its cohesiveness.

- From sociological and economic perspectives, suicide bombings can be linked to altruism as a form of intergenerational investment in which the agent gives up current consumption for the sake of enhancing the betterment of the descendants.

- Altruism is not antithetical to aggression. In war soldiers perform altruistic actions by risking their lives for comrades and country.
  - Actions of Japanese kamikaze pilots in World War 11

- In communities undergoing massive social and economic dislocations because of endemic and violent conflicts with a more powerful enemy altruism rises and people react by valuing and supporting ideas of self sacrifice such as suicide bombings

- Shafiqa, an incarcerated failed Palestinian suicide bomber in Israel, did not detonate her device after seeing "a woman with a little baby in her carriage. And I thought, why do I have to do this to that woman and her child?... I won't be doing something good for Allah. I thought about the people who loved me and about the innocent people in the street…It was a very difficult moment for me."

- Are suicide bombers mindless or mindful killers?

As Stanford University psychologist Philip Zimbardo puts it, "It is neither mindless nor senseless, only a very different mind-set and with different sensibilities than we have been used to witnessing among young adults in most countries."

Altruistic Punishment

- Suicide bombings invariably provoke a brutal response from authorities.

- By injecting fear and mayhem into ordinary rhythms of daily life, such bombings undermine the state's authority in providing security and maintaining social order.

- State can legitimately impose *altruistic punishments* to deter future violation threatening security and social order. These include punishments meted out to perpetrators and their supporters. The state-sanctioned military actions against the Palestinians, Sri Lankan Tamil Tigers, Iraqi insurgents and the Taliban in Pakistan and Afghanistan are examples of these punishments.

- Altruistic punishments are only effective when they do not violate the norms of *fairness*. Punishments and sanctions seen as unfair, hostile, selfish and vindictive by targeted groups tend to have detrimental effects. Instead of promoting compliance, they reinforce recipients' resolve to non-compliance.
- Counter-insurgency operations are aimed at increasing the cost of insurgency to the insurgents, and invariably involve eliminating leaders and supporters who plan suicide bombings, destroying insurgents' capabilities for mounting future attacks, and restrictions on mobility and other violations of civil liberties.

Countering suicide terrorism

- Killing and incarcerating the perpetrators
- Targeted killing of terrorist leaders- Israeli and US polices
- Suicide bombings are carried out by community based organizations. Strategies aimed at findings ways to induce communities to abandon such support may isolate terrorist organizations and curtail their activities.
- Strategies addressing and lessening the grievances and humiliation of populations that give rise to suicide attacks are required for their elimination. Support for suicide bombings attacks is unlikely to diminish without tangible progress in achieving at least some of the fundamental goals that suicide bombers and those sponsoring them and supporting them share

Thank You