1

The Growing Threat

SUICIDE TERRORISM IS rising around the world, but there is great confusion as to why. Since many such attacks—including, of course, those of September 11, 2001—have been perpetrated by Muslim terrorists professing religious motives, it might seem obvious that Islamic fundamentalism is the central cause. This presumption has fueled the belief that future 9/11's can be avoided only by a wholesale transformation of Muslim societies, a core reason for broad public support in the United States for the recent conquest of Iraq.

However, the presumed connection between suicide terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism is misleading and may be encouraging domestic and foreign policies likely to worsen America's situation and to harm many Muslims needlessly.

I have compiled a database of every suicide bombing and attack around the globe from 1980 through 2003—315 attacks in all.[1] It includes every attack in which at least one terrorist killed himself or herself while attempting to kill others; it excludes attacks authorized by a national government, for example by North Korea against the South. This database is the first complete universe of suicide terrorist attacks worldwide. I have amassed and independently verified all the relevant information that could be found in English and other languages (for example, Arabic, Hebrew, Russian, and Tamil) in print and on-line. The information is drawn

from suicide terrorist groups themselves, from the main organizations that collect such data in target countries, and from news media around the world. More than a "list of lists," this database probably represents the most comprehensive and reliable survey of suicide terrorist attacks that is now available.

The data show that there is little connection between suicide terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism, or any one of the world's religions. In fact, the leading instigators of suicide attacks are the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka, a Marxist-Leninist group whose members are from Hindu families but who are adamantly opposed to religion. This group committed 76 of the 315 incidents, more suicide attacks than Hamas.

Rather, what nearly all suicide terrorist attacks have in common is a specific secular and strategic goal: to compel modern democracies to withdraw military forces from territory that the terrorists consider to be their homeland. Religion is rarely the root cause, although it is often used as a tool by terrorist organizations in recruiting and in other efforts in service of the broader strategic objective.

Three general patterns in the data support my conclusions. First, nearly all suicide terrorist attacks occur as part of organized campaigns, not as isolated or random incidents. Of the 315 separate attacks in the period I studied, 301 could have their roots traced to large, coherent political or military campaigns.

Second, democratic states are uniquely vulnerable to suicide terrorists. The United States, France, India, Israel, Russia, Sri Lanka, and Turkey have been the targets of almost every suicide attack of the past two decades, and each country has been a democracy at the time of the incidents.

Third, suicide terrorist campaigns are directed toward a strategic objective. From Lebanon to Israel to Sri Lanka to Kashmir to Chechnya, the sponsors of every campaign have been terrorist groups trying to establish or maintain political self-determination by compelling a democratic power to withdraw from the territories they claim. Even al-Qaeda fits this pattern: although Saudi Arabia is not under American military occupation per se, a principal objective of Osama bin Laden is the expulsion of American troops from the Persian Gulf and the reduction of Washington's power and influence in the region.

Understanding suicide terrorism is essential for the promotion of American security and international peace after September 11, 2001. On that day, nineteen al-Qaeda terrorists hijacked four airlines and destroyed the

World Trade Center towers and part of the Pentagon, killing nearly 3,000 innocent people. This episode awakened Americans and the world to a new fear that previously we had barely imagined: that even at home in the United States, we were vulnerable to devastating attack by determined terrorists, willing to die to kill us.

What made the September 11 attack possible—and so unexpected and terrifying—was that willingness to die to accomplish the mission. The final instructions found in the luggage of several hijackers leave little doubt about their intentions, telling them to make

> an oath to die. . . . When the confrontation begins, strike like champions who do not want to go back to this world. . . . Check your weapons long before you leave . . . you must make your knife sharp and must not discomfort your animal during the slaughter. . . . Afterwards, we will all meet in the highest heaven. . . .[2]

The hijackers' suicide was essential to the terrible lethality of the attack, making it possible to crash airplanes into populated buildings. It also created an element of surprise, allowing the hijackers to exploit the counterterrorism measures and mind-set that had evolved to deal with ordinary terrorist threats. Perhaps most jarring, the readiness of the terrorists to die in order to kill Americans amplified our sense of vulnerability. After September 11, Americans know that we must expect that future al-Qaeda or other anti-American terrorists may be equally willing to die, and so not deterred by fear of punishment or of anything else. Such attackers would not hesitate to kill more Americans, and could succeed in carrying out equally devastating attacks—or worse—despite our best efforts to stop them.

September 11 was monstrous and shocking in scale, but it was not fundamentally unique. For more than twenty years, terrorist groups have been increasingly relying on suicide attacks to achieve major political objectives. From 1980 to 2003, terrorists across the globe waged seventeen separate campaigns of suicide terrorism, including those by Hezbollah to drive the United States, French, and Israeli forces out of Lebanon; by Palestinian terrorist groups to force Israel to abandon the West Bank and Gaza; by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (the "Tamil Tigers") to compel the Sri Lankan government to accept an independent Tamil homeland; by al-Qaeda to pressure the United States to withdraw from the Persian Gulf region. Since August of 2003, an eighteenth campaign has begun, aimed at driving the United States out of Iraq; as of this writing, it

is not yet clear how much this effort owes to indigenous forces and how much to foreigners, possibly including al-Qaeda.

More worrying, the raw number of suicide terrorist attacks is climbing. At the same time that terrorist incidents of all types have declined by nearly half, from a peak of 666 in 1987 to 348 in 2001, suicide terrorism has grown, and the trend is continuing. Suicide terrorist attacks have risen from an average of three per year in the 1980s to about ten per year in the 1990s to more than forty each year in 2001 and 2002, and nearly fifty in 2003. These include continuing campaigns by Palestinian groups against Israel and by al-Qaeda and Taliban-related forces in Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan, as well as at least twenty attacks in Iraq against U.S. troops, the United Nations, and Iraqis collaborating with the American occupation.

Although many Americans have hoped that al-Qaeda has been badly weakened by U.S. counterterrorism efforts since September 11, 2001, the data show otherwise. In 2002 and 2003, al-Qaeda conducted fifteen suicide terrorist attacks, more than in all the years before September 11 combined, killing 439 people.

Perhaps most worrying of all, suicide terrorism has become the most deadly form of terrorism. Suicide attacks amount to just 3 percent of all terrorist incidents from 1980 through 2003, but account for 48 percent of all fatalities, making the average suicide terrorist attack twelve times deadlier than other forms of terrorism—even if the immense losses of September 11 are not counted.[3] If a terrorist group does get its hands on a nuclear weapon, suicide attack is the best way to ensure the bomb will go off and the most troublesome scenario for its use.

Since September 11, 2001, the United States has responded to the growing threat of suicide terrorism by embarking on a policy to conquer Muslim countries—not simply rooting out existing havens for terrorists in Afghanistan but going further to remake Muslim societies in the Persian Gulf. To be sure, the United States must be ready to use force to protect Americans and their allies and must do so when necessary. However, the close association between foreign military occupations and the growth of suicide terrorist movements in the occupied regions should make us hesitate over any strategy centering on the transformation of Muslim societies by means of heavy military power. Although there may still be good reasons for such a strategy, we should recognize that the sustained presence of heavy American combat forces in Muslim countries is likely to *increase* the odds of the next 9/11.

To win the war on terrorism, we must have a new conception of victory. The key to lasting security lies not only in rooting out today's generation of terrorists who are actively planning to kill Americans, but also in preventing the next, potentially larger generation from rising up. America's overarching purpose must be to achieve the first goal without failing at the second. To achieve that purpose, it is essential that we understand the strategic, social, and individual logic of suicide terrorism.

Our enemies have been studying suicide terrorism for over twenty years. Now is the time to level the playing field.

2

Explaining Suicide Terrorism

MY STUDY ASSESSES the record of suicide terrorism and the state and global responses to it over the past twenty years, with a view to explaining how and why suicide terrorism has occurred and persisted, why the incidence is rising, how far the menace is likely to spread, and what can be done to contain it. Although no approach can predict the future with absolute certitude, a comprehensive analysis of the history and causes of suicide terrorism affords us the opportunity to ground our policies in a real knowledge.

My general propositions hold across a wide variety of circumstances and account for a large portion of suicide terrorism, but they have limits. My arguments are meant to account for modern suicide terrorism, especially the increasing use of suicide attack by terrorist groups from the early 1980s to the present. Modern suicide terrorist groups share a number of features. In general, they are weaker than their opponents; their political goals, if not their tactics, are broadly supported by a distinct national community; the militants have a close bond of loyalty to comrades and devotion to leaders; and they have a system of initiation and rituals signifying an individual's level of commitment to the community. Modern suicide terrorist groups may receive material assistance from states that share some of their political aspirations, but they are independent actors who rarely follow the dictates of others blindly. Perhaps most important, modern suicide

terrorism is highly lethal, because the attackers' purpose is not only to die, but to use their deaths to kill the maximum number of people from the opposing community.

These commonalities make it possible to develop a general theory of modern suicide terrorism. However, the account I offer for the origins of *suicide* terrorism should not be viewed as a general explanation for terrorism as a whole. "Ordinary," nonsuicide terrorism is significantly different. It occurs under a wider variety of circumstances, for a wider variety of goals, with wider variation in the use of destructive force and in sympathy from the terrorists' national community. In addition, nonsuicide terrorism is often used by groups far smaller than those using suicide terrorism. Accordingly, we should not expect the same factors to account equally well for suicide and nonsuicide terrorism. I have set aside the broader problem of terrorism in general in order to concentrate on the specific causes of the deadlier threat, suicide terrorism.

WHAT IS SUICIDE TERRORISM?

Terrorism involves the use of violence by an organization other than a national government to intimidate or frighten a target audience.[1] In general, terrorism has two broad purposes: to gain supporters and to coerce opponents.[2] Most terrorist campaigns seek both outcomes to some extent, often aiming to change the target state's policies while simultaneously mobilizing support and recruits for the terrorists' cause. Sometimes terrorism directed at outsiders can also be a way of competing with rival groups for support within the same social movement. However, there are trade-offs between these objectives, and terrorists can strike various balances between them. These choices represent different forms of terrorism, the most important of which are "demonstrative," "destructive," and "suicide" terrorism.

"Demonstrative terrorism" is as much political theater as violence. It is directed mainly at gaining publicity, for any or all of three reasons: to recruit more activists; to gain attention to grievances from soft-liners on the other side; and to gain attention from third parties who might exert pressure on the other side. Groups that emphasize ordinary, demonstrative terrorism include the Orange Volunteers (Northern Ireland), National Liberation Army (Colombia), and Red Brigades (Italy).[3] Hostage taking, airline hijacking, and explosions announced in advance are generally in-

tended to bring issues to the attention of the target audience. In these cases, terrorists often avoid doing serious harm, so as not to undermine sympathy for the political cause. Brian Jenkins captures the essence of demonstrative terrorism: "terrorists want a lot of people watching, not a lot of people dead."[4]

"Destructive terrorism" is more aggressive, seeking to coerce opponents with the threat of injury or death as well as to mobilize support for the cause. Destructive terrorists seek to inflict real harm on members of the target audience at the risk of losing sympathy for their cause. Exactly how groups strike the balance between harm and sympathy depends on the nature of the political goal. For instance, the Baader-Meinhof group selectively assassinated rich German industrialists, acts that alienated certain segments of German society but not others. Palestinian terrorists in the 1970s often sought to kill as many Israelis as possible, fully alienating Jewish society but still evoking sympathy from Muslim communities. Other groups that emphasize destructive terrorism include the Irish Republican Army, Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), and the nineteenth-century Anarchists.[5]

"Suicide terrorism" is the most aggressive form of terrorism, pursuing coercion even at the expense of angering not only the target community but neutral audiences as well. What distinguishes a suicide terrorist is that the attacker does not expect to survive the mission and often employs a method of attack (such as a car bomb, suicide vest, or ramming an airplane into a building) that requires his or her death in order to succeed. In essence, suicide terrorists kill others at the same time that they kill themselves.[6]

The classic model of "suicide attack" that we most commonly think of today includes only situations in which the attacker kills himself or, increasingly among the Tamil Tigers and Palestinians, herself. A broader definition could include any operation that is designed in such a way that the terrorist does not expect to survive it, even if he or she is actually killed by police or other defenders. We might call such operations suicide missions instead of suicide attacks. An example would be the February 1994 Hebron Massacre: its perpetrator, Baruch Goldstein, had no plan for escape, left a note indicating he did not expect to return, and simply continued killing Palestinians until some of his victims brought him down. Such suicide missions have occurred in a number of conflicts, as in the cases of Palestinians who invade Israeli settlements on the West Bank with guns

and grenades, intending to kill the inhabitants; few of these assailants escape alive.

This book counts only suicide attacks that meet the classic definition, partly because it is the common understanding of the concept, and partly because suicide missions are hard to identify reliably since we rarely know for certain that an attacker who did not kill himself or herself actually expected to die. In any event, including those suicide missions of which we can be confident would not change my basic findings.

In principle, suicide terrorism could be used for demonstrative purposes or could be limited to targeted assassinations. In practice, however, recent suicide terrorists often seek simply to kill as many people as they can. Although this maximizes the coercive leverage that can be gained from terrorism, it does so at heavier cost than other forms of terrorism. Maximizing the number of enemy killed alienates virtually everyone in the target audience, including those who might otherwise have been sympathetic to the terrorists' cause. In addition, the act of suicide creates a debate and often loss of support among moderate segments of the terrorists' community, although it may also attract support among radical elements. Thus, while coercion can be one of the aims of any form of terrorism, coercion is the paramount objective of suicide terrorism.

THE HISTORY OF SUICIDE TERRORISM

The forms of suicide terrorism that concern us most today—a driver detonating a car laden with explosives near a large, inhabited building, or a person exploding a suicide vest in a busy marketplace—were practically unknown before 1980. Instances of suicide terrorism did occur earlier, although these were mainly suicide missions rather than suicide attacks, and were much less common than they are now.

The three best known of these earlier suicide campaigns were those of the ancient Jewish Zealots, the eleventh- and twelfth-century Assassins, and the Japanese kamikazes during World War II.[7]

The world's first suicide terrorists were probably two militant Jewish revolutionary groups, the Zealots and the Sicarii.[8] Determined to liberate Judea from Roman occupation, these groups used violence to provoke a popular uprising—which historians credit with precipitating the "Jewish War" of A.D. 66—committing numerous public assassinations and other

audacious acts of violence in Judea from approximately 4 B.C. to A.D. 70. They attacked their victims in broad daylight in the heart of Jerusalem and other centers using small, sicklelike daggers (*sicae* in Latin) concealed under their cloaks. Many of these must have been suicide missions, since the killers were often immediately captured and put to death—typically tortured and then crucified or burned alive.[9]

One of the earliest attacks was an attempt by ten Jewish Zealots to assassinate Herod, the ruler of Judea installed by Rome, for his role in establishing a set of institutions (such as the gymnasium and the arena, and the display of graven images of Roman emperors) that were particularly inimical to Jewish custom and law. Although the plot ultimately failed, the account of what happened when the Jews were brought before Herod presents a remarkable picture of individuals willing to die to complete their violent mission. As Josephus, the main historian of the period, says:

> They openly displayed their daggers and freely confessed that the conspiracy was justified and had taken place . . . not because of a desire for gain . . . but rather for the sake of communal customs . . . for which one is prepared to give up one's life. . . . After they had confessed their plot so openly, they were led away and, after they had endured every kind of torture, put to death.[10]

The Ismaili Assassins, a Shi'ite Muslim sect based in northwestern Iran in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, created an effective organization for the planned, systematic, and long-term use of political murder that relied on suicide missions for success. For two centuries, the Assassins' daggers terrorized and demoralized the mainly Sunni rulers of the region as well as leaders of Christian Crusader states, chalking up more than fifty dramatic murders and inspiring a new word: "assassination." Most of the Assassins' victims were political and military leaders who were so heavily guarded that even successful attackers would almost surely have to pay for that success with their lives. What made the Assassins so lethal was that their killers were willing to die to accomplish their missions and often, rather than attempting to escape, reveled in their impending death. The first successful Assassin, who killed the vizier to the Great Sultan Malikshah of Persia in 1092, exclaimed before himself being killed: "The killing of this devil is the beginning of bliss." Subsequent Assassins undertook suicide missions with similar enthusiasm.[11] These killers were routinely highly trained in the art of murder, planned clever stratagems to gain ac-

cess to their victims, and also routinely expected to be caught, made no effort to escape, and considered that to survive a mission was shameful.

The Japanese kamikazes in World War II are not normally considered terrorists because they targeted solely soldiers and sailors, not civilians, and because their actions were directed and authorized by a recognized national government. History records many cases of individual soldiers who continued to fight for their country under certain-death circumstances or who, in response to a sudden threat, sacrificed themselves to save others; indeed, such sacrifice is part of our common definition of military heroism. The kamikaze program, however, was organized, planned, and persistent, not a series of individual responses to battlefield emergencies. Desperate to stop the advance of the American invasion fleet which was approaching from the Philippines, from July 1944 onward the Japanese high command organized a variety of "special attack" organizations whose pilots—commonly called kamikazes—agreed to crash their airplanes, gliders, and even manned torpedoes into U.S. naval vessels. Kamikaze raids continued for ten months, from October 25, 1944, until Japan surrendered on August 15, 1945. In total, some 3,843 pilots gave their lives. These suicide attacks did not stop the Americans, but they were four to five times more deadly than conventional strike missions and did impose high costs on the invasion forces. They damaged or sank at least 375 U.S. naval vessels, killed 12,300 American servicemen, and wounded another 36,400.[12]

Between 1945 and 1980, suicide attacks temporarily disappeared from the world scene. Although there were numerous acts of suicide by individuals in the service of political causes, there is not a single recorded instance of a suicide terrorist killing others while killing himself.

Famous self-immolations and hunger strikes did occur, but these were mainly demonstrative acts intended to evoke political sympathy and involved little risk of harming others. Mahatma Gandhi staged numerous hunger strikes against British rule in India, including in 1947; these events evoked sympathy from the British public and may have hastened Indian independence. In South Vietnam during the 1960s, Buddhist monks and nuns burned themselves to death in protest against religious persecution by the regime of the Catholic president, Ngo Dinh Diem. These horrific suicides inspired as many as 20,000 South Vietnamese to take to the streets in Saigon to demand the formation of a new government and the withdrawal of American forces. On January 19, 1969, in Czechoslovakia, a philosophy student, Jan Palach, burned himself alive in Prague's Wenceslas

Square to protest the recent Soviet invasion, a dramatic suicide that brought hundreds of thousands of people into the streets. In 1981, Bobby Sands and nine other Irish Republican Army prisoners died during a hunger strike. They failed to achieve their announced aim of compelling the British government to accord political status to IRA prisoners, but had the larger effects of strengthening Catholic perception of the British government as callous and of swelling IRA recruitment.[13]

Modern suicide terrorism—in which the attackers kill others and themselves at the same time—got its start in Lebanon the early 1980s and differs from its historical precursors in one striking way. Previously, there had rarely or never been more than one suicide terrorist campaign active at the same time. Only in recent years has suicide terrorism emerged as a tool of political coercion used by multiple actors across the globe at the same time. Suicide terrorism is increasing, both in the raw numbers of attacks and in geographical spread from one region to another.

Although not the very first modern instance, the suicide car bombing by the terrorist group called Hezbollah of the U.S. Marine barracks in Lebanon on October 23, 1983, was so spectacular—killing 241 soldiers, demolishing the building, and coinciding with a near-simultaneous second attack that killed fifty-eight French troops—that the event dominated media headlines for weeks, consumed Western national leaders for months, and encouraged terrorist groups from Hamas to the Tamil Tigers to al-Qaeda to adopt this method of attack. Hezbollah would go on to chalk up a total of thirty-six suicide attacks against American, French, and Israeli targets during the 1980s.

In the 1990s, suicide terrorism spread to several additional countries. Starting in July 1990, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam began a series of suicide attacks against Sri Lankan political leaders, military targets, and civilians, as well as using a suicide attacker to kill former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi. Suicide terrorism also spread to Israel in 1994, when the Palestinian terrorist groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad started to use suicide attacks against Israeli civilians and troops; to the Persian Gulf in 1995, when al-Qaeda initiated suicide attacks against American military targets in the region; and to Turkey in 1996, when the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) began suicide attacks against Turkish military and government targets.

Suicide terrorism spread further during the first years of the twenty-first century. Suicide attacks continued in Sri Lanka, Israel, and the Persian Gulf, and began to occur in new regions of the world. In 2000 and 2001,

rebel groups in Chechnya launched suicide attacks against Russian targets, rebels in Kashmir conducted similar attacks against Indian targets, and al-Qaeda escalated its operations with the most spectacular suicide attack in history, the direct attack on the United States on September 11, 2001.

TABLE 1. Suicide Terrorist Campaigns, 1980–2003

Date	*Terrorists*	*Religion*	*Target Country*	*# Attacks*
Completed Campaigns				
1. 1983	Hezbollah	Islam	United States, France	5
2. 1982–1985	Hezbollah	Islam	Israel	11
3. 1985–1986	Hezbollah	Islam	Israel	20
4. 1990–1994	LTTE	Hindu/secular	Sri Lanka	15
5. 1995–2000	LTTE	Hindu/secular	Sri Lanka	54
6. 1994	Hamas	Islam	Israel	2
7. 1994–1995	Hamas	Islam	Israel	9
8. 1995	BKI	Sikh	India	1
9. 1996	Hamas	Islam	Israel	4
10. 1997	Hamas	Islam	Israel	3
11. 1996	PKK	Islam/secular	Turkey	3
12. 1999	PKK	Islam/secular	Turkey	11
13. 2001	LTTE	Hindu/secular	Sri Lanka	6
Ongoing Campaigns, as of December 2003				
14. 1996–	al-Qaeda	Islam	United States, Allies	21
15. 2000–	Chechens	Islam/secular	Russia	19
16. 2000–	Kashmirs	Islam	India	5
17. 2000–	several	Islam/secular	Israel	92
18. 2003–	Iraqi rebels	unknown	United States, Allies	20
Attacks Not Part of Organized Campaigns				14
Total incidents				315

Altogether, between 1980 and 2003 there were 315 suicide terrorist attacks worldwide, of which 301 were carried out as parts of eighteen organized coercive campaigns—that is, each a series of attacks that the terrorist leaders explained as aimed at gaining specific political concessions from a named target government, and which continued until the terrorist leaders deliberately abandoned the effort, either because sufficient gains were

achieved or because the leaders became convinced that the effort had failed. Five suicide terrorist campaigns were still ongoing as of the beginning of 2004.

THE CONVENTIONAL WISDOM

Although terrorism has long been part of international politics, we do not have good explanations for the growing phenomenon of suicide terrorism. Traditional studies of terrorism tend to treat suicide attack as one of many tactics that terrorists use, and so do not shed much light on the recent rise of this type of attack.[14] The small number of studies that explicitly address suicide terrorism tend to focus on the irrationality of the act of suicide from the perspective of the individual attacker. As a result, they focus on individual motives for suicide—either religious indoctrination, or psychological predispositions that might drive individual suicide attackers.[15] This work is important and largely accounts for the twin explanations commonly offered in academic and journalistic accounts—that is, that suicide terrorism is a product either of indoctrination into Islamic fundamentalism or of the suicidal inclinations of individuals who would likely end their lives in any event.[16]

The first-wave explanations of suicide terrorism were developed during the 1980s and were consistent with the data from that period. However, as suicide attacks mounted from the 1990s onward, it has become increasing evident that these initial explanations are insufficient to account for which individuals become suicide terrorists and, more important, why terrorist organizations increasingly rely on this form of attack.

First, although religious motives may matter and although Islamic groups receive the most attention in Western media, modern suicide terrorism is not limited to Islamic fundamentalism. As shown in Table 1, the explicitly antireligious Tamil Tigers have committed 76 of the 315 suicide attacks, more than any other group; they are responsible for the spectacular bombing of the World Trade Center in Colombo in 1997 and the assassinations of two heads of state, Rajiv Gandhi of India and Ranasinghe Premadasa of Sri Lanka.

Even among Muslims, secular groups account for over a third of suicide attacks. The Kurdish PKK, which has used suicide bombers as part of its strategy to achieve Kurdish autonomy, is guided by the secular Marxist-

Leninist ideology of its leader, Abdullah Ocalan, rather than by Islam. Even in the conflicts most characterized by Islamic fundamentalism, groups with secular ideologies account for an important number of suicide attacks. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, a Marxist-Leninist group, and the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, with allegiance to Yasser Arafat's socialist Fatah movement, together account for thirty-one of ninety-two suicide attacks against Israel, while communist and socialist groups, such as the secular Lebanese National Resistance Front, the Lebanese Communist Party, and the Syrian National Socialist Party, account for twenty-seven of thirty-six suicide attacks in Lebanon in the 1980s.

Overall, Islamic fundamentalism is associated with about half of the suicide terrorist attacks that have occurred from 1980 to 2003.[17]

Second, psychological explanations cannot explain why suicide terrorism occurs only in certain societies and at certain times. While suicide rates vary from one society to another, they do not vary enough to explain why the overwhelming majority of societies—even those experiencing political violence—exhibit no suicide terrorism but a handful of societies have experienced dozens of attacks each. This requires a political or social explanation. Similarly, while the supply of suicidal individuals may vary somewhat over time, psychological explanations cannot account for why over 95 percent of all suicide terrorist attacks occur in organized campaigns that are concentrated in time. Further, the demographic profile of suicide terrorist attackers does not fit the usual profile of suicidal individuals. Until recently, the leading experts in psychological profiles of suicide terrorists characterized them as uneducated, unemployed, socially isolated, single men in their late teens and early twenties.[18] This study, however, collects comprehensive data on the demographic characteristics of suicide terrorist attackers (see Chapter 10), which shows that they have been college educated and uneducated, married and single, men and women, isolated and socially integrated; they have ranged in age from fifteen to fifty-two.[19] In other words, suicide terrorists come from a broad array of lifestyles. Some may exhibit suicidal tendencies as these are conventionally understood, but many do not.

Recently, new explanations for suicide terrorism have begun to appear. Some have wondered whether suicide terrorism is a product of especially deep poverty or domestic political competition among various nonstate actors. The idea that suicide terrorism results from poverty is intuitively attractive. It is easier to accept that individuals with little to live for would be

more willing to commit suicide than those with meaningful lives ahead of them, especially since suicide terrorism has emerged from Third World societies, all of which are poorer than Western societies.

As scholars have shown, however, poverty is a rather poor explanation for suicide terrorism.[20] A brief look at the international economic facts of life helps to explain why, especially if we control for the likely perturbing effects of the U.S. war on terrorism that led to the conquest of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003. As Table 2 shows, the countries plagued by suicide terrorism from 1980 to 2001 are by no means the worst off in the world; some would be considered "middle income" societies, and their people enjoy life expectancies not dramatically lower than those in the United States.

TABLE 2. 1998 Economic and Human Development Indicators for Countries and Areas Associated with Suicide Terrorism from 1980 to 2001

	GNP per capita (rank of 206)	*Life Expectancy*
Algeria	$1,550 (111)	71
Egypt	1,290 (121)	67
Lebanon	3,560 (80)	70
Pakistan	470 (158)	62
Saudi Arabia	6,910 (60)	72
Sri Lanka	810 (139)	73
Turkey	3,160 (85)	69
Chechnya*	2,270 (90)	66
India	450 (162)	63
West Bank	1,560 (112)	71
United States	29,240 (1)	77

Source: World Bank, *World Development Indicators* (2000)

*Data for Russia

Table 3 shows economic statistics for a dozen of the most economically hopeless states in the world, but neither these nor any of the forty-four countries that rank below India in gross national product were associated with even a single suicide terrorist attack during this period.

TABLE 3. 1998 Economic and Human Development Indicators for Poor Countries and Areas Not Associated with Suicide Terrorism from 1980 to 2001

	GNP per capita (rank of 206)	*Life Expectancy*
Chad	$230 (192)	48
Burundi	140 (191)	42
Ethiopia	100 (206)	43
Haiti	410 (162)	54
Mali	250 (189)	50
Mozambique	210 (195)	45
Nigeria	300 (181)	53
Niger	200 (198)	46
Rwanda	230 (192)	41
Sierra Leone	140 (202)	37
Uganda	310 (180)	42
Zambia	330 (177)	43

Source: World Bank, *World Development Indicators* (2000)

Even if we include the countries associated with suicide terrorism after the U.S. war on terrorism began, poverty remains a poor indicator of suicide terrorism. As Table 4 shows, of the five new countries that would be added to the list of those associated with suicide terrorism, only Afghanistan would be considered among the poorest forty-four countries (of 206) in the world.

TABLE 4. 1998 Economic and Human Development Indicators for Countries Associated with Suicide Terrorism Since 2001

	GNP per capita (rank of 206)	*Life Expectancy*
Tunisia	$2,060 (101)	72
Indonesia	640 (149)	65
Afghanistan	(not available)	46
Iraq	761–3,030 (est)	59
Morocco	1,240 (124)	67

Source: World Bank, *World Development Indicators* (2000)

The final explanation that has recently emerged is that suicide terrorism is a product of domestic competition among multiple organizations

for popular support from their community. What this explanation has going for it is that it appears to correlate with some facts from the Palestinian case.[21] Starting in 1994, two separate radical groups, Hamas and Islamic Jihad, began to conduct suicide terrorist attacks that were rarely coordinated with each other and, starting in 2000, the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine launched suicide terrorist attacks as well.

However, there are good reasons to doubt that domestic political competition among rival groups is an adequate explanation either for the Palestinian case in particular or suicide terrorism in general. Even if domestic competition accounts for why multiple Palestinian groups are engaged in suicide terrorism and even if these groups are striving to outbid each other for popular support from the local community, this does not explain why suicide terrorism is so popular among the Palestinian population in the first place.[22] More important, there are many societies in which multiple violent groups compete for domestic political support without their competition leading to suicide terrorism—for instance, Somalia, Colombia, El Salvador, Nigeria, and Nicaragua—while the vast majority of cases of suicide terrorism are not associated with competition among multiple extremist organizations. The Tamil Tigers and al-Qaeda had no competitors during the periods they carried out suicide attacks, while the multiple groups that made up Hezbollah in Lebanon worked together rather than in competition with each other.

THE STRATEGIC LOGIC OF SUICIDE TERRORISM

What causes suicide terrorism? To answer this question, we must recognize that modern suicide terrorism occurs mainly in campaigns of suicide attacks carried out by organized groups for specific political goals and extending over a considerable period of time. So the core phenomenon to be explained is not an individual suicide attack, or even many such attacks considered one at a time, but the existence of protracted suicide terrorist campaigns. Although the motives of individual attackers matter, the crucial need is an explanation of the political, social, and individual conditions that jointly account for why suicide terrorist campaigns persist, why so many are occurring now, and why they occur where and when they do.

To explain suicide terrorism, it is helpful to think of a suicide terrorist

campaign as the product of a three-step process, to explain each step individually, and to provide a unifying framework for the causal logic as a whole. The three principal questions are these.

First, what is the strategic logic of suicide terrorism? That is, why does suicide attack make political sense from the perspective of a terrorist organization? If terrorist organizations did not believe that suicide attack would advance their political goals, they would not do it.

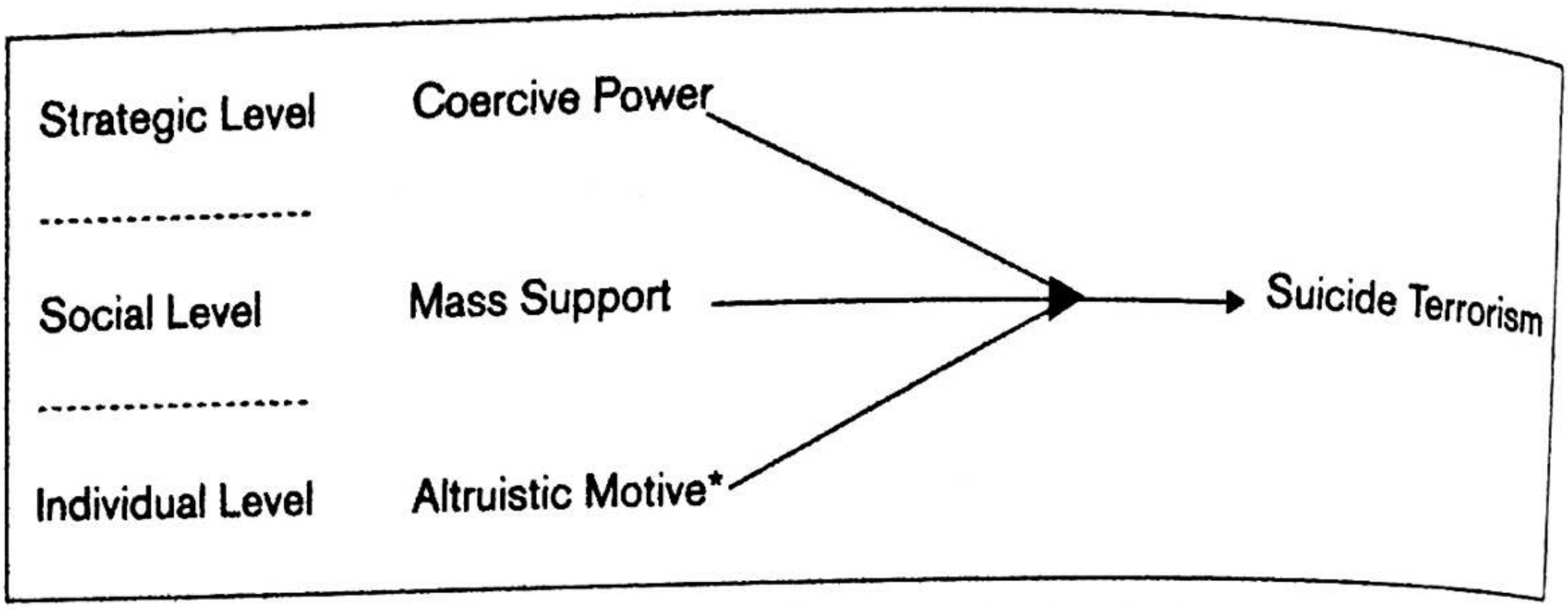
Second, what is the social logic of suicide terrorism? Why does suicide attack receive mass support in some societies and not others? Without social support from the terrorists' national community, suicide terrorist campaigns could not be sustained.

Third, what is the individual logic of suicide terrorism? What makes particular people willing to give up their lives to carry out terrorist attacks? Without a ready supply of willing attackers, suicide terrorist campaigns would be much more limited in scope than they are.

Suicide terrorism depends for its existence on all three of these components—the strategic, the social, and the individual.[23] The diagram on the following page illustrates the general framework for the causal logic of suicide terrorism and supplies a brief summary of the principal mechanisms at work in each level of analysis.

The strategic logic of suicide terrorism is aimed at political coercion. The vast majority of suicide terrorist attacks are not isolated or random acts by individual fanatics, but rather occur in clusters as part of a larger campaign by an organized group to achieve a specific political goal. Moreover, the main goals of suicide terrorist groups are profoundly of this world. Suicide terrorist campaigns are primarily nationalistic, not religious, nor are they particularly Islamic. From Hezbollah in Lebanon to Hamas on the West Bank to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka, every group mounting a suicide campaign over the past two decades has had as a major objective—or as its central objective—coercing a foreign state that has military forces in what the terrorists see as their homeland to take those forces out. Further, all of the target states have been democracies, which terrorists see as more vulnerable to coercion than other types of regimes. Even al-Qaeda fits this pattern. Osama bin Laden's highest-priority objective—although he has others—is the expulsion of U.S. troops from the Persian Gulf region. Terrorists loyal to al-Qaeda routinely attack American troops, individuals from Western countries, and governments friendly to the West in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states.

CAUSAL LOGIC OF SUICIDE TERRORISM



*Altruistic suicides are those committed to further a goal that the individual's community supports; they are to be distinguished from egoistic suicides, which are committed to escape a life that has become intolerable. See Chapter 9.

There is a disturbing reason why suicide terrorism has been rising so rapidly: over the past two decades, suicide terrorists have learned that this strategy pays. Suicide terrorists sought to compel American and French military forces to abandon Lebanon in 1983, Israeli forces to leave Lebanon in 1985, Israeli forces to quit the Gaza Strip and the West Bank in 1994 and 1995, the Sri Lankan government to create an independent Tamil state from 1990 on, and the Turkish government to grant autonomy to the Kurds in the late 1990s. In all but the case of Turkey, the terrorists' political cause made more gains after the resort to suicide operations than it had before.

Second, suicide terrorism follows a social logic strikingly different from what many assume. Suicide terrorist groups are neither primarily criminal gangs dedicated to enriching their top leaders, nor religious cults isolated from the rest of their society. Rather, suicide terrorist organizations often command broad social support within the national communities from which they recruit, because they are seen as pursuing legitimate nationalist goals, especially liberation from foreign occupation.

Although suicide terrorism is virtually always a response to foreign occupation, only some occupations lead to this result. Suicide terrorism is most likely when the occupying power's religion differs from the religion of the occupied, for three reasons. A conflict across a religious divide increases fears that the enemy will seek to transform the occupied society; makes demonization, and therefore killing, of enemy civilians easier; and makes it easier to use one's own religion to relabel suicides that would otherwise be taboo as martyrdom instead.

Finally, what motivates individual suicide terrorists? Are suicide attackers driven by economic helplessness, social anomie, religious indoctrination, or something else? Not all suicides arise from similar causes. Emile Durkheim's famous study of suicide in nineteenth-century Europe showed that there are multiple forms of suicide. The most common is "egoistic suicide," in which personal psychological trauma leads an individual to kill himself in order to escape a painful existence. Less common is "altruistic suicide," in which high levels of social integration and respect for community values can lead normal individuals to commit suicide out of a sense of duty. Many, perhaps most, suicide terrorists fit the paradigm of altruistic suicide, at least from the point of view of those who support terrorism to further their political cause. From everyone else's point of view, suicide attacks are murders.

Few suicide attackers are social misfits, criminally insane, or professional losers. Most fit a nearly opposite profile: typically they are psychologically normal, have better than average economic prospects for their communities, and are deeply integrated into social networks and emotionally attached to their national communities. They see themselves as sacrificing their lives for the nation's good.

The bottom line, then, is that suicide terrorism is mainly a response to foreign occupation. Isolated incidents in other circumstances do occur. Religion plays a role. However, modern suicide terrorism is best understood as an extreme strategy for national liberation against democracies with troops that pose an imminent threat to control the territory the terrorists view as their homeland.

Understanding the strategic, social, and individual logics of suicide terrorism has important implications for America's war on terrorism. Our current policy debate is misguided. Neither offensive military force nor concessions alone are likely to work for long. The key problem we face is that our security depends on achieving not one goal, but two: we must defeat the current pool of terrorists seeking to launch spectacular attacks against the United States and our allies, while simultaneously undermining the conditions that will otherwise produce the next, potentially larger generation of terrorists. Accomplishing this overall purpose will require a new strategy for victory; that strategy must recognize that a trade-off exists between our two objectives, because the use of heavy offensive force to defeat today's terrorists is the most likely stimulus to the rise of more.

September 11 has changed the lives of Americans. Every day, many

wonder if each airplane, building, or bus they see could be a danger to them or their families. When people themselves are weapons of war, it is hard to be confident of safety. However, the future need not be grim. Understanding the logic of suicide terrorism can help us pursue the right domestic and foreign policies to contain this deadly threat.