Case Studies in Interdisciplinary Research

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5 Integrating Theory-Based Insights on the Causes of Suicide Terrorism

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Introduction

One of the most insidious forms of terrorism is suicide terrorism. This is the "intentional killing of oneself for the purpose of killing others in the service of a political or ideological goal" (Hronick, 2006, p. 2).[1] Since the attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, research on terrorism has increasingly focused on suicide terrorism because these attacks have increased in frequency and ferocity, with more than 180 occurring each year since 2001. From 2000 to 2004, there were 470 suicide attacks in 22 countries, killing more than 7,000 people and wounding tens of thousands, including women and children. Since 2005, suicide attacks have spread to Afghanistan, Britain, India, Pakistan, China, and Spain. More troubling still is that the great majority of these attacks are carried out by adherents of a fundamentalist arm of Islam, one of the world's four major faith traditions (Judeo-Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism) whose adherents are found in most countries of the world. Suicide terrorism is becoming a global phenomenon because of the geographical spread of attacks and because participants come from countries across the Middle East and Europe (Atran, 2006, p. 127). Consequently, scholars and policy makers are anxious to develop a more comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon.

[1]Hronick's study summarizes the proceedings of a conference held in October 2004 and hosted by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), the research, development, and evaluation agency of the U.S. Department of Justice. Conference participants included Ariel Merari of Tel Aviv University, who advanced the definition quoted here in an attempt to distinguish suicide terrorism from high-risk terrorist missions.

To this end, some have used a multidisciplinary approach in which expert views from different disciplines are juxtaposed, but they make no attempt to integrate these conflicting insights.[2] While potentially helpful, these multidisciplinary efforts fall far short of the interdisciplinary approach that Ian Pitchford (2003) calls for:

> The key to understanding suicide terrorism is to identify a theoretical framework capable of explaining the disparate facts on which the majority of researchers are agreed and of extending our understanding by establishing links to other bodies of knowledge [i.e., the disciplines]. (p. 1)

Developing "a theoretical framework" and "establishing links" across disciplinary knowledge domains requires creating common ground and performing integration, which are distinguishing features of interdisciplinarity. Analyzing the causes of suicide terrorism, therefore, requires an interdisciplinary approach, for several reasons. First, the problem is complex, meaning that it has several components and that each component has a different disciplinary character. Second, important insights into the problem have been produced by experts from multiple disciplines: These are narrowly focused and thus often conflict. Third, no single disciplinary expert has been able to address this problem comprehensively, much less offer a holistic solution to it. Fourth, suicide terrorism is a pressing societal/public policy/foreign policy problem that urgently requires a more comprehensive understanding of its causes so that policy makers can develop effective countermeasures. Fifth, the problem falls within the research domain of several disciplines (Repko, 2008, pp. 151–155).

The purpose of this chapter is to show how the application of the interdisciplinary research process delineated in Repko (2008) can illuminate a complex problem, such as suicide terrorism, in which the expert views are typically theory based. Though most of the steps of the integrated model of research process are used, the primary focus of the chapter is on Steps 7 to 9, concerning how to perform causal integration of conflicting theoretical explanations.

Drawing on Disciplinary Insights (Steps 1 to 6)

After framing the research problem or question (Step 1) and justifying the use of an interdisciplinary approach to investigate it (Step 2), several decisions need to be made. These include deciding which disciplines are most relevant to the problem (Step 3), which disciplinary literatures to mine for insights (Step 4), how to achieve adequacy in each relevant discipline in terms of the elements (i.e., assumptions, theories, and concepts) that pertain to the problem (Step 5), and how to analyze the problem and evaluate each insight into it (Step 6).

[2]Examples of multidisciplinary approaches include the following: Walter Reich (1998), Wadsworth/Thomson Learning (2004), and Rex A. Hudson (1999).

Identifying the Most Relevant Disciplines (Step 3) and Conducting the Full-Scale Literature Search (Step 4)

Step 3 of the research process calls for identifying those disciplines, subdisciplines, and interdisciplines that are *potentially* relevant to the problem because it falls within their research domains. These include economics, psychology, history, sociology, communications (an applied field), international relations (a subdiscipline of political science), cultural anthropology (a subdiscipline of anthropology), religious studies, and cultural studies (an interdiscipline).[3] This list was generated using the perspectival approach (i.e., relying on each discipline's unique perspective on reality). This preliminary list was checked for completeness against a list generated from Szostak's (2004) classification approach, which links particular phenomena (including theories) to particular disciplines. Both approaches are discussed in Chapter 4 of Repko (2008).

Narrowing this list to those disciplines most relevant to the problem requires conducting a full-scale literature search (Step 4). This involves querying the major databases such as Academic Search Complete, JSTOR, and WorldCat using the keywords "terrorism" and "suicide terrorism." This search serves two critical functions. It shows that the most important insights into the problem have been produced by psychology, political science, history, and cultural anthropology, based on their theories, concepts, assumptions, and research methods. These disciplines are the *most relevant* to the problem because they "are most directly connected to the problem, have generated the most important research on it, and have advanced the most compelling theories to explain it" (Newell, 1992, p. 213). The second function of the search is to establish whether the problem is researchable in an interdisciplinary sense. It is *if* the search yields insights or expert views from two or more disciplinary perspectives (Repko, 2008, p. 350). Notably, the literature search on the problem of suicide terrorism met these criteria and revealed a substantial number of insights, many of which are theory based.

[3]This describes the "perspectival approach" to conducting a literature search. There is a second way to identify the most relevant disciplines using Rick Szostak's (2004) classification approach, which links most topics readily to one or more broad categories of phenomena (such as genetic predisposition and individual differences) that cut across disciplinary boundaries. Each of these categories links to a more detailed list of second-level phenomena, and each of these, in turn, links to a still more detailed list of third-level phenomena. The researcher using the classification approach should be able to identify connections to neighboring phenomena that may touch on the research question but that may have been overlooked using the perspectival approach. At minimum, this approach provides an effective way to determine whether the initial list of potentially relevant disciplines is, indeed, complete. For example, the problem of suicide terrorism definitely concerns individual differences (one of the broad categories in Szostak's first level of phenomena). But it *may* also concern the broad category of genetic predisposition that explains, among other things, motivations (including aggression and group identification) and emotions (including anger, fear, jealousy, and emotional display). If so, then the literature search (Step 4) must be broadened to include the biological sciences. In the case of suicide terrorism, the expanded literature search failed to reveal any published peer-reviewed research.

Developing Adequacy in Each Relevant Discipline (Step 5)

Once the disciplines most relevant to the problem are identified, the next task is to develop adequacy in them. "Adequacy" in an interdisciplinary context means knowing enough about the discipline to have a basic understanding of how it approaches the problem and how it illuminates and characterizes the problem (Klein, 2005, p. 68).[4] The perspectives of the most relevant disciplines on suicide terrorism are as follows:

- Psychology's overall perspective on human behavior is that it reflects the cognitive constructs that individuals develop to organize their mental activity and motivate their behavior. Applied to suicide terrorism, this perspective suggests that suicide terrorist behavior reflects inherent personality traits and/or cognitive constructs that are possibly cultivated by terrorist leadership.
- Political science tends to view the world as a political arena in which individuals and groups make decisions based on the quest for or exercise of power. Politics, at all levels and in all cultures, is typically viewed as a perpetual struggle over whose values, not just whose interests, will prevail in setting priorities and making collective choices. When applied to suicide terrorism, this perspective views suicide terrorism as motivated primarily by strategic and power/political considerations.
- Cultural anthropology views individual cultures as organic integrated wholes with their own internal logic. By "culture" is meant the sets of symbols, rituals, and beliefs by which a society gives meaning to daily life. This perspective views suicide terrorism as a complex phenomenon deeply rooted in some variants of Islamic culture.
- History tends to view events past and present as expressions of trends and developments leading up to them and as the result of both societal forces and individual decisions. Consequently, this perspective tends to view suicide terrorism as the product of events and developments that have shaped, and continue to shape, the course of Muslim civilization for more than a thousand years (Lewis, 2002, p. 1).

Developing adequacy in the most relevant disciplines may also include identifying important theories advanced by disciplinary experts to explain the phenomenon. This is especially true when working in the social sciences, which are typically theory laden. Because suicide terrorism has attracted the most scholarly interest from the social sciences, and because the most important insights are generally theory based, developing adequacy calls for identifying these theories, which are shown in Table 5.1.[5]

The interdisciplinarian must be open to the possibility that one or more of these theories may not be as important as first supposed, and/or that further searching may reveal the need to add one or more new theories to the list.

[4]Developing adequacy involves asking questions of these disciplines, such as how much knowledge, and what kind of knowledge, is required from each discipline. Beyond knowing the cognitive map of the disciplines involved, not much specialized knowledge is required. Indeed, the problem can be adequately illuminated using a handful of introductory-level elements from each of the relevant disciplines. These include its assumption(s), theories, concepts, and research methods. See the discussion of adequacy in Repko (2008, pp. 189–194).

Analyzing the Problem and Evaluating Each Insight Into It (Step 6)

Closely associated with achieving adequacy in the relevant disciplines is analyzing the problem from the perspective of each relevant discipline and evaluating each important insight into it, particularly the theory that each expert advances. The evaluation focuses on each theory's explanation of the causes of suicide terrorism, its key assumption(s), and its strengths and weaknesses as an explanatory model. This work is foundational to creating common ground and to performing integration.

The Theory-Based Insights of Psychology

Psychology typically sees human behavior as reflecting the cognitive constructs individuals develop to organize their mental activity. Psychologists

Table 5.1 Important Theories on the Causes of Suicide Terrorism

Relevant Discipline and Subdiscipline	Writer	Theory
Psychology	Post	Terrorist psycho-logic
	Bandura	Self-sanction (moral disengagement)
	Merari	Martyrdom
Political Science	Crenshaw	Collective rational choice
	Rapoport	Sacred terror
	Monroe & Kreidie	Religious identity theory
Cultural Anthropology	Atran	Fictive kin
History	Lewis	Modernization

[5]Since 9/11, the literature on terrorism has grown exponentially, which greatly complicates the interdisciplinarian's task of identifying the most relevant insights and the most important theories.

also study inherent mental mechanisms, both genetic predispositions and individual differences. Experts typically see suicide terrorism in terms of individuals whose behavior is the product of mental constructs and cognitive restructuring. They attempt to identify the possible motivations behind a person's decision to join a terrorist group and commit acts of shocking violence. They tend to agree that there is no single terrorist mindset, a finding that greatly complicates attempts to profile terrorists groups and leaders on a more systematic and accurate basis (Hudson, 1999, p. 22). Among the several psychology-based theories that researchers have advanced to explain this phenomenon are the theories advanced by Jerrold M. Post, Albert Bandura, and Ariel Merari, which are frequently cited by other experts.

1. Post (1998) argues that suicide terrorists reason logically but employ what he calls "a special logic" or "psycho-logic." According to this theory, terrorists do not *willingly* resort to terrorism as an intentional choice. Rather, "political terrorists are driven to commit acts of violence as a consequence of psychological forces, and . . . their special psychologic is constructed to rationalize acts they are *psychologically compelled to commit* [emphasis added]" (p. 25). In other words, terrorists are born with certain personality traits that can predispose them to engage in terrorist acts, including suicide attacks. Post's theory challenges other research on suicide attackers, which shows that "most suicide terrorists are psychologically normal, in the sense that psychological pathology does not seem to be present and the attacks are virtually always premeditated" (Cronin, 2003, p. 6). His theory assumes that attackers are born, not made. A major weakness of Post's theory is its narrow focus on the "special logic" of individual terrorists, which does not allow room for those terrorists whose behavior may be motivated by something other than this "special logic." The implication of his theory is that suicide terrorists may themselves be "victims" because they have no control over their particular personality traits.

2. Bandura (1998) is interested in how terrorists rationalize their acts of violence. He assumes that terrorists are made, not born. According to his self-sanction theory, terrorists use four techniques to insulate themselves from the human consequences of their actions: (1) imagining themselves as the saviors of a constituency threatened by a great evil, (2) viewing themselves as functionaries who are merely following their leader's orders, (3) minimizing or ignoring the actual suffering of their victims, and (4) dehumanizing their victims (p. 161). A principal strength of his theory is that it addresses causal factors external to the individual attacker, including political factors, the influence of culture on one's sense of identity, and the influence of sacred beliefs. A major weakness of the theory is its silence concerning a person's cognitive predisposition and personality traits that may influence decision making.

3. Merari (1998) rejects the notion that suicide attackers are mentally unstable and assumes, with Bandura, that attackers are made, not born. They need, he says, a very specific mindset to carry out a suicide bombing. According to his martyrdom theory, this mindset is shaped by four factors: culture (including religion), ideas (i.e., indoctrination by terrorist organizations), politics, and the attacker's personality. He rejects the widely held view that this brand of terrorism is the exclusive domain of religious fanaticism, noting that "in most cases the perpetrators sacrificed themselves in the name of a nationalistic rather than a religious idea" (pp. 196, 204–205). He argues that personality factors, especially the psychological impact of a broken family background, seem to play a "critical role in suicidal terrorism" but attributes primary responsibility to recruiting organizations and their charismatic trainers (p. 207). As with Post's theory, this theory fails to address the causal factors of politics, culture, and religion that research outside psychology has shown to be highly influential in the development of a suicide attacker.

These psychological approaches focus on individual terrorists, their motivations and behaviors, their recruitment and induction into terrorist groups, their personalities, their religious beliefs, their family ties, and other influences that can possibly explain their actions. Conflicting assumptions underlie these theories. Post (1998) assumes that suicide terrorists are inherently predisposed to commit acts of terrorism, whereas Bandura (1998) and Merari (2007) assume that they are the product of factors external to the individual.[6] All three theories share the deeper assumption basic to psychology: that group behavior can be reduced to individuals and that understanding the behavior and motivations of individual suicide terrorists is best achieved by examining their personality traits.

The Theory-Based Insights of Political Science

Whereas psychologists are interested in the mental life of the individual terrorist, political scientists are interested in the political contexts of terrorist groups. They typically view suicide terrorism as a purposeful or rational mode of political expression and focus on the terrorists' ideological convictions and strategic and power-motivated political considerations. However, newer approaches are focusing on the role of religion in politics and religious perceptions of political reality.

[6]Rex A. Hudson (1999) questions the widely held Olson hypothesis, which "suggests that participants in revolutionary violence predicate their behavior on a rational cost-benefit calculus" and the theory's conclusion that prevailing social conditions explain why violence is often seen as "the best available course of action" (p. 19).

Political scientists Martha Crenshaw, David C. Rapoport,[7] and Kristen Renwick Monroe and Lina Haddad Kreidie view suicide terrorism as a form of political expression of competing values, worldviews, and interests.[8]

1. Crenshaw (1998), a pioneer of terrorist studies, concedes that psychology is, indeed, important in determining terrorist behavior, but she contends that the nonpsychological—that is, the instrumental—bases of terrorist actions must be accorded equal weight. For Crenshaw, terrorist behavior is a product of strategic choice and an expression of political strategy (p. 7). Strategic choice theory is a variation of rational choice theory that holds that people calculate the likely costs and benefits of any action before deciding what to do. All kinds of actions, even those that may appear to be irrational or nonrational, such as suicide attacks, are explained as rationally motivated and calculated. The theory assumes that the individual decision maker is "typical" or "representative" of some larger group. It also makes two other assumptions: that the terrorist is "maximizing utility" by choosing this preferred alternative, and that the presence of constraints makes the decision to use suicide attack necessary (Green, 2002, pp. 4, 7). Crenshaw's (1998) theory of collective rational strategic choice offers three advantages: (1) it permits the construction of a standard by which degrees of strategic reasoning modified by psychology and other constraints can be measured; (2) it suggests important questions about the preferences or goals of terrorist organizations; and (3) it offers a useful interpretation of reality. The resort to terrorism need not be viewed as an aberration, she says. Rather, it may be "a reasonable and calculated response to circumstances" (pp. 9–10). The main problem with her theory is its "assumption that terrorist actions and motivations are purely results of strategic choice—that it is logical thinking that is aimed at achieving rational, strategic ends" *that are essentially political.* However, the theory fails to account for the varieties of terrorist motivations, that is, "the ways in which certain belief systems, particularly ideological and religious ones, contribute to world views that make terrorism attractive to some persons" (Reich, 1998, p. 3).

2. Rapoport (1998) is a leading analyst of the relationship between terrorism and religion, particularly within Shia and Sunni Islam. His particular focus is on the revival of terrorist activities to support religious goals or

[7]Rapoport is a political scientist *and* a historian.

[8]Bruce Hoffman's *Inside Terrorism* (2006) is widely viewed as the seminal work for understanding the historical evolution of terrorism and the terrorist mindset. In it, he argues that terrorism in general, and suicide terrorism in particular, are ways to pursue, acquire, and use power to achieve political change (p. 2). Suicide terrorism, he says, is an "entirely rational and calculated choice, consciously embraced as a deliberate instrument of warfare" (p. 132). His use of rational choice theory to understand the causes of suicide terrorism differs from Crenshaw's (1998) use of it in this critical aspect: Hoffman's approach makes room for religious and theological justifications for using this form of terrorism. Still, there is more similarity than difference between Hoffman's approach and the approaches of Crenshaw and Rapoport to justify his inclusion.

terror justified in theological terms, a phenomenon he calls "holy" or "sacred" terror. The main difference between sacred and secular terror, he says, derives from the special justifications and precedents each uses. Whereas secular terrorists produce cultures in which participants feel free to take their lessons from anyone, sacred or religiously motivated terrorists ground their approach in events in Islam's founding period and the commentaries of religious sages. According to these sages, sacred terror is the duty of true Muslim believers and will reverse Islam's humiliation and decline (1998, pp. 98–111). Rapoport's theory of "holy" or "sacred" terror is broad enough to account for terrorist political aspirations and to explain how culture and religious values may motivate a person to become a suicide terrorist. Yet, it fails to address how a person's mind may be predisposed, susceptible to, or shaped by these complex influences and motivated to commit such a horrific act.

3. Monroe and Kreidie (1997) say that part of the scholarly failure to understand the growth of Islamic fundamentalism and to explain the phenomenon of suicide terrorism "results from a failure to recognize the importance of cognitive differences in worldviews held by fundamentalists and secularists" (p. 19). This fundamentalist worldview is completely different from rational choice decision-making models, which are Western and secular. Rather than superimpose this model on suicide terrorists, Monroe and Kreidie turn to identity theory, which is based on the psychological concept of "cognitive-perceptual framework," to explain how Islamic fundamentalists perceive reality and what motivates their behavior. The term "cognitive-perceptual framework" is a compound idea that includes the concepts of cognition and perspective. Cognition "refers to that particular part of an individual's beliefs about how the world works which is used to organize and make sense of reality." Monroe and Kreidie "assume that the development of a person's cognitive-perceptual framework is influenced by societal norms and culture." In turn, "culture helps shape the human mind and gives meaning to action" (p. 23). Perspective conveys the visual idea of locating oneself on a cognitive map, much as one locates oneself in a landscape. In a psychological sense,

> perspective contains the idea that we all have a view of the world, a view of ourselves, a view of others, and a view of ourselves in relation to others. Perspective implies that there is a particular way in which the world is seen. . . . It incorporates our worldviews and our identities. (p. 25)

Identity theory shows that the Islamic fundamentalist way of life "takes precedence over all else, even one's own children, and even their own life" (Monroe & Kreidie, 1997, p. 37). Consequently, politics, for suicide terrorists, is merely one aspect of an all-encompassing religious faith. Power is sought and exercised for the purpose of extending the reach of religion. Achieving, maintaining, and extending power is a moral (in a theological sense)

imperative.[9] Therefore, it is a mistake for Western policy makers to view Islamic fundamentalists as rational actors but then dismiss them as irrational when they do not act as predicted by traditional cost/benefit models such as rational choice theory. Islamic fundamentalism, argue Monroe and Kreidie, is not simply another set of political values that can be compromised or negotiated. Nor is it a system of beliefs or ideology, such as socialism or communism, in which "traditional liberal democratic modes of political discourse and interaction are recognized." Rather, "Islamic fundamentalism taps into a quite different political consciousness, one in which religious identity sets and determines the range of options open to the fundamentalists. It extends to all areas of life and respects no separation between the private and the political" (pp. 19–20, 41). Though the theory is interdisciplinary in that it borrows concepts from psychology, it fails to probe the psychological mechanisms that enable terrorists to do what they do as deeply as some psychology theories (such as Post's) do.

Crenshaw (1998) and Rapoport (1998) view suicide terrorism primarily as a political phenomenon, whereas Monroe and Kreidie (1997) seek broader understanding and thus borrow heavily from research outside their discipline. Nevertheless, all four writers believe that the root causes of terrorism can be found in influences such as international events and national environments (home and foreign) as well as subnational causes such as the influences of local schools and foreign universities (Hudson, 1999, p. 16). These theories share two assumptions: that factors external to the terrorists explain their motivation and behavior, and that groups and organizations exercise a determinative role on the transformation of a person into a suicide terrorist.

The Theory-Based Insight of Cultural Anthropology

Cultural anthropology typically views individual cultures as organic integrated wholes with their own internal logic. A "culture" is the set of symbols, rituals, and beliefs—including religious beliefs—by which a society gives meaning to daily life. When religion is a very strong element in a society, culture may include values that are considered sacred. For cultural anthropologist Scott Atran (2008), fictive kin theory trumps almost every other explanation for suicide terrorism.[10] *Fictive kin* refers to a family-like

[9]One could place this in cost/benefit terms: They believe that their acts will gain them eternal life. Monroe and Kreidie (1997) show that there is a "cognitive collision between Western and fundamentalist worldviews" (p. 22).

[10]Atran has changed his mind about why people are willing to become suicide terrorists and die for a cause. He has "moved from thinking that individual cognition and personality factors, influences from broad socio-economic factors, and devotion to a religious or a political ideology were determinant, to seeing friendship and other aspects of small group dynamics trumping almost all other factors." See Atran (2003c).

group of friends—campmates, workmates, and soccer buddies—who share a cause and a devotion to each other and to their mentors. Atran finds that "support for suicide actions is triggered by moral outrage at perceived attacks against Islam and sacred values." Though millions may express this sense of outrage, only a few thousand are willing to commit violence. These few thousand arise within specific "scenes" such as neighborhoods, schools, workplaces, and common leisure activities (soccer, mosque, café, online chat rooms) and act in small groups "consisting mostly of friends, and some kin" (p. 2). Suicide bombers are not born but made, says Atran. They have been indoctrinated by groups who are able to manipulate emotions, which "creates a deep commitment equal to the one a mother feels when she sacrifices herself for her child" (2003b, p. 10). A limitation of fictive kin theory is that it fails to explain how inherent psychological constructs and external political events may frame a worldview that makes suicide terrorism attractive to some persons.

The Theory-Based Insight of History

Historians believe any historical period, including our own, cannot be adequately appreciated without understanding the trends and developments leading up to it. Historical events, including current ones, are the result of both societal forces and individual decisions. History sees a historical period, person, or event in the context of the trends and developments leading up to it and as a product of societal forces and individual decisions. Consequently, historians tend to view a phenomenon such as suicide terrorism as the product of historical developments, societal forces, ideas, and individual decisions.

Bernard Lewis (2002), one of the foremost Western authorities on Islamic history and culture, applies this perspective to the problem of suicide terrorism, seeing it deeply rooted in the history of Islam and the decline of its culture and economic and military prowess vis-à-vis the West. His approach to this problem is to place it in the broadest possible historical context. He goes all the way back to 1683 when the Ottoman Turks laid siege to Vienna, Austria but were repelled and later defeated by an alliance of European states. That defeat, says Lewis, was the turning point for Islam and the beginning of centuries of culture clashes between Christian Europe and the Islamic Middle East. Lewis explains the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in our own day and the phenomenon of suicide terrorism as a result of Islam's loss of civilizational leadership and retreat from modernity (p. 159). He uses modernization theory to explain what went wrong as Islamic countries suffered successive stages of military, political, and economic decline. In the most general terms, this cross-disciplinary theory attempts to explain the process of historical and cultural change and why some cultures "modernize" or transform themselves politically, economically, and technologically following the Western model while others do not. However, the idea that all

states would become Western has been largely discredited, as Asian and other societies have developed economically without adopting a wide range of Western cultural attributes.

A Taxonomy of Theory-Based Insights

At this point in the interdisciplinary research process, the problem is how to organize effectively the rapidly accumulating data. The approach used here is to develop a taxonomy of the most relevant insights and their key elements, as shown in Table 5.2. These elements are the theory's name, the insight of

Table 5.2 Theory-Based Insights Into the Problem of Suicide Terrorism

Theory	Insight of Theory Stated in General Terms	Insight Into the Problem	Concept	Assumption
Terrorist psycho-logic	Political violence is not instrumental but an end in itself. The cause becomes the rationale for acts of terrorism the terrorist is compelled to commit (Post, 1998, p. 35).	"Individuals are drawn to the path of terrorism to commit acts of violence . . . as a consequence of psychological forces, and . . . their special psycho-logic is constructed to rationalize acts they are psychologically compelled to commit" (Post, 1998, p. 25).	Special logic (Post, 1998, p. 25)	Humans organize their mental life through psychological constructs.
Self-sanction	"Self-sanctions can be disengaged by reconstruing conduct as serving moral purposes, by obscuring personal agency in detrimental activities, by disregarding or misrepresenting the injurious consequences of one's victims, or by blaming and dehumanizing the victims" (Bandura, 1998, p. 161).	"Self-sanctions can be disengaged by cognitively restructuring the moral value of killing, so that the killing can be done free of self-censuring restraints" (Bandura, 1998, pp. 164, 171–182).	Moral cognitive restructuring (Bandura, 1998, p. 164)	

Theory	Insight of Theory Stated in General Terms	Insight Into the Problem	Concept	Assumption
Martyrdom	"Terrorist suicide is basically an individual rather than a group phenomenon; it is done by people who wish to die for personal reasons . . . Personality factors seem to play a critical role in suicidal terrorism. . . . It seems that a broken family background is an important constituent" (Merari, 1998, pp. 206–207).	"Perpetrators of suicidal attacks . . . are not the exclusive domain of religious fanaticism in general. . . . In most cases the perpetrators sacrificed themselves in the name of a nationalistic rather than a religious idea" (Merari, 1998, p. 205).	Indoctrination (Merari, 1998, p. 199)	
Collective rational strategic choice	This approach permits the construction of a standard that can measure degrees of rationality, the degree to which strategic reasoning is modified by psychology and other constraints, and explain how reality is interpreted (Crenshaw, 1998, pp. 9–10).	Terrorism can be understood as an expression of political strategy (Crenshaw, 1998, p.7).	Collective rationality (Crenshaw, 1998, pp. 8–9)	"Terrorism may follow logical processes that can be discovered and explained" (Crenshaw, 1998, p. 7).
"Sacred" terror	"Holy" or "sacred" terror is "terrorist activities to support religious purposes or terror justified in theological terms" (Rapoport, 1998, p. 103).	"Sacred" or "holy" terrorists justify the means they use on the basis of sacred writings and/or on certain theological interpretations of these writings (Rapoport, 1998, pp. 107–130).	"Holy" or "sacred" terror (Rapoport, 1998, p. 103)	
Identity	"Religious identity sets and determines the range of options open to the fundamentalist. It extends into all areas of	Religious identity (in an Islamic fundamentalist sense) redefines what is meant by		There is no separation between religion and politics.

(Continued)

Table 5.2 (Continued)

Theory	Insight of Theory Stated in General Terms	Insight Into the Problem	Concept	Assumption
	life and respects no separation between the private and the political" (Monroe & Kreidie, 1997, p. 41).	"politics" (Monroe & Kreidie, 1997, p. 41).		Religious identity explains "political" behavior.
Fictive kin	Loyalty to an intimate cohort of peers who are emotionally bonded to the same religious and political sentiments (Atran, 2003a, pp. 1534, 1537).	Suicide terrorists act out of a universal heartfelt human sentiment of self-sacrifice for the welfare of the group/culture (Atran, 2003b, p. 2).	"Religious communion" (Atran, 2003a, p. 1537)	Personal relationships shape people's ideas about what is good.
Modernization	Explains the process of historical and cultural change and why some cultures "modernize" or transform themselves politically, economically, and technologically following the Western model while others do not (Lewis, 2002, p. 59).	Suicide terrorism is an expression of extreme frustration caused by the humiliation that the Islamic world has experienced at the hands of the West and particularly the United States (Lewis, 2002).		

the theory stated in general terms, the theory's insight into the problem stated in the writer's own words, the key concepts that express the theory, and its core assumption(s). Experience has shown that condensing and juxtaposing this critical information aids in creating common ground and performing integration. As a rule of thumb, it is better to err on the side of including too much information than too little, for the simple reason that it is impossible to know with certainty what information will ultimately prove critical to creating common ground and performing integration.

Integrating Causal Explanations (Steps 7 to 9)

The second part of the research process, and the primary focus of this chapter, is to perform causal integration. *Causal* refers to the different theoretical explanations of the behavior of a particular phenomenon.

Integration is a cognitive process that involves making a series of decisions, each of which correspond to Steps 7 to 9 of the research process: identifying conflicts between insights and locating their sources (Step 7); creating common ground between these insights (Step 8);[11] and constructing a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study (Step 9).

Identifying Conflicts in Insights and Locating Their Sources (Step 7)

There are several possible sources of conflict that one typically encounters when working with insights from multiple disciplinary literatures. The first is that which naturally arises when viewing the problem from the distinctive perspective of each relevant discipline. Because disciplinary perspectives conflict, it is natural that expert insights written from different disciplinary perspectives also conflict (Newell, 2007, p. 256). These conflicts stand in the way of creating common ground and, thus, of achieving integration (Wolfe & Haynes, 2003, p. 153). The task of the interdisciplinarian is to identify these conflicts and locate their sources so that common ground can be created and integration can proceed. The approach taken here is to identify in serial fashion the conflicts between the theoretical explanations written from the perspective of each relevant discipline and locate the sources of these conflicts.[12]

Conflicting Disciplinary Perspectives

The first possible source of conflict in insights is at the most general level, namely, between the overall perspective of each group of experts from the same discipline. These conflicts in perspective, noted earlier in the discussion of Step 6, are summarized in Table 5.3.

Conflicting Disciplinary Assumptions

A second possible source of conflict between these insights is the assumptions that underlie each discipline. An assumption is something taken for granted, a supposition. These assumptions are accepted as the truths upon which the discipline is based. Stated another way, a discipline's defining elements—its theories, concepts, and methods—are simply the practical outworking of its assumptions. Grasping the underlying assumptions of a discipline

[11]Concerning Step 8, I state elsewhere, "Creating common ground is undoubtedly the most challenging aspect of interdisciplinary work because it requires original thought that draws on close analytical reasoning and creative thinking. But it is achievable if one takes a systematic approach, pays attention to the nature of the challenge, and chooses an appropriate integrative technique" (Repko, 2008, p. 271).

[12]Perspectives on each relevant discipline are drawn from the taxonomy in Chapter 3 of Repko (2008).

Table 5.3 Conflicting Disciplinary Perspectives

Discipline	Perspective
Psychology	Views terrorist behavior as reflecting the psychological constructs of individuals
Political Science	Views suicide terrorism as a political phenomenon involving groups and institutions
Cultural Anthropology	Views suicide terrorism as a cultural expression of religious sharing and empowerment
History	Views suicide terrorism as an individual and cultural response to political, military, and economic loss

as a whole provides important clues to the assumption underlying the writings of its experts on a particular problem and may prove useful in creating common ground (Repko, 2008, p. 89). Concerning the problem at hand, Post (1998), Bandura (1998), and Merari (1998) share an assumption of psychology that individual human behavior can be ascertained by examining a person's mental life. By contrast, Crenshaw (1998), Rapoport (1998), and Monroe and Kreidie (1997) share an assumption of political science that terrorism in any form follows logical processes that can be discovered and explained (Crenshaw, 1998, p. 7). These assumptions conflict with an assumption underlying cultural anthropology and the work of Atran (2003a): that people's ideas and values (and thus behaviors) are largely the product of their culture. They also conflict with an assumption underlying social history and the work of Lewis (2002): that cultural clashes involving marginalized peoples and cultures are the product of deeply rooted historical developments.

Conflicting Disciplinary Theories

A third possible source of conflict between the insights under review is the theories they advance. A theory is "a generalized scholarly explanation about some aspect of the natural or human world, how it works, and why specific facts are related that are supported by data and research" (Repko, 2008, p. 352). Theory-based insights are "insights that are informed by or advance a particular theoretical perspective" (p. 255). The sources of conflict between theory-based insights fall into two categories: those produced by the same discipline, and those produced by different disciplines.

Sources of Conflict Between Theory-Based Insights Produced by the Same Discipline. Theories produced by the same discipline are likely to have far less conflict between them because, as noted earlier, they typically share the

discipline's basic assumption that personality factors and psychological constructs explain suicide terrorist motivation and behavior. However, these theories conflict over the role that religion and culture play in shaping an individual's psychology. Post (1998) and Merari (1998) tend to discount both influences, whereas Bandura (1998) argues that religion plays a significant role because it is used to "cognitively restructure the moral value of killing, so that the killing can be done free from self-censuring restraints" (p. 164).

Just because experts writing from the same disciplinary perspective share the discipline's basic assumptions does not mean that differences in their theory-based approaches will be muted. Political scientists Crenshaw (1998), Rapoport (1998), and Monroe and Kreidie (1997) view Islamic fundamentalism as a political force. However, they disagree sharply over the role played by religious belief. Crenshaw (1998) explains suicide terrorist behavior in terms of "strategic reasoning" that "is modified by psychology and other constraints" and minimizes the role of religion (pp. 9–10), whereas Rapoport (1998) and Monroe and Kreidie (1997) emphasize the strong influence of religion in this reasoning.

Religion is the central focus of Rapoport's (1998) sacred terror theory as well as Monroe and Kreidie's (1997) identity theory. "Holy" or "sacred" terror, explains Rapoport (1998), is designed to "support religious purposes or terror justified in theological terms," and "is most striking in Islam among both Shia and Sunni" (p. 103). He is careful to distinguish between sacred terrorists and secular terrorists. The former draw from events in Islam's founding period, from its sacred writings, and from the commentaries on them by religious sages, especially *The Neglected Duty,* which sees jihad as the essential means for reviving Islam. The latter feel free to draw from anyone, even from non-Islamic sources. Sacred terrorists, he says, are on a mission to purify Islam from all non-Muslim influences and are willing to kill to achieve this goal (p. 129).

Sources of conflict between the three political science theories extend beyond the role of religion, however, to include the role of perception, cognition, and intrapsychic traits. These concepts, borrowed from psychology, form the core of Monroe and Kreidie's (1997) identity theory and enable it to transcend the narrow focus on politics and power typically associated with political science work on terrorism. Indeed, the theory serves as a bridge between the insights of political science and those of psychology. Moreover, by recognizing that the self is situated in a cultural context, the theory includes the important factor of culture and the equally important factor of religion. For suicide terrorists, politics is subsumed under an all-encompassing religious faith.

Sources of Conflict Between Theory-Based Insights Produced by Different Disciplines. Once the most relevant insights from the same discipline are identified and the sources of conflict between them are located, the next task

is to identify the sources of conflict between insights produced by different disciplines. It is usually *easier* to *identify* conflict between disciplines because the contrast is greater, but *harder* to *mitigate* it to create common ground (because the conflicting positions have less in common). If the insights are theory based, as they are in the case of the causes of suicide terrorism, identifying the sources of conflict involves examining each theory in terms of its explanation of the problem and ferreting out its underlying assumption(s). Having examined the important psychology and political science theories and how these conflict, it remains only to evaluate the theories advanced by Atran (cultural anthropology) and Lewis (history).

Atran (2003a) rejects the notion that suicide terrorists have an "appreciable psychopathology" as Post and other psychologists claim. It is a "fundamental attribution error," he says, for people to explain this behavior in terms of individual personality traits—that is, as not rational and not deterred by rational concepts—for two reasons. First, research shows no instances of religious or political suicide terrorism stemming from "the lone actions of cowering or unstable bombers."

> Suicide terrorists exhibit no socially dysfunctional attributes (fatherless, friendless, or jobless) or suicidal symptoms. They do not vent fear of enemies or express "hopelessness" or a sense of "nothing to lose" for lack of life alternatives that would be consistent with economic rationality. (p. 1537)

Second, explaining suicide terrorist behavior in terms of individual personality traits ignores "significant situational factors in the larger society at work" as well as the root causes of terrorists' perceptions. These factors and perceptions include "a collective sense of historical injustice, political subservience, and social humiliation . . . as well as countervailing religious hope." The idea that religion must struggle to assert its control over politics is something that is radically new to Islam. In fictive kin theory, Atran finds a more plausible explanation of the "critical factor" determining suicide terrorism behavior: "loyalty to an intimate cohort of peers, which recruiting organizations often promote through religious communion" (Atran, 2003a, p. 1537).

> Through indoctrination and training and under charismatic leaders, self-contained suicide cells canalize disparate religious and political sentiments of individuals into an emotionally bonded group of fictive kin who willfully commit to die spectacularly for one another and for what is perceived as the common good of alleviating the community's onerous political and social realities. (p. 1534)

Fictive kin theory assumes that suicide terrorism should be approached as a complex cultural phenomenon that requires understanding its historical, political, social, and religious contexts.

Lewis (2002) views the problem of suicide terrorism through the lens of modernization theory. This theory explains the rise of religious fundamentalism as "an antidote to the dislocations resulting from rapid change or modernization" and a defense against threats posed by modernization to Islam's traditional identity (Hudson, 1999, p. 42). The root of Muslim rage, says Lewis (1990),

> goes beyond hostility to specific interests or actions or policies . . . and becomes a rejection of Western civilization as such, not only what it does but what it is, and the principles and values that it practices and professes. These are indeed seen as innately evil, and those who promote or accept them as "the enemies of God." (p. 48)

The phenomenon of suicide terrorism, then, is the inevitable result of Islam's failure to embrace Western institutions and values. Modernization theory also rejects the idea of religious fundamentalism as pathology. The theory shares with rational choice theory the view that unequal socioeconomic development is the basic reason for the discontent and alienation that fundamentalists experience. Caught between an Islamic culture that provides moral values and spiritual satisfaction and a modernizing and secularizing Western culture that provides access to material improvement, many Muslims find an answer to resulting anxiety, alienation, and disorientation through an absolute dedication to an Islamic way of life (Lewis, 1990, pp. 59–60).[13] Modernization theory assumes that a combination of material improvement, technological advancement, democratization, and secularization is the key to ending the cognitive collision between Western and fundamentalist worldviews. The theory also shares the basic assumption of rational choice theory that suicide attackers generally make choices and are not impulsive or "crazy."

Summary of These Theories and How Their Assumptions Conflict

Before performing integration, it is useful to summarize the sources of conflict between the relevant theories in terms of their underlying assumptions, as shown in Table 5.4.

Juxtaposing the assumptions of each theory shows that some of these assumptions are shared by more than one theory. For example, the psychology theories of terrorist psycho-logic, self-sanction, and martyrdom share the assumption typical of psychology: understanding the behavior and motivation of suicide terrorists requires studying the mental life and psychological constructs of individual terrorists. The theories of collective rational choice,

[13]Just how many or what proportion has huge implications for policy. The focus of this chapter, however, is on causes.

Table 5.4 Sources of Conflict Between Relevant Theories in Terms of Their Underlying Assumptions

Theory	Assumption(s) of Theory
Terrorist psycho-logic	Understanding the behavior and motivation of suicide terrorists requires studying primarily the mental life and the psychological constructs of individual terrorists.
Self-sanction	
Martyrdom	
Collective rational strategic choice	Suicide terrorists follow logical processes that can be discovered and explained. The primary focus of research should be on terrorist groups rather than on individuals.
"Sacred" terror	
Identity	Religious identity is (at least in this instance) an effective way to explain the "political" phenomenon of suicide terrorism. Terrorist behavior is essentially rational.
Fictive kin	Suicide terrorists are largely the product of identity with and loyalty to a culturally cohesive and intimate cohort of peers that recruiting organizations often promote through religious indoctrination.
Modernization	Poverty, authoritarianism, and diminishing expectations inevitably breed alienation and violence. Suicide terrorism is the inevitable result of Islam's failure to embrace Western institutions and values.

sacred terror, and identity share the assumption that suicide terrorists follow logical processes that can be discovered and explained. These theories also assume that the primary focus of study should be the behavior of terrorist groups rather than the behavior of individual terrorists. But only sacred terror theory and identity theory assume that a terrorist's religious affiliation is an effective way to explain the "political" phenomenon of suicide terrorism. Fictive kin theory assumes that the determining factor in shaping the development of a suicide terrorist is the terrorist's loyalty to an intimate cohort of peers, all of whom share an intense devotion to religious dogma. This theory shares with identity theory the assumption that religion is an important factor in understanding the development of a suicide terrorist. Finally, modernization theory rests on the assumption that suicide terrorism is the result of Islam's failure to embrace Western institutions and values.

There are two practical benefits of focusing on assumptions in this case. The first is to identify the possible sources of conflict between the theory-based insights and to reduce the number of these conflicts to as few as possible. The second is to make it easier to create common ground by working from the "bottom up" with assumptions while working from the "top down" with theories.

Creating Common Ground (Step 8)

Having identified the most relevant theory-based insights and located the sources of conflict between them, the process of creating "common ground" (Step 8) can proceed. Interdisciplinary common ground is one or more concepts and/or assumptions by which conflicting disciplinary insights, including theoretical explanations, can be reconciled and integrated (Repko, 2008, p. 272). Paying careful attention to this step will make integration possible.[14]

A good place to begin is with assumptions. As noted earlier (and summarized in Table 5.4), the assumptions underlying the various theories conflict. For example, a key assumption of self-sanction theory is that understanding the behavior and motivation of suicide terrorists requires studying *primarily* the mental life and the psychological constructs of *individual* terrorists. By contrast, the key assumption of identity theory is that understanding the behavior and motivation of suicide terrorists requires studying their cultural as well as their religious identity, but not at the expense of taking into account personality traits (inherent and acquired). However, a deeper probing of the assumptions of both theories reveals a commonality that both share, namely, the *goals* of suicide terrorists. These are not defined in terms of self-interest, as rational choice advocates would have it, but rather as "moral imperatives" or "sacred duties." This deeper assumption is also shared by the theories of fictive kin, strategic rational choice, "sacred terror," martyrdom, terrorist psycho-logic, and modernization. The common ground assumption shared by all of the theory-based insights to varying degrees, then, is that the goals of suicide terrorists are "moral" and "sacred"—and thus, rational—as defined by Islamic fundamentalism. The more comprehensive understanding should reflect this assumption.

Constructing a More Comprehensive Understanding (Step 9)

When working with theories, there are two possible approaches. The first, and preferable, approach is to piece together the "good parts" from each of the most relevant theories to form a new comprehensive theory. This approach is appropriate when each theory is deeply rooted in the discipline from which it emerges because it prevents the problem of either/or thinking—of having to choose one theory and reject the others. The second approach (and the one used here) is to add parts from several theories to extend, and thus maximize, the explanatory power of one of the selected theories. *Extension* is an integrative technique that addresses conflict between disciplinary concepts

[14]Creating common ground is undoubtedly the most challenging aspect of interdisciplinary work because it requires original thought that draws on close analytical reasoning and creative thinking. But it is achievable if one takes a systematic approach, pays attention to the nature of the challenge, and chooses an appropriate integrative technique.

or assumptions by extending the meaning of an idea beyond the domain of one discipline into the domain of another discipline (Newell, 2007, pp. 258–259; Repko, 2008, p. 341). The integrative technique of extension is used when one of the theories already has parts that come from more than one discipline.[15] The best practice is to use the former approach and avoid the latter, *except when one of the theories is already interdisciplinary, though imperfectly so, as in the present case.* "Already interdisciplinary" means that parts of the theory are borrowed from other disciplines. What is missing, and what theory extension provides, are one or more additional parts—that is, causal factors—from the other relevant theories that will enable it to account for all the known factors causing the problem.

One way to proceed is to identify all the causal factors and then categorize them under the fewest possible headings. The categories include (1) *personality traits* (i.e., the cognitive constructs of individual terrorists), (2) *power seeking* (i.e., power/political aspirations), (3) *cultural identity* (i.e., the perception that the culture is under threat), and (4) *sacred values* (i.e., a belief system based on religious doctrine). It so happens that these factors correspond closely to the assumptions noted earlier. The causal factor of *personality traits* refers to cognitive constructs that may predispose a person to become a suicide terrorist as well as influences on a person's mental development. These traits include "justification" (an even stronger, more compelling moral claim that overrides one's natural repugnance to engage in suicide terrorism), and strong "emotion" (triggered by traumatic memory or regret for not exacting vengeance on an enemy; Reisberg, 2006, pp. 465–470). The causal factor of *power seeking* refers to the influence of institutions, both domestic and foreign, on individuals, on particular groups, and on society as a whole. Such influence may include the policies and activities of Western corporations, UN agencies, foreign military forces, Western support of oppressive regimes, American support of Israel, and the countervailing influence of terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaeda. Each and any of these influences may trigger or exacerbate a collective or an individual sense of political oppression and/or historical loss. The causal factor of *cultural identity* refers to having a shared sense of place and identification with a race, ethnic group, history, nation, and/or religion. Cultural identity may also include emotional bonding based on a way of life, traditions, behaviors, values, and symbols. The causal factor of *sacred values* refers to a fundamentalist faith tradition that relies on sacred

[15]Integrative techniques are discussed by Newell (2007) and include the following: *redefinition,* which involves modifying or redefining concepts and assumptions; *extension,* which extends the meaning of an idea beyond the domain of one discipline into the domain of another discipline; *transformation,* which uses continuous variables when concepts or assumptions are not merely different (e.g., love, fear, selfishness) but opposite (e.g., rational, irrational); and *organization,* which identifies an underlying commonality in meaning of different disciplinary concepts or assumptions and redefines them accordingly and organizes the redefined concepts or assumptions to bring out a relationship among them (pp. 258–259). Applications of each technique are found in Repko (2008, pp. 280–292).

writings and charismatic leadership to determine an individual's motivations and actions. This factor includes the idea that religion must struggle to assert (or reassert) its control over every facet of life. The perspective of history is subsumed under culture, politics, and religion.

With these key causal factors broadly stated, the next task is to examine the relevant insights and their theories to see which causal factors each includes. The result of this evaluative process is shown in Table 5.5.

Table 5.5 shows that all the theories focus on at least two of the causal factors, with the exception of sacred terror, self-sanction, and identity, which attribute the causes of suicide terrorism to three factors. Rapoport's theory of "holy" or "sacred" terror explains suicide terrorism as a political problem caused by terrorist political aspirations. Even so, it takes into account how culture and religious values may motivate a person to become a suicide terrorist. But because the theory has not borrowed from psychology, it is unable to explain how a person's mind may be predisposed, susceptible to, or shaped by these complex influences and motivated to commit such a horrific act. So rather than force the theory to explain what it was not designed to explain—namely, the shaping of a person's personality and cognitive development—it is better to consider the possibilities offered by the other two.

Bandura's (1998) self-sanction theory explains how terrorist organizations convert "socialized people" into dedicated combatants by "cognitively restructuring the moral value of killing, so that the killing can be done free

Table 5.5 Theory-Based Insights Into the Causes of Suicide Terrorism, Showing Key Causal Factors

	Key Causal Factors			
Theory of Suicide Terrorism	**Personality Traits**	**Power Seeking**	**Cultural Identity**	**Sacred Beliefs**
Terrorist psycho-logic	Yes	No	No	No
Self-sanction	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Martyrdom	Yes	No	No	No
Collective rational strategic choice	Yes	Yes	No	No
"Sacred" terror	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Identity	Yes, if expanded	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fictive kin	No	No	Yes	Yes
Modernization	No	Yes	Yes	Indirectly

from self-censuring restraints" (p. 164). The process of moral cognitive restructuring involves using religion, politics, and psychology to construe suicide attacks narrowly. This involves using (a) religion to justify such acts by invoking "situational imperatives," (b) the political argument of self-defense to show how the group is "fighting ruthless oppressors" who are threatening the community's "cherished values and way of life," and (c) the psychological device of dehumanization to justify killing "the enemy" (pp. 161, 174, 180–182). Though the theory does not borrow from other disciplines, it explains how cultural and political factors are integrated into the mental process of construal and inform individual decision making. One weakness of the theory is its silence concerning individual personality factors that may influence the would-be terrorist's decision-making process. But because the theory is a psychological theory, this weakness can be overcome by borrowing from other psychology theories so that it can include the influence of personality traits and dispositions.

If it were not for identity theory, the best approach would be to piece together the good parts from each of the theories to form a new comprehensive theory. However, because identity theory is already interdisciplinary (though imperfectly so), it is appropriate to extend it by adding one or more parts from the other theories so that it is inclusive of all the key causal factors. Identity theory has two primary strengths. First, it already addresses three of the four factors—cultural identity, sacred beliefs (i.e., religion), and power seeking (i.e., politics). Identity theory includes religion by showing that the Islamic fundamentalist conception of religion is, in fact, an all-encompassing ideology that erases all lines between public and private. This theology-based ideology is based on religious writings and commentaries on these writings that are viewed by its most devoted followers as sacred, inviolable, nonnegotiable, and worth dying for. As a "sacred ideology" (Marxism never achieved this lofty status), Islamic fundamentalism redefines politics and power. As Monroe and Kreidie show, politics for Islamic fundamentalists is subsumed under an all-encompassing religious faith and is sought and exercised for the purpose of extending the faith. Achieving, maintaining, and extending power is a sacred duty that has priority over all other obligations, including family. Because the theory holds that the self is culturally situated, it is able to explain how culture influences identity formation.

Second, the theory requires the least amount of "stretching and pulling" (i.e., extending) to include the fourth key factor of personality traits. This is because identity theory, as noted earlier, is based on the psychological concepts of cognition and perspective. These concepts address personality traits in a way that is inclusive of the psychology theories already examined. Monroe and Kreidie (1997) use the concept of cognition in a developmental way, meaning that they are concerned to show how persons are influenced by factors external to themselves—namely, culture and societal norms—rather than focusing on individual cognitive abnormalities, as Post does, to argue

that some persons are psychologically predisposed to commit acts of suicide terrorism. Only slight "stretching" or extending is necessary to have identity theory include personality factors intrinsic to the individual suicide terrorist. Monroe and Kreidie's application of "perspective" to explain suicide terrorist behavior is also helpful in this regard because it effectively delineates the options that terrorists perceive as being available to them (p. 26). The act of committing a suicide attack in the service of a fundamentalist conception of *jihad* "emanates primarily from the person accepting their identity which means that they have to abide by the tenets of their religion" (pp. 26, 36). By borrowing these concepts from psychology, identity theory offers an understanding of human behavior that is based on the interplay of mental constructs in tandem with the exogenous variables of politics, culture, and religion.

The process of using the common ground assumption to reconcile or integrate the various discipline-based insights is straightforward and proceeds serially, beginning with the three psychology-based theories. Terrorist psycho-logic theory attributes the cause of terrorist behavior to "their special psycho-logic" that enables them to construct rationalizations for their actions that they are "psychologically compelled to commit" (Post, 1998, p. 25). According to Post, this built-in psychological compulsion simply awaits triggering by one or more external stimuli. In the case of suicide terrorism, the external stimulus is typically Islamic fundamentalism, which provides a comprehensive and compelling perception of reality and life goals that are "moral" and "sacred." Borrowing as it does from psychology, identity theory is able to explain the interplay between these innate cognitive traits and the exogenous factors of power, culture, and religion. Consequently, both theories agree that personal rationalizations determine terrorist action. They differ, however, over the reason for these rationalizations: Terrorist psycho-logic theory attributes them to innate psychological compulsions (that are at some point triggered by one or more exogenous factors); identity theory says that they result from a deep and abiding commitment to Islamist fundamentalist religious doctrine.

Self-sanction theory explains how terrorist organizations can disengage self-sanctions by cognitively restructuring the moral value of killing. This enables the individual terrorist to act free from self-censuring restraints (Bandura, 1998, p. 164). This process involves terrorist organizations using the exogenous factors of religion, politics, and psychology to enable the recruit to (1) reconstrue suicide attacks as serving moral purposes, (2) disregard or misrepresent the injurious consequences to one's victims, or (3) blame and dehumanize the victims (p. 161). Identity theory, by borrowing from psychology, is also able to explain the role that mental accounting and emotion play in terrorist motivation. The common ground shared by both theories is acknowledging that because the goals of suicide terrorists are grounded in Islamic fundamentalism, terrorists can disengage self-sanctions because they perceive their actions as "moral" and "sacred."

Martyrdom theory attributes the cause of suicide terrorism to individuals who are willing, if not eager, to die while simultaneously committing violence against others. The theory explains that these persons "wish to die for personal reasons" based on a variety of "personality factors" and circumstances such as "broken family backgrounds" (Merari, 1998, pp. 206–207). As a product of cognitive psychology, the theory takes into account exogenous factors such as the influence of culture and the indoctrination of suicide terrorists by various political and religious organizations. The theory assumes, as noted earlier, that understanding the behavior and motivation of suicide terrorists requires studying primarily the personalities of individual terrorists. This assumption is very close to that underlying identity theory: Understanding suicide terrorism requires knowing how terrorists perceive themselves and their actions. For both theories, this understanding requires close examination of how the exogenous factor of religion, primarily Islamic fundamentalism, determines terrorist goals that they perceive as "moral" and "sacred."

The common ground assumption that reconciles identity theory with the theory-based insights of psychology can also be used to integrate the theory-based insights of political science. Crenshaw's (1998) collective rational strategic choice theory explains the cause of suicide terrorism as the product of a sophisticated political strategy *whether in pursuit of secular or religious goals*. Her theory admits that there are "important questions about the preferences of the *goals* of terrorist organizations" (p. 9; emphasis added). Though she assumes that terrorist goals are primarily secular and strategic, Crenshaw leaves the door open to the possibility that there may be "varied degrees of rationality" in some cases and that the "strategic reasoning" of terrorists may be "modified by psychological and other constraints" (p. 9). "Other constraints" could very well include religious constraints. These caveats leave room in the theory for the possibility that *some* suicide terrorists pursue goals which *they* would consider to be "moral imperatives" or "sacred duties." It bears repeating that these terms are freighted with religious meaning derived from the theology of Islamic fundamentalism. The theory of collective rational choice shares with identity theory (at least to some extent) the assumption that the goals of some suicide terrorists are those which *they* consider to be "moral imperatives" or "sacred duties" according to Islamic fundamentalism.

"Sacred" terror theory focuses on the role of mental accounting, emotion, "special justifications, and precedents" used by religiously motivated terrorists. Paramount among these "special justifications" are religion and the sacred writings of select religious scholars, which are used to dispel the doubts of recruits concerning the importance of martyrdom and jihad (Rapoport, 1998, p. 122). The theory finds common ground with identity theory at two levels. At the level of theory, both argue that religion permeates all areas of the suicide terrorist's life and respects no separation between the private and the political. At the level of assumptions, both theories assume that suicide

terrorists engage in a rational process of decision making, even though it is largely determined by religious dogma and values. (Rapoport, 1998, p. 107; Monroe & Kreidie, 1997, p. 41).

The common-ground assumption that the goals of suicide terrorists are "moral" and "sacred" as defined by Islamic fundamentalism can also be the basis for reconciling identity theory with fictive kin theory. The latter holds that suicide terrorists act out of a universal heartfelt human sentiment of self-sacrifice for the welfare of the group or culture (Atran, 2003b, p. 2). The theory explains how psychological and cultural relationships, rooted in rationality, are "luring and binding thousands of ordinary people into the terrorist organization's martyr-making web" (Atran, 2003a, p. 1538). However, the theory is conflicted concerning the role that religion plays in causing suicide terrorism. On the one hand, it rejects the notion that religion "or even religious-like motivation" can *by itself* explain this phenomenon; on the other, it assigns a determining role to "culture," a term that is notoriously vague and can be defined in terms of a wide range of attitudes and behaviors, some of which can certainly be attributed to the influence of religion. Given the elasticity of the term "culture," fictive kin theory can be reconciled with identity theory on the basis of what each assumes to be the role that religion plays in causing suicide terrorism: that persons who become suicide terrorists identify with and develop a deep sense of loyalty to a culturally cohesive and intimate cohort of peers based (at least in part) on adherence to religious dogma.

It is more challenging to use the common-ground assumption (that the goals of suicide terrorists are "moral" and "sacred" as defined by Islamic fundamentalism) to reconcile identity theory with modernization theory. This theory argues that the rise of suicide terrorism stems from the failure of the peoples of the Middle East to embrace Western notions of secularism, individualism, and liberal democratic capitalism. This supposed "failure" points up the powerful and persisting influence of religious, cultural, political, and historical factors that are contributing to the clash of civilizations and that are producing the downward spiral of "hate and spite, rage and self-pity, poverty and oppression" (Lewis, 2002, p. 159). The theory focuses on how religion, culture, politics (internal and external), and history are fueling a desire for retaliation against the West and against the U.S. in particular. Of the theories examined, this one is the most difficult to reconcile with identity theory because it treats Islam and Islamic fundamentalism as just another set of political values or beliefs or ideology that is squarely at odds with secular liberal democratic modes of political discourse and interaction. Perhaps the best way to proceed is to focus on the goals that both theories assume are embraced by suicide terrorists. For modernization theory, the goals of suicide terrorism should be viewed *through the lens of Western values and interests*. This shows them to be primarily secular, material, and self-serving. For identity theory, the goals of suicide terrorists should be *viewed through their own eyes,* the eyes of their

fictive kin, and the eyes of their recruiting organizations. Viewing them from the "inside out" rather than from the "outside in" shows them to be "moral" and "sacred" as defined by Islamic fundamentalism.

Clearly, using the assumption concerning the goals of suicide terrorists to reconcile or integrate the various conflicting theories and their assumptions does not erase all differences. Instead, it focuses on the fundamental commonality of almost all the theories, namely, that the goals of suicide terrorists are largely determined by Islamic fundamentalism.

A Statement of the More Comprehensive Theory Itself

Having created common ground and performed causal integration, it remains to state the comprehensive theory itself. In its original form, identity theory was already interdisciplinary because parts of it came from outside political science. The theory was broad enough to include the causal factors of culture and the influence of fictive kin. Both factors are known to shape an individual's cognitive-perceptual framework. As a theory grounded in political science, identity theory included the causal factor of politics in all of its expressions at all levels (local, national, and international) and explained how it influences individual terrorists' perceptions of themselves, their goals, and their actions. The theory also included the causal factor of religion, explaining how Islamic fundamentalism provides the foundation for daily living and shapes an individual's perspective on all basic issues. And because the theory borrowed the concepts of cognition and perception from cognitive psychology, the original conception of identity theory was able to explain how a variety of external factors influenced the development of an individual's personality over time. Chief among these factors, according to Monroe and Kreidie (1997), is Islamic fundamentalism and how it attracts individuals by providing them with a basic identity and worldview. In its original form, the theory made two assumptions: that religious identity is an effective way to explain the political phenomenon of suicide terrorism; and that terrorist behavior is essentially rational, in the sense that individuals make choices within the confines of their fundamentalist identity.

Though interdisciplinary, identity theory was *narrowly* so because it excluded the insights of Post (1998) and Lewis (2002). As noted earlier, Post's terrorist psycho-logic theory explained how some terrorists are possibly born with a predisposition to commit acts of violence, awaiting only some triggering event to cause them to commit horrific acts. Lewis's conception of modernization theory explained that suicide terrorism may well be a rational reaction against modernity (i.e., referring to Western secular culture and material dominance) and even be, in some cases, a pathological retreat from this prevailing reality. Both insights can be accommodated, however, by modifying these assumptions to include the psychological concept of "varying degrees of rationality."

The way to do this is to extend the definition of rationality so that it includes factors (such as religious belief in an afterlife) normally excluded from discussions of rationality. Instead of accepting normal either/or thinking that treats rational thought and religious belief as completely separate, the interdisciplinarian is able to engage in both/and thinking, which is a recognized feature of interdisciplinary integration. Once extended, the definition of rationality permits the inclusion of the factors that Post and Lewis examine.

The comprehensive statement of identity theory, then, may be stated as follows: Suicide terrorism is caused by a complex interaction of variables that are both endogenous and exogenous to the individual. Endogenous variables include psychological predispositions and cognitive constructs developed over time; exogenous variables include the combined influences of culture, politics, and religion, with Islamic fundamentalism providing the perceptual framework that determines an individual's identity, motivation, and behavior. Suicide terrorists manifest varying degrees of rationality in pursuing goals that they consider "moral" and "sacred" according to a theologically based cost/benefit calculus.

Lessons for Interdisciplinary Practice

The foregoing analysis has, I hope, demonstrated the utility of first establishing common ground before attempting to integrate theoretical explanations of the phenomenon. The strategy used here was to work up from assumptions (i.e., creating common ground) and down from theories (i.e., constructing the more comprehensive understanding). In the case of the causes of suicide terrorism, one of two approaches could be used: the perspectival approach that focuses primarily on integration when different disciplines provide conflicting insights, and the classification approach that uses the strategy of integrating insights along different causal links. Until someone applies the latter approach to the same problem and the same set of theory-based insights, it is impossible to determine which approach yields the better results. Meanwhile, it is hoped that the scope of understanding of this problem is extended by the approach used here.

The focus of analysis has been on certain defining elements of the most relevant disciplines, specifically theories (both disciplinary and interdisciplinary) and their assumptions. What is striking about the theoretical explanations examined here is that the writers typically fail to critically analyze competing theories and their assumptions and, consequently, other methods of approaching the problem offered by experts from other disciplines. Consequently, it falls to the interdisciplinarian to identify the strengths and weaknesses of these theoretical explanations, evaluate them, and assume the responsibility for performing integration and constructing

a more comprehensive understanding. It bears emphasizing that creating common ground is a critical step in the integrative process.

The analysis has also shown that research on problems centered on human activity needs to include endogenous factors from inside the individual as well as exogenous factors from outside the individual. In the present case, linkages need to be examined between these two sets of factors (as well as linkages between clusters of external variables), and ways need to be found to measure their relative influence on terrorist activity.

The Final Step (Step 10)

Integration is often seen as the ultimate goal of the interdisciplinary enterprise, but an instrumentalist understanding of interdisciplinarity argues that the ultimate goal should be the ability to test or assess the understanding and communicate it to appropriate audiences. To be interdisciplinary, the understanding must integrate the conflicting theories and thereby produce a "cognitive advancement"—that is, an understanding that is new and more comprehensive. "More comprehensive" means that the understanding would not be possible using single disciplinary approaches. "Cognitive advancement" may include explaining the phenomenon, proposing a solution to the problem, or raising a new research question. As well, the interdisciplinary understanding is the product of, but distinct from, the various disciplinary insights into the problem (Boix-Mansilla, 2005, p. 16).

One way to test the new understanding is to use it as a benchmark against which to evaluate current policy. Though it is beyond the scope of this chapter to propose a new policy approach that draws on the full implications of the new understanding, it is appropriate to make two observations. The first concerns the reluctance of many disciplinary experts to take the reality of religion and the power of theology seriously. Of the theory-based insights examined, only Monroe and Kreidie's (1997) religious identity theory and Rapoport's (1998) sacred terror theory fully acknowledge the centrality of religion in the lives of suicide terrorists and the vast majority of the peoples of the Muslim world. This failure has contributed in no small measure to America's tragic approach to nation-building in Iraq and to the conduct of the War on Terrorism.

For this reason, Islamic fundamentalism should not be dealt with simply as another set of political values that can be compromised or negotiated, or even as a system of beliefs or ideology—such as socialism or communism—in which traditional liberal democratic modes of political discourse and interaction are recognized. Rather, the foregoing analysis suggests that the first step toward coexistence and peace with this strident branch of Islam calls for Western policy makers to develop the capacity to view the world as they see it.

Conclusion

It is useful to conclude by briefly reviewing the key theoretical arguments and benefits of using an interdisciplinary approach to the problem:

- Producing an interdisciplinary understanding of the causes of suicide terrorism is clearly not possible without the foundational work produced by experts from different disciplines. Rather than taking a reductionist approach whose purpose is to push into the background, mute, or even ignore the multifaceted and cross-disciplinary character of the problem, the interdisciplinary approach and resultant understanding accepts the fact that the problem is complex and beyond the ability of any single discipline to understand comprehensively.
- Identifying the most relevant theory-based insights and locating the sources of conflict between them (Step 7) is a defining characteristic of the interdisciplinary research process and one way that it differs from disciplinary or multidisciplinary approaches. The latter approach merely juxtaposes disciplinary insights but omits the hard work of ferreting out the sources of conflict, let alone attempting integration. It is left to the interdisciplinarian to perform this essential task. This work often reveals gaps in expert understanding as well as the extent to which certain theories (such as rational choice theory) and their assumptions color expert understanding of the problem.
- Creating common ground between conflicting theory-based insights is critical to the integrative process. Without it, producing an interdisciplinary understanding would be impossible to achieve. In the present study, the resultant common ground assumption bridged the differing explanatory theories and enabled me to produce an understanding that is more comprehensive than any single disciplinary explanation.
- The integrative process revealed that the disciplines tend to view suicide terrorism through the lens of a Western and secular conception of rationality. Western policy makers tend to dismiss suicide terrorists as irrational actors when they do not act in accordance with cost/benefit models such as rational choice theory or utility theory. However, reason-based choice theory, for example, claims that we make decisions only when we see compelling reasons for that decision. Therefore "*any reason* that influences our thinking in general (our ability to make judgments, our ability to reason) should have a direct impact on decision making" (Reisberg, 2006, p. 464). "Any reason" includes religious-based reasons and those based on deeply held sacred values. For this theory, identity theory, and sacred terror theory, the only justification for an immoral action such as suicide terrorism is an even stronger, more compelling moral claim based on religious values (p. 470).

In many instances, it is religious *experience* far more than detached appraisal that plays a pivotal role in terrorist decision making. On this basis, secular cost/benefit models are too narrow as descriptive theories of how people actually make decisions, especially the decision to become a suicide terrorist.

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