

# POLS 429: International Terrorism

## Lecture 19 (02.28.2020): Suicide Terrorism

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# Overview

- 1 Quick review
- 2 Introduction
- 3 Theoretical Approaches
- 4 Extra Material

# Review

## WHAT WE COVERED LAST MEETING?

- Target selection and the theoretical approaches.
- Strategic: soft targets, civilians or military.
- Organizational: size and age; internal and external competition, cooperation.
- Ideology: restricted/unrestricted target selection.
- Structural: geography (dense population), regime type.
- Policy: harden targets, pitfalls of targeted killings, moral and normative issues of policies targeting certain ideologies.

Questions??

# Introduction

- A tactic of violence against non-combatants intended to affect a large public audience to achieve a political goal.
- Primary target → identified rival.
- Requires the intentional self-destruction of the perpetrator.
- Puzzles:
  - ① Why some group adopt suicide terrorism while others not?
  - ② Why some people willing to kill themselves while killing others?

# Introduction

- Why study?
  - ① Most lethal: high casualties per attack.
  - ② Political and psychological implications.
  - ③ Strategic success versus self-sacrifice of group members.

## EVOLUTION OF SUICIDE TERRORISM

- A contemporary phenomenon.
- **Examples:**
  - ① Assassination of the Russian Tsar.
  - ② Japanese Kamikaze pilots (WW2).
  - ③ Lebanon (December 1981): attack on Iraqi embassy.

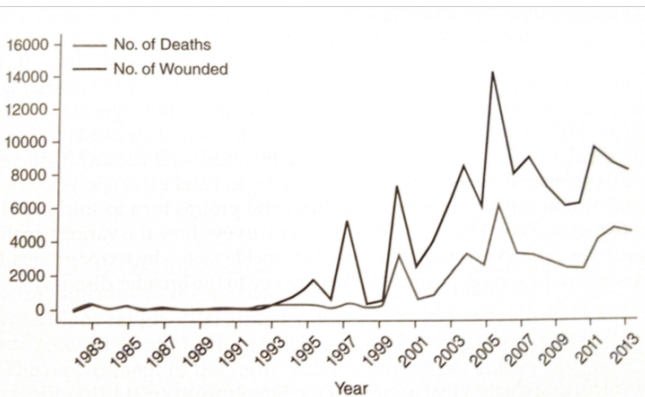
# Introduction

## EVOLUTION OF SUICIDE TERRORISM

- **Lebanon:** *Hezbollah* and the Lebanese civil war:
  - 1982: assassination of the pro-Israel Lebanese president.
  - 1983: US Marine barracks in Beirut. [▶ MarinesBeirut](#)
- The Israel-Palestine conflict: Hamas and Palestinian IJ. (*Beit Lid Attack-Jan1995*)
- Popular during the 2nd intifada (2000-2006). [▶ HotelISR](#)
- Global spread, mostly after 9.11.

# Suicide Terrorism Data

- Data: an increase in the number and intensity of attacks.
- 2015 (CPOST): over 600 attacks and over 6000 fatalities worldwide.



# Suicide Terrorism

## Terms and Concepts

- Suicide → negative religious interpretation.
- Martyrdom: subjective interpretation → removes the negative stigma and glorifies the act.
- Suicide missions: acts directed and executed by a group.
- Self-immolation: an individual intentionally kill her/himself on behalf of a collective goal (a symbolic act).
- Tunisian merchant Mohamed Bouazizi (December 2010).



# Explaining Suicide Terrorism

- Suicide terrorism → religious fanatics or crazed psychopaths thriving in the midst of poverty and ignorance.
- Religious narrative: "easy" to persuade operators to "give up" their life for a "bigger, sacred" cause.

## STRATEGIC APPROACHES

- **Suicide terrorism is not irrational.**
- Weapon of weak actors against a materially stronger rival.
- A strong signal of resolve and credibility.

# The Strategic Approach

- Suicide as rational choice: increase support and recruits.
- Saudi Arabia after 9.11: overwhelming support among ages 25-41 (95%).
- The expected US retaliation → bolster support (victimization of the population).
- Tactical benefits of suicide terrorism:
  - ① The bomber carries the weapon directly to the site of attack
  - ② No need for extraction or escape route.

# The Strategic Approach

- Substitution in methods: suicide attacker overcomes hardening of public targets.
- Example: Moscow airport (2011).
- Effective: cheap and reliable compared to other methods (IEDs or airplane hijacking).
- What amplifies effectiveness in democracies?
  - ① Public opinion.
  - ② Free media.
- Coordinated campaigns of suicide attacks are successful over 50% of the time (Pape 2005).

# The Strategic Approach

- Counter-argument: overall violent resistance is more likely facing foreign occupation.
- Pape (2005): selecting on the dependent variable?
- Saudi Arabia and Pakistan: internal attacks (not a unique tactic against foreign occupation).
- Success = More lethal: suicide attacks generate almost 5 time more fatalities.
- Still, explosives are more reliable:
  - 1 Less accidents.
  - 2 Last minute change of heart. [▶ DefuseSuicide](#)

# The Strategic approach

- Suicide: rational intertemporal choice → an intergenerational wealth transfer.
- Self-sacrifice in exchange for future payments and benefits.
- Preference: secure a collective good → suicide attack is rational.
- Harsh economic and social deprivation: the promise of relief and benefits in the afterlife of the bomber.
- Also provides rational explanation for suicide terrorism.

# The Organizational approach

- Why groups value recruitment and enlarging the supply of bombers?
- Suicide & inter-group competition: offer prestige, public image, recruiting and funding.
- *Outbidding* using suicide terrorism to ensure group survival:
  - 1 LTTE (Sri Lanka).
  - 2 PKK (Turkey).
  - 3 Palestinian groups.

# The Organizational approach

- Adopting suicide tactic to establish it as a role model.
- Al Qaeda → suicide as a 'role model' for Islamic militant groups.
- Emulate success and 'represent' global jihad.
- Adopting suicide → expanded transnational cooperation between violent groups.

# The Organizational Approach

- **Technological innovation:** suicide tactic adopted by young groups.
- **Diffusion:** extend external links and capabilities.
- Alliances and indirect links between groups → diffusion of suicide terrorism.
- Innovation and diffusion within suicide tactics: the LTTE and the development of the 'suicide vest'.
- An innovation that spread rapidly among terror groups across the globe.



# Recommended readings

More studies on suicide terrorism:

- ① Assaf Moghadam, "Motives for Martyrdom: Al-Qaida, Salafi Jihad, and the Spread of Suicide Attacks," *International Security*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (Winter 2008/2009), pp. 46-78.
- ② Scott Atran, "The Moral Logic and Growth of Suicide Terrorism," *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (2006), pp. 127-147.

# Suicide Terrorism



Figure: Marine Barracks, Beirut, Lebanon, April 1983

# Suicide Terrorism: Israel



**Location: NETANYA PARK HOTEL**  
**Year: 2002**  
**Responsible: HAMAS**  
**Casualties: 30 KILLED.**  
**160 INJURED.**

