

# Motives for Martyrdom

Assaf Moghadam

## Al-Qaida, Salafi Jihad, and the Spread of Suicide Attacks

Suicide missions—or attacks whose success is dependent on the death of their perpetrator/s—are one of the most lethal tactics employed by terrorist and insurgent groups today. Moreover, they have demonstrated great potential to create turbulence in international affairs.<sup>1</sup> The four suicide attacks of September 11, 2001, and the war in Iraq—where suicide operations have become the signature mode of attack—have highlighted how this tactic can lead to considerable losses of human life and physical infrastructure while influencing the course of global events in their wake.

During the 1980s and 1990s, suicide missions wreaked considerable havoc on their targets; yet these targets were relatively few in number. The vast majority of attacks took place in only a handful of countries, namely, Israel, Lebanon, Sri Lanka, and Turkey.

More than thirty-five countries on every continent save for Antarctica and Australia have experienced the wanton violence brought on by suicide attacks. In the past decade, suicide bombings have not only occurred in a growing number of countries, but these attacks have been planned and executed by an even greater number of organizations and have killed larger numbers of people every year. The targets of these attacks have also undergone some shifts. More suicide bombings have occurred in Iraq since 2003 than in all other countries in the twenty-five years preceding the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. Suicide missions have increasingly targeted Muslims and have been adopted as part of

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1. I use the terms “suicide missions,” “suicide attacks,” and “suicide operations” interchangeably. The term “suicide missions” is drawn from Diego Gambetta, ed., *Making Sense of Suicide Missions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

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a strategy not only to gain a national homeland, but also to depose regimes regarded as un-Islamic. In recent years, suicide missions have been launched in countries with little or no prior history of such attacks, including Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, Uzbekistan, and Yemen.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps most important for the West, suicide attacks are no longer a distant threat, having targeted cities such as London, Madrid, and New York.<sup>3</sup>

This article examines the causes and characteristics of the phenomenon of the “globalization of martyrdom.”<sup>4</sup> Two interrelated factors explain the proliferation of suicide missions: the evolution of al-Qaida into a global terrorist actor and the growing appeal of Salafi jihad, the guiding ideology of al-Qaida and its associated movements. Discussion of these factors is largely missing from scholarly work on suicide attacks.<sup>5</sup> Although a few scholars have claimed that most contemporary suicide attacks can be attributed to jihadist groups,<sup>6</sup> this article is the first to test this argument empirically.

In the first section, I present my data set on suicide missions from December

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2. Only a small number of suicide attacks occurred in some of these countries before the turn of the millennium. In Pakistan there were just three such attacks. On November 19, 1995, a truck bomb rocked the Egyptian embassy in Islamabad. On December 21, 1995, a car bomb exploded in a crowded street in Peshawar in northwestern Pakistan, killing at least 30 and wounding more than 100; and on April 29, 1996, a suicide bomber blew himself up inside a passenger-filled bus returning from a religious festival in Punjab, killing 52. A handful of attacks occurred in 2000 and 2002, but suicide attacks in Pakistan were widely adopted only after 2003.

3. Although the Madrid train bombings of March 11, 2004, were not a suicide mission, seven of the suspects detonated themselves weeks later in the Madrid suburb of Leganes, as Spanish special forces were about to storm their apartment. See Rogelio Alonso and Fernando Reinares, “Maghreb Immigrants Becoming Suicide Terrorists: A Case Study on Religious Radicalization Processes in Spain,” in Amy Pedahzur, ed., *Root Causes of Suicide Terrorism: The Globalization of Martyrdom* (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 179–198.

4. See Assaf Moghadam, “The New Martyrs Go Global,” *Boston Globe*, November 18, 2005.

5. Some exceptions exist. Yoram Schweitzer and Sari Goldstein Ferber highlight the role of al-Qaida in internationalizing suicide attacks, but they do not emphasize the role of Salafi jihadist ideology. Schweitzer and Goldstein Ferber, “Al-Qaida and the Internationalization of Suicide Terrorism,” Jaffee Center Memorandum, No. 78 (Tel Aviv: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University, November 2005). Mohammed M. Hafez discusses the appeal of Salafi jihadist ideology, but he limits his analysis to the case of Iraq. Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq: The Strategy and Ideology of Martyrdom* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2007).

6. Bruce Hoffman, citing data from the RAND Terrorism Incident Database, said that 78 percent of all suicide attacks since 1968 occurred after September 11, 2001, adding that 31 out of the 35 groups employing this tactic were Islamic. He did not, however, specifically refer to jihadist groups, nor did he argue that these groups were ideologically motivated. Hoffman, email correspondence with author, December 27, 2005. Scott Atran points out that “most suicide terrorists today are inspired by a global Jihadism,” but he does not provide empirical support for his claim. See Atran, “The Moral Logic and Growth of Suicide Terrorism,” *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (Spring 2006), p. 139. In an earlier study, I, too, suggested that contemporary patterns of suicide attacks are dominated by Salafi jihadists without offering any empirical data. See Assaf Moghadam, “Suicide Terrorism, Occupation, and the Globalization of Martyrdom: A Critique of ‘Dying to Win,’” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 29, No. 8 (December 2006), pp. 707–729.

1981 through March 2008. In the second section, I review existing studies of suicide attacks and discuss their limitations. In the third section, I present the main argument of this study. In the fourth section, I discuss the theoretical implications of my findings. The conclusion offers practical implications of these findings for efforts to confront the challenges posed by suicide operations.

### *The Global Rise of Suicide Attacks*

According to most indicators, suicide missions have been on the rise since 1981, but they have grown at an unprecedented pace since the turn of the millennium.<sup>7</sup> According to my data set, 1,857 suicide attacks were perpetrated from December 1981 through March 2008.<sup>8</sup> Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, the number of suicide missions remained relatively small, not exceeding 7 attacks per year, with the exception of 1985, when 22 such attacks were carried out. Beginning in 1994, the number of suicide missions started to increase, peaking temporarily in 1995, when 27 attacks were launched. The number dropped slightly in the second half of the 1990s. The year 2000 witnessed 37 attacks—a record number. It also signaled the beginning of an upward trend in the number of suicide missions that would span most of the first decade of this century. Thus, between 2000 and 2007, the number of attacks rose steadily each year, from 54 in 2001 to 71 in 2002, 81 in 2003, 104 in 2004, 348 in 2005, 353 in 2006, and 535 in 2007 (see figure 1).<sup>9</sup>

The global proliferation of suicide missions is reflected in the rise in the number of organizations that employed them. From 1981 to 1990, an average of 1.6 organizations perpetrated suicide attacks every year. From 1991 to 2000,

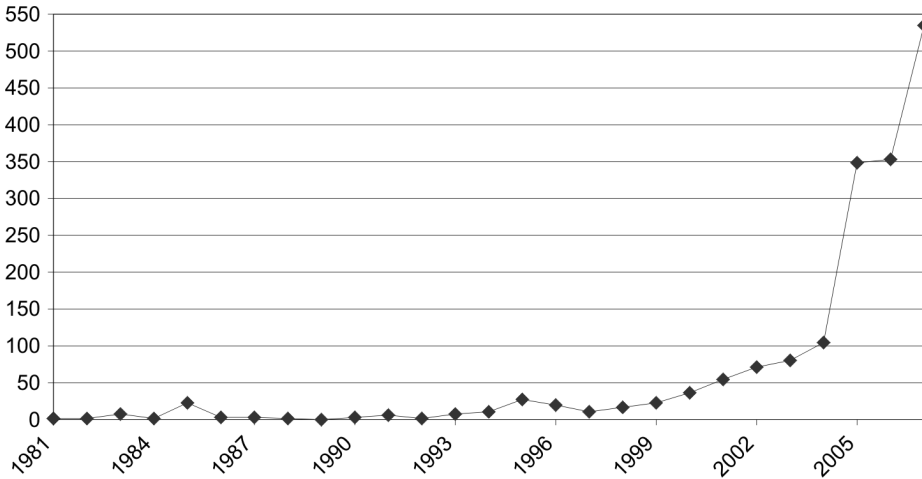
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7. Suicide attacks and their precursors have existed since biblical times. Prior to 1981, however, these attacks were not generally considered acts of terrorism. The modern phenomenon of suicide terrorism began in Lebanon with the December 1981 bombing of the Iraqi embassy. For an overview of modern-day suicide attacks and their historical precursors, see "Introduction," in Assaf Moghadam, *The Globalization of Martyrdom: Al-Qaida, Salafi Jihad, and the Diffusion of Suicide Attacks* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

8. The data set relies heavily on two sources. The first is the Suicide Terrorism Database collected by the National Security Studies Center at the University of Haifa in Israel. For a version of the database that includes 1,165 suicide attacks conducted until April 17, 2006, see [http://www.laits.utexas.edu/tiger/terrorism\\_data/suicide\\_attacks\\_worldwide/](http://www.laits.utexas.edu/tiger/terrorism_data/suicide_attacks_worldwide/). For data since April 18, 2006, as well as for all data related to suicide attacks in Iraq and Afghanistan, I used the National Counterterrorism Center's (NCTC) Worldwide Incidents Tracking System. The NCTC database is available at [www.nctc.gov](http://www.nctc.gov). After combining these two databases, eliminating duplicates, and updating the resulting database with additional information, I arrived at a data set with a total of 1,857 suicide attacks recorded from December 1981 to March 2008. For a copy of the data set, please contact me at [assafm@hotmail.com](mailto:assafm@hotmail.com).

9. One hundred nine attacks were recorded in the first quarter of 2008.

Figure 1. Number of Suicide Missions, 1981–2007



the average increased to 4.8. And from 2001 to 2007, it rose to an average of 14.3.

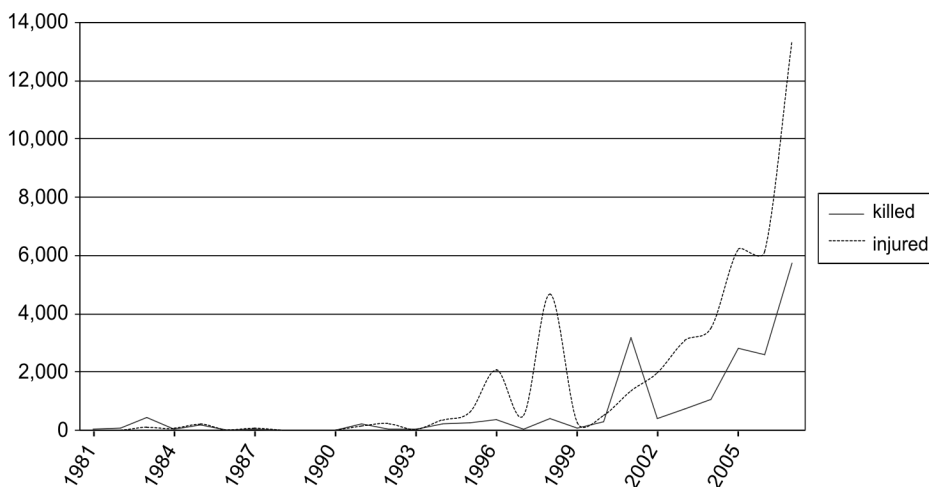
Suicide attacks have exacted an enormous human toll. The 1,857 suicide attacks recorded in my data set claimed 20,603 lives and left at least 48,209 wounded. Of these, more than 87 percent were killed and more than 80 percent injured in this decade alone (see figure 2). The overall trend in the number of injured in suicide attacks is comparable to the numbers of people killed, although in two years—1996 and 1998—the numbers of wounded (2,082 and 4,666) were particularly high.<sup>10</sup> The sharp increase in dead and wounded beginning in 2003 stemmed largely from the war in Iraq.

Based on my data set, the average suicide mission in the period under review killed 11 people and injured 26. These numbers should be approached with caution, however, because the range was exceedingly wide, and because information about casualty rates (especially number of wounded) is often incomplete or missing altogether. The median of the numbers of people killed was 3, and that of people wounded was 9.

From 1981 to 2007, the number of countries in which suicide missions were

10. The 1996 figure includes a suicide car bombing on January 31, 1996, by a member of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), in which 19 people died and an estimated 1,400 people were wounded. The 1998 figure includes the August 7, 1998, suicide bombing of the U.S. embassy in Nairobi, Kenya, which killed 213 people and wounded an estimated 4,000.

Figure 2. Number of Casualties from Suicide Missions, 1981–2007



launched generally increased. The average number of countries that experienced a suicide attack from 1981 to 1994 was a relatively low 1.7 per year. Lebanon and Sri Lanka were the most frequently targeted countries. From 1995 to 2007, an average of 8.6 countries per year experienced a suicide attack. In both 2005 and 2006, suicide missions were executed in 15 countries—the highest number of countries recorded.

According to my data, 1,020 suicide missions took place in Iraq (54.9 percent of all suicide missions worldwide); 235 (12.7 percent) in Afghanistan; 188 (10.1 percent) in Israel (including the West Bank and Gaza Strip); 107 (5.8 percent) in Sri Lanka; 88 (4.7 percent) in Pakistan; 41 (2.2 percent) in Lebanon; 37 (2.0 percent) in Russia; and 141 (7.5 percent) in 29 other countries.<sup>11</sup>

### *Existing Theories on Suicide Attacks*

Studies dedicated to explaining the causes of suicide attacks—rare until the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001—can be divided into at least four gen-

11. These other countries are Algeria, Argentina, Bangladesh, China, Croatia, Egypt, Finland, India, Indonesia, Italy, Jordan, Kenya, Kuwait, Laos, Moldova, Morocco, Panama, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Somalia, Syria, Tanzania, Tunisia, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States, Uzbekistan, and Yemen.

eral categories: those that focus on the level of the individual bomber;<sup>12</sup> those stressing the group or organizational factors;<sup>13</sup> those emphasizing socio-structural causes; and those suggesting the need to integrate multiple levels of analysis.<sup>14</sup>

At the individual level of analysis, scholars from a variety of disciplines have concluded that suicide bombers often believe that they are acting for altruistic reasons.<sup>15</sup> Most analysts reject the notion that suicide bombers act irrationally, arguing that these “martyrs” believe that the benefits of perpetrating suicide attacks outweigh the costs.<sup>16</sup> In addition, they agree that profiling suicide bombers is virtually impossible given their diverse backgrounds. Moreover, they claim that suicide bombers—much like terrorists in general—do not suffer from a salient psychopathology,<sup>17</sup> and thus dismiss mental illness as a reason for their actions.<sup>18</sup>

Scholars focused on individual motivations suggest the following: a strong commitment to a group or cause,<sup>19</sup> a desire for revenge,<sup>20</sup> an expectation of

12. See, for example, Joan Lachkar, “The Psychological Make-up of a Suicide Bomber,” *Journal of Psychohistory*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (Spring 2002), pp. 349–367; David Lester, Bijou Yang, and Mark Lindsay, “Suicide Bombers: Are Psychological Profiles Possible?” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (July–August 2004), pp. 283–295; Eyad Sarraj and Linda Butler, “Suicide Bombers: Dignity, Despair, and the Need of Hope,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (Summer 2002), pp. 71–76; and Anat Berko, *The Path to Paradise: The Inner World of Suicide Bombers and Their Dispatchers* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Security International, 2007).

13. Ehud Sprinzak, “Rational Fanatics,” *Foreign Policy*, No. 120 (September/October 2000), pp. 67–73; Mia Bloom, *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Robert A. Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005); and Ami Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005).

14. Assaf Moghadam, “The Roots of Suicide Terrorism: A Multi-Causal Approach,” in Pedahzur, *Root Causes of Suicide Terrorism*, pp. 81–107; and Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq*.

15. See, for example, Ami Pedahzur, Arie Perliger, and Leonard Weinberg, “Altruism and Fatalism: The Characteristics of Palestinian Suicide Terrorists,” *Deviant Behavior*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (July 2003), pp. 405–423.

16. Sprinzak, “Rational Fanatics”; Assaf Moghadam, “Palestinian Suicide Terrorism in the Second Intifada: Motivations and Organizational Aspects,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (March 2003), pp. 65–92; Bloom, *Dying to Kill*; Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism*; and Bruce Hoffman and Gordon H. McCormick, “Terrorism, Signaling, and Suicide Attack,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (July 2004), pp. 243–281.

17. Clark R. McCauley and M.E. Segal, “Social Psychology of Terrorist Groups,” in Clyde A. Hendrick, ed., *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations: Review of Personality and Social Psychology* (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage, 1987).

18. Jeff Victoroff, “The Mind of the Terrorist: A Review and Critique of Psychological Approaches,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 49, No. 1 (February 2005), pp. 3–42.

19. According to some researchers, suicide attackers tend to act out of a deep sense of commitment to a larger cause, to their social network, or to a terrorist organization. See, for example, Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism*, pp. 126–134.

20. A suicide attacker may acquire a thirst for revenge after the death of a family member or friend, which can be reinforced by a perceived sense of humiliation. For an application of humilia-

benefits after death,<sup>21</sup> and personal crisis.<sup>22</sup> No study, however, has identified either necessary or sufficient conditions for an individual's resort to suicide terrorism, that is, why some highly committed individuals become suicide bombers while others do not, or why revenge leads to suicide terrorism in some cases and not in others. Nor has any study explained the globalization of suicide terrorism.

A second category of studies focuses on the organizational-strategic level of analysis. Building on the theories advanced by Martha Crenshaw, who argues that terrorist organizations believe that violence is the best means to advance their political goals,<sup>23</sup> several scholars have suggested that terrorist organizations engage in suicide attacks to fulfill rational objectives, ranging from basic survival to sophisticated strategic and tactical plans for success. Suicide terrorism, the argument goes, can weaken an external opponent while strengthening the organization itself. Internally, suicide attacks can strengthen the group because they enhance its perceived need to survive.<sup>24</sup> They may also broaden support among the domestic population.<sup>25</sup> Externally, suicide attacks are a proven strategy to weaken the group's opponent. Robert Pape, for example, argues that their high degree of lethality makes suicide attacks a rational or "logical" choice for organizations and states under certain circumstances, asserting that "the main reason that suicide terrorism is growing is that terrorists have learned that it works."<sup>26</sup> Pape, however, appears to have exaggerated the success rate he ascribes to suicide terrorism.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, as Robert Brym and Bader Araj have noted, characterizing suicide missions as strategically ra-

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tion-revenge theory, see Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

21. Several authors have stressed the expectation of posthumous benefits as a motive for suicide attackers, particularly when the perpetrators of the attacks are Muslims. Such benefits can include the suicide attacker's elevated social status after death, rewards for the family, as well as the attainment of heavenly pleasures in the afterlife.

22. Personal crisis appears to be a particularly common motivation among women suicide bombers such as the Chechen Black Widows. Anat Berko and Edna Erez, "'Ordinary People' and 'Death Work': Palestinian Suicide Bombers as Victimizers and Victims," *Violence and Victims*, Vol. 20, No. 6 (December 2005), pp. 603–623.

23. Martha Crenshaw, "An Organizational Approach to the Analysis of Political Terrorism," *Orbis*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (Fall 1985), pp. 465–489; and Martha Crenshaw, "Theories of Terrorism: Instrumental and Organizational Approaches," in David C. Rapoport, ed., *Inside Terrorist Organizations* (London: Frank Cass, 1988).

24. On the organizational goals of survival and maintenance, see James Q. Wilson, *Political Organizations* (New York: Basic Books, 1973); and Crenshaw, "An Organizational Approach to the Analysis of Political Terrorism."

25. Mia M. Bloom, "Palestinian Suicide Bombing: Public Support, Market Share, and Outbidding," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 119, No. 1 (Spring 2004), pp. 61–88; and Bloom, *Dying to Kill*.

26. Pape, *Dying to Win*, p. 61.

27. See Moghadam, "Suicide Terrorism, Occupation, and the Globalization of Martyrdom."

tional oversimplifies the complexity of motivations at the organizational level. They find that suicide bombings involve mixed rationales, including the urge for retaliation or the mere existence of opportunities to strike, which can prevail over purely strategic considerations.<sup>28</sup>

A consensus among scholars does exist, however, with regard to the tactical utility of suicide missions. Scholars agree that terrorist groups use suicide attacks because of the disproportionate amount of fear they create in the target population;<sup>29</sup> their ability to boost the groups' morale;<sup>30</sup> and operational benefits, such as their cost efficiency and high precision, as well as the low security risks they pose to the organization at large.<sup>31</sup>

Organizational-strategic explanations have several limitations. They do not explain why, if the benefits of suicide missions are so numerous, many organizations avoid their use;<sup>32</sup> when a terrorist group is likely to engage in suicide attacks; or their dramatic rise since the turn of the millennium.

The third major category of studies of suicide attacks argues that individuals and organizations will employ suicide terrorism if they are likely to enjoy social support for this tactic. This explanation appears to account for the widespread use of suicide attacks in places such as Israel and Lebanon, where a cult of martyrdom has manifested itself in the veneration of suicide bombers; in the prominent use of heroic and euphemistic labels for suicide attacks and their perpetrators; and in the penetration of the suicide bomber into popular culture, including movies, comics, and plays. Some researchers claim that sustained levels of suicide terrorism depend entirely on strong support among the

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28. Robert J. Brym and Bader Araj, "Suicide Bombing as Strategy and Interaction: The Case of the Second Intifada," *Social Forces*, Vol. 84, No. 4 (June 2006), pp. 1969–1986.

29. Although this is a key feature of all terrorist attacks, suicide attacks further demonstrate the inefficacy of the targeted government, given in part the demoralization of the public and of law enforcement agencies. In addition, the effect of a suicide attack can be particularly traumatizing and long-lasting. See, for example, Keith B. Richburg, "Suicide Bomb Survivors Face Worlds Blown Apart," *Washington Post*, January 31, 2004; and Amos Harel, "Suicide Attacks Frighten Israelis More Than Scuds," *Haaretz*, February 13, 2003.

30. Suicide attacks often lead to a sense of moral superiority of the groups' members over their adversaries, which may result in a group's perception that it will eventually prevail over its enemies. See Adam Dolnik, "Die and Let Die: Exploring Links between Suicide Terrorism and Terrorist Use of Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear Weapons," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (January 2003), pp. 17–35.

31. See, for example, Sprinzak, "Rational Fanatics"; and Boaz Ganor, "Suicide Attacks in Israel," in International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT), ed., *Countering Suicide Terrorism* (Herzliyya, Israel: ICT, 2001), pp. 140–154.

32. A notable exception to these limitations is found in recent research conducted by Michael Horowitz, who employs adoption capacity theory to argue that groups with higher levels of organizational capital are more likely to adopt suicide terrorism than groups with lower levels of capital. See Michael Horowitz, "Non-State Actors and the Diffusion of Innovations: The Case of Suicide Bombing," unpublished manuscript, Harvard University, July 2008.

attacker's domestic population.<sup>33</sup> In recent years, however, an increasing number of suicide attacks have been carried out in countries where such domestic support appears to be lacking: examples include Afghanistan, Pakistan, and even Iraq.<sup>34</sup> A culture of martyrdom may influence the suicide bombers in these countries, but increasingly that culture seems to be found in cyberspace rather than in the streets.<sup>35</sup>

Another argument put forward by some scholars is that societies are more inclined to produce suicide bombers when they are subjected to foreign occupation. In the next section I examine the applicability of this "occupation thesis" as well as that of another explanation, the "outbidding thesis," to the globalization of suicide attacks.

#### OCCUPATION

In his book *Dying to Win*, Pape argues that the "bottom line is that suicide terrorism is mainly a response to foreign occupation."<sup>36</sup> He defines an occupation as "one in which a foreign power has the ability to control the local government independent of the wishes of the local community."<sup>37</sup> There are three reasons, however, why foreign occupation does not explain many contemporary suicide missions.<sup>38</sup> First, these attacks increasingly occur in countries where there is no discernible occupation, including Bangladesh, Indonesia, Jordan, Morocco, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom, the United States, Uzbekistan, and Yemen. Second, in foreign-occupied countries such as Iraq, the attacks are often not directed at the occupiers themselves who, according to the logic of the occupation thesis, should be the most obvious targets. Many suicide bombings in Iraq, for example, have targeted Kurds, Shiites, and Sufis, in an effort to stir ethnic tensions in the country and delegitimize the Iraqi government in the eyes of Iraqis. Third, even if they do target the occupation forces, many suicide attacks are not carried out by those individuals most directly affected by the occupation. In Iraq, for instance, most attacks against occupation forces are carried out by foreign jihadis from places

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33. Bloom, *Dying to Kill*.

34. See Moghadam, "Suicide Terrorism, Occupation, and the Globalization of Martyrdom," pp. 707–729.

35. See, for example, Gabriel Weimann, *Terrorism on the Internet: The New Arena, The New Challenges* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2006), pp. 64–75; Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), pp. 109–123; and Moghadam, *The Globalization of Martyrdom*, chap. 4.

36. Pape, *Dying to Win*, p. 23.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

38. For a more extensive critique of Pape's book *Dying to Win*, see Moghadam, "Suicide Terrorism, Occupation, and the Globalization of Martyrdom."

such as Kuwait, Libya, Saudi Arabia, and Syria.<sup>39</sup> The perpetrators of the September 11 attacks were from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

Pape's focus on occupation and his dismissal of religion or ideology as important variables are most striking in his discussion of al-Qaida. "For al-Qaeda, religion matters," Pape writes, "but mainly in the context of national resistance to foreign occupation."<sup>40</sup> The evidence, however, does not support Pape's argument. A closer reading of statements issued by al-Qaida leaders suggests that religion plays a more central role in the organization's ideology and mission than Pape would ascribe to it. Osama bin Laden and al-Qaida are engaged in a defensive jihad against what they portray as the "Crusader-Zionist alliance" because they believe that the United States has made a "clear declaration of war on God, his messenger, and Muslims."<sup>41</sup> In a statement from November 2001, bin Laden declared, "This war is fundamentally religious. . . . Under no circumstances should we forget this enmity between us and the infidels. For, the enmity is based on creed."<sup>42</sup> In another message, bin Laden went as far as urging Americans to convert to Islam: "A message to the American people: Peace be upon those who follow the right path. . . . I urge you to become Muslims, for Islam calls for the principle of 'there is no God but Allah.'"<sup>43</sup>

Al-Qaida's understanding of occupation differs from that of Pape. Whereas Pape suggests that foreign occupation consists of "boots on the ground"—or, as he puts it, the ability of a foreign power "to control the local government independent of the wishes of the local community"<sup>44</sup>—al-Qaida's understanding

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39. In February 2006, for example, Director of National Intelligence John Negroponte confirmed that "extreme Sunni jihadist elements, a subset of which are foreign fighters, constitute a small minority of the overall insurgency, but their use of high-profile suicide attacks gives them a disproportionate impact." See Negroponte, "Statement by the Director of National Intelligence to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence," 109th Cong., 2d sess., February 2, 2006. As recently as May 2007, for instance, Gen. David Petraeus stated that "80 to 90 percent of the suicide bombers come from outside Iraq." Quoted in Joshua Partlow, "An Uphill Battle to Stop Fighters at Border," *Washington Post*, May 5, 2007.

40. Pape, *Dying to Win*, p. 104.

41. Osama bin Laden, "Text of Fatwa Urging Jihad against Americans," *Al-Quds al-Arabi* (London), February 23, 1998, quoted in Christopher M. Blanchard, "Al-Qaida: Statements and Evolving Ideology," CRS Report for Congress (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, November 16, 2004), Order Code RS21973, p. 3.

42. Osama bin Laden, speech broadcast on Al-Jazeera satellite channel television, November 3, 2001. Quoted in "Bin Laden Rails against Crusaders and UN," *BBC News*, November 3, 2001.

43. "Statement by Usama bin Ladin," *Waqiaah*, October 26, 2002, quoted in Anonymous [Michael Scheuer], *Imperial Hubris: Why the West Is Losing the War on Terror* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 2004), p. 154.

44. Pape, *Dying to Win*, p. 46.

of occupation is much broader. It includes a long history of injustices manifested today in the military, religious, political, economic, and cultural humiliation of the larger Muslim world by the “Crusader-Zionist alliance.” It is this ideologically inspired definition of occupation that matters most for al-Qaida but that is absent from Pape’s analysis.

Pape also does not explain why most suicide missions are perpetrated by groups claiming to act in the name of religion, while attacks by secular organizations have declined in recent years. Although he correctly notes that “modern suicide terrorism is not limited to Islamic fundamentalism,”<sup>45</sup> he does not acknowledge that most such attacks are perpetrated by radical Islamist groups. “Overall,” Pape calculates, “Islamic fundamentalism is associated with about half of the suicide terrorist attacks that have occurred from 1980 to 2003.”<sup>46</sup> Not included in Pape’s count, however, is the high tally of suicide attacks that have occurred in Iraq since the 2003 U.S. invasion—a total of 1,020 such attacks by March 2008. According to my data set, Salafi-jihadist groups were the most dominant perpetrators of suicide missions in Iraq in the five years since the U.S.-led invasion.<sup>47</sup>

#### OUTBIDDING

Mia Bloom posits that terrorist groups may engage in suicide missions because they are trying to compete against other groups for the support of the local population. This tactic, known as “outbidding,” is designed to increase the group’s “market share” among that community. The thesis thus assumes that suicide bombing campaigns depend on the support of the local population. “In the war for public support,” Bloom writes, “when the bombings resonate positively with the population that insurgent groups purport to represent, they help the organization mobilize support. If suicide bombing does not resonate among the larger population, the tactic will fail.”<sup>48</sup>

The outbidding thesis appears plausible as an explanation for the adoption of suicide missions by several organizations, including the Popular Front for

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45. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

47. Of the 1,020 suicide attacks in Iraq recorded in the data set, 208 were claimed by Salafi jihadist groups. The next most popular were nationalist-separatist groups, with 11 claimed attacks. Although the perpetrators of 794 attacks in Iraq are still unknown, anecdotal accounts suggest that the overwhelming number of all suicide attacks in Iraq are conducted by Salafi jihadist groups. See, for example, Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq*; and International Crisis Group, “In Their Own Words: Reading the Iraqi Insurgency,” Middle East Report, No. 50 (Brussels: International Crisis Group, February 15, 2006).

48. Bloom, *Dying to Kill*, p. 78.

the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP),<sup>49</sup> the Fatah al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades,<sup>50</sup> and Amal in Lebanon.<sup>51</sup> The outbidding thesis, however, falls short of providing a satisfactory explanation for the adoption of this tactic in many other cases, including some noted by Bloom in *Dying to Kill*. For instance, it cannot explain why Sri Lanka's Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) adopted this tactic only in 1987, at a time when the internal rivalry between radical Tamil organizations had reached its pinnacle with the May 1986 massacre of the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO) and the killing of its leader.<sup>52</sup> By that time, the LTTE had eliminated not only the TELO but all of its other rivals as well.

Moreover, Bloom's own findings appear to contradict one of the central assumptions of the outbidding thesis, namely, that groups are vying for the support of the local population. Her own survey data suggest that suicide missions in Sri Lanka are not condoned among the Tamil population. Based on her interviews and polls of "hundreds of Tamils all over Sri Lanka," she found that "there was virtually no support for attacking civilians, regardless of whether they were in Sinhalese territory or in the Tamil regions."<sup>53</sup> Despite this lack of support, the LTTE continued its relentless suicide bombing campaign (including attacks against civilians), apparently undeterred.

The outbidding thesis fits within the traditional paradigm that sees suicide attacks as occurring in the context of long-standing historical conflicts in which a large segment of the population supports the actions of suicide attackers as a legitimate form of resistance designed to achieve self-determination, or at least some degree of autonomy. That paradigm, however, is incompatible with the global jihad being waged by transnational groups such as al-Qaida that are seeking to achieve less defined goals and that are unwilling to compromise. It is for that reason that the notion that suicide attackers are vying for domestic popular support is most problematic with regard to al-Qaida and the global jihad movement.

The London bombers of July 2005, for example, targeted their own fellow citizens. Similarly, a growing number of suicide missions being conducted in Iraq target Iraqis rather than the occupying forces. It is hard to argue that Iraqi

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49. Bloom, "Palestinian Suicide Bombing."

50. See assessment by Ely Karmon, quoted in Christopher Dickey et al., "Inside Suicide, Inc.," *Newsweek*, April 15, 2002, p. 26.

51. Martin Kramer, "Sacrifice and Fratricide in Shiite Lebanon," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (Autumn 1991), pp. 30-47.

52. Bloom apparently recognizes this problem and does not argue that outbidding has been a factor in the adoption of suicide attacks by the LTTE. See Bloom, *Dying to Kill*, p. 71.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 67.

suicide attackers are trying to gain the sympathy of the very people in whose midst they are blowing themselves up.

### *Al-Qaida, Salafi Jihad, and Suicide Attacks*

The main reason for the global spread of suicide missions lies in two related and mutually reinforcing phenomena: al-Qaida's transition into a global terrorist actor and the growing appeal of its guiding ideology, Salafi jihad. This argument requires an explanation of two separate issues: first, why and how al-Qaida became a global entity in both outlook and practice; and second, al-Qaida's emphasis on suicide missions as the primary method of terrorist operations.

#### AL-QAIDA'S GLOBAL OUTLOOK

Three key factors influenced al-Qaida's decision to globalize its operations, the first being the group's core doctrine. As envisioned by Abdullah Azzam, bin Laden's mentor, al-Qaida was designed as the vanguard of an Islamic army similar to an international rapid reaction force that would come to the rescue of Muslims wherever and whenever they were in need. This Muslim legion would be self-perpetuating, generating new waves of Islamic warriors who would fight and defeat infidel and apostate countries the world over.

The second reason for the globalization of al-Qaida was the spread of the "Afghan Arabs," the foreign fighters who flocked to Afghanistan after the Soviet invasion, to other countries beginning in 1988. After the Red Army's withdrawal from Afghanistan, many Afghan Arabs returned to their home countries, where they participated in local jihads against entrenched regimes in countries such as Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. Others moved to third countries, including some in Western Europe. Realizing Azzam's dream, many of these Afghan Arabs radicalized and mobilized Muslims in their countries. They regarded themselves as the vanguard that Azzam had foreseen, and many chose violence as their preferred tactic.<sup>54</sup>

Third, al-Qaida based its decision to globalize on a deliberate shift in strategy. Between 1995 and 1996, after heated internal discussions, al-Qaida decided not to attack the "near enemy" (i.e., the local Arab regimes it regarded as apostate), but the "far enemy" (i.e., Western "infidel" countries, above all the United States).<sup>55</sup> This shift in strategy was epitomized when, in 1996, al-Qaida

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54. Jason Burke, *Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), p. 290.

55. Marc Sageman, "Global Salafi Jihad," statement to the National Commission on Terrorist At-

declared war on the United States, and again, two years later, when it announced the formation of a global alliance to defeat the “Crusader-Zionist” enemy. Al-Qaida’s first major suicide attack, the August 1998 bombings of the U.S. embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, embodied that strategic shift.

#### AL-QAIDA AND THE PRIMACY OF SUICIDE ATTACKS

In al-Qaida’s tactical arsenal, suicide attacks play a pivotal role. No other tactic symbolizes al-Qaida’s tenaciousness and ability to inspire a large number of Muslims worldwide as much as “martyrdom operations,” to use the group’s euphemistic labeling. Al-Qaida has all but perfected this tactic and institutionalized it to an extent not seen in other terrorist groups. It instilled the spirit of self-sacrifice in the collective psyche of virtually all of its fighters, thus creating a cult of martyrdom that far exceeds the Palestinian and Lebanese cult of death in both scope and depth.

Abdullah Azzam was the first theoretician to succeed in turning martyrdom and self-sacrifice into a formative ethos of future al-Qaida members. It is largely because of him that self-sacrifice has become a moral code that al-Qaida has used to justify suicide missions against its enemies.<sup>56</sup> More than any other individual, Azzam persuaded jihadis in Afghanistan and beyond that those who die for the sake of God (*fi sabil Allah*) will be rewarded in paradise. Ironically, Azzam understood martyrdom not as involving suicide missions per se, but as the death of any “true” Muslim waging jihad. Such martyrdom would wash away the jihadi’s sins and bestow glory upon him.

Death-obsessed Afghan Arabs were so deeply affected by Azzam’s thinking that they became a “curious sideshow to the real fighting in Afghanistan,” Lawrence Wright observed. “When a fighter fell, his comrades would congratulate him and weep because they were not also slain in battle. These scenes struck other Muslims as bizarre. The Afghans were fighting for their country, not for Paradise or an idealized Islamic community.”<sup>57</sup>

Al-Qaida’s decision to engage in suicide attacks was also influenced by the Egyptian group al-Jihad and its leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri. Years before Zawahiri and al-Jihad formally joined al-Qaida in 2001, the Egyptian organization had employed suicide missions as a terrorist tactic. In August 1993 a sui-

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tacks upon the United States, July 9, 2003; and Fawaz A. Gerges, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

56. Reuven Paz, interview by author, Washington, D.C., July 17, 2006.

57. Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (New York: Vintage, 2007), p. 125.

cide bomber smashed his explosives-laden motorcycle into the car of Egypt's interior minister, Hassan al-Alfi, who nevertheless survived the attack.<sup>58</sup> On November 19, 1995, al-Jihad staged another attack, this one at the Egyptian embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan, involving two assailants, including one suicide bomber. Sixteen people were killed.

In interviews with Fawaz Gerges, former jihadist confirmed that Zawahiri's advocacy of suicide bombings fundamentally influenced bin Laden's adoption of this tactic. The spectacular nature of al-Qaida's suicide attacks, they told him, were adopted from al-Jihad, which had always used extremely lethal and psychologically damaging attacks to differentiate itself from its jihadist rival in Egypt, the al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya.<sup>59</sup>

When pressed to explain the use of suicide bombers—a tactic still considered taboo, especially when used against fellow Muslims—Zawahiri stated that these martyrs represented a “generation of mujahideen that has decided to sacrifice itself and its property in the cause of God. That is because the way of death and martyrdom is a weapon that tyrants and their helpers, who worship their salaries instead of God, do not have.”<sup>60</sup> Zawahiri made a claim that many other supporters of suicide attacks would repeat: the suicide attacker does not kill himself for personal reasons, but sacrifices himself for God. He is therefore not committing suicide, but achieving martyrdom. It was a game of words, but it provided justification for hundreds of future suicide bombers to emulate these early *shuhada*.

In August 1996, bin Laden formally declared war against the United States, imploring Muslim youths to sacrifice themselves. Seeking religious justification, bin Laden ties the longing for martyrdom to verses from the Quran, hadith, and poems. According to bin Laden, “Our youths believe in paradise after death. They believe that taking part in fighting will not bring their day nearer, and staying behind will not postpone their day either. Exalted be to Allah who said: ‘And a soul will not die but with the permission of Allah, the term is fixed’ (Aal Imraan: 3:145). . . . Our youths took note of the meaning of the poetic verse: ‘If death is a predetermined must, then it is a shame to die cowardly.’” Bin Laden then highlights a number of sayings that together describe the rewards of the martyr in Paradise:

Allah, the Exalted, also said: “And do not speak of those who are slain in Allah's way as dead; nay, they are alive, but you do not perceive” (Bagarah;

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58. The group al-Jihad is also known as Egyptian Islamic Jihad. Some authors dispute that al-Jihad was responsible for the attempt on al-Alfi's life and blame the al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya instead.

59. Gerges, *The Far Enemy*, pp. 142–143.

60. Quoted in Wright, *The Looming Tower*, pp. 248–249.

2:154). . . . And: "A martyr will not feel the pain of death except like how you feel when you are pinched" (Saheeh Al-Jame' As-Sagheer). He also said: "A martyr's privileges are guaranteed by Allah; forgiveness with the first gush of his blood, he will be shown his seat in paradise, he will be decorated with the jewels of belief (Imaan), married off to the beautiful ones, protected from the test in the grave, assured security in the day of judgement, crowned with the crown of dignity, a ruby of which is better than this whole world (Dunia) and its entire content, wedded to seventy-two of the pure Houries (beautiful ones of Paradise) and his intercession on the behalf of seventy of his relatives will be accepted."

Bin Laden goes on to praise the courage of youths willing to sacrifice themselves, suggesting that through death, young Muslims will prevail in the struggle against the "Crusaders": "Those youths know that their rewards in fighting you, the USA, is double than their rewards in fighting someone else not from the people of the book. They have no intention except to enter paradise by killing you."<sup>61</sup>

Al-Qaida's emphasis on suicide missions was on display in its Afghan training camps. A document found in an al-Qaida safe house in Afghanistan titled "Goals and Objectives of Jihad," for example, ranked the goal of "attaining martyrdom in the cause of God" second only to "establishing the rule of God on earth." Another document listed two "illegitimate excuses" for leaving jihad as "love of the world" and "hatred of death."<sup>62</sup>

Bin Laden sought to spread the virtues of martyrdom through videotapes and statements on the internet. In 2004, for instance, he urged his followers to "become diligent in carrying out martyrdom operations; these operations, praise be to God, have become a great source of terror for the enemy. . . . These are the most important operations."<sup>63</sup>

The use of suicide attacks is also a logical outcome of al-Qaida's desire to maximize the pain and suffering of its enemies in a protracted struggle. In his 2001 book, *Knights under the Prophet's Banner*, Zawahiri writes, "If our goal is comprehensive change and if our path, as the Koran and our history have shown us, is a long road of jihad and sacrifices, we must not despair of repeated strikes and recurring calamities."<sup>64</sup> He adds that there is a need within

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61. "Bin Laden's Fatwa," *PBS Online Newshour*, August 8, 1996, [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/terrorism/international/fatwa\\_1996.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/terrorism/international/fatwa_1996.html).

62. C.J. Chivers and David Rhode, "Turning Out Guerrillas and Terrorists to Wage a Holy War," *New York Times*, March 18, 2002.

63. Quoted in Blanchard, "Al-Qaida: Statements and Evolving Ideology," p. 10.

64. Ayman al-Zawahiri, *Knights under the Prophet's Banner* (London: Al-Sharq al-Awsat, 2001), part 11. The book was serialized in the London-based magazine *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* between December 2 and December 10, 2001, and translated by the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), FBIS-NES-2001-1202.

the jihadist movement to offset the power of the Muslims' enemies, whose numbers and capabilities have risen tremendously, as did "the quality of their weapons, their destructive powers, their disregard for all taboos, and disrespect for the customs of wars and conflict."<sup>65</sup> To address this asymmetry, Zawahiri suggests a number of steps, including "concentrat[ing] on the method of martyrdom operations as the most successful way of inflicting damage against the opponent and the least costly to the mujahidin in terms of casualties."<sup>66</sup>

#### SALAFI JIHAD AND SUICIDE ATTACKS

The Salafi jihad is a radical offshoot movement with roots in a broader Islamist trend known as Salafism, as well as in Wahhabism and Qutbist factions of the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>67</sup> Salafis have adopted a strict interpretation of Islamic religious law, and their doctrine centers around a more literal understanding of the concept of *tawhid* (the unity of God) than does that of ordinary Muslims. For Salafis, the unity of God—a concept adhered to by all Muslims—extends to the belief that all man-made laws must be rejected because they interfere with the word and will of God. Salafis reject the division of religion and state and believe that only the *salaf*—the Prophet himself and his companions—led lives in accordance with God's will. Only by emulating that lifestyle can Muslims reverse the decline of Islam.

Whereas ordinary Salafis believe that God's word should be spread by *da'wa* alone—the nonviolent call to Islam by proselytizing—Salafi jihadists advocate waging violent jihad. This advocacy of violence leads to four main points of contention between the two groups: unlike Salafis, Salafi jihadists elevate jihad to the same level as the five pillars of Islam; they engage in *takfir*, the process of labeling fellow Muslims as infidels (*kufir*), thus justifying violence against them; they condone the targeting of civilians; and they support the use of suicide operations.<sup>68</sup>

Salafi jihadists believe that suicide operations against "infidels" and "apostates" (i.e., non-Muslim heretics and nominally Muslim "traitors") represent the ultimate form of devotion to God and the optimal way to wage jihad. They present jihad and self-sacrifice as the antithesis to everything the West stands

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65. Ibid.

66. Ibid.

67. Wahhabism is a puritanical strand of Islam closely related to Salafism, which is common in Saudi Arabia.

68. Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (May 2006), pp. 207–239.

for—hence the mantra, “The West loves life, while true Muslims love death.” In the words of Abu Ayman al-Hilali, a key interpreter of bin Laden’s ideas on Salafi jihadist websites, “First we have to acknowledge a basic fact, proved by experience and reality, already acknowledged by the enemy, which is that the vital contradiction to the Zionist and American enemy is the doctrine of Jihad and Martyrdom (Istishhad).”<sup>69</sup>

In certain mosques, Salafi jihadist preachers such as Abu Hamza al-Mazri and Omar Bakri Muhammed led thousands of Muslim youths to develop a cult-like fascination with martyrdom. Other preachers are active mainly on the internet, providing legitimation for “martyrdom operations.” Because Islam forbids the taking of one’s own life, Salafi jihadists draw a conceptual distinction between suicide and martyrdom, arguing that those committing ordinary suicide do so for personal reasons, such as distress or depression; in contrast, martyrs die primarily for the sake of God, but also for the greater good of the Muslim community.

Although statistical evidence for the growth of Salafi jihad is scant, there is ample anecdotal evidence of its increasing popularity among both men and women<sup>70</sup> in general,<sup>71</sup> and in Europe,<sup>72</sup> the Middle East,<sup>73</sup> Central Asia,<sup>74</sup> Southeast Asia,<sup>75</sup> and Africa<sup>76</sup> in particular.

In this study, the rise of the Salafi jihad and its growing influence on suicide missions are examined through a coding of the fifty groups that employed them from December 1981 through March 2008 as part of their guiding ideol-

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69. Cited in Reuven Paz, “Qa’idat Al-Jihad: A New Name on the Road to Palestine” (International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism, May 7, 2002), <http://www.global-report.co.il/prism/?l=en&a+4959>.

70. On women, see, for example, Sebastian Rotella, “European Women Join Ranks of Jihadis,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 10, 2006; and Katharina von Knop, “The Female Jihad: Al-Qaida’s Women,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 30, No. 5 (May 2007), pp. 397–414.

71. See, for example, Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002); and Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

72. Kathryn Haahr, “Emerging Terrorist Trends in Spain’s Moroccan Communities,” *Terrorism Monitor*, Vol. 4, No. 9 (May 4, 2006), pp. 1–2; Pascale Combelles Siegel, “Radical Islam and the French Muslim Prison Population,” *Terrorism Monitor*, Vol. 4, No. 15 (July 27, 2006), pp. 1–2; and Lorenzo Vidino, “The Danger of Homegrown Terrorism to Scandinavia,” *Terrorism Monitor*, Vol. 4, No. 20 (October 19, 2006), pp. 5–6.

73. On the Middle East, see, for example, Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

74. See, for example, Anar Valiyev, “The Rise of Salafi Islam in Azerbaijan,” *Terrorism Monitor*, Vol. 3, No. 13 (July 1, 2005), pp. 6–7.

75. See International Crisis Group, “Indonesia Backgrounder: Why Salafism and Terrorism Mostly Don’t Mix,” Asia Report, No. 83 (Brussels: International Crisis Group, September 13, 2004).

76. Douglas Farah, “Salafists, China, and West Africa’s Growing Anarchy” (Alexandria, Va.: International Assessment and Strategy Center, December 7, 2004).

ogy or doctrine (see table 1). In all, 1,857 such attacks took place. To be coded as Salafi jihadist, a group must be a Sunni Islamic group to which at least one of the following characteristics must also apply: (1) affiliation with and/or adherence to al-Qaida was reflected in the group's name;<sup>77</sup> (2) the group had "internalized the worldview of al-Qaida and global jihad";<sup>78</sup> (3) the group engaged in violence to overthrow an Islamic regime and create a transnational caliphate in its stead;<sup>79</sup> or (4) the group engaged in the labeling of some other Muslims as heretics.<sup>80</sup>

My analysis of the data yields the following findings: of the 788 suicide attacks from December 1981 to March 2008 in which the identity of the group could be identified, Salafi jihadist groups carried out 37.7 percent—more than any other group. They were followed by nationalist-separatist groups with 18.5 percent and hybrid groups with 17.8 percent. One thousand sixty-nine attacks (57.6 percent) were perpetrated by organizations whose identities remain unknown. Of these, however, 795 (74.4 percent) occurred in Iraq, where the vast majority of organizations conducting suicide bombings are known to be Salafi jihadist.<sup>81</sup> The bulk of suicide missions in the "unknown" category were therefore likely carried out by Salafi jihadist groups, too.

More important, according to the following criteria, Salafi jihadist groups have assumed the leadership among groups that employ this modus operandi: number of suicide attacks, number of organizations engaged in suicide attacks, total number of fatalities, and average number killed per attack. In 1997, for example, none of the groups that undertook suicide missions were Salafi jihadist. In 1998 a quarter of the groups that employed this tactic adhered to Salafi jihadist ideology. After 2004, at least half of all groups conducting suicide missions adhered to Salafi jihadist ideology in every given year.

The growing ascendancy of Salafi jihadist groups among groups employing suicide attacks is paralleled by the relative decline in the importance of groups

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77. An example would be the group al-Qaida in Iraq.

78. This assessment is based on the best judgment of a group of eight terrorism experts at the RAND Corporation. See Angel Rabasa, Peter Chalk, Kim Cragin, Sara A. Daly, Heather Gregg, Theodore W. Krasik, Kevin A. O'Brien, and William Rosenau, *Beyond Al-Qaeda, Part 1: The Global Jihadist Movement*, and *Part 2: The Outer Rings of the Terrorist Universe* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 2006).

79. This excludes groups such as Hamas, which engages primarily in violence against Israel, a non-Muslim state, but has generally avoided systematic attacks against the Palestinian Authority (prior to Hamas's electoral victory in 2006) for fear of sparking a civil war.

80. *Takfir* is not generally practiced by mainstream Islamist groups and not even by all Salafi jihadists. Those groups and individuals who do practice this form of excommunication, however, are exclusively Salafi jihadist.

81. See International Crisis Group, "In Their Own Words"; and Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq*.

Table 1. Ideological Affiliation of Groups Conducting Suicide Attacks, December 1981 through March 2008

Organizations	Ideology	Organizations	Ideology
Al Dawa <sup>1</sup>	SH	Jemaah Islamiyya <sup>24</sup>	SJ
Al Jihad <sup>2</sup>	SJ	Jund al-Sham (Army of the Levant) <sup>25</sup>	SJ
Al-Gama'a al-Islamiya <sup>3</sup>	SJ	Kashmir Separatists <sup>26</sup>	H
Al-Qaida	SJ	Kurdistan Workers Party	M/NS
Al-Qaida in Iraq <sup>4</sup>	SJ	Lashkar-e-Jhangvi <sup>27</sup>	SJ
Al-Qaida in the Islamic Magreb <sup>5</sup>	SJ	Lashkar-e-Taibeh <sup>28</sup>	SJ
Amal	SH	Lebanese Liberation Organization <sup>29</sup>	U
Ansar al-Islam <sup>6</sup>	SJ	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam	NS
Ansar Allah	SH	Mujahideen Army <sup>30</sup>	H
Ansar al-Sunnah <sup>7</sup>	SJ	Mujahideen Shura Council <sup>31</sup>	SJ
Armed Islamic Group <sup>8</sup>	SJ	Mujahideen Youth Movement <sup>32</sup>	SJ
As-Sirat al-Moustaqim <sup>9</sup>	SJ	Palestinian Islamic Jihad	MI/NS
Chechen Separatists	H	Partisans of the Sunni	U
Chechen Separatists—Arbi Barayev <sup>10</sup>	H	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine	M/NS
Chechen Separatists—Karachayev Jamaat <sup>11</sup>	U	Popular Resistance Committees	MI/NS
Chechen Separatists—Ramzan Akhmadov <sup>12</sup>	H	Qari Zafar Group <sup>33</sup>	SJ
Fatah	NS	Revolutionary People's Liberation Party	M
Hamas <sup>13</sup>	MI/NS	Riyad us-Saliheyn Martyrs' Brigade <sup>34</sup>	H
Hezbollah	SH	Saddam Loyalists	NS
Hizb-i-Islami <sup>14</sup>	SJ	Shields of Islam	U
Hizb-ul Mujahideen <sup>15</sup>	SJ	Soldiers of the Prophet's Companion	SJ
Hizb-ut-Tahrir <sup>16</sup>	SJ	Syrian Baath Organization	NS
Islamic Army in Iraq <sup>17</sup>	MI/NS	Syrian Social Nationalist Party	M/NS
Islamic Courts Union <sup>18</sup>	H	Taliban	H
Islamic Jihad of Uzbekistan <sup>19</sup>	SJ	Tawhid wal Jihad <sup>35</sup>	SJ
Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan <sup>20</sup>	SJ	Tehrik-i-Taliban <sup>36</sup>	H
Islamic State of Iraq <sup>21</sup>	SJ	Victory and Jihad in Greater Syria <sup>37</sup>	U
Jaish-e-Muhammad <sup>22</sup>	SJ		
Jamatul Mujahedin Bangladesh <sup>23</sup>	SJ		

SOURCES: The following sources were used to ascertain the ideological or doctrinal orientation of groups that employ suicide terrorism: The Terrorism Knowledge Base (TKB) of the Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism (MIPT); the 2005 Country Reports on Terrorism, published by the U.S. Department of State's Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism; Angel Rabasa, Peter Chalk, Kim Cragin, Sara A. Daly, Heather Gregg, Theodore W. Krasik, Kevin A. O'Brien, and William Rosenau, *Beyond Al-Qaeda*, Part 1: *The Global Jihadist Movement*, and Part 2: *The Outer Rings of the Terrorist Universe* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 2006); and anecdotal information, when the first three sources did not provide sufficient information to establish ideological identity. The TKB integrates data from the RAND Terrorism Chronology and RAND-MIPT Terrorism Incident databases; the Terrorism Indictment database; and DFI International's research on terrorist organizations. On March 21, 2008, the MIPT announced via email to subscribers of the TKB newsletter that the TKB would "cease operations on March 31, 2008, and elements of the system will be merged with the Global Terrorism Database, managed by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) at the University of Mary-

Table 1. (Continued)

land." The TKB website (<http://www.tkb.org>) is no longer accessible. The RAND studies detail information on the ideological affiliation of jihadist groups. The assessments made in the two RAND studies are based on the consensus agreement of eight RAND terrorism experts.

NOTE: Groups are coded as hybrid (H), Marxist (M), mainstream Islamist (MI), nationalist-separatist (NS), Shiite (SH), Salafi jihadist (SJ), unknown (U) groups, as well as in combinations (e.g., MI/NS or M/NS). Hybrid organizations comprise members who have adopted a Salafi jihadist ideology as well as those who seem to be motivated primarily by ethnonationalist and separatist concerns. Groups coded as mainstream Islamist groups, such as Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, differ from Salafi jihadist groups in that they participate in the political process—something that Salafi jihadist groups consider heretical, given that all power must derive from God, not from the electorate. In addition, mainstream Islamist groups do not engage in *takfir*—the labeling of other Muslims as *kufir*, or heretics. Salafi jihadists, all of whom are Sunnis, consider the Shiite stream of Islam to be heretical.

<sup>1</sup>Al-Dawa conducted at least three suicide attacks in Kuwait between 1983 and 1985. According to the Terrorism Knowledge Base (TKB), al-Dawa is a Shiite organization.

<sup>2</sup>Al-Jihad was led by Ayman al-Zawahiri. The group formally merged with al-Qaida in June 2001.

<sup>3</sup>Although the al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya has recently distanced itself from al-Qaida, it was one of the prominent Salafi jihadist groups during the 1990s and a major influence on al-Qaida.

<sup>4</sup>Al-Qaida in Iraq is a franchise of al-Qaida. The group was formerly known as Tawhid wal Jihad.

<sup>5</sup>Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb is a franchise of al-Qaida. The group was formerly known as the Salafist Group for Call and Combat.

<sup>6</sup>Ansar al-Islam seeks the violent overthrow of Iraqi Kurdistan and conversion of the province into an Islamist state. A faction of Ansar al-Islam split off and established Tawhid wal Jihad. According to *GlobalSecurity.org*, Ansar al-Islam "has close links to and support from al-Qaida. Al-Qaida and Usama Bin Laden participated in the formation and funding of the group, which has provided safe haven to al-Qaida in northeastern Iraq." See "Ansar al Islam (Supporters of Islam)," *GlobalSecurity.org*, [http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/ansar\\_al\\_islam.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/ansar_al_islam.htm).

<sup>7</sup>According to the TKB, Ansar al-Sunnah (Followers of the Tradition) is an Iraqi jihadist group dedicated to the establishment of an Islamic state in Iraq based on sharia law. It seeks to achieve this objective by defeating coalition forces and the foreign occupation. Taken from "Group Profile: Ansar Al-Sunnah Army," *Terrorism Knowledge Base*. On Ansar al-Sunnah's Salafi roots, see also Mohammed M. Hafez, "Suicide Terrorism in Iraq: A Preliminary Assessment of the Quantitative Data and Documentary Evidence," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 29, No. 6 (September 2006), pp. 591–619; International Crisis Group, "In Their Own Words: Reading the Iraqi Insurgency," Middle East Report, No. 50 (Brussels: International Crisis Group, February 15, 2006); and Michael Eisenstadt and Jeffrey White, "Assessing Iraq's Sunni Arab Insurgency," *Policy Focus*, No. 50 (Washington, D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, December 2005), pp. 1–39.

<sup>8</sup>The Armed Islamic Group engages in *takfir*. See Rabasa et al., *Beyond Al-Qaeda*, Part 2, p. 28.

<sup>9</sup>As-Sirat al-Moustaquim is the cell responsible for the 2003 Casablanca bombings. It is sometimes referred to as Salafia Jihadiya. A panel of eight experts at the RAND Corporation concluded that Salafia Jihadiya has "internalized the Al-Qaida worldview of Global Jihad." See Rabasa et al., *Beyond Al-Qaeda*, Part 1, pp. xxii, 2, 79. Information also taken from "Group Profile: Salafia Jihadia," *Terrorism Knowledge Base*. There are persistent reports that As-Sirat al-Moustaquim/Salafia Jihadiya does not exist as a group, but is a term

Table 1. (Continued)

- invented by Moroccan authorities. There is little doubt, however, that the cell responsible for the bombings was driven by Salafi jihadist ideology. For a discussion of the controversy over the existence of Salafia Jihadiya, see Thomas Renard, "Moroccan Crackdown on Salafiya Jihadiya Recruitment of Foreign Fighters for Iraq," *Terrorism Focus*, Vol. 5, No. 27 (July 23, 2008), p. 5.
- <sup>10</sup>According to the Haifa database, on June 7, 2000, a truck bomb driven by two Chechen suicide bombers (one male and one female) exploded in Alkhan Yurt, targeting an OMON (Special Forces Police) unit. Chechen separatists under the leadership of Arbi Barayev, who are also known as the Special Purpose Islamic Regiment (SPIR), claimed responsibility. According to the Terrorism Knowledge Base, the primary objective of SPIR is the liberation of Chechnya and the formation of an independent Chechen state. However, the Islamic fighters also promoted a more radical strain of Islam and a desire to install a fundamentalist Islamic republic governed by Sharia law in Chechnya. Taken from "Group Profile: Special Purpose Islamic Regiment (SPIR)," *Terrorism Knowledge Base*.
- <sup>11</sup>Chechen separatists under the leadership of Karachaev sent three suicide bombers to detonate themselves in coordinated attacks near the Russian border with Chechnya. They killed 20 and wounded about 140. The purpose of the attacks remains unknown. No additional information was available about the group.
- <sup>12</sup>The Chechen separatist group led by Ramzan Akhmadov was responsible for six suicide attacks in June and July 2000. Although information is to determine whether the group is Salafi jihadist in character is insufficient, Akhmadov was known as a radical Islamist and was likely influenced by Wahhabism. Like other Chechen terrorist groups, this group likely comprised both Salafi jihadists as well as more nationalist elements.
- <sup>13</sup>Although Hamas's origins extend to the Muslim Brotherhood, its primary goal is the elimination of Israel. Hamas has resisted the adoption of al-Qaida's doctrine of global jihad, and it does not engage in *takfir*. Its unwillingness to adopt al-Qaida's worldview of global jihad has elicited several heated exchanges between al-Qaida's deputy leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri, and the Hamas leadership. Zawahiri has appealed to Hamas—and to the Muslim Brotherhood at large—not to participate in the democratic process because he and other Salafi jihadists believe that power derived from the electorate rather than from God is heretical. For additional information, see Reuven Paz, "The Islamic Debate over Democracy: Jihadi-Salafi Responses to Hamas' Victory in the Palestinian Elections," Project for the Research of Islamist Movements (PRISM), Occasional Papers, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Herzliya, Israel: PRISM, January 2006); and Stephen Ulph, "Al Zawahiri Takes Hamas to Task," *Terrorism Focus*, Vol. 3, No. 9 (March 7, 2006), p. 1.
- <sup>14</sup>Hizb-i-Islami is led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who is believed to be allied with Osama bin Laden. Its goal is the end of occupation in Afghanistan and the establishment of an Islamist state there. See "Hizb-i-Islami Gulbuddin," *GlobalSecurity.org*, [http://www.globalsecurity.org/security/profiles/hizb-i\\_islami\\_gulbuddin.htm/](http://www.globalsecurity.org/security/profiles/hizb-i_islami_gulbuddin.htm/).
- <sup>15</sup>Although Hizb-ul-Mujahideen has ties with Salafi jihadist groups, including Lashkar-e-Taibeh, its primary focus is the liberation of Kashmir and its accession to Pakistan. Taken from "Group Profile: Hizbul Mujahideen (HM)," *Terrorism Knowledge Base*. It is also tied to Jamaat-i-Islami, the mainstream Islamist party, and the equivalent of the Muslim Brotherhood in Pakistan.
- <sup>16</sup>Hizb ut-Tahrir was responsible for a suicide attack at the entrance to a children's clothing store in the local market in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, on March, 29, 2004. According to *GlobalSecurity.org*, Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami (Islamic Party of Liberation) is "a radical Islamic political movement that seeks 'implementation of pure Islamic doctrine' and the creation of an Islamic caliphate in Central Asia. . . . Its basic aim was struggle with infidels and the organization of a universal caliphate embracing all Islamic countries. . . . The political struggle is manifested in the struggle against the disbelieving imperialists, to deliver the Ummah from their domination and to liberate her from their influence by uprooting their intellectual,

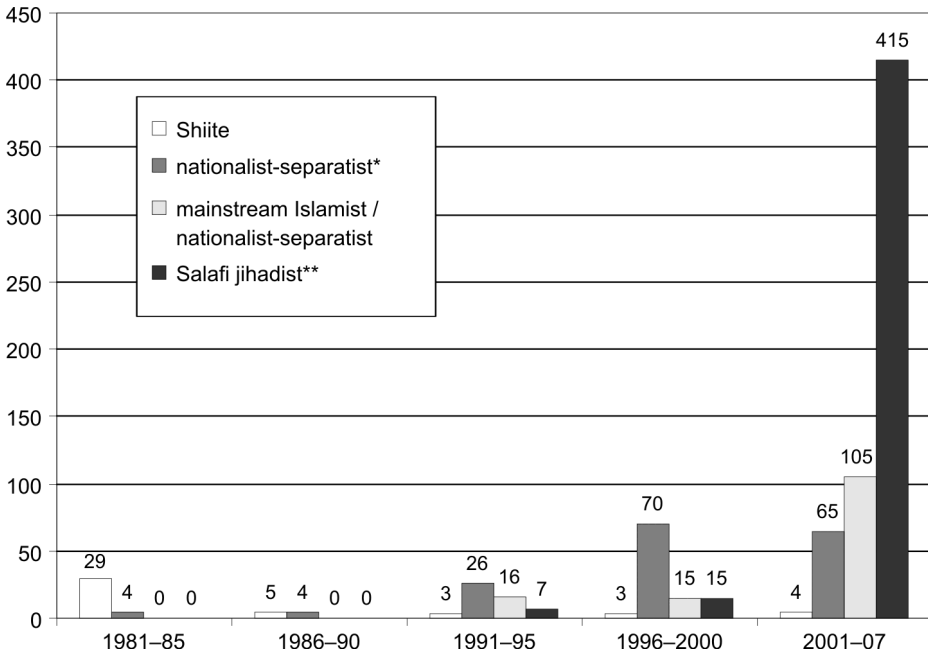
Table 1. (Continued)

- cultural, political, economic and military roots from all of the Muslim countries." See "Hizb ut-Tahrir Al-Islami (Islamic Party of Liberation)," *GlobalSecurity.org*, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/hizb-ut-tahrir.htm>.
- <sup>17</sup>The TKB does not provide sufficient information to determine whether the Islamic Army in Iraq is a Salafi jihadist organization. According to Mohammed Hafez, the Islamic Army in Iraq is both nationalist and Islamist. Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq: The Strategy and Ideology of Martyrdom* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2007).
- <sup>18</sup>The Somali Islamic Courts Union consists of members with a mainstream Islamist orientation as well as Salafi jihadists with suspected ties to al-Qaida. "The Supreme Islamic Courts Union/al-Ittihad Mahakem al-Islamiya (ICU)," *GlobalSecurity.org*, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/icu.htm/>.
- <sup>19</sup>The Islamic Jihad of Uzbekistan openly declared its participation in the "global jihad" and is a splinter group of the Salafi jihadist Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. See "Islamic Jihad Group of Uzbekistan," *GlobalSecurity.org*, [http://www.globalsecurity.org/security/profiles/islamic\\_jihad\\_group\\_of\\_uzbekistan.htm/](http://www.globalsecurity.org/security/profiles/islamic_jihad_group_of_uzbekistan.htm/).
- <sup>20</sup>The Islamist Movement of Uzbekistan has "internalized the Al-Qaida worldview of Global Jihad." Rabasa et al., *Beyond Al-Qaeda*, Part 1, pp. xxii, 2, 79.
- <sup>21</sup>The Islamic State of Iraq is the successor organization to the Salafi jihadist Mujahideen Shura Council and is dominated by al-Qaida in Iraq.
- <sup>22</sup>Jaish-e-Muhammad has "internalized the al-Qaida worldview of Global Jihad." Rabasa et al., *Beyond Al-Qaeda*, Part 1, pp. xxii, 2, 79.
- <sup>23</sup>According to the TKB, "Jamatul Mujahedin Bangladesh (JMB) is a terrorist group dedicated to removing the country's secular government and imposing a Taliban-inspired Islamic theocracy in its place. In addition to calling for an Islamic state based on Sharia law, JMB has denounced the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, warning President [George W.] Bush and British Prime Minister [Tony] Blair to leave all Muslim countries." Taken from "Group Profile: Jamatul Mujahedin Bangladesh (JMB)," *Terrorism Knowledge Base*.
- <sup>24</sup>Jemaah Islamiyya has "internalized the Al-Qaida worldview of Global Jihad." Rabasa et al., *Beyond Al-Qaeda*, Part 1, pp. xxii, 2, 79.
- <sup>25</sup>A group named the Army of the Levant (Jund al-Sham) took responsibility for the March 19, 2005, bombing of a theater in Doha, Qatar, near a British school and popular among Westerners. The name has been claimed by several Sunni Islamic extremist entities, all or none of which may be linked. According to TKB, all of the Jund al-Sham entities desire to "achieve the unified purpose of replacing what they view as misguided forms of Islam and governmental rule with their vision of a traditional Islamic caliphate extending across the Levant. . . . Like many second- and third-tier Islamic extremist entities, the Jund al-Sham organizations are believed to be incorporated, however loosely, under the greater al-Qaeda umbrella." Taken from "Group Profile: Jund Al-Sham," *Terrorism Knowledge Base*.
- <sup>26</sup>Lashkar-e-Taibeh, Jaish-e-Muhammad, and Harkat-ul-Mujahideen, the three major Kashmir separatist groups, have "internalized the Al-Qaida worldview of Global Jihad." Rabasa et al., *Beyond Al-Qaeda*, Part 1, pp. xxii, 2, 79.
- <sup>27</sup>Lashkar-e-Jhangvi has "internalized the Al-Qaida worldview of Global Jihad." Ibid.
- <sup>28</sup>Lashkar-e-Taibeh has "internalized the Al-Qaida worldview of Global Jihad." Ibid.
- <sup>29</sup>On November 11, 1987, a female suicide bomber detonated 12 pounds of explosives packed in a briefcase at Beirut airport. On November 14, 1987, a female suicide bomber detonated 2 pounds of explosives connected to a nail-filled grenade concealed in a box of chocolates in the lobby of the American University Hospital in West Beirut. The Lebanese Liberation Army claimed responsibility, but no solid information on the ideology of this group is available. Given the use of female suicide bombers, however, it is unlikely that this was a Salafi jihadist group.

Table 1. (Continued)

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- <sup>30</sup>The Mujahideen Army, or Jaish-e Mujahideen, is “associated with Al-Qaida” but has recently distanced itself from al-Qaida’s indiscriminatory killing. See “Jaysh al-Mujahideen Terrorist Lieutenant and Propaganda Chief Captured,” *GlobalSecurity.org*, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2005/11/mil-051124-mnfi02.html>. According to Evan F. Kohlmann, the Mujahideen Army has “wavered back and forth in its stated jihadist political platform.” See Evan F. Kohlmann, “State of the Sunni Insurgency in Iraq: August 2007” (Washington, D.C.: NEFA Foundation, July 20, 2008), <http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/iraqreport0807.pdf/>.
- <sup>31</sup>The Mujahideen Shura Council was the primary Salafi jihadist grouping in Iraq until it was renamed the Islamic State of Iraq on October 15, 2006. Its stated goal was to manage “the struggle in the battle of confrontation to ward off the invading infidels and their apostate stooges.” Taken from “Group Profile: Mujahideen Shura Council,” *Terrorism Knowledge Base*.
- <sup>32</sup>There is a high likelihood that the Mujahideen Youth Movement is directly influenced by al-Qaida. See Andrew Black, “Somalia’s Mujahideen Youth Movement,” *Terrorism Focus*, Vol. 4, No. 19 (June 19, 2007), p. 2. The group’s founder and leader, Adan Hashi Ayro, has close al-Qaida connections. See Alisha Ryu, “Youth Mujahideen Group Leading Attacks in Somalia,” *GlobalSecurity.org*, June 19, 2007, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2007/06/mil-070619-voa03.html>.
- <sup>33</sup>Qari Zafar is a splinter group of the Salafi jihadist Lashkar-e Jhangvi and affiliated with al-Qaida. See Abbas Naqvi, “They Were Targeting Pakistan and Its Leaders,” *Daily Times*, February 18, 2007.
- <sup>34</sup>According to the TKB, “The Riyad us-Saliheyn Martyrs’ Brigade is a relatively young terrorist organization, dedicated to the creation of an independent Islamic republic in Chechnya (and other primarily Muslim parts of Russia such as Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria, Ingushetia, Ossetia, and Tataria).” The group, whose name translates to “Requirements for Getting into Paradise,” espouses radical Islamic doctrine (Wahabbism) and is believed to have strong ties to al-Qaida. Most experts, however, agree that the primary inspiration behind Riyad’s activities is a desire for the independence of “Chechen lands,” rather than religious zealotry. Taken from “Group Profile: Riyad Us-Saliheyn Martyrs’ Brigade,” *Terrorism Knowledge Base*.
- <sup>35</sup>Tawhid wal Jihad is the forerunner of al-Qaida in Iraq.
- <sup>36</sup>Led by Beitullah Mehsud, the Tehrik-i-Taliban, also known as the Pakistani Taliban, is dedicated to enforcing sharia law, fighting NATO, and conducting “defensive jihad” against the Pakistani government. Its leader is said to have close ties to al-Qaida. See Hassan Abbas, “A Profile of Tehrik-i Taliban,” *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (January 2008), pp. 1–4.
- <sup>37</sup>This previously unknown group claimed responsibility for the killing of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri on February 14, 2005. At the time of this writing, no additional information about this group was available. The investigation into the killing of Hariri was ongoing. For information on the attack being most likely a suicide attack, see “UN Probe into Murder of Former Lebanese Leader Nears Sensitive Stage—Inquiry Chief,” *United Nations News Centre*, December 18, 2006.
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Figure 3. Number of Attacks by Ideology, December 1981–March 2008



\*Includes Marxist/nationalist-separatist groups.

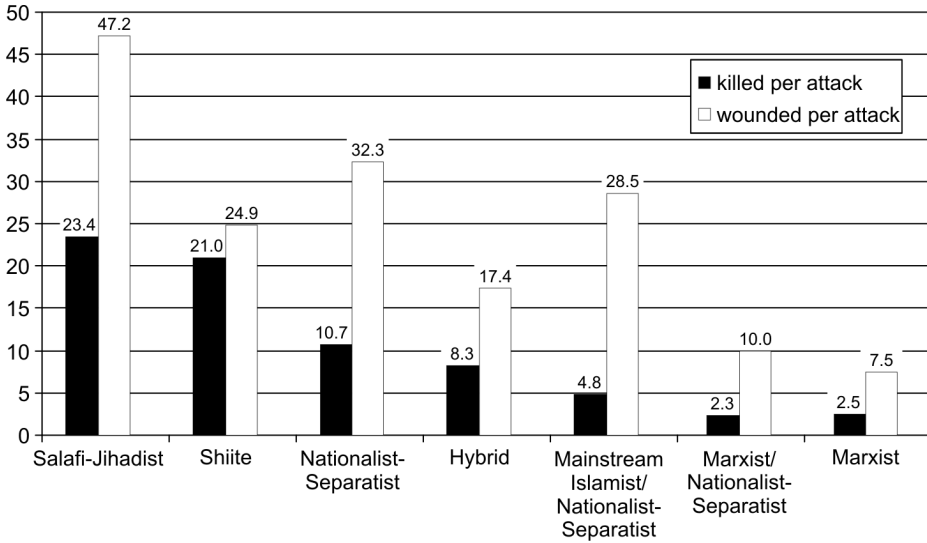
\*\*Includes hybrid groups.

adhering to other ideologies. Figure 3 illustrates the rise in the number of attacks by Salafi jihadist groups and the concomitant decline of attacks by groups guided by other ideologies.<sup>82</sup> During the 1980s, Shiite groups were the main perpetrators of suicide missions,<sup>83</sup> followed by groups with a nationalist-separatist agenda. During the 1990s, nationalist-separatist groups were the most frequent users of suicide attacks, followed by groups with a combination of a mainstream Islamist and nationalist-separatist agenda. Since the turn of the millennium, suicide attacks by Salafi jihadist groups have become more common than attacks by all other groups. The steep rise in this number is par-

82. Attacks by unknown groups, whose ideology could not be ascertained, are omitted from this table.

83. According to other databases, Shiite groups such as Hezbollah and Amal conducted fewer attacks in Lebanon than secular or Sunni groups. See, for example, Pape, *Dying to Win*. Indeed, the identity of many groups that conducted suicide attacks in Lebanon during the 1980s were not identified in the data set used here. It is therefore possible that Shiite groups may not have been the dominant perpetrators of suicide attacks during the 1980s.

Figure 4. Lethality of Suicide Missions by Ideology, December 1981–March 2008



ticularly worrisome given that their attacks were much more lethal than those by non-Salafi jihadist groups (see figure 4).

### *From Localized to Globalized Patterns of Suicide Attacks*

Al-Qaida and its Salafi jihadist ideology have produced an altogether new pattern of suicide attacks, namely, “globalized suicide missions,” which can be distinguished from “localized” suicide missions, the more traditional pattern of suicide attacks. Localized and globalized patterns of suicide missions differ in five key areas: the types of conflicts in which these attacks are used; group ideology; the geographic scope of these actors; their target definition; and their goals (see table 2).

#### LOCALIZED SUICIDE ATTACKS

The overwhelming majority of suicide missions during the 1980s and 1990s occurred in relatively localized settings.

**CONFLICT TYPE.** Suicide missions have traditionally occurred in the context of relatively localized conflicts between two belligerents. Examples include conflicts between Israel and Hezbollah, Israel and the Palestinians, Tamils and Sinhalese, and Turks and Kurds. These conflicts have generally endured for many years, and often decades, between ethnic/religious groups.

Table 2. Patterns of Suicide Missions

	Localized	Globalized
Conflict	Identifiable; long-standing	Less identifiable; short-term
Ideology	Religious; ethno-nationalist; secular	Salafi jihadist
Actors	Subnational	Transnational
Target definition	Narrow	Broad
Goals	Limited	Unlimited
Examples	Hezbollah, Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, Kurdistan Workers' Party, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Fatah	Al-Qaida and associated movements

**IDEOLOGY.** Suicide attacks that fall into the traditional, localized pattern have been planned and executed by religious, secular, Marxist, ethnonationalist, and nationalist groups. Examples of religious groups include Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), and Hezbollah. Secular or nationalist groups include the LTTE, the PFLP, Fatah's al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), and the Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party.

**GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE OF ACTORS.** Traditionally, suicide missions have been planned and executed by subnational terrorist or insurgent actors such as Hezbollah, the LTTE, Hamas, PIJ, and the PKK. Palestinian organizations employing suicide missions, for example, have largely conducted the operational planning of these missions locally, although they may have been receptive to the strategic message and direction of an exile leadership.<sup>84</sup> The subnational nature of these groups suggests that they recruited and trained suicide bombers mostly in or near the conflict area, and have rarely sought them from abroad. The majority of PKK recruits, for example, come from large, poor families residing in Turkey.<sup>85</sup> Among Palestinian organizations, more than 99 percent of the bombers between 1993 and 2008 were residents of the area of conflict—the West Bank, Gaza, and Israel proper. The only exceptions were two Britons involved in the attacks on the bar Mike's Place in Tel Aviv on April 30, 2003.<sup>86</sup> As for the LTTE, experts believe that it is unlikely to have drawn its recruits from outside Sri Lanka because they are chosen from within the ranks

84. Yoram Schweitzer, email communication with author, November 19, 2006.

85. Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism*, pp. 167–168.

86. They were Asif Mohammed Hanif, a 21-year-old student from West London who blew himself up at the Mike's Place bar in Tel Aviv on April 30, 2003; and 27-year-old Omar Khan Sharif, a married resident of Derby, England. Sharif also intended to perpetrate a suicide bombing at Mike's Place along with Hanif, but Sharif's explosive device failed to detonate. He fled the scene and later

of the regular LTTE army, where the motivation to serve is high.<sup>87</sup> According to Stephen Hopgood, for example, “The emphasis on commitment to the cause both for regular cadres and Black Tigers makes non-Sri Lankan or Indian Tamil recruits highly unlikely. The LTTE seems to have no recruitment problems for Black Tigers, so looking outside would only be necessary if some ethnic or linguistic feature of the operative’s identity was necessary to accomplish the mission.”<sup>88</sup>

**TARGETS.** Groups that conducted localized suicide missions mostly targeted people and assets of the enemy state near or in the conflict area, while largely refraining from targeting assets of their foes in other locations. The PKK, for instance, conducted all of its 16 suicide attacks in Turkey. Hamas and other Palestinian organizations did not execute a suicide mission against Israeli or Jewish targets outside of Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza. Hezbollah’s suicide operations against Israel were staged mostly against Israel Defense Forces troops inside Lebanon—with the exception of two suicide attacks on Israeli and Jewish targets in Argentina, for which the group declined to assume responsibility.<sup>89</sup> The LTTE staged nearly all of its attacks in Sri Lanka proper—a notable exception being the killing of Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in the Indian city of Madras in May 1991. Two experts on the LTTE whom I consulted were unaware of additional suicide missions carried out by the LTTE outside of Sri Lanka.<sup>90</sup> To quote Hopgood, “The LTTE is very careful to make it clear its target is the Sri Lankan state and its collaborators, rather than all Sri Lankans. It is conscious of its public image, and escalating to attack on foreign soil would be counterproductive both to legitimacy and diaspora fundraising.”<sup>91</sup>

**GOALS.** The subnational terrorist or insurgent movements that followed a localized pattern of suicide attacks generally aim to advance limited and well-defined political goals for the community they purport to represent. These political goals may include an end to foreign occupation or military presence, increased regional autonomy, and self-determination. The struggle for an inde-

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drowned in the Mediterranean. His body washed ashore on the Tel Aviv beach front on May 12, 2003.

87. Michael Roberts, email communication with author, November 20, 2006; and Stephen Hopgood, email communication with author, November 24, 2006.

88. Hopgood, email communication with author.

89. Hezbollah is believed to have staged two attacks in Argentina: the March 17, 1992, suicide car bombing of the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires, which killed 29 people and injured more than 250; and the July 18, 1994, suicide car bombing of the Jewish Community Center building in Buenos Aires, which killed more than 80 people and wounded some 300.

90. Roberts, email communication with author; and Hopgood, email communication with author.

91. Hopgood, email communication with author.

pendent homeland, whether it is Tamil Eelam, Kurdistan, or Palestine, lies at the center of the conflicts in which suicide missions have traditionally been employed.

#### GLOBALIZED SUICIDE ATTACKS

The localized pattern of suicide missions contrasts sharply with the new globalized pattern displayed by al-Qaida and its Salafi jihadist associated movements. Although the localized pattern continues to exist, the globalized pattern has become increasingly dominant since the millennium.

**CONFLICT TYPE.** Globalized suicide missions may occur in the context of clearly identifiable conflicts such as Iraq, but those conflicts need not have a long history. Suicide attacks in Iraq, for example, occurred less than a week after the start of the U.S.-led invasion in March 2003<sup>92</sup>—hardly long enough to produce the types of deep-seated grievances that influenced Palestinian, Tamil, or Kurdish suicide bombers in localized contexts. Nor are the targets of many globalized suicide bombers aware that they are involved in a conflict with a bitter enemy who seeks their death along with its own. Unlike traditional suicide attacks, globalized suicide operations frequently occur in areas that—by any objective standard—are not identified by all parties as zones of conflict. The September 11 attacks, for instance, did not take place in a region where a large ethnic group was vying for an independent state while battling an occupation army. The same is true for the U.S. embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania in August 1998 and the attack on the USS *Cole* in October 2000. Other examples include Djerba (April 2002), Bali (October 2002 and October 2005), Mombasa (November 2002), Casablanca (May 2003), Istanbul (November 2003), London (July 2005), and Amman (November 2005).

**IDEOLOGY.** Salafi jihadist groups have overwhelmingly planned and executed the new globalized suicide missions.

**GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE OF ACTORS.** Globalized suicide missions tend to be planned and executed by cells and groups that are connected to a transnational terrorist or insurgent network or movement. This transnational network suggests that the planning of suicide missions and their execution may occur in different places. Examples include the September 11 attacks and the July 2005 London bombings.

Additionally, organizations conducting globalized suicide missions no longer recruit and train suicide bombers exclusively in the country where the

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92. Steven Lee Myers, "A Nation at War: Suicide Strike; With Bombing, Iraqis Escalate Guerrilla Tactics and Show New Danger on Front Lines," *New York Times*, March 30, 2003.

attacks are to take place. This is true, again, in the case of the September 11 attacks and the 2005 bombings in Amman, and it is especially evident in the preponderance of foreigners who volunteer for suicide attacks in Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>93</sup> The November 2005 bombings in Amman, for example, were executed by three Iraqis.<sup>94</sup>

**TARGETS.** Organizations and cells that stage globalized suicide missions do not limit their attacks to an identifiable zone of conflict. Due in large part to the expansive nature of Salafi jihad, many of today's suicide attackers regard much of the world as a legitimate target. Hence, even though al-Qaida has declared the United States its main enemy, it does not limit its suicide attacks to the U.S. homeland. Instead, it will strike U.S. interests wherever an opportunity may arise. In addition, it may strike targets of real or perceived allies of the United States.

**GOALS.** Suicide missions that fall within the globalized category are generally perpetrated by organizations whose goals are more elusive than those in the localized category. It is unclear, for instance, whether the suicide bombings in Amman in November 2005 were intended to punish the Hashemite monarchy for its pro-Western stance, including its relations with Israel; to target foreign diplomats; to hurt Israeli and Jewish interests in the kingdom; to create instability and spark an anti-Hashemite backlash; or to extend the jihad in Iraq to the broader Middle East. Similarly, Western analysts often argue over al-Qaida's goals and motivations, although few would disagree that its demands are maximalist.

#### IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS

Distinguishing between localized and globalized patterns of suicide attacks has several theoretical implications for the study of terrorism. It allows re-

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93. According to a Department of Defense news briefing with Col. Sean MacFarland, commander of the First Brigade Combat Team, First Armored Division stationed in Ramadi, Iraq, "[Foreign fighters] are very few in number, although as far as we can tell, they constitute about 100 percent of the suicide bombers." Quoted in Michael O'Hanlon and Nina Kamp, eds., "Iraq Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction and Security in Post-Saddam Iraq" (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, November 13, 2006, updated October 1, 2007), p. 18. See also comments by Maj. Gen. Rick Lynch, who stated on December 1, 2005, that "at least 96 percent of suicide bombers [in Iraq] are not Iraqis." Quoted in Chris Tomlinson, "U.S. General: Suicide and Car Bomb Attacks Down in Iraq," Associated Press, December 1, 2005. On Afghanistan, a recent report by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, for instance, suggests that there is little doubt that some perpetrators in Afghanistan crossed the border from Pakistan, although at least some are Afghan refugees. United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), "Suicide Attacks in Afghanistan (2001-2007)" (New York: UNAMA, 2007).

94. Craig Whitlock, "Amman Bombings Reflect Zarqawi's Growing Reach," *Washington Post*, November 13, 2005.

searchers to place existing explanations into their proper context, to recognize their limitations, and to define important new avenues for research. For instance, scholars can better assess the role of occupation, which appears to be a significant factor in countries whose suicide attacks have a more traditional, localized pattern. It plays a different role in the globalized pattern associated with Salafi jihadist ideology, which adopts an extremely loose definition of “occupation,” rendering virtually any perceived offense an example of Western occupation.<sup>95</sup>

### *Conclusion*

Most suicide attacks today are perpetrated by terrorist groups that adhere to a radical Salafi jihadist ideology. Although ideology thus plays an important role in explaining the global proliferation of suicide attacks, there is no evidence that it is the cause of suicide attacks per se. The causes of suicide attacks are complex: they can be found in the interplay of personal motivations, the strategic and tactical objectives of the sponsoring groups, societal and structural factors, as well as intergroup dynamics at the level of the terrorist cell.<sup>96</sup> In addition, individuals acquire ideology for reasons having to do with emotions and beliefs—a complex process whose examination exceeds the scope of this article. Ideology plays an important role, however, in helping reduce the suicide attacker’s reservations to perpetrate the acts of killing and dying. It helps the suicide bomber justify his or her actions and to disengage morally from his act and his victims.

Because ideology is an important—and often neglected—factor in the genesis and spread of suicide attacks, challenging the appeal of this ideology is a crucial component of an overall counterterrorism strategy. The task for the United States in challenging the appeal of Salafi jihad will be particularly difficult because of widespread antipathies toward U.S. policies in parts of the Arab and Muslim world. According to a forty-seven-nation Pew Global Atti-

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95. A theoretical division of suicide attacks into two patterns also helps contextualize the outbidding thesis. That explanation may account for the adoption of suicide attacks in some cases, but is less capable of accounting for cases of globalized suicide missions. The perpetrators of the London bombings of July 2005, for example, hardly vied for the sympathies of the domestic population—on the contrary, they detested the local population to such an extent that they blew themselves up in its midst. The outbidding thesis is therefore less relevant to our understanding of globalized suicide missions because the importance of killing “infidels” seems to supersede organizational rivalries.

96. On the importance of small group dynamics, see Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*; and Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq*.

tudes Survey released in the summer of 2007, for example, the “U.S. image remains abysmal in most Muslim countries in the Middle East and Asia, and continues to decline among the publics of many of America’s oldest allies.”<sup>97</sup> U.S. practices in detention centers such as Guantánamo Bay and Abu Ghraib and the rush to war in Iraq have aggravated the negative views of the United States in Arab and Muslim countries and beyond. Partly because of the poor standing of the United States, and more important, because of the grave danger Salafi jihad poses to Muslims, nonviolent Salafists, Islamists, and moderate Muslims must begin to challenge this ideology.

The United States and its allies can do little to influence what must primarily be an internal Muslim debate over the future of the Muslim community. They can, however, discreetly convey to moderate Muslims and nonviolent Salafists why waging this internal battle is so important, thus quietly supporting these communities without running the risk of exposing them as “subservient” to the West. As Muslims prepare for this debate, Western states can underscore what most Muslims already know: the credibility of Salafi jihad suffers from a fundamental contradiction. On the one hand, Salafi jihadists claim to act for the benefit of Muslims. On the other hand, Muslims suffer the consequences of Salafi jihadist ideology and terrorism more than any other group.

Moderate Muslims can marshal the following three arguments to undermine Salafi jihadists. First, Muslims are the primary victims of Salafi jihadist terrorism, including suicide attacks. More Muslims than non-Muslims have died or been maimed by Salafi jihadist terror in the last three decades. In Algeria alone, 100,000 or more Muslims have lost their lives to acts of violence largely committed by the Salafi jihadist Armed Islamic Group. In Iraq, where more than half of all suicide attacks since 1981 have taken place, suicide missions have killed more Iraqi civilians than foreign military or foreign civilian personnel. In Afghanistan, civilians have been the prime victims of the growing number of suicide attacks, even if these attacks were aimed at members of the International Security Assistance Force. In Pakistan, too, an increasing number of suicide attacks have targeted the indigenous population.

Second, Salafi jihadists defend the killing of Muslims by claiming that the ends justify the means. Innocent Muslims not only die as a by-product of war and insurgency waged by Salafi jihadists, but Salafi jihadists also seem to believe that Muslims are expendable. As Abu Musab al-Zarqawi noted, “Admittedly, the killing of a number of Muslims whom it is forbidden to kill

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97. Pew Global Attitudes Project, “Global Unease with Major World Powers: Rising Environmental Concern in 47-Nation Survey” (Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center, June 27, 2007), p. 3.

is undoubtedly a grave evil; however, it is permissible to commit this evil—indeed, it is even required—in order to ward off a greater evil, namely, the evil of suspending jihad.”<sup>98</sup>

Third, the use of *takfir*—the labeling of some Muslims as infidels—is dividing the Islamic community and runs the risk of creating a Muslim civil war. The Algerian civil war of the 1990s offers a devastating example of this practice. The use of the *takfir* label has created serious tensions within the Islamic community, and it is used to justify scores of suicide bombings against Muslims in countries such as Afghanistan, Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, and Pakistan. Unless it is rejected by moderate Muslims, who form the majority of the Islamic community, such labeling will continue to lead the Islamic nation on a downward spiral of self-inflicted violence. Moderate Muslims should remind their coreligionists that wrongly accusing another Muslim of being an infidel is a major sin in Islam.

The battle against suicide attacks will not be won by exposing the inconsistencies of Salafi jihad alone. Like terrorism more generally, suicide missions are a tactic, and as such cannot be “defeated” entirely. Like war, there are countless reasons why terrorism occurs—and like war, it is unlikely that terrorism and suicide attacks will disappear. Governments struggling against terrorism should therefore conceive their battle not as a war whose goal is victory, but as a long-term effort that requires commitment, endurance, and ingenuity.

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98. Quoted in Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), “Abu Mus’ab Zarqawi: Collateral Killing of Muslims is Legitimate,” Special Dispatch Series, No. 917 (Washington, D.C.: Jihad and Terrorism Project, MEMRI, June 7, 2005).