Collective Palestinian frustration and suicide bombings

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ABSTRACT *This study proposes that Islamic militancy, poverty, youth and personality patterns contribute to the explanation of support for Palestinian suicide bombings, as well as proneness to participate in them. Data come from a simple random sample of 342 Palestinian refugees living in southern Lebanon. The administration of the research instrument took place during the summer of 2002. The findings attest to the strength of political Islam, low income, youth and certain social functionality attributes in explaining endorsement of suicide attacks, as well as willingness to take part in them.*

Violent actions such as suicide bombings are unusual and unnatural forms of human behaviour. Their mere occurrence indicates the presence of a serious problem in interpersonal interaction. Violence signals the collapse of dialogue and resort to unconventional means of communication. Believing that the Oslo peace talks between Israeli and PLO negotiators did not provide the proper conduit for achieving Palestinian national aspirations in statehood, radical groups such as Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad have since 1984 unleashed a wave of suicide terror that has caused the deaths of hundreds of Israeli civilians. Palestinian violence has invited overwhelming Israeli retaliation that took the form of collective punishment, which has further escalated the pace of suicide bombing.

Sacrificial death in perspective

Valour in battle, including deliberate self-destruction, has always punctuated armed conflicts. For instance, Laqueur (1999: 140) observes that 'suicide missions have been carried out for as long as wars have been fought'. In modern times, which we take back to the 19th century, suicide missions became the weapon of choice of Irish and Spanish anarchist movements, as well as of the Russian Social Revolutionaries. During the 1980–88 Iran–Iraq War thousands of Iranian infantrymen, motivated by extraordinary religious zeal, unnecessarily perished in repeated human-wave attacks against heavily armed Iraqi troops. Dixon (1976) recounts with puzzlement European military behaviour during World War I trench warfare, when poorly envisioned human-wave attacks against fortified enemy positions resulted in the death of more than one million British,

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1049

HILAL KHASHAN

German and French combatants in the four-month long First Battle of the Somme, which began on 1 July 1916.

The Japanese kamikaze pilots presented themselves as one of the unforgettable images of World War II. They chose to die in honour for Japan. Some scholars argue that Japan's collectivist and cohesive society fosters a range of culturally sanctioned suicide actions. According to Taylor (1988: 113), 'within traditional Japanese cultural contexts, suicide related to achieving some socially or personally defined end has a long and an honourable history'.

In Sri Lanka the living conditions of the Hindu Tamil minority that drove the guerrillas of the underground Tiger Movement to unleash a wave of suicide terror against the Buddhist Sinhalese majority since 1986 in many respects resemble the living conditions of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Shortly after the island's independence in 1947 the Sinhalese majority embarked on a series of measures to consolidate its economic and political grip on the country to the detriment of the Tamil minority. Grosscup (1991: 242) cites the Citizenship Act that made Tamil plantation workers stateless, the Sinhalese-only Act, which excluded Tamils from attending universities and the migration programme of Sinhalese settlement in Tamil areas. Grosscup reports that:

> The political leadership of the Sinhalese majority has taken these steps with a righteous belief in the historical destiny of the Sinhalese community. From their reading of Sri Lankan history comes the claim that, as the original community to arrive from India, as the only people in the world speaking Sinhala, a language with deep Sanskrit origins, and as the 'chosen race' of Lord Buddha, it is the right of the Sinhalese people to dominate the island. (Grosscup, 1991: 242–243)

Hindu Tamil suicide terrorism is particularly relevant to our study since it reinforces Merari's conclusions about Palestinian suicide missions, which he derives from reviewing the profiles of more than 50 suicide bombers. Merari (in Gupta *et al*, 2002: B4) asserts suicide bombing 'is neither an Islamic phenomenon nor a religious phenomenon: religion is just one more element in the persuasion, but it is neither necessary nor sufficient'.

Despite certain striking similarities between Hindu Tamil and Palestinian perceptions of deprivation, the former did not serve as a role model for the emergence of the phenomenon of Palestinian suicide bombing. It was Lebanon's Shi'i Hizbullah who provided the impetus and doctrinal foundations for Palestinian religiously inspired politico-military suicide missions. Saad-Ghorayeb (2002: 127) remarks that the centrality of the notion of martyrdom in Shi'ism is imbedded in the determination to reject injustice and humiliation. Even though Jaber (1997) traces the beginning of Shi'i suicide bombing activity to 11 November 1982, when a 17-year-old bomber destroyed the Israeli military headquarters in Tyre, southern Lebanon, fully fledged resistance to Israeli occupation came a year later as a direct reaction to an immense perception of injustice that invoked the concept of Shi'i self-sacrifice in the face of tyranny. Lebanese Shi'is were 'severely provoked by the Israelis' interruption of the Ashura festival in Nabatiyeh in October 1983. The incident was an appalling plunder and a decisive factor in the emergence of the Shiites' resistance against the Israeli occupation' (Jaber, 1997: 86).

Jihad and martyrdom

Muslim thinkers and clerics usually present differing perspectives on the meaning of *jihad*, as well as its centrality in Islam. There are clear indications, nevertheless, that the concept of *jihad* has undergone profound transformations ever since the rise of Islam in 610 CE. The Qur'an's indeterminate perception of Jews and Christians, as well as its ambivalence on the issues of war and peace, made it possible for the development of a changing conception of *jihad* capable of responding to incipient political and military conditions. On the one hand, the Qur'an evinces friendliness towards Christians and Jews, promising them immunity from fear. On the other hand, there are instances where the Qur'an warns Muslims against scheming by the other two monotheistic religions. The Qur'an, therefore, urges Muslims to refrain from interacting with them: 'O ye who believe! Take not the Jews and the Christians for your friends and protectors' (Surat al-Maida, verse 51). It promises swift punishment for the nemeses of the mission of Prophet Muhammad: 'Soon shall We cast terror into the hearts of the Unbelievers … And evil is the home of the wrong-doers' (Surat al-Imran, verse 151).

The Qur'an does not include any specific verses that urge Muslims to engage in *jihad* against Jews and Christians. Prophet Muhammad's main adversary were his own tribespeople of Quraysh, then a very influential tribe in Arabia. Qurayshis delayed the spread of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula for more than 20 years. Pristine Islamic notions of *jihad* and martyrdom, which refer to the valour of early Muslim warriors, aimed at those Arab Bedouins who persecuted Prophet Muhammad's followers and sought to nip the new faith in the bud.[1] Christians and Jews constituted a tiny fraction of the people of Arabia, and although their speedy conversion to Islam would have hastened its legitimisation in the predominantly pagan peninsula, they were not, however, the primary objective of the Prophet's military endeavours. Hence Christians and Jews remained peripheral to the new religion's prodding of the faithful to contribute to *jihad*, in abnegation of the luxuries of life for the furtherance of Islam. It is with this understanding that we proceed to explain the meaning of *jihad* as understood by the early Muslims.

The Qur'an makes it quite clear that those who die for God win immortality: 'And say not of those who are slain in the way of Allah: "They are dead", nay, they are living, though ye perceive [it] not' (Surat al-Baqarah, verse 154). It also proposes what amounts to a contractual agreement promising a place in Heaven for believers willing to fight and die for God's cause: 'Allah hath purchased of the believers their persons and their goods; for theirs [in return] is the Garden [of Paradise]' (Surat at-Tauba, verse 111). Willingness to die for a holy cause invokes the saliency of the concept of *fida'i* ('commando'[2] is the closest equivalent in English) in *jihad*. A *fida'i* is a devout male Muslim (Islam insists on maleness) who perceives involvement in holy war as a religious obligation. He is eager 'to fight for the sake of righteousness, justice and freedom, which Islam embodies'; he agrees—in fact, seeks—to die as a *shahid* (martyr). (al-Shurbasi, 1970: 7).

Al-Luhaydan (1978: 58) lists seven preconditions for *shahada* (martyrdom),

the culmination of *jihad*: 1) commitment to Islam, 2) legal age, 3) freedom of choice, 4) maleness, 5) good health, 6) sanity, and 7) availability of adequate funds for next of kin. Al-Rumi (1985: 41) enumerates six components of the 'bargain': the *shahid* 1) wins instant forgiveness for all sins with the first gush of his blood, 2) sees his seat in Heaven, 3) receives the trophy of faith, 4) marries 72 beauties, 5) acquires the supreme crown (adorned with many gems; each more worthy than our entire planet) and 6) writes-off the wrongdoings of 70 relatives. This pertinent information impels us to reiterate our hypotheses and assert that these elements of al-Rumi's bargain must particularly appeal to Palestinian refugees demonstrating political Islamic tendencies, suffering from social functionality problems, and undergoing unusual economic hardship. Before we turn our attention to the technical aspects of the study and draw conclusions, it is necessary to define our terms and justify their inclusion in the analysis.

Political Islam

Political Islam refers to persons who, in addition to performing standard religious obligations,[3] believe that their faith plays a central role in the lives of the community of believers, feel strongly about the need for creating an Islamic state, and regard *jihad* as a religious obligation. *Jihad* in Islam, it must be emphasised, is not a wanton activity; Karim (2002: 425) reminds us that the Prophet 'laid down very specific rules of engagement, which explicitly enjoined upon his followers not to wage war upon the innocent … and noncombatant men'. After he distinguishes between *jihad* (a regulated use of force) and terrorism (an unregulated use of force), Karim (2002: 426) concludes that terrorism is the choice of people who 'feel that they have no recourse for their voices'. The Jewish state's overwhelming military superiority, and the lack of Arab enthusiasm for supporting the Palestinians in the battlefield, eventually convinced many of them to shift their military tactics to random, often suicidal attacks. The Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ),[4] for example, blames the West for planting the roots of the Palestinian problem by invading Egypt in 1798 and issuing the Balfour Declaration in 1917. According to the PIJ, it was the destruction of the Ottoman Empire and the creation of a shaky system of Arab states in the twentieth century, ruled by local lackeys, that made it possible for the birth of a powerful Jewish state in Palestine. The PIJ saw that the new reality left the Palestinians with no recourse but to declare an unscrupulous form of *jihad* with the aim of liberating Palestine and inducing a pan-Islamic revival trend throughout the Middle East (Hatina, 2001: 51). Hamas sees eye to eye with the PIJ on the issue of the existence of the Jewish state in Palestine. Thus Israel looms as 'a constant reminder of the weakness and deep crisis of the Islamic Umma that does not have the strength to get rid of this "cancer"' (Nusse, 1998: 29).[5]

Hamas, just like the PIJ, advances a dichotomous perception of the world based on *haqq* (truthfulness) versus *batil* (untruthfulness); *haqq* refers to the Islamic community as righteous, whereas *batil* designates the forces of apostasy, an allusion to Christians and Jews (Nusse, 1998; Hatina, 2001). This categorisation paved the way for vilifying adherents of the other two monotheistic religions, but mainly Jews, against whom Hamas has pitted itself in a mortal confrontation. The

discourse of Hamas describes the Jews as 'the "bloodsucker of mankind", "racists", [and] "criminals"' (Nusse, 1998: 33). Militant Islamic movements usually build their moral edifice for acting against Jews by grounding their claims in Qur'anic verses: 'Their hands [the Jews'] shall be shackled and they shall be cursed for what they say … We have put enmity and hatred among them till the day of resurrection' (Surat al-Ma'ida, verse 64). Vilification invites dehumanisation, which makes it appear as if it were morally permissible to unleash indiscriminate terror against Jews. The caricaturing of the Jewish character coincided with the retreat of Palestinian pan-Arab secularists and the Islamisation of Palestinian identity. Litvak (1996: 12) writes about the sanctification of Palestine in the collective consciousness of Palestinians, especially for Hamas, who made the sanctifying terminology 'become a central pillar of its ideology'. The likelihood of peace between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, which culminated in the famous handshake in 1993 between Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO Chairman Yassir Arafat, gave rise to one spate of suicide bombings after another. Our next step concerns itself with an attempt to sketch the profile of the potential suicide bombers whose death missions have heightened the threshold of hostilities between Israelis and Palestinians and brought mutual suspicions to previously unimaginable levels. To do this, we seek to elaborate on social functionality, in addition to social and economic conditions.

Social functionality

By social functionality we refer to those aspects of behaviour that facilitate an individual's capacity to perform well in society and interact beneficially with other members of the community. Interpersonal interactions imply perceptions of the self and one's outlook on life. We argue that self-esteem (self-respect), optimism and personal competence augment an individual's standing in society and enhance his/her well-being. Similarly, the prevalence of social trust and belief in the sanctity of human life add civility to interpersonal relations and engender enduring societal bonds.

Boxill (1995: 94) emphasises the importance of expressing anger at injustice: 'people should protest their wrongs … not only to stop injustice but also to show self-respect and know themselves as self-respecting'. Massey (1995: 201) goes a step further and points out that a self-respecting person 'is confident that he will continue to act in accordance with his standards of worthy behavior'.[6] Cooper-smith (1967: 5) shares the same view and concludes that self-esteem is 'a personal judgment of worthiness'. Since self-respecting people emphasise continuity in their actions, we would not expect them to commit themselves knowingly to self-destructive actions but it would certainly make sense for powerlessness and helplessness, which lead to self-estrangement, to foster radical behaviour (Neal, 1983: 166). Franks and Marolla (1976: 434) link fanaticism and violence to weak personal and social worth. Poorly equipped to compromise, people suffering from the latter grow increasingly frustrated; the acceleration of the feeling of incompetence 'compel[s] them to act on the basis of their own understanding and assessments without regard for the consequences'. Therefore

they lose sight of the purpose of their actions and end up venting their wrath against innocent people. Zanden (1987: 337) names this type of aggression a free-floating impulse, which he equates with displacement.

The theoretical constructs of frustration and aggression have been reformulated by Gurr (1970) as the relative deprivation (RD) theory. Gurr's RD model, which refers to the frustration that results from the discrepancy between expectations and gratifications, consists of three phases: 'The primary causal sequence in political violence is first the development of discontent, second the politicization of that discontent, and finally its actualization in violent action against political objects and actors' (Gurr, 1970: 12–13). Gurr's emphasis on the politicisation of discontent is further reinforced by Tilly (1978: 24), who insisted that aggression must be 'politicized if it is to appear as collective political violence'.

Secular Arab political parties and movements declined after the 1967 Six Day War and were quickly supplanted by political Islamic groups. This shift was accompanied by a sudden rise in religiosity levels in Arabic-speaking countries, and elsewhere in the world of Islam. It is worth reporting that many Hizbullah recruits were former Shi'i members of the Lebanese Communist Party. The demise of the PLO in Lebanon after Israel's invasion in 1982 caused the rise of Hizbullah in Lebanon and Hamas and the PIJ in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. It would be unrealistic to deal with political violence in the Arab–Islamic context without recognising the salient role of political Islam, which is not identical with religiosity.

Social and economic conditions

There is an intense debate, producing little agreement on the impact of social and economic conditions on suicide bombers, which indicates the immediateness of the need for further inquiry. A number of academicians assert that poverty and education do not play a role in explaining terrorism. Thus Krueger and Maleckova (2002: 31) insist that 'neither poverty nor education has a direct, causal impact on politically motivated violence and terrorism. Economic conditions and education are largely unrelated to participation in, and support for terrorism.' Gupta (in Gupta *et al*, 2002: B4) concurs and reports that 47% of Middle Eastern terrorists are educated. In an earlier study (Gupta, 1990: 220), he evinces conviction 'that the spread of education will reduce ideological fervor within the society since education will promote economic mobility'.

Some Arab scholars seem to agree with Western propositions on support for terrorism. Khalil Shikaki's Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research has in the past few years conducted a number of public opinion polls on Palestinian attitudes towards the *intifada*, peace and support for terrorism. The third such poll, for example, reports that the vast majority of respondents do not view Palestinian violent acts as terrorism, and that education does not seem to affect the patterns of response.[7] Ibrahim (1980: 439) examines the profile of young Egyptian militants in jail and finds that 29 out of the 32 militants he interviewed were enrolled in college at the time of their arrest, and adds that 23 of them had fathers employed as middle-range government employees. His findings encourage him to construct the profile of an Egyptian Islamic militant as a

college-educated, high-achieving 23-year-old young man. Laqueur (1987: 77) brings to bear the youthfulness of terrorists: 'calls to action do not usually fire the middle-aged and elderly with enthusiasm.'

Juergensmeyer (2000: 158) drops the economic dimension altogether in order to recognise what he calls a Palestinian culture of violence. He uses eschatology to account for suicide bombers who kill themselves, along with others, in the name of a cosmic war.[8] Kelley (2001: 80) dwells on the learning process that legitimises suicide bombings among Palestinians. He points to the wall signs in Hamas kindergartens in Gaza that read: 'The children of the kindergarten are the martyrs of tomorrow'. Kelley clearly implies that five-year-old children living in refugee camps learn about militancy long before they are able to think analytically or begin to conceptualise about their poverty.

Morris (1996: 41) accepts that poverty, in conjunction with other variables such as nationalism and religious militancy, plays a role in promoting suicide bombings. Nevertheless, he judges that the decisive factor is psychological abnormality: 'To commit suicide you have to be suicidal'. Chittenden (2003) contends that the desperate living conditions of Palestinians 'easily foster suicide bombers'. Rabinovich (2002) regards the promise of financial support for their poverty-stricken families, together with the motivation to avenge personal traumas caused by Israeli occupation, as the two compelling reasons why young men commit acts of suicide bombings. The September 11 attacks seem to have altered perceptions about the profile of suicide bombers:

> Before the 11 September attacks, experts generally considered suicide bombers to be usually poor, not particularly well-educated, unmarried, and hungry for revenge. The 11 September suicide attacks, conducted by well-educated and generally prosperous individuals, have shaken that profile. (Smith, 2002: 37)

Smith's viewpoint concurs with an earlier study by Dang (1988: 34), whose analysis of the profile of Punjabi terrorists determines that 'they mainly come from landlord, rich peasant and upper middle class families'. But many Arabs scholars would disagree. Haydar (1997: 22) insists that the growth of Islamic militant terrorism in the Middle East directly results from 'poverty, backwardness, unemployment, weakness of academic curricula and decline of academic institutions'. He does not seem to think that a college degree means a lot in most Arab countries since their educational systems, which in certain cases continue to emphasise learning by rote, do not foster 'the creation of a liberal, independent-minded individual' (Haydar, 1997: 23). Al-Sayyid (1997) and Abu Ghazaleh (1997) share the views of Haydar on poverty and weak academic credentials as major elicitors of terrorist behaviour.

Refugee camps as breeding grounds

Conventional social and economic variables such as income, education and occupation may not necessarily provide significant attitudinal/behavioural predictors about Palestinians dwelling in refugee camps, in view of their particularly appalling living conditions, mainly in the Gaza Strip and southern Lebanon. It might be noted that Gaza, whose residents constitute less than one-

third of the population of the Palestinian Territories, provides more than two-thirds of suicide bombers (Sammur, 2002: 223). The deplorable conditions of life for Palestinians living in refugee camps in Lebanon produce an utterly poor population: per capita income for 60% of them is about a dollar per day. In addition, more than 40% of children below 16 years of age work under subhuman conditions (Ayyash, 2002: 24). More than half of Lebanon's nearly 400 000 Palestinian refugees live in southern Lebanon, mostly in refugee camps (80%). The two largest camps in the south are 'Ain al-Hilwa (70 000 residents) in the vicinity of the port city of Sidon, and al-Rashidiyya (38 000 residents) near Tyre.

Palestinians in Lebanon endure widespread human rights violations, because of the confessional nature of the Lebanese political system, which precludes the possibility of integrating new groups in society. Essentially accommodative, yet fragile, the system suffers from inherently weak integrative capacity, which explains its aversion to Palestinian refugees living in the country. After the conclusion in 1990 of the Tai'f Agreement that aimed to regulate post-civil war Lebanon, the government in Beirut has been imposing a host of draconian measures against the country's beleaguered Palestinian community, with the aim of coercing them to emigrate. For example, Palestinians have no access to the state's health programme or to public schooling, and Lebanese law bars their employment, except in menial jobs. The situation of Palestinians living in refugee camps is even worse than that of their compatriots residing in urban settings. In the refugee camps Palestinians occupy substandard residences, get no access to municipal services such as garbage collection or potable running water, and have become accustomed to the indignities they suffer at the hands of Lebanese bureaucrats and security forces. Because discrimination against them is rampant, the unemployment rate for camp Palestinians reaches 60% (Country Report: Lebanon 2002).

Camp conditions in the south of the country are even worse. Because of their proximity to the Israeli border, the Lebanese army literally puts them under an undeclared siege. Army units closely scrutinise camp entrants and departees through a single gate, which effectively curtails the movement of Palestinians through excessive delays at these military checkpoints. Lebanese authorities do not allow camp Palestinians to repair their residential quarters, nor to perform basic maintenance tasks. For example, government restrictions do not allow Palestinians even to bring nails and hammers into camps close to the Israeli border. Grave humanitarian conditions inside the camps give rise to a mood of helplessness and despair, and heighten the refugees' sense of frustration, thanks to an official Lebanese 'policy of merciless strangulation' (Hajjaj, 2000).

The research model

Naturally, we accept the complexity of the phenomenon of suicide bombings and recognise, therefore, that different motives encourage their perpetrators to shed blood in the name of a high-principle cause. This implies our dissension from the assertion that suicide bombers show no pattern or ties (Bennet, 2002: A1). On the basis of an empirical study of Palestinian refugees, we seek answers to three questions on Palestinian perspectives on suicide bombings. First, do they lend

themselves to profiling in terms of educational, economic and personality characteristics? Second, does militant religious ideology taking the form of *jihad* pervade their thinking? Third, do they account for a significant proportion of refugees?

The review of the literature points to a general agreement about the youthfulness of terrorists, including suicide bombers. Therefore, we hypothesise as follows.

Hypothesis 1: disposition towards suicide attacks is a function of young age.

We noted in the literature that Gurr and Tilly emphasise the importance of the politicisation of anger and frustration in order for political violence to ensue. For nearly three decades Islamic fundamentalist groups have presented themselves as the decisive oppositional force in the Arab World, especially in the Palestinian Territories. On this basis, we move to our next hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2: a strong commitment to political Islamic teaching should increase a disposition toward suicide attacks.

In the literature on social functionality we pointed to the importance of self-concept in promoting social health and the development of a personality endowed with self-esteem, optimism, personal competence, social trust and belief in the sanctity of human life. In evident support of our view, Post (1990: 27) says: 'It is my distinct impression … that "borderline personality disorders" … are found with extremely high frequency in the population of terrorists'. This gives us our third hypothesis.

Hypothesis 3: manifestations of a damaged self-concept are likely to intensify a disposition toward suicide attacks.

We believe there is sufficient support for the assertion that poverty provides an excellent breeding ground for terrorists, especially among Arab scholars, to dissent from the conventional wisdom stating otherwise.

Hypothesis 4a: poverty is expected to strongly influence disposition toward suicide bombings.

In view of Arab scholars' sharp criticism of their countries' educational systems, as well as the content their curricula, we make one additional hypothesis to 4a.

Hypothesis 4b: education is irrelevant to disposition toward suicide bombings.

Measurement

This study derives from a simple random sample of 342 Palestinian refugees administered during the summer of 2002 by 10 well-trained interviewers. We selected all respondents from southern Lebanon, where harsh conditions of life for Palestinians, especially those living in camps, compare in many respects with those of their brethren in the Gaza Strip, from which most suicide bombers originate.[9] Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Palestinian refugee camps in

southern Lebanon provided Hizbullah with many fighters and suicide bombers. In the aftermath of Israel's pull-out from southern Lebanon in May 2000 its army killed several Palestinians in the course of attacks they had launched against the Jewish state in the upper Galilee. Were it not for the Lebanese army's sealing off the border in order to avoid devastating Israeli retaliation, Palestinian suicide bombings across the border would have probably become a frequent occurrence.

The dependent variable dealing with disposition toward suicide attacks identifies two dimensions: endorsement of and proneness to personal involvement. We include three items in operationalising each of the two dimensions, whose construct validity is ascertained by the strong factor scores appearing in Table 1.

In order to test the four hypotheses pertaining to suicide attacks, we use the following seven independent variables to account for causality: age, political Islam, self-esteem, social trust, optimism, belief in the sanctity of life, and feelings of personal competence. Except for age, the independent variables take the form of scales consisting of uni-dimensional items validated by strong factor scores, as Table 2 demonstrates.

We spared no effort in collecting highly reliable data. A pre-test of 30 respondents preceded the actual administration of the instrument, which was executed by Palestinian interviewers physically residing in southern Lebanon and known in their local communities. Congruence with reality and response consistency tests yielded excellent matches, further increasing our confidence in

TABLE 1
Factor analysis scores for disposition towards suicide attacks

Variables	Factor 1	Factor 2
Factor 1: endorsement of suicide attacks		
Suicide attacks are legitimate	0.87	
Approval of suicide attacks	0.89	
Reaction to suicide attacks	0.86	
Eigenvalue	3.47	
% of total variance explained	57.80	
Factor 2: partaking in suicide attacks		
Principle of personal involvement in a suicide attack		0.91
Sanction suicide attack by a family member		0.87
Personal involvement for sake of Palestinian cause		0.84
Eigenvalue		1.36
% of total variance explained		22.71
% of total cumulative variance explained (both factors)		80.52
Number of cases		342

Notes
Extraction method: principal axis factoring
Rotation method: varimax rotation
SPSS 10.0.5 was used to perform this analysis

TABLE 2
Factor loadings for six scales used to predict disposition towards suicide attacks

	Political Islam	Self-esteem	Social trust	Optimism	Sanctity of life	Personal competence
	Live in Islam state 0.66	Play role in life 0.66	Trust people 0.83	Time is hope 0.83	Worthless victory 0.68	Planned past 0.72
	Jihad is obligation 0.87	Contentment 0.87	People helpful 0.82	Good from bad 0.79	Accept bloodletting 0.75	Plan future 0.86
	Religion shapes politics 0.85		People manipulate 0.70	Silver living 0.84	Life is sacred 0.77	Implement plans 0.70
Eigenvalue	1.90	1.28	1.85	2.03	1.61	1.75
Variance explained*	63.47	64.00	61.57	67.65	53.50	58.38

Notes
*In total percentage
Extraction method: principal axis factoring
Rotation method: varimax rotation
SPSS 10.0.5 was used to perform this analysis

the reliability of the data. The full text of the items measuring the dependent and independent variables of the present study appear in Appendix I, whereas Table 3 provides their summary statistics.

Analysis

Suicide operations elicit overwhelming support among Palestinian refugees. Muslim clerics call them legitimate martyrdom operations and acts of self-defence against a preponderant enemy of malicious intentions (Saoud, 2001; Sachs, 2002). Basisu (2002: 6) even sanctions killing civilian Jews on the grounds that Israel has a militaristic society. Even though our findings show that most respondents endorse suicide attacks, only a minority say they would participate in them (see Table 4 for the text and distribution of all responses).[10]

Qa'war (2002: 9) does not view suicide bombings as acts of retribution, but as a strategic weapon that, in his view, has created a balance of terror between Israelis and Palestinians. He provides statistics about suicide bombings devastating effects on Israeli society; the attacks have caused economic recession, delivered a staggering blow to morale, which, in turn, has slowed down immigration to the Jewish state and accelerated emigration from the Promised Land.

Suicide activities are popular among Palestinians to the point where, on occasion, they assume crazed proportions. Palestinian TV once displayed the photo of an anonymous teenager killed by Israeli troops. The announcer appealed to viewers to identify him at a local hospital. A few minutes later, hundreds of residents arrived at the hospital's morgue insisting that the dead boy was their child (Intifadat al-Aqsa, 2001: 57). Decades of defeat at the hands of the Jewish state have eventually forged a new Palestinian collective consciousness thoroughly determined to redeem itself. The Palestinian psyche has become imbued with the idea that Israel respects valour and fears might and that

TABLE 3
Sample summary statistics

Variable	Number of observations	Mean	Standard deviation
Age	342	2.19	1.12
Gender	342	1.57	0.50
Education	342	1.69	0.64
Income	342	2.32	0.68
Political Islam scale	332	1.94	0.81
Sanctity of life scale	342	2.47	0.74
Optimism scale	335	2.44	0.68
Self-esteem scale	332	2.32	0.74
Personal competence scale	342	2.19	0.80
Social trust scale	336	2.53	0.64
Endorsement of suicide attacks scale	334	1.40	0.60
Partaking in suicide attacks scale	340	2.02	0.87

TABLE 4
Marginal distributions of disposition towards suicide attacks

	High (%)	Medium (%)	Low (%)
Endorsement of suicide attacks			
Suicide attacks are legitimate	62	35	3
Approval of suicide attacks	66	28	6
Reaction to suicide attacks	68	27	5
Partaking in suicide attacks			
Principle of personal involvement in a suicide attack	39	19	42
Sanction suicide attack by a family member	38	27	36*
Personal involvement for sake of Palestine cause	24	22	54

*Percentages do not add up to 100 due to rounding.

unwavering struggle presents the only recourse for achieving national aspirations (Al-Farra, 2001: 452). Asila (2002: 7) claims that most Palestinians no longer care about winning world public opinion support for their cause. They seem to have concluded that negotiations with the Jewish state will not lead to the creation of a Palestinian state. Unable to challenge Israel's overwhelming military power in a conventional confrontation, most Palestinians have become convinced, as Table 4 suggests, that suicide operations supply the ultimate weapon for coercing Israel to submit to their demands. Many respondents expressed a willingness to transform themselves into smart bombs by detonating 20 to 30 pounds of explosives in the midst of Jewish assemblies. For them, this was the fastest way to immortalise themselves in Allah's heavens and the surest way to achieve a balance of terror with Israel's overwhelming military machine.

After showing the strength of endorsement of suicide attacks and the desirability of participating in them, we now shift our attention to account for their causal factors. In keeping with the stated objective of this paper, we set out to test the hypotheses asserting that the refugees' position on the two dimensions of suicide bombings (endorsement and personal involvement) would be determined by youth and masculinity (age and gender), strong commitment to political Islam, weak social functionality (self-esteem, social trust, optimism, sanctity of life, and personal competence) and severe social and economic conditions (education and income).

Regression analysis, whose results appear in Table 5, sheds important light on the four hypotheses. Model III best predicts males' endorsement of suicide bombings, but not their inclination towards personal involvement in them. We interpret this to mean that approval of suicide bombings attracts overwhelming support among all age groups of refugee camp residents with no regard to gender (model II), whereas it is evidently stronger among men living in urban Sidon (model III). Political Islam, social functionality and socioeconomic variables did not seem to account for urban Palestinians' endorsement of suicide bombings. Model II, however, reveals that endorsement of suicide bombings is essentially a function of the strength of political Islam and self-esteem.

TABLE 5
OLS estimates of predictors of disposition towards suicide attacks[11]

Independent variables	Endorsement of suicide attacks			Partaking in suicide attacks		
	I	II	III	I	II	III
Age	−0.01	0.00	0.20	0.22	0.17	0.13
	(−0.23)	(0.14)	(1.74)	(4.26)*	(3.15)*	(1.17)
Gender						
Females	Reference category[a]	Reference category[a]	Reference category[a]	Reference category[a]	Reference category[a]	Reference category[a]
Males	0.08	−0.02	0.36	0.06	0.06	0.17
	(1.44)	(−0.43)	(3.02)*	(1.13)	(0.98)	(1.46)
Education	−0.10	−0.11	−0.18	0.02	−0.02	0.08
	(−1.87)	(−1.95)	(−1.52)	(0.36)	(−0.32)	(0.57)
Income	0.06	−0.03	−0.09	−0.30	−0.08	−0.29
	(0.91)	(−0.57)	(−0.78)	(−5.30)*	(−1.41)	(−2.55)*
Political Islam	0.44	0.52	0.18	0.38	0.53	0.06
	(8.66)*	(9.27)*	(1.49)	(7.58)*	(9.73)*	(0.50)
Self-esteem	0.17	0.16	0.00	0.12	0.09	0.05
	(3.28)	(2.92)*	(0.01)	(2.12)*	(1.56)	(0.34)
Social trust	−0.16	−0.10	−0.05	0.04	−0.05	0.17
	(−3.14)*	(−1.86)	(−0.39)	(0.42)	(−0.94)	(1.45)
Optimism	−0.06	−0.07	−0.05	0.07	0.08	0.07
	(−1.05)	(−1.19)	(−0.33)	(−0.30)	(1.44)	(0.47)
Sanctity of life	0.09	0.00	0.08	−0.18	−0.05	−0.32
	(1.72)	(0.05)	(0.65)	(−3.63)*	(−0.92)	(−2.18)*
Personal competence	−0.02	−0.02	−0.08	0.01	0.03	0.09
	(−0.29)	(−0.26)	(−0.65)	(0.19)	(0.50)	(0.69)
Constant	4.81*	9.20*	19.94*	4.06*	3.75*	2.44*
Adjusted R^2	0.25	0.30	0.13	0.34	0.32	0.21

N = 342 for Model I, N = 273 for Model II, and N = 69 for Model III.
Entries are standardised regression coefficients with t statistics in parentheses. Values are rounded to 0.01 with a few exceptions.
[a] Gender is coded 1 for males and 0 for females. *p<0.001.

This finding hints that support for suicide bombings is not the result of a need for personal affirmation; rather it suggests a deep sense of national humiliation, which bombers seek to redeem by politicising religion, not through breaking away from it. On the other hand, political Islam and, quite expectedly, youth, with no regard to gender, can explain camp refugees' willingness to carry out suicide operations. Younger Palestinians usually find employment in Lebanon's

poorly paying construction and agricultural sectors, mainly because most Lebanese look down on menial jobs. Others seeks asylum in Western countries; some of those young Palestinians unable to emigrate from Lebanon or obtain employment eventually find sanctuary in the underworld, an unlikely place for contemplating a suicide mission. This leaves maltreated young labourers and those unable to find a refuge abroad—bored, marginalised and bereft of marketable skills—more predisposed toward suicide bombings than older camp refugees. Older Palestinian camp residents have already been traumatised by Lebanon's protracted civil war and the widespread destruction that befell their community. Palestinian suffering during the Camp War in the mid-1980s with the pro-Syrian Amal movement left thousands of refugees dead. Broken by the unspeakable horrors of civil strife, older refugees did not seem prepared to manifest a tendency to take part in suicide bombings.

Harsh camp conditions and limited space augment communal socialisation between males and females which, in turn, leads to the transmission of militant ideas to women. Significantly more females than males live in refugee camps. It is usually young men who emigrate from Lebanon in pursuit of better living opportunities. This puts tremendous burdens on females to care for minors and the elderly. Palestinian women in refugee camps in Lebanon do not fit the pattern of Arab women, who are usually sidelined in their male-dominated societies.

Among urban refugees (model III), political Islam plays no discernible role. There, it is income that explains proneness to involve oneself in suicide attacks. It seems that long-term absence of gratifying work opportunities eventually erodes personal views on the sanctity of human life. The results show the unmistakable linkage between weak appreciation for human life and readiness to trigger the bomb. It is plausible to argue that urban Palestinians' exposure to and interaction with different income groups accentuate their bitterness and erode their fidelity to the sanctity of human life concept. The situation differs in the refugee camps, where grinding poverty unites all residents and attenuates the intensity of income comparability. Nevertheless, the compactness of refugee camps in terms of acreage and congested dwellings enhances the preaching activities of Islamic fundamentalist movements. Physical mobility constraints and lack of recreational facilities add momentum to the spread of militant teachings.

Except for the modest correlates of belief in the sanctity of life in explaining willingness to participate in suicide attacks (model III) and self-esteem in accounting for endorsement of suicide attacks (model II), the social functionality variables did not generally provide significant predictors of disposition to suicide attacks, contrary to our hypotheses. Part of the problem with the predictive potential of the social functionality variables has to do with the fact that, in Arabic-speaking societies, the majority of people do not usually score highly on them.

We have already reported the strength of low income in determining propensity to take part in suicide attacks among urban refugees (model III). Income did not serve as a predictor of disposition towards suicide attacks for other models. There are some possible explanations for the predictive weakness of income in this type of research. First, support for suicide attacks is widespread enough among the

respondents to allow for only limited variability. Second, depressed living conditions in refugee camps in southern Lebanon are so appalling that conventional questions on income do not seem to account adequately for the refugees' harsh life. The unpropitious result of relying on items that measure income is to hide the impact that life adversity can have on a person's willingness to engage in suicide operations. The fact that the vast majority of potential suicides come from refugee camps attests to the incubative role of abject poverty, hopelessness, a hostile surrounding environment and rejection by the host state in the phenomenon of suicide bombings.

Conclusion

The findings of this study challenge the conventional wisdom that the Palestinian suicide bombing phenomenon has no pattern. There is a tendency to describe it in terms of a collective mania and as a societal malaise that knows no distinction between rich and poor, fundamentalist and secularist, educated and illiterate, or socially functional and dysfunctional. Stereotyping oversimplifies the problem and hints at the futility of seeking a solution for it that recognises the need for corrective action. The apparent implication is that counter-violence provides the only possible means of stemming suicide attacks.

This study finds that political Islam does indeed play a crucial role in fomenting proneness to participation in suicide attacks, especially among refugee camp inhabitants, where dismal poverty coalesces with radical Islam. Disposition to partaking in suicide attacks cannot take place without provocation that produces intolerable frustration. Israeli writers describe the travails of Palestinian detainees in Israeli jails, on the grounds of participating in terrorist activities, in the following manner:

> [Palestinians] … Suffered a grave personal injustice at the hands of their Jewish employers or colleagues. Each prisoner had his own story to tell, but the gist of their experiences was similar: at one time or another they had been subjected to verbal and even physical abuse, cheated out of their wages, and set to work under inhuman conditions, and exposed to the sweep of the dragnet that followed every act of terrorism. All complained of the insult and humiliation repeatedly suffered at army roadblocks and checkpoints: the nasty tone in which they were addressed, the body searches accompanied by shoves and shouts, the derision they were forced to endure in front of family and friends. (Schiff & Ya'ari, 1989: 82–83)

The key to combating the suicide bombing phenomenon lies in understanding its causal factors. Drawn-out Palestinian collective frustration has ultimately assumed unmanageable proportions. A litany of peace initiatives and countless commissions of international well-wishers have failed to achieve a breakthrough in the elusive drive towards peace. Israel's military preponderance has further complicated an already stubborn conflict, whereas Palestinian suicide attacks provided a crude recipe in the bid to bring about a balance of terror with the Jewish state.

Political Islam and poverty may not mix well in other Islamic environments, but in the context of Palestinian refugee camps the mix is not just striking but

also conducive to suicidal violence. During the long years of the country's civil war, Palestinian refugee camps in southern Lebanon became sanctuaries for extreme religious ideas. There, they were propagated in the confines of a limited world-view and produced a long list of candidates for suicide missions. Now that the USA has launched its Road Map to peace, we hope that this latest endeavour will have a happier ending than its predecessors. A suicidal mentality has taken shape among certain extremely impoverished and disgraced Palestinians from which only a meaningful peace can extract them.

Notes

1. In the Battle of Badr in 624 CE Prophet Muhammad's vastly outnumbered followers soundly defeated a force of more than 900 Qurayshis, who charged in the hope of crushing the nascent religion. The Prophet's troops at Badr insisted that angels wearing white turbans fought on their side and made their victory possible. Muslims worldwide consider the Battle of Badr, in which God's Will intervened in order to defeat Quraysh, as the epitome of *jihad*.
2. The main difference between a commando and a *fida'i* is that the former takes self-preservation measures, whereas the latter does not.
3. We made sure, for the sake of the reliability of the instrument, that respondents scoring high on the political Islam scale also performed basic obligations such as fasting in Ramadan and praying regularly.
4. This is one of three Palestinian movements that launch suicide attacks against Israelis; the other two movements are Hamas and Shuhada' al-Aqsa (Al-Aqsa martyrs).
5. Hamas and the PIJ do indeed fit many of the characteristics of doomsday religious movements. They display unmistakably apocalyptic beliefs, betray a violent theological world-view that divides the world into two opposing camps of good versus evil, and view themselves as prophetic vanguards of the elite (Canadian Security Intelligence Service, 2002).
6. Regardless of the situation, it is unlikely that a self-respecting person would carry out a suicide attack. Even though Hamas and the PIJ insist that they carefully choose suicide bombers from long lists of volunteers to ensure that those approved are neither desperate nor unaware of the grave consequences of their decisions, many Arabs disagree with this rationalisation. For example, al-Akhdar (2002: 10) judges that the abundance of suicide bombers is evidence of collective delirium; he puts the blame on 'Arab uncritical thinking, which emanates from a stagnant cultural environment'.
7. http:www.pcpsr.org/survey/polls/2001/p3a.html.
8. Juergensmeyer does not spare Israelis from his notions of violent cultures and cosmic wars. What is particularly disturbing about Juergensmeyer's prognosis is his admission of bewilderment over the reasons why good and pious people do bad things, such as suicide bombings. Unfortunately, he did not develop his argument and contented himself with a single, apocalyptic interpretation.
9. The sample consisted of 273 respondents from 'Ain al-Hilwe and al-Rashidiyyeh refugee camps, and 69 respondents from the port city of Sidon. In a realistic reflection of the demographic distribution of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, the sample included 57% females and 43% males.
10. Endorsement of suicide attacks demonstrates an attitude, whereas personal involvement in them addresses behavioural propensity. Behaviours usually lag behind attitudes in terms of intensity of responses.

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Appendix I

Key survey items used in the study on propensity towards suicide bombings

1. Education (1 = high, 3 = low)
2. Income (1 = high, 3 = low)
3. Do you agree that religion must play a decisive role in shaping the political thinking of Muslims? (1 = strongly agree, 4 = strongly disagree)
4. Do you agree that Muslims must live in an Islamic state? (1 = strongly agree, 4 = strongly disagree)
5. Do you agree that *jihad* is a religious obligation? (1 = strongly agree, 4 = strongly disagree)
6. Do you think you have an important role to play in life? (1 = strongly positive, 4 = strongly negative)
7. Do you feel good about yourself? (1 = strongly positive, 4 = strongly negative)
8. Were you able in the past to prepare achievable plans for your life? (1 = strongly positive, 4 = strongly negative)
9. Do you think it is better for people to prepare long-term plans for their lives? (1 = strongly positive, 4 = strongly negative)
10. How often do you implement personal long-term plans? (1 = always, 4 = never)
11. Do you think you can trust most people? (1 = strongly positive, 4 = strongly negative)
12. Do you think that most people try to help others if they can? (1 = strongly positive, 4 = strongly negative)
13. Do you think most people try to take advantage of you if they can? (1 = strongly positive, 4 = strongly negative)
14. Even if things seem hopeless, they should improve in the course of time (1 = strongly agree, 4 = strongly disagree)
15. In most cases, good things come out of a bad situation (1 = strongly agree, 4 = strongly disagree)
16. Every cloud has a silver lining (1 = strongly agree, 4 = strongly disagree)
17. Defeating Israel is not worth the human and material losses suffered by the Palestinian people (1 = strongly agree, 4 = strongly disagree)
18. We must not be concerned about bloodshed if it achieves our political objectives (1 = strongly agree, 4 = strongly disagree)
19. I believe that the sanctity of human life, in its absolute form, is more important than political values (1 = strongly agree, 4 = strongly disagree)
20. Do you agree with the argument that suicide bombings are legitimate from a Palestinian perspective? (1 = strongly agree, 4 = strongly disagree)
21. Do you support Palestinian suicide bombings? (1 = strongly support, 4 = strongly oppose)
22. How do usually react upon hearing of a suicide bombing? (1 = very favourably, 4 = very unfavourably)
23. Would you ever agree to carry out a suicide attack if it is deemed helpful to the Palestinian cause? (1 = strongly agree, 4 = strongly disagree)

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