Edited by
Updesh Kumar | Manas K. Mandal

UNDERSTANDING
SUICIDE
TERRORISM

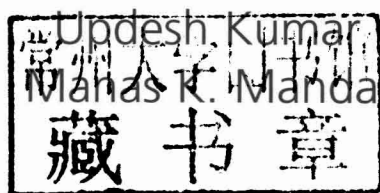## Psychosocial Dynamics

UNDERSTANDING SUICIDE TERRORISM
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UNDERSTANDING
SUICIDE TERRORISM

To
His Holiness Sri Sri Ravi Shankar Ji,
the Founder of Art of Living

This book is also available as an e-book.

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List of Abbreviations

ASVAB	Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery
CHF	Congestive heart failure
CNN	Cable News Network
DIPR	Defence Institute of Psychological Research
DoA	Department of the Army
DoD	Department of Defense
DRDO	Defence Research and Development Organization
GIGN	Groupe d'Intervention de la Gendarmerie Nationale of France
GSG 9	Grenz Schutz Gruppe 9 of Germany
HADD	Hypersensitive agent detection device
IDF	Israel Defense Forces
IED	Improvised explosive devices
ISI	Inter-Services Intelligence
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
JI	Jemaah Islamiyah
LET	Lashkar-e-Taiba
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MCI	Minimally counterintuitive
MMPI-2	Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory
MOS	Military Occupational Specialty
NCTC	National Counterterrorism Center
PA TV	Palestinian Authority Television
PIJ	Palestinian Islamic Jihad
PTA	Prevention of Terrorism Act
PTSD	Posttraumatic stress disorder
SERE	Survival, evasion, resistance, and escape
SES	Socioeconomic status
SF	Special Forces
SFAS	SF Assessment and Selection
SO	Special Operations
SOCOM	Special Operations Command
SOF	Special Operations Forces
USSOCOM	United States Special Operations Command
WMD	Weapon of mass destruction
WW-II	World War II

Foreword

From a historical perspective, terrorism is, arguably, the oldest form of violent struggle. Long before there were rules of war and large organized military formations, tribal wars were fought in ways that would readily fall under most of the current definitions of terrorism. It is therefore surprising that, strictly defined, suicide attacks are a relatively new method of terrorism. As a planned, systematic terrorist tactic, suicide attacks appeared as late as in the 1980s. Older cases of terrorist campaigns, especially the Jewish Sicarii of the first century CE and the Muslim Assassins of the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, which are often mentioned as ancient examples of suicide terrorism, cannot be regarded as genuine cases of suicide, because the perpetrators did not kill themselves.

Historically, new terrorist methods were often associated with technological developments, such as the invention of dynamite in the nineteenth century, which made the construction of bombs easier, or the proliferation of commercial aviation, which made the hijacking of airliners an attractive terrorist tactic in the 1960s and 1970s. Interestingly, this was not the case with suicide attacks. The hardware for these attacks—explosive devices, cars, and airplanes—had been used by terrorists long before it was utilized for suicide attacks. The novelty of this method was entirely in the mental aspect—the willingness of the suicides to cause their own death, the willingness of the organization to sacrifice them, and, often, the support, sometimes enthusiasm, of their social milieu for this form of terrorism. Thus, psychological and social processes, which are the subject of this book, are the basis of the phenomenon of suicide terrorism.

Although suicide attacks are an extreme form of terrorism, they did not attract much academic attention during the 1980s and 1990s, perhaps because the number of attacks in that period was small—less than 150. The number of scholarly publications grew in the wake of the dramatic attacks of 9/11 (2001), and continued to grow in the following years, which have been marked by a huge proliferation of suicide attacks and an expansion of their geographical spread. Still, similar to the general literature on terrorism, only a small minority of the growing body of works on

suicide terrorism have specifically focused on psychological aspects of this phenomenon. Most of the literature on suicide terrorism has emphasized the political and religious aspects of conflicts that generated these attacks and on the motivation of the perpetrating organizations. The disciplines of psychology and sociology have been greatly under-represented in the academic literature on suicide terrorism. Thus, this book is an important addition to our body of knowledge.

The book reflects the complexity and diversity of suicide terrorism. While the first two chapters offer an overview of the main factors and processes involved in this phenomenon, other chapters discuss specific types of motivation that influence the decision of groups to resort to suicide attacks and the willingness of individuals to undertake them. Two chapters analyze central issues that pertain to society's response to this extreme form of terrorism: the legal perspective and the heavy question of deterring this seemingly un-deterrable tactic. Altogether, this volume is a highly significant contribution toward a better understanding of this multifaceted form of malevolent human behavior.

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Preface

Terrorism to the extent of immolating oneself to kill others is one of the greatest dangers to humanity. Given its inherently fatal nature and the immense impact it makes on the victims as well as spectators, it has achieved an incomparable status in intriguing the researchers of terrorism phenomena, as well as policymakers looking for security solutions. Use of suicide tactics by various terror organizations has tended to make increasingly vast impact due to the diverse nature of geo-political conflicts and increasing polarizations in the modern world. This ultimate form of terrorism has evoked apprehensions, fear, and vulnerability across the globe and has forced the entire world to be on guard constantly. The sheer unpredictability and ingenuity of methods employed by the perpetrators have mandated the security establishments to devise ways to defend itself and the potential victims under all circumstances. The phenomenon has also compelled terrorism research to focus on it with concentrated effort and invigorated zeal.

Although the little existing literature on *suicide terrorism* provides myriad of research perspectives and interdisciplinary viewpoints offering varied explanations and proposing different pathways of understanding, a lot remains to be explored, understood, and explicated of the issues involved both as a phenomenon and as a process. Varied theoretically, complex viewpoints of different scholars pose it as a challenge to enable an objective-scientific perspective of the entire issue. The current volume *Understanding Suicide Terrorism: Psychosocial Dynamics* attempts to take on this challenge by delineating the research perspectives from prominent scholars and researchers in the field and by sifting through the overt and obvious to uncover the psychosocial dynamics lying beneath. The volume progressively deals with these dormant issues and generates a discourse that leads one beyond the mundane and clichéd dictums. The volume incorporates 12 chapters authored by prominent scholars and researchers in the field across the globe. To amalgamate and synthesize the common focal viewpoints, the volume has been divided into two sections—the former delineating on *suicide terrorism as a phenomenon* and the latter delineating on *suicide terrorism as a process*. The sections have been well balanced by having six chapters in each.

The first section focusing on *suicide terrorism as a phenomenon* concisely puts together the scholarly views that provide a scientific framework to the conceptual understanding of this phenomenon. The second section's scholarly impetus is on uncovering the underlying operative dynamics and to make the reader understand *suicide terrorism as a process* rather than one independent act. The volume opens up with the chapter titled 'Suicide terrorism: Delineating the construct' wherein Swati Mukherjee, Updesh Kumar, and Manas K. Mandal attempt to unearth the contentious issues involved in defining the construct of suicide terrorism. Emphasizing upon suicide terrorism as a multifaceted phenomenon, the authors skim through the existing information frameworks and utilize theoretical, developmental, sociocultural inputs for developing the construct of suicide terrorism. Beginning with the issues in definition, the chapter wades through the multiplicity of views in the field. Though the authors endeavor to satisfy the reader's enthusiasm of thorough conceptual understanding of suicide terrorism, multiple related questions still remain unanswered being beyond the scope of the chapter.

The volume steps forward to address the raised questions. Ibáñez, in the second chapter, puts efforts toward *explaining suicide terrorism* from *a psychosocial approach*. The chapter critically reviews several hypotheses about the nature and causes of the phenomenon and offers a characterization of suicide terrorism from a psychosocial point of view. A detailed discussion is included based on the conceptualization of suicide terrorism as more than a symptom of social or psychological disorders and suicide campaigns as instrumental but not entirely rational acts toward the achievement of set targets. The author traces the development and sustenance of the phenomenon as a social construction in which matters of social identity play a dominant role. Further, the author delineates on the multidimensional dynamics inherent to the development of suicide terrorist campaigns and provides an insightful discussion on the risk factors related to the strategic shift toward suicide terrorism and those associated with the processes of polarization and radicalization that sustain suicide campaigns as a viable strategy. Moving ahead in a systematic manner, the *evolutionary psychological science of suicide terrorism* has been well documented upon in the third chapter by Liddle and Shackelford who urge the readers to view the suicide terrorism phenomenon through the lens of evolutionary

theory and lead them through the journey toward exploring hidden causes going beyond the obvious proximate explanations. The chapter reviews key concepts and misconceptions related to evolutionary psychology and proceeds to argue that there is a significant overlap between suicide terrorism and religious commitment. Based on the premise, the authors explicitly review the evolutionary psychological theories and associated empirical research related to religious belief, and examine the phenomenon of suicide terrorism in the light of this. They further highlight several promising directions for future research on suicide terrorism from an evolutionary psychological perspective and discuss broader implications of applying evolutionary psychology to suicide terrorism.

Taking the volume forward, Jonathan Matusitz provides *a communicative perspective* and explains *suicide terrorism as social noise* in the next chapter. Herein, the author examines the phenomenon from the particular perspective of communication, as social noise. The author conceptualizes the attention grabbing property of the suicide terrorist acts through noisy, graphic, provocative, or controversial acts intended to create change in the audience's attitudes or opinions. The chapter puts forth a model of the concept as a specific form of communication in the context of martyrdom in Islamist terrorism. The conceptualization of suicide terror as a form of communication, the roles and different types of the audiences in the context that perpetuate the phenomenon and lead to the ultimate consequence of public disorder are the points of author's discourse and have been supported by the provision of a specific case study.

Exploration of the concept with specific emphasis on *Mumbai Style* is the focal point of the fifth chapter wherein Mark Dechesne builds on an argument to consider 'Mumbai Style' or fidayeen terrorist attacks as a specific category of suicide attacks. The horrific Mumbai attacks of 26/11 characterized by perpetrators seemingly randomly killing until they get caught or killed by security forces do not find any match in the formal theorizations of suicide terrorism. Providing a detailed and engaging account of the Mumbai attack, the chapter utilizes this instance as a case study to analyze suicide terror tactics in broader perspective. Uniquely characterizing 'Mumbai Style' in terms of conviction, combinations of weapons, coordination, and communication, the author attempts to set apart the 'Mumbai Style' suicide attacks. The section of explaining suicide terrorism as a phenomenon comes toward an end by scholarly

article on 'Suicide bombings: Homicidal killing or weapons of war?' authored by Riaz Hassan. Hassan critically examines the distinction between war and terrorism and argues that both of these kill civilians and insert the coerciveness of precaution in the daily rhythm of social life. The argument has been well supported by discussion of Palestinian and Sri Lankan as incidences as case studies. Using evidence from ethnographic studies on the nature of war and homicide, the chapter concludes that suicide bombing attacks, because of the principle of *substitutability* which characterize war killing, could be regarded as a weapon of war. But given that they are characterized by willful killing of civilians, they could be regarded as 'War Crimes' under the Fourth Geneva Convention. As an eminent scholar, the author emphasizes that exploration of the meanings of the suicide terror acts requires critical theoretical, conceptual, and hermeneutical tools which do not distort their meanings.

After the seemingly apt efforts put in the first section to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of suicide terrorism as a phenomenon, the volume uncovers the second section to delve upon *suicide terrorism as a process*. Having a concise focus on the theme, this section also includes six chapters by prominent scholars in the field. The section delineating upon the process of suicide terrorism opens up with the seventh chapter authored by Jerrold M. Post and his colleagues, and is aptly titled as 'The psychology of suicide terrorism.' The authors of the article attempt to provide a comprehensive review of the current understanding of suicide terrorism from a mental health perspective. The chapter discusses the key concepts and definitions, and reviews individual and group-level models to explain the processes involved in the development of suicide terrorism. Uncovering many of the psychological processes underlying suicide terrorism, Post and his colleagues emphasize the need for a multidisciplinary approach for attaining a holistic comprehension of suicide terrorism. The next chapter in the section continues the discourse by conceptualizing *the militant jihadi ideology of martyrdom as short-lived psychological first aid for trauma and loss*. Anne Speckhard, the author, conceptualizes militant jihadi ideology as providing short-term psychological first aid in conflict and non conflict zones where deep psychological vulnerabilities exist among Muslims and converts to Islam—temporarily attending to the psychological needs of the person following it. The chapter further discusses the consequences of exposure to violent conflict

as posttraumatic stress disorder and traumatic dissociation, and traces the development of allegiance to jihadi ideology as a search for redressal of these traumas. It is posited that the process develops especially powerful in societies where other types of psychological assistance are either not available or stigmatized.

The process underlying the phenomenon of suicide terrorism further raises an ever essential question—*Are suicide terrorists suicidal?* An effort has been made by Bruce Bongar, Uri Kugel, and Victoria Kendrick to answer this question in the ninth chapter. The authors attempt to answer the question by presenting the current literature and analyzing suicide terrorism from several different perspectives such as the act itself, motivational background of suicide bombers, the organizational component of suicide terrorism, and the psychological profiles of the suicides. The classical categorization of suicides as egoistic, altruistic, and anomic provided by Durkheim has been discussed in order to debate similarities and dissimilarities between the suicidal processes and suicide terrorism. The chapter asserts the multidimensional and multidetermined nature of suicide attacks and the process leading up to it, and emphatically distinguishes these from other acts of suicide. Extending the discourse on similar lines, in the next chapter, Uri Kugel and associates attempt to specify *the role of military psychologists and psychiatrists in understanding suicide terrorism.* The authors put forth that suicide terrorists materialize from a psychological commitment to a specific cause, along with group influences, and the crucial role of training and selection. The chapter addresses a crucial need in comprehending suicide terrorism by exploring what military psychologists and psychiatrist, with their knowledge of training and selection criteria, can bring to the current understanding of the recruitment, training, and deployment of suicide terrorists. The authors interestingly compare and contrast the selection, recruitment, training, and motivation of Special Forces personnel with that of the suicide terrorist and show both commonalities and extreme differences to make the understanding of the reader more convenient.

As the volumes shape toward the end, the 11th chapter deals with the sensitive issue of *the use and abuse of children/youth in terrorism and suicide bombing* wherein Erez and Berko provide a comprehensive review of the ways children are used and abused in war and terrorism. The functions that children serve for military and terrorist organizations, the reasons for the recruitment

of them, and the benefits of using them over adults in suicidal op-
erations have been discussed in detail by the authors. Taking the
Israeli–Arab/Palestinian conflict as a case study to highlight the
methods of indoctrination employed to influence children to join
terrorism and suicide missions, and the way in which participating
children view and evaluate their experiences, the authors elaborate
upon the adverse effects of living in conflict areas and being in-
volved in armed hostilities have on children. Policy implications
for needful social and political actions have been discussed in brief.
The final chapter of the book sums up the entire discourse by com-
ing to the crux of the matter of and the most essential aspect of
'Deterring suicide terrorism.' The author, a security expert, Major
General Dushyant Singh joins the quest for evolving workable
counterterrorism strategies against suicide terrorism and proposes
that a specific deterrence strategy developed using cumulative de-
terrence appears to work best against suicide terror. The chapter
builds the argument for deterrence based on the elaborate data-
base of Chicago Project on Security and Terrorism and identifies
key elements in deterrence. Finally, the author summatively puts
forth specific points of intervention at individual, familial, organi-
zational, and societal levels that might prove effective in deterring
suicide attacks.

Suicide terrorism involves highly complex subject matter and si-
multaneously it incorporates a vast and varied area of scholarly ex-
pertise as well as a crucial part of security policy. Editing a volume
on suicide terrorism has been a quite formidable exercise. It has
been an effortful and enlightening experience for us to put together
in a synthesized form such expert views and scholarly opinions as
this volume contains. We hope that this effort fructifies not merely
by adding a multidisciplinary perspective to the ocean of literature
on the issue, but by taking us all a step closer to rational analysis
of the enigmatic issue of suicide terrorism and by helping us arrive
at a comprehensive understanding of its underlying psychosocial
dynamics.

Any venture of this intensity can never be undertaken or ac-
complished all alone. There have been people around us who have
provided the encouragement, understanding, and undeterred sup-
port through the task. We extend our gratitude to one and all who
have helped and facilitated us. We are grateful to our institute, De-
fence Institute of Psychological Research (DIPR) and our mentors

at the Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO) for providing us with all kinds of support and encouragement. It has indeed been a rewarding experience to edit a volume in which eminent scholars brought in not only diverse disciplinary knowledge but also their diverse cultural experiences. We extend our heartfelt thanks to all the contributors in the volume and look forward to continued association with them in developing an interface between research and policy in a manner to be able to evolve effective deterrence against terrorism. We will always be indebted to our beloved family members who always encouraged us and provided us with their complete care and support to complete this volume in a short span of time. We are also obliged to acknowledge the effort put in by the anonymous reviewers of the order of distinguished professors. Without their involvement, the volume would not have materialized in the present form. We hope that this volume will serve to help the reader in multiple ways and will promote a higher sense of security by means of making people aware of the dynamics of the acts of terror.

Updesh Kumar
Manas K. Mandal

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