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Motivations and Beliefs in Suicide Missions

Jon Elster

Why do people kill themselves for other reasons than that they do not want to live? The special case of why they engage in suicide bombings or (as on September 11, 2001) other modes of suicide missions is the main topic of the present chapter. I shall also, however, consider some broader issues of politically motivated suicides.

To address the special case, we need a distinction between two levels of actors. At the first level are those who sacrifice their lives (the suicide attackers). At the second level are those who incite and enable them to do so (the organizers).¹ Unlike self-immolations, which are largely individual acts, suicide missions (SMs) are rarely undertaken spontaneously but instigated or coordinated by religious or political leaders. The bus driver Abu Olbeh who on 14 February 2001 drove his bus into a crowd of soldiers in Azur (near Teal-Aviv), killing eight, was apparently not affiliated with or sponsored by any political faction, but nor was his act suicidal.

To make sense of these missions, we can adopt the usual explanatory machinery of the social sciences, the key elements being the *motivations* and *beliefs* of the actors, attackers, and organizers, and the *constraints* they face. We may also want to consider *skills* as an explanatory element. The reason skills are not usually cited in standard analyses of actions is that their presence or absence can be accounted for in terms of motivations and constraints. For some individuals, some skills may be out of reach even with the strongest motivation to acquire them and with unlimited resources (the blind cannot become trapeze artists). They are *directly* skill-constrained. Those who lack the resources that would enable them to acquire the skills are *indirectly* skill-constrained (poor families cannot afford pianos or piano lessons for their children). Those who fail to acquire the skills because they are insufficiently motivated are subject to short-run constraints (I cannot speak Russian) but not to long-term constraints (I could learn it).

Making a reliable bomb is difficult. Flying a large plane into the towers of the World Trade Center is probably even more difficult. The latter task, however, has to be carried out by the suicide attackers themselves, a fact that provides the necessary motivation. The former task can be delegated more efficiently to an organization.

Suicide bombers are subject to a short-run skill constraint that they have no motivation to overcome, just as I have no motivation to learn Russian in order to read books that I can read in translation. In the absence of an organizational provider, would-be suicide bombers could nevertheless learn how to make their own bombs. It is a somewhat puzzling or at least interesting fact that so far, and as far as we know, this behaviour ('outcome 2' in Chapter 5 of this volume by Kalyvas and Sánchez-Cuenca) has not been observed. One might think that the 'mental model' provided by other suicide attacks would have inspired some individuals to emulate them by acting on their own. A possible explanation, further pursued below, might lie in the unstable and ephemeral nature of the motivations.

In a broad historical perspective, both attackers and organizers were constrained by the lack of technology before Nobel's invention of dynamite in 1866 and the invention in the twentieth century of aircraft that could be used as flying bombs. Although this technical constraint no longer operates, financial constraints may have some importance. While the costs of making a bomb, about \$150 (Atran 2003, p.1537), are affordable for individuals as well as organizations, even an organization might not be able to buy a jumbo jet. Following September 11, new constraints on hijacking planes were created by intensified security measures. Security forces in countries subject to suicide bombings also try to reduce the number of opportunities for attacks, thus constraining organizers as well. As Kalyvas and Sánchez-Cuenca argue in their chapter, citing the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC) as an example, the lack of individuals willing to carry out SMs can also be a constraint on organizers (their 'outcome 3'). To summarize, organizers need opportunities (vulnerable targets), funds, skill (to make bombs) and volunteers, while attackers need opportunities and either destructive technology (bombs) or skill (to fly a plane).

In the rest of the chapter I focus exclusively on motivations (or desires) and beliefs, assuming that the skill and constraint requirements are satisfied. The best-known scheme for explaining action in terms of desires and beliefs is that of rational-choice theory. According to the standard version of that theory, agents choose the best means to realize stable desires, acting on beliefs that are well-grounded in information that is the outcome of an optimal search process.² The relevant beliefs are those that, for a given motivation, can make a difference for action: for example, beliefs about the feasible options and, for each of them, their likely consequences. The importance of this restriction will be seen shortly.

In itself, there is nothing irrational in the willingness to sacrifice one's life for a cause, and even less in the willingness to send others to their death for it. Also, for reasons discussed below, suicide attackers are rarely subject to pathological or suicidal motivations. I shall argue, nevertheless, that in some cases suicide attacks fall short of

being fully rational due to the instability of the underlying motivations. I shall also argue that some attackers are subject to irrational belief formation and that, moreover, these irrational beliefs contribute to the explanation of their actions. It does *not* follow, however, that these actions are irrational. The reason is that the causal effect of these irrational beliefs is to shape or reinforce motivations, not to influence the choice of means to implement a given motivation. Hitler's hatred of the Jews was based on his irrational belief that they were evil, but that belief did not prevent him from carrying out the Holocaust in a methodical and rational way. Intuitively, we might want to say that his motivations and hence his actions were irrational, but standard rational-choice theory does not allow such statements.

I shall draw heavily on other chapters in this volume as well as on some other sources. Let me briefly indicate the *ten cases* of suicide attacks to which I shall refer, together with some of the main sources. They are listed in descending order of centrality, as a function not of their intrinsic importance but of how much we (or I) know about them.

- (i) Palestine (Ricolfi, Chapter 3, this volume).
- (ii) The attacks on September 11, 2001 (Holmes, Chapter 4, this volume).
- (iii) Lebanon (Reuter 2002: ch. 4).
- (iv) Japanese suicide missions (Hill, Chapter 1, this volume).
- (v) The Tamil Tigers (Hopgood, Chapter 2, this volume).
- (vi) The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Turkey (Ergil 2002).
- (vii) Teenage martyrs in the Iraq-Iran war (Reuter 2002: ch. 5).
- (viii) Chechnya (Reuter 2002: ch. 9).
- (ix) Kashmir (Reuter 2002: ch. 9).
- (x) Iraq (current news reports).

Inevitably, the intensively studied SMs originating in the Middle East will dominate the discussion. While drawing on Ricolfi's chapter, I have tried to avoid repeating his analyses, but some overlap remains. The other cases serve mainly as background and as support for various generalizations. In addition, I shall discuss some cases of politically motivated suicide behaviours that are not intended to cause the death of other individuals: self-immolation (Biggs, Chapter 6, this volume) and hunger strikes (Reyes 1998). The discussion will be organized as follows. First, I offer a general discussion of politically motivated suicide. Second, I focus on the beliefs and motivations of the suicide attackers. Then I turn to the beliefs and goals of the organizers of these attacks. The final section is an attempt to summarize what we know and, especially, what we don't.

Politically Motivated Suicide

'In a true suicide attack, the terrorist knows full well that the attack *will not be executed* if he is not killed in the process' (Ganor 2002: 141). It is one and the same act that causes his death and the accomplishment of his goal. This is a narrow and clear definition, which is useful for many purposes. In some contexts, however, it would be pointless to exclude cases in which an act by the actor causes the accomplishment of the goal, which in turn triggers the act that kills him. For a Muslim militant in Kashmir it may simply be a question of efficiency considerations whether to run into an Indian military installation with a gun to shoot as many enemy soldiers as he can before he is killed or to drive into it with a truck loaded with explosives (Reuter 2002: 326).³ When three Japanese killed twenty-four persons at Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv on 30 May 1972, they not only expected but wanted to die, as shown by the fact that the one survivor tried to strike a deal with the authorities to give him a gun and a bullet in exchange for a full confession (Reuter 2002: 311–12).

Yet we might not want to include acts that will bring about the actor's death with a very high probability that falls short of absolute certainty. Because of the 'certainty effect' (Kahneman and Tversky 1979), certainty is *not* merely a limiting case of high probability.⁴ The fact that the Japanese *kamikaze* pilots could not 'realistically expect to survive the war' even under conditions of normal fighting, as Hill notes in Chapter 1, does not imply that the decision to volunteer for *kamikaze* missions was a matter of near-indifference. On the contrary, Hill shows that it was clearly a momentous one. Thus one might question Biggs's statement in Chapter 6 that 'A potential motivation for suicide attacks is the calculation that death in combat is highly probable anyway, and so little is lost by volunteering for a suicide attack'.⁵

Suicidal acts for political purposes, including matters of public policy towards religion, form a much wider category than suicide attacks thus narrowly defined. In Chapter 6, Biggs surveys cases of *self-immolation by burning* for purposes that range from the instrumental to the reactive. As he shows, the self-immolations of Buddhist monks in the 1960s had the clear instrumental purpose of affecting the discrimination against Buddhism practised by the Catholic Vietnamese government at the time.⁶ The self-immolation of Jan Palach in Czechoslovakia, too, was intended to mobilize opinion against the Soviet regime. Whereas such instrumental acts are forward-looking, reactive acts of self-immolation are backward-looking. They express the sorrow, disappointment, or frustration caused by some meaningful event. When Russian and West European sympathizers of the PKK set themselves ablaze after their leader Ocalan's capture, it was because they felt 'indignant and defeated. He represented all they stood and hoped for' (Ergil 2002: 119). After Indira Gandhi was

assassinated in 1984, several people either committed suicide or attempted suicide by self-immolation. Since acts of self-immolation are invariably committed in public, these expressive acts, too, seem to have an instrumental component, that is, the desire to make an impression on the audience.

Another widely used strategy is that of *hunger strikes*, mainly but not exclusively in prison populations. In the classification of Reyes (1998), one may distinguish between food refusers and hunger strikers proper. Within the former, there is a further distinction between those who refuse to eat in order to gain some advantage (such as a better cell) but have no intention of putting their health at risk, and quasi-suicidal individuals who essentially stop eating because they are depressed. Within hunger strikers proper, Reyes distinguishes between the determined and the not-so-determined. Whereas the former make a voluntary and autonomous decision to refuse food until their demands are met, the latter are often 'volunteered' by their fellow prisoners. The determined hunger striker is not suicidal, but he is willing to die for the cause. In the face of this motivation, prison authorities have two decisions to make: whether to accede to the demands and whether to force-feed the strikers.

In Ireland, a country with a long history of hunger strikes (Sweeney 1993), the British government's practice has varied in this respect. In 1909, political hunger strikers were force-fed by court order. In 1919, prisoners were released when they announced a hunger strike. In 1981, the authorities refused to give in to the demands of republican prisoners in Northern Ireland while respecting the autonomy of their decision; as a result ten prisoners died. In the case of PKK, we observe suicide attacks, self-immolation *and* hunger strikes. During Ocalan's leadership, the PKK carried out fifteen suicide bombings. After his capture, his followers reacted with hunger strikes as well as self-immolation. Prior to his capture, there had already been several waves of hunger strikes in Turkish prisons, leaving at least twelve prisoners dead. Outside the prison walls, the most famous instances were the fastings in India of Gandhi and his followers. Gandhi made it clear, however, that fastings were not to be used as threats. As Biggs notes in Chapter 6, unlike self-immolations hunger strikes can in fact be brandished as threats.

In suicide attacks narrowly defined, as well as in self-immolation and determined hunger strikes, there is an *intention to die* since only actual death will produce the desired end. (In hunger strikes, the truth of this statement depends on the intransigence of the authorities.) When individuals in wartime volunteer for highly dangerous missions, what we observe is rather a *willingness to die*, which is obviously consistent with taking precautions against dying. The teenagers that Ayatollah Khomeini, the Iranian leader, sent to die in the Iraqi mine fields in the 1980s seem to have displayed an *eagerness to die*. For them, death was seen as benefit or bonus rather than as a cost to be accepted or a risk to be minimized. Below, I discuss

whether this might also be the case of other suicide attackers. I also consider at some length the robustness or stability of this motivation.

The Suicide Attackers

Two issues need to be addressed. First, we need to identify the *reasons*—motivations and beliefs—of suicide attackers. Second, we have to look at the *causes* of these reasons. Resentment, for instance, is a cause rather than a reason. The desire for national liberation is a reason rather than a cause. I am not denying that in a general philosophical sense reasons also are causes. I am simply here using ‘reasons’ and ‘causes’ as terms of art for proximate and ultimate causes of action. Better, perhaps, we may view the causes as determinants of the *strength* of the reasons. I shall begin with the reasons and then move on to the causes.

Reasons

Consider first the motivations of suicide attackers. The immediate goal is usually easy to identify: to kill as many enemy civilians or soldiers as possible. (As noted in the next section, the organizers may have a different aim.) The hard question is how this goal can motivate the agent when it can be realized only at the expense of his or her own life.

Before I address this issue, let me note the importance of target selection. Hill mentions in Chapter 1 that a *kamikaze* pilot wanted to cause the damage *himself* rather than merely stop the enemy from preventing another pilot from doing so. This rings true, for reasons related to the urgency of the motivation (see below). I also conjecture that for the same reason (and probably for other reasons too) it would be difficult to recruit volunteers for killing moderates in one’s own camp or leaders of rival oppositional groups. The Tamil Tigers are an exception to this statement. Motivations related to target selection may also explain why the goal of most suicide missions has been to kill people rather than to create material damage. To give up one’s own life must be psychologically easier when one knows that enemy lives will be destroyed at the same time than when the goal is to blow up an oil depot. Again there are exceptions: the Iranian teenage martyrs, the Tamil Tigers, and possibly the attack on the World Trade Center. Although the last proved to be unique in terms of human fatalities, material destruction, and symbolic damage, we do not know whether all these effects were equally firmly expected or which was the more motivating.

I want to begin with what I take to be a very robust claim: ‘Most suicide bombers are normal, fearless people with strong convictions’ (Ariel Merari, cited in Reuter 2002: 204). Although made about Palestinian suicide attackers, the claim

probably has quite general validity. The willingness to lay down one's life for a cause depends on the strength of one's conviction. Nobody will or should think it a serious puzzle why people sometimes volunteer for war service, or lie about their age and disabilities to get into a situation that is quite likely to get them killed. To obtain or defend a national homeland is a cause that may seem as compelling as was the defence of democracy in the struggle against Hitler. Although there is, as I said, a gap between engaging in an operation with high probability of death and accepting one in which death is certain, the voluntary acceptance of either may have, as a necessary condition, a strong attachment to a cause larger than oneself.

I am not saying this is all there is to the matter, just as patriotism is hardly the dominant motivation for regular soldiers. To pursue the comparison, we may note Aristotle's observation that in battle most soldiers refrain from cowardly behaviour because of the fear of being punished by their superiors, whereas others are held in check by the shame they would feel before their peers. The good man, Aristotle suggests, is motivated neither by fear nor by shame but by the intrinsic goodness of the action (for references and discussion see Elster 1999: 70–2). The case of suicide attackers presents a partial analogue. Since they are drawn from a pool of volunteers, coercion and fear play a much smaller role in their motivation than in that of drafted soldiers. To be sure, Hill's chapter makes it clear that the Japanese *kamikaze* pilots were to some extent 'volunteered by' their superiors. Also, there are claims that the LTTE relies on forced recruitments to the Tamil Tigers. As Hopgood argues in Chapter 2 (citing Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam), however, this idea is implausible. Forced recruitment is not compatible with the degree of commitment and self-discipline required by suicide attackers. Another matter is that, once a volunteer has been accepted by an organization that uses the method of SMs, he or she may be the subject of extreme pressure. Thus one PKK member who refused to carry out an SM was allegedly 'executed in front of another who was offered the "honor"' (Ergil 2002: 118). The sources for this statement may, however, be biased.

By all accounts, peer pressure is an important factor in generating and especially in sustaining the motivation of suicide attackers.⁷ In their chapters, Hopgood cites reports about 'psychological pressure' to join the Tamil Tigers, and Hill argues that a feeling of guilt (or shame?) towards other pilots was among the motivations for volunteering. Hill also notes that, to sustain the motivation, the presence of other pilots who escorted the *kamikaze* pilots to the target may have prevented them from backsliding. In Chapter 3, Ricolfi observes that the clustering of Palestine suicide volunteers in a few towns suggests the importance of peer pressure or emulation. Descriptions of the rituals surrounding Palestinian suicide missions also emphasize the goal of building up a pressure that will make it unbearably shameful to

change one's mind. A widely respected expert on this topic, Ariel Merari, testified before the American Congress that a

critical element in this training process is the creation of a point of no return. . . . In order to make sure that the person does not change his mind, the organization makes points of no return. These are achieved by making the candidate to write last letters to his family, to his friends. The person, the candidate, is being videotaped saying farewell, and from that point on the person in the case of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the person is actually referred to in Arabic as al-shahid al-hai, which means the living martyr. The living martyr, meaning that he is already dead. He is only temporarily here with us.⁸

Palestinian suicide attackers are thus kept on a short leash by their handlers, who are ready to provide more or less subtle additional pressures in case the primary motivation should falter.⁹ As Merari also states (*CBS News*, 25 May 2003), 'There is no return for [the suicide bomber] without really losing any self-respect, the respect of others'. Judging from a recent report from Iraq (*New York Times*, 25 February 2004), the suicide attackers operating there are also carefully monitored. One man, who was captured and disarmed because of his visible nervousness, said that 'for three days before his mission, he had been locked in a room with an Ansar mullah who had talked about Paradise and fed him a special soup that made him strong'. The mental state that actually triggers the act of detonating the bomb may therefore be ephemeral and something of an artefact rather than a stable feature of the person. When asked how well he thought he understood the state of mind of suicide attackers in the minutes before they died, Merari answered: 'Some of them were elated, apparently. Ecstatic, in the last moments' (*CBS News*, 25 May 2003.). Such trance-like states most likely do not spring from a stable motivational system.¹⁰

In this respect as in others (see below), the participants in the missions on September 11, 2001 are in a different category. They seem to have been on a very long leash, except if we view the leaders such as Mohammed Atta as *handlers* rather than mere executants (Darius Rejali, personal communication). As Holmes asserts in Chapter 4, the mechanical rituals of the 9-11 attackers were indeed suited to "induce a sort of trance". The category of the handler, who mediates between the attackers and the organization, is somewhat elusive. If Atta was a handler, he was also willing to die together with his foot soldiers. In Chapter 1, Hill notes that some of the escort pilots for the *kamikazes* resented their passive role and wanted to be allowed to participate in suicide missions too. Nothing seems to be known about the handlers in the Middle East.

The desire to contribute to the creation or defence of a homeland or to drive infidels out of the holy lands are *other-related motivations*. The suicide attacker will

not be able to benefit from the mission, but the hope is that his kin or compatriots will. On a smaller scale, the material benefits that will accrue to the family of the suicide attacker may provide an other-related motivation.¹¹ The desire to avoid shame is also an other-related motivation. The suicide attacker is sustained by the fearful anticipation of what others will think of him if he fails. A further other-related motivation is the desire to be well thought of by others if he succeeds. In other chapters in the present volume, varieties of this motivation are referred to as 'vanity' (Biggs, Hill), desire for 'fame' (Ricolfi, Biggs) or the search for 'glory' (Hill, Biggs, Holmes, Ricolfi). The common denominator of these motivations is a desire to transcend death by living on in the grateful or admiring memory of others, a memory that constitutes as it were a *secular hereafter*. We know from other contexts that this desire can be a powerful motive indeed (Adair 1998), and one that may well be an important ingredient in the motivational mix of suicide attackers and of politically motivated suicide behaviours more generally. These are all other-related motivations that involve members of the suicide attacker's own group. He acts to benefit them, to avoid their blame, and to gather their praise, albeit posthumously.

A quite different other-related motivation, *revenge*, involves members of the enemy group. Many reports suggest that revenge for an Israeli killing of a friend or relative has been an important motive in many Palestinian SMs. Margalit (2003), for instance, writes that his 'distinct impression is that the main motive of many of the suicide bombers is revenge for acts committed by Israelis, a revenge that will be known and celebrated in the Islamic world'. Specific evidence about this motivation is provided by Ricolfi (Chapter 3, this volume). Similarly, many reports indicate the importance of personal revenge as a motivation for suicide attacks in Chechnya, where 'the rules of Adat, the traditional code of honor, is more important than religion. . . . Although suicide is seen as shameful, the shame can be turned into honor if it is a question of avenging family members who have been killed and lost their honor' (Reuter 2002: 337). A survivor of the Nord Ost hostage-taking in Moscow reports that a 'Chechen women said that they came to die, to take revenge for their husbands and children who were killed in the Chechen war. They said that they had nothing to lose in their lives. However, it seemed that male terrorists intended to leave' (*Pravda*, 1 November 2002).

Acts motivated by hatred of the enemy are not acts of revenge. Revenge, typically, is tit-for-tat.¹² Once revenge has been taken and the thirst of the gods has been slaked, there may be no further violence.¹³ Hatred of the enemy can never be stilled, however, until he has been completely exterminated. If the attack on the World Trade Center had been part of a private vendetta of Saddam Hussein against the Bush family, as was sometimes suggested at the time, one might have hoped that no further attacks would be forthcoming. If by contrast the attacks were motivated by abiding

hatred, only an 'Endlösung'—the destruction of the West—could satisfy it. A third possibility is that the motivation was purely instrumental: to drive the Americans out of Saudi Arabia just as earlier suicide attacks had driven them out of Lebanon.

One motivation of the suicide attacker which would not seem to be other-related is the desire to reach the *religious hereafter*.¹⁴ Are religious suicide bombers in fact motivated by the desire to attain Paradise? Within the Christian tradition, this would essentially be a form of simony. According to the *Catholic Encyclopedia*¹⁵, 'Simony is usually defined as "a deliberate intention of buying or selling for a temporal price such things as are spiritual or annexed unto spirituals". While this definition only speaks of purchase and sale, any exchange of spiritual for temporal things is simoniacal.' Even doing good works for the sole purpose of achieving salvation would be simony, notwithstanding that doing good works (for the love and fear of God) may be a condition for salvation. Salvation, that is, is essentially a by-product of actions undertaken for other ends (Elster 1983: ch. 2). A parallel in Islam is that, although Sunni theologians 'perpetuated the veneration [of] the early martyrs of Islam . . . they nonetheless rigorously opposed the cultivation of a contemporary cult of martyrdom in their respective societies by emphasizing the illegality of suicide and equating the seeking of a martyr's death with this' (Lawson 1995: 57). The Shiite tradition, though, is more favourable to such instrumentalization of martyrdom.

The Koran itself prescribes no unambiguous ban on suicide (Clarke 1995: 133; Reuter 2002: 246). The prophetic canon, by contrast, 'frequently, clearly, and absolutely prohibits suicide' (Clarke 1995: 133). As an operational criterion, the tradition ruled that a necessary condition for martyrdom was that of not having brought one's affairs in order before dying (Reuter 2002: 248). To have done so would show premeditation and thus suicidal or simoniacal intent. This criterion would obviously rule out those suicide attackers in the Muslim world who go through elaborate departure rituals before setting out on their mission. By and large, however, contemporary Islamic theologians seem to emulate the Jesuits by showing how 'you can get around a given norm in perfectly legal ways' (Reuter 2002: 54). It is all a matter of 'directing one's intention' to one aspect of the behaviour rather than to another.¹⁶ As a result of their teaching, the religious legitimacy of selfless suicide now seems to be quite widely accepted, although not uncontroversial.¹⁷

The religious legitimacy of suicidal intentions does not, however, imply that suicide attackers are *motivated* by the desire for (a privileged position in) the afterlife, in the sense that they would have abstained from SMs had they not believed that these would assure them salvation. But this standard might be too rigorous. I might do X because I believe it will bring about A and B, but not do X if I thought it would bring about only A or only B. A would-be suicide bomber might abstain from a mission if he thought it would bring about salvation without political gains or vice versa, but

commit himself if both goals can be achieved. Here, we are obviously approaching or crossing the borders of what can be empirically verified. Let me only say that to me, at least, Reuter (2002: 26, 263) rings true when he asserts that religion is a form of consolation or a bonus rather than a motivation.¹⁸ Like the knowledge that one's relatives will be financially taken care of after one is dead, the belief in some kind of afterlife may attenuate the psychological costs of commitment. As suggested by Diego Gambetta (personal communication), rather than offering a positive motivation the religious and financial expectations might have the disinhibitory effect of lifting some of the normative constraints against suicide missions.

Let me elaborate. If those who claim to be religious believers were as sure of the afterlife as they are that the sun will rise tomorrow, *and* if they thought they could get there by performing good actions, we would observe a vastly greater number of martyrs than we actually do. Before the fall of Communism, Christians from the West would have overrun the borders to the Soviet Union to spread the gospel, knowing that the worst that could happen was that eternal bliss would begin sooner rather than later. I conjecture that the small number of contemporary martyrs has less to do with the fear of committing simony than with the somewhat shadowy nature of most people's belief in the existence of an afterlife. That belief may serve, in fact, as a kind of consumption good rather than as a premise for action.¹⁹ This is not to exclude the possibility that in some cases it may tip the balance by preventing backsliding, or that it may acquire an ephemeral reality in the last moments before the action.

The previous discussion has already raised the issue of the *beliefs* of the suicide attackers with regard to the existence of an afterlife and the means for reaching it. As for their secular beliefs, I assume these rely heavily on the statements of the sponsoring organizations. I shall say more about that issue in the next section. Here I only briefly note that a prominent feature of these statements seems to be a curiously dual assumption about the enemy. On the one hand, Israel and Zionism more generally is seen as an overwhelmingly powerful and evil force in history. On the other hand, the maximalist rhetoric of several organizations presupposes that the Palestinian people can drive this omnipotent enemy from its land and into the Mediterranean Sea. For those two beliefs to be consistent, the Palestinians would have to be even more omnipotent, if that were not a contradiction in terms.

Causes

From reasons, let me turn to causes. What are the features of individuals and of the societies in which they live that could generate motivations of the required kind and, especially, of the required strength? Among the causal factors commonly cited are gender, youth, lack of family attachments, resentment, inferiority feelings, poverty,

frustrated expectations, downward mobility, and illiteracy. To assess these claims, two questions must be addressed. First, are these factors actually present? Second, is there a plausible causal link from the factors to the motivations (and ultimately the behaviour) we want to understand?

Prior to September 11, there was a widespread belief that the typical suicide bomber in the Middle East was a single young unemployed man, perhaps sexually starved (see n. 19), for whom a religious movement could fill a vacuum that would otherwise be occupied by family and work (Moghadam 2003: 76). Then overnight, following the attack on the World Trade Center, experts on terrorism decided that they had to 'rewrite the book' (Ehud Sprinzak, cited in *New York Times*, 15 September 2001, Section A p.2). Even before then, however, the frequent if oscillating deployment of female suicide bombers (Ricolfi, Chapter 3, this volume) should have led scholars to question this stereotype. In the recent Palestinian Intifada, the use of female suicide bombers, some of them mothers or highly educated, is even more striking. Even if teenage hormones may partially explain the suicidal activists in Khomeini's war on Iraq, arguably the greatest self-sacrifice in history (Reuter 2002: 61), this cliché seems otherwise to have little explanatory power. Moreover, to the extent that there is a preponderance of unattached males it may be due to a selection effect. One Palestinian leader said, for instance, that the recruit should 'not be an only child, or the head of a family' (Moghadam 2003: 83).²⁰ Also, 'If two brothers ask to join in, one is turned away' (Hassan 2001). Recently, though, the head-of-family constraint seems to have become weaker.

The factors of poverty and illiteracy also seem to have limited causal efficacy, at least as features of the individual suicide attackers. Among Palestinian suicide bombers, income and education tend in fact to be higher than in the general population (see Ricolfi, Chapter 3). Yet this finding does not exclude the causal efficacy of poverty and illiteracy at the population level. To see why, we may note that the founders of Marxism, coming themselves from the upper bourgeoisie, were directly motivated by the poverty they could see around them. Some writers on the topic seem to confuse the two levels, either using the well-off status of suicide bombers as evidence for the irrelevance of poverty²¹ or citing the prevalence of poverty in the affected region to refute the claim that terrorists come from an affluent background.²² It seems quite plausible, however, that *ceteris paribus* suicide attacks are both more likely to occur in poor and illiterate societies and more likely to be carried out by the better-off and most educated members of those societies. In addition, there could be a selection effect: leaders may prefer educated individuals who can more easily fit into a foreign environment and not, for instance, be given away by their local dialect (Krueger and Maleckova 2002).

Explanations in terms of poverty are also unsatisfying because it is not clear how poverty would generate the required motivation. In one common view, the gains from blowing oneself up have to be weighed against the cost of blowing oneself up—one's life. If life is not highly valued, the cost is less. According to this approach, a life in misery and poverty is worth so little to the individual that the costs of suicide become negligible. I am sceptical about this argument, since I think that poor people find their lives as worth living as anyone else. That people adjust their aspirations to their circumstances so that they maintain a more or less constant level of satisfaction is a pretty well-established psychological finding (Frederick and Loewenstein 1999). A more plausible factor than absolute deprivation is the gap between expectations and reality experienced by the many educated Palestinians who are now without any prospect of decent employment. Downward social mobility, an element stressed by Holmes in Chapter 4, could have the same effect.

The most relevant feature of the populations from which suicide bombers are drawn, at least in the Middle East and in Sri Lanka, seems to be permanent feelings of *inferiority* and *resentment*, the former emotion being based on comparison and the latter on interaction (Elster 1999: ch. III). In Chapter 4, on the participants in the September 11 mission, Holmes conjectures that they were motivated in part by the 'bruising loss of status and prestige' they experienced when transplanted to the west European context. Their destructive urge, he also suggests, was 'intensified by envy of America's prosperity and power'. Most writers on the Palestinian suicide bombers emphasize the intense resentment caused by the daily humiliations that occur in the interaction with the Israeli forces. Beyond the degrading checks and controls to which the Palestinians are subject, there is also their awareness that many Israelis think all Arabs 'lazy, cowardly, and cruel', as a Jerusalem taxi driver said to me almost twenty years ago. This deep-seated and widespread stereotype has ancient roots (Morris 2001: 42–5). For the Palestinians, the perception that the Israelis view them as inferior must be doubly unsettling since under Ottoman rule the Jews were at the bottom of the social hierarchy (Morris 2001: 47). As Roger Petersen (2002) has brought out, with special reference to the Jews of central and eastern Europe, reversal of status hierarchies is a very potent source of resentment.

Interaction-based emotions tend to be stronger than comparison-based ones (Elster 1999: 143). Envy of America's power will not provide the same multiplier of the willingness to die as does the resentment of humiliation at the hands of the Israelis. The motivation of the participants in the attack on the World Trade Center is in fact harder to fathom than that of the Intifada suicide attackers. The multiplicandum may have been larger, but what was it? In Chapter 4, Holmes explores, with an appropriate mix of boldness and caution, some of the complex psychic mechanisms that may have been at work in the attackers of September 11. He

makes a good argument that in their case religious motives may have been decisive, while also noting that for the time being we do not have the evidence that would enable us to reach any definite conclusions. In a later section I suggest that the difficulty may lie even deeper.

The Organizers

I shall now consider the motivations and beliefs we can impute to those who organize suicide missions. A prior question, however, is whether the imputation of motivations and beliefs to supra-individual actors such as organizations is at all meaningful, an issue that is especially acute when (as in the case of al Qaeda) we are uncertain whether we are really dealing with an organization at all or with something more like a franchise. Aggregation issues and free-rider problems make it very problematic to apply individual-level categories to collective actors. In the case of organizations run on dictatorial lines such as the PKK or the LTTE this difficulty does not arise, but in organizations with internal factional struggles such as the Palestinian Fatah it can be quite intractable. Thus, when we consider the multiplicity of goals imputed to the organizers we may simply be dealing with the goals of different factions. Specific events may be explained by the motives of the faction or the individuals momentarily in ascendancy rather than by the (perhaps non-existent) goals of 'the organization'.

Motivations

Most of the organizations are defined by a stated official goal, which can be territorial, religious, or both. As we shall see shortly, their behaviour may also be due to other goals that bear a rather indirect relation to the official goal. Let me begin, nevertheless, by surveying the official goals and how SMs might be a means to their realization. Although these goals are often stated as being non-negotiable, this assertion may be merely a standard negotiating ploy. The Tamil Tigers (LTTE) are fighting for an independent state, and the Turkish PKK for a larger Kurdistan that would include all Kurds in the Middle East. Yet it is hard to know whether these maximalist claims are as non-negotiable as the organizations routinely claim them to be or whether they might accept a federalist solution. Although the official goal of the Palestinian Hamas and of Islamic Jihad is to eliminate the state of Israel, the organizations might still come to accept a compromise (Mishal and Sela 2000: ch. 6).

Organizations making only territorial demands focus on the recovery of a homeland from the enemy (the PKK, the LTTE, and Fatah), the defence of the homeland (the rationale of the Japanese *kamikaze* missions), and the expulsion of occupying forces from the national territory (Iraq, Lebanon). Note the difference

between the demand for *part* of the national territory that is made by the PKK, the LTTE, and Fatah, and the demand for *all* of it that is made by other Palestinian organizations.

Organizations making only religious demands focus on the defence of the holy sites of Islam, notably in Saudi Arabia and in Palestine, and more conjecturally on the destruction of the infidels. As far as we can understand, al Qaeda seems to have purely or mainly religious motives. In Iraq, it is unclear whether the suicide attacks on 2 March 2004 against Shiite worshipers were carried out by Sunni extremists acting from religious motives or by groups trying to undermine the American occupation by triggering a civil war.

Organizations making both territorial and religious demands now include all organizations that sponsor suicide bombings in the Middle East (except Fatah), in Kashmir, and in Chechnya. Even the traditionally secular Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine has begun to use religious language. The exact nature of the marriage between religion and nationalism remains unclear, at least to me. Israeli nationalism can be justified in religious terms, but there is no Book holding out the promised land to the Palestinians. Although the Al-Aqsa mosque is one of the holy sites of Islam, no Palestinian organization limits its goals to the recuperation of this place. There may simply be a tendency for any civil war in which Muslims are involved on one side to be transformed into a holy war (Reuter 2002: 369).

The officially stated connection between the official goal and the SMs is simple: they are intended to put intolerable pressure on the enemy until territorial or religious demands are granted or hostile intentions defeated. To create this pressure, the missions may use either focused attacks on military targets and civilian elites or random attacks on the population at large.

The *kamikaze* attacks had a narrow military focus, as had the use of youngsters to trigger land mines in the Iraq-Iran war, the suicide missions of the LTTE, the Iran- and Syria-sponsored attacks on French, American, and Israeli military targets in Lebanon, and the suicide attacks in Kashmir and Chechnya. The targets have been enemy military forces, except for the LTTE, which has also sought to inflict material damage.

The purpose of targeting civilian elites could be twofold. On the one hand, the intention could be to weaken the regime by deterring individuals from taking up positions of responsibility. The PKK mainly used 'selective violence against official targets', although after the arrest of its leader it briefly engaged in 'indiscriminate terrorism for the sake of vengeance' (Ergil 2002: 123). At the time of writing (March 2004), we also observe SMs targeting Iraqis who collaborate with the American occupying forces. On the other hand, the purpose could be to persuade top officials that they or their families are personally at risk unless they change their policies.²³ This

conjecture might explain an otherwise puzzling feature of al Qaeda behaviour or, as I shall argue, non-behaviour. It is a striking fact that there has not been a single 'ordinary' SM on American soil, in spite of the ease with which it could have been organized. If the main goal of the leadership of al Qaeda had been to strike terror in the American public, it could easily (I assume) have organized ten simultaneous suicide bombings in American shopping centres or subway stations. Instead, its preferred mode of action in the United States has been to strike at highly visible symbols of American wealth and power. The attacks on September 11 did, to be sure, instil terror, but the lack of follow-up actions suggests that this may not have been their main purpose.²⁴ Other possible intentions include humiliating the US, mobilizing and recruiting al Qaeda supporters, and deterring American leaders who might be concerned about their personal security.

The use of random or indiscriminate violence against enemy civilian populations is unique to the Palestine organizations and al Qaeda. If my conjecture about the motives of the latter is correct, we can focus on the former. It is far from clear how the indiscriminate suicide killings are supposed to serve the official goal, harboured by some of them, of the destruction of the state of Israel. Pape (2003: 353) argues that 'Although Hamas objected to surrendering claims to all of historic Palestine, it did value the West Bank and Gaza as intermediate objectives, and certainly had no objection to obtaining this goal sooner rather than later'. Yet whereas there is a conceivable account (Pape offers one) of how suicide attacks could lead to the realization of these limited territorial goals, I cannot imagine any mechanism by which they could lead to the ultimate capitulation or destruction of the Israeli state.

Let me refer to the use of SMs to impose so much material and psychological damage on the enemy that it prefers making limited concessions rather than sustaining more damage as *deterrence*.²⁵ This strategy worked against the US, France, and Israel in Lebanon, and seems to have had substantial success in Sri Lanka. Pape (2003) argues that the Hamas suicide attacks in 1994 and 1995 made the Israelis speed up their withdrawal from the occupied territories. Although I am not persuaded by his argument, which rests exclusively on ambiguous statements by the then Prime Minister Rabin and self-serving statements by Hamas spokesmen, the mechanism is not intrinsically implausible. In any case, it seems very doubtful that deterrence is the full explanation of the bulk of the many SMs that have taken place in Palestine since 1993. In the light of the available evidence, at least *four other mechanisms* seem to have been at work: sabotage, overbidding, provocation, and retaliation. Their relative importance at any given moment and over time depends on Israeli policies and on power struggles in and among the Palestinian organizations.

Sabotage occurs when an extremist organization with maximalist goals launches a wave of SMs to break up ongoing negotiations between the Israeli

government and a moderate grouping. Kydd and Walter (2002) make a good case for the importance of this 'spoiler strategy'. I believe they go too far, however, when they argue that their game-theoretical model of 'sabotaging peace' is consistent with the entire pattern of events from October 1993 to October 1998. They do not mention that two of the four spikes in suicide attacks, in 1994 and in 1996, were probably direct retaliations for, respectively, the massacre committed by Baruch Goldstein and the killing of a master Palestine bomb-maker. Also, as Ricolfi points out in Chapter 3, the 1993 cut-off point leaves unexplained the fact that Hamas already organized intensive suicide attacks in 1992, before the Oslo agreement

Overbidding occurs when an organization initiates or escalates suicide bombings to gain an ascendancy over other organizations (Bloom 2002). Here the target audience is not the Israeli government but the Palestinian population. The emergence of Fatah's Al-Aqsa martyr brigades, for instance, was a direct response to the perceived success of Hamas. Rivalry among Palestinian organizations is also shown by the many cases in which several organizations lay competing claims of responsibility for the same attack (Human Rights Watch 2002).²⁶

Retaliation (not to be confused with revenge) seems to be a common motive for suicide bombings. When the Israelis kill a leading figure in a Palestinian movement, the latter is often compelled to retaliate to maintain internal loyalty and cohesion (Crenshaw 2002: 25). Not to retaliate against a 'targeted killing' of a leader or a bomb-maker would be perceived as tantamount to capitulation (Reuter 2002: 234, 367) and might trigger member defection to another organization. The Israeli side, too, tends to retaliate against increases in the level of Palestinian terrorism, but there is an asymmetry between the two parties. Massive retaliation by the Israelis is regularly perceived by world opinion as overreacting, and often triggers statements of condemnation even by actors normally friendly towards Israel.

Provocation relies precisely on the predictable tendency of Israel to respond in ways that will be perceived as overreaction. Here the target audience is not the Israeli government but world opinion. By contrast, I have not seen it credibly suggested that Israeli crack-downs could be motivated by the intention to provoke the Palestinians into overreacting. Whereas Israel does care about world (especially American) opinion, the Palestinian organizations care more about the opinions of their own constituencies, which have been largely supportive of random killings of Israeli civilians (Krueger and Maleckova 2002; Ricolfi, Chapter 3, this volume).

Beliefs

Consider now questions of organizational beliefs, to the extent they can be inferred from statements and behaviour. I shall limit myself to the two sets of beliefs I

identified earlier, concerning (a) the evil omnipotence of Zionism and the Israeli state and (b) the Palestinian capacity to defeat the same state. In addition, I shall discuss the importance of mental models in the adoption of the SM strategy.

There is evidence that both the ordinary citizens from whom the suicide bombers are recruited and the political leaders of the factions that organize them share a conspiratorial and paranoid theory of history that makes dialogue and argument very difficult. In the classic statement by Hofstadter (1964: 36), 'the paranoid mentality is far more coherent than the real world, since it leaves no room for mistakes, failures, or ambiguities. It is, if not wholly rational, at least intensely rationalistic; it believes it is up against an enemy who is as infallibly rational as he is totally evil'. Reuter (2002: ch. 7) provides extensive evidence for such beliefs among citizens and leaders in the Muslim world. He cites, for instance, the leader of one of the largest Koran schools in Pakistan, referring to the claim that Bin Laden was behind the attacks on September 11 as an 'American-Jewish-Indian conspiracy' (Reuter 2002: 273). Equally hallucinatory, and probably more consequential, is Article 22 from the Charter of Hamas:

For a long time, the enemies have been planning, skillfully and with precision, for the achievement of what they have attained. They took into consideration the causes affecting the current of events. They strived to amass great and substantive material wealth which they devoted to the realisation of their dream. With their money, they took control of the world media, news agencies, the press, publishing houses, broadcasting stations, and others. With their money they stirred revolutions in various parts of the world with the purpose of achieving their interests and reaping the fruit therein. They were behind the French Revolution, the Communist revolution and most of the revolutions we heard and hear about, here and there. With their money they formed secret societies, such as Freemasons, Rotary Clubs, the Lions and others in different parts of the world for the purpose of sabotaging societies and achieving Zionist interests. With their money they were able to control imperialistic countries and instigate them to colonize many countries in order to enable them to exploit their resources and spread corruption there.

You may speak as much as you want about regional and world wars. They were behind World War I, when they were able to destroy the Islamic Caliphate, making financial gains and controlling resources. They obtained the Balfour Declaration, formed the League of Nations through which they could rule the world. They were behind World War II, through which they made huge financial gains by trading in armaments, and paved the way for the establishment of their state. It was they who instigated the replacement of the League of Nations with the United Nations and the Security Council to enable them to rule the world through them. There is no war going on anywhere, without having their finger in it.

It is easy to imagine how such beliefs can interact with the daily experience of humiliation to intensify emotional reactions. We may pause to note, however, that this

idea of the Jews as long-standing oppressors is hard to square with the idea of Jews as a formerly oppressed people, with resentment being sparked when the status hierarchy is reversed. I do not know which idea is the dominant one. It seems plausible, however, that the general public in the Middle East sincerely believes in the existence of a Zionist conspiracy (Pipes 1998: 225). Whether the political elites share this view or merely propagate it for manipulative purposes, is harder to tell (Pipes 1998: ch. 11). The manipulation theory would be consistent with the hypothesis that, unlike the population at large, the leadership is quite aware that a status reversal has taken place.

The conspiratorial frame of mind is irreducibly irrational. It is resistant to contrary evidence, which it can always twist around to make it appear as supporting the conspiracy theory, and it cares little about internal contradictions. If the theory serves as a cognitive premise for actions that would not have been undertaken had the actor not believed it to be true, these actions themselves are equally irrational. As far as I can see, however, the conspiracy theory does *not* serve as a cognitive premise for suicide missions. It does not include beliefs about options, constraints, or ends-means relationships that would make a rational difference for behaviour. Yet the theory, assuming it to be sincerely held, could affect behaviour by another causal pathway. If, as I suggested, the conspiracy theory interacts with the daily experience of humiliation, it might strengthen feelings of resentment to the point of bringing about a willingness to sacrifice one's life that would not have been produced by the belief that one is dealing with a more ordinary enemy. In standard rational-choice theory, this would not make the suicidal *actions* irrational. Yet it would still be true (*a*) that suicide *attackers* are irrational and (*b*) that they would not have opted for suicide missions had they been rational.

The other key element in the belief systems of Palestinian leaders and activists concerns the efficacy of SMs. Judging from behaviour, one might be tempted to infer that the more extremist groups actually believe that these missions, combined with other forms of attack, will ultimately bring about the maximalist goal, the elimination of the state of Israel. This belief could explain both the refusal—assuming it to be to genuine rather than a bargaining ploy—to engage in negotiations for a limited territorial solution and the persistence of suicide bombings. It is also, of course, utterly unrealistic and hardly consistent with the delusional beliefs about Israeli omnipotence. It is hard to believe that anyone would hold it but easier to believe that the rank and file could entertain it than that the leaders could. For the suicide attacker, the belief that the sacrifice might help bring about a Palestinian state 'from the river to the sea' would clearly be very attractive. Like belief in the afterlife, it might serve to bolster and support his resolve rather than serving as a causally efficacious premise.

I need not dwell on the speculative nature of the preceding remarks. Even if they are accepted, it remains to explain the behaviour of the leaders, on the

assumption that they have a more realistic view of the situation. One interpretation is that they use strategies of deterrence, sabotage, overbidding, retaliation, and provocation for the purpose of obtaining the best feasible settlement, while using paranoid and maximalist language to motivate the rank and file. Another is that they are motivated mainly by the desire to stay in power, at the expense of their rivals, while again using inflammatory rhetoric in which they do not believe. These are two versions of what Holmes in Chapter 4 calls 'the Voltaire thesis'. Referring to the al Qaeda leaders, he notes that their isolation and lack of reality checks makes it somewhat credible that they are as deluded as those whom they send to their deaths. As the fierce in-fighting of the Palestinian struggle may have made even the fundamentalist religious leaders in the region somewhat more subject to reality checks, the Voltaire thesis may apply better to them.

In explaining the adoption of the SM strategy by the organizations discussed in the present volume, we may appeal to another cognitive factor that I shall refer to as *mental models*.²⁷ To deploy the SM strategy in its modern form, which aims at large numbers of enemy deaths in exchange for the life of the suicide attacker, somebody first had to *think* of it. The inventions of explosives and of aircraft that could be used as guided bombs were a necessary condition for the idea to enter anyone's mind. If they had been a sufficient condition, we would have expected SMs to appear earlier and more widely than they in fact did. Somebody had to *do* it first, to provide a mental model that others could imitate. As far as I can see, the early use of this strategy by the *kamikaze* pilots did not find any direct imitators.²⁸ The idea was reinvented independently by Iran during the war with Iraq, and spread from Iran to Lebanon (Reuter 2002: 94). From Lebanon it diffused possibly to the Tamil Tigers (Swamy 2001: 102) and later to Palestine, Kashmir, al Qaeda, Chechnya, and now Iraq. The PKK seems to have been influenced by the Tamil Tigers (Reuter 2002: 356), which it also resembles in many other respects (secular ideology, selective targeting, dictatorial leader, widespread use of female suicide attackers). The transfer from Iran to Lebanon and from Lebanon to Sri Lanka and Palestine involved more than just a mental model. More than a thousand Iranian revolutionary guards were operating in Lebanon in the early 1980s (Reuter 2002: 94), whereas Tamil Tigers were actually trained in Lebanon (Swamy 2001: 97–102). The Hamas operatives who introduced suicide bombing to Israel were among the 415 Palestinians deported to Lebanon in 1992, where they established fruitful contacts with Hezbollah.

The importance of mental models in ordinary suicide behaviour has often been noted (Wasserman 1984; Jamison 1999: 277–80). Biggs's chapter in this volume on self-immolation provides a specific set of examples. In his cases, no technical breakthrough was needed. Nor was training required: self-immolation is easy. Nor is there any learning effect: one does not need to see others burning themselves to

understand that it is likely to have an impact. What seems to happen is that, following one person's self-immolation, other people begin to see it as a realistic option rather than a merely conceivable alternative. That this happens seems clear. How it happens, I do not understand. The diffusion of the suicide bombing strategy is certainly more complex, but the basic mechanism (whatever it is) could be similar. At the level of the leaders the mental model may have caused them to take seriously the idea of recruiting suicide attackers, and for the recruits the model could have made the idea seem acceptable.

I conclude with some additional remarks on the relationship between the organization and the suicide attackers. The actual composition of the group of suicide attackers probably owes something to selection effects. Those who actually carry out the missions may differ in a number of respects from those who volunteer to do so. In addition to screening for family status and education, we may expect the organizers to try to eliminate those who have suicidal tendencies. As Hopgood and Ricolfi note in their chapters, this is indeed what we observe. The main reason, I conjecture, is that suicidal types are less efficient, notably because they are incapable of *waiting* for the optimal target to come into sight. The decision to take one's life is, under any circumstances, a momentous one which is likely to trigger extremely strong emotions. One characteristic feature of the emotions is the *urgency* they lend to the corresponding action tendencies (Elster 2004), thus inducing a preference for earlier action over later action (not to be confused with the phenomenon of time discounting, which involves a preference for earlier reward over later reward). To resist this tendency, a stable and strong personality is needed.²⁹

The importance as well as the difficulty of waiting is emphasized in much of the literature on SMs. In his chapter, Hill notes that 'the first rule of the *kamikaze* was that they should not be too hasty to die'. He cites one pilot to the effect that the stress of waiting was 'unbearable'. Hopgood writes in his chapter that, in the training of the Tamil Tigers, 'mental preparation [is] essential if one is to return to a regular unit . . . and wait to be called for a mission perhaps some time ahead'. Holmes observes in his chapter that the attackers on September 11, 2001 'were not simply zealots, but disciplined zealots, capable of patience'. Hassan (2001) cites the praise for a suicide bomber offered by the father of his co-attacker: 'Even after Salah saw my son ripped the shreds, he did not flinch. He waited before exploding himself, in order to cause additional deaths.'

One can draw a parallel between suicide bombing and the use of torture. Whereas suicide bombing is the ultimate insurgency technique, torture is the ultimate counter-insurgency method. Although some insurgency groups practise torture, it is more frequently practised by governments. In both cases, individuals are being asked to perform extraordinary acts: killing themselves and deliberately inflicting pain on

another human being. I conjecture that for this reason torture, no less than suicide bombing, requires volunteers. In both cases, an organization must take the decision to engage in the practice before asking for volunteers. In both cases, the set of agents who engage in these acts are the joint result of selection and self-selection. In both cases, the organization tries to weed out types who would spontaneously perform the acts in question: suicidal individuals (see above) and sadistic ones (Arendt 1994: 105) respectively. In both cases, a plausible reason for rejecting such individuals is that they are typically less efficient than others (a problem of adverse selection). Suicidal types might blow themselves up prematurely, and sadistic types might kill the tortured individual before he or she talks. In both cases, the organization would prefer individuals who are indifferent to respectively their own deaths and the pain of others. If they have a positive preference for these outcomes, they may be inefficient, as just noted. If they have a negative attitude, they might be reluctant to volunteer.

As I argued earlier, suicide attackers are likely to have a very focused motivation: to take as many enemy lives as possible. For them, this is the main benefit that justifies the high cost of their action, namely, their death. The organizers may have a different perspective. For one thing, if the supply of volunteers is limitless, as was the case in the Iran-Iraq war and in the second Palestinian Intifada, it is less important to ensure that each of them performs with maximal efficiency. By contrast, the Hezbollah attacks were constrained by limited supply and hence put greater weight on efficiency (Reuter 2002: 104), thus making the aims of attackers and of organizers converge.

For another thing, efficiency may be redefined to include symbolic values as well as the number of enemies killed. For the organizers, the death of the attackers may represent a benefit rather than a cost by symbolizing the strength of commitment to the movement. Martyrdom is crucial for the legitimacy of the movement (Crenshaw 2002: 26). Attacks are valued as a symbol of resistance and as a signal that 'we will rather die than accept a compromise'. For Khomeini, the Iranian teenagers' willingness to die was more important than their military significance (Reuter 2002: 76). In Chapter 3, Ricolfi draws the conclusion that, from the point of view of the organizers, the *maximal* number of enemy deaths may not be the *optimal* one. The more spectacular operations may be less effective overall, since they focus attention on the victims rather than on the martyrs.

The symbolic or intrinsic value of the death of a person who takes his or her life for political ends can be measured by the strength of commitment it requires, as revealed for instance by the size of the sacrifice involved. Thus, the political suicide of a healthy person, who has more to lose by dying than a sick one, has greater symbolic value. The instrumental value of the death is measured in most cases by the number of enemies that are killed. The relevant first- and second-order actors can

order or weigh intrinsic and instrumental values in three ways: by giving absolute priority to the former, by giving absolute priority to the latter, and by allowing trade-offs between them.

The Buddhist self-immolations have only intrinsic value.³⁰ For the Buddhist, the optimal number of deaths in addition to his or her own is zero. For an efficiency-oriented organization such as the Tamil Tigers or Hezbollah, a suicide attack can be justified only by its instrumental value. For a given number of victims, the optimal number of martyrs is the minimal one; for a given number of martyrs, the optimal number of victims is the maximal one. If martyrdom has an intrinsic value, it is essentially a by-product of its instrumental value (see Reuter 2002: 111).³¹ Ricolfi's argument in Chapter 3 is that, in the second Intifada, the organizers trade-off intrinsic and instrumental values—the number of martyrs and the number of victims—against one another. My suggestion is that the suicide attackers themselves, for intelligible psychological reasons, place a greater and perhaps exclusive weight on the instrumental efficacy of their action. Although the phenomenon of self-immolation shows that intrinsic value can be strongly motivating, I believe that the Palestinian suicide attacks are so strongly motivated by negative emotions against the Israelis that their destruction becomes the principal aim.

Conclusion: An Enigma Wrapped in a Puzzle

The innermost layer in the suicide attacks consists of the beliefs and motivations of the attackers. Many suggestions have been made concerning the objects of these attitudes. Some of them are discussed in the present chapter and elsewhere in this volume. Although some are more plausible than others, we may not ever know the exact motivational and cognitive states of the suicide attackers for the simple reason that (to some extent at least) *there is no fact of the matter*. In his chapter, Hill describes the inability of one *kamikaze* pilot to decide 'whether his relief [at being ordered to abort a mission was] indicative of cowardice or of rationality' and similarly whether his joy at being given a new chance was due to 'patriotic zeal or the desire to wipe out [his] shame'. Referring to the motivations of Mohammad Atta, Holmes in Chapter 4 writes that 'It is impossible to know if he was bothered more by the injustice or the apostasy of Egypt's public power'. The two issues must have seemed inextricably intertwined in his thinking.' I argued above that some of the motivational and cognitive states may be ephemeral, artefacts of the situation rather than stable features of the individual. Religious beliefs and the motivations stemming from them may be held for their consumption and consolation value ('opium of the masses') rather than as premises for action. Perhaps 'quasi-beliefs' 'and quasi-motivations' are

better terms for these attitudes. A trivial example is the quasi-grief expressed by many people after the death in 1997 of Diana, Princess of Wales.

The complexity of beliefs about the afterlife is well brought out by Paul Veyne (1976: 428) in his comments on attitudes to death in classical antiquity.

At one and the same time an octogenarian can plant a tree for his great-nephew, believe in the immortality of the soul, wish to go to Paradise as late as possible, die with the resignation of a poor man, hope to live in the memory of posterity, order a beloved object to accompany him to his last resting-place, make sure that his funeral will be marked by all the splendour due to his rank, show in his will an unselfishness that was unknown when he himself had enjoyment of his possessions, never mention the dead without an abundance of *litotes*, and yet talk to those around him, with no embarrassments on either side, about his latest testamentary dispositions and the richness of his tomb, be afraid or unafraid of death (he may or may not spend the night after the death of a relative without a lighted lamp in his room) depending on whether or not he is deeply imbued with the feeling that death means a passage to a better state.

From this perspective, beliefs or quasi-beliefs are highly context-dependent. In different situations the same individual may express different or even contradictory beliefs about the same topic. The Jews are omnipotent, but can be defeated. In fact, two independent sources told me that they overheard Islamic militants charging that the Jews were behind the attack on the World Trade Center while also expressing pride in this successful attack on the American enemy. Conspiratorial theories, with their enormous flexibility, do not reflect a stable cognitive attitude.

Even when the suicide attackers do act from stable motivations and independently held beliefs, we may not be able to identify them. The actors themselves are dead, while their families and the organizations that sent them on their way tend to put up a smokescreen of rhetoric that may have little to do with the actual mental states of the martyrs. Interviews with would-be suicide attackers who failed or were foiled are an intrinsically unreliable source. Even if they failed because they were detected, we do not know if they were careless because they wanted to be caught, nor if they would actually have gone through with the act had they not been stopped.³² Thus, the aims and beliefs of the Palestinian suicide attackers are likely to remain an enigma. We may be able to identify some components, as I have tried to do, but their status and causal efficacy are elusive. It is possible that other suicide missions, notably in Sri Lanka, would lend themselves better to analysis if we knew more about them. The religious and conspiratorial elements that render the Palestinian missions so opaque do not seem to operate here. For the time being, however, individual-level evidence about the Tamil Tigers is lacking.

If we move to the level of the organizers, we confront a puzzle rather than an enigma. External observers do not know whether the maximalist rhetoric is sincere or strategic, but the actors themselves probably do. From the outside, a given attack may look over-determined by goals of deterrence, sabotage, overbidding, retaliation, and provocation, but there is no reason to doubt that there is a fact of the matter if we could only get at it. The decision-processes take place, however, under conditions of secrecy and dissimulation that make them virtually impenetrable.

Attempts to identify motivations by some combination of game-theoretic analysis and econometrics are, in my opinion, doomed to fail. For one thing, game theory has very little to say about the equilibrium outcome of strategic interaction among more than two actors. In Palestine, eight different groups have been involved in SMs (Ricolfi, Chapter 3). Some of them are (or appear to be) divided into hardliners and moderates, or into a political and a military branch.³³ Their common opponent, the Israeli state, is also subject to multiple internal divisions.

For another thing, I do not think it makes sense to impute to the organizers (even if suitably disaggregated) the level of rationality presupposed by game theory. Although I have argued that irrational conspiracy theories may not by themselves affect the rationality of behaviour,³⁴ it would be surprising if those who believe in them were not also vulnerable to other and more significant mechanisms of irrational belief formation. To talk about rational actors with irrational beliefs would be an oxymoron. Also, in the emotionally charged atmosphere of the Middle East it would be surprising if second-order actors were moved exclusively by considerations of instrumental rationality. Retaliation may be induced by the need to satisfy a constituency, but also by spontaneous, self-destructive vindictiveness. Sometimes the parable of the scorpion and the frog seems to have more explanatory power than might be claimed by any model.

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Note: The many relevant studies published by International Policy Institute for Counterterrorism at the Interdisciplinary Center, Herzliya (ICT) can be found at www.ict.org.il.

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The two-level analysis is in one sense a bit artificial. If we ask 'Who becomes a suicide attacker?' we are dealing with the level of actors. If instead we ask 'Who is selected to become a suicide attacker?', the emphasis shifts to the level of the organization. In reality, of course, the composition of the corps of suicide bombers results from the interaction between these two levels. The organization makes a choice among those who volunteer. The relative importance of selection and self-selection is discussed in several places below.

² The requirement of stability is rarely explicitly stated by rational-choice theorists, but their work would make little sense without it. If we do not assume stability, an individual exhibiting cyclical choice behaviour (choosing A over B, B over C, and C over A), might be seen as rational.

³ If the militant believes that Islam tells him that suicide is unconditionally wrong, the former action would be preferable on religious grounds (Kristian Elster, personal communication). Although most Islamic theologians now condone suicide (see below), some may still refuse to do so. See also n. 16 below.

⁴ As an example of this effect, most people prefer winning a one-week tour of England with certainty over a 50% chance of winning a three-week tour of England, France, and Italy, but also prefer a 5% chance of the second option over a 10% chance of the first.

⁵ Even more questionable, of course, is a statement one occasionally comes across to the effect that Palestinians live under such miserable conditions that they have little to lose by blowing themselves up.

⁶ Whether Buddhist doctrine implies that suicide has a negative effect on the *individual*, by causing him or her to be reborn at a lower level in the next incarnation, seems to be a controversial issue.

⁷ An early example is found among the South Asian Muslims on the Malabar coast, who carried out suicide missions against the dominant Hindus from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries. Those 'who changed their mind at the last moment after having gone through the rituals were derided by other Muslims as . . . "half-martyrs", and often this ridicule drove them to participate in later attacks' (Dale 1980: 122).

⁸ Testimony before the Special Oversight Panel on Terrorism of the Committee of Armed Services, House of Representatives, 13 July 2000.

⁹ Foreseeing a failure of will, individuals may voluntarily expose themselves to peer pressure. Thus many people who try to quit smoking tell their friends about their

plans, so as to add fear of being shamed to their primary motivation. I have not seen it suggested, though, that would-be suicide bombers deliberately ask for will-sustaining rituals.

¹⁰ In his discussion of 'ecstatic suicide', Meltsberger (1997) mostly cites character features such as mania or 'malignant narcissism' as explanatory factors. As religiously motivated instances he mentions the Indian 'widows who threw themselves into the flames of their husband's funeral pyres . . . in the belief that they would be bettered in the afterlife' and (citing Gibbon 1776-78: ch. 16) the early Christians who sought martyrdom to enter 'into the immediate fruition of eternal bliss.' I am sceptical about the voluntary nature of suicide by Indian widows. As for the early Christians, the description of the Donatists and notably of the Circoncillions in the *Catholic Encyclopedia* suggests that their voluntary martyrdom had more in common with the collective madness of Jonestown than with instrumentally rational actions to get access to the afterlife.

¹¹ The Israeli practice of destroying the homes of families of suicide attackers may to some extent counter (and be intended to counter) this motivation. A further step would be to kill the family members.

¹² In fact, there is some evidence that revenge is often 'two tits for a tat', requiring two enemy deaths to compensate for one death on one's own side. Kalyvas (2003: s. 4.1.2) cites a Lebanese woman who in response to the killing of 365 Lebanese Muslims said that 'At this moment I want the [Moslem militia] . . . to go into offices and kill the first seven hundred and thirty defenseless Christians they can lay their hands on'. This corresponds remarkably well to the predictions of prospect theory (Kahneman and Tversky 1995).

¹³ If, however, both sides view revenge as 'two tits for a tat', the process may never reach an equilibrium.

¹⁴ Even this motivation might have an other-related component, however. According to Sheikh Raid Salad, an important leader of Israel's Arab population, the martyr 'receives from Allah six special things, including 70 virgins, no torment in the grave, and the choice of 70 members of his family and his confidants to enter paradise with him' (*Haaretz*, 26 October 2001, cited in <http://ww.likud.nl/extr147.html>). The component of the package that I have italicized is never cited as a motivation of suicide bombers, and so I shall ignore it here.

¹⁵ This standard work is available on-line at <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/>.

¹⁶ A certain amount of casuistry is also needed to justify the killing of Israeli civilians and even of Muslims. One line of argument is that there are no Israeli civilians. Both men and women do military service, and children will grow up into men and women who will do the same. Another line is that the killing of innocents, however defined, is a form of collateral damage. A third claim is that the settlers in occupied territories should be viewed as occupying forces rather than as civilians. These arguments are not only casuistic but disingenuous, since it is obvious to all that the main goal of the suicide attacks is to create fear in the population at large rather than to achieve military objectives. The killing of enemy civilians or soldiers is harnessed to that more general aim. Things were different in the early Hezbollah suicide missions in

Lebanon, which had exclusively military aims. There it was argued that, if the enemy uses Muslims as human shields, it is legitimate to kill them as well, provided that the number of enemies killed exceeds that of Muslim victims (Reuter 2002: 107).

¹⁷ 'The classical [Islamic] jurists distinguish clearly between facing certain death at the hands of the enemy and killing oneself by one's own hand. The one leads to heaven, the other to hell. Some recent fundamentalist jurists and others have blurred or even dismissed this distinction, but their view is by no means unanimously accepted. The suicide bomber is thus taking a considerable risk on a theological nicety' (Lewis 2003: 30).

¹⁸ Note that this takes care of the by-product problem, but not of the ban on suicide. Theologically, you can go wrong in two ways: by choosing illegitimate means (suicide) to a valued end or by transforming the by-products of actions undertaken for the sake of that end into their principal aim.

¹⁹ In any case, claims that suicide bombers are motivated by the seventy or seventy-two virgins in Paradise, or promises of a never-ending erection and orgasms lasting a hundred years (Reuter 2002: 262), strike me as absurd. Although one can see why Israeli propagandists might want to propagate a view of suicide bombers as sex-starved individuals who seek in the afterlife what they cannot find on earth, the image is hard to square with the descriptions offered by those who have talked to volunteers for suicide missions as well as to families of dead bombers (for example, Hassan 2001). The large and increasing number of female suicide bombers should also undermine this legend.

²⁰ If we compare recruitment to suicide missions with conscription into military service, this double injunction is unusual. Whereas China has offered exemption from military service to young men without siblings (who have to take care of their parents) and the United States has exempted fathers (who have to take care of their children), no system known to me does both.

²¹ 'Economic deprivation in and of itself . . . is an insufficient explanation for the emergence of a widespread willingness to die among large parts of the Palestinian population. Not only have these harsh economic conditions existed before the emergence of suicide attacks in Israel, but some of the suicide bombers have come from relatively well-off families' (Moghadam 2003: 76).

²² Referring to various earlier studies (omitted in the bibliography to the present chapter), Khashan (2003: 1055) writes that '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 [sic] 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".'

²³ Along somewhat similar lines it has been argued that among the causes of the US withdrawal from Vietnam was the introduction of the draft lottery that ended the

student deferment that had protected children of elite decision-makers. I do not know of any evidence for this claim, but it might be true.

²⁴ This conclusion is supported by the record of al Qaeda's other activities. Besides the attacks on September 11, 2001, the main suicide attacks organized by al Qaeda have taken place in Nairobi, Mombasa, Dar es Salaam, Karachi, and Riyadh (search under 'Al Qaeda' at http://db.mipt.org/mipt_rand.cfm). Except for the attack on the Israeli-owned and -frequented Paradise Hotel in Mombasa, these all targeted American installations. (The target in the Riyadh attack is ambiguous.)

²⁵ For an analysis of why SMs were used instead of (or together with) other tactics, I refer the reader to Chapter 5, by Kalyvas and Sánchez-Cuenca.

²⁶ Outperforming rivals is, of course, not the only way of achieving a dominant position. Eliminating them is another method. Thus, on the basis of the experience with competing opposition groups in Sri Lanka (Swamy 2001), one might ask whether the different Palestinian organizations have taken to assassinating each other's leaderships. Although there is considerable internecine Palestinian violence (see Ricolfi, Chapter 3), it is not clear how it breaks down into punishment of collaborators with the Israeli forces, moderates within one's own organization, and leaders of rival organizations. As we know from other cases, the lines between the first category and the other two are easily blurred by the use of the idea of 'objective complicity'.

²⁷ Other instances of diffusion of behaviour through mental models include the 1848 revolutions in Europe and the student movements of the 1960s. Mental models should be distinguished both from the domino effect (which explains the breakdown of communism in Eastern Europe) and the common-cause effect (which explains the re-emergence of Communism in many of the same countries). Actual situations may have elements of all three.

²⁸ For a possible link, see nevertheless Reuter (2002): 311–12.

²⁹ One should not of course wait for too long. Reuter (2002: 12) cites the story of a would-be suicide attacker in Shiriya Motzkin, a suburb of Haifa, who showed the explosives strapped to his body so that everybody left, and then killed himself 'in the loneliness of the empty café'.

³⁰ As Biggs writes in Chapter 6, however, Buddhists do not measure the depth of commitment merely by the size of the sacrifice, since 'there is evidence that younger novices were refused permission' to kill themselves, the reason being that they might not have 'attained sufficient wisdom to make a responsible choice'.

³¹ This was, according to Reuter (2002: 110–11), the view at least of the main spiritual mentor of Hezbollah, Sheikh Fadlallah. A radical faction of Hezbollah claimed, however, that even a failed suicide bombing attempt should be counted as a success, since it showed the willingness to sacrifice oneself 'on the altar of resistance' (Reuter 2002: 111).

³² If the source of failure was a malfunctioning bomb, the testimony would be more reliable (Shany Mor, personal communication).

³³ Although the Al-Aqsa brigades (the military branch of Fatah) seem to be relatively independent of the political branch (Human Rights Watch 2002), the opaqueness of the situation does not allow us to exclude the possibility that this could be mere appearance engineered for purposes of deniability. It is a standard tactic of 'moderate leaders' to claim that 'we cannot control our hardliners'.

³⁴ This statement may be less valid for organizers than for attackers. If the organizers base their anticipation of enemy responses on conspiratorial theories rather than on strategic reasoning, their actions might violate the canons of rationality. To take a simple example, it would be pointless to try to drive in a wedge between Israel and the American Jewish community if these are seen as part of a single unified and coherent conspiracy.