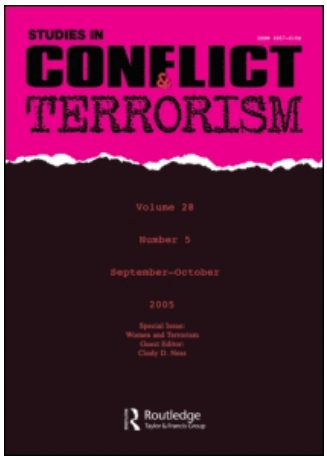
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Palestinian *Istishhadia*: A Developing Instrument

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This article delineates and analyzes the phenomenon of the Palestinian suicide bombing campaign. Two central and distinct periods are proposed in the article in reference to this phenomenon; the first spans from 1993–2000 and the second from 2000 onward. The two periods are differentiated by an increased level of intensity in the second period, an enlarged number of participating organizations and volunteers that occurred following the blockade of the peace process that was initiated through the Oslo Accords. This article examines several aspects of Palestinian suicide terrorism including manners of recruitment, persuasion, modus operandi, and concurrently, it observes the Israeli countermeasures and their ramifications.

Introduction

Over the last thirteen years, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict has produced one of the highest numbers of suicide bombers in comparison with other conflicts around the world. As such, it has served as the subject of many articles and research studies by journalists and academic scholars in Israel and abroad. In Israel, for example, a number of superb books such as *The Seventh War*,[1] *Boomerang*,[2] and *Eyeless in Gaza*[3] have been written by Israeli authors about the "Al Aqsa Intifada" covering within this context some aspects of the phenomenon, and *The Path to the Garden of Eden*[4] which was based on interviews with failed bombers and leaders. International scholars such as Hoffman (2003),[5] Bloom (2005),[6] Hafez (2006),[7] Pedhazur (2006),[8] Moghaddem (2003),[9] Pape (2005)[10] Atran(2006),[11] Nasra Hassan (2001),[12] and many others dedicated their writings to Palestinian suicide bombings, either directly or as part of analyzing the global phenomenon of suicide terrorism. Their contribution has been of great value to the understanding of the roots and development of this phenomenon within the Palestinian community.

This article aims to add its contribution to the ocean of literature written on this topic and is derived from the personal experience of conversing directly with failed suicide bombers and their dispatchers who are imprisoned in Israel.

Correspondingly, this article is the culmination of research that began in 2004 and continued for over two years. The intention of this research was to obtain an in-depth first-hand insight into the individual as well as the organizational aspects of Palestinian

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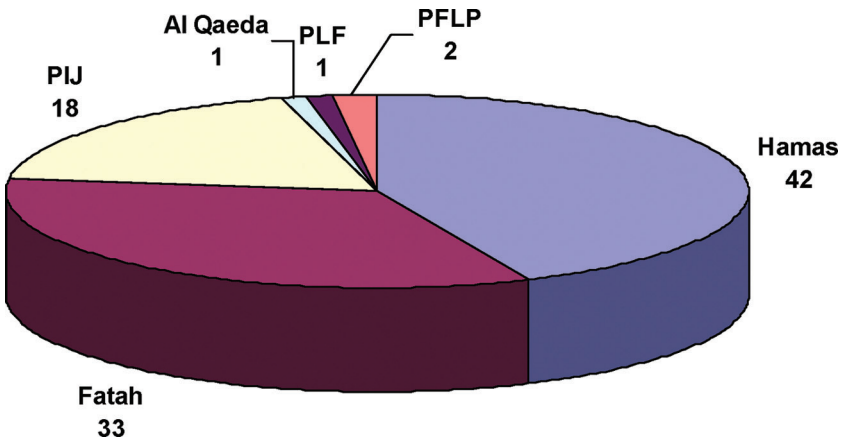


Figure 1. Interviewees by organization.

suicide terrorism (known among the Palestinians as *Amaliyat Istishhadia*, the concept of sacrificing one's life in the path of Allah), during the past 13 years.

The research is based on extensive personal interviews with Palestinians who were directly involved in the perpetration of *Istishhadia*. All interviews were conducted in Israeli jails, with the consent of the prisoners. Some of the interviews were structured and pre-scripted, and others were unscripted, free-flowing conversations. They included detailed and lengthy discussions with the failed suicide bombers, their dispatchers, and many other detained Palestinians who were serving long prison sentences as a result of their involvement in terror activities of various kinds.

During the course of the research, 97 people were formally interviewed (17 females and 80 males). Of these 97, 31 were suicide bombers, 41 were dispatchers, and 25 were "regular" convicted terrorists who served as a control group.

Of the 97 interviewees, 42 were members of Hamas, 33 of Fatah, 18 of Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), 2 of PFLP (Popular Front of liberation of Palestine), 1 of PLF (Palestinian Liberation Front) and 1 of Al Qaeda's affiliates (Figure 1). Approximately one third of the interviewees were under the age of 24 at the time of their involvement in terrorist operations and another third were between the ages of 25 and 35.

Palestinian Suicide Terrorism: Two Distinct Periods (Figure 2)

In principle, suicide terrorism has served terrorists all over the world as a weapon intended to balance, at least to some extent, the inherent asymmetry that exists in the confrontation between a weaker side—terrorist organizations—and a stronger side—the opposing government. This has been true for the Palestinian suicide terror campaign as well.

Yet one cannot consider this campaign a linear and static phenomenon, as it has developed and changed over the years, and can be roughly divided into two main periods. Each period had its unique dynamic, objectives, and characteristics, and each was highly affected by changing political circumstances. The division into two separate periods is important in order to focus more accurately on the roots of suicide terrorism, to indicate the direction of its development, and to examine its circumstances, aims, and achievements. The two phases are:

- April 1993 to March 2000.

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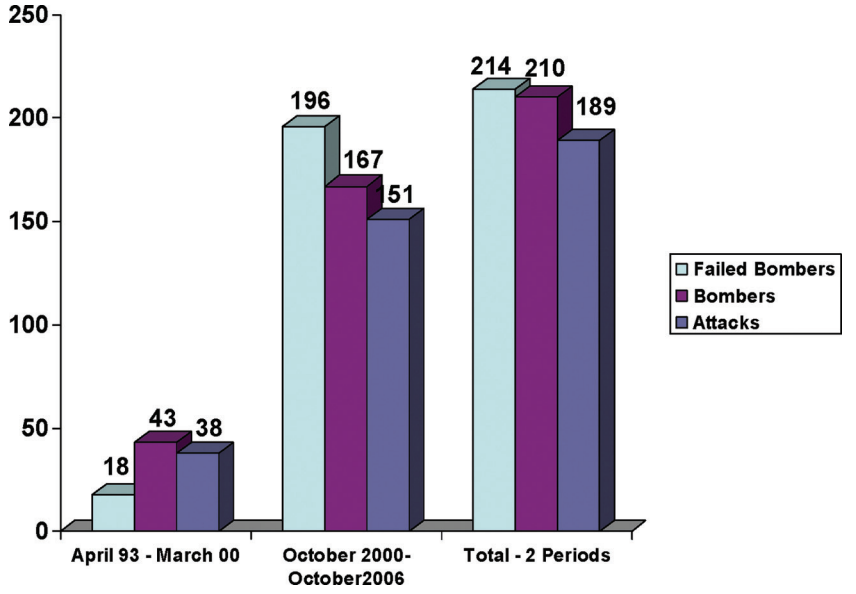


Figure 2. Suicide attacks in the two periods.

- October 2000 to October 2006, often referred to in Israeli parlance as the "Second Intifada" or "Intifadat al-Aqsa." It is imperative to note that the October 2006 date in the second phase is given as the date of the final submission of this article and not as a marker of political conciliation.

All in all, the State of Israel experienced 189 suicide attacks up until October 2006; 38 attacks were carried out in the first period, and the remaining 151 in the second period. These attacks involved more than 189 suicide bombers because in some attacks there was more than one perpetrator. In addition, more than two hundred suicide bombers (*Istishhadis*) were apprehended on their way to carry out an attack or while engaged in preparations toward it, and there were many more who expressed their desire to do so.[13]

At the beginning of the first period, the pattern of *Istishhadia* was one of trial and error. Initially, there were individual operatives who worked underground to carry out suicide attacks, later perfecting their procedures. In the second period, however, the terrorists relied on the precedents that had been set, and the scope of technical knowledge disseminated by veteran terrorists in preparing demolition charges grew by leaps and bounds. The number of organizations involved in dispatching *Istishhadis* also grew, as did the number of people involved in terrorist attacks. The volunteers offering themselves for *Istishhadia* increased mainly for emotional reasons: hate, anger, despair, and lack of hope among widening circles of the Palestinian rank and file.

The major differences between the two periods can be summarized as follows:

- Quantitative differences in the number of "*successful*" *Istishhadis*— growth by a factor of almost four.
- Growth in the number of participating organizations. Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) were active in the first period, and in the second were joined by additional factions, including various arms of Fatah, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and *ad hoc* networks.

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- Involvement of women and children in the second period.
- More extensive popular Palestinian support of *Istishhadia* in the second period than in the first, when it was still perceived by the majority of Palestinians as a potential obstacle to political or diplomatic progress.

The Palestinian Perception of *Istishhadia*

It is important to understand the Palestinian concept of *Istishhadia* ("self-sacrifice in the path of God"), as opposed to the parallel Western term, suicide bombings. The common accepted definition in the West limits the label of suicide bombers to those who use explosives charges that are transported by a motorized vehicle (such as a car, truck, motorbike, boat, plane, etc.), or by a non-motorized method (on the body of the perpetrator), and where detonation of the explosives guarantees the death of the attacker.

However, *Istishhadis* themselves, as well as their dispatchers and supporters, adopt a broader definition, which has direct ramifications for the extent of this phenomenon. In the Palestinian worldview, anyone who attempts an armed attack on Israelis is an *Istishhadi*, or martyr, provided he or she is resolved to die in the attempt. This is especially true for those among them who make some or all of the typical preparations for death—such as purification, paying back loans, preparing a personal will, or taping an organizational will—as many *Istishhadis* have done. They consider this somber preparation itself to be self-sacrifice in the path of God (*Amalia Istishhadia fi sabil Allah*), and identical in spiritual effect to the use of explosives. There is little chance of an *Istishhadi* surviving a small arms attack when undertaking a mission in this state of mind.[14]

Thus, the Palestinian rank and file and their dispatchers, as well as the terrorist organizations, do not make the Western distinction between types of suicide attacks. Sometimes the decision to operate with small arms rather than an explosive charge was due only to a shortage of explosives, or a technological glitch, or an operational problem in obtaining a vehicle (when that method was preferred), or sometimes even the preference of the attacker himself.[15]

The extent of *Istishhadia*, therefore, is much greater numerically when one combines firearms attacks with those involving explosive devices. If one ignores the view of suicide attacks displayed by Palestinian terrorist organizations and their supporters, one greatly underestimates the true scope of the phenomenon, particularly in the second period under discussion.

The Growth and Development of Palestinian Suicide Attacks

In practice, the *Istishhadia* model is rooted in the significant inferiority of Palestinian military strength compared to that of Israel. According to the interviewees, because the Israelis suffered far fewer losses than the Palestinians in the first Intifada, when the Palestinians mostly used stones as weapons, Palestinian Islamic organizations began planning a transition to the use of light arms.[16] With organizational backing and the initiative of field operators, the Palestinians attempted to prove their ability to inflict heavy losses on Israel despite their inferior capabilities. Suicide bombing was selected as the most appropriate method, as it is financially cheap, precise, and has an immensely deadly effect.[17]

The use of suicide bombing led to the creation of new myths. The attackers were transformed into heroes, and the terrorist organizations were perceived as immensely powerful. The bombers expressed the desire to retaliate inside the borders of Israel. They

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also viewed these actions as compensation for the humiliation and powerlessness felt by Palestinians, and for their perception of ongoing victimization. Soon Palestinians learned that the power of *Istishhadia* went far beyond the death and destruction it caused, because it had an enormous psychological effect not only in Israel, but beyond the national borders.

These kinds of terrorist attacks are, by their very nature, "media prone." Their perpetrators wanted to achieve international coverage and to convey the hardships of the Palestinian nation, alongside the bravery and devotion of its warriors, while making sure this would remain on the international agenda. The horrifying pictures of carnage wreaked by terrorist attacks were meant to highlight Palestinian aspirations for independence and political sovereignty. The Palestinians attempted to demonstrate the price that would be exacted on Israel and the entire Middle East in the event of a continued Israeli occupation: the lack of personal and political security, and the undermining of regional stability.

In addition to examining the principal methods common to both periods, it is important to examine the motives that led individuals and organizations to choose these methods. Despite similarities, the motives are not identical. They are influenced by the different circumstances of each period, as well as by different social situations and political changes that were evident over time in the Palestinian and Israeli milieu.

The First Period: April 1993–March 2000

The Palestinian suicide bombing campaign had its roots in trial and error. The initiators of the attacks opposed the political process, and the attacks undoubtedly led to an erosion of Palestinian belief in political solutions. This was because the success and deadly effectiveness of *Istishhadia* led to a gradual escalation in Israeli reprisals, causing the Palestinians as a whole to lose faith in achieving the hoped-for fruits of the political process. *Istishhadia* as a tactic was adopted and perfected, and quickly became the preferred mode of action, because it inflicted maximum Israeli losses with relatively minimal effort. *Istishhadia* thus evolved into a tool that symbolized the strength and zeal of Palestinian resistance to strike at and damage a much stronger adversary.

The Hamas organization had long called for "armed resistance" against Israel and was the first to adopt the concept of *Istishhadia* as a weapon. (The name Hamas is an acronym for Harakat Al-Muquwama Al-Islamiyya, the Islamic Resistance Movement). Its leaders considered that the Intifada of stones and Molotov cocktails did not produce the desired changes; it was also inefficient, especially in view of the large number of Palestinian casualties compared to the small number of Israelis. Hamas eventually decided to change the "popular peaceful resistance," or Intifada, as they perceived it, into an "armed resistance" (*mukawama musalakha*). This was designed to kill more Israelis, in order to create a greater symmetry of casualties and to demonstrate the group's ability to inflict pain and destruction on its enemy.

In 1992, Hamas members attempted to carry out sporadic terrorist attacks with light arms and to abduct Israeli soldiers. As a result, some four hundred organizational leaders were arrested and exiled to Lebanon. This created a void in the ranks that was filled by mid-level Hamas field operatives, who continued the tactics of an armed struggle. In the cities of the West Bank and Gaza, active terror cells arose and began to carry out armed attacks. The Israelis consequently labeled them as wanted criminals. Their fate was either to face arrest by Israeli troops or to die as *shahid*s (martyrs). The result was the formation of a fertile base of volunteers who preferred to forfeit their lives rather than be struck

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down by the "Zionist enemy." Among them was the notorious Yihye Ayyash, a self-taught expert on explosives and sabotage, who became known as the first Hamas "Engineer." His network was responsible for the first wave of suicide attacks. It was he who taught other operatives how to manufacture demolition charges, and armed Hamas cells sometimes called themselves Students of Ayyash or Students of the Engineer.

An abortive Hamas terrorist attack in Ramat Efal (February 1992), a suburb east of Tel Aviv in central Israel, was a turning point. The booby-trapped car, primed to explode, was found, but the accessories to the bombing escaped. The Hamas network learned its lesson and perfected its modus operandi. Its leaders now decided to leave one of the perpetrators in the booby-trapped car, to ensure the successful activation of explosives.

The movement's first successful suicide attack, in the village of Mehola (April 1993),[18] was perpetrated by Saher, the son of a wealthy candy merchant from Nablus, who had taken part in the failed attack in Ramat Efal. He had become a wanted fugitive for the murder of two settlers, whom he had run over with a car as an act of vengeance in response to an armed clash in the disputed territories. Knowing he was on the Israeli "wanted" list, Saher expected to be either arrested or killed, so he volunteered instead to drive a car laden with explosives into a roadside fast-food bar.

Suicide attacks in the first period thus developed in stages, one after another, in a chain of extreme violence. Circumstances interacted with objectives and processes that took place in the field, forming a critical mass and gradually evolving into a phenomenon. Yihye Ayyash and his network had both the initiative and ability to execute suicide attacks in Israel.[19] The first unimpressive attempts could not anticipate what *Istishhadia* eventually became. Only in retrospect can one conclude that *Istishhadia* became a Palestinian strategy, purpose, and religiously sanctioned destiny as a result of its effectiveness and potency.

In February 1994, a Jewish resident of Hebron carried out a massacre of Muslim worshippers in the mosque in the Tomb of the Patriarchs, killing 29 people. This set off a wave of suicide attacks aimed at Israeli cities. Hamas, in the vanguard of Palestinian suicide bombings, followed by the PIJ, decided on vengeance. The method, which had been limited at first to the disputed territories, now entered Israel proper. A new cycle of terrorism began, with dramatic proof of the power and impact of suicide attacks. Eight Israelis were murdered in a suicide attack in the town of Afula (April 1994), which was followed by a wave of murderous attacks that sent shock waves throughout Israel and the international community. It demonstrated the potential of suicide attacks to express the intensity of Palestinian outrage and to cause an unprecedented slaughter of Israelis, with minimal damage to the perpetrating side. This primal blow left the Israeli public reeling, and led to the gradual consolidation of the *Istishhadia* ethos as an effective resistance tool that was henceforth adopted by Palestinians as an appropriate and worthy means of achieving their ends.

Suicide bombings created an action–reprisal dynamic between Israel and the Hamas and PIJ. Once it was clear to Israel that the Palestinian Authority (PA) would not effectively prevent suicide attacks, the members of these organizations were branded by the Israeli government as wanted terrorists and slated for arrest or elimination. Their targeted killing by Israel led to acts of vengeance by the two Palestinian terror organizations, and the whole cycle was repeated. In January 1996, Yihye Ayyash was killed by Israel. Ayash's supporters organized a cluster of suicide attacks to extract vengeance: two terrorist attacks within a week (February–March 1996) on bus line number 18 in Jerusalem, a Hamas attack in Ashkelon, and a PIJ attack in Tel Aviv's busy Dizengoff Center had an enormous effect on the Israeli public, and were even deemed to have contributed to the change of government

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in the national elections in May that year, when the right-wing Binyamin Netanyahu was narrowly voted in.

It is true that Hamas members who were interviewed reject the term "vengeance," saying that it devalues *Istishhadia* to attribute it to a cold-blooded strategy with a hint of emotion. But in practice—and the February–March 1996 attacks are a salient example—it was quite clear that many suicide attacks were planned in advance, awaited implementation at an appropriate opportunity, and could be rapidly executed to avenge the death of leaders.[20]

The suicide campaign in 1996 was a watershed in the development of the phenomenon in the first period. Scores of deaths in terrorist attacks created a powerful aura of threat and danger in Israel. The resulting physical and psychological damage, and the capabilities of the operatives in carrying out the attacks, served to raise the prestige of *Istishhadia* in the eyes of Palestinian sympathizers, and to increase the horror it created in the mind of the Israeli public.

The growth in suicide attacks, however, was not only a reaction to events that took place vis-à-vis Israel. The aspirations of *Istishhadis* were highly shaped by a desire to prove to the local rank and file that armed resistance was the only possible strategy to achieve Palestinian interests. The setting up of the PA administration in early 1994, with the group of "foreigners" who came from Tunis headed by Yasir Arafat, had initiated a new spirit of reconciliation with the Israeli enemy, and had raised hopes for improvement in living conditions and for political momentum towards independence. Eventually, the corrupt and self-serving behavior of the Fatah regime brought them into disrepute and aroused protest against them. The pendulum swung in the opposite direction, toward violence as a more appealing alternative that would, at least, compensate Palestinians for their sense of humiliation and political dead end.[21]

The clash between the Hamas/PIJ organizations and Israel was thus the background to intra-Palestinian tension between the local inhabitants (including many within Fatah) and the PA leadership from abroad.[22] The conflict between the two strategies—armed struggle versus political diplomacy—was also a battle for the hearts and minds of Palestinians and for political support. The *Istishhadia* campaign became a challenge to the PA's authority, and its leaders contended that it offered a forceful and effective alternative to the unproductive political strategies of Arafat and his entourage.

The Hamas and PIJ leaders demanded a slice of the action in running the government. Fatah's "foreign" leadership alienated local residents and leaders, who felt victimized and deprived of their proper status in Palestinian society. They adopted *Istishhadia* as their only means of influencing the Palestinian political arena and attracting international attention. These attacks also had a great impact on the Israeli community, on its methods of responding to terror and its policies in dealing with the PA. Ultimately, *Istishhadia* severely undermined the credibility of Israeli–Palestinian relations and led to the confrontation of September 2000, which ignited the Second Intifada.

The Hamas and PIJ interviewees reject the view that the original objective of *Istishhadia* was to thwart the Oslo process; they said that "they [the attacks] were carried out *despite* Oslo and not *because of* Oslo."[23] However, they admitted that they vehemently opposed the concepts behind the Oslo process because they did not believe that this type of negotiation would achieve the interests of the Palestinian nation. In fact they perceived it as treason.[24]

At the height of the suicide campaign, in the first period, members of both Hamas and PIJ found themselves pursued by Israel as well as by the PA, especially in the late 1990 s. The arrest of wanted terrorists by the PA, as a result of demands from Israel, the United States, and the European Union as part of the pressure that built up in the wake of the 1996 attacks, damaged Hamas's infrastructure and its ability to carry out further

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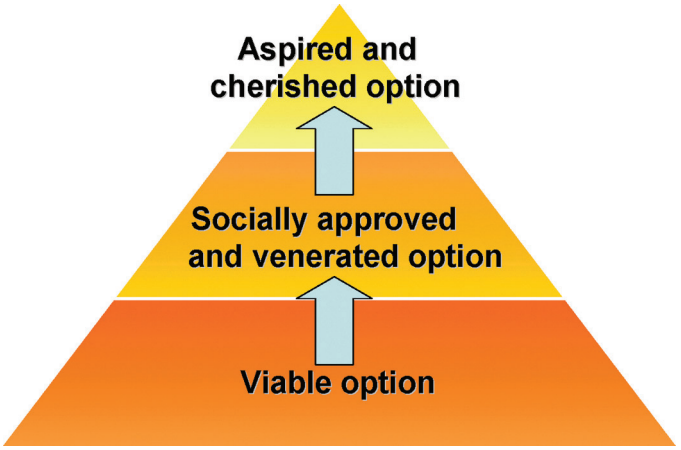


Figure 3. The Palestinian subculture of suicide terrorism—2nd phase.

attacks. However, the political damage had already been done and the "Oslo spirit" was eroded on both sides. The Palestinians claimed that Israel did not carry out its part of the agreement, and there was a sharp drop in the Palestinian "hope index," indicating that the Palestinians no longer believed the process would lead to political independence and economic improvement.

On the other side of the coin, many among the Israeli public despaired of the Oslo process because of the harsh terrorist attacks, and support for peace policies faltered. It became clear that the *Istishhadia* strategy had a substantial impact on the ability—or rather, inability—to implement strategic processes toward peaceful political settlement. Although the attacks temporarily declined from late 1996 into 2000, the lull was illusory, and the now proven methods were ready for even more intensive use by Palestinians in the next confrontation.

The Second Period: October 2000–October 2006 (Figure 3)

The precedent of the first period presented the Palestinian terror groups with an available, familiar, and effective tool for dealing with Israel's military superiority. The failure of a political–diplomatic strategy led to renewed violent confrontation, a renewed, aggressive propaganda campaign, and highly intensified use of *Istishhadia* as a weapon.

Suicide terrorism did not begin in 2000, but was adopted gradually, synchronized to the pace of events and progressively increased. The PIJ unleashed the initial wave of attacks, with Hamas soon entering the picture. In early 2001, Hamas increased the number of suicide attacks and their destructiveness. The existing ideological and practical infrastructure for *Istishhadia* had only to be set in motion again. The difference was that while in the first period these attacks received only limited support among Palestinians, they were now viewed as the central mode of action by widening circles of supporters. This was due to despair at the political deadlock and a reaction to what was perceived as growing Israeli brutality, as well as the acknowledgement of the effectiveness of this modus operandi.

Istishhadia thus became for many Palestinians, during the second period, initially a viable option, then a socially venerated option, and finally, an option that was actively aspired to by a growing number of individuals. Eventually, *Istishhadia* became a social

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ethos that was adopted as a potent political symbol of resistance by large sections of the Palestinian public.

The attack–reprisal cycle led to the acceleration of suicide attacks on two levels:

- The pool of potential *Istishhadis* grew significantly, in line with the rising number of Palestinians who wished to retaliate against Israel. Their ranks expanded in response to an unfolding cycle of events: The PA did not fully cooperate with Israel to prevent terror in general and suicide attacks in particular. Israel therefore increased its targeted killings, causing a large number of casualties among the Palestinians. This, in turn, provided fertile ground for recruitment of new *Istishhadis* who sought to avenge these deaths.
- The wanted terrorists understood that they had nothing to lose, because they were likely to be killed by Israel. This increased their motivation to sacrifice themselves in the process of killing as many Israelis as possible through *Istishhadia* operations.

As a result of targeted killings and the arrests, the organizations made structural and personnel adjustments. They carried out their attacks via regional networks and local cells, and when members of these local units were arrested or eliminated, the new ones entering the fray were highly motivated to avenge the death of their comrades and create as much mayhem as possible.

Thus, in the beginning of the second period, Hamas carried out a series of attacks in retaliation for the killing of Fawaz Badran, another explosives expert, who had independently initiated the suicide attack in the Netanya Mall (January 2001), in which 35 people were wounded. The Netanya attack was planned by Badran as his "entrance ticket" to Hamas,[25] and was the first of several such attacks in the ensuing months that took a large toll of Israeli lives.

The elimination of Badran led Abbas al-Sayed, the Hamas spokesman who was also the military commander of the organization's network in the West Bank town of Tul Karem, to announce that Hamas would carry out ten revenge suicide attacks. Al Sayed himself later masterminded a series of suicide attacks, including the infamous bombing at Netanya's Park Hotel (27 March 2002), which took the lives of 30 elderly Israelis and led Israel to initiate Operation Defensive Shield, reoccupying the major Palestinian cities. The series of "promised" suicide bombings—all of which were ultimately carried out—included the Dolphinarium discotheque in Tel Aviv (21 killed), the Sbarro pizza restaurant in the heart of Jerusalem (15 killed), and others. These attacks accelerated the deterioration between the two sides.

As Palestinian public support for *Istishhadia* grew, the number of volunteers for the missions increased exponentially. During the first period and at the beginning of the second, the organizations had to expend efforts to recruit operatives. As time went on, there was such an assortment of volunteers that the terror networks could pick and choose the most appropriate candidates. In many cases, it appeared that the *Istishhadis* themselves had "recruited" their dispatchers, instead of the reverse. The easy availability of volunteers turned the method into an extremely "cheap" and accessible instrument.[26]

During the second period, the lines that distinguished the various organizations—Hamas, the PIJ, Fatah, and the PFLP—became blurred. Palestinian society as a whole cultivated the suicide ethos as a weapon of defiance and as its principal tool against the Israeli occupation, whereas it had previously been an option only for solitary members of the Hamas and the PIJ. Now, deep into the second period, the suicide subculture became firmly entrenched (Figure 4).

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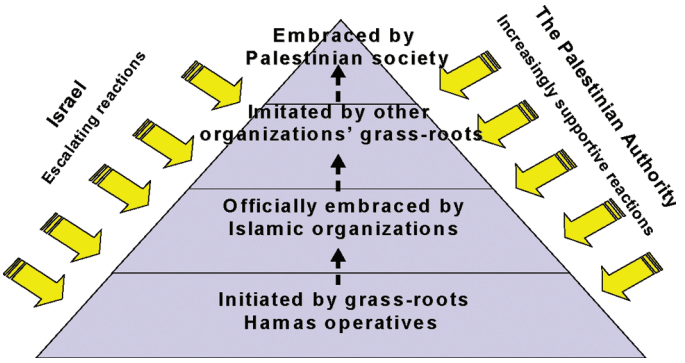


Figure 4. The Palestinian subculture of *Istishhadia*.

At times, it seemed that *Istishhadia* served mainly as a retaliatory weapon rather than furthering any clear strategic or political objective. This became particularly evident when Fatah itself began to dispatch *Istishhadis* at the beginning of 2002, in retaliation for the elimination of Riyad Karmi. Karmi was a Fatah activist who operated terror cells at the same time as serving in the PA's security apparatus, and, as a result he was targeted by Israel. From this time on, suicide bombing became an integral part of Fatah network operations and opened a new round of bloodshed endorsed by the largest Palestinian organization—and the one in government.[27]

In addition to the social and cultural factors that reinforced the strategic rationales of the suicide bombing campaign in the second period, the Palestinians had a strong desire for a miraculous instrument to balance their profound asymmetry in the conflict. "We wanted Israel to pay part of the price of the occupation, and not only enjoy the profits."[28] The violent method they chose was intended to prove to the world that the Palestinian problem must be solved. The regional instability seeped outward, arousing general public interest in the Islamic world and causing it to step up its support for the Palestinian struggle. The price, of course, was that after 9/11 international public opinion began to identify Palestinian terror with worldwide Islamic terror.

Environmental Factors: Political, Social, and Cultural (Figure 5)

The act of suicide terrorism is both a personal and a group process, and must be examined in light of both factors. It is, primarily, a personal decision in which the individual undergoes a profound and complex emotional process, leading to the decision to end his life in the name of an expressed altruistic cause, usually articulated in ideological, national, and religious themes. Even if another rationale lies behind the decision, it often remains concealed or latent.

Concurrently, the realization of a personal decision to conduct a suicide attack necessitates organizational backing. An organizational system binds itself to the potential perpetrator's personal development; it maintains and even strengthens the commitment to the act, in order to make sure the volunteer 'will not change his mind until the mission is accomplished. The organization is the producer and choreographer of the suicide attack.

Analysis of the individual's motives to carry out such an extreme act requires examination of a number of variables that interrelate and influence the decision. These include:

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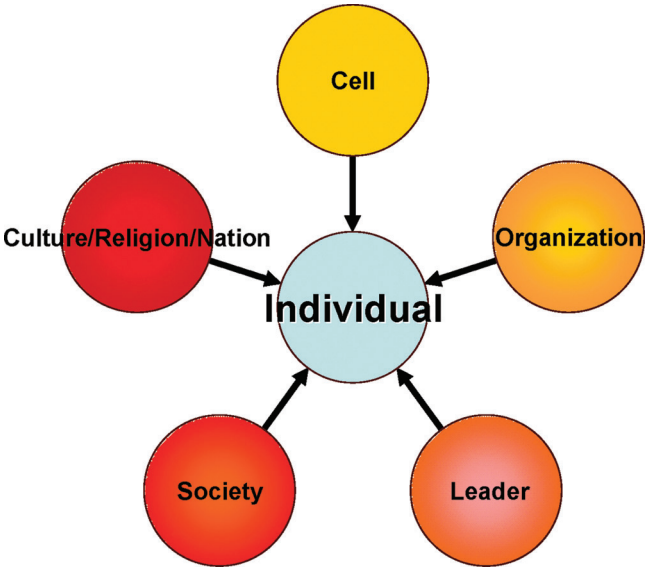


Figure 5. Forces influencing an individual to become a suicide bomber.

- The personality of the individual contemplating sacrificing himself;
- A direct or indirect traumatic defining event experienced by the *Istishhadi*[29];
- The *Istishhadi*'s connections to a close friend or to colleagues in the terror cell to which he belongs;
- The *Istishhadi's* affinity to the organization.

It is important to emphasize that these components are not equally involved in each operation, and their degree of influence may vary. There are cases when the perpetrator volunteers for a mission and is relatively unconcerned about which particular organization "adopts" him.

However, research shows that in Palestinian society the influence of close friends or relatives is very great, and members of a kin or friendship network often ask to operate together in cells of two or three.[30]

Thus, for example, a senior dispatcher in Fatah revealed that "some approach us as a 'unit' with a prior decision that they want to operate together and refuse to do so separately."[31] A Hamas *Istishhadi* candidate said that he was motivated to act by his cousin, who was also his best friend and the object of his admiration. He said that "if he had not convinced me, I most likely would have acted on behalf of my nation but not in an act of *Istishhadia*."[32] Someone else said, "I knew that I was ready to do everything for my closest friend because I loved him dearly. He succeeded in convincing me. I believed everything he said because he was my role model."[33]

This tendency was also found among women who were dispatched for *Istishhadia* in the second period, as the female recruiter influenced her close friends: "At a certain stage I turned to the organization and said that I wanted to recruit women for *Istishhadia*. I told my closest friend who also belonged to the organization and she decided to volunteer. I felt that I was doing her a favor by sending her into action."[34]

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Unlike Tamil suicide bombers in Sri Lanka, or the Kurds in Turkey, the senior leadership of the Palestinian organizations had only limited influence in mobilizing individuals to carry out such acts.

As for the dispatching organizations, they must be examined mainly against the political context within which they operated. Indeed, their decision to use the specific instrument of *Istishhadia* rests on history, tradition, heritage, and religion.[35] In the final analysis, however, the organizations are most affected by political constraints and circumstances. In the first period, Hamas and the PIJ employed suicide attacks primarily to demonstrate their commitment to armed resistance as a preferred, more efficient strategy over the Fatah path of political diplomacy; they also sought to protest certain policies and to take revenge against Israel.[36] When the PA entered into negotiations with Israel in 1993, it touted the political process as the major route to achieving Palestinian objectives, while the two opposition organizations flaunted armed resistance (*mukawama*) as their sole option. *Istishhadia* became the major instrument of choice to convey their message.

In the second period, *Istishhadia* escalated as Palestinian despair mounted over the failure of the political process and Israel's arrest or elimination of top-level terrorist operatives. The opposition of many Palestinians to the PA's policy toward the Israeli enemy, as well as their dissatisfaction with the "foreigners" who had been forced on them from above, contributed to the embracing of suicide attacks by the Palestinian public. As one operative explained:

> The Palestinian Authority was perceived as being unable to protect the Palestinian citizen, as lacking authority and content, as being a failed entity. The only other organizations that could bestow a feeling of belonging and security on the Palestinian individual were the terrorist organizations. Since the individual Palestinian felt that his family and clan were also unable to protect him, he felt that his life was not worth living. Death was equivalent to life, as life was a living death.[37]

Many individuals hastened to become *Istishhadi* candidates out of a personal sense of helplessness, and to take vengeance on those who had harmed them and their nation. The daily exposure to national and sometimes personal humiliation, perpetual risk to their own lives, and pervasive death around them often led to the feeling that they had nothing to lose. Frequently, all these factors fused together to form personal motivation for *Istishhadia*. This was expressed by one Palestinian who researched the phenomenon among jailed failed bombers:

> When a person lives a dog's life, it is better to die a holy death to avenge one's personal, and also national, humiliation and degradation. Most of the Istishhadis do not look for political advantage and do not care what will happen after their deaths; they simply want to inflict pain on the occupiers—the Israelis. When these feelings arose, the individual looked for means to carry out *Istishhadia* and achieve social acceptance. The means were supplied by the organizations. Cognitive justification for the decision was given social legitimacy, and support was provided by the dispatching cell. Therefore, *Istishhadia* did not appear to be an act of personal despair. Religious terminology and belief provided the divine explanation and rewards. Religious concepts are well-known to the public, and they have become commonly used. Thus the religious dimension received strong backing in the Palestinian struggle.

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> Young people who see their relatives and friends become weak [and helpless], are more vulnerable to their influence and are [psychologically] wounded in a profound way. The young Palestinian who decides to carry out *Istishhadia* on the basis of personal negative experiences in the national struggle often uses theological argumentation. Explanations about the death of the holy [martyr] is the type of necessary 'balance' needed to take him out of the cognitive dissonance in which he finds himself. The young Palestinian realizes that he cannot vanquish an enemy that is stronger than he. Therefore he makes do with a modest national objective: to hurt the enemy. The theological explanation gives him not only emotional peace but also social prestige. The end result is that the young Palestinian who decides to carry out *Istishhadia* is an *egotist* in his decision, and an *altruist* in his justification. The *Istishhadi* is a fatalist: because he cannot change anything in his life, he prefers death over life.[38]

Social support is important to the individual *Istishhadi*, although it derives more from his or her immediate surroundings than from society in general. In the first period, the *Istishhadis* were satisfied with the encouragement of the close circle that backed their organization and the cohesive cell to which they belonged.[39] These were their supports even in the days when the majority of Palestinians dissociated themselves from *Istishhadia*.[40] *Istishhadis* in the second period did not face this dilemma, and enjoyed widespread support. *Istishhadia* became a subculture within the Palestinian rank and file.

The strategy of self-sacrifice "in the path of God" (*fi sabil Allah*) for an altruistic goal is well grounded in traditional exegesis of the Quran. The social-traditional background of the Palestinians endowed the person who resisted occupation with the *fidai* halo. A *fidai* warrior is a national hero who is prepared to sacrifice himself defending the nation and the honor of society.[41] These traditions facilitated the acceptance of *Istishhadia* within its time-frame and political context. They also created the environment for organizational terrorist acts. The organizations created, cultivated, and strengthened an ethos of self-sacrifice through the cult of the *shahids*, and used this to fortify the resolve of *Istishhadi* candidates.[42] The subculture of self-sacrifice was fostered by the media and in rituals and ceremonies that glorified individual *Istishhadis* and their actions.

The research indicates that the organizations were also, in practical terms, subject to prevailing local constraints. Sometimes their decisions were fueled by emotion and the desire for revenge; sometimes they played the game of organizational competition and prestige.[43] Ultimately, however, the organizations had to adhere to realistic dictates and to considerations of organizational survival. A prominent example is their decision to accept the unilateral *de facto* cease-fire, the *tahadiya* of March 2005, because they hoped to gain political advantage. Indeed, this objective was achieved by Hamas.[44]

Groups and Organizations Promoting Suicide Bombings

The first organization to carry out *Istishhadia* was Hamas. Hamas paved the way and was the most dominant and effective of all the organizations that adopted *Istishhadia*. In the first period, Hamas was joined by the PIJ. The two organizations shared a national–religious perspective that denied Israel's right to exist and aspired to establish Islamic religious law throughout "Palestine." *Istishhadia* was consistent with this worldview, which promoted the use of armed resistance by all possible means, including self-sacrifice. The PIJ, however,

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lacked the social and organizational infrastructure of Hamas and was therefore smaller, had a narrower support base, and wielded less influence.

Hamas and the PIJ together dispatched about eight *Istishhadis* even before the Oslo Agreement was signed and the PA arrived on the scene. Their sporadic acts of *Istishhadia* were based on trial and error; they used small amounts of explosives and were not very effective. They mainly expressed the desire to escalate the struggle and to demonstrate opposition. At the time, both organizations were on the margins of Palestinian political life. For many years, they were overshadowed by the PLO under the leadership of Arafat and his Fatah organization, and their views were not taken into account. When the PA took over control of sections of the West Bank and Gaza in 1994 under the Oslo Agreement, the opposition organizations employed *Istishhadia* to express their armed opposition to what they called "capitulation to Israeli dictates and acceptance of Israel's existence."

Other events that accelerated the dispatch of *Istishhadis* were the massacre of 29 Arabs by a Jewish settler in a Hebron mosque (February 1994), and Israel's arrests and targeted killings of high-ranking Hamas and PIJ *Istishhadi* operatives. These events escalated the confrontation between Israel and the Islamic opposition organizations, and led to mounting strife between Israel and the PA. *Istishhadia*, which started as an attempt to ratchet up the military activity of the organizations, to redress the asymmetry in the casualty equation, and to express the *mukawama* (resistance) ethos, turned into a primary instrument of revenge, destruction, and terrorization directed against Israeli citizens. The result, intentional or not, was disruption of the Oslo process, leading to a bloodbath in which *Istishhadis* played a central role.

In the second period, from October 2000, the process of disintegration of the PA mandate went into high gear. As violence between Israel and the Palestinians increased, Hamas and the PIJ continued to dispatch *Istishhadis*, and were gradually joined by Fatah, PFLP, and other organizations. Despite the fact that *Istishhadi* candidates did not particularly care which group sent them, the organizations competed among themselves to enhance their prestige by recruiting into their ranks almost all available volunteers (as long as these seemed intent on carrying out their mission). In the second period, Hamas continued to be more meticulous in its selection of volunteers, but even it enlarged its ranks and recruited *Istishhadis* from among the *Dawa* (Muslims who exhort other Muslims to deeper commitment to Islam, and who are influential in daily religious life), students in Islamic colleges and universities, and high school pupils.

Hamas was relatively more organized than the other organizations in its operations and was guided by a strategic objective. The PIJ and Fatah dispatched their attackers in accordance with their operative abilities, but with no guiding strategy beyond the desire to cause as many casualties as possible. As one of the main PIJ *Istishhadi* dispatchers admitted:

> We made a mistake in that we operated in a disorganized fashion without a set objective, beyond the [general] struggle against the occupation, and therefore we were not successful in evicting Israel from the West Bank in the first stage. If we would have operated in a strategically coordinated fashion and would have focused on striking at soldiers and settlers in the disputed territories, we could have caused the end of the occupation on the West Bank, in the first stage.[45]

A Fatah operative who commanded a cell that dispatched four *Istishhadis* (including two women) also admitted that "we had no strategy. It's impossible to operate without a

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plan and a political objective. Extreme violence must have an objective, and an appropriate time schedule for a specific operation and for halting the operation if there is a chance for political process."[46]

Another Fatah operative explained: "Our [terrorist] operations in general, and *Istishhadia* specifically, were expressions of organized anarchy. Our organization was purely tactical—connecting a bomber with a dispatcher and with a Kalashnikov or a demolition charge." This operative was an assistant to Marwan Barghouti (the influential Fatah leader and Tanzim commander currently imprisoned in Israel) and was involved in terror operations and the dispatching of *Istishhadis*, particularly those without explosive belts, who carried light arms.[47]

Thus it can be said that the objectives of the suicide campaign in the second period were retaliatory and vindictive, especially on the part of the field operatives. The strategy of the organizational commanders was to force Israel to change its policies. When this did not happen, they continued their attacks as a wave of action–reprisals, until circumstances allowed the Palestinians to accept a temporary de facto ceasefire or *tahadiya*.

Planning and Management of Suicide Bombings

The planning of *Istishhadia* was often shaped by constraints and circumstances in the field. The organizations acted underground and in secrecy, via networks and terror cells, because of Israel's policy of arrests and targeted killing—sometimes with the assistance of the PA, which opposed the independent policies of Hamas and the PIJ. The more pressure that was applied by Israel on the terrorist organizations, and at times in the first period also by the PA, the more these organizations functioned within secret cells and networks that were often autonomous.

In the first period, when only Hamas and the PIJ dispatched suicide bombers, they chose their targets carefully, and the network and cell leaders guided the perpetrators to their destinations. The attractiveness of the destinations was determined by the relative ease of reaching them and by their potential for producing as many fatalities as possible. When attacks were organized to avenge Israel's elimination of terror network heads, the targets, in 1995 and 1996, were bustling civilian areas such as Jerusalem's Central Bus Station and buses (by Hamas) and Tel Aviv's Dizengoff Street (by the PIJ and Hamas). In the second period as well, crowded targets were deliberately sought. Some targets such as buses, shopping centers, restaurants, and clubs were determined in advance and specifically marked out, while in other cases the perpetrators themselves chose particular targets.

In the second period, especially in its initial stage, Hamas continued to maintain its relatively organized administrative hierarchy compared to other organizations, especially among the young generation of commanders who remained outside prison. The various Hamas networks maintained contact and coordination, despite the fact that they operated independently, while also keeping contact with organizational command abroad (in Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon). An infamous example of coordination between the networks was the series of ten suicide operations carried out by Hamas in retaliation for the killing of one of its demolition experts.[48]

As Israeli pressure mounted and many commanders were arrested or killed, the operations became more decentralized under the control of regional leaders. When these leaders were arrested, they were replaced by others, these, in turn, activated cell leaders who had, for the most part, the means and connections needed to continue organizing attacks.[49] Some of the cells were only partially guided; they chose their goals according

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to their understanding of the general directives and the best means of carrying them out. For example, a cell leader responsible for a large number of operations including suicide attacks, said, "They asked me to look for targets for possible attacks, like restaurants, for instance. They gave me written instructions about their preferences and about easy targets, and they told me to look for a new target or a unique attack."[50] In regard to a devastating café bombing in Jerusalem, he explained:

> They asked us to locate a target for the attack and a time when we were willing to pull it off. I went around and located the Moment Café. There were also people who gave me tips about possible places. Our preference was central Jerusalem, because the army and security service were always claiming that central Jerusalem was an area that no terrorist could enter, and we wanted to prove to them that we could get into any place.[51]

From the beginning of the second period, the PIJ, as opposed to Hamas, acted on the initiative of the field operatives, who had prepared themselves before the outbreak of the Second Intifada. The operations were centered in the West Bank city of Jenin. The group began to dispatch *Istishhadis* on its own initiative. As the conflict with Israel grew more heated and several of its leaders were killed, new members joined. Their actions were directed by a number of regional terror networks, whose coordination was based on the mutual acquaintance and trust of their leaders.

These PIJ networks were characterized by a large degree of independence. "I made the decisions myself, according to my own judgment, and if I needed assistance, I had a connection with the organization," explained one leader. "They knew they could depend on me. I prepared everything—the explosive belts, sending out people to recruit the *Istishhadis* for me, and I would check them before they went out and decide who would go and who wouldn't. It's not as hard as it seems."[52]

The leaders, however, were strict about partitioning the membership to protect identities in case of arrest, so that only a few were acquainted with most of their fellow members. Accessories were used to recruit *Istishhadis* and collect information about targets, and chose their own targets and dates of attack. They were given the necessary supplies by their commanders, to whom they reported, usually after an attack.[53] The first instances of *Istishhadia* were car bombs. Later, as the organizations obtained knowledge about explosive belts, that method was put to use. When the Israel Defense Forces entered Jenin during Operation Defensive Shield, all these networks were dealt a heavy blow, with many of their members killed or arrested.

Fatah, which began to dispatch suicide bombers only in January 2002, about 15 months after the start of the conflict, conducted its first attack in an "anarchistic-orderly" fashion.[54] Its earliest actions were sweeping acts of vengeance following the death of Raed Karmi, a key activist and a personal friend of members of Tanzim (the armed militia of Fatah) who were, at the time, also members of the Palestinian security forces and were wanted terrorists. They answered the call for vengeance, each one doing his best to recruit and dispatch *Istishhadis*, with no defined strategic aim, either political or military. Targets were chosen almost randomly, with an underlying desire to cause injury to Israel, its soldiers, and its citizens.

The initiatives were usually taken by members via a coordinator, who had the necessary means and funds. Some supplied the perpetrators, some the weapons, and some the means of transporting the perpetrators to their destinations. The desire for vengeance grew with the

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number of members injured, and new actions were taken by autonomous cells. According to one commander:

> I made the decisions about timing according to my strategic understanding. I had experience, and I was responsible for the group in my area. I was attentive to what people were saying in the street. I didn't blindly dispatch people. There was no orderly leadership that took charge. Every region had a task and commanders, who would analyze the situation according to their understanding and plan responses on the basis of their reasoning.[55]

Some of the cells maintained contact with drivers who held Israeli identity cards and were familiar with the country, and knew where it would be most lethal to operate. It was these drivers who chose the locations for attacks and served, to some extent, as operational contractors. "I plan everything; the attack and how many *Istishhadis* are needed. My job is to be independent. No one tells me where to attack. I decide. I don't tell anyone where I'm planning the attack or how I plan to get there so the police won't be waiting for me and no one will inform on me."[56]

The Recruitment of Suicide Bombers

In the first period and the initial phase of the Second Intifada, volunteers had to be identified and recruited for suicide missions. However, as acts of terror grew more prevalent and acceptable, and the number of attacks even exceeded the ability of the organizations to provide opportunities for them, the recruitment process became easier. Dispatchers had a larger pool of candidates and could be more selective in choosing volunteers whom they considered reliable. Recruiters gained status. They were familiar and they were heroes.

A very large bank of volunteers for *Istishhadia* was created, and often it was these attackers who "recruited" the dispatchers to find ways for them to fulfill their consuming desire to commit suicide. At times, the urgent need to orchestrate attacks outweighed judgments about the most suitable candidate for the mission. As a result, the criteria for screening and selecting perpetrators became more flexible. A member of the PFLP described it thus:

> The new reality opened the door to entrepreneurs, and that's how the privatization process for the suicide industry began. The market was supply-saturated, and the means of production were available, as were human resources. This situation demanded that leadership let the field operatives initiate and operate, rather than spell out the details of whom they take and who they reject. Members of the PA mechanism who had previously intercepted organizations dispatching *Istishhadis* were now themselves wanted by Israel. The new entrepreneurs didn't need permission to act; they just acted. From an operational point of view, the activities and their timing were not tightly supervised. The use of women and children resulted from a breach in frameworks and limits. There is no more 'forbidden' and 'allowed.'[57]

During the first period, most of the *Istishhadis* recruited by Hamas and the PIJ were organizational members of cells or accessories close to them. If they were found suitably loyal to Islam and to the organization's principles, they would be evaluated in conversations

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with the cell leader and usually also by the network head, who would approve their "eligibility." Their close familiarity and organizational membership obviated the need for a complex "recruitment" process. They needed only to maintain their willingness and occasionally to be bolstered a bit by a religious authority. Of all the organizations, Hamas selected its *Istishhadis* with greatest precision. The recruiter had to be acquainted with the person he recruited and to recommend him as suitable for the mission. Selection was rarely ad hoc.

In the second period, there were nuances of selectiveness among the organizations at various times. But as long as there were plenty of volunteers, their screening was primarily technical, to ascertain seriousness of intent.

One example of how accessories became bombers was the recruitment of Saher, the first Palestinian *Istishhadi*, mentioned earlier. He was an occasional driver for the leader of a terrorist cell that included Yihye Ayyash as its demolition expert. Regardless of his status as an Israeli target, Saher envisaged taking his own life, and volunteered to become the first *Istishhadi*. Another bomber sent by Hamas was an accessory to a cell headed by one of Ayyash's chief assistants. The cell leader recruited him, first speaking with him at length to assess his character and learn more about him. Convinced of his suitability, the cell head instructed him about the operation. The terrorist needed no special preparation. He set out on his mission two days after his commander was arrested, and blew himself up on a bus near Tel Aviv.[58]

In the second period, although Hamas continued to insist on religious faith as a criterion for recruitment, neither the issue of formal affiliation with an organization, nor the circle of accessories around a candidate, presented an obstacle if the need for an operation arose. The majority of recruits emerged from religious frameworks of supporters, such as members of *Dawa* and students at religious colleges and universities, notably the El Najah University in Nablus (the site of widespread student activity and an inexhaustible source of candidates). In Tul Karem, for example, Hamas members were involved in the dispatch of several terrorists, two of whom were their classmates and fellow worshippers at a mosque. The request was made following prayers at the mosque.

One of the recruiters told how he identified a suitable candidate and knew he would get a positive response. He said it was hard to explain in words; he simply had a "gut feeling" although it was based on prior acquaintance with the candidate. He said it was instantly clear who was truly religious and willing to do anything for the religion, based on observing the person and how he behaved in the mosque and among others. "If you were to go into the room and see the boy, you would know."[59]

Once an *Istishhadi* candidate's suitability was confirmed, the process of maintaining his readiness until he was called on to act, depended on the period in which he was recruited and the timing of the operation. The perpetrator of the Park Hotel bombing in Netanya (March 2002) for instance, in which 30 people were killed, was to have performed an earlier act of *Istishhadia* that was postponed due to focused prevention efforts by Israel. He remained with his cell and was sent on his deadly mission seven months later.

The PIJ was consistently more flexible than Hamas in recruiting *Istishhadis* from its ranks and setting criteria for recruitment. At first, the PIJ also recruited from among its own members. Later, *Istishhadis* were selected from all sectors of the population, with preference given to highly religious candidates. In the second period, in which the organization dispatched dozens of *Istishhadis*, its criteria became more flexible. Some candidates were recommended by recruiters; others volunteered on their own initiative. Some of those recruited had no organizational affiliation, but were looking for action. High motivation for *Istishhadia* was sufficient, even if the candidate was not identified with a

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particular organization or its goals. Candidates underwent brief interrogations to ensure they were not motivated by personal interests and that they believed in God, without having to prove they adhered strictly to religious commandments, or had a deep understanding of religious law and of the need for a national struggle. The most important criterion was that they proved "serious" in their intention to fulfill the task and would not change their mind.

On the other hand, one PIJ dispatcher admitted that if he concluded that a candidate was charismatic and highly capable, he would reject his request and ask that he be given a different, more useful role in the organization. He gave the example of such a young man whom he had dispatched, in the end, as an *Istishhadi* after keeping him on hold for five months. Frustrated, the young man threatened that if he were not given an assignment, he would attack soldiers with a knife and die for nothing, and the dispatcher said he had no choice but to meet his demand for *Istishhadia*.[60]

Fatah recruited anyone willing to volunteer for a mission, as long as the dispatchers were convinced he would remain devoted to the task and to his desire to fight the enemy without second thoughts. "We were flooded with *Istishhadis*. At every demonstration, we were approached by a serious group that wanted to commit suicide. After the assassination of Raed Karmi, for example, many were aroused to volunteer for *Istishhadia*. As soon as a young man comes to us and asks to be an *Istishhadi*, he is automatically a potential for dispatch."[61]

In interviews with senior dispatchers working in the same terror network, one of them replacing the other after he was arrested, it became clear that the main criterion was, in the end, "operational need," and the primary consideration was the certainty that the mission would be accomplished. Fatah, like the PIJ, "gave in" to pressure by *Istishhadis* (females as well) who threatened to attack with a knife and die without having caused damage to the enemy if their demands for an *Istishhadia* operation were not met.[62] At times, then, these organizations compromised on their choice of perpetrators.

The selection process for a female *Istishhadi* was similar—a general interview and investigation of her background, and confirmation that she was serious and devoted. When the need for an operation arose, she would be sent without any special mental preparation.[63]

Israeli Government Policy

Israel adopted different strategies for the two periods, based on two different assumptions. In the first period, it based its strategy on an effort to halt the suicide attacks by cooperating with the PA. When that proved ineffective, a combined strategy of offensive and defensive measures was decided on. The defensive measures were based on intelligence designed to foil future suicide operations, and by consolidating circles of police and military defense components around sensitive key targets, together with public vigilance and preparedness. On the offensive side, the measures consisted of occasional incursions into PA territory to arrest known terrorists and, if this proved impossible, to kill their leaders. At the same time Israel cooperated with the PA, which it perceived as weak and inefficient, and applied political pressure to encourage the Palestinian leadership to conduct more independent actions against terror.

In the second period, due to the escalation in terrorism, including massive suicide attacks, Israeli policy was based on the assumption that the PA would not act decisively against this, and that some elements within the regime were even working to expand the phenomenon. Israeli policy therefore began to take the form of more frequent and aggressive targeted killings—from operations against wanted terrorists to operations against

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organizational commanders and leaders. This policy forced Israel to deal with a complicated dilemma: on the one hand, the enormous number of suicide attacks caused an unprecedented large number of civilian losses in Israel; on the other hand, the resultant aggressive policy of targeted killings often provided incentives to the other side to exact vengeance, and increased the motivation to join terrorist organizations and commit further acts of *Istishhadia*.

The Israeli perception of the suicide attacks as an attempt to impose a Palestinian agenda on the its government—by disrupting daily life and causing insufferable damage to every aspect of it—thus gave rise to an alternative policy aimed mainly at reducing the scale of the suicide attacks, the number of victims, and the amount of damage caused. The policy was to conduct life as usual and to make rational political decisions that did not emerge from a state of distress. Israel perceived itself as battling against attempts by the other side to wear it down, and its aim was to preserve the existing asymmetry until the other side ceased its use of terror, particularly the suicide attacks.

In the end, by combining defensive measures, such as solid intercept intelligence to stop the attacks beforehand; efficient security zones based on coordinated efforts by police, military, civil guards, trained medical personnel, and social workers; and the construction of a protective wall and electronic fence along critical parts of the border; together with offensive measures based on operational intelligence that enabled a campaign of surgical targeted killings against the initiators and executors of the suicide campaign,[64] Israel succeeded in meeting the overall challenge presented by the suicide campaign. Leading terrorist organizations, realizing that suicide bombings as a dramatic and even cohesive weapon had not tipped the balance, and in a sense had been exhausted (perhaps temporarily) in strategic terms, have attempted to find other alternatives, as was evident in the March 2005 announcement of the *tahadiya*.

One organization that continues to attempt acts of suicide terrorism, and has even committed a few such acts since the beginning of the *tahadiya*, is the PIJ, which remains firm in its view that an armed struggle is the only possible strategy.

Summary

The Palestinian suicide campaign started as a local initiative by small groups of determined field operatives from Hamas, who were later joined by PIJ operatives. Both groups were looking for an efficient way to offset their conspicuous military inferiority vis-à-vis the powerful and well-equipped Israeli army. Over time, suicide attacks became the pivotal instrument that swept along the majority of Palestinian society in its favor, and the participation of many.

This unique and lethal modus operandi has correlated with the beliefs, grievances, and sensitivities of individuals, along with aspirations of national pride and personal redemption. The interests of individuals and of terrorist groups thus converged and flourished under the escalating circumstances that arose from the counterterror measures taken by Israel, whose citizens suffered the burden of the indiscriminate massive violence inflicted on them.

Consequently, the suicide weapon proved to be a two-edged sword. True, it has inflicted an unprecedented number of casualties on Israeli civil society during the 13 years of its existence, but at the same time it has also deepened the agony of Palestinian society, which suffered multiple casualties and was greatly impoverished by the consequences of the terror campaign. The Palestinian economy (already weakened by corruption and inefficiency) was wrecked, and the Palestinian Authority, which could not—or would not—curtail the spread

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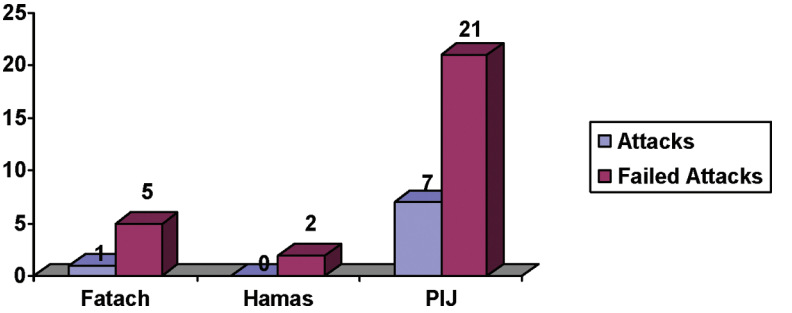


Figure 6. Suicide attacks after the *Tahadia* (March 2005–October 2006).

of suicide attacks, eventually paid a high political price, leading to its rival, Hamas, winning the parliamentary elections of January 2006.

Two months later, the *tahadiya* brought a temporary suspension of the suicide campaign. The real reasons for this development are debatable, as each side claimed it had won and that the other had given up its initial aspirations. Some of the factors that probably facilitated the *tahadiya* and its relatively long duration (with ups and downs) included the internal political developments in Palestinian politics. The Israeli declaration of unilateral disengagement from Gaza and its implementation in August 2005 gave a sense of victory to the Palestinians. On the other hand, the massive Israeli countermeasures, which significantly reduced the number of suicide attacks and casualties among its citizens, together with the resilience of the Israeli public, helped to convince the Palestinians that the path of *Istishhadia* would not compel Israel to capitulate. The general sense on both sides was that the strategic goal of neither would be achieved through sheer violence and counterviolence.

Yet it should be remembered that the unilateral decision taken by the Palestinian organizations to suspend the *Istishhadia* campaign was conditional, and the attacks can be revived if one or more groups decide this would serve their interests. Indeed, some suicide operations have continued even during the *tahadiya* period up till today, mainly by the PIJ (Figure 6).

This has proved that suicide attacks are still a valid option for many young, restless and disenchanted Palestinians, and that there is still vociferous opposition to the new path taken by the uneasy coalition of the PA and Hamas. The renegades are encouraged by external forces such as Iran and its Lebanese proxy, Hizbullah. Both support *Istishhadia* tactics in order to obstruct and destabilize the political course. The reports by Israel of continued successes in intercepting and defusing attempts to carry out suicide attacks are a sober indication that the threat has by no means disappeared.

Notes

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10. Robert A. Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005).

11. Scott Atran, "The Moral Logic and Growth of Suicide Terrorism," *The Washington Quarterly* 29(2) (2006), pp. 127–147.

12. Nasra Hassan, "An Arsenal Of Believers Talking to the Human Bombs," *The New Yorker,* 19 November 2001.

13. The source of the statistical data included in this article is a database maintained by the author at the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University.

14. The reader is referred to the excellent article of Dr. Assaf Moghadam that deals with the definition of suicide bombing and warmly embraces his call for a clear definition in an analytical article. See "Root Causes of Suicide Terrorism—The Globalization of Martyrdom," edited by Ami Pedahzur (London: Routledge, 2006) pp.13–24.

15. Interviews by author with Nasser Abu Hmeid, Fatah, January 2006 and December 2005.

16. Interview by author with Nasser Harun, 23 March 2005, and with Zaher Jabarin, 1 June 2005.

17. Interview by author with Nasser Issa, March 30, 2005.

18. Interview by author with Zaher Jabarin, Hamas, 1 June 2005, and with Nasser Isa, Hamas, 22 March 2005.

19. Interview by author with Nasser Issa, Hamas, 30 March 2005.

20. Interview by author with Nassr Issa, Hamas, 22 March 2005, and with Hassan Salame, Hams, 16 January 2006.

21. Amos Harel and Avi Isacharoff, *The Seventh War: How We Won and Why We Lost the War with the Palestinians* (Tel-Aviv: Yedi'ot Aharonot & Hemed Books, 2004) (Hebrew), see, for example, pp. 54–58.

22. Interviews by author with Nasser Abu Hmeid, Fatah, January 2006 and December 2005.

23. Interview by author with Nasser Issa, Hamas, 23 November 2005.

24. Shlomi Eldar, *Eyeless in Gaza* (Tel-Aviv: Yedi'ot Aharonot & Hemed Books, 2005) (Hebrew), p. 301.

25. Interview by author with Nihad Abu Kishak, Hamas, 17 January 2005, and with Abbas Sayid, 10 January 2005.

26. Interview by author with Nasser Abu Hmeid, Fatah, 3 January 2006.

27. See Raviv Druker and Ofer Shelah, *Boomerang: The Failure of Leadership in the Second Intifada* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing, 2005), pp. 151–174. (Hebrew)

28. Interview by author with Abbas Sayed, Hamas, January 10, 2005

29. See Anne Speckhard, "Understanding Suicide Terrorism: Countering Human Bombs and Their Senders," in *Topics in Terrorism: Toward a Transatlantic Consensus on the Nature of the Threat* (Vol. I), eds. Jason S. Purcell and Joshua D. Weintraub (Washington, D.C.: Atlantic Council Publication, 2005), pp. 1–22.

30. This phenomenon is not unusual in other organizations and networks as well, especially among AQ and its affiliates, as was indicated by other scholars. See Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (University Park, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004) and Ami Pedahzur and Arie Perlinger, "The Changing Nature of Suicide Attacks: A Social Network Perspective," *Social Forces* 84(4) (2006).

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31. Interview by author with Nasser Abu Hmeid, Fatah, 3 January 2006.
32. Interview by author with Rafat Mokdi, Hamas, 8 March 2006.
33. Interview by author with Muhammad Haj, Hamas, 7 February 2006.
34. Interview by author with Manal Sabaana, PIJ, 1 March 2006.
35. See Mohammed Hafez, "Rationality, Culture, and Structure in the Making of Suicide Bombers: A Preliminary Theoretical Synthesis and Illustrative Case Study," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29(2) (2006), pp. 165–185.
36. Interviews by author with Nasser Issa, Hamas, March 2005, with Hasan Salame, January 2006, and with Ahmad Mugrabi, Fatah, October 2006.
37. Interview by author with Walid Daka, PFLP, March 2004.
38. Ibid.
39. Interview by author with Uthman Billal, Hamas, 2 April 2006.
40. Interview by author with Fahed Shaludi, Hamas, 15 December 2004, and with Hassan Salama, Hamas, 16 January 2006.
41. See an interview with Shikh Yassin at Anat Berko, *The Path to Garden of Eden* (Miskal-Yedioth Aharonot Books and Chermel Books, 2004) (Hebrew), pp. 71–91.
42. See Mohammed Hafez, "Rationality, Culture, and Structure in the Making of Suicide Bombers: A Preliminary Theoretical Synthesis and Illustrative Case Study," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29(2) (2006), pp. 165–185.
43. Mia Bloom, "Palestinian Suicide Bombing: Public Support, Market Share and Outbidding," *Political Science Quarterly* 119(1) (2004), pp. 61–88.
44. Interviews by author with Haron Nasser al Din, Hamas, March, June, and December 2005.
45. Interview by author with Thabet Mardawi, PIJ, 7 February 2006.
46. Interview by author with Ahmad Mugrabi, Fatah, 19 October 2005.
47. Interview by author with Ahmad Barghouti, Fatah, 14 March 14 2005.
48. Interview by author with Abbas Sayid, Hamas, January 2004.
49. Ami Pedahzur and Arie Perlinger, "The Changing Nature of Suicide Attacks: A Social Network Perspective," *Social Forces* 84(4) (2006), pp. 1988–2008.
50. Interview by author with Wael Kassaem, Hamas, 8 December 2005.
51. Ibid.
52. Interview by author with Amjad Obeidi, 2 November 2005.
53. Interview by author with Thabet Mardawi, PIJ, 23 November 2005.
54. Interview by author with Ahmed Barghouti, 8 March 2006.
55. See interview by author with Ahmed Mugrabi, Fatah, 19 October 2005.
56. Interview by author with Ibrahim Sarakhne, Fatah, 14 November 2005.
57. Interview by author with Walid Daka, PFLP, 27 September 2004.
58. Interviews by author with Nassar Issa, 30 March 2005, and 23 November 2005.
59. Interview by author with Abu Qishaq, Hamas, August 2005.
60. Interview by author with Thabet Mardawi, PIJ, 23 November 2005.
61. Interview by author with Abu Hmeid, PIJ, 3 January 2006.
62. Interviews by author with Thabet Mardawi, 23 February 2005, and Amjad Obedei, 2 November 2005.
63. Interview by author with Muataz Haimuni, 19 September 2005.
64. Mohammed M. Hafez and Joseph Hatfiel, "Do Targeted Assassinations Work? A Multivariate Analysis of Israel's Controversial Tactic during Al-Aqsa Uprising," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29(4) (2006), pp. 359–382. Hafez and Hatfield defied in their article the effective role played by the targeted killings in Israel's policy.