

Editor: **Mark A. Heller**

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THE EXPORT AND IMPORT OF SUICIDE BOMBERS

Yoram Schweitzer
Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies

The suicide bombing on the Tel Aviv promenade that killed two Israelis and a French woman working as a waitress in "Mike's Place" Pub was essentially just another entry in the roster of terrorist attacks that have long since become a routine part of life in Israel. Since 1993, there have been about 155 suicide attacks carried out by almost 250 perpetrators. In this case, what the two bombers did was precisely what so many others before them had done in response to exhortations by Palestinian terrorist organizations, especially Islamist ones, as well as by al-Qaeda and its offshoots – to walk "in the path of God" ("Fi Sabilillah").

True, the attack came immediately after the appointment of Abu Mazen as Palestinian Prime Minister. That does not necessarily mean that Abu Mazen has no intention of trying to change the course of Palestinian affairs. But it does serve to underscore the fact that Abu Mazen is still too constrained by Yasir Arafat as well as by various terrorist organizations, including Fatah in its various guises (Tanzim, al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades) to do that, at least in the short term. Since these elements have shown no more willingness to renounce the "right of terror" than to renounce the "right of return," the attack simply showed that the mere assumption of

office by Abu Mazen does not mean an early end to this method of action.

Perhaps more suggestive was the fact that the two perpetrators, Asif Muhammad Hanif and Omar Khan Sharif, were British citizens of Pakistani origin. The reliance on imported suicide bombers has been widely interpreted by the media as a significant innovation. In fact, there is nothing particularly novel about the involvement of foreigners in Palestinian terrorism. Even back in the early 1970s, the "secular" Palestinian terrorist organizations recruited young people, mainly females, especially young Europeans (British, Dutch) and South Americans (Peruvians) to bypass strict Israeli security checks and smuggle explosives onto aircraft or into Israel. Some of these foreign accomplices were dupes but some were fully conscious of their roles and willingly took part in what they saw as a romantic international revolutionary struggle represented by Palestinian organizations led by Yasir Arafat, George Habash and Ahmad Jibril.

In the latter half of the 1990s, Shi'ites entered the picture and even managed to infiltrate into Israel foreign citizens or bearers of foreign travel documents in order to carry out terrorist attacks. The most prominent example was Steven

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Smirek, a German who converted to Islam and was recruited by Hizbullah in Germany and dispatched to Israel after expressing a willingness to carry out a suicide attack. He was apprehended when he landed at Ben Gurion Airport in November 1997 for what was meant by his Hizbullah handlers to be a training mission and a test of his determination and capabilities.

Hizbullah, whose leaders consistently deny any involvement in terrorism outside the borders of Lebanon, also sent Lebanese Shi'ites with foreign passports or nationality to Israel (by way of Europe), who posed as businessmen or tourists. The most notorious of these was Hussein Mikdad, who arrived in Israel on a flight from Switzerland. In April 1996, he was caught in possession of explosive materials apparently provided by local Palestinians after a bomb he was assembling in his room at the Lawrence Hotel in East Jerusalem exploded prematurely, leaving him seriously wounded. Other examples include Gerard Shuman, who carried Sierra Leone travel documents and was caught in Jerusalem after arriving on a flight from Britain in January 2000, and Hussein Ayoub, who was apprehended in 2002.

Al-Qaeda, which ceaselessly struggles to inject itself into the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as part of its global Islamic jihad against the "Judeo-Crusader axis of evil," has also sent its own operatives to Israel. One of these was Richard Reid, a British citizen who converted to Islam during his stay in a British prison and subsequently made his way to al-Qaeda. In July 2000, after undergoing training in Afghanistan, Reid, posing as a tourist, came to Israel to gather information about various targets in Israel in order to plan for terrorist attacks. Reid later gained notoriety as "the shoe bomber." He was captured in December 2001 during a suicide mission for al-Qaeda when a bomb he carried in his shoes onto an American Airlines flight from

Paris to Miami failed to detonate. Al-Qaeda was also implicated in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict when Nabil Ukal, a Hamas-affiliated Palestinian who underwent training in Usama Bin Laden's camps in Afghanistan, returned to Gaza and tried to set up a terrorist network before being captured in June 2000.

All in all, there is nothing new in the recruitment of immigrant and second-generation Muslims in Europe by al-Qaeda and other organizations in order to carry out terrorist operations, including suicide attacks. Many of these recruits have been arrested by the French, Italian, British and German security services. Nor do the attacks constitute a precedent insofar as young Britons of Pakistani origin are concerned. In 2000, for example, one such youth who had been recruited in Britain and trained in Afghanistan carried out a suicide attack on an Indian Army base in Srinagar, Kashmir. Umar Sheikh, who was convicted of involvement in the kidnap and murder of the American journalist Daniel Pearl at the beginning of 2002 and was implicated in the kidnapping of other foreigners in India going back to 1995, underwent a similar course after he abandoned his studies at the London School of Economics in favor of terrorism and joined the ranks of "Global Jihad."

The media have correctly reported several tactical innovations in the suicide bombing at Mike's Place: the itinerary followed by the bombers (Britain-Damascus-Jordan-Gaza-Tel Aviv); the use of very sophisticated explosive material; and possible coordination between Hamas elements in Damascus and Gaza and Islamist supporters of al-Qaeda in Britain. But the involvement of foreigners, in and of itself, is not new. Instead, this bombing simply provides one more warning sign to western leaders about the threat of globalized Islamic terror, the futility of trying to contain terror beyond the borders of their own countries, and the need for effective, coordinated action against it.