

Teenage Suicide Missions: The Role of Religion in the Recruitment of Young Suicide Bombers

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Abstract

‘No child’, writes Christopher Reuter in *My Life Is A Weapon* (2004) ‘is born with ten kilos of TNT strapped to its stomach’ yet there is disturbing evidence that children are being encouraged (tacitly or otherwise) to volunteer to kill themselves and others in the name of religion. This paper examines the extent of ‘underage’ suicide bombers and critiques the commonly-held view that religion plays a relatively minor part in the recruitment of children and teenagers for suicide missions. This study investigates the reports, writings, diaries, and interviews with and about children from four separate areas of conflict where they have been recruited for suicide missions. In particular, it examines Shintō/Buddhist influence in Japan during World War II on fourteen- and fifteen-year old Kamikaze recruits; Ayatollah Khomeini’s religious justification of Iran’s suicide battalions—tens of thousands of young Iranians some as young as twelve and thirteen—during the Iran-Iraq War in the mid 1980s; the influence of Hinduism on young Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka and, finally, the highly politicised evidence of Sunni Palestinian youth being recruited for suicide missions inside Israel.

Introduction

It is difficult to be objective about the chilling practice of teenage suicide bombing. One is repulsed by the numerous video clips of children posing as “holy warriors,” appalled when reading reports of a disabled child (possibly with Down Syndrome) being used to carry out a suicide attack, or saddened when viewing video clips of young Palestinian youth reading their last will and testament before carrying out a suicide attack.¹ It is extremely distressing to think that anyone would strap explosives to young people and send them off to kill themselves and to maim and kill others. It is also deeply disturbing when sacred texts and religious authorities, be they Christian, Hindu, Islamic, Shintō, Sikh, or of any other religion, are used to legitimize suicide attacks and similar activities.

This paper arose out of concern for the way religion is used to validate and to perpetuate violence against children. The recruitment of teenagers for suicide missions is really the sharp end of a global trend to deploy children as soldiers. The paper seeks first to gauge the extent of teenage suicide bombing and secondly, to critique the commonly-held view that religion plays a minor part in the recruitment of children and teenagers for suicide missions. I have adopted the straight-forward method of examining whatever documentation is available, much of necessity from the internet, concerning “underage” suicide missions. In terms of demonstrating religious influence on teenage suicide bombers, the paper examines four case studies from separate geographical regions in the world and from different religious traditions: Shintō/Buddhist influence in Japan during World War II on Kamikaze recruits some as young as fourteen and fifteen; Ayatollah Khomeini’s religious justification of Iran’s suicide battalions—tens of thousands of young Shi’aransians, some as young as twelve and thirteen—during the Iran–Iraq War in the mid 1980s; the influence of Hinduism on young Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka; and, finally, the highly politicised activities of Hamas, a Sunni militant group, among Palestinian youth.

There are two definitional matters that immediately present themselves: the first concerns the use of the word “suicide” (sometimes renamed “homicide”) in admittedly, emotive expressions like “suicide missions,” “suicide bombers,” and “suicide attacks.” Most religions are generally chary of the word “suicide,” so, persistently those who glory in suicide missions

¹ See short indoctrination clips and music videos for children, promoting violence as an ideal, broadcast on PA TV, “Children as Combatants in PA Ideology,” TC Archives–Library <http://www.pmw.org.il/tv%20part3.html> (accessed February 27, 2008).

either reframe them with theological argument or refer to them euphemistically as “holy martyrdoms,” “martyrdom operations,” (*ishtishahd* in Arabic) “voluntary deaths,” “giving yourself,” or “self-gift.” I am persisting with the word “suicide” because martyrdom operations normally involve a deliberate act of suicide and, as well, I see nothing holy or altruistic, in sending young people to murder others and to a certain death, even if we admit (as we must) the socio-political conditions that often give rise to this social evil. I also abhor such language as “smart bombs,” “human bombs,” and “the poor man’s atomic bomb,” to describe suicide attackers. The other problematic issue concerns the definition of a child. Is a child a person under fifteen- sixteen- r eighteen-years of age? For both International law and *Shari’ah* (Islamic law) this is a fuzzy area, especially when it comes to the involvement of children in hostilities and armed conflict throughout the world.² The deployment of child soldiers is not new in either the West or the East, however arming them with extremely lethal weapons does appear a new development.³ For the purposes of this paper, I have taken eighteen as the cut-off point which is in line with Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child which was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 20 November 1989.⁴

The Extent of Teenage Suicide Bombings

While most experts on terrorism seem to agree that suicide bombers are primarily young people, it is notoriously difficult to determine what percentage of them are under eighteen. However, Robert Pape’s global survey of 462 suicide attackers from 1980 to the end of 2003 provides a helpful starting point.⁵ And although Pape is rightly critical of the general tendency to profile suicide terrorists as teenagers and young men, he, nonetheless, concedes that 13 percent of all attacks investigated were carried out by boys *and* girls between the ages of fifteen and eighteen.⁶ A related and somewhat surprising finding from Pape’s study is that the percentage of boys and girls involved in suicide attacks is almost identical.⁷ This statistic indicates that neither age nor sex seems to be an acceptable prohibition against the recruitment of young people for suicide missions.

Rosemarie Skaine’s work on female suicide bombers (*shahidas*) builds on Pape’s study.⁸ In 2006 Skaine identified ten terrorist organizations throughout the world that were engaged in recruiting women as suicide bombers between 2000 and 2003 or 2004.⁹ Skaine’s extensive tables list considerable biographical information on the suicide bombers, including their ages. This information reveals that most terrorist organizations (religious and secular) are not averse to recruiting girls under the age of eighteen, despite contrary assertions from leaders of Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the Tamil Tigers and other terrorist organizations.¹⁰ For example, the youngest appears to have been Sana Youssef Mehaydali, the first female bomber for the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP/PPS) and the first female to commit a suicide attack in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. On April 9, 1985, in southern Lebanon, she drove a Peugeot car

² For a brief history of child soldiers, see Margaret Trawick, *Enemy Lines: Childhood, Warfare and Play in Batticaloa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 147–155.

³ Peter N. Stearns, *Growing Up: The History of Childhood in a Global Context* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2005) 2.

⁴ Article 1: “For the purposes of the present Convention, a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.” <http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu3/b/k2crc.htm> (accessed June 25, 2008).

⁵ Robert Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (Melbourne: Scribe, 2005), 14.

⁶ Pape, *Dying to Win*, 5, 207.

⁷ Pape, *Dying to Win*, 209.

⁸ Rosemarie Skaine, *Female Suicide Bombers* (Jefferson, NC and London: McFarland, 2006).

⁹ Skaine, *Female Suicide Bombers*, 49. The organizations are: Hezbollah, Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party (SSNP/PPS), the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), Chechen rebels, Al-Aqsa Martyrs, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Hamas, Al-Qaeda network, Iraqi insurgents.

¹⁰ Abdel Bari Atwan, *The Secret History of Al-Qa’ida* (London: Abacus, 2006), 100.

packed with explosives into an Israeli Defence Force (IDF) convoy killing two Israeli soldiers and wounding two others. Sana was known to her admirers as “The Bride of the South” (the funerary ritual thus constituting her “wedding”). She was just sixteen- or seventeen-years-old.¹¹ Only slightly older than Sana was the seventeen-year-old Laila Kaplan, a bomber for the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). In October 1996, Kaplan disguised as a pregnant woman detonated her bomb killing five and wounding twelve others at the police headquarters in Adana, south-east Turkey.¹² More recently, in March 2002, a seventeen- or eighteen-year-old Palestinian girl named Ayat al-Akhras walked into a Jerusalem supermarket and detonated a bomb concealed under her clothing, killing two Israelis and wounding twenty-two others.¹³ The Al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigade (part of Fatah, the largest faction of the Palestine Liberation Organization), the group that armed Akhras and the first Palestinian group to use women as suicide bombers, claimed at the time that they had established a special unit to train female suicide bombers and already there were 200 young women from the Bethlehem area alone who were ready to sacrifice themselves.¹⁴

Not all suicide bombers are effective in carrying out their mission. Among these Skaine cites the case of Shireen Rabiya who was just fifteen when on June 13, 2002 she was captured before being fitted with a suicide vest. She had been recruited by her uncle, a senior operative within Tanzim (a militant faction within Fatah), with the complicity of her school principal. Apparently, Rabiya was having difficulty at school when her uncle convinced her that she would have a more rewarding existence in the afterlife.¹⁵ Regrettably, terrorist organizations are pulling in younger and younger people. For example, in March 2004, Yasser Arafat’s Fatah group tricked Abdullah Quran, a twelve-year-old boy into carrying a large bomb in his school bag into a checkpoint near Nablus. His life was saved only because a cell phone rigged to detonate the thirteen-pound bomb remotely, failed to set off the explosive.¹⁶

The phenomenon of recruiting children for suicide-terrorism is very real. There are claims that the ranks of the “Black Widows,” the Chechen female suicide bombers, are filled mainly with fifteen to nineteen-year-old girls.¹⁷ The Kurdish rebel group, the PKK, has a reputation for recruiting children for suicide missions. There are sketchy reports of Iranians recruiting ten- to fifteen-year-olds in Tajikistan as *mujahideen* (Islamic fighters, guerillas, “holy warrior”) and *shahids* (martyrs).¹⁸ The most reliable evidence focuses on the Palestinian Occupied Areas. Two separate surveys tell more or less the same story. For the two years, January 2002 to January 2004, the international organization, Human Rights Watch, listed eight Palestinian Suicide Bombers aged sixteen or eighteen.¹⁹ The Israeli Security Service (Shin Bet) offers similar figures; for the period September 2000 to 2005, it estimated that 8 percent of the 160 suicide attacks carried out were by young people under the age of seventeen.²⁰ If the results from both of these surveys were extrapolated for the years 2000 to the beginning of 2008, then

¹¹ Skaine, *Female Suicide Bombers*, 50, 77, 79,

¹² *Ibid.*, 81, 82.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 127–28.

¹⁴ Anne Applebaum, “Girl Suicide Bombers,” April 2, 2002, <http://slate.msn.com/id/2063954/> (accessed June 24, 2008).

¹⁵ Skaine, *Female Suicide Bombers*, 143; Barbara Victor, *Army of Roses: Inside the World of Palestinian Women Suicide Bombers* ([Emmaus, PA: Rodale]: 2003), 260–264.

¹⁶ Rachael Bell, “Willing to Die: Palestinian suicide bombers,” http://www.trutv.com/library/crime/terrorists_spies/terrorists/palestinians/index.html (accessed June 26, 2008).

¹⁷ “Shahidka,” *Wikipedia*, May 31, 2008, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shahidka> (accessed June 24, 2008).

¹⁸ Vadim, “Tajik,” May 23, 2007, <http://tajikistan.neweurasia.net/2007/05/23/tajik-teenage-terrorists/> (accessed June 24, 2008).

¹⁹ “Teenage Suicide Bombers,” <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Terrorism/teenbomb.html> (accessed June 24, 2008).

²⁰ “Who Are the Suicide Bombers?” http://www.israelmessiah.com/terrorism/suicide_bombers.htm (accessed June 26, 2008).

it is estimated that at least twenty-nine suicide attacks were carried out by Palestinian youth under the age of eighteen.

The reality of teenage suicide bombers was brought before the world's attention in March 2004 when a sixteen-year-old Palestinian boy, Mahmoud Tabouq, was captured at a checkpoint near Nablus, hiding five pipe bombs under his coat. This incident gained notoriety because it was recorded by a Palestinian film crew crossing the border at the time.²¹ More recently, other television footage such as that by the BBC showing hundreds of Palestinian children, some as young as eleven being trained in the art of suicide bombing, has provided convincing evidence of the nature and the extent to which children are embroiled in the conflict there. "We are teaching the children that suicide bombing is the only thing that make[s] the Israeli people very frightened," said Mohammed el Hattab, a camp instructor. "Furthermore, we are teaching them that we have the right to do it."²²

In the past year or two there has been a higher incidence of suicide bombings in Pakistan and Iraq than in Palestine. In 2007 alone, there were fifty-six suicide bombings in Pakistan, killing at least 636 people, including 419 members of the Pakistan's security forces. By mid March there were already clear signs that the numbers for 2008 would surpass those appalling statistics.²³ Many of the bombers were teenagers like the sixteen- or seventeen-year boy who detonated explosives strapped to his body, killing eleven army cadets at Kohat in December 2007.²⁴ Or more recently, in January 2008, a suicide bomber aged fifteen or sixteen attacked a packed Shiite mosque in the north-western Pakistani city of Peshawar, killing eight people and wounding twenty others.²⁵ Then in March 2008, a teenage suicide bomber attacked an assembly of tribal elders in the village of Zarghon, near the north-western town of Darra Adam Khel, the scene of recent violent clashes between Pakistani troops and Islamic militants. It was a huge explosion, killing more than forty people and wounding over a hundred.²⁶

The Pakistani *madrassahs* or local Islamic religious schools for boys generally between the ages of five and eighteen have frequently been accused of being hotbeds of terrorism and training grounds for young suicide bombers. Although it is often difficult to discern truth from propaganda in some of these assertions, it is clear from the reports and interviews by Jessica Stern, Zahid Hussain and others that many of these schools have become centres of radicalization with hardline reformist Wahhabi and Salafi strains of faith replacing the more tolerant Deobandi and Barelvi form of Islam.²⁷ Pakistan government officials estimate between 10 to 15 percent of the *madrassahs* (thousands of which are unregistered) have links with sectarian militancy or international terrorism. Traditionally, the *madrassahs* taught religion within a highly rigorous and traditional perspective; they did not conduct military training or provide arms to students. Since the 1980s, and especially after the overthrow of the Taliban in

²¹ "Teen Bomber Stopped At West Bank," March 24, 2004, <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2004/03/25/world/main608756.shtml> (accessed June 24, 2008).

²² Jeremy Cook, "School trains suicide bombers," BBC News, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/1446003.stm (accessed February 27, 2008); Julie Stahl, "'Paradise Camps' Teach Palestinian Children to Be Suicide Bombers," <http://www.cnsnews.com/ForeignBureaus/archives/200107/For20010723d.html> (accessed February 27, 2008).

²³ Herschel Smith, "Taliban and al-Qaeda Strategy in Pakistan and Afghanistan," March 23, 2008, <http://www.captainsjournal.com/2008/03/23/taliban-and-al-qaeda-strategy-in-pakistan> (accessed June 24, 2008).

²⁴ "Seminaries luring children to 'paradise'," *One World South Asia*, <http://southasia.oe.world.net/Article/seminaries-luring-to-be2018paradise2019/> (accessed June 14, 2008).

²⁵ "Suicide bomber Attacks a Shiite Mosque in Peshawar," *Al-Huda News*, January 17, 2008, <http://al-huda.al-khoei.org/news/59/ARTICLE/1210/2008-01-17.html> (accessed June 24, 2008).

²⁶ "A Teenage Suicide Bomber Kills 40 in Pakistan," March 2, 2008, <http://eye-on-the-world.blogspot.com/2008/03/teenage-suicide-bomber-kills-40-in.html> (accessed June 24, 2008).

²⁷ Jessica Stern, *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2003), 210; Zahid Hussain, "Nursery for Jihad," in *Frontline Pakistan: The Path to Catastrophe and the Killing of Benazir Bhutto* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2008), chap. 4.

Afghanistan by U.S. forces at the end of 2001, extremist *madrasahs* have fostered “Islamic warriors” and encouraged participation in “holy war.” Rafiqullah, a fourteen-year-old would-be suicide bomber, appears to be just one of a growing stream of young suicide bombers deemed ready to join the Taliban.²⁸ At the Salib *madrasah* in South Waziristan he was not only taught Islamic law and religion, he was also taught the deadly art of suicide bombing. In May 2007 Rafiqullah was captured by the Afghan police riding a motorcycle and wearing a suicide vest. His mission was to kill Arsala Jamal, the governor of Khost province.²⁹

Since the U.S.-led invasion, Iraq has surpassed all other nations including Sri Lanka for the frequency of suicide attacks. Frank Barnaby, in his handbook on terrorism, estimates that there have been more than 600 suicide attacks in Iraq between 2003 and 2007.³⁰ Louise Richardson, an expert on terrorist movements, also claims that “there have been more suicide attacks in Iraq alone in the years since the fall of Saddam Hussein in April 2003 than in the rest of the world since the tactic was first adopted in 1981.”³¹ Indeed, such has been the ferocity and frequency of attacks in Iraq, that in just two months, May and June 2005, there were more suicide attacks there than in Israel since the tactic was first introduced there in 1993.³² Although accurate data is difficult to obtain, it is safe to assume that the frequency of teenage suicide attacks in Iraq is also very high. There are several indicators. Firstly, there is evidence of very young suicide bombers. In November 2005, for example, a boy as young as thirteen wearing an explosive belt seriously wounded Brigadier Khattab Iris Abdullah, the police commander in the northern Iraqi city of Kirkuk. The unnamed attacker was most likely the youngest child suicide bomber yet recorded at that time by Human Rights Watch.³³ In January 2008 another thirteen-year wearing an explosive-packed vest blew himself up among a group of tribal elders in the western province of Anbar killing at least three others and wounding eight in the city of Fallujah. Secondly, girls as well as boys are being recruited. In March 2008, a female suicide bomber, aged eighteen, killed the leader of a local citizen’s group, his five-year-old niece, and one of his security guards, at Kanan in the volatile Diyala province.³⁴ In May 2008, a girl aged between sixteen and eighteen blew herself up outside an Iraqi army post south of Baghdad, killing one soldier and wounding several others.³⁵ And in August 2008, Iraqi police in Baqouba, the capital of the Diyali province, captured and filmed a teenage girl of about fifteen

²⁸ “Would-be teen suicide bomber arrested in Pakistan,” September 8, 2008, <http://www.aol.com.au/news/story/Would-be-teen-suicide-bomber-arrested> -in-Pakistan (accessed September, 9, 2008); “Taliban recruiting children for suicide attacks; 3 teen bombers trained in Pakistan,” July 15, 2007, <http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2007/07/15/asia/AS-GEN-Afghan-Boy-Bomber.php> (accessed September 8, 2008).

²⁹ “Afghanistan: Teen Describes Madrasah Effort To Make Him A Suicide Bomber,” June 6, 2008, <http://www.rferl.net/featuresarticle/2008/6/0fa2c42e-64ff-4595-b353-9fe0cb089cb0.h>. (accessed June 24, 2008); “President pardons boy suicide bomber and sends him on his way with \$2, 000,” <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article2080589.ece> (accessed June 24, 2008).

³⁰ Frank Barnaby, *The Future of Terror* (London: Granta Books, 2007), 199; cf. Mohammed M. Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq: The Strategy and Ideology of Martyrdom* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2007) 3 who states that “[f]rom March 22,2003, to August 18, 2006, approximately 514 suicide attacks took place there.”

³¹ Louise Richardson, *What Terrorists Want: Understanding the Terrorist Threat* (London: John Murray, 2006), 150.

³² Richardson, *What Terrorists Want*, 150.

³³ Andrew Tully, “Iraq: Kirkuk Suicide Bomber Believed to Be a Boy,” <http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/iraq/2005/11/iraq-051102-rfer101.htm> (accessed June 24, 2008).

³⁴ “Two blasts in Iraq kill eight U.S. troops,” CNN, March 11, 2008, <http://www.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/meast/03/10iraq.main/index.html> (accessed June 24, 2008).

³⁵ “Teenage girl blows herself up in Iraq suicide attack,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, May 15, 2008, <http://www.smh.com.au/news/world/teenage-girl-blows-herself-up-iniraq-suicide-attack> (accessed June 24, 2008).

or sixteen wearing an explosive vest.³⁶ Thirdly, Mohammed Hafez in *Suicide Bombers in Iraq* (2007) has demonstrated that Jihardi Salafis and other Sunni insurgent groups in Iraq are developing increasingly complex theological arguments to legitimate suicide attacks and promote the myth of martyrdom among young people.³⁷ Finally, there is confirmation of underage recruiting activities. In May 2008 six teenage boys from the northern city of Mosul alleged that they had been forced into training as suicide bombers.³⁸ Also in May, the Islamic State of Iraq, the umbrella name adopted by a number of Iraqi insurgent groups, released a video of a new teenage terror cell for children under sixteen. The video called “Youth of Heaven” depicts young aspiring suicide bombers brandishing Kalashnikovs and promising to blow themselves up against “the crusaders and apostates.”³⁹

As hostilities intensify again in Afghanistan, it is almost certain that there will be a rapid rise in the incidence of teenage suicide bombings there. In November 2007, a teenage suicide bomber carried out a devastating attack, killing at least thirty-five people, including five members of the Afghani government on a fact-finding expedition to Baghlan province north of Kabul.⁴⁰

The Role of Religion in Teenage Suicide Bombings

There is considerable research to indicate that the “root cause” of suicide missions is not religion, and that many suicide bombers, at least initially, are rarely driven by religious motives.⁴¹ Yet this is not the same as saying that religion plays no role at all. Although Robert Pape, mentioned earlier, has repeatedly stressed that “[s]uicide terrorism is not overwhelmingly a religious phenomenon,” but rather an “extreme strategy for national liberation” against foreign occupation,⁴² he concedes that religion does play a role in suicide bombing though, in doing so, he is careful not to single out Islamist fundamentalism.⁴³ Religion, Pape continues, “is often used as a tool by terrorist organizations in recruiting and in other efforts in service of the broader strategic objective.”⁴⁴ Besides recruiting potential suicide bombers, religion according to Pape, also helps to demonize others and to “relabel” taboo topics such as “suicide” with the more acceptable language of “martyrdom.”⁴⁵

Like Pape, Louise Richardson in *What Terrorists Want* (2006) also claims that religion is never the root cause of terrorism and that there is no necessary link between Islam and

³⁶ Leila Fadel, “Dazed Iraqi teen suicide bomber says she didn’t want to die,” August 25, 2008, <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/226/story/50681.html> (accessed September 8, 2008); Karin Laub, Iraq parades teen girl ‘bomber’,” August 26, 2008, <http://www.smh.com.au/news/world/iraq-parades-teen-bomber/2008/08/26/121951638> (accessed September 8, 2008).

³⁷ Mohammed M. Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq: The Strategy and Ideology of Martyrdom* (Washington, DC: Unites States Institute of Peace Press, 2007), chap. 4.

³⁸ “Iraqi army: 6 teens trained as suicide bombers,” *USA Today*, May 26, 2008, http://www.usatoday.com/news/topstories/2008-05-26-4110462503_x.htm (accessed June 24, 2008).

³⁹ “Iraq: Al-Qaeda releases video of teenage terror cell,” Media Center ADN, <http://www.adnnkronos.com/AKI/English/Security/?+1.0.2200945484> (accessed June 26, 2008).

⁴⁰ Soraya Sarhaddi Nelson, “Teen Suicide Bomber Kills Dozens in Afghanistan,” September 8, 2008 (<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=16053212>) (accessed September 9, 2008).

⁴¹ See, for example, *The Roots of Terrorism*, ed. Louise Richardson (New York and London: Routledge: 2006); *Root Causes of Suicide Terrorism: The globalization of martyrdom* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006); *Root Causes of Suicide Terrorism: The globalization of martyrdom*, ed. Ami Pedhazur (London and New York: Routledge, 2006); Alan B. Krueger, *What Makes a Terrorist: Economics and the Roots of Terrorism* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007); Ariel Merari, “Psychological Aspects of Suicide terrorism,” in *Psychology of Terrorism*, ed. Bruce Bongar, Lisa M. Brown, Larry E. Beutler, James N. Breckenridge, and Philip G. Zimbardo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 101–15.

⁴² Pape, *Dying to Win*, 23, 237.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 17, 210.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 4, 38.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

terrorism. For her part, the key motivators of all forms of terrorism, including suicide terrorism, come under of the rubric of the three Rs: “revenge, renown and reaction.”⁴⁶ While a fourth R, “religion,” is astutely avoided as a primary cause, Richardson also acknowledges the importance of religion in the recruiting, mobilizing and retaining of young people and of its power to provide an all-encompassing ideology that both legitimates and elevates the actions of suicide bombers. “Religiously motivated terrorist groups,” Richardson says, “tend to be more fanatical, more willing to inflict mass casualties and better able to ensure unassailable commitment from their adherents.” Furthermore, when religion is combined with social, economic and political factors, it tends to make terrorist groups “more absolutist, more transnational and more dangerous.”⁴⁷

Unlike Pape and Richardson who are somewhat reticent to acknowledge the role of religion in suicide attacks, the sociologist, Mark Juergensmeyer in *Global Rebellion* (2008), places religion squarely in the foreground. Juergensmeyer argues that when suicide bombings are “religionized,” they become more than tactics in a political strategy, they become powerful symbols and sacred deeds, part of a great cosmic battle between good and evil.⁴⁸ Far from being a subsidiary factor in suicide bombings, religion plays a critical role in radicalizing and mobilizing young suicide bombers. Religion in Juergensmeyer’s opinion, offers something that nothing else can: an all-embracing ideology—a powerful legitimizing discourse with a vision of a cosmic struggle between good and evil, redemption and heavenly reward—that can justify even the most appalling brutalities.⁴⁹ Jason Burke, in his recent book on Al-Qaeda concurs. Jihad is a profoundly-felt religious duty.⁵⁰ A legitimizing discourse, he says, is “the critical element that converts an angry young man into a human bomb.”⁵¹

Since 9/11 experts on terrorism have begun to speak about the “new terrorism” (sometimes called “superterrorism”) to differentiate it from the “old terrorism” that is carried out mainly for political and nationalistic reasons.⁵² The activities of Hamas in Palestine, the IRA in Northern Ireland, ETA in Spain, and the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka are cited as typical examples of the old terrorism. The dominant aim of these groups is usually to create an independent homeland with religion usually playing a minor role. After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 (9/11), now generally accepted as a watershed in world history, it is argued that a new type of terrorism emerged on the world scene that is perpetuated by religious extremism. According to Bruce Hoffman, an expert in counterterrorism, religion has been the “dominant force” behind all suicide attacks since 9/11⁵³ with Al Qaeda regarded as the epitome of the new terrorism. The “new terrorism” is very different to the old political/nationalist terrorism; it is international or transnational in scope, terrifyingly destructive in its potential, and very much driven by extremist interpretations of religion, most especially Islam at the

⁴⁶ Richardson, *What Terrorists Want*, 161.

⁴⁷ Richardson, *What Terrorists Want*, 92.

⁴⁸ Mark Juergensmeyer, *Global Rebellion: Religious Challenges to the Secular State, from Christian Militias to al Qaeda* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2008), 253–55; see also Juergensmeyer’s earlier work, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2003), esp. chap. 11.

⁴⁹ Juergensmeyer, *Global Rebellion*, 255.

⁵⁰ Jason Burke, *Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam* (London: Penguin, 2007), 297.

⁵¹ Burke, *Al-Qaeda*, 308.

⁵² For a critique of the “new terrorism”, see Frank Furedi, *Invitation to Terror: The Expanding Empire of the Unknown* (London and New York: Continuum, 2007). On “superterrorism”, see John Gearson, “The Nature of Modern Terrorism,” in *Superterrorism: Policy Responses*, ed. Lawrence Freedman (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2002), 18–21.

⁵³ Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism. Revised and Expanded Edition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 131.

present time.⁵⁴ The distinction between “new” and “old” terrorism may be too artificial because there is already considerable evidence of “old terrorist” bodies morphing into the “new” and of the new terrorism adopting similar methods (e.g., “psychological warfare”) as the old. Still, the distinction is helpful in that it reinforces the unmistakable religious dimension in modern terrorism even though it seriously underestimates, as I intend to show in the following four case studies, the role exercised by religion in so-called “old” political/nationalist terrorism.

Japan

The first area of conflict that I want to consider is Japan. It concerns the almost four thousand Japanese army and navy pilots who died towards the end of the Second World War attempting to crash their planes, submarines or various other vessels into Allied ships. They are commonly referred to as “Kamikaze.” These pilots were male and predominantly between eighteen and twenty-four years of age, so strictly speaking they are not children. However, just to look at the ages of the pilots who died is to miss the point. Many of the navy’s Kamikaze pilots were drawn from naval-aviation junior high schools for boys in their mid-teens, particularly those unlikely to succeed academically in a conventional academic environment. The army also ran a similar programme for “army youth pilots.” In the last five months of the war when things were going badly for Japan, 32 percent of those enlisted as Kamikaze were students.⁵⁵ One Japanese commander is purported to have said of his fourteen and fifteen-year-old Kamikaze pilots, “Actually they are still too young to drink alcohol.”⁵⁶

The role of religion in the recruitment of young Japanese students was not straightforward. Religion in Japan is a confusing phenomenon in that nearly all Japanese are formally simultaneously Buddhist and Shintō. It should also be added that Confucian values such as filial piety, respect for authority, education and diligence were, and still are, important cultural factors in Japan. There is no conception in Japan of exclusive adherence to one religious faith; traditionally there has been a basic division of labour in that Shintō has generally concentrated on rites associated with birth, marriage, and fertility, while Buddhism deals with the afterlife as well as the development of self-awareness and liberation from worldly concerns.

Shintō is this paper’s immediate concern. According to Shintō’s creation myths, the Japanese islands are of divine origin. Japan is therefore the land of the gods and the Japanese people differ completely and are considered to be superior to all the other peoples in the world.

In the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, Shintō’s message of Japanese uniqueness was exploited to bolster national cohesion leading to what is commonly called “State Shintō”—the State’s use of Shintō, with its shrines and deities for propaganda purposes, emperor worship, and the celebration of patriotism.⁵⁷ Two imperial decrees reinforced State Shintō. In 1882 an Imperial *Rescript to Soldiers and Sailors* embodied the famous precept that “duty is more weighty than a mountain; death is no heavier than a feather.” It was followed some years later by a *Rescript on Education* which decreed respect for the Constitution, observance of the laws, and courage in the defence of the State and the

⁵⁴ Barnaby, *The Future of Terror*, 149–52; Kumar Ramakrishna and Andrew Tan, “The New Terrorism: Diagnosis and Prescriptions,” in *The New Terrorism: Anatomy, Trends and Counter-Strategies*, ed. Andrew Tan and Kumar Ramakrishna (Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 2002), 6–10.

⁵⁵ Peter Hill, “Kamikaze, 1943–5,” in *Making Sense of Suicide Mission*, ed. Diego Gambetta (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 12.

⁵⁶ Christoph Reuter, *My Life Is A Weapon: A Modern History of Suicide Bombing* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002), 130.

⁵⁷ On State Shintō, see Helen Hardacre, *Shintō and the State, 1868–1988* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989).

Imperial Throne.⁵⁸ Both *Rescripts* were expected to be committed to memory by young soldiers and high-school-age students.

In the years leading up to and including the War, it was virtually impossible for young Japanese students to resist the prevailing ideology of Bushido (the “Way of the Warrior”) which had its origins in the samurai moral code with its stress on frugality, loyalty, martial arts and honor unto death.⁵⁹ Bushido lies in the background and sometimes in the foreground of the numerous diaries of Kamikaze pilots that have been collected, published and analysed. In the main the diaries do not reveal young “fanatics” bent on destruction as in the film, *Tora! Tora!;* nor do the pilots see themselves as martyrs; instead, they reveal their utter powerlessness and confusion in the face of a powerful ideology and also their scepticism of the State’s attempt to persuade its citizens to sacrifice their lives to nationalist and imperialist goals. The diaries offer eloquent testimony that contradicts both the stereotype held outside of Japan and the propaganda circulated by the Japanese military—that the Kamikaze died happily for the emperor. Having no choice except to go through with their assigned mission, most Kamikaze (*tokkotai*) pilots reproduced the imperial ideology in action while refusing or failing to embrace it in thought.⁶⁰

Sri Lanka

At first sight, the situation in contemporary Sri Lanka seems vastly different to that in wartime Japan. Yet, in Sri Lanka as well, there is good evidence that children are being recruited by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)—the Tamil rebel army fighting for the independence of Sri Lanka’s Tamils. The Tamil Tigers are considered the most effective and brutal exponents of suicide terrorism in the world; they invented the “suicide belt” and were responsible for the bombing of the World Trade Center in Colombo in 1997 and the assassinations of two heads of state, Rajiv Gandhi in 1991 and Ranasinghe Premadasa of Sri Lanka in 1993.

The Black Tigers, the elite commando section of the army that carries out suicide missions, is extremely careful not to publish personal details about their recruits, especially their ages, so it is quite difficult to know for certain whether or not the Tamil Tigers send children on suicide missions. There is strong circumstantial evidence to indicate that they do. Firstly, it would be hardly surprising that of the thousands of children recruited into the ranks of the LTTE, many aspire to become like their cult heroes, the Black Tigers, by their mid to late teens.⁶¹ Indeed, Ami Pedahzur’s meticulous research on the recruitment and training of children by the LTTE states that after an extremely rigorous basic training, prospective suicide bombers are carefully selected from among the children, tested to a high mental and physical standard, and given “elite status.”⁶² Secondly, members of the LTTE’s political wing frequently address school children and target mid-teens. These youth are subjected to intense propaganda and are encouraged to view films of glorious Tamil battles. The most extreme example of the LTTE’s socialization strategy is found in Punniapoomi. This school is located in Oddusuddan, where

⁵⁸ The Rescripts are cited in Hill, “Kamikaze, 1943–5,” 15.

⁵⁹ Bernard Millot, *Divine Thunder: The Life and Death of the Kamikaze* (London: Macdonald, 1971), 4–5; Richard O’Neill, *Suicide Squads: Axis and Allied Special Attack Weapons of World War II: their Development and their Missions* (London: Salamander, 1981), 11–12.

⁶⁰ Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, *Kamikaze Diaries: Reflections of Japanese Student Soldiers* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

⁶¹ Mia Bloom, *Dying To Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror* (New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2005), 64–65; Jerrold M. Post, *The Mind of the Terrorist: The Psychology of Terrorism from the IRA to al-Qaeda* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 97; Trawick, *Enemy Lines*, 147–209. In February 2006 the LTTE was accused of having recruited 5,794 child soldiers in its ranks. After criticism from UNICEF and Human Rights Watch there has been a significant drop in LTTE recruitment of children.

⁶² Ami Oedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 173; see also, Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 136.

children are moulded into LTTE soldiers. There, socialization and indoctrination techniques are employed to prepare Tamil youth to adopt violence in the cause of self-determination and nationalism.⁶³ Thirdly, of the estimated 10,000 active Tigers, one-third of them are women and girls, with that number rising to almost two-thirds among the subset of suicide bombers.⁶⁴ As noted earlier, the recruitment of women is closely associated with the recruitment of children, so it is quite plausible that reports of children as young as ten having participated in suicide missions are true.⁶⁵ Fourthly, the leader of the Tamil Tigers, Vellupillai Prabhakaran, himself, was only eighteen years old when he created the Tamil New Tigers (TNT), later renamed the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. From the beginning, he advocated violence in the pursuit of Tamil liberation. Finally, the LTTE's own propaganda confirms that children are recruited as suicide bombers. This is explicit in the film *tayakkanavu*, or "Dream of the Motherland" which depicts a young boy joining a suicide squad after his friend had been killed in a Sri Lankan army bombing raid.⁶⁶

If one accepts that the LTTE recruits children both as soldiers and also as suicide bombers, it is still necessary to reassess the commonly-held view that there is little evidence that religion per se is a feature in the emergence of suicide missions among the Tamils.⁶⁷ Pape, for example, comments that the Tamil Tigers are "a Marxist–Leninist group" who may have their roots in Hinduism but who are "adamantly opposed to religion;"⁶⁸ Juergensmeyer, for his part, states that the Tamil position is "not explicitly religious;"⁶⁹ Mia Bloom says that religion is "incidental" to the conflict,⁷⁰ and Rosemarie Skaine claims that the LTTE "does not have religion as the common ground."⁷¹ These assertions are essentially true. Although there are two competing nationalisms at work, it is hard to ignore the complex religious dimension at play in Sri Lanka where the majority Sinhalese community is overwhelmingly Buddhist, the minority Tamil community is predominantly Hindu, and the Muslim Tamil community in the East are becoming increasingly radicalized. Buddhism figures prominently in the rhetoric of Sinhala nationalism, and although Hinduism is far more muted in the Tamil fight for a homeland, their response to the Sri Lankan government's "Buddhization" is deeply rooted in its proud Tamil history, culture and religion. The LTTE connects its ideology with a judicious use of symbols rooted in Tamil myth such as the springing tiger, the symbol of one of the most favourite Tamil gods, Murugan. This is just one indication that the source of the LTTE's ideology lies not only in Marxist ideology but also in its ancient Tamil religion and culture. Secondly, the LTTE's notion of martyrdom is deeply rooted in the sacrificial themes depicted in ancient Tamil religious texts. Themes, such as dedication and asceticism have been invigorated from the Tamil *bhakti* religious tradition which helps LTTE recruits develop a sense that their struggle for independence is of cosmic significance.⁷² There are also references in traditional Hindu and Tamil classics that laud Tamil warriors sacrificing themselves and others for their leader.⁷³ It is therefore not difficult to appreciate how such texts could be pressed into service by leaders of the LTTE wishing to radicalize the minds of potential young suicide bombers.

Iran

⁶³ Michael P. Arena and Bruce A. Arrigo, *The Terrorist Identity: Explaining the Terrorist Threat* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2006), 102–3.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Skaine, *Female Suicide Bombers*, 50–51.

⁶⁵ Skaine, *Female Suicide Bombers*, 88.

⁶⁶ Arena and Arrigo, *The Terrorist Identity*, 102–3.

⁶⁷ Bloom, *Dying To Kill*, 60.

⁶⁸ Pape, *Dying to Win*, 4.

⁶⁹ Juergensmeyer, *Global Rebellion*, 128.

⁷⁰ Bloom, *Dying To Kill*, 69.

⁷¹ Skaine, *Female Suicide Bombers*, 87.

⁷² Rena and Arrigo, *The Terrorist Identity*, 188.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 188.

The third case study considers the so-called “human wave attacks” carried out during the Iran–Iraq War in the mid 1980s.⁷⁴ If you were to visit the long entrance hall to the Martyrs Museum in Tehran, you will find it carpeted in blood red with a giant sign overhead proclaiming: “In the Name of God of the Martyrs and the Honest.” It is a chilling testament to thousands of fresh-faced boys, “warrior-martyrs” who either died in that country’s eight-year war with Iraq or in the revolution against the Shah.⁷⁵

These “human wave attacks”—tens of thousand of children, some as young as twelve and thirteen, running into the Iraqi firing line and into minefields with the word “Karbala” on their lips and flags—represent the most disturbing and gruesome parade of mass self-sacrifice in living memory, comparable only to the battles of Flanders during the First World War.

The story of the sacred city of Karbala (in present-day Iraq) and the death (martyrdom) of Hussain, Ali’s son and the Prophet’s grandson, goes back to the seventh century when Hussain was assassinated by Yazid, a caliph of the Sunni’s Umayyad dynasty. To this day that event is recognized as the tragic turning point in Shi’ite history—rather like the Crucifixion in the Christian tradition. Karbala lies at the very bedrock of Shi’ites sensibility and consciousness and it is the reason for Shi’ite fearlessness in battle and their veneration for martyrdom.

The assassination of Hussain is commemorated annually in massive parades throughout Shi’ite communities. Men stripped to the waist parade down city streets, flagellating themselves with whips until their backs become raw and bloody. On these occasions—the Ashura celebrations—held during the first ten days of the Islamic month of Muharran, the faithful remember the suffering of Hussain and grieve for his death and their own vicarious guilt for not having stood by him in his time of trial.

There is little doubt that Ayatollah Khomeini used this Shia religious tradition to justify his suicide battalions. Under Khomeini, Karbala was no longer a passion story but the real thing, and Hussain’s sacrifice, a model for every Shi’ite.

When the war was going poorly for Iran, recruiters trawled through the schools. They told the children the heroic epic of Karbala as though it were a fairytale adventure, a grandiose stage on which they themselves could appear as heroes, martyrs. One recruiter who could no longer bear it and who later fled to Germany recorded the details of the recruitment process. On some days, he said, entire classes were taken directly to the barracks by Revolutionary Guards. The families were given only a short message that their son had volunteered to go to war.

If any children refused, we vilified them. We asked them if their parents perhaps weren’t good Muslims, and wondered out loud whether we would have to send them to prison. Every evening, new children were standing in the barrack-yard distraught, intimidated, and with no real idea of what lay ahead. There were panicking children; children who imagined they’d soon be with Muhammad, the Prophet, in Paradise—and children who wanted to feed their families by serving in the war.⁷⁶

Palestinian Occupied Territories

Finally, the deployment of younger and younger children in Gaza and the West Bank as suicide bombers is of major concern. Two very different books, *Army of Roses* (2003) by the American journalist Barbara Victor, and *Hamas* (2006) by the intelligence analyst, Matthew Levitt, describe well the role of religion in the culture of martyrdom that is fostered among Palestinian

⁷⁴ Reuter, *My Life Is A Weapon*, 35.

⁷⁵ For a full description of Iran’s child soldier–martyrs, see Joyce M. Davis, *Martyrs: Innocence, Vengeance, and Despair in the Middle East* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), chap. 3.

⁷⁶ Cited in Reuter, *My Life Is A Weapon*, 45.

children.⁷⁷ Victor's lively account is based almost exclusively on personal interviews with children, parents, teachers, clerics, academics and leaders of militant organizations in Gaza and the West Bank. She describes the enormous pressure on children. Parents proudly told her how they wanted their children to become martyrs. They spoke of the great honor in having one in the family and their duty to provide one. One mother who encouraged her sons and daughters to become martyrs told Victor, "I adore my children, but I help them to achieve martyrdom."⁷⁸ In interviews with primary school children Victor observed how most children were preoccupied with the question of death and killing. Many told her that they wanted to be a martyr when they grew up.⁷⁹ Children traded martyr cards as though they were cards of movie stars or football and basketball heroes. Necklaces were worn with photographs of martyrs. Carpets were embroidered with images of martyrs. Coasters were printed with the faces of martyrs. Songs were composed to martyrs. Even the most popular television programs for pre-teens and older adolescents were about those who had died in suicide bombings. Martyrdom, according to Victor, separated "the 'in' kids from the nerds."⁸⁰ Suicide bombers were such a source of neighbourhood pride that streets and buildings were named after them; walls, houses, apartments, hospitals, municipal buildings, schools, and police stations were plastered with posters and photographs glorifying the exploits of suicide bombers.⁸¹ Martyrs were elevated almost to the status of prophets. For many Palestinian children, therefore, martyrdom is the ultimate achievement, their life's goal, if only Allah will select them for this supreme honor.⁸²

Levitt also employs extensive personal interviews but the strength of his approach is the vast amount of documentary material he has unearthed—including hitherto undisclosed intelligence material—to expose Hamas' approach to recruiting and radicalizing children. Hamas' supreme objective, Levitt states upfront, "is to mutate the essentially ethno-political Palestinian national struggle into a fundamentally religious conflict."⁸³ Hamas considers the recruitment of children as a legitimate practice in its fight against Israel and it has been extremely successful in doing so, if figures of a 2001 report claiming that 73 percent of children aged between nine and sixteen hoped to become martyrs, is any guide.⁸⁴ Through Hamas' extensive social welfare and proselytization networks, children are desensitized early to violence and encouraged to glorify and participate in it. Levitt cites a gruesome example of Hamas' desensitizing strategy from their weekly online children's magazine called *al-Fateh* (The Conqueror). One issue featured a photograph of the decapitated head of Zaynab Abu Salem, a female suicide bomber from the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade (not Hamas) with the caption: "The perpetrator of the suicide bombing attack, Zaynab Abu Salem. Her head was severed from her pure body and her headscarf remained to decorate [her face]. Your place is in heaven in the upper skies, oh, Zaynab ... sister of men."⁸⁵ Other Hamas websites frequently screen the "last will and testament" of suicide bombers recorded before their attacks,

⁷⁷ Barbara Victor, *Army of Roses: Inside the World of Palestinian Women Suicide Bombers* (Emmaus, Pa: Rodale]: 2003); Matthew Levitt, *Hamas: Politics, Charity, and Terrorism in the Service of Jihad* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006). See also, Mohammed M. Hafez, "Dying to be Martyrs: The symbolic dimension of suicide terrorism", in *Root Causes of Suicide Terrorism: The globalization of martyrdom*, ed. Ami Pedahzur (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 61–72. For photographs depicting children in the role of martyrs, see Anne Marie Oliver and Paul F. Steinberg, *The Road to Martyrs' Square: A Journey into the World of the Suicide Bomber* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁷⁸ Victor, *Army of Roses*, 102.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 188.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 185.

⁸³ Levitt, *Hamas*, 107.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 141.

sometimes showing the final footage of the actual attack.⁸⁶ Hamas also employs various other means to radicalize children. It organizes summer camps where children are given a diet of religious propaganda and military training. Mosques, run by Hamas members and sympathizers, are engaged to teach children about jihad and to glorify suicide bombers. Typical of the propaganda fed to the children is an audio tape with the title, “The Pearl of Al-Aqsa Martyrs.” It contains songs with lyrics like “War is Medicine and Death is Eternity” and “After the stone, a knife, and after that martyrdom.”⁸⁷

Palestinian religious authorities aid the recruitment of young suicide bombers with religious rhetoric and theological arguments. Sermons extolling the virtues of martyr operations are delivered in the city mosques and reinforced by Palestinian television channels. Suicide, which is expressly forbidden in the Qur’an, is justified on the grounds that martyrdom attacks are an expression of selflessness and altruism and are “Islamically legitimate” in the defence of Islam. A typical example of theological reframing of suicide operations is offered by Sheikh Yusuf al Qardawi, a well-known Palestinian theologian. In 1996, Qardawi stated that: “Suicide bombings in occupied Palestine represent one of the highest forms of jihad in the name of Allah.”⁸⁸ Furthermore, young suicide bombers are promised the pleasures of paradise, the power to intercede on behalf of family members, and many other compelling rewards validated with theological authority and interpretations of the Qur’an.

Conclusion

Let me conclude by saying that the recruitment of teenage suicide bombers is very real, and could spread rapidly as it has done in Iraq. It is a mistake to dismiss the role of religion in the recruitment and the radicalizing of young people. It is a powerful instrument in the hands of militant groups. Religion may not be the primary or root cause in the formation of teenage suicide bombers, but the evidence is such that at some point in the recruitment and radicalization of young people (often those who are not very religious in the first place), religion in its various dimensions, plays a key legitimizing role. Even among more secular terrorist groups and nation states, religion has been, and is being, used as a motivating factor and as a cloak for military and political ends. It is clear that educational programmes need to be developed to enable young people, themselves, to strip away the warped theological vision that enables militants to operate so effectively among them, and for the theological leaders of the great world religions to counter their vision of death with a vision of life.

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⁸⁶ Ibid., *Hamas*, 141–2.

⁸⁷ Ibid., *Hamas*, 137.

⁸⁸ Quoted in Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 160.

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