

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE			Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188		
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1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 03-05-2009		2. REPORT TYPE FINAL		3. DATES COVERED (From - To)	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Suicide Terrorism: Deadly Tactic or Operational Art at Work?		5a. CONTRACT NUMBER			
		5b. GRANT NUMBER			
		5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER			
6. AUTHOR(S) LCDR Scott P. Smith, USN Paper Advisor (if Any): N/A		5d. PROJECT NUMBER			
		5e. TASK NUMBER			
		5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER			
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Joint Military Operations Department Naval War College 686 Cushing Road Newport, RI 02841-1207		8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER			
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)		10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)			
		11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)			
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Distribution Statement A: Approved for public release; Distribution is unlimited.					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES A paper submitted to the Naval War College faculty in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Joint Military Operations Department. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the NWC or the Department of the Navy.					
14. ABSTRACT Terrorist groups have repeatedly used suicide attacks in an attempt to achieve their strategic objectives. There is minimal argument that these groups demonstrate a profound understanding of both the strategic and tactical levels of war, however there is little mention of their understanding of the operational level of war. An analysis of suicide terror attacks over the past 25 years indicates that developed terrorist groups (including Al Qaeda and many others) understand the operational level and practice the tenets of operational art. This knowledge is crucial in developing a response to counter what has become a prevalent and effective terrorist tactic. This paper provides background information on the development of the suicide attack as an effective terrorist tactic. It analyzes several terrorist groups and their utilization of suicide attacks to achieve strategic objectives. Finally, the paper reaches conclusions about the groups' awareness and use of operational art concepts, and provides recommendations for assisting the development of a counterterrorism game plan.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS suicide attacks, terrorism, Al Qaeda, operational art					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 22	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON Chairman, JMO Dept
a. REPORT UNCLASSIFIED	b. ABSTRACT UNCLASSIFIED	c. THIS PAGE UNCLASSIFIED			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (include area code) 401-841-3556

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Suicide Terrorism: Deadly Tactic or Operational Art at Work?

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

Signature: _____

4 May 2009

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Abstract

Terrorist groups have repeatedly used suicide attacks in an attempt to achieve their strategic objectives. There is minimal argument that these groups demonstrate a profound understanding of both the strategic and tactical levels of war, however there is little mention of their understanding of the operational level of war. An analysis of suicide terror attacks over the past 25 years indicates that developed terrorist groups (including Al Qaeda and many others) understand the operational level and practice the tenets of operational art quite well. This knowledge is crucial in developing a response to counter what has become a prevalent and effective terrorist tactic. This paper provides background information on the development of the suicide attack as an effective terrorist tactic. It analyzes several terrorist groups and their utilization of suicide attacks to achieve strategic objectives. Finally, the paper reaches conclusions about the groups' awareness and use of operational art concepts and provides recommendations for assisting the development of a counterterrorism game plan.

INTRODUCTION

“Terrorising you, while you are carrying arms on our land, is a legitimate and morally demanded duty. . . . It is a duty now on every tribe in the Arab Peninsula to fight, Jihad, in the cause of Allah and to cleanse the land from those occupiers. . . . These youths know that: if one is not to be killed one will die (any way) and the most honourable death is to be killed in the way of Allah.”¹ The fatwa (“a religious opinion on Islamic law”)² issued by Osama bin Laden in February 1996 specifically alludes to the use of martyrdom operations (“killed in the way of Allah”) in his declaration of war against the United States. Since 1983, terrorist groups including Al Qaeda, Hamas, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), and Chechen rebels (among many others) have utilized suicide terror attacks as a tactic to achieve their strategic objectives.³

There is little doubt that terrorists who conduct suicide attacks have a well-developed tactical level of war composed of robust intelligence, steadfast protection measures, and clandestine offensive capabilities. The operational level of war “links the tactical employment of forces to national and military strategic objectives.”⁴ An analysis of several suicide attacks between 1983 and the present yields interesting insights into the possibility that the terror groups who utilize them have knowledge not only of the tactical and strategic levels of war, but also of the operational level. Terrorist groups who have achieved strategic

Some notes appear in shortened form. For full details, see the appropriate entry in the bibliography.

1. Osama bin Laden, "Declaration of War Against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places," *Al Quds Al Arabi*, August 1996, http://www.pbs.org/newshour/terrorism/international/fatwa_1996.html (accessed 23 April 2009).

2. *Merriam-Webster Online*, s.v. “fatwa,” <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fatwa> (accessed 23 April 2009).

3. The October 1983 bombing of the U.S. Marine Corps Barracks in Beirut, Lebanon is widely viewed as the catalyst for the use of suicide attacks against Americans. See Cook and Allison, *Understanding and Addressing Suicide Attacks*, 1-2.

4. U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication 3-0: Joint Operations*, II-2.

successes have also demonstrated an understanding of the basic tenets of operational art, and practice them to achieve their objectives.

BACKGROUND

The first terrorist attacks during which an individual assailant was not expected to survive occurred in the first century AD. Since then the Jewish Zealots, Thugs of India, and Ismaili Assassins have all utilized tactics requiring an assailant to enter a heavily defended area in order to attack a high priority target (usually a high-ranking political or military leader), with the expectation that the assailant would not survive the attack.⁵ The assailant's death was a not a prerequisite for the success of the attack; however the tactic usually resulted in the assailant being killed by forces defending the target. More recently, Japanese Kamikaze attacks in World War II demonstrated that a large military force may resort to suicide tactics in the interest of survival. In the modern age of terrorism, the term "suicide attack" is defined as "a politically motivated violent attack perpetrated by a self-aware individual (or individuals) who actively and purposely causes his own death through blowing himself up along with his chosen target. The perpetrator's ensured death is a precondition for the success of his mission."⁶

The operations of terrorist groups are motivated by two ideologies: religion and nationalism. The overwhelming majority of suicide attacks since 1983 are perpetrated by Muslim groups, like Al Qaeda, with religious motivations; however the LTTE in Sri Lanka, with purely nationalistic objectives, also conducts a significant number of suicide attacks.⁷

5. For a history of organizations using suicidal attacks prior to 1983, see Bloom, *Dying to Kill*, 4-11.

6. Yoram Schweitzer, "Suicide Terrorism: Development and main characteristics," in *Countering Suicide Terrorism*, 76.

7. Cook and Allison, *Understanding and Addressing Suicide Attacks*, 12.

Other Muslim groups who have used suicide attacks as a primary method of terror include Hamas, Sunni insurgent groups in Iraq, and the Chechen rebels. It is important to note that these movements (against Israeli, American, and Russian occupation respectively) have entirely secular nationalist objectives, but have incorporated the religious motivation of martyrdom under the global radical Islamist influence of groups like Al Qaeda.⁸ The Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partia Karkaren Kurdistan* or PKK) and LTTE are perhaps the only terrorist organizations that do not use religion to justify suicide attacks.

In medical terms, suicide is “the intentional taking of one's own life”⁹ and, depending upon the translation, is specifically forbidden in the Quran.¹⁰ In the minds of radical Islamists, a Jihadist who blows himself up with the intention of killing others is not committing suicide, but rather is sacrificing his life for Allah. Their teaching is that “the Jihad becomes the duty of every Muslim (a personal duty). In this state, self-sacrifice becomes the highest duty of the Muslim and the supreme expression of the Jihad.”¹¹ Using this general philosophy, radical Muslim clerics have justified suicide attacks as martyrdom since the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), when the Iranian Ayatollah Khomeini and other Shiite clerics passed religious rulings permitting self sacrifice.¹² This interpretation of martyrdom has since become the standard for Islamist terrorist groups that utilize suicide attacks.

Martyrs are highly regarded in Islamic tradition, but the definition of a martyr is contested between traditional Muslim religious leaders and those with a fundamentalist dogma. The traditional view holds that a martyr is one who dies in the Jihad.¹³ This view

8. Cook and Allison, *Understanding and Addressing Suicide Attacks*, 41.

9. *The Free Dictionary*, s.v. “suicide,” <http://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/suicide> (accessed 24 April 2009).

10. Quran 4:29, trans. Rashad Khalifa, <http://www.submission.org/suras/sura4.htm> (accessed 24 April 2009).

11. Shay, *The Shahids*, 11.

12. *Ibid.*, 9.

13. *Ibid.*, 8.

also maintains that taking one's life, regardless of the means used to do so, is suicide and is forbidden in Islam. Conversely, radical Islamists like Sheikh al-Kardawi, a Muslim clerical leader, opined in a 1996 interview printed in an Egyptian newspaper that "suicide puts an end to his life out of selfish considerations . . . whereas the person involved in martyrdom (*mujhad*) is brimming with belief in Allah and his mercy. He fights his enemies and the enemies of Allah, with this new weapon [the suicide attack], which fate has placed in the hands of the weak so that they can fight and defeat the arrogant and stronger adversary."¹⁴ Radicals believe that martyrdom is not suicide and is, in fact, celebrated and welcomed by Allah. Islamist terrorist groups recruit suicide bombers using selected passages from the *hadith* ("the collective body of traditions relating to Muhammad and his companions"),¹⁵ which discuss the rewards afforded to martyrs in the afterlife. These rewards include total forgiveness of sin, eternity in paradise, 72 *houris* (virgins of paradise), and the ability to intercede for 70 relatives.¹⁶

There are other terrorist groups who have routinely used suicide attacks and have had no religious motivations to do so. These groups, including the LTTE in Sri Lanka and the PKK in Turkey, have entirely secular nationalist strategic objectives. Both are fighting to gain international legitimacy and sovereign territory within that of a larger nation. The LTTE began using suicide attacks in 1987 and have conducted more than 100 attacks in the

14. Shay, *The Shahids*, 10.

15. *Merriam-Webster Online*, s.v. "hadith," <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hadith> (accessed 24 April 2009).

16. There are many different interpretations of the treasures awaiting the martyr in paradise. For a full discussion, see Cook and Allison, *Understanding and Addressing Suicide Attacks*, 10.

interim.¹⁷ The PKK has conducted numerous suicide attacks since 1996 and is still active in Turkey.¹⁸

SUICIDE ATTACKS PERPETRATED BY AL QAEDA

Almost eight years after being specifically targeted by an international anti-terror coalition led by the United States, Al Qaeda remains a most serious threat to global security. Its strategic objectives are to “rid the Muslim world of western influence, to establish a caliphal Muslim state, to foster a state of permanent salvational jihad, and to eventually convert (or at least conquer) the entire world to Islam.”¹⁹ To say that Al Qaeda’s operations have had strategic influence on nations across the globe would be an understatement. The 9/11 attacks in New York and Washington, D.C. have been well documented and their strategic effects are widely known. Al Qaeda has made it clear that those attacks were not the first, nor will they be the last. There are several lesser known elements of Al Qaeda’s operations, including the 9/11 attacks, that should be considered in any analysis. These elements demonstrate Al Qaeda’s profound, if not obvious, understanding of operational functions and the principles of war.

Command and control (C2) is the “exercise of authority and direction by a commander over assigned and attached forces in the accomplishment of the mission.”²⁰ A distinct centralized command organization is very evident within Al Qaeda. “What radical Muslims previously lacked was organization, which Al Qaeda and several other Islamist

17. A complete list of all suicide attacks carried out by the LTTE can be viewed at http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/shrilanka/database/data_suicide_killings.htm (accessed 24 April 2009).

18. For a comparison between LTTE and PKK operations, see Ali M. Koknar, “PKK LTTE: Twin Terror,” http://www.saag.org/common/uploaded_files/paper1865.html (accessed 24 April 2009).

19. Cook and Allison, *Understanding and Addressing Suicide Attacks*, 49.

20. U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication 3-0: Joint Operations*, III-1

groups have built and sustained amid great secrecy.”²¹ Al Qaeda utilizes a hierarchical structure with the emir-general (Osama bin Laden) at the top, a consultative council (the *shura majlis*) directly under him, and four operational committees (military, economics, religious studies, and public relations) under the council.²² The structure of Al Qaeda under the committees has undergone several changes, especially since 9/11, but there remains consistent evidence that “the military committee appoints agent handlers who manage an extensive network of cells and agents.”²³ It is this level, which directly controls highly decentralized execution, that could be considered the operational leadership of Al Qaeda. They are responsible for coordinating individual cells and operatives to conduct kinetic attacks (usually suicide attacks).

Intelligence is vital to Al Qaeda’s operational successes. Specifically, human intelligence (HUMINT) is incorporated heavily at the tactical and operational levels. The agent handlers at the operational level are heavily involved in recruiting and training subagents, who infiltrate Muslim communities to recruit supporters and gather intelligence for future operations.²⁴

To declare that a terrorist group employs operational fires might seem like a stretch, until one analyzes the suicide attack that killed Sheikh Massoud Sh’ah, the military leader of Afghanistan’s Northern Alliance in 2001. Sh’ah was killed in a suicide attack conducted by two individuals linked to an Algerian terrorist group acting on direct orders from Al Qaeda headquarters. This attack occurred on 9 September 2001 (notably two days prior to 9/11) and “was meant to neutralize the main rival of Al Qaeda and the Taliban in anticipation of the

21. Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda*, 74.

22. *Ibid.*, 76-7.

23. *Ibid.*, 77.

24. *Ibid.*, 102.

terror attack in the United States.”²⁵ Osama bin Laden expected the United States to react by attempting to unite with the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan. Then he directly attacked the only indigenous support the Americans would have in the country. “Operational fires can be described as the application of one’s lethal and/or nonlethal firepower for generating a decisive impact on the course and outcome of a campaign or major operation.”²⁶ The suicide attack on Massoud Sh’ah is a clear example of an operational fire designed to have decisive influence on the American military response in Afghanistan.

Al Qaeda also demonstrates a profound comprehension of the concept of operational protection. “Al Qaeda’s global network has survived by its members strictly adhering to the principles of operational security.”²⁷ A global network of tactical terror cells is managed by Al Qaeda’s operational level, the previously discussed agent handlers. A vast compilation of safe houses provide these cells with bases from which to operate. There exists a strict protocol by which these houses are procured, making them almost impossible to find and neutralize.²⁸ Al Qaeda ensures its communications are secure by eschewing electronic methods whenever possible and relying on human couriers to deliver orders and messages. Typically, only the upper-level leadership is authorized the use of satellite communications, and any discussions are directed to be “quick, explicit, and pertinent.”²⁹ An incredible degree of operational security is demonstrated in the 9/11 operation. “What is remarkable about [the] September 11 attacks is that it is one of those few conspiracies in history where all of the participants knew that they were going to die as a result of their actions and yet kept silent and in no way (knowingly) betrayed the operation, even to say goodbye to their

25. Shay, *The Shahids*, 101.

26. Vego, *Joint Operational Warfare*, VIII-59-60.

27. Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda*, 105.

28. *Ibid.*, 105-6.

29. *Ibid.*, 107.

families.”³⁰ Information operations are also an integral part of Al Qaeda plans. “Al Qaeda deceived coalition forces in Afghanistan during the Tora Bora campaign by broadcasting prerecorded tapes indicating that Osama and other leaders were in the area, whereas they had in fact gone elsewhere.”³¹ The protection function conserves a force’s fighting potential through passive and active defensive measures.³² Al Qaeda’s exceptional use of passive measures to hide its operatives and communications and its use of active information operations in a protection role proves it understands well the function of operational protection.

Elements of operational art are apparent throughout Al Qaeda’s suicide operations. The use of combined forces in recent operations has increased the lethality and effectiveness of U.S. Armed Forces. The same principle applies to Al Qaeda, which is widely believed to have had a hand in planning, coordinating, and executing suicide attacks in support of terror organizations detached from their own massive network of decentralized cells. The Chechen rebels utilize Al Qaeda’s military and economic resources to support its terror campaign against Russia. Chechens rebels are suspected of having procured weapons and completed training in Al Qaeda’s Afghan camps.³³ Al Qaeda is all too willing to support its brothers involved in the Jihad, and the situation in Chechnya fits the mold perfectly. On the surface, the struggle between the PKK and Turkey does not seem suited to Al Qaeda because the PKK has never claimed itself as a religiously –motivated group. Nevertheless, Al Qaeda has claimed joint responsibility for several attacks in Turkey. Attacks on two Jewish synagogues on 15 November 2003 and the bombing of an HSBC bank and the British Consulate in

30. Cook and Allison, *Understanding and Addressing Suicide Attacks*, 54.

31. Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda*, 107.

32. U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication 3-0: Joint Operations*, III-24.

33. Manekas, “The Invisible Enemy,” 38.

Istanbul five days later “bore the hallmarks of an Al Qaeda operation, with near simultaneous timing and the use of fertilizer-based bombs.”³⁴

Al Qaeda also exhibits the use of sequencing concepts while planning operations. The attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon were “only part of an overall plan to continue terror operations of an escalating nature inside the United States.”³⁵ Fortunately, these continued operations have been foiled, at least for the time being. The criminal investigation in support of the conviction of Zacarias Moussaoui (the “20th hijacker”) yielded several clues that there may have been a separate massive air attack planned against the United States in 2001. Moussaoui had information about the aerial dispersal of pesticides and “had inquired in June 2001 about crop dusting.”³⁶ This evidence suggests that Al Qaeda had a separate operation in work, possibly planned in sequence to follow the attacks of 9/11 with another unconventional attack designed to cause mass casualties.

Al Qaeda attempts to coordinate with other terrorist groups sharing similar ideology and sequence its operations in order to achieve its strategic objectives, demonstrating an understanding of the basic tenets of operational art. Al Qaeda also clearly understands and implements at least four of the six operational functions, enabling the effective planning and execution of suicide terror attacks around the globe.

SUICIDE ATTACKS IN ISRAEL, LEBANON, AND PALESTINE

Israel, and nations in the region that support its existence, has been the target of suicide attacks by pro-Palestinian groups since the early 1980s. These groups include Hezbollah (a Shiite organization based in Lebanon) and several Palestinian groups including

34. Bloom, *Dying to Kill*, 117.

35. Cook and Allison, *Understanding and Addressing Suicide Attacks*, 55.

36. Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda*, 146.

Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), and the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades. These groups have conducted more than 140 suicide attacks in Israel since 1993, resulting in more than 540 (mostly civilian) deaths.³⁷ Strategic objectives vary slightly depending on the organization, but the consistent theme is the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state. Martyrdom, the prevalent motivation for suicide attacks, is regarded by Palestinian leaders “as a strategic weapon that provides a deterrence effect and a strategic balance in relation to Israel.”³⁸

Anti-Israeli terror groups use operational art principles to conduct attacks in support of their strategic objectives. Following the February 1994 massacre in the Tomb of the Patriarchs-Khalili Mosque perpetrated by Jewish radical Dr. Baruch Goldstein, Hamas began a campaign of suicide attacks that lasted until 2005.³⁹ Operational pauses were utilized by Hamas during this time to reconstitute and recruit new bombers. “In general, there was a pattern of quiet after every major operation, with suicide attacks then gradually building up to another major operation.”⁴⁰ In all, there were approximately 120 attacks perpetrated by Palestinian groups from 1994 to 2005, capped by a suicide bombing during the Passover Seder at the Park Hotel in Netanya, Israel, which killed 29 and injured more than 150 civilians.⁴¹ Ultimately, the operations were a strategic failure, as they resulted in Israel’s reoccupation of several Palestinian cities and the West Bank;⁴² nevertheless they demonstrated Hamas’ understanding and use of operational pauses in the conduct of a campaign.

37. For a complete list of suicide perpetrated against Israel, see <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/> (accessed 25 April 2009).

38. Shay, *The Shahids*, 11.

39. Cook and Allison, *Understanding and Addressing Suicide Attacks*, 28-9.

40. *Ibid.*, 29.

41. For a detailed explanation of the attack on the Park Hotel, see Timmerman, *Preachers of Hate*, 30-45.

42. Cook and Allison, *Understanding and Addressing Suicide Attacks*, 35.

According to Israeli terrorism expert Dr. Shaul Shay, Hamas, the PIJ, and Fatah have all demonstrated the ability to cooperate and execute suicide attacks.⁴³ It is extraordinarily difficult to assess whether or not these groups actually cooperate or simply attempt to take responsibility for other groups' attacks in order to gain support from the Palestinian people. Hamas and the Islamic Jihad both claimed responsibility for an attack at a Sbarro pizzeria in 2001. Hamas, the Islamic Jihad, the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) all claimed responsibility for a deadly bus bombing in 2002.⁴⁴ It seems likely, based on the prevalence of suicide attacks in Israel, that Palestinian terrorist groups would combine knowledge, intelligence, and personnel in a joint effort to achieve a common objective.

Anti-Israeli groups do not demonstrate the use of operational functions to the degree that Al Qaeda does, primarily because they are not global organizations. Due to aggressive Israeli attempts at quelling the influence of these groups, protection is certainly a consideration in their operations. Hamas uses attacks against civilians as an operational protection measure. A Hamas training manual notes that it would be "foolish to hunt the tiger when there are plenty of sheep around."⁴⁵ Why target military units who are generally better prepared to withstand such attacks and will cause terrorist casualties when killing civilians is both easier and much more effective at achieving the strategic objective?

Although not the first instance of a modern suicide terror attack, the October 1983 bombing of the United States Marine Corps barracks in Beirut (claimed by Hezbollah), which killed 260 Marines, is widely viewed as the catalyst for the ongoing suicide attacks

43. Shay, *The Shahids*, 196.

44. Bloom, *Dying to Kill*, 29.

45. There is some disagreement as to the origin of this quote. Some sources cite it from a Hamas training manual, while others cite it from an Al Qaeda manual. See Bloom, *Dying to Kill*, 34.

against Western nations by Islamic radical groups since that date.⁴⁶ This attack, along with the bombing of the American Embassy in Beirut a few months earlier, was highly successful in achieving a strategic objective: the United States, France, and Italy withdrew all troops from Lebanon three months later. “These withdrawals have subsequently been pointed to by Al Qaeda and other groups as important signs that suicide attacks can be extremely effective against Western democratic powers.”⁴⁷ What is less well known by Americans is that the barracks bombing was one of two simultaneous attacks that day. The other, also a suicide car bomb, occurred near French military headquarters and killed 58 people.⁴⁸ These attacks were very well synchronized in order to cause maximum damage and strategic effect, and indicate comprehension of a key operational art concept.

SUICIDE ATTACKS PERPETRATED BY THE LTTE

The LTTE, PKK, Chechen rebels, and Iraqi insurgents all have nationalist strategic objectives similar to the anti-Israeli groups. They are fighting to achieve independent states distinctly different from a perceived aggressor. The LTTE, which is attempting to gain an independent state on the island of Sri Lanka, “is unequivocally the most effective and brutal terrorist organization ever to utilize suicide terrorism.”⁴⁹

Under leader Villupilai Prabhakaran, the LTTE (a.k.a. the Tamil Tigers) uses a structured hierarchical command and control system, akin to a national military. There are distinct differences between units, which are divided by military specialty. The Tamil Tigers utilize a navy, an air force, a child soldier division, a female soldier division, and a distinct

46. Cook and Allison, *Understanding and Addressing Suicide Attacks*, 2.

47. Cronin, *Terrorists and Suicide Attacks*, 4-5.

48. Shay, *The Shahids*, 40.

49. Yoram Schweitzer, “Suicide Terrorism: Development and main characteristics,” in *Countering Suicide Terrorism*, 78.

suicide bombing division named the “Black Tigers.”⁵⁰ Within the “Sea Tigers” naval force, there is a separate, distinct division of naval suicide units, called the “Black Sea Tigers.”⁵¹ The leaders of these military divisions would be considered the LTTE operational leadership. They are responsible for planning and coordinating joint attacks between naval forces and suicide forces and have the most direct influence on operations.

The LTTE has robust intelligence capabilities, which, in violation of United Nations Resolution 1612 (and many others), hinge on the use of children as spies and couriers.⁵² The LTTE uses child spies to gather information about Sri Lankan military and law enforcement targets. They also rely heavily on female suicide bombers to obtain surprise because women are “better able to avoid detection and pass through security.”⁵³ These measures appear very tactical in nature, but an analysis of the targets of LTTE suicide attacks demonstrates that its operational level is alive and well. The LTTE is responsible for the 1991 suicide assassination of Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.⁵⁴ The Tamil Tigers also assassinated the Sri Lankan Minister of Defense in 1991 with a suicide attack.⁵⁵ The 1999 attempted assassination of Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga by a female Black Tiger suicide bomber left the president without one of her eyes, but she survived the attack.⁵⁶ Absent other information about the operational level of the LTTE, one could reasonably surmise from the strategic nature of these targets that operational intelligence and C2 are being practiced.

50. Bloom, *Dying to Kill*, 60.

51. Dammika Wijewardana (Sri Lankan Navy), in discussion with the author, 30 April 2009.

52. Bloom, *Dying to Kill*, 65.

53. *Ibid.*, 65.

54. Rohan Gunaratna, “Suicide Terrorism in Sri Lanka and India,” in *Countering Suicide Terrorism*, 101.

55. *Ibid.*, 100.

56. Bloom, *Dying to Kill*, 61.

THE IRAQ INSURGENCY

The insurgency in Iraq has undergone several phases with respect to suicide attacks (and the targets have differed significantly during those phases), but the objective remains the same: the removal of U.S forces from Iraq and the return of Iraq to a Sunni Islamist state.⁵⁷ Since Operation IRAQI FREEDOM began, over 1,200 suicide attacks have occurred in Iraq, far more than in any other area of the world in the same time period.⁵⁸ These groups exhibit some knowledge of operational functions and operational art principles, but do not appear to be organized nearly as well as Al Qaeda.

Insurgents conducting suicide attacks in Iraq have not yet been studied extensively, but one can glean some information by analyzing the timing and targets of those attacks. Suicide attacks in Iraq can be viewed in distinct phases. The initial suicide operations were combined Sunni and Shiite attacks on Coalition military forces, followed by Sunni attacks on the democratic process, Sunni attacks on Shiites and their holy places, and, most recently, Sunni attacks on Iraqi government officials and police.⁵⁹

The period 2005-2007 marked the most frequent use of suicide attacks in Iraq. During this period, military counterinsurgency operations and public indications of Iraqi political stability were usually followed by a campaign of suicide attacks designed to frighten the public and destabilize the country.⁶⁰ Over half of the attacks in Iraq during this time frame were conducted by unknown perpetrators, while Al Qaeda in Iraq conducted 30% of the attacks, and a combination of Ba'ath Party loyalists and radical Sunni groups conducted

57. Cook and Allison, *Understanding and Addressing Suicide Attacks*, 75-6.

58. For a comprehensive list of known suicide attacks in Iraq since 2003, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suicide_bombings_in_Iraq_since_2003 (accessed 25 April 2009).

59. Cook and Allison, *Understanding and Addressing Suicide Attacks*, 75-6.

60. Hafez, "Suicide Terrorism in Iraq," 604.

the remainder.⁶¹ Al Qaeda's operational level was discussed previously, but unfortunately, there is little information about an operational level of war existing in the other insurgent groups. Sunni and Ba'ath Party radicals may simply be using the proven tactic of suicide bombing to achieve their strategic objectives of destabilizing the new Iraqi government and ultimately causing the departure of foreigners from Iraqi soil. Upon consideration of the intelligence and protection measures required to achieve success, it is tenable that these organizations contain operational leaders who combine the functions and elements of operational art to achieve maximum effect.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Operational security is inherent in the suicide attack. The success of the operation depends on the death of the attacker, who will not be captured and will not be subject to interrogation by enemy forces. In the LTTE, operatives carry a cyanide capsule and, in case of capture, are directed to commit suicide to maintain the security of the organization.⁶² Details about tactics and future operations are therefore incredibly difficult to glean from terrorist groups who employ suicide attacks. Counterterrorism units simply do not have much information about the operational level of suicide terrorism. The author believes this level exists, as demonstrated by analyzing the suicide attacks conducted by Al Qaeda, Hamas, Hezbollah, the LTTE, and insurgents in Iraq.

Al Qaeda clearly employs several operational functions, including C2, intelligence, fires, and protection. They also exhibit an understanding of sequencing and combining operations, fusing their knowledge and conducting joint attacks to achieve maximum effect.

61. Hafez, "Suicide Terrorism in Iraq," Figure 12, 609.

62. Rohan Gunaratna, "Suicide Terrorism in Sri Lanka and India," in *Countering Suicide Terrorism*, 97.

Fortunately, the United States may have foiled a large Al Qaeda sequenced operation with the arrest and conviction of Zacarias Moussaoui. In order to defeat Al Qaeda, counterterrorism units must identify Al Qaeda's agent handlers and conduct robust intelligence collection in order to gain access to the global network of terrorist cells. HUMINT resources are critical in this effort and the current shortfall should be addressed immediately.

Terrorist groups in Israel clearly utilize the operational function of protection as well as the operational art concepts of synchronicity and pauses. What becomes more difficult in the case of anti-Israeli groups is identifying where the operational level of leadership exists and how much direct control, if any, it has over individual attacks. More research is necessary in this area to attempt to identify the operational level of military leadership within Hamas, PIJ, and other anti-Israeli groups. HUMINT resources are key in identifying the structure of the organization and gathering information useful in quelling suicide attacks in Israel. Another critical issue to address is the concept of martyrdom. It is this religious justification for suicide attacks that make them so lucrative for Palestinians. Counterterrorism experts must find a way to minimize the influence of radical Islamist ideology through education. Prospective suicide bombers must be made aware that the radical ideology is not the sole ideology.

The insurgency in Iraq is also an extremely wicked problem. Physical security measures have been effective in reducing the number of attacks aimed at military targets, but soft civilian targets have since taken the brunt of the damage. If a suicide bombing succeeds and a particular group does not step forward to claim the attack, it is nearly impossible to determine which group conducted it. This is a large part of the problem in Iraq. Here again,

HUMINT resources are needed to determine which group executed the attack and where its operational level exists. Once that level is identified, counterterrorism professionals stand a chance of disrupting the future operations of a specific group.

When comparing a suicide terrorist group's operational level to that of a national military, one must avoid dismissing the small size of the terrorist tactical element. "The suicide attack is usually carried out by a lone attacker; however, the execution of the attack involves many members of the terror organization, each of whom has designated tasks that ultimately enable the action of the lone attacker. Thus, the suicide attack must not be regarded as the act of an individual."⁶³ It is the functions performed above the tactical element and ultimately the strategic objectives of the group that establish the operational level within a terrorist group. It is a level that is difficult to identify, yet if it can be found and exploited by HUMINT resources, will be critical to the success of counterterrorism campaigns.

63. Shay, *The Shahids*, 57.

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