

CHAPTER 8

The New Children of Terror

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I will make my body a bomb that will blast the flesh of Zionists, the sons of pigs and monkeys. I will tear their bodies into little pieces and cause them more pain than they will ever know.

A., age 11¹

Terrorism, it is said, is the “weapon of the weak.” But while our conception of warfare is often an assumption of men in uniform fighting for the political cause of their nation–states, it is a misnomer. The reality of contemporary conflict is that increasingly it has pulled in the “weak” of society, most specifically children, both as targets and participants. Although there is global consensus (based on moral grounds) against sending children into battle, this terrible practice is now a regular facet of contemporary wars. There are some 300,000 children (both boys and girls) under the age of 18 presently serving as combatants, fighting in almost 75 percent of the world’s conflicts; 80 percent of these conflicts where children are present include fighters under the age of fifteen.²

Thus, while it may be disturbing, it should be no surprise that children are also present in the dark terrorist domain of modern global conflict. As on the world’s battlefields, children are increasingly present in terrorist groups. Many of these groups have long had “youth wings” to provide broader support in the populace, but now youths are increasingly being used in actual operations to strike at targets behind the battle lines. This occurs for the same fundamental reasons that children are now on the battlefields: Children offer terrorist group leaders cheap and easy recruits, who provide new options to strike at their foes.

With the global war on terrorism, children's role in this aspect of war should take on added importance to Americans. Captured al Qaeda training videos reveal young boys receiving instruction in the manufacturing of bombs and the setting of explosive booby traps. The very first U.S. serviceman to die in Afghanistan was shot by a fourteen-year-old sniper. At least six young boys between the ages of thirteen and sixteen have been captured by U.S. forces in Afghanistan and taken to the detainee facility at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.³ They were housed in a special wing entitled "Camp Iguana."⁴ In addition, several more combatants in the sixteen–eighteen-year range are thought to be held in the regular facility for adult detainees at "Camp X-ray." U.S. soldiers continue to report facing child soldiers in Afghanistan, with the youngest on public record being a twelve-year-old boy. He was captured in 2004 after being wounded during a Taliban ambush of a convoy.⁵

U.S. forces in Iraq have also had to contend with the challenge posed by children's new involvement in conflict. Iraq, under Saddam Hussein, built up an entire apparatus in the 1990s designed to pull children into his military. This included the noted *Ashbal Saddam* ("Saddam's Lion Cubs"), a paramilitary force of boys between the ages of ten–fifteen that was formed after the first Gulf War and whose members received training in small arms and light infantry tactics. They were the feeder organization of the paramilitary *Saddam Fedayeen* force that troubled U.S. forces far more than the Iraqi Army. Over 8,000 young Iraqis were members of this group in Baghdad alone.⁶ During the recent war that ended Saddam Hussein's regime, American forces engaged with Iraqi child soldiers in the fighting in at least three cities (Nasariya, Mosul, and Karbala).⁷ This is in addition to the many instances of children being used as human shields by Saddam Hussein loyalists during the fighting.⁸

The implications of this training and involvement in military activities by large numbers of Iraqi youth were soon felt in the guerilla war that followed. Beaten on the battlefield, insurgent leaders sought to mobilize this cohort of trained and indoctrinated young fighters. A typical incident in the contentious city of Mosul provides a worrisome indicator of the threat posed to U.S. forces by child soldiers. Here, in the same week that President Bush made his infamous aircraft carrier landing, heralding the end to the fighting, an Iraqi twelve-year-old boy fired on U.S. Marines with an AK-47 rifle.⁹ Over the next weeks, incidents between U.S. forces and armed Iraqi children began to grow, to the extent that U.S. military intelligence briefings began to highlight the role of Iraqi children as attackers and spotters for ambushes. Incidents with child soldiers ranged from child snipers to a fifteen-year-old who tossed a grenade into an American truck, blowing off the leg of a U.S. Army trooper.¹⁰

In the summer of 2004, radical cleric Muqtada al Sadr directed a revolt that consumed the primarily Shia south of Iraq, with the fighting in the

holy city of Najaf being particularly fierce. Observers noted many child soldiers, some as young as twelve years old, serving in Sadr's "Mahdi" Army that fought U.S. forces. Indeed, Sheikh Ahmad al-Shebani, al Sadr's spokesman, defended the use of children, stating, "This shows that the Mahdi are a popular resistance movement against the occupiers. The old men and the young men are on the same field of battle."¹¹ A twelve-year-old-fighter commented, "Last night I fired a rocket-propelled grenade against a tank. The Americans are weak. They fight for money and status and squeal like pigs when they die. But we will kill the unbelievers because faith is the most powerful weapon."¹² Fighting in the radical Sunni hotbed of Falluja also involved child soldiers. During the November 2004 offensive into the city, Marines reported being fired at by "twelve-year-old children with assault rifles."

The overall numbers of Iraqi children involved in the fighting are not yet known. But the indicators are that they do play a significant role in the insurgency. For example, British forces have detained more than sixty juveniles during their operations in Iraq, while U.S. forces have detained 107 Iraqi juveniles in the year after the invasion, holding most at Abu Ghraib prison.¹³ The U.S. military considered these children "high risk" security threats, stating that they were captured while "actively engaged in activities against U.S. forces."¹⁴

Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of contemporary terrorism is the growth in suicide bombing, particularly emanating from the Middle East. Here, too, children are present. Radical Islamic groups like Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas have recruited children as young as thirteen to be suicide bombers and children as young as eleven to smuggle explosives and weapons. At least thirty suicide bombing attacks have been carried out by youths since the Israel-Palestine conflict sparked up again in 2000.¹⁵ Possibly the most tragic example was a semi-retarded sixteen-year-old, who was convinced by Hamas to strap himself with explosives. He was caught by Israeli police in the town of Nablus, just before he was to blow himself up at a checkpoint.¹⁶

But Palestine is not the only locale to see this practice emerge. In Morocco, a pair of thirteen-year-old twin sisters, who had been recruited by al Qaeda-linked groups, were caught during the summer of 2003 in the process of trying to suicide-bomb Western businesses and local government buildings.¹⁷ Likewise, U.S. Army intelligence reports claimed that in late summer 2003, the insurgent forces in Iraq began to copy this tactic and give young children explosive vests to suicide-bomb Coalition forces.¹⁸

It is important to note, though, that neither terrorism nor children's roles in it are a uniquely Muslim phenomena. Just as there are a variety of terrorist groups across the world, whose members represent nearly all the world's religions, so too is there a broader set of terrorist groups that seek to mobilize children. For example, the "Real IRA," a coalition of dissi-

dent IRA terrorists in Northern Ireland, began to recruit boys in the fourteen–sixteen-year-old range in the late 1990s.¹⁹ The youngest reported terrorist was a nine-year-old boy in Colombia, sent by the National Liberation Army to bomb a polling station in 1997; a ten-year-old was later used by the FARC to bomb a military checkpoint in 2003.²⁰ Likewise, when radical Muslim groups began to use child suicide bombers, they were not actually breaking any new ground. Instead, they were following the lead of the Tamil Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka, which has consistently been one of the most innovative of terrorist groups. The LTTE, which has utilized suicide bombers to kill both a former Indian prime minister and a Sri Lankan president, is a master of this technique. It has even manufactured specialized denim jackets designed to conceal explosives. Some are specially tailored in smaller sizes for child suicide bombers.²¹

Why Terrorists Recruit Children

Terrorist groups choose to utilize children for reasons that mimic those of the myriad other armies, warlords, and rebel groups that recruit and use children (40 percent of the armed organizations around the world—157 of 366—use child soldiers). Children are a relatively low-cost way to build out their forces, whose youth also brings certain distinct advantages in operations.

The thinking behind using children derives from both tactical and strategic reasons. For example, the Real IRA began to pull in children at the low point of its recruiting efforts in the late 1990s. The group faced a recruiting decline due to the emerging peace process, as well as opposition from other competing Irish nationalist groups, and thus had a strategic rationale to expand its recruiting base. Additionally, many of its activists were also well known to the British authorities. The recruitment of young “clean skins” (as they were called by British intelligence) was thus an operational response by the group as well. These boys had no records and allowed the group to raise its membership numbers with less fear of infiltration.²²

Similarly, two factors have led Palestinian groups to use children during the two *Intifadas*. The first motivating factor was strategic, in that having children take part in the violence (whether it be burning tires or throwing Molotov cocktails) was a way to attract the television cameras needed to keep the Palestinian cause on the world’s screens. The second factor was tactical. Israeli troops had a standing order to not shoot live ammunition against children under the age of twelve. So Palestinian gunmen began to work in tandem with the children, using their efforts to draw out Israeli troops as well as provide a screen for their sniping.²³

This same rationale also holds for why groups recruit children for sui-

cide bombing. Suicide bombing is an efficient method for weaker forces to strike at an otherwise well-prepared opposition. Even if they lack the technology for guided missiles or other “smart bombs,” the inclusion of the human element allows groups to create a thinking bomb that can adjust to changing circumstances. As one leader of Hamas commented, “We do not have tanks or rockets, but we have something superior—our exploding Islamic human bombs. In place of a nuclear arsenal, we are proud of our arsenal of believers.”²⁴

By the standards of typical costs of guided weaponry, the human bomb is stunningly cheap. All that is needed to make an effective bomb suit for the terrorist is a nine-volt battery, a light switch, a short cable, mercury (readily obtainable from thermometers), acetone, gunpowder, and some form of homemade shrapnel such as nails or screws. Palestinian experts note that the total cost of a typical operation is about \$150, with the most expensive part often being the bus fare to transport the bomber to his/her target. Add in a young terrorist, and the bomb is then able to kill or wound all individuals within a 25–50-meter area.²⁵

The suicide bomb is also an effective attempt to sidestep or wear down the common means of defense. Deterrence plans fail, as the terrorists do not care about the consequences. Likewise, guards have greater difficulties in screening, particularly if the terrorists are willing to die and take the guard with them. By including children among the set of potential attackers, the scope of defenses must be even wider. As the mother of one suicide bomber in Palestine commented, “This is a girl who would never appear on a wanted list. She sat at home. She was not active in anything political. [Israeli President] Sharon can chase all the ones he says organize these operations, but he cannot chase away the will of young people to carry out these things.”²⁶

There is thus an additional, distinctly psychological, element to using child terrorists. The use of suicide bombers spreads wider fear than conventional terrorism. It presents the image of an unbending foe who will seek victory at any cost, including its own destruction. A child in this role heightens the hysteria that terrorists seek to cause. If even children are a potential threat, then everyone is.

Why Children Join Terrorist Organizations

While it is easy to see why terrorist group leaders would see the appeal of children as operatives, it is more complex why children would join terrorist groups, and be willing to sacrifice their lives in suicide bomb attacks. The information is far from complete, and certainly varies across cases. There are, however, some common threads that lead children into this pernicious form of violence. As with conventional child soldiers, many of these

factors center on the combination of youth's inherent susceptibility to powerful influences and the harsh environments which can shape them.

The first factor that might lead children to join terrorist groups is the potential of warped religious motivation. While most religions are decidedly against suicide, most also tend to laud the concept of martyrdom, of dying for one's faith. As one fourteen-year-old fighter in Najaf commented, "My parents encouraged me to come here [to Najaf, the site of a battle against U.S. forces during the summer of 2004]. I would prefer to live and taste victory, but if not my death will be rewarded with spiritual gifts in heaven."²⁷ This trend is particularly poignant in many Islamic regions, where the concept of jihad, a personal battle to improve one's faith, has been warped and expanded by radicals to declare holy wars against non-believers. They cite passages from the Koran claiming that a *shaheed*, or martyr, will be immediately forgiven all his sins and will even be married to seventy-two beautiful virgins in paradise. Additionally, martyrs are given the ability to admit seventy of their relatives to paradise, perhaps adding an element of motivation for family support of the faithful. For children who have known nothing but poverty and hopelessness, such visions for the future are highly enticing. As one Palestinian psychiatrist in Gaza noted, "an important factor in suicide bombers is their sense of frustration with their surroundings, connected to the desire to go to heaven."²⁸ However, it is noteworthy that not only radical, religiously-motivated groups use suicide attacks. As the appeal of the operations grew in Palestine, for example, the Fatah and Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine—which are both highly secular militant groups—adopted the tactics.²⁹

There is also the potential of economic motivations. While the majority of terrorist group leaders—such as Osama bin Laden of al Qaeda or Carlos Castaño of the AUC—come from relatively privileged backgrounds, they often target the youngest and the very poorest for their foot soldiers.³⁰ As one extremist leader in Pakistan explicitly notes, "We want their children."³¹ The head of Laskar Jihad in Indonesia admits that he even likes to recruit "children as young as eight" to train in terrorist and suicide operations.³²

The financial inducements that these groups are able to offer vary. One particularly powerful element for children are rewards that flow to the family. In this recruitment tactic, a group is able to promise poor youngsters that their family will be better taken care of in their absence. In Palestine, for example, suicide bombers' families were offered up to \$25,000 from the Iraqi government of Saddam Hussein and by private Saudi donors to the "Martyr's Fund." The rate from Hamas was about \$5,000, along with such staples as flour, sugar, and clothing.³³ Other groups, such as the LTTE in Sri Lanka and the Jamiat Islami in Pakistan, move young suicide bomber's families into nicer homes or provide them with first access to better jobs. Thus, their sacrifice is portrayed to the children as a means to be

selfless and raise their family's lot in life. To do otherwise, then, when there are no better options, can be spun as an act of selfishness.³⁴ These offers particularly resound with children growing up in conflict zones and refugee camps, who can visualize no other way to help their families out of their fate.

The institutions that a child interacts with, most particularly educational, might also play a role. In a number of areas, militant groups that use child terrorists actually run schools themselves. These institutions are then used as recruiting and training grounds for future terrorists. For example, LTTE-run orphanages in Sri Lanka even have shrines set up to honor suicide bombers.³⁵ In the border regions of Pakistan, approximately 15 percent of madrasas provide some sort of training that prepares children for militant groups.³⁶ In the occupied territories of Palestine, Hamas has set up a series of schools that are highly politicized, even down to the preschool level. The walls in these schools are labeled with posters such as, "The children of the kindergarten are the *shaheeds* of tomorrow," and classes similarly teach hatred along with reading skills.³⁷ As one Hamas leader—Sheikh Hasan Yusef in Ramallah—commented of the bombers his group had trained, "We like to grow them from kindergarten through college."³⁸

Sheik 'Ikrimi Sabri, the Mufti of Jerusalem, appointed by the Palestinian Authority, expressed a similar sentiment in an October 2000 interview:

Question: What do you feel when you pray [for the souls of the martyrs]?

Sabri: I feel the martyr is lucky because the angels usher him to his wedding in heaven. . . .

Question: Is it different when the martyr is a child?

Sabri: Yes, it is. It's hard to express it in words. There is no doubt that a child [martyr] suggests that the new generation will carry on the mission with determination. The younger the martyr, the greater and the more I respect him. . . .

Question: Is this why the mothers cry with joy when they hear about their sons' death?

Sabri: They willingly sacrifice their offspring for the sake of freedom. It is a great display of the power of belief. The mother is participating in the great reward of the jihad to liberate Al-Aqsa.³⁹

Other related institutions with which children have a deep contact can also motivate. For example, the Palestinian Authority ran a series of summer camps in 2000 that had a distinctly violent aspect. More than 25,000 campers learned everything from infiltration techniques and assembling AK-47s to the art of ambushing units and kidnapping leaders.⁴⁰ Similar camps were run in Iraq under Saddam Hussein and likely added to the capacity and the potential for the subsequent attacks and terrorist strikes at U.S. forces in a post-Saddam Iraq.⁴¹

Social motivations may also play a powerful role in inducing children to join these groups, often with their parents' approval. It is no coincidence that the majority of suicide bombings take place in what anthropologists call "shame societies." In such settings, young people are taught from birth that the acquisition of honor and avoidance of shame are the critical motivators of behavior. These beliefs take on an added power in settings that entail humiliation and subservience. Any act of retaliation, even one that has no realistic chance of recompense, can still be interpreted as heroic and cancels out the shame. Violence thus becomes viewed as what psychiatrist Franz Fanon described as a "cleansing force," which releases the youth to become fearless in their actions and use bloodshed to drive out their feelings of "inferiority," "despair," or "inaction."⁴²

This can take place at the level of the individual or family unit or at the greater societal level. For example, one of the more tragic incidents in the U.S. operations in Afghanistan was when a Special Forces medic, Sergeant First Class Christopher Speer, was killed by a fifteen-year-old al Qaeda member while operating in the Khost province. The young boy, who was originally from Canada, was the sole survivor of a group of al Qaeda fighters who had ambushed a combined U.S.-Afghan force. This led to a five-hour firefight involving massive air strikes. When U.S. forces went to sift through the rubble, the young boy popped up, with pistol in hand, and threw a grenade which seriously wounded Speer. The young boy was shot down by Speer's comrades, but survived his wounds. A few months later, he spent his sixteenth birthday at the U.S. detention facility at Guantanamo Bay. By this time, however, Speer had died from his injuries. In a sad irony, Speer had risked his life just two days earlier by going into a minefield to save two injured Afghan children.⁴³

Most believe that the young fifteen-year-old al Qaeda member was brought into the realm of terrorism at such a young age by his family. Not only was his father a noted terrorist financier, but his two older brothers were also members of the organization. As one cleric—who knew the family while they were in Canada—noted, "Ahmed Khadr made his boys into his own image—a fanatic driven by hate for the West and wrong ideas of Islam."⁴⁴

The challenges faced by Palestinian society during the present conflict may be the best current example of how this individual-level phenomenon can build up to a broader national-level concern. In Gaza City, the heartland of Hamas, some 1.3 million refugees live in a 140-square-mile enclave of semi-permanent shelters; 70 percent are unemployed, and 80 percent live in abject poverty.⁴⁵ Thus, the occupation, with its the treatment of two generations of Palestinians as second-class refugees, followed by the nearly complete decimation of Palestinian civil society through the violence over the last decade, has arguably backfired on the Israelis. Rather than creating a cowed populace, its product has instead been broad youth rage express-

ing itself through the violence of the *Intifada* and suicide bombers. Participating in violence has given many youths a sense of mission and control over their lives that they otherwise lacked while growing up in squalid—and seemingly permanent—refugee camps.⁴⁶ As one Hamas leader notes, he finds no shortage of willing recruits for suicide operations from this pool. “Our biggest problem is the hordes of young men who beat on our doors, clamoring to be sent. It is difficult to select only a few. Those whom we turn away return again and again, pestering us, pleading to be accepted.”⁴⁷

These social motivations can also be directed through the family. Some groups, such as the LTTE in Sri Lanka and the Jamiat Islami in Pakistan, give young suicide bombers’ families special recognition and honors in the community. Hamas in Palestine even celebrates the child’s “martyrdom” with festivities, treating the event as if it were a wedding. The death notice will take the form of a wedding announcement in the newspaper.⁴⁸ Hundreds of guests congregate at the family’s house to offer congratulations. Sweet desserts and juices that the youth chose in their will are served. These joyful scenes and the idea that they might achieve similar notoriety in their home village resonate to other potential recruits and their families.

Many parents whose children have died in the operations take it as a point of pride. Mothers have been seen to dance with joy at the occasion.⁴⁹ As one Kashmiri father noted, “Everyone treats me with more respect now that I have a martyred son. And when there is a martyr in the village, it encourages more children to join the jihad. It raises the spirit of the entire village.”⁵⁰ In turn, those parents who demur from providing their children can expect anything ranging from low-level harassment to condemnation in the local newspaper.⁵¹

The broader social environment can also help construct children’s identity in ways intended to reinforce these tendencies. For instance, if martyrdom is taught as being a good and honorable deed on national TV, then it is more likely to become an unfortunate part of a national consciousness. Palestinian television, for example, even once had a Sesame Street–like television program called the “Children’s Club.” With its puppet shows, songs, and a Mickey Mouse character, the show definitely had a children’s audience in mind. However, the substance of it was very adult and pernicious, celebrating violence. Its shows even included songs with such lyrics as “When I wander into Jerusalem, I will become a suicide bomber.” Another song sung by a seven-year-old girl expressed, “I finished practicing on the submachine gun. . . . I trained my friends from among the children and the youths. We swore to take vengeful blood from our enemies for our killed and wounded.”⁵²

Likewise, many worry about the effect that the repeated images of civilian casualties in Iraq will have in the Islamic world. The concern is that repeated airings of civilian casualties in the Arab media will motivate Arab youngsters to join groups like al Qaeda that target the United States. As

one seventeen-year-old in Syria noted of his response, “I was watching what was happening and I found myself cursing for the first time in my life. I felt I wanted to kill, not only curse.”⁵³

These influences of society, family, and so on, may not be the only environmental factors that are sufficient to lead a child into terrorist activity or its support. Further personal experiences might play a role. These include the loss of a relative or friend, or some other form of direct suffering from violence. A common experience is jailing or brutalization from local security forces. Rather than deterring the youths from radicalization, it often places them under the influence of radical groups’ leaders while in custody. Such children then want to use violence even more when they get out and are better prepared to do so.

It is important to note that while all these factors may provide an explanation for why children might join a terrorist group, they do not combine to offer any sort of justification. Terrorism is typically a highly communitarian, unspontaneous enterprise. The suicide bomber is, as terrorism expert Walter Laqueur describes, “only the last link in the chain.”⁵⁴ Few terrorist attacks, and no suicide bombings we have seen so far, are the result of freelancing individuals. Instead, most are the result of careful planning by groups that recruit, indoctrinate, and train specifically for the purpose of killing defenseless civilians. In some cases, they are doing so with children in mind as both perpetrators and potential victims, making their actions even more distasteful.

Thus, while the motivations may vary by individual recruit, the underlying success of an effort by terrorist groups to recruit children is dependent on their having a recruiting pool at hand. This pool is shaped by both its environment and the permissiveness that society may or may not give to the group to access it. When children are disillusioned, humiliated, lack proper schooling, and see themselves with no viable future, they are more likely to take refuge in radicalism. For many, then, even killing themselves becomes interpreted as relief from a present life that they see as intolerable. In turn, society’s willingness to sacrifice their youth may be generated by external political actions, such as an occupation, or by internal societal causes, such as an ethic of revenge.

In any case, the outcome is that it is children who bear the costs of society’s failures. It is particularly disturbing that an increasing number of radical Muslim clerics preach that Islam permits suicide bombings and that the child bombers are martyrs to be lauded. Their view is that Islam may forbid suicide, but that these cases are different because of the adversary. As one cleric in Kashmir put it, “If jihad is undertaken according to the strict interpretations of the Koran, suicide missions can be allowed if they offer military or strategic advantage to the Muslim army.”⁵⁵ Such individuals are then described as not taking their own lives, but rather as sacrificing themselves for the good of the community. These are highly

controversial assertions—and, as many respected Muslim clerics and scholars would argue, they lack any merit in religious texts.⁵⁶ However, in the present context, such beliefs too often go unchallenged, and popular support for the practice is especially high among Muslim populations that see no other options available to them. For example, over 70 percent of Palestinians approve of suicide bombings.⁵⁷

That this practice is tolerated, let alone celebrated, is a terrible indictment of political and religious leaders. As one Arab journalist put it, “What kind of independence is built on the blood of children while the leaders are safe and so are their children and grandchildren? Are only the miserable destined to die in the spring of their lives? Those children who are killed may not, in their short lives, have enjoyed a fresh piece of bread, sleeping in a warm bed, the happiness of putting on a new piece of clothes, or carrying books with no torn pages to school.”⁵⁸

Training and Action

The training of children in terrorist actions varies as much as the techniques for recruitment. Indeed, it is a process that is undergoing constant refinement. The training process begins with the selection of children. In addition to their intelligence and enthusiasm, appearance in relation to potential targets is highly important. The ability to blend in or otherwise not raise suspicions among security forces allows the attackers to get closer to their targets. Thus, groups are careful to keep this in mind in selecting their operatives. For example, the LTTE uses cute young girls that are less likely to look suspect; Palestinian Islamic Jihad often selects those who can pass for Israeli Jews.⁵⁹

Once selected, the terrorist often goes through an intense period of mental preparation. For suicide bombers, this often takes place in small cells, made up of a training leader and two or three candidate bombers. This compartmentalization not only makes it harder for security forces to crack the organization, but also increases the intimacy and hold of the leader over the new recruits.⁶⁰ The cells are sometimes named for resounding events or subjects, to increase their impact on motivation. Hamas suicide bombing cells, for instance, are usually given a name taken from a Koranic text or event in Islamic history. There is also the use of pledges among the new members. For example, some radical Islamic groups pledge the *bayt al ridwan* (named after the garden in Paradise), which seeks to lock the group further together in a shared fate.

The training often includes concentrated study of texts that reinforce the notion of sacrifice, as well as tasks of memorization and visualization. Other indoctrination strategies include carrying out re-enactments of past successful operations. Repetition is used to drive points home. A focus is

also made on the ease of death. Its pleasures are extolled in contrast to a future life of sadness, sickness, and continued humiliation. Hamas, for example, has its recruits rest in empty graves, in order to see how “peaceful” death will be. In turn, LTTE survivors tell of training drills in which they would rehearse what they would do if captured or wounded. Their coaches would instruct them how to bite into the cyanide capsules that they would wear in necklaces during operations. As one fourteen-year-old trainee tells, “It mixes with our blood, and within one second, we die.”⁶¹

Rather than sadness at their coming fate, potential suicide bombers often describe this training and indoctrination as a period of great anticipation and happiness at their selection. As one young member of Hamas (who survived his intended suicide attack and woke up from a coma a month later) describes, “We were in a constant state of worship. We told each other that if the Israelis only knew how joyful we were they would whip us to death! Those were the happiest days of my life.”⁶² Trainers reinforce these feelings by extolling the coming triumph and celebration at their success. The candidates are even referred to by new honored titles, such as *al shaheed al hayy* (the living martyr) that afford them special status.

The final hours are often spent in prayer and making wills or farewell messages that are recorded on video or audiocassettes. These farewell videos and tapes not only are used for future recruiting, but help make it harder for the bombers to back out, and thus risk public humiliation.⁶³ In the LTTE, young suicide bombers were given the honor of spending their last meal in camp with the leader of the Tigers.⁶⁴

Once trained and indoctrinated, the terrorists are sent into action. Again, the intersection of the group’s needs and the target’s responses determine their use. Some operations may be highly targeted, such as the LTTE strategy of aiming at individual leaders, and thus require complex planning. They may even involve layers of infiltration to get the bomber as close to their target as possible. Others, whose intent is simply to strike wider fear in the opposition’s public, may be aimed at collateral damage and thus less tightly designed. Hamas, for example, has a more ad hoc approach and typically lets the bomber choose the target themselves. As one trainer describes, “We told them ‘blow yourselves up any place where there are people.’ They went wherever they knew to go.”⁶⁵ These might include buses or former workplaces.

After the operation is carried out, groups are usually quick to claim credit. This is both an achievement of their wider goals to spread fear, as well as an aid in their recruiting strategy. For example, Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad typically notify the local media right after attacks and distribute copies of their attacker’s final video or audio message. This is followed up by extolling the action in local organizations affiliated with the group, such as mosques or schools. They also might praise the heroism of the youth through posted leaflets and graffiti (usually depicting the

bomber in Paradise under a flock of green birds, referring to a belief that the soul of a martyr is carried to Allah upon the wings of a green bird of Paradise). Calendars are even distributed that have illustrations of the “martyr of the month.”

Conclusions and Policy Responses

While there are multiple reasons for children to become involved in terrorist groups, none are simply coincidental or beyond the control of the groups themselves. Instead, they are usually the result of the combination of a harsh environment that leaves children with no good choices and a deliberate mobilization strategy by the group itself to pull children into terrorism. Sometimes, this process is enabled by the parents’ approval. This may be the saddest aspect of children’s involvement in such groups. When a parent wishes that their child grow up to be a suicide bomber instead of becoming a doctor or teacher and live to an old age, something is indeed wrong.

In attempting to defeat this practice, the key is to influence both the recruiting pool and the groups’ willingness and ability to access it. A focus should be made on the underlying problem of hopelessness that often leads children (and/or their parents) to believe that they have no better future than involvement in terrorism and a likely early death. An essential problem to deal with is the surroundings of violence, humiliation, and lack of opportunity that underlie this desperation. As Charles Stith, the former U.S. Ambassador to Tanzania (who served in the wake the 1998 al Qaeda attack there), noted, “People who have hope tend not to be inclined to strap 100 pounds of explosives on their bodies and go into a crowd and blow themselves up.”⁶⁶

Some counter such claims by asserting that terrorism is an affair of the well-off elite from rich, stable countries; they usually point to those who perpetrated the 9/11 attacks as evidence. However, in doing so, they focus on the leadership (Osama bin Laden or Mohammad Atta) rather than the membership of the wider organization and the troops who make the operations possible. For instance, if we look at all of those who seized the planes on 9/11—an event that was also rare in involving a crosscontinental infiltration rather than the mass of attacks that occur within the local environs—prosperity was not one of their hallmarks. Indeed, a number of the hijackers were “alghamdi”—a name that indicates that they did not even have a respectable tribal origin, and thus were accorded a low social status within their countries. Equally, all—even the Saudis—came from countries with growing poverty, steeply declining standards of living, and declining job prospects. Aside from the 9/11 example, the youth involved in suicide bombings typically fit the profile laid out above.

Focusing solely on the leadership of terrorist organizations also misses the larger socioeconomic context of radicalism and terrorism, as well as how and where terrorists thrive. Successful terrorist groups are based in (and thrive in) zones of chaos, poor governance, and lawlessness. Indeed, it is the context that surrounds, nurtures, and protects a group like al Qaeda that makes it such a magnified and continuing threat, as compared to a group like Germany's Baader–Meinhof Gang or the Oklahoma City bombers, who enjoyed no societal resonance and thus never became a magnified threat. Likewise, effective extremist groups rely on a division of labor between young and uneducated “foot soldiers” and ideologically trained and well-funded elite operatives.⁶⁷ Al Qaeda's use of this structure was further illustrated by the 2003 Morocco bombings. The operatives in these attacks were young men, some as young as 17, who were recruited from local slums. In short, elites certainly play a role in terrorism, but it is a broader, communal affair.

Two particular issues must then be resolved to undercut the present terrorist threat. The first is to affect the context. The seemingly permanent status of conflict and its dispossessed refugees in a number of war zones (including Israel-Palestine and Kashmir) is an obvious driving force behind children's participation in violence. This is heightened by failing educational systems and economic stagnation that hold back the realization of human potential across many regions. As Fadl Abu Hein, a psychology lecturer from Gaza, notes, “Martyrdom has become an ambition for our children. If they had a proper education in a normal environment, they won't have looked for a value in death.”⁶⁸

The second facet is to undercut the institutions that assist terrorist groups in the mobilization and recruitment of children. Possible options to do so range from enlisting religious leaders to speak out against the use of children—specifically by noting that the use of children and involvement in terrorism is counter to the true intent of religious texts—to establishing campaigns designed to reverse the social and economic rewards that accrue. Shutting down payment plans and punishing families for the actions of their children are other strategies. The overall key is to weaken the high regard that such terrorists are too often given by embattled societies.

Finally, the cost-benefit analysis of terrorist groups must be altered. Presently, the downside for groups to use children is minimal. They have created a context in which neither local nor international support has been harmed by such a decision. Those who use children must be convinced that it is no longer in their best interest. When the institutions that influence children are controlled by groups that can be identified, such as organization-linked media or schools that extol attacks by children, costs must be extracted. Not only must the programs be shut down, but the group that enabled and planned them should be made to fear the loss of something it values more, such as recognition by and interaction with in-

ternational authorities. The ultimate intent of the pressure is to force the group into the realization that recruiting and using children for violence is not just an illegal and immoral strategy, but also that it will detract from its long-term goals.

In battling terrorist groups, and particularly those that use children to carry out violence, we cannot simply hope to shame the shameless. But we can begin to alter their methods, gains, and ultimately, their strategies.

39. CAFGUs (territorial militia) are deployed in remote areas with little support. With inferior training and equipment, the CTM target them as easier prey. An analysis of combat operations from 2001–2003 shows that CAFGUs were nearly twice as likely to die per combat incident than their comrades in regular units. The author thanks the AFP Joint Operations Center and Combat Research Division of the J3 for access to this raw data for analysis.

40. For those not familiar with the latest U.S. Army recruiting campaign, this is a play on its slogan “An Army of One.”

41. Roger Petersen’s work, for example, assesses variation in support for rebellion at the individual and community level, using a model he calls “the spectrum of individual roles during rebellion” that includes the triggering mechanisms that can move individuals across the scale from compliance with the government to neutrality to armed rebellion against the government. This is measured on a 7-point scale ranging from –3 to +3 and includes possible activities of individuals at each point on the scale. See Roger Petersen, *Resistance and Rebellion* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991).

42. Mancur Olsen describes the powerful effect that selective incentives can have on mobilizing collective action in *The Logic of Collective Action* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960).

43. The ability of the rebels to provide private rewards for rebel participation has a powerful motivational effect and impacts the commitment level of those recruited. Low-commitment individuals may need immediate payoffs while higher-commitment individuals are willing to support the rebels based on rewards promised in the distant future. The Philippines military intelligence operatives call these “low-commitment” individuals the “lie-lows” who tend to avoid fighting and are more prone to surrender. See Jeremy Weinstein, “Resources and the Information Problem in Rebel Recruitment” (unpublished paper, Stanford University, 2003).

44. Mancur Olsen discusses the motivating effect of social incentives such as the desire for *prestige, respect, and friendship* in *The Logic of Collective Action*, p. 60.

45. An excellent first hand account is Victor Corpus’s *Silent War* (Quezon City, Philippines: VNC Enterprises, 1989).

46. A difficult challenge facing the central government of the Philippines is the ability to follow through with its sophisticated poverty reduction and counterinsurgency programs at local levels. Scarce resources devoted to such efforts get even scarcer when diluted by graft and corruption. The payoffs generated by communist insurgency and efforts to reduce it provide perverse incentives to some individuals and organizations to insure it continues.

Chapter 8: New Children of Terror

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Chapter 9: Hamas Social Welfare

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