

SUICIDE ATTACKS

A Case for an End to an Egregious Means...

“... AND MAKE NOT YOUR OWN HANDS CONTRIBUTE TO (YOUR) DESTRUCTION...” Holy Qur’an, Surah Al-Baqara,[2:195]

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Abstract:

The *Palestinian Human Rights Monitoring Group's* (PHRMG) mission is to end human rights (HR) violations against Palestinians, regardless of who is responsible. Given the absence and/or ineffectiveness of democratic mechanisms of accountability in Palestine, PHRMG's main strategy, since its founding in 1996, is to hold the HR violator accountable before the Palestinian public – and the international community at large. Our methods are a simple and effective recipe of on-the-ground field research and HR education. With these activities providing a solid foundation, PHRMG also implements special projects with tangible HR impacts.

This paper outlines the background, the need, and the recommendations that the PHRMG has made to bring an end to the merciless practice of suicide attacks. The goal of this project is to draw attention to its practice, its harms, the reasons for its popularity, and to promote dialogue of this issue amongst the Palestinian community in order to bring an end to such an egregious means...

Introduction:

The act of using one's own body as part and parcel of their strategic weapon against an intended population may be referred to as a suicide attack (SA). Various other terms have been applied to such a phenomenon. Some occidental terms are more telling than others: "Suicide Bombing", "Homicide Bombing", "Genocide Bombing", "Islamikaze, and "Predatory Martyrdom"...

From an Islamic perspective – the taxonomy becomes more complex. They are often times referred to as *isshtahad* (i.e. *martyrdom operation*). And the SAer is named a *shahid* (pl. *shuhada*, literally 'witness' and usually translated as 'martyr'). The term denotes one who has died in order to testify his faith in Allah – e.g. those who die while waging *jihad bis saif*. This term is applied by the PA (PA), among others, to SAers, in part to surmount the Islamic constraints against suicide.¹

Notwithstanding this confusing nomenclature, healthy, bright young people are strapping bombs around their bodies at an escalating pace. The practice of these SAs as a form of resistance to Israeli occupation is gaining increasing popularity in Palestinian society, and is a cause of great concern to the HR community.

The Israeli government has continued to exert mounting pressure on the entire population of Palestinians in the Palestinian Territories. In these afflicted areas, it remains an enigma whether school or university courses will be held the following day. Manual laborers and skilled employees alike take a daily gamble as to whether or not they will be allowed to travel on the roads that lead to their place of employment. Unlivable situations make for a population of people willing to surrender their lives...

The international community is directly at fault for allowing the continued occupation and oppression of an entire populace. The Israeli government builds illegal settlements in the West Bank, encroaching on the native land of Palestinians, and is allowed to do so by the silent consent and ensuing complicity of the international community.

These actions are not without consequence. More than 415 Israeli and other civilians have been killed, and more than 2000 injured, as a result of attacks by armed Palestinians between September 30, 2000 and August 31, 2002 alone.² According to Robert Pape, 95% of such recent attacks have the same specific strategic goal: to cause an occupying state to withdraw forces from a disputed territory.³ These SAs are invariably employed in areas well known to lack conventional warfare – leading to an imbalance in the occupied population's means to resist the occupying power's discriminatory policies. Moreover, these "political tactics" are generally used against democratic countries in which public opinion plays a role in determining such policies...

Various means of data collection were employed during the undertaking of this research project. However, public opinion polls were most commonly used. We hope that the publication of this report will stimulate further dialogue and discourse on such a controversial subject. Clearly, awareness and dialogue are the first steps towards eradication of this horrific practice. Our intention is to compile this research and publish it as a report in both Arabic and English for circulation in Palestine and abroad.

This paper aims to explore a broad scope of issues surrounding this phenomenon as follows. First, we will briefly narrate the historical background of SAs and how society permitted them to emerge so successfully. Next, we will define the rationale and motivations behind these attacks – specifically the psychosocial motivation driving them. Here, we shall discuss the use of culture practices, traditions and religious ideologies as justifications for honor crimes. Then, we will discuss the perception of SAs amongst the government, media and general population. At this point, we will delineate the legal context that surrounds such practices – specifically, the analysis of the Palestinian penal code. Here will also look at the effect of SAs on the Palestinian reputation amongst the international community – as well as the influence of the Arab world on Palestinian society, particularly as it relates to SAs. Next, we will analyze the influence of Islam on such practices, if any. We will probe the concept of both murder and suicide, specifically, from a religious, legal and social perspective. Finally, we offer a strong case in support of upholding the principles of HR. We look at SAs from a HR perspective; how these practices undermine the fabric of civil society and the establishment of a society based on the principles of HR; and the role that humanitarian organizations must play in sustaining a world that condemns such inhumane acts...

Purpose:

The PHRMG strongly condemns SAs, and it is the position of this paper to argue against the needless killing of civilians on both sides of the political divide. This paper explores the motivations behind undertaking such actions, the legal context in which these crimes are committed, the responsibilities of the Palestinian legal system in upholding HR, and the role that humanitarian organizations can play in eliminating public support for this callous practice.

Researching the SA phenomenon is imperative as there is little accurate information available concerning the real motivations behind carrying out a SA. This is a topic that typically evokes emotional – rather than objective responses. The subject of SAs is controversial because it is difficult within the religious community to come to a consensus as to whether or not SAs are in violation of Islamic scriptures.

It is also a challenging subject when discussed this subject in the political context. There are arguments on both sides as to whether it is an effective tool in the arsenal against occupation. Many Palestinians, who in practice may disagree with SAs, rarely vocally oppose its occurrence, thereby allowing this practice to persist with impunity. Despite the myriad difficulties in conducting research of this nature, we feel that this topic cannot be ignored when evaluating the HR situation in Palestine. Therefore, an organized effort must be made to educate the public about the social, emotional, and legal ramifications of undertaking such actions.

The practice of SAs is a violation of international law, and the Palestinian government must be held responsible for upholding the principles of HR. According to international humanitarian law (IHL), the guidelines are salient – the killing of civilians is illegal. However, the situation gains complexity when trying to decide what actually constitutes a “civilian”. The presence of Israel as a military state further obfuscates this theoretical simplicity.

Analyzing the causes that drive young Palestinian men and women to commit SAs is a daunting task. Notwithstanding this difficulty, this paper attempts to delineate the basic profile of SAers. Several contextual factors will be discussed – including the historical background and motivational factors. Moreover, the opinions of Palestinian and Israeli professionals will add to the overall analysis.

The purpose behind defining both the rationale and motivations behind SAs is twofold. First, to hopefully reduce the number of further attacks. It is hoped that this task may be addressed by publicly confronting such motivations and subsequently dispelling them. Second, is to prevent false labeling of SAers with specious psychological definitions that prove effective only in leading the media, the public, and government officials astray. Therefore, PHRMG asks that Palestinian professionals in particular take note of our research and become more outspoken against the practice of SAs. Indeed, the Palestinian voice is often missing or inaccurate on such sensitive matters...

Mahmoud Abbas recently stated that, “...we stopped the culture of violence and the Palestinian people have started looking at it as something that should be condemned.”⁴ While PHRMG agrees that more widespread condemnation of such implacable practices has commenced, we, unfortunately, disagree that the culture of violence has effectively ceased. Subsequently, more attention must be focused on this area...

Background:

History:

SAs have taken place in over 30 countries. Those most devastated by such attacks have been Sri Lanka during its prolonged ethnic conflict; Lebanon during its civil war; Israel and the Palestinian Territories since 1994; Russia by Chechen seaparartists; Turkey by the Kurdistan Workers' Party; and Iraq by Sunni insurgents since the US-led invasion in 2003. Most countries with a Muslim majority...

However, it is a mistake to perceive the SAs as an Islamic invention of asymmetrical warfare. The earliest reference of a SA outside the context of warfare has been suggested to be the Biblical story of the Amorites attacking the Jews: "The Amorite who dwell on that mountain went out against you and pursued you as the bees would do; they struck you in Seir until Hormah."⁵ The 11th century French rabbi Rashi suggested this to mean that the Amorites attacked like bees do, i.e. stinging and then dying.

A more obvious example is the story of Samson who died together with his victims as he collapsed at a Philistine temple: "Samson said, 'Let me die with the Philistines!' Down came the temple on the rulers and all the people in it. Thus he killed many more as he died than while he lived."⁶ A more modern example of SAs occurred during the Belgian Revolution, when the Dutch Lieutenant Jan van Speijk detonated his own ship in the harbour of Antwerp to prevent being captured by the Belgians. Such "political tools" can also be traced back to the assassination of Czar Alexander II of Russia in 1881.⁷ Strategic suicide as also been well documented amongst the Japanese through history, as we shall discuss later in this paper.

In the late 20th century, however, the use of suicide as an explosive weapon (i.e. bomb) was first used by the Syrian Social Nationalist (SSN) Party in Lebanon during the 1980s. Following this example, other Lebanese Islamic militant organizations also began utilizing this form of warfare. Such "novelty", however, was introduced to them by a radical Japanese terrorist unit.⁸

It was during the Lebanese civil war in December 1981 that the Islamic *Dawa* Party's car bombing in front of the Iraqi embassy in Beirut took place. *Hezbollah's* bombing of the U.S. embassy in April 1983 and the later attack on U.S. Marine and French barracks in October 1983 brought SAs into the international spotlight. The SSN party sent the first female suicide bomber in 1985.⁹

Although Lebanon saw the first course of such bombings, it was the LTTE Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka who perfected the tactic and inspired its use elsewhere. Their Black Tiger unit has committed between 76 and 168 SAs since 1987 – the higher estimates putting them behind more than half of the world's SAs between 1980 and 2000.¹⁰

It was in Lebanon that Palestinian resistance groups were first taught the methods of SAs. In December 16, 1992, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin expelled 415 Palestinians from *Islamic Jihad* and *Hamas* to Lebanon. There, they were in close proximity to organizations that already employed SAs and were able to train in such techniques. It was two years later, and after extreme provocation before the otherwise weaponless Palestinians followed suit.¹¹

Fathi `Abd al-`Aziz al-Shikaki, one of Islamic Jihad's (a known terrorist organization) founders, was among the first to openly advocate the Palestinian use of suicide bombing tactics against Israelis. In 1988, he publicly advocated a strategy of "exceptional" martyrdom according to which Palestinian militants would penetrate "enemy territory" and detonate explosions that the Israelis would be unable to prevent.¹²

However, it was not until an Israeli settler opened fire in Hebron's Ibrahimi mosque during a Friday congregational prayer – killing 29 Palestinians – that the first Palestinian suicide bomber launched his attack. This offensive, which took the lives of 9 innocent Israelis, occurred on April 6, 1994 – albeit 40 days after the initial attack on the Palestinian worshippers.¹³

Since the signing of the Oslo Agreements in 1993, Palestinian terrorist organizations have sent more than 70 suicide bombers on missions against Israeli targets. Fortunately, not all succeeded in their missions. During this time, most Palestinians did not support SAs. However, under increasing closures, limitation of movement, amplified building of

illegal settlements, and a general state of hopelessness – a majority of Palestinians now support SAs, as will be discussed below.¹⁴

In the course of the al-Aqsa Intifada, which followed the collapse of the Camp David II summit between the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israel, the number of SAs drastically increased. These suicide missions have instigated a clear move to the political right, increasing public support for hard-line policies towards the Palestinians. In response, Israel mobilized its army in order to seal off the Gaza Strip and reinstate military control of the West Bank – patrolling the area with tanks.

Hamas and *Islamic Jihad*, two known Palestinian terrorist camps, were largely responsible for the majority of the SAs on Israeli targets in the mid-1990s, as part of their opposition to the Oslo Accords. Following a rapid escalation of violence on both sides of the political divide, *Hamas* again resorted to SAs against Israeli civilians when, on January 1, 2001, a suicide bomber blew himself up at a crowded bus station in Netanya – severely wounding at least 20 civilians.¹⁵

Throughout 2001, there was a proliferation of such SAs, peaking in March, November, and early December. In June and again in December 2001, in response to mounting international pressure, the PA obtained a cessation of SAs (albeit not all attacks) against civilians. This lasted for some six weeks beginning in early June and for some four weeks beginning in mid-December. On January 14, 2002, Israeli forces killed a local West Bank leader of the *al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades*, which is loosely affiliated with Arafat's *Fatah* organization. The *al-Aqsa Brigades* carried out their first SAs two weeks later – the first to be carried out by a female perpetrator. The attack killed one civilian and injured one hundred. A fourth group, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), also carried out SAs in 2002.¹⁶

Of the four Palestinian terrorist groups, three have typically had an adversarial relationship with the PA (particularly with Arafat): *Hamas*, *Islamic Jihad*, and the PFLP. The fourth, the *al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades*, has generally proclaimed its support for the PA – notably for Arafat and to a lesser degree for Abbas.

Leaders of these groups have openly acknowledged that they favor SAs, because they have the potential to cause a large number of casualties. They include civilians as well as military targets, in gross breach of their obligations under IHL. “The main thing is to guarantee that a large number of the enemy will be affected...With an explosive belt or bag, the bomber has control over vision, location, and timing”, said one senior *Hamas* leader.¹⁷

Such weapons use readily available materials and are relatively inexpensive to produce. Typically, these SAers seek to detonate their explosives in places with vast aggregates of innocent civilians (e.g. restaurants and places of entertainment – or ‘soft’ targets where they could expect to cause the largest number of casualties). To exacerbate such horrendous consequences, these attackers often pack such explosives with nails and miscellaneous pieces of scrap metal for more virulent effects.

Israeli ability to deter attacks has improved significantly since the peak of SAs in 2002. “Soft” targets have hardened and the numbers of casualties has dramatically decreased. As a result, SAs has become a less opportunistic tactic. While this decrease in SAs is a welcomed modification, it is irresponsible to conclude that violent intentions have decreased altogether...

Profile of a Suicide Attacker:

A SA is an attack that is dependent upon the demise of the perpetrator. The body of the attacker is essentially a component of the bomb. The person who carries out the SA serves as both the transport and detonation mechanism for the explosive device. The explosives typically have a hand-pulled detonator, as opposed to a button, to preclude possible accidental triggering of such bombs.

The Palestinian suicide bomber is typically a young unmarried man. The median age of SAers is 22. 64% are between ages 18 and 23 (the vast majority of the rest are under 30) – the approximate age of college graduates. This is a notable observance as many Palestinians express frustration at failing to find employment after procuring a University degree. It is argued that the lack of employment emanates from pressure on Palestinian society by Israeli occupation. It should also be noted that the median age of suicide bombers arouses suspicion of a power conflict amongst Palestinian

factions. Palestinians, not given military strength through state power, believe that they must take for themselves what they see being given to those who oppose them.

47% of the SAers have an academic education – and an additional 29% have at least a high school education; 83% are single; and 68% of the suicide bombers are from the Gaza Strip. Most volunteer for such missions. They will generally spend incrementally less time with their families, while devoting themselves to more religious study and spiritual preparation. They usually only have a few days notice to complete such a mission. Recruits are reassured by their respective organizations that their families will be sought after, both financially and socially. In fact, charitable organizations are specifically constructed for such diabolical purposes.

Female bombers make up a minority of such attackers – and are most common among the Tamil Tigers, Chechen rebels, Palestinian militants and the Kurdistan Workers Party. From 2003-2004, women were more frequently involved in SAs than any other time in history.¹⁸

Aside from these groups, suicide operatives are still overwhelmingly male. They are often from middle-class backgrounds in countries with little political freedom. They are usually well-educated and hold strong political or religious beliefs. Contrary to popular belief, they are generally neither poverty-stricken nor mentally ill.

Results:

PHRMG compiled data from nearly all SAs since the start of the 2nd Intifada. The data has been arranged in bar and line chart form for ease of interpretation. Our raw data may be found on our website or e-mailed upon request. There have been approximately 165 Palestinian SAs – where the suicide bomber was successful in detonating their explosives. For reference, the overall population of Gaza and the West Bank has been included (see below). We have noted the region in which each individual lived. The charts depict the chronological occurrence of such attacks. Information in regards to which militant group claimed responsibility for each bombing may be found on our website. The following is a summary of our findings.

SAs	
Gaza	34
Hebron	15
Nablus	48
Tulkarem	9
Ramallah	6
Qalkilia	4
Jenin	26
Bethlehem	18
Jerusalem	3
Green Line	1
Foreigner	1
Total	165
Males	157
Females	8

Table 1: Number of Palestinian SAs by region.

2005 Population according to CIAWF	
1,376,289	Gaza
2,385,615	West Bank
6,276,883	Israel

Table 2: 2005 Israeli/Palestinian Population

	AGE
Mean	22.19047619
Median	22
5# summary	16
	19.15068493
	22
	25.14666667
	48

Table 3: Average Statistical Age of SAers.

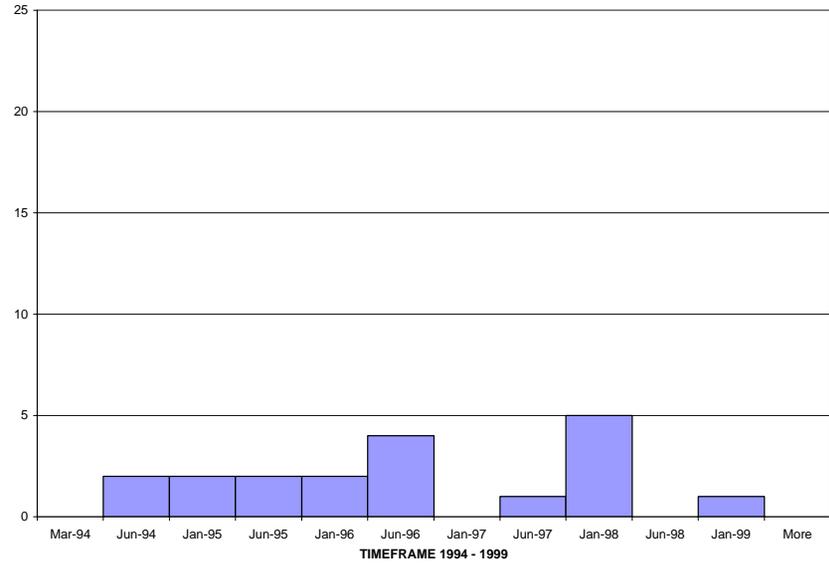
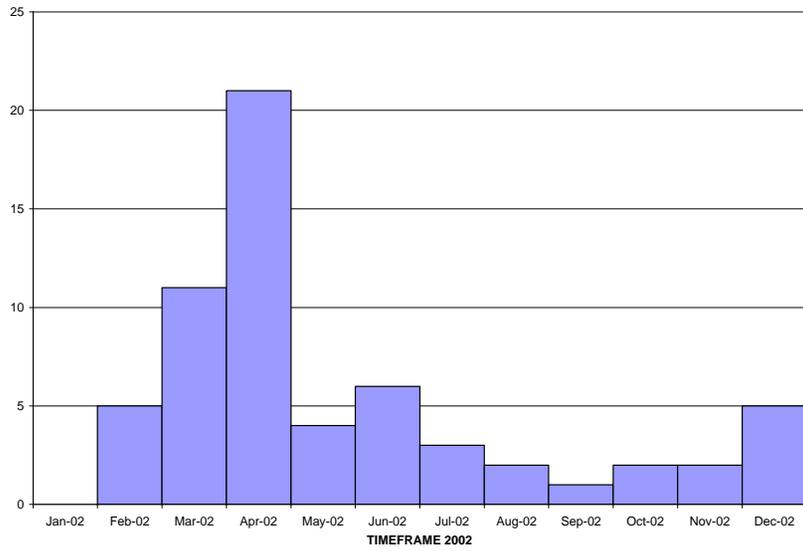
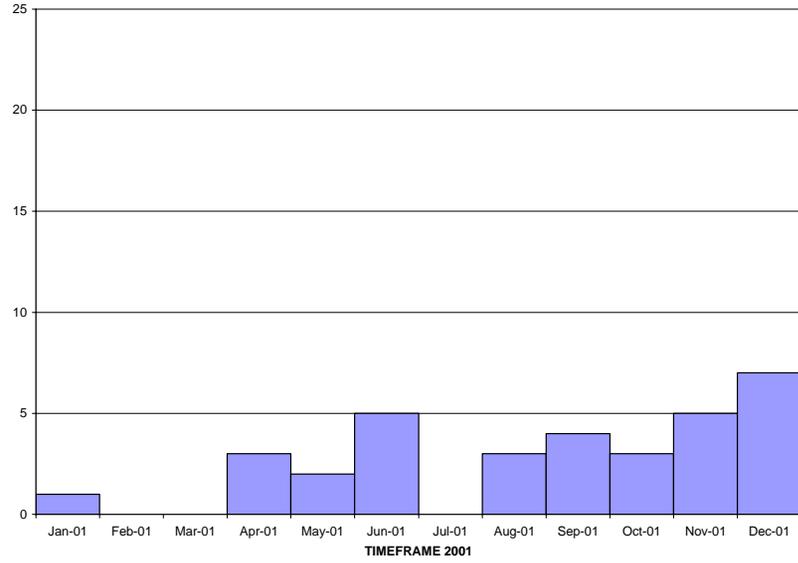
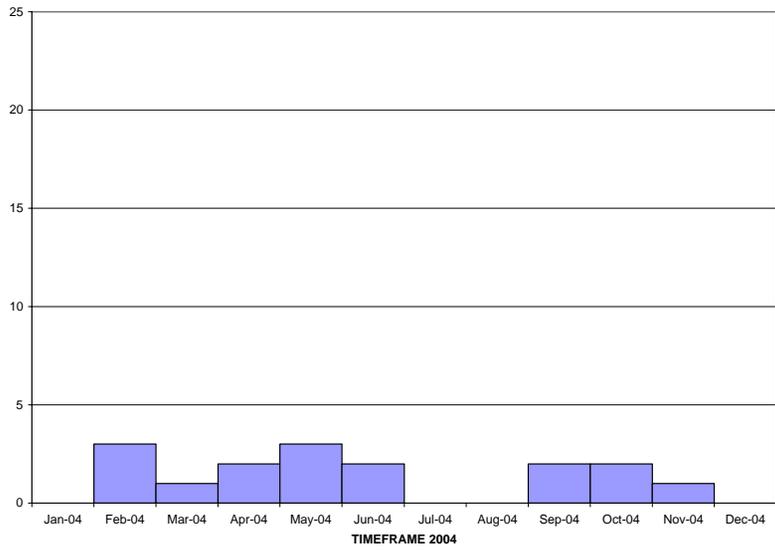


Figure 1: Timeframe and Frequency of SAs (Charts 1-4)

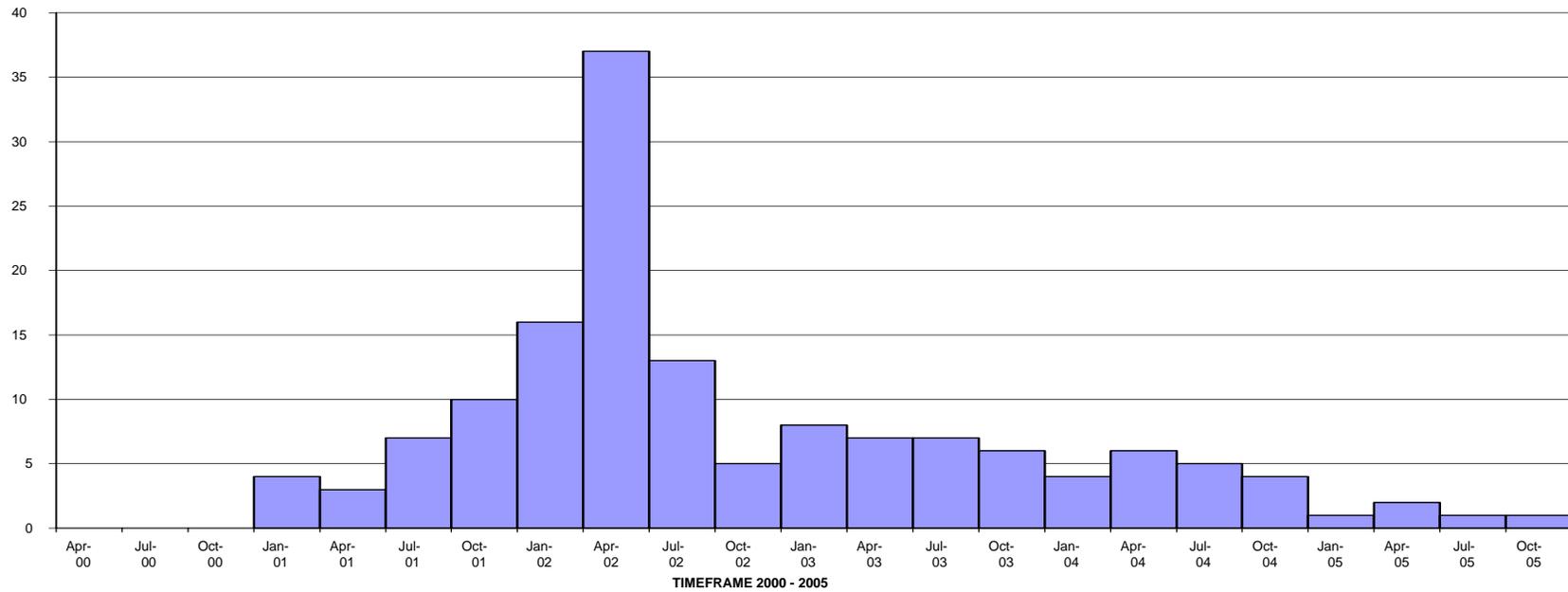
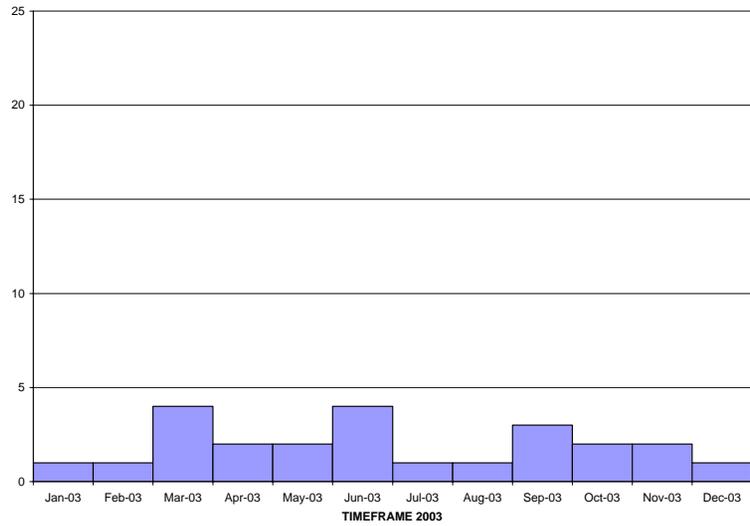


Figure 2: Timeframe and Frequency of SAs Cont. (Charts 5-6)

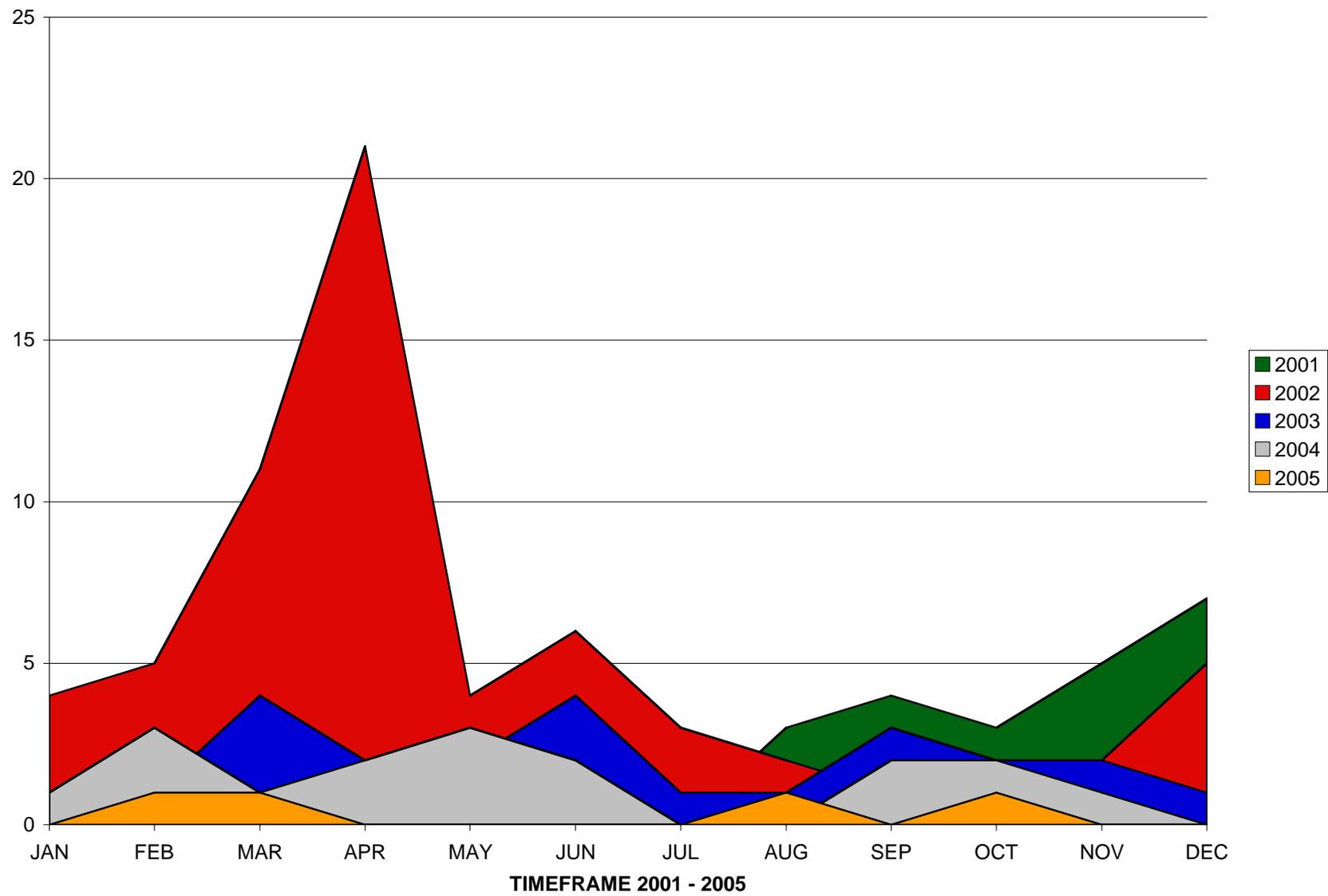


Figure 3: Overlapping Timeframe and Frequency of SAs

2000 - 2005

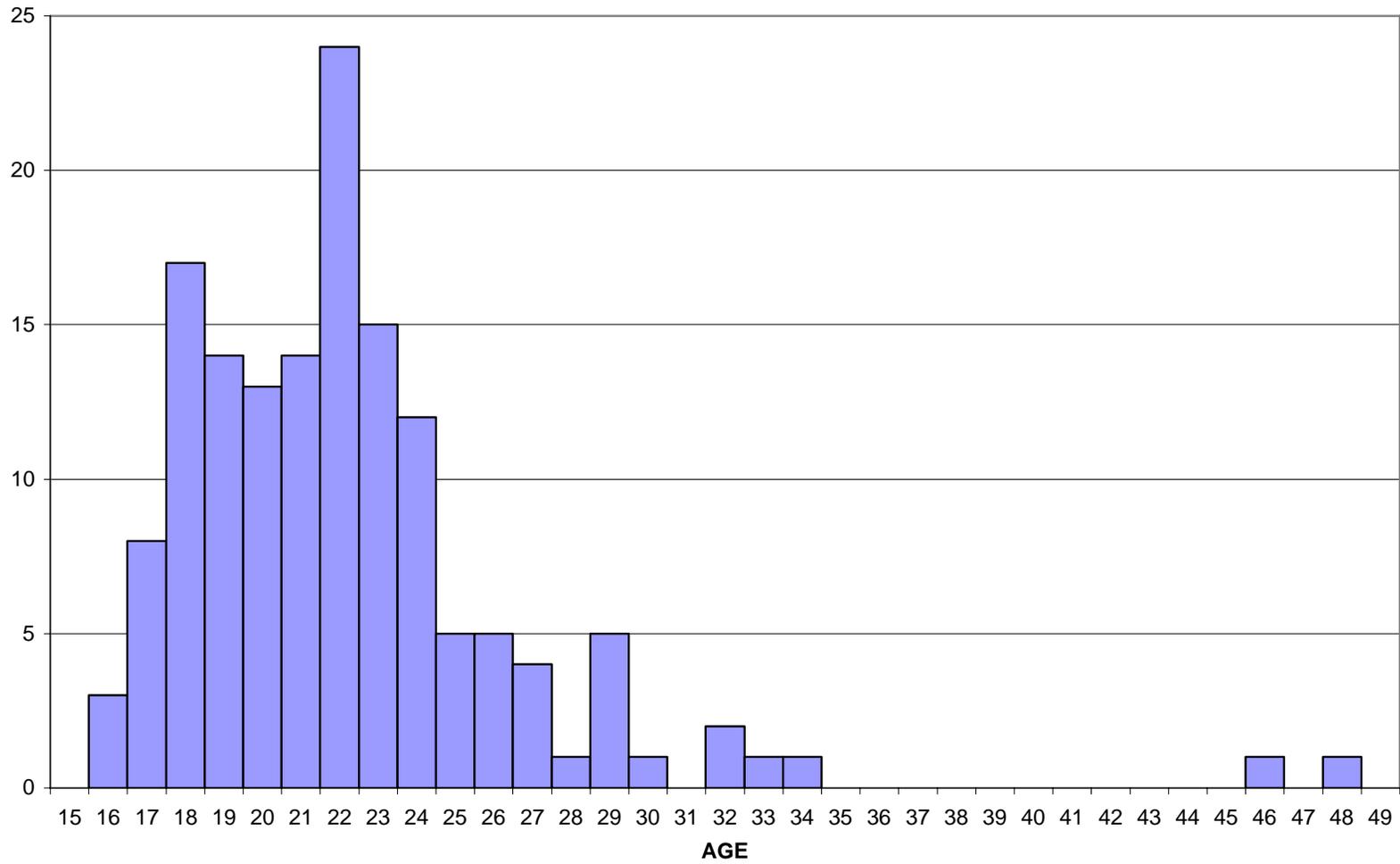


Figure 4: Average Statistical Age of Palestinian SAers

Survey of Young Adults:

In June 2005, PHRMG randomly surveyed 70 university students between the ages of 18 and 27. The purpose of our survey was to target the median age group committing SAs. The Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PCPSR) survey (discussed below) noted a recent decrease in support for SAs. However, the results included individuals of all ages. A significant decrease in support from individuals aged 25 and older does not necessarily represent a decrease in support of those individuals most likely to carry out a SA. In order to accurately estimate support for SAs, PHRMG believes it is necessary to survey the age group of those individuals most often responsible for attacks.

Our survey pool consisted of 31 males and 39 females spread out over 5 locations as follows: West Bank polling was conducted at Birzeit University in Ramallah (16), Al Khalil in Hebron (12), and Al Najah University in Nablus (10). Gaza polling was conducted at Al Azhar University in Gaza City (20). Polling was also conducted at Al Quds University in Jerusalem (12). Percentages not totaling 100 reflect questions not answered by those polled. Our results are as follows:

<i>Question:</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
Did you know any of the suicide bombers, their families, or friends?	54%	44%
Did you support SAs during their peak in 2002?	82%	18%
Did you consider becoming a suicide bomber?	32%	66%
Do you think more bombings now would help bring about an end to Israeli occupation?	58%	36%
If the current peace process fails, do you think another wave of SAs will occur?	88%	12%
Do you think the bombings from 2001-2004 have made things better or worse for the Palestinians?	54% (better)	40% (worse)
Do you think that the Palestinian goals could be achieved through nonviolent means?	20%	76%

Table 4: Survey of Young Adults on Issues surrounding SAs

Clearly, the results suggest significant continued support of violent attacks among the surveyed age group. Of further interest are the same results broken down by region. The regional variations are compared in the following charts.

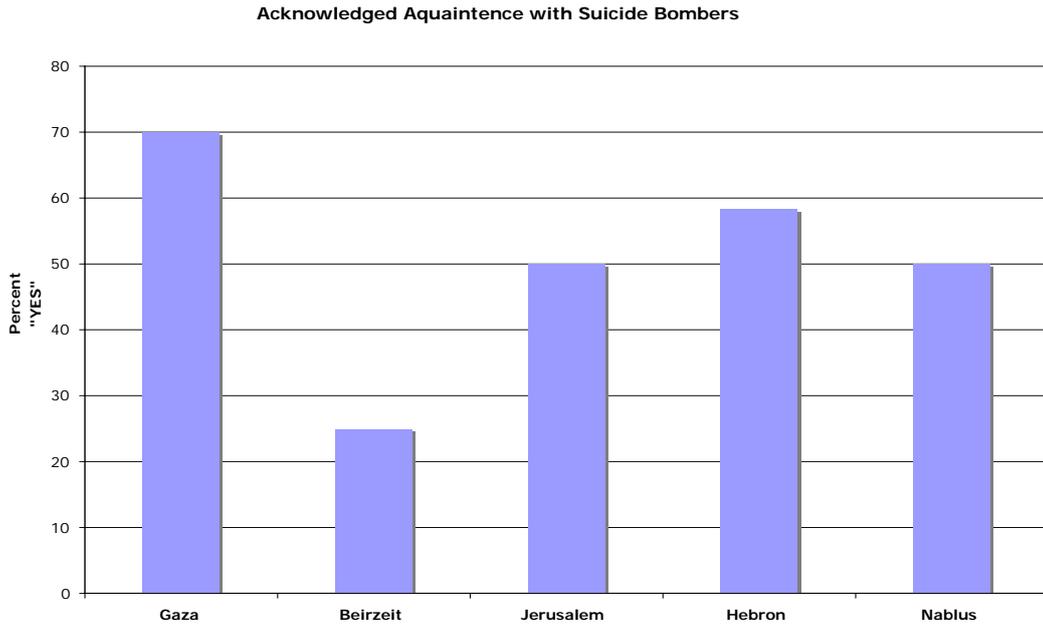


Figure 5: Percentage of young Palestinians (by region) acknowledging acquaintance with known SAers.

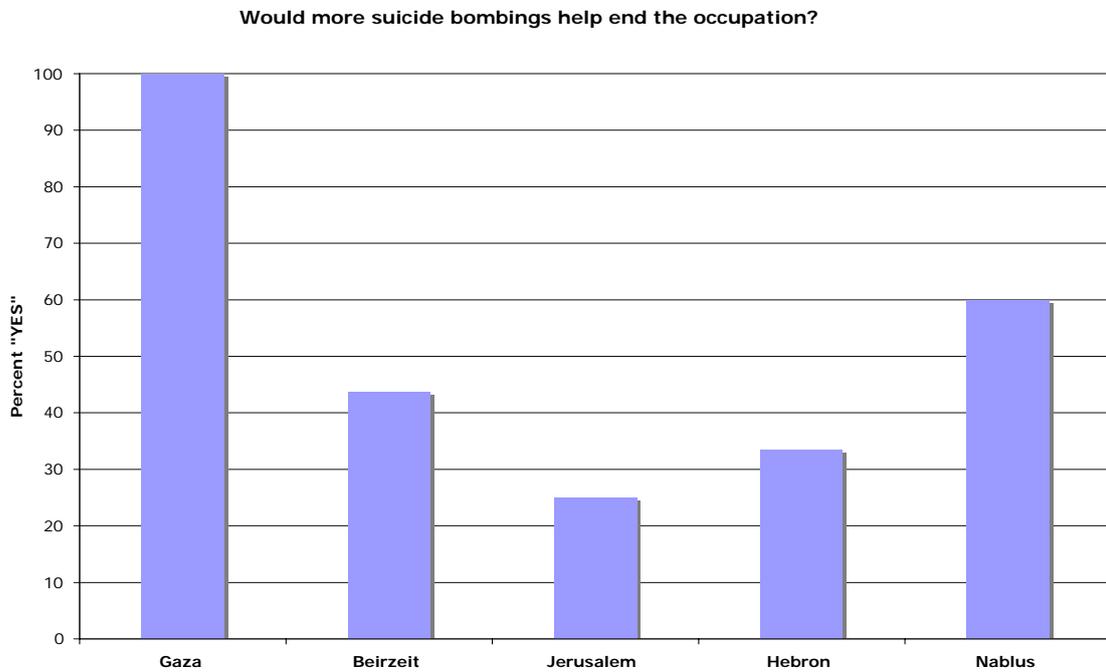


Figure 6: Percentage of young Palestinians believing that SAs are an effective means to end the Israeli occupation.

Can Palestinian goals be met through NON-violent action?

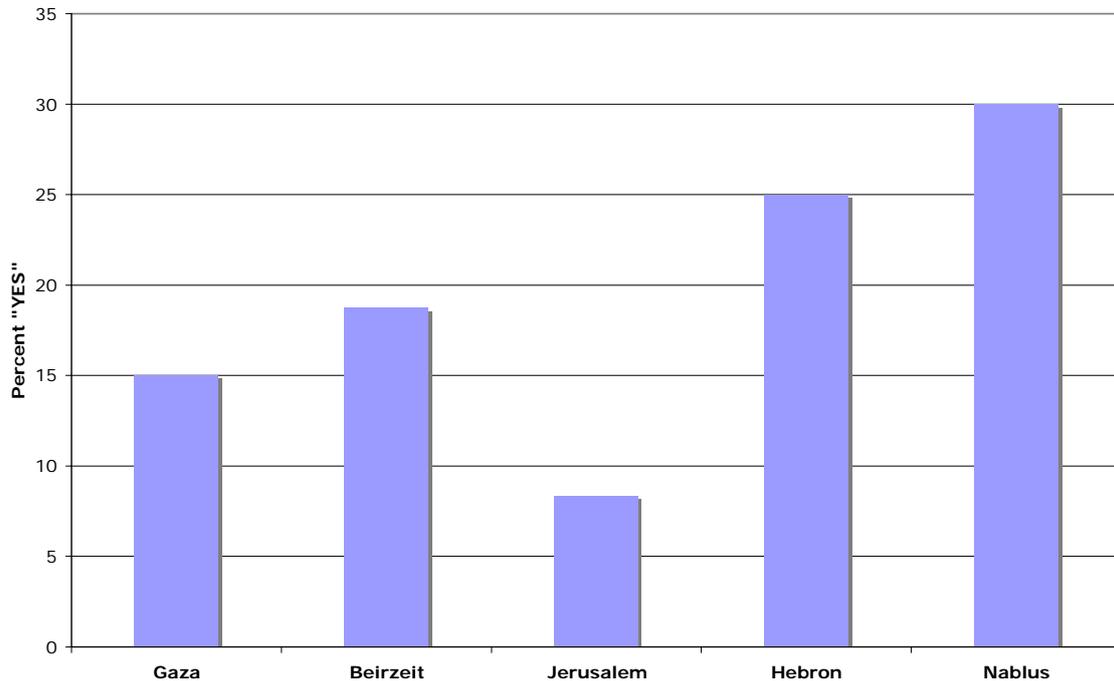


Figure 7: Percentage of young Palestinians believing that violent action is necessary in achieving the Palestinian national goals.

As can be observed, a large percent of those polled acknowledge having had some acquaintance with suicide bombers. The largest group was found in Gaza. In the 2nd chart, Gaza claims the largest percentage of individuals who believe that continued attacks would help end Israeli occupation. We can only assume that likeminded people believe the end of Israeli occupation in Gaza in August 2005 was a result of successful violent action perpetrated by Palestinians against Israelis.

“Crime” Defined:

Under IHL, anyone who is not a combatant is considered a civilian. The principal difference is that the soldier is implementing the policy of a nation and is thus held responsible, whereas a civilian may or may not support their nation’s policies nor consider the terrorist’s nation (or people) an enemy. However, this distinction becomes murky when discussing the case of Israel – particularly in regards to Jewish settlers in the occupied territories as well as the Israeli military reserve system.¹⁹

Case in point, leaders of both *Hamas* and *Islamic Jihad* have stated that they consider all of Israel to be “occupied territory”, all Jewish Israelis to be settlers – and thus all Israelis to be legitimate targets. Indeed, *Hamas*’s leader, Shaikh Ahmad Yassin, in August 2001 stated that: “The Geneva Convention protects civilians in occupied territories, not civilians who are, in fact, occupiers.”²⁰ Hussein al-Sheikh, a *Fatah* official, made the same distinction: “We don’t consider settlers to be civilians”.²¹

Even Palestinians who criticize attacks against civilians frequently excuse attacks against settlers. These assertions, albeit plausible, are inconsistent with IHL. The fact that a person lives in a settlement, whether illegal or not, does not constitute a legitimate military target. Despite the fact that Israel’s policy of maintaining and expanding civilian settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip is illegal under IHL, a person who resides in an illegal settlement continues to be a civilian unless he or she directly participates in hostilities. Except in those

circumstances of direct participation in armed conflict, these residents are entitled to full protection as civilians.

Notwithstanding this lucid legal definition, the fact that many individual settlers carry arms (arguably for their own defense) appears to have given a new argument to armed groups to justify attacks against civilians. This is argued not based upon the premise that the settlements are illegal, but because the settlers are, in fact, militias.

It is further contested that when individual settlers take an active part in offensive hostilities, as opposed to acting in legitimate self-defense, they lose their civilian protection and become legitimate military targets during the period of their participation. This can be juxtaposed with the fact that Palestinian militants who take an active part in armed conflict become legitimate military targets during such a time period.²²

However, even in a situation in which armed settlers were to become combatants, their presence amongst the larger civilian settler population would not negate the requirement that Palestinian combatants distinguish between military and civilian targets during that time, desist from attacking civilians, take all feasible precautions to avoid harm to civilians, and refrain from attacks that cause disproportionate harm to civilians.

Hamas and *Islamic Jihad* further argue that Israel's military reservist system makes almost all of its Jewish citizens, except for children and the elderly, legitimate targets of armed attacks. IHL clarifies, however, that reserve or off-duty soldiers who are not at that moment subject to the integrated disciplinary command of the armed forces are considered civilians until the time that they become subject to military command – i.e. until they are effectively incorporated into the armed forces. Their incorporation into the regular armed forces is most frequently signified by wearing a uniform or other identifiable insignia. They regain civilian status once they are no longer directly engaged in hostilities – thus benefit from protection as such.²³

Palestinian groups have also argued that they are engaged in a “liberation war” against Israel's continuing occupation, and so are somehow exempt from the obligation to respect IHL. This claim of exemption is also artifactual. Indeed, Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions, which by its terms governs wars of national self-determination, states that “[a]cts or threats of violence, the primary purpose of which is to spread terror among the civilian population, are prohibited.”²⁴

IHL leaves absolutely no doubt that attacks targeting civilians constitute war crimes when committed in situations of armed conflict, and cross the threshold to become crimes against humanity when conducted systematically – whether in peace or war. IHL governing situations of armed conflict prohibits even attacks against civilians that are said to have been carried out in reprisal for attacks against one's own civilian population. This principle is stipulated in both the 4th Geneva Convention and in Additional Protocol I.²⁵

Psychosocial Motivation:

The western media speciously portrays religion as the main driving force behind SAs. Although it does play a factor – this is a mistake. In fact, profiles of SAers show that a great number of them were not particularly religious. Professor Robert A. Pape of the University of Chicago writes: “Beneath the religious rhetoric with which [such terror] is perpetrated, it occurs largely in the service of secular aims. Suicide terrorism is mainly a response to foreign occupation rather than a product of Islamic fundamentalism.”²⁶

Moreover, many were educated in colleges and universities. Interviews with would-be SAers who changed their minds show that their greatest motivation was a growing sense of frustration at a life that affords them no real future – a feeling of hopelessness that can be

ascribed to a proximal tangible party.²⁷ Indeed, the vast majority of SAs have been employed by insurgents struggling against an occupying (and internationally recognized) force.

Human systematic oppression is a denial of physical freedom. From empirical research, the obstruction of this basic entitlement seems to be the most potent catalyst to achieve human suffering – particularly when implemented by a group significantly different than the majority. This epitomizes anthropogenic destruction and is most acute when conjoined with two other indirect factors creating quintessential suffering – relative poverty and its most profound extension – extreme poverty. All three seem to coexist within the same algorithm that perpetuates the desirable conditions and wealth of the status quo. This is at the direct expense of others. And this theoretical concept is personified by the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Authority.

While it is understandable that the Israeli government take several precautions to ensure the safety of their citizens, it is our strong belief that they not assume that the present Israel-Palestine dynamics can subsist much longer. This fault lay not solely on their shoulders – but also rests upon the combined weight of the current key players of the Arabic world as well as the Palestinian administration. The Palestinian will continue to ail and subsequently harm others most extraordinarily until an alternative arrangement is implemented...

Many Palestinians feel that their lives do not hold much value in the international community. The daily atrocities being committed against Palestinian civilians make it easy for them to justify killing Israeli civilians. The glorification of suicide bombers on posters also makes it appealing for discouraged Palestinians to end their lives in a way that will grant them some sort of immortality and admiration. Therefore, both the humiliation of life under occupation and religion (to a lesser degree) seem to be the key motives for SAers bent on starting a better life in paradise.

A recently published paper by Harvard University Professor of Public Policy Alberto Abadie “cast[s] doubt on the widely held belief that terrorism stems from poverty, finding instead that terrorist violence is related to a nation’s level of political freedom.”²⁸ He further argues that when governments are weak, political instability is elevated – thus conditions are favorable for the appearance of terrorism.²⁹ Others agree: “Confronted by a seemingly endless combination of death, destruction, restriction, harassment and humiliation, they conclude that ending life as a bomb – rather than having it ended by a bullet - endows them, even if only in their final moments, with a semblance of purpose and control previously considered out of reach.”³⁰

PHRMG conducted three interviews to coincide with statistical research. The people interviewed were chosen as a result of their significant contribution to the analysis of motivations behind SAs, militant organizations, their concern for Palestinian mental health and responsible social functioning, and for their efforts to help end violent actions conducted by both Israelis and Palestinians.

To explore the mental health status of Palestinians under Israeli occupation, PHRMG interviewed Ms. Miassar Sbeih – a social worker in the West Bank. We then met with Dr. Ariel Merari – a professor of psychology at Tel Aviv University, who has studied political terrorism and published widely on this area for nearly 30 years. Finally, we spoke with political science professor Dr. Ami Pedahzur at the University of Haifa. These three offer their professional and balanced perspective on recent, current, and future SAs.

I. MIASSAR SBEIH – Mental Health in the West Bank³¹

Ms. Sbeih works fulltime at the Palestinian Ministry of Mental Health. She earned her Masters degree in Community Mental Health in Jerusalem. Ms. Sbeih provides mental and social support to the Palestinian community through the Ministry of Mental Health and through the Center for Victims of Torture. She refers individual cases to other agencies and works on funding a variety of mental health

programs throughout the West Bank. Ms. Sbeih has provided individual therapy for personal trauma since 1981, community therapy since 1995, and group therapy since 1997 (all in the West Bank). She was one of the original founders of the Treatment and Rehabilitation Center for Victims in Torture (<http://www.trc-pal.org/>) located in Ramallah. She continues to offer services there.

During the time of increased SAs, Ms. Sbeih and her associates noted an increase in the number of clients seeking assistance and an increase in the severity of each case. The increases found their root cause to be stresses resulting from the increase of Israeli violence. Such stresses as humiliation at checkpoints, economic and employment challenges, and the dividing of communities were leading causes for individuals to seek guidance and assistance.

In her therapy methods, Ms. Sbeih frequently uses Islamic teachings and the Qur'an to promote patience and understanding. This runs counter to the use of religion as an influential tool in recruiting or justifying SAs. It is critical we acknowledge the use of Islam here to placate the frustration felt by the community. In the clinical environment, Islam can be used effectively to offer peaceful means for struggling individuals to express their discontent. The clinics use religion if they feel it will be helpful to a client.

At the time of our interview, she was working with a client who openly claimed that he had thought about a revenge-induced SA. The man, while in the U.S. trying to set up a life for his family, lost his son. He was killed by an Israeli soldier. The killing was unprovoked and captured on videotape. The father's treatments consisted of regular debriefings aimed at purging emotions.

Ms. Sbeih worked on this problem specifically and used Islam to help him. Following initial sessions, he was introduced to group therapy with other fathers who had experienced similar events. No officials were notified when he voiced his desire for revenge. They viewed his sentiments as part of an initial grief reaction – and nothing more. The fact that he was seeking therapy was evidence enough of this fact. However, if a regular client stops meeting without prior notice, they investigate through phone calls and an outreach program.

Ms. Sbeih has not worked with the families or friends of SAers. There is no system established to respond if one were to communicate a desire to commit an attack. Understanding the gravity of such a claim, she stresses that such a statement would be taken seriously and an analysis of the individual's cognitive functions would be made. No comment was made on whether government officials would be notified.

When questioned about Palestinian families who respond with pride when questioned about their son or daughter who committed a SA, Ms. Sbeih argues that such individuals are not displaying genuine pride, but instead this reaction is part of an elaborate emotional defense response. Their state's pride is not enough to cover up the emotional trauma being experienced. Those family members who do display genuine pride and lack signs of remorse are extremists, she says. She rhetorically asks the question that many of us ask: if they are so supportive, why don't they do it themselves?

Ms. Sbeih states that people involved directly or indirectly with SAs do not believe that these actions will lead to peace, an end to occupation, or the realization of a Palestinian state. Her opinion coincides with statements made by individuals during our recent polling. Indeed, the primary reward is found in the action itself – not the result. The ability to inflict harm on the Israelis supercedes any long term goals of statehood in what many perceive as a winless battle.

On the subject of narcissism, a label often contributed by psychologists less familiar with Palestinian suicide bombers, Ms. Sbeih and Dr. Merari are in agreement that Palestinian SAers are not narcissistic. Conversely, they are plagued by feelings of hopelessness and defeat.

Other motivational factors recorded by those seeking therapeutic assistance are as follows: organized political violence, degrading experiences at checkpoints, financial exhaustion, post traumatic stress disorder in children (PTSD) and a small percentage of domestic violence. Domestic violence, Sbeih claims, is a novelty for the community she deals with and is more an internalization of external stress. Palestinian couples generally do not marry "into violence", but such intermarital confrontations correlate with negative circumstances surrounding Israeli occupation.

II. ARIEL MERARI – Psychological Analysis of Suicide Bombers³²

Dr. Merari is a professor of psychology at Tel Aviv University. He earned his doctorate from University in California, Berkeley. He has been analyzing Palestinian SAs since their eruption in the Palestinian state in 1993. Since that time, he has conducted numerous interviews with captured (i.e. failed) SAers as well as the friends and family members of SAers.

He firmly believes that although most involved do not speak about SAs leading directly to peace, an end to Israeli occupation, or the realization of a Palestinian state – such attacks are still effective. For the attacker, the motivation can be a number of things (as discussed above), but for the organizers the motivation comes largely from tactical benefits. SAs itself have been chosen as a tactic simply because, as Dr. Merari purports, it has become “internationally fashionable”.

Back in 2001, Dr. Merari stated that religion was not a driving force behind bombings (as other colleagues have noted above). Alternatively, Dr. Merari states, the driving force behind these attacks is strategic necessity for organizational units. For the individuals who carry out the attacks – they have typically experienced some form of humiliation at the hands of Israelis. Many of the attackers also demonstrate strong nationalistic fervor. Dr. Merari also claims that all suicide bombers, since at least 2001, have been recruited by organizations. They have never acted as individuals.

Dr. Merari mostly agrees with the sentiments of Sbeih, in that the individuals who commit a SA are not narcissistic. They display neither signs of significant personality disorders nor organic psychiatric illnesses. Dr. Merari claims that SAers typically do not harbor “normal” suicidal tendencies. Curiously, in contrast to Ms. Sbeih’s feedback, Dr. Merari recalls not a single SA case induced by bereavement. Dr. Eyad Serraj of the Gaza Community Mental Health Program, however, claimed that all suicide bombers had experienced some degree of helplessness as a child – particularly the humiliation of their fathers by Israeli soldiers.

Therefore, based upon Dr. Merari’s feedback, it can be inferred that Palestinian SAs are not a manifestation of psychological illness – they do not seek escape. “Normal” suicide is an attempt to remove aversive stimuli or aversive experiences – it is a form of inaction. On the contrary, SAs are a deliberate form of action. They seek to influence their environment in the only manner they feel is effective.

III. AMI PEDAHZUR – Political Analysis of SAs and Other Violent Activities³³

Ami Pedahzur is a senior lecturer of Political Science at the University of Haifa and Deputy Director of the National Security Studies. His recent publications deal with political extremism in Israel, political violence and the roles that political parties play in this.

He comments that recent studies consider leaders of terrorist organizations as rational actors. The respective organizations will employ SAs as a strategy only as long as it serves its strategic, domestic and organizational purposes. However, in order to carry out a successful suicide campaign, there is a need for individuals to perpetrate the acts – and a community which will support them. Hence, the organizations make efforts to glorify suicide missions and to instill a “culture of hatred and death” within the community.

Crisis and commitment are strong motivational factors for individuals. Subsequently, SAs occur, again, not as a result of individual mental problems, but as a result of social structures stipulating that such a barbarous act is commendable, and thus deemed worthy by a community with a strong similar interest. This common thread among all Palestinian is the “bitter experience of what they see as Israeli state terror”.

He concludes that SAers are apart of tightly-knit social networks. These social networks can be either peaceful or violent before a SA is considered by the group. He emphasizes that the social networks are generally “normal” networks strongly resembling those seen in any society. However, when militant activity engages one individual, the violence spreads throughout the group to the other members. Pedahzur provides several examples as follows:



Figure 8: Examples of SAers as members of tight social networks with other known SAers.

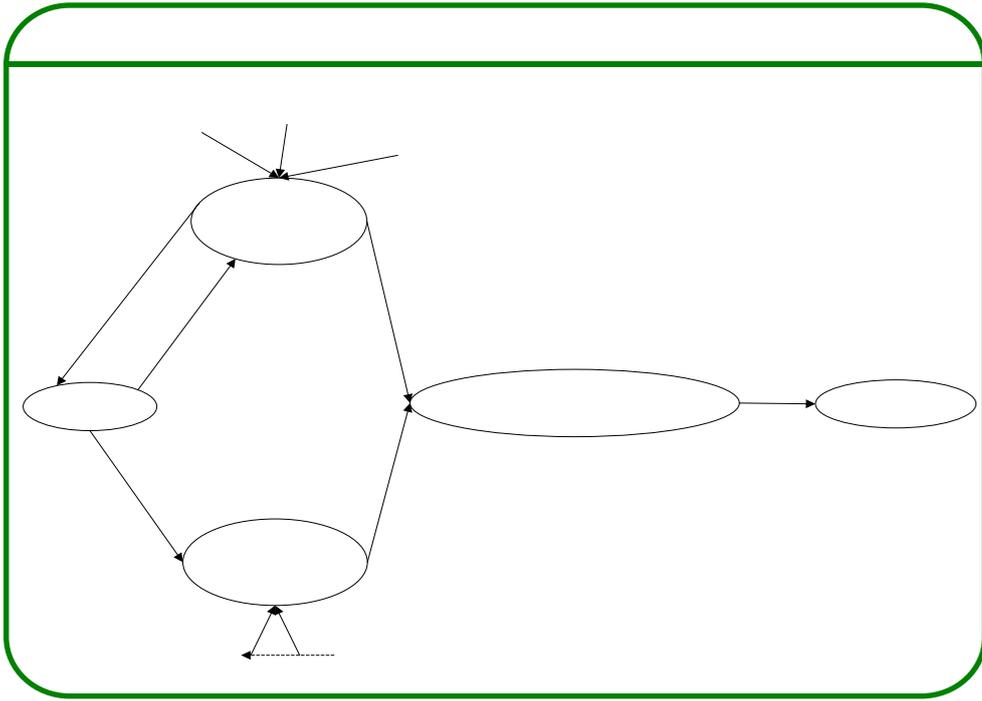


Figure 9: A schematic model describing the psychosocial motivational factors driving SAs

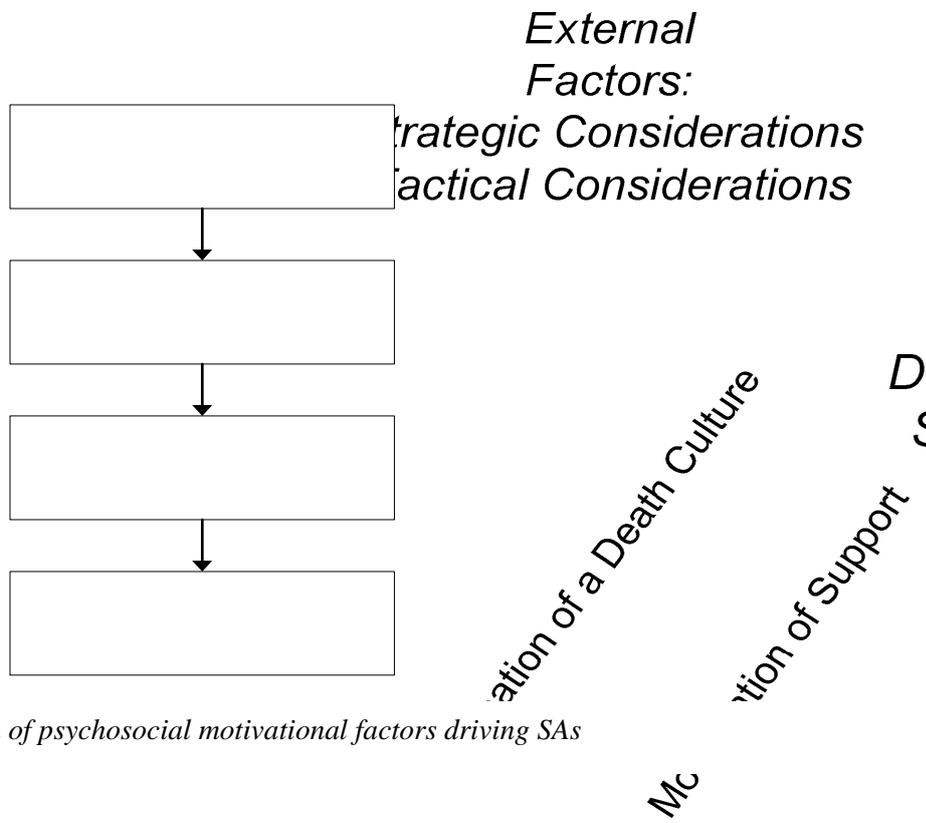
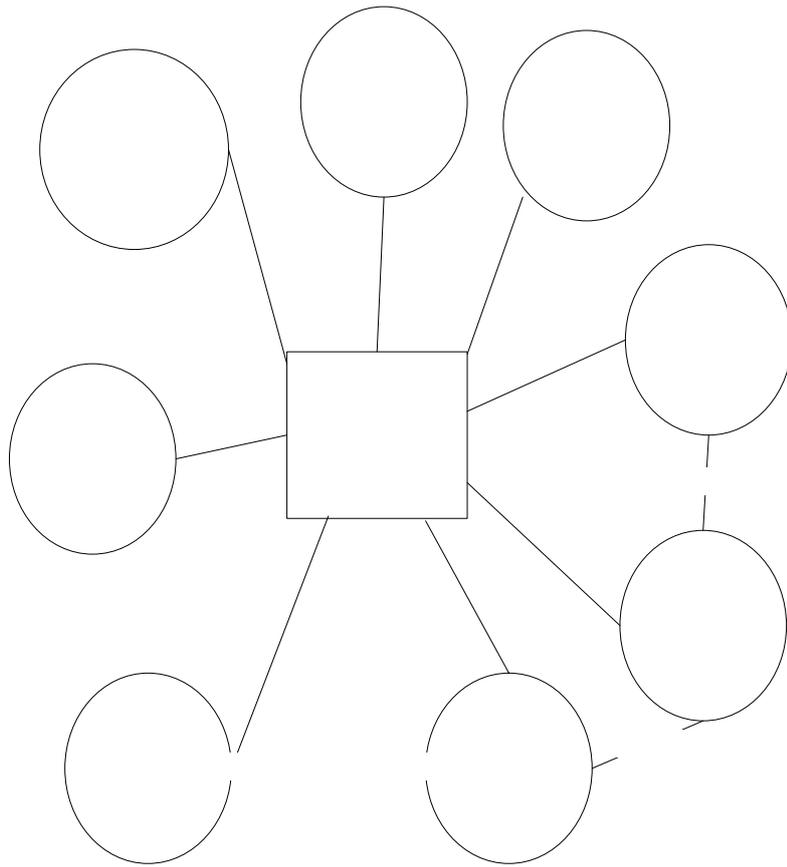
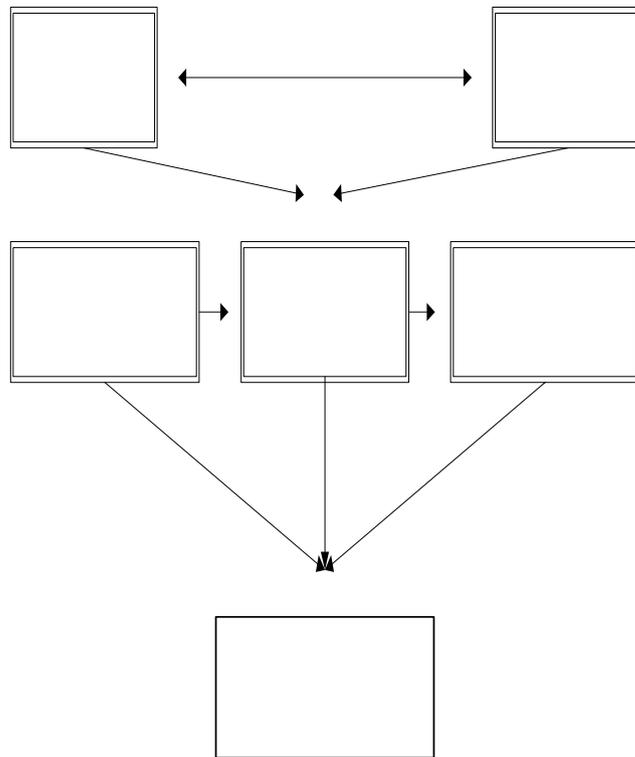


Figure 10: The chain reaction of psychosocial motivational factors driving SAs



Team member
 Mujaheer
 Al-Jaabri
 Suicide Attack at
 Checkpoint
 Near Jerusalem (

Figure 11: Examples of SAers as members of tight social networks with other known SAers – and their links to the leaders of their recruiting organizations.



Team Member
 Mahmoud Hamdan
 Kawasmeh - Suicide
 Attack in Haifa (5.3.2003

Figure 12: The dynamic relationship between psychosocial motivational factors influencing the incidence of SAs

Public Support:

Government:

There are still a few militant groups who consider violence as a powerful political tool. As long as this persists, it is difficult to reasonably attempt to bring an end to the SA phenomenon. While *Hamas* (including its military wing – *Izz al-Din al-Qassam*) has shown admirable progress recently (albeit inconsistent) in their nonviolent political endeavors, others, namely *Islamic Jihad*, have blatantly demonstrated their acceptance of violence as a way to stall or effectively thwart the peace process.³⁴

The discovery of a SAer on June 21, 2005, the day Mahmoud Abbas met with Ariel Sharon, deliberately embarrassed the PA and made it impossible for Palestinians to speak without distraction about their intentions for peace. Indeed, *Islamic Jihad* and others, are struggling not for the Palestinian goal of statehood, but for something far less noble – political clout they have lost as *Hamas* has proportionally risen.³⁵

As reported by *Ha'aretz* on May 30th, 2005, Abbas stated that he believed the era of SAs to be over.³⁶ Considering the decrease in successful SAs in recent years, his assumption was a reasonable one to make. However, it is critical to analyze the cause of this decrease. Two main factors influence the occurrence of SAs: inability on the Israeli side to prevent them, and desire on the Palestinian side to commit such attacks. These factors were reported in a PHRMG press release on June 28th, 2005, shortly before renewed attempts successes in SAs. Such attacks were and are predictable despite President Abbas's suggestion that the era of SAs is never more.

Friday sermons are continued to be broadcast live, usually from a prominent mosque in Gaza or the West Bank, spreading messages of hatred for Israel and the continued advocacy of SAs. This implies that the broadcaster has limited control over the message. However, according to international criminal law, the PA has a responsibility to ensure SAs are neither broadcast nor published – and should bring to justice those who make them. The PA is also obliged to prevent such incitement under article XII (1) of the 1994 Gaza-Jericho Agreement and Article II (3) (c) of Annex I to the Israel-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.³⁷

Indeed, the greatest failure of President Arafat and the PA leadership was their unwillingness to deploy a viable criminal justice system decisively to stop the SAs, particularly in 2001, when the PA was most capable of doing so. Instead, Arafat and the PA pursued a policy whereby suspects, when they were detained, were not investigated or prosecuted, but typically were soon released onto the street again.

While Arafat repeatedly and publicly condemned SAs and other attacks against Israeli civilians, he did little to confront or correct the positive portrayal of the bombers within the Palestinian community as “martyrs”. Alternatively, several PA officials have repeatedly praised attacks on civilians. This inaction has continued to foster an environment that has allowed Palestinian armed groups to believe they could attack civilians with impunity – and they, unfortunately, have.

Case in point, the *al-Aqsa Brigades* appear to still operate with a wide degree of local discretion and to maintain only a loose relationship with senior *Fatah* leadership. Such a relationship does not meet the criteria required to establish that top PA officials have “command responsibility” (i.e. criminal liability) for the attacks against civilians carried out by the *al-Aqsa Brigades*.

Many Palestinian leaders argue that the PA is not a state, and is therefore not a party to the major IHL treaties. However, IHL, through the well established doctrine of “command responsibility”, requires that those who occupy positions of authority cannot escape

accountability for war crimes or other grave abuses committed by persons under their control if they ordered their subordinates to commit such crimes, failed to take reasonable preventive action, or failed to punish the perpetrators. This doctrine is particularly relevant to those in the military chain of command, but the doctrine also extends to political and other leaders insofar as they have “effective responsibility and control” over the actors in question. The leaders of *Islamic Jihad* in particular, and *Hamas* (to a lesser degree), appear to be criminal offenders under that doctrine. The PFLP leadership is also criminally liable.³⁸

Media:

Media in the Occupied Territories consist of local, privately funded television and radio; PA-funded television and radio; and satellite channels broadcast from surrounding countries – including *al-Manar* (affiliated with Hezbollah). Of three major Palestinian newspapers, *al-Ayyam* and *al-Hayat al-Jadedah* are published in the West Bank and *al-Quds* is published in East Jerusalem after clearance by the Israeli military censor.

Israeli critics have argued that the Palestinian media significantly contributes to SAs on civilians by placing an inappropriate, commendatory emphasis on martyrdom. In fact, the term “martyr” is even applied as a venerable term to some prominent individuals who, since September 2000, died of natural causes. Public statements by officials have delivered mixed messages on SAs. Israeli authorities and critics of the PA have also argued that Palestinian media have even fostered public support for such attacks.³⁹

The media coverage comprises only part of a larger atmosphere of social respect for those who have died in the *intifada* – expressed through street posters, pamphlets, internet sites, murals, banners, public discourse, and attendance by public officials at funerals or memorial ceremonies of SAers. In fact, before sending bombers on their suicide missions, the sponsoring organizations frequently had them make video testimonies that were then distributed and publicized through the media – seeking to portray them as “martyrs”. “The brainwashing is reinforced with official broadcasts of films of a dead boy beckoning potential suicide killers to join him in paradise.”⁴⁰

Once again, the terminology surrounding SAs is telling. In Palestinian Arabic, the phrase for a bombing attack in which the perpetrator is killed is an *amaliyya istishhadiyya* (i.e. a martyrdom operation) or an *amaliyya fida'iyya* (i.e. a sacrificial operation). In the Israeli Arabic-language media, the preferred term, on the other hand, is an *amaliyya intihariyya* (i.e. a suicide operation).⁴¹

Government support in conjunction with its respective media coverage can prove even more detrimental. The Palestinian militant groups (i.e. Sunni Muslim) actually resemble the Lebanese Shi'a Hezbollah group in that they are quite media-conscious and the timing and posing of most SAs are all meticulously planned in order to achieve maximal public impact.

In a June 2002 interview with the London-based Arabic newspaper, *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, the Saudi ambassador to the U.K said, “I wish I would die a martyr despite the fact that I am of an age that does not allow me to carry out a martyrdom operation”.⁴² Such comments glorify individuals who die in order to attack civilians. They contribute to public acceptance of such attacks, and, in the context of ongoing SAs against civilians, publicly legitimize war crimes or crimes against humanity. Therefore, PHRMG strongly believes that public officials have a responsibility not to make such statements – as well as discourage others from making them.

It should be noted that some apologetic statements by public officials have been made for permitting such broadcasts. Notwithstanding this positive direction, they are often accompanied by the broadcast of incendiary statements on publicly funded television. Among these were the live broadcasts of *Shaikh Ibrahim Ma'adi* delivering sermons from a Gaza mosque on June 8, 2001, and again on August 3, 2001 by saying: “Blessed are the people who

strap bombs onto their bodies or those of their sons”.⁴³ Clearly, this is either neutralizing the statements of genuine public condemnation or Palestinian leaders are merely playing lip service to Western demands for such.

Some argue that control may be entirely out of the government’s hands. Ghassan Khatib, founder and director of the Jerusalem Media and Communications Center, argues that the prime sources of media encouragement for SAs are not under the control of the PA. “Look at the media – it’s a free platform for *Hamas*”, he said, speaking of Gulf States’ support for *Hamas*.⁴⁴ He continued by saying: “*Al Jazeera* has not been at all professional in the way it favors *Hamas* over other factions, and promotes anything that’s critical of the PA and PLO”.⁴⁵

Despite this tragic manipulation by the media that fuels the propagation of such egregious acts, there are commendable steps taken by a limited number of Arab journalists to condemn SAs. Journalists used to be more supportive of SAs, reflecting public opinion, but recently they seem to be increasingly coming out more clearly against them.

However, it is really the editors who determine what gets broadcast – and they reflect the line of the PA. Before December 16, 2001, the message was a mixed one. But the PA now seems to be diligently using media to bring an end to SAs. The current dominant sound bite is that armed resistance is for the Occupied Territories *only* – against the occupation forces. Unfortunately, many Palestinians are extremely disenchanted with the PA after numerous futile attempts to establish peace – manifesting in the Israeli reoccupation. In addition, the PA apparently has little influence over religious clerics and places of worship.⁴⁶

Nevertheless, Palestinian public debate over SAs against civilians has grown since March 2002. For example, on June 19, 2002, in a full-page advertisement in *al-Quds*, 55 public personalities and intellectuals published an “Urgent Appeal to Stop SAs”. Sari Nusseibeh, the president of al-Quds University and the PLO representative for Jerusalem, reportedly organized the initiative that Palestinian newspapers both welcomed and criticized.⁴⁷

Ziad Abu `Amr, a Palestinian legislator in Gaza and prominent critic of PA policies, agrees: “The debate about suicide bombers is growing, but it’s still largely overwhelmed by the desperateness of our situation. The problem is that few people here watch Palestinian TV...There is more coverage [of SAs] on CNN than on Palestinian TV...They watch *Jazeera* and *Manar*. You want to see incitement? That's where it is.”⁴⁸

General Population:

On March 10, 2005, PCPSR conducted a public opinion poll in the West Bank and Gaza. The poll concluded that 29% of the population supported the SAs in Tel Aviv. This polling included all adults. Support for the attacks was normally 5% higher in individuals between the ages of 18 and 25 – i.e. the average age of suicide bombers. Although this is a dramatic decrease from the 77% who supported the Beer Sheva attack in August 2004, the fact that 1/3 of the population remains supportive indicates that the culture of violence has not been eliminated.⁴⁹

The Palestinian Center for Public Opinion (PCPO) also conducted a separate poll in 2005, whereby a substantial majority (76.1%) supported SAs like that of Netanyahu, whereas 12.5% opposed them, and 11.4% expressed no opinion.⁵⁰

In a 3rd independent survey of university students between the ages of 18 and 26 conducted by PHRMG in June, 2005, 76% did not believe that Palestinian goals of statehood could be achieved through non-violent means. 88% believed another wave of SAs will occur if the current peace process fails, and 58% feel that more bombings now would help bring about an end to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and that previous attacks contributed to the end

of Israeli occupation in Gaza. Not surprisingly, only 15% in Gaza found non-violent actions effective. The highest percentage was found in Nablus, but still suggests that only 1/3 of the students there view non-violent action as an effective means to their ends.

While our findings are interesting, further polling must be conducted for greater statistical accuracy. These sum results, albeit conflicting, suggest considerable continued support for violent activity. Support for SAs may be decreasing (as was seen in the PCPSR poll), but the question of why that is must be raised.

Islam and SAs:

A fundamental problem in addressing the SA phenomenon is that western media continues to depict Islam as (erroneously) linked with terrorist activities of all sorts, including SAs. As was shown in the previous section, the common denominator in suicide bombers is not religious zeal, but rather a sense of helplessness and despair. Hence, it is important to undertake a campaign to educate the public on Islam's message of peace, and also to negate the belief that SAers undertake such missions with the primary reason being religious.

While there are many verses in the Qur'an that specifically denounce killing innocent civilians as well as suicide, words that are written one way can be interpreted (and manipulated) in many different ways. There have been myriad *fatwas* (rulings based on Islamic law) that have denounced SAs. At the same time, however, there are many that glorify them and the people who carry them out. The fact that Palestinians have no access to weapons also allows the Islamic clerics to validate SAs as a suitable form of warfare. Islam also makes provisions for killing in self-defense – and for a just cause. The ongoing occupation is seen as giving SAs such a mandate.⁵¹

Sayed Mohammed Musawi, head of the World Islamic League in London, insists “there should be a clear distinction between the SAs of those who are trying to defend themselves from occupiers, which is something different from those who kill civilians, which is a big crime.”⁵² This is, however, far from the mainstream opinion: an overwhelming consensus of Muslim scholars hold that SAs are simply forbidden.

Since the four SAs in London, the Oxford-based Malayist jurist, Shaykh Muhammad Shaykh Muhammad Afifi al-Akiti, issued his landmark *fatwa* on SAs, where he states SAs in its most widespread form, is forbidden: “If the attack involves a bomb placed on the body or placed so close to the bomber that when the bomber detonates it the bomber is certain [yaqin] to die, than the more correct position according to us is that it does constitute suicide.”⁵³ In January 2006, one of Shi'a Islam's highest ranking marja clerics, Ayatollah al-Udhma Yousof al-Sanei also decreed a *fatwa* against SAs, declaring it a “terrorist act”. Sheik Abdul Aziz bin Abdullah al Sheik, the supreme religious leader of Saudi Arabia, also promulgated a *fatwa* that equated SAs with suicide – ergo, not permissible in Islam.⁵⁴

According to Islamic jurist and scholar Khaled Abou Al-Fadl argues that most classical jurists, nearly without exception, agree that those who attack by stealth, while targeting noncombatants in order to terrorize the resident and wayfarer, are corrupters of the earth. The legal term given to people who act this way was *muharibun* (those who wage war against society), and the crime is called the crime of *hiraba* (waging war against society). The crime of *hiraba* was so serious and repugnant that, according to Islamic law, those guilty of this crime were considered enemies of humankind and were not to be given quarter or sanctuary anywhere. He says it is unequivocal: “Islamic law strictly prohibited the taking of hostages, the mutilation of corpses, and torture.”⁵⁵

Yet unfortunately there are those who continue to obfuscate this salient message. Mohammed Sayed Tantawi, a leading doctrinal authority in the Sunni Muslim world, wrote in Egypt's *Al Ahram* that “If a person blows himself up, as in operations that Palestinian youths carry out

against those they are fighting, then he is a martyr. But if he explodes himself among babies or women or old people who are not fighting the war, then he is not considered a martyr.”⁵⁶ This curiously resembles the legal distinction between a war crime and a crime against humanity.

Other clerics argue that suicide, which the Qur’an explicitly condemns, can be distinguished from “martyrdom operations” on the grounds that suicide is largely carried out from despair. Conversely, most SAers were arguably successful (i.e. young, healthy, educated, and not poverty-stricken) in their “earthly lives”. In short, they argue, there was a future to live for – and they chose to bring an end to their existence anyhow.⁵⁷ Notwithstanding the logic rooted in the philosophical bifurcation, this continued manipulation of religious scriptures permits the practice of SAs to continue by confusing the youth at risk as well as providing manipulative ammunition for organizations searching for prey.

Qur’an Analysis on the Subject of Suicide Attacks:

An analytical study of the Qur’an, however, embraces the message of most Muslim clerics – that terrorist acts are, indeed, against the tenets of Islam. In fact, the very root of the word Islam describes peace. “Harming innocent bystanders, even in times of war”, was explicitly forbidden by the Prophet Muhammad. There are voluminous verses that plainly forbid both suicide and murder. And there are just as many verses that promote peaceful coexistence with neighbors, peaceful non-Muslims, and avowed enemies who make an offering of peace.

The following verses clearly state that suicide is forbidden in Islam:

- *...Do not kill (or destroy) yourselves. Surely God hath been to you Most Merciful! [4:29]*
- *... and make not your own hands contribute to (your) destruction... [2:195]*

There are also verses that specifically prohibit murder – with special emphasis made on the killing of innocent civilians:

- *... take not life, which God hath made sacred, except by way of justice and law... [6:151]*
- *...We ordained for the Children of Israel that if any one slew a person - unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land - it would be as if he slew the whole people: and if any one saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people... [5:32]*
- *But if the enemy inclines towards peace, do thou (also) incline towards peace, and trust in God: for He is One that heareth and knoweth (all things). [8:61]*
- *If any do that in rancor and injustice, - soon shall We cast them into the Fire: And easy it is for God. [4:30]*
- *Fight in the cause of God those who fight you, but do not transgress limits; for God loveth not transgressors. [2:190]*

Seppuku and Suicide Attacks:

SAs became widely known during the 2nd World War in the Pacific as Allied ships were attacked by Japanese kamikaze pilots who caused maximal damage by flying their explosive-laden aircraft into military targets. The Japanese Navy also used both one- and two-man piloted torpedoes (i.e. *kaiten*) on suicide missions.⁵⁸

Although originally equipped with escape hatches – there is no evidence that such routes were ever taken nor did the pilots have any such intention to employ them. As the war progressed, however, *kaitens* were built with no means of escape – thus providing one sole purpose.

After aiming a two-person *kaiten* at their target, the two crew members traditionally embraced and shot each other in the head. Social support for such choices was strong, due in part to Japanese cultural history, in which *seppuku* (i.e. honorable suicide) was apart of samurai duty. Such a practice, enshrined in the Samurai code of honor, was a way for defeated samurai to escape with a modicum of such honor. Seppuku was a key part of *bushido* (i.e. the code of the samurai warriors). It was used by warriors to avoid falling into enemy hands – thus precluding disgrace.

Often times, disgraced warriors were sometimes allowed to commit seppuku rather than be executed in a normal manner. Typically, a samurai would commit such an act via a detailed ritual, which ended with the samurai disemboweling himself – and a skilled swordsman attendant completing the process by decapitating him. This cultural practice bears a striking resemblance to modern times, where Muslim men/women envisaging a hopeless future commit such a practice in order to retain respect that is socially produced by their respective environments.

Such a form of socially constructed “honor” was also fostered and indoctrinated by the Imperial program to persuade the Japanese soldiers to commit such acts. In fact, it is speculated that such heinous attacks reinforced the resolution of the World War II Allies to destroy the Imperial force via firebombing, and may have had a significant effect in the decision to use atomic bombs against Japan.

Decades later, such a tactic would spread to the Middle East via Japan. In 1972, in the hall of the Lod airport in Tel Aviv, three Japanese used grenades and automatic rifles to kill 26 people and wound more than 100 before turning such weapons onto themselves. The group belonged to the Japanese Red Army (JRA) – a terrorist organization created in 1969 and allied to the PFLP. Until then, no group involved in terrorism had conducted such a suicide operation in the Middle East. Moreover, JRA members became instructors in martial arts and kamikaze operations at several *Hezbollah* training camps – ushering in a new genre of guerrilla warfare.⁵⁹

We argue that such strategies became popular in two cultures – albeit ostensibly culturally distinct – similar in one main ethic: dedication to the group over the trivial importance of the individual. Such a philosophy is enshrined in Confucianism, which remains a dominant guide in East Asian behavior. Curiously, Islam holds strikingly similar tenets. This ideology strives to remove the negative aspects of selfishness, thus facilitating group harmony.

At the same time, however, the general population is manipulated to confide all importance into the “body politic”, which when such leadership is malicious and sends distorted messages to its constituents has absolute power over them – essentially guiding them robotically. The PHRMG, therefore, strongly believes that modern dialogue be applied to such an ancient text to negotiate the possibility of a livable balance between self and family-importance, a devout faith in Islam, as well as a cautious inclination to confide absolute faith into one’s respective government.

The Arab “Decline”:

Some Israeli academics argue that the use of SAs, particularly by Palestinians, represents the rage and desire for revenge of a civilization in retreat since 1683. The Battle of Vienna, spearheaded by the Habsburg kingdom, marked the turning point in the 300-year struggle between the forces of the central European kingdoms and the Ottoman Empire.

This date, therefore, commemorates the first of a long series of military defeats between a significant Muslim force (i.e. the Ottoman Turks) and a Western army. Since then, Arab armies have been invariably humiliated by Western forces – most notably in the *Nakba* of

1948; the six-day defeat of 1967; and watched helplessly as the largest standing contemporary Arab military (i.e. Iraq) was squashed by the U.S. in 1991.⁶⁰

Asher Susser writes that the “Arab predicament...now stands at an impasse...How they entered it is a cumulative litany of wrong choices, beginning with the hero of Arabism – Gamal Abdel Nasser.”⁶¹ It is argued that the Arabs have since failed to build viable nation-states. Conversely, they have established police states that continue to exploit every available resource in order to protect their regimes from the respective populaces they govern. Subsequently, they succeeded in this regard, yet still remain incapable of defending themselves from external threats.

Case in point, the application of Palestinian force (e.g. SAs) has been dubbed a “catastrophic” mistake – the worst they have made since 1948 with their resistance to the establishment of the Israeli state. Indeed, the Palestinian means of SAs has earned their struggle unprecedented international condemnation. In fact, even Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch (organizations that almost invariably support the rights of the oppressed) have openly condemned such activity as none other than “crimes against humanity”. This opprobrium is a novelty, indeed...⁶²

As long as such states continue to employ such merciless means, they will be subsequently dubbed as pariahs by the international community and will be thus precluded from formally entering today’s globalized economy as a sustainable member. While the pride of Islam is commendable, it is high time that such governments cease violent resistance of Occidental domination and, alternatively, aim for a peaceful co-existence with their neighbors. Muslim nations who have done so, have demonstrated a significant improvement in their economy and overall quality of living. Turkey, Jordan, Egypt, the Gulf States, Brunei and Malaysia provide perfect examples.

Conclusion:

Suicide attacks are far from a unidimensional phenomenon. The sensitive context in which they materialize in, the obvious exclusion of the perpetrator from research, the vehement political environments in which they emerge, as well as the ideological bifurcation between two massive worlds together causes SAs to be a challenging subject to study and subsequently address.

However, the PHRMG, by virtue of our ties to both the Palestinian people and a significant Western audience has strived to do so. This paper is not definitive, but provides an approximate blueprint to follow in order to bring an eventual end to this heinous practice – as, contrary to popular Palestinian belief, it benefits neither the Arab nor the Western world. It is time to seriously address this issue which needlessly claims thousands of lives and more seriously deteriorates any meaningful dialogue and efforts for a sustainable peace process.

This paper has many purposes as delineated above, but it most importantly has set out to accomplish two major goals. First, to bring a realistic end to the era of SAs. Second, to cleanse a portion of the Palestinian voice, in that a substantial population is vociferously against such a means. Western media often portrays the Palestinian as an unfortunate yet savage people. This is a mistake. And the Palestinian has it in their individual power to rectify such an artifactual stereotype. We are a strong and proud population, but have been, unfortunately, oppressed by the West and manipulated by many Arab and Palestinian leaders alike.

Throughout the course of this paper, we have discussed myriad facets that encapsulate the SA phenomenon. We have outlined the historical development and shown that SAs are not endemic to Islam – much less the Palestinian. Conversely, this is a practice that has been in existence for millennia and was only first used by the Arabs 26 years ago – and forwarded

into Palestinian hands 13 years later. Therefore, its use still remains a novelty, and as such may be effectively eradicated.

We have eliminated numerous specious correlations and stereotypes surrounding SAers – including that of being psychologically disturbed, mentally incompetent, poverty-stricken, and driven by religious fervor. We have shown that an insightful analysis portrays the average SAer as a rational actor living in an irrational world, and thus susceptible to modification. Indeed, SAers appear to be driven by strong nationalistic zeal, systematic oppression by a population whose culture is significantly different from their own, an ensuing feeling of helplessness and despair, a devout hatred for a neighboring tangibly occupying force, and a false assurance by organizations as well as a manipulation of religious scriptures to more easily guide such individuals towards imminent self-destruction...

We have conclusively demonstrated that Islam – and its underlying ethos – is not inherently responsible for SAs. Islam is a religion and culture that promotes peace and understanding. Unfortunately, it is the work of manipulative theologians with significant influence who often obscure the benign messages enshrined in the Qur'an.

The matter of public support has also been addressed. SAs, quite simply, would naturally cease to exist if it materialized in a vacuum. Unfortunately, this is not the case. It is largely the fault of both political and religious leaders who continue to advocate its utility as well as the media's known bias and social construction that this epidemic persists. While some leaders and media journalists have altered their path on this subject – a majority still either blatantly supports the use of SAs or sends mixed messages, which simply complicates the complex. The PHRMG, therefore, calls upon its leaders and media representatives to bring this matter into center stage and seriously educate the population on the ramifications of such a futile means.

As several surveys indicate, the majority of the general Palestinian population still supports SAs as a powerful political tool and most further believe that non-violent means will not bring an agreeable solution to their woes. However, the PHRMG believes that this will radically change if the following issues are addressed.

First, Palestinian leadership must meaningfully address SAs and begin to turn their proverbial backs on them. Second, Palestinian individuals must begin to envisage the power and uniqueness that each possesses, so that they may garner significant agency in order to challenge dishonorable and distrustful political administrations that may emerge at different points in time. Finally, Palestinians must recognize that in this increasingly pluralistic world, they must co-reside with their Western neighbors. They must not fight with hatred, weapons and suicide bombs, but compete with the rest of the world at their own game – education and economics. It will be very difficult at first, but through time, and through the inviolable solidarity well-known to be shared amongst their Muslim brothers and sisters, we firmly believe that they can find a place and ensuing satisfaction in today's inescapable world.

Future Recommendations:

Several recommendations have been made throughout this paper within their respective sections. First and foremost, it is imperative for the Palestine and other Arab states willingly accept future opportunities for peace talks. However, it is counterproductive for such dialogue to take place amidst a perennial state of terror. Therefore, this culture of violence must truly be addressed and subsequently extinguished.

In order to do this, the PA must recognize and address the fact that a substantial portion of the general population still believes that continued violence will bring about peace. The PHRMG calls on the PA to clarify its statements that any violence during this time will only result in further setbacks to the peace process. Media outlets must also take further measures not to

condone propaganda that might incite or glamorize SAs and to properly inform the public on the repercussions on Palestinians that result from violent attacks against Israelis.

More attention should be given to social and psychological programs that assist families who have been victims of the Israeli occupation and that work to prevent SAs. PHRMG recognizes organizations such as The Treatment and Rehabilitation Center for Victims of Torture that has proven effective in social outreach programs throughout the West Bank, and the Gaza Community Mental Health Center (<http://www.gcmhp.net/>) which has conducted research into the social environments that encourage suicide bombers. Finally, Palestinian communities must acknowledge that their level of influence can be as potentially great as that of the PA and the Israelis in creating an atmosphere conducive to the development of a just, much needed, and viable state of peace...

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