

Chapter 25

Preventing Suicide Attacks by Terrorists

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Suicide attacks have been a feared tactic of terrorism since the initiation of suicide bombings in Lebanon in the 1980s and, perhaps even more so, since their adaptation in the airplane attacks on the US on 11 September 2001. The numbers of suicide attacks, especially suicide bombings, have increased over time, in some cases dramatically. Is it possible to prevent suicide attacks by terrorists, and, if so, by what means? In fact, there are examples of effective efforts to prevent suicide attacks. One example involves the prevention of suicide bombings in Israel. Another example involves the prevention of one type of suicide attack – attacks using commercial airplanes. Suicide bombings peaked in Israel in 2002 and 2003, but decreased between 2003 and 2005. One explanation for this decrease is effective counterinsurgency (COIN) and counterterrorism efforts implemented during and following the second Palestinian Intifada. Terrorism has continued – even increased – in Israel, but suicide attacks are no longer a common occurrence. The second example relates to suicide attacks involving commercial airplanes. Changes in airport and airplane security after 9/11 have made it harder for terrorists to target or utilize airplanes in attacks. Counterterrorism efforts have not stopped terrorists from attempting further attacks on airports and airplanes, yet these attempts have been met with further hardening of these targets. While counterterrorism efforts in Israel which involve air travel have been largely successful, these successes have not included remedies for the sources of the violence that inspire groups to use suicide attacks or individuals to participate in them. The groups responsible for the suicide attacks in Israel and on 9/11 continue to operate and continue to support violence.

Keywords: COIN, counter-terrorism, suicide attack, suicide bombing, strategy, terrorism, terrorist tactics.

There is clear public interest in preventing suicide terrorism. The people who carry out suicide attacks act like guided missiles with the capacity to identify times and places where to strike in order to maximize the terror of their attacks. Suicide attacks often cause more destruction, kill more people, and gain more attention than non-suicide attacks. Threats of these attacks perpetuate fear within larger communities and raise the coercive capacity of otherwise weak non-state actors. Suicide terrorists often target civilians in places of perceived safety, outside an active conflict zone. No single event illustrates the devastation of suicide attacks more plainly than the 9/11 attacks, in New York, Washington DC, and Pennsylvania. The tremendous loss of life, destruction, and disruption associated with the attacks showed the potential for similar attacks in the future, guided by unknown adversaries, capable of directing and inspiring attacks from faraway places. The surprise of the attacks, along with their choice of weapons, targets, and scale, drew new attention to an otherwise well-established tactic of terrorism. While the 9/11 attacks marked a change in the attention given to this specific modus operandi, they did not mark the beginning of the study of suicide attacks, their causes, or ways to prevent them.

Suicide attacks were not a new tactic brought into the twenty-first century by groups like Al-Qaeda. They were a tactic introduced twenty years earlier in Lebanon during the country's fifteen-year civil war – though its origins are much older. Since that time, suicide bombings evolved from what was initially an insurgent tactic used primarily against government and military targets in the context of civil war into a tactic of terrorism aimed at civilians in times of relative peace. Suicide attacks increased in frequency after 2001, despite enhanced counterterrorism efforts, and in some cases perhaps as a side-effect of these efforts and as a reply to them.¹

At the same time, and notwithstanding the increase in the number of attacks overall, there is some evidence of success in preventing suicide attacks by terrorists, and lessons can be learned from these examples. One example is what appears to be the successful prevention of a repeat of the 9/11 attacks, using civilian airplanes as guided missiles. A second example is the reduction of suicide bombings in Israel during and after the second Palestinian Intifada.

The focus of this chapter is on prevention. Is it possible to prevent suicide attacks by terrorists, and, if so, by what means? This is not a question about preventing terrorism, in general. Rather, the focus is on preventing one type of attack, specifically suicide attacks, carried out by a specific type of non-state actor, namely a group that uses terrorist tactics.

Answering this question on prevention requires attention to the role of suicide attacks in terrorist strategy, patterns in the adoption and innovation of terrorist tactics, and the seemingly open-ended threat of future terrorist violence. It also requires attention to past efforts to prevent terrorist attacks, including successful counterterrorism efforts aimed at dwarfing specific types of attacks, as well as cases in which suicide attacks have been effectively halted.

The discussion begins with an outline of what it means to refer to suicide attacks by terrorist groups. The second section involves a discussion of early suicide bombers and the evolution of suicide attacks. The third section consists of analyses of two examples of successful prevention of

¹ See, for example, Hafez, Mohammed M. 'Suicide Terrorism in Iraq: A Preliminary Assessment of the Quantitative and Documentary Evidence'. *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 29.6: 2006, *passim*; Hafez, Mohammed M. *Suicide Bombers in Iraq: The Strategy and Ideology of Martyrdom*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press 2007, pp. 89-93, pp. 213-215.

suicide attacks by terrorists. The first example details changes in air travel arrangements after 9/11, describing how one type of suicide attack has been prevented. The second example focuses on Israeli counterinsurgency (COIN) and counterterrorism, and shows how one state significantly reduced the frequency of suicide bombings within its borders. This discussion is followed by explanations of alternative reasons for a decrease in suicide bombings. The final section includes considerations of implications and limitations.

Distinguishing Terrorism and Suicide Attacks

Terrorism is a type of political violence perpetrated primarily against civilian or noncombatant targets with the goal of provoking widespread fear as a means of bringing closer a desired political change.² Terrorist groups are motivated by political objectives, that use terrorism as a tactic in pursuit of their goals. The terrorism label belongs to individuals as well as those working within a terrorist group or network, including perpetrators of attacks, those who plan and orchestrate attacks, others who act in supporting roles, and their leaders. To some extent, terrorists share, regardless of role, an expectation that attacking and generating fear among civilians or noncombatants will help them achieve their goals.³

Terrorist groups do more than engage in acts of terrorism.⁴ The same groups that attack noncombatants and civilians may also attack military and hardened government targets, and they may do so in peacetime or in the context of war, at home or abroad. Attacks on “softer” civilian targets are, however, prototypical terrorist attacks. Attacks on “harder” armed targets are not necessarily terrorism, even though the perpetrators may be terrorists. Attacks on “harder” state targets tend to require more capable and better-trained militants. Some terrorist groups have these capabilities, and those that do, may be more appropriately identified as insurgents, especially if terrorist attacks are not their dominant form of attack.⁵

It is no coincidence that the groups labeled as terrorists by some experts, are labeled as insurgents by others. There is considerable overlap between these labels. Insurgents are political actors seeking to change a political system, such as by installing a new regime or establishing a new state. Their adversaries are states and other non-state actors, and their tactics often include a combination of terrorist attacks and guerrilla warfare techniques.⁶ Although insurgencies are generally associated with sustained conflict or larger-scale warfare, this is not always the case.⁷ The weakest

² Hoffman, Bruce. *Inside Terrorism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006, pp. 1-41; Schmid, Alex P. (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research*. New York: Routledge, 2011, pp. 86-87.

³ Schmid, Alex P. ‘The Revised Academic Consensus Definition of Terrorism’, *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 6 Issue 2, 2012, pp. 158-159.

⁴ Moghadam, Assaf, Ronit Berger, and Polina Beliakova, ‘Say Terrorist, Think Insurgent: Labeling and Analyzing Contemporary Terrorist Actors’. *Perspectives on Terrorism* 8.5, passim 2014.

⁵ See, for example, Martin, Susanne, and Leonard B. Weinberg, *The Role of Terrorism in Twenty-first-century Warfare*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press 2016, pp. 1-5, pp. 11-14; Martin, Susanne, and Leonard B. Weinberg, ‘Terrorism in an Era of Unconventional Warfare’. *Terrorism and Political Violence* 28.2, 2016, passim.

⁶ Merari, Ariel, ‘Terrorism as a Strategy of Insurgency’, *Terrorism and Political Violence* 5.4 1993, p. 245.

⁷ See, for instance, Boot, Max, *Invisible Armies: An Epic History of Guerrilla Warfare from Ancient Times to the Present*. New York, NY: Liveright Publishing Corporation 2013, pp. 569-570; Martin and Weinberg, 2016, pp. 12-20.

(would-be) insurgents may fail to create and sustain the level of violence or disruption typically associated with a protracted “insurgency.”⁸

Insurgents’ combination of guerrilla operations and terrorist tactics depends to some extent on their strength. Some insurgents control territory. Those that do, tend to have more resources and operate more openly. They may collect “taxes” to fund their operations, and they may develop a trained and possibly even a uniformed militia.⁹ Weaker insurgents may be relegated to carrying out attacks on “softer” unarmed targets, essentially relying on terrorism, while stronger insurgents are capable of attacking “harder” armed targets, typically with guerrilla tactics, such as sabotage, ambushes and hit-and-run attacks. They rarely have the capacity to engage in direct military confrontation. The insurgents using guerrilla tactics are guerrillas. The insurgents using terrorism are terrorists. Insurgent groups are often both guerrilla and terrorist.

Suicide attacks are one tool used by a subset of insurgents for guerrilla and terrorist attacks. Suicide attacks are a type of attack for which the death of the attacker is necessary for the successful completion of the attack.¹⁰ This is a “narrow,” or “strict,” definition of suicide attack, as compared to definitions that require only a high likelihood of an attacker’s death for a mission’s success.¹¹ Even when the attackers’ deaths are highly likely, their deaths may not be required for an attack to be successful. Perpetrators of gun and knife attacks have a high likelihood of being killed while carrying out an attack, but their deaths are not a requirement for the attack to be successful, and there is a chance of survival. Suicide bombings are direct attacks that practically guarantees the death of the perpetrator. Suicide bombers expect to die when they detonate their explosives. That suicide bombers are willing to die, and are consenting to die, is a necessary element of a narrow definition of the phenomenon.¹² It is also a condition that is impossible to ascertain in many cases. For example, some “suicide bombers” are themselves victims, who have been kidnapped or coerced before being armed with explosives they cannot remove. There are also cases of remote detonation of “suicide” bombs. Attacks that do not require the death of a perpetrator or do not have a willing perpetrator are not suicide attacks according to the strict definition,¹³ yet they may be counted as such, given the often limited information available.¹⁴

Suicide attacks are terrorism when the primary targets of the attacks are civilians or noncombatants, and the intent of the attacks is to spread fear in order to bring about a desired

⁸ Boot, 2013, pp. 569-570.

⁹ See, for instance, De la Calle, Luis, and Ignacio Sanchez-Cuenca, ‘What we talk about when we talk about terrorism’, *Politics and Society* 39.3 2011, p. 458.

¹⁰ Ganor, Boaz. n.d., ‘The Rationality of the Islamic Radical Suicide Attack Phenomenon’; in: *Countering Suicide Terrorism*. Herzliya, Israel: IDC Herzliya, Institute for Counter-Terrorism, ICT, pp. 6-7; Moghadam, Assaf, ‘Defining Suicide Terrorism’; in: Ami Pedahzur (ed.), *Root Causes of Suicide Terrorism: The Globalization of Martyrdom*. London: Routledge 2006, pp. 14-23; Crenshaw, Martha (‘Explaining Suicide Terrorism: A Review Essay’. *Security Studies*, 16.1 2007, pp. 135-140.

¹¹ Moghadam, 2006, pp. 17-21.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., p 20. We can expect there to be cases in which suicide attacks have involved unwilling participants, though we may not be able to distinguish these from those attacks with willing participants. There is often too little information to rule out remote detonation and forced participation, and ‘successful’ suicide bombers cannot provide this information.

political advantage or change. The same group may use suicide attacks against “softer” civilian targets as well as against “harder” government and military targets. As such, a single group may carry out suicide attacks that is seen as terrorism as well as suicide attacks that are more consistent with guerrilla warfare.¹⁵ References to suicide attacks by terrorist groups, which is the focus of this chapter, include the subset of attacks that are aimed at military and government targets, so long as the perpetrators of these attacks are non-state actors that also target civilians in terrorist attacks.

Early Suicide Bombers

Suicide bombing began spreading as a terrorist and insurgent tactic in the late twentieth century. The first suicide bombings by terrorists that gained attention occurred in the early 1980s, during Lebanon’s fifteen-year sectarian civil war (1975-1990).¹⁶ Lebanon’s early suicide bombers drove explosive-laden vehicles into their targets, most of which were military installations and embassy buildings belonging to foreign states. Some of the militants using suicide bombings were reportedly (co-)sponsored by Iran and Syria, and their targets were also adversaries of these countries.

One of the roots of suicide bombing as a tactic of terrorism may be traced to Iran and Iranian propaganda from the era of the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988). During the war, the newly established Islamic Republic of Iran encouraged its soldiers, including untrained youth volunteers, to embrace self-sacrifice in the protection of the state. Propaganda celebrating the sacrifice of a thirteen-year-old child soldier offers one example. As the story has been told, the child detonated his grenades in front of an Iraqi tank, halting its progress and saving many civilian lives in the process. The story provided support for an official narrative, which drew connections between self-sacrifice for the state and for the larger Shia community, with promises of rewards in the afterlife.¹⁷ While the Iran-Iraq War continued, violent political groups, including some with ties to Iran, were among the first to carry out suicide bombings – often termed ‘martyrdom operations’ – in Lebanon.

Most suicide bombings in Lebanon, including those attributed to Lebanon’s Hezbollah, targeted harder, non-civilian targets.¹⁸ In the context of civil war, many of these bombings could – if they targeted military objects – be considered as acts of war by weak insurgents rather than “terrorist”

¹⁵ Similarly, there are many occasions on which states have used suicide attacks in regular warfare, especially toward the end of a war and when defeat was almost inevitable. This was the case toward the end of the Second World War, when Japanese kamikaze pilots attacked American warships in the Pacific.

¹⁶ Suicide missions such as those described by Japan’s kamikaze pilots were not terrorism but rather part of the warfare between states. In addition, the kamikaze pilots used planes as explosives, more along the lines of the 9/11 attackers. The suicide bombers in Lebanon carried their explosives or used cars.

¹⁷ See, for instance, Ferrero, Mario, ‘Martyrdom Contracts’, *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 50.6., 2006, pp. 872-873; Aryan, Hossein, ‘How Schoolchildren are Brainwashed in Iran’. *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* (Commentary, May 27, 2010). Available at: https://www.rferl.org/a/Commentary_How_Schoolchildren_Are_Brainwashed_In_Iran/2054304.html.

¹⁸ See, for instance, Pedahzur, Ami *Suicide Terrorism*. Malden, MA: Polity Press 2005, p. 19; Pape, Robert A. *Dying to Win*. New York: Random House 2005, pp. 253-254 (Appendix 1); Global Terrorism Database (GTD), National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) 2020. Available at: <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/access/> (last accessed July 2020).

attacks. Iraq's embassy was the first target of suicide bombers in Beirut, in 1981, while Iraq was at war with Iran. Suicide bombers attacked the US' embassy in Beirut twice, in 1983 and 1984. Simultaneous suicide bombings in 1983 targeted the barracks of American marines (killing 241) and French paratroopers (killing 58), in different parts of Beirut. Suicide bombers attacked Israel's military in southern Lebanon on multiple occasions. The civil war's deadliest suicide bombings targeted foreigners.

Hezbollah has received attention as the initiator of suicide bombings. The group may not have carried out the first suicide bombing¹⁹ and it was not the most prolific user of suicide attacks, yet the group inspired other groups to copy its suicide bombing tactics for use in their own conflicts.²⁰ In Lebanon, suicide bombings ceased for a time with the end of the civil war in 1990. Hezbollah and other militant groups turned to party politics, participating in Lebanon's post-war power-sharing governments. Lebanon's militant groups remained active during this time, with many of the attacks in the country credited to Hezbollah.²¹ Suicide attacks, however, were far less common. As the frequencies of suicide bombings declined in Lebanon, they were increasing elsewhere. There have been nearly 7,000 such operations in more than 50 countries since 1981, with the majority (nearly 6,800) occurring after 9/11.²²

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE or Tamil Tigers) adopted suicide tactics in the late 1980s. The Tamil Tigers were nationalist-separatist insurgents engaging in what would become a decades long civil war in Sri Lanka. Unlike Hezbollah, the LTTE was a secular group with a membership that was primarily Hindu and Christian. The Tamil Tigers had observed the apparent success of suicide bombings in Lebanon and reportedly went so far as to obtain training from Hezbollah on how to use these tactics in their insurgency.²³ The Tamil Tigers also added their own innovation, the suicide vest or belt, such as the one used in the May 1991 assassination of the former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.²⁴ Until the American-led 2003 invasion of Iraq, when suicide bombings surfaced there, the secular Tamil Tigers had carried out more suicide attacks than any other group, and perhaps closer to two-thirds of the total number of attacks during this time.²⁵ More than a quarter of the LTTE's suicide bombers, including Gandhi's assassin, were female.²⁶

The Tamil Tigers were relatively strong by insurgent terms. They organized themselves as military units, with specialized forces, including an army, a navy, and the beginnings of an air force, known as the Tigers, Sea Tigers, and Air Tigers, respectively. The Sea Tigers became a "suicide force,"

¹⁹ Crenshaw, 2007, p. 148.

²⁰ See, for example, Pedahzur, 2005, pp. 71-73.

²¹ Global Terrorism Database, 2020.

²² Ibid.

²³ Hoffman, 2006, p. 131, p.141, p.145; Hopgood, Stephen, 'Tamil Tigers, 1987-2002'; in: Diego Gambetta (ed.) *Making Sense of Suicide Missions*. New York: Oxford University Press 2005, p. 51; Pape 2005, p. 73.

²⁴ Hoffman, Bruce (2006). *Inside Terrorism*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, p. 143; Hopgood, Stephen (2005). 'Tamil Tigers, 1987-2002'; in: Diego Gambetta (ed.) *Making Sense of Suicide Missions*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 56-57; Pape, Robert A. (2005). *Dying to Win*. New York: Random House, p. 227.

²⁵ See, for example, Pape 2005, p. 16; Hoffman 2006.; Global Terrorism Database 2020 ; Hopgood 2005, , p. 53; Hoffman notes that there is not an agreed upon count of LTTE suicide attacks during this time, p. 327, footnote 33.

²⁶ Bloom, Mia, *Bombshell: Women and Terrorism*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 2011, p. 137.

also referred to as the “Black Sea Tigers.”²⁷ The Tamil Tigers employed a special operations force devoted to carrying out suicide attacks (Black Tigers). As with the insurgents in Lebanon, most of the Tamil Tigers’ suicide attacks were aimed at military, police, and government entities.

Palestinian militants adopted suicide bombings in the 1990s, taking lessons from Hezbollah’s vehicle-borne bombs and the Tamil Tigers’ suicide bomb vests.²⁸ Secular Palestinian groups had had strongholds in Lebanon prior to being expelled during Lebanon’s civil war. Hezbollah and the Palestinians were at odds during that time. After the civil war, however, they again viewed Israel as their main adversary. Moreover, the first Palestinian suicide attackers were members of a different Palestinian political group. They were not the exiled members of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO); rather, they came from the religious nationalist groups that formed during the PLO’s absence, and many of their members were newly exiled from Israel.²⁹ Members of the Islamic Resistance Movement, better known by its acronym Hamas, were among the deportees.

Unlike in Lebanon and Sri Lanka, civilians were the primary targets of Palestinian suicide attacks in Israel and in the Palestinian territories. These were clearly terrorist attacks. Also unlike in Lebanon and Sri Lanka, Palestinian militants began using suicide attacks at a time of relative peace.

Suicide bombings began during and following the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations in Oslo, Norway. The negotiations, which resulted in the Oslo Accords, included representatives of Israel and the PLO. Hamas, which was among the groups opposed to peace negotiations and excluded from the new, nondemocratic Palestinian Authority (PA) government, was the first group to carry out a suicide bombing in Israel.

In fact, Hamas’ violent opposition made the group a target of counterterrorism operations undertaken by Israel and the post-Oslo Accord PLO-led PA government. The same was true of other opposition groups, such as the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), which were weakened by the peace and weak by comparison with their PA counterparts.

Suicide attacks spread further, beyond Israel and the Levant. The secular Kurdish Workers’ Party (PKK) adopted suicide bombing tactics, followed by Al-Qaeda, Chechen militants, and the Taliban. The tactics appealed to groups from Egypt, India, Indonesia, and the Philippines, among others. Al-Qaeda’s new affiliates used suicide tactics after 2001. Boko Haram and Al Shabaab started to use suicide tactics nearly a decade later.³⁰ The most prolific users of suicide attacks since 2003 operate in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, and Nigeria. There were more suicide bombings in Iraq within a few years after the 2003 invasion and occupation than there had been worldwide since the initiation of suicide bombings in Lebanon.³¹

²⁷ Hoffman 2006, p. 143; Hopgood 2005, p. 43.

²⁸ Hoffman 2006, p. 132, pp. 148-152.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ See, for example, Global Terrorism Database 2020.

³¹ Moghadam, Assaf (2008/2009), ‘Motives for Martyrdom: Al-Qaida, Salafi Jihad, and the Spread of Suicide Attacks.’ *International Security* 33.3: p. 46.

There are many reasons for the spread of suicide terrorism. As those targeted by the early bombings would soon realize, insurgents had found a way to exploit security vulnerabilities. Suicide bombings appeared to work, at least in the sense of achieving some of a group's objectives.³² Several foreign powers abandoned their positions in Lebanon after suicide bombers targeted their embassies and military barracks. American and French forces withdrew from the country in 1984. Israeli forces remained in southern Lebanon but withdrew in 1985 to a Security Zone along Lebanon's southern border.³³

Another reason for the spread of suicide attacks is that rebel forces are innovative. They adopt new tactics and adapt them to their operations. Suicide bombings gave weaker groups new opportunities. They could reach "harder" targets with greater effect. The early weapons, often in the form of suicide truck bombs, could blend into regular traffic. Vehicles can hold large amounts of explosives and their drivers could force their way into places ordinary militants could not reach. Insurgents and terrorists who adopted suicide bombing tactics, including those outside Lebanon, found different ways of transporting explosives and improvising explosions, new carriers for their explosives (including women and children),³⁴ as well as new targets.

Once adopted, suicide bombings may become part of a group's "signature" and *modus operandi*. It is useful to think of suicide attacks as a *modus operandi* for the militant groups that use these tactics. The reasons some terrorist groups continue carrying out suicide tactics differ from the reasons they adopted these tactics in the first place. After a group invests in the infrastructure and expertise needed to carry out suicide attacks, these tactics become part of the way they do "business." Moreover, since most militant groups generally have limited capacities,³⁵ investing in one tactic (such as suicide attacks) often means diverting resources from other types of operations. Suicide tactics become one of the tools among several the militants may use, but they may also replace other tools.

The initial spread of suicide tactics may have reinforced further spread, as such attacks became seen as acceptable among an extremist subset of militant groups. With their spread, suicide attacks became what can be called the "emblematic deed" of the latest "wave" of terrorism.³⁶ For many insurgents, suicide attacks became their "most sophisticated tactic," with suicide attackers acting as guidance systems for powerful explosives in attempts to maximize the impact of their attacks while leaving a shocking "psychological effect" on their targets.³⁷

³² See, for instance, Pape, 2005, pp. 20-24.

³³ Ricolfi, Luca, 'Palestinians, 1981-2003'; in: Diego Gambetta (ed.), *Making Sense of Suicide Missions* New York: Oxford University Press 2005, p. 81.

³⁴ See, for instance, Bloom, Mia, with John Horgan, *Small Arms: Children and Terrorism*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, *passim* 2019.

³⁵ For instance, Horowitz, Michael C., 'Nonstate Actors and the Diffusion of Innovations: The Case of Suicide Terrorism.' *International Organization* 64.1, 2010, *passim*.

³⁶ Weinberg, Leonard, 'Observations on the Future of Terrorism'; in: James O. Ellis III (ed.) *Terrorism: What's Coming, The Mutating Threat*. Oklahoma City, OK: Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism 2007, p. 41. Available at: mip.publishpath.com/terrorism-whats-coming (accessed September 9, 2014); Rapoport, David (2012), 'The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism'; in: John Horgan & Kurt Braddock (Eds.) *Terrorism Studies: A Reader*. New York, NY: Routledge, *passim*.

³⁷ Ganor, pp. 8-11.

While many of the groups using suicide attacks remain active, patterns in the use of these tactics among the earliest adopters provide some insight into the conditions under which suicide attacks may be ceased. In Lebanon, some groups that used suicide attacks became included in government. They were not defeated; they were incorporated into the political system. Terrorism in the form of assassinations continued, yet there were far fewer suicide bombings. Suicide bombings returned to Lebanon in 2006 with different perpetrators, notably Al-Qaeda affiliates and the Islamic State. Ironically, the targets of suicide attacks included Hezbollah, the party credited with initiating and spreading suicide tactics a quarter-century earlier. Suicide attacks ended in Sri Lanka in 2009 with the death of the Tamil Tigers' leader, the defeat of the insurgent group, and, as in Lebanon, the end of the civil war.³⁸

The decrease in suicide attacks in Israel differs in important ways from the experiences in Lebanon and Sri Lanka. As in Lebanon and Sri Lanka, the sharp decrease in suicide attacks coincided with the end of violent conflict. The groups perpetrating the attacks against Israel, Hamas, PIJ, and militants affiliated with Fatah and others, survived the Intifada and have continued their opposition to Israel and each other. A key difference is that they no longer carry out as many suicide bombings as they once did.

There are reasons to believe that the second (Al-Aqsa) Intifada (2000-2005) ended at least in part because the Palestinian groups were no longer able to carry out their deadliest attacks, including suicide bombings. As such, it may not be that suicide attacks ended because the Intifada ended, but rather the reverse. The Intifada ended because the groups could no longer physically reach their desired targets. Effective COIN and ongoing counterterrorism operations by Israel weakened the groups' capacity to carry out suicide attacks, even while their desire to attack remained intact. In this way, Israel's COIN efforts offer a unique case. Israel achieved a significant decrease in the threat of suicide terrorism without defeating the groups responsible for the attacks, and without removing the threat of violent resistance. Israel faces an ongoing threat of terrorism, but no longer a significant threat of suicide terrorism.

Israel offers one case of suicide terrorism prevention that deserves further consideration. Another case worth discussing involves the efforts to prevent a repeat of a 9/11-style attack from the air. The Israeli case shows this application to a context, or place, in which suicide attacks decreased. The post-9/11 case suggests successful prevention of a specific type of attack, though not an attack tied to a place. Both examples involved a combination of COIN and counterterrorism responses, and both reductions are likely the result of the counterterrorism efforts.

Preventing Suicide Attacks on Passenger Planes

Preventing suicide attacks is distinct from preventing terrorism in general. There seems to be consensus among counterterrorism professionals that terrorism, as a tactic, will not disappear.³⁹

³⁸ The Tamil Tigers had eliminated Tamil opposition and consolidated power within their constituency. With their defeat, the organized Tamil opposition in Sri Lanka also dwindled.

³⁹ For example, Cronin, Audrey Kurth (2009). *How Terrorism Ends: Understanding the Decline and Demise of Terrorist Campaigns*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, p. 199; Cronin, Audrey Kurth (2006), 'How al-Qaida Ends: The Decline and Demise of Terrorist Groups.' *International Security* 31.1: p. 7; Weinberg, Leonard, *The End*

Some of the ideologies associated with terrorism change over time, together with the weapons and tactics.⁴⁰ Yet the practice of targeting civilians remains a constant feature of political violence. Terrorists may be defeated, but terrorism as a coercive tactic will continue and new terrorism networks will emerge where others disappear. One of the reasons behind a change in tactics has to do with the introduction of new technologies, relating to both instruments and targets of attack.⁴¹ Another reason that terrorist tactics change rapidly is the fact that targets become more resilient, meaning that certain targets get hardened to prevent at least some types of attacks. Air travel is a useful example of a new technology and a new target, which has been hardened repeatedly in response to new threats.

The expansion of international air travel in the mid-twentieth century created new opportunities for terrorists. Airplanes and their passengers became valuable civilian targets, which terrorists could direct to their desired locations and exchange for specific concessions. For a time, skyjackings were the “spectacular attacks” that gained widespread media attention.⁴² In-flight bombings of airplanes were less common but even more terrifying; as hostages were able survive their ordeals, plane bombings were often more lethal.

The era of skyjackings and plane bombings came to an end, for the most part, with changes in airport security. Metal detectors made it difficult for hijackers to board planes with guns or bombs to commandeer an aircraft and control its passengers. Scans of luggage made it more difficult for terrorists to load arms and explosives onto planes. Assurances that passengers traveled with their luggage may have deterred plane bombings at a time before groups began employing suicide attackers. Additional barriers at airports included allowing only ticketed passengers to approach gates for international flights. Airplane hijackings and bombings decreased in number as airport security increased and airplanes became harder targets. However, these efforts did not stop terrorism and terrorists found new ways to carry out their next attack.

In the 1980s and 1990s, suicide attacks began to replace skyjackings as the new “spectacular” type of attack.⁴³ Suicide bombings allowed militants to perpetrate devastating attacks and gain enormous media attention in the process. Much of the attention related to the ways these attackers could maximize their impact in terms of death, destruction, and disruption as well as to the types of targets they could reach. Questions regarding how to deter attackers who are willing to kill themselves while killing others also gained attention.

The 9/11 attacks represented a further innovation. The attackers took advantage of remaining vulnerabilities in air travel with a combination of skyjacking and suicide bombing. Unlike the hijackers of earlier decades, the 9/11 hijackers were on suicide missions. Unlike the vehicles and vests used by other suicide attackers, the 9/11 hijackers did not need to carry explosives or other traditional weapons. They were educated, privileged, and well-traveled. They could board the

of Terrorism? New York: NY: Routledge 2012, p. 3; Rapoport, David (2012), ‘The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism’; in: John Horgan & Kurt Braddock (Eds.), *Terrorism Studies: A Reader*. New York, NY: Routledge, *passim*.

⁴⁰ Rapoport, David, ‘The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism’; in: John Horgan & Kurt Braddock (Eds.), *Terrorism Studies: A Reader*. New York, NY: Routledge 2012, *passim*; Weinberg, Leonard, *Global Terrorism: A Beginner’s Guide*. Oxford: Oneworld 2005, Chapter 2.

⁴¹ For example, Rapoport, 2012.

⁴² For example, Weinberg 2005, Chapter 2.

⁴³ Weinberg 2005, Chapter 3; Rapoport, 2012, p. 52.

planes without drawing attention. They could commandeer aircraft and kill thousands of people without possessing a gun (just knives and mace or pepper spray). They used airplanes as a weapon of terrorism.

The absence of a repeat of the 9/11 attacks nearly twenty years later suggests a measure of success in counterterrorism efforts. Air travel has become an even “harder” target and tool for terrorists. Airport and airplane security continue to change in response to new and potential threats. New types of scans, enhanced background and identification checks, additional restrictions accessing departure gates, and no-fly lists have further hardened air travel. Changes in airplane security have included reinforced cockpit doors, restrictions on congregating near the cockpit, restrictions of carry-on items, and embedded law enforcement (air marshals), along with training of airplane staff and, in some cases, vigilant passengers. Furthermore, the possibility that fighter jets would intervene in future attacks diminishes what attackers might hope to achieve even if they could take control of a plane.

This is not to suggest that there have not been any further attempted and successful suicide attacks involving aircraft since 9/11. There have been a few, but with little success. Attempted suicide attacks on commercial airplanes, including the “shoe bomber” and the “underwear bomber,” have been followed by further hardening of airplane and airport security.

At the same time, the hardening of airplanes and access to passenger planes is only part of the story. Attacks like the ones on 9/11 require more resources and know-how than most terrorist groups can muster. It was already difficult for the planners of the 9/11 attacks to find 19 people who were willing and capable to carry out the attacks.⁴⁴ That said, it would be even more difficult to find attackers capable of, and willing to, carry out similar attacks given recent changes making air travel more secure.

Instead of targeting airplanes, however, terrorists have found targets in other modes of transportation. On 7 July 2005, suicide attackers targeted London’s transportation system. Four more attacks two weeks later, also in London, failed due to deficient bomb-making skills. One of the best defenses from attacks such as these, beyond effective counterterrorism, may be widespread disdain for these types of attacks and the groups responsible for them in the constituency terrorists claim to fight for.

Preventing Suicide Bombings in Israel

Israel’s operations during and after the second Palestinian Intifada offer another example of COIN and counterterrorism efforts, which resulted in a sharp reduction in suicide bombings. Palestinian militants began using suicide bombings in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories in 1993, toward the end of the first Palestinian Intifada (which began in 1987). Their first targets were Israeli civilians traveling on busses. Subsequent targets included restaurants, clubs, markets, and other places where civilians gathered. Suicide bombings continued throughout the 1990s. By one estimate, more Israelis died from acts of terrorism between 1993 and 1998 than during the previous

⁴⁴ Kurzman, Charles, ‘Why is it so hard to find a suicide bomber these days?’ *Foreign Policy* 2011, p. 188.

fifteen years.⁴⁵ The early years stand in contrast, however, to the intensification in suicide bombings that began in 2001 and peaked in 2002. After that, suicide bombings began to decrease in numbers in 2003 and 2004 until they had become rare occurrences by 2005. What led to this decrease? Moreover, if the decrease was a response to effective counterterrorism and COIN, which operations contributed to this outcome?

In the case of Israel, the answer appears to be that efforts aimed at weakening militants and hindering their ability to carry out suicide attacks were effective in raising the costs and restricting opportunities to carry out these attacks, leading to an overall reduction in the number of such attacks. While Israel's approach to countering suicide terrorism may not be separated from the state's approach to countering terrorism, more generally, it is the significant decrease in the number of suicide attacks that stands out.

The story of the prevention of suicide attacks in Israel requires an overview of the initiation of suicide attacks against Israeli targets and an explanation of the sources of Israel's increasing vulnerabilities in the years leading to the Second Intifada. It is useful to divide Israel's experience with suicide terrorism into three periods. The first period began in the early 1980s during Israel's intervention in Lebanon. The targets of these bombings were military, and the attacks took place in the context of war and occupation. The second period began in 1993, with suicide bombings aimed at civilians in Israel. These bombings preceded the completion of the peace negotiations in Oslo. This period is important because it was during this time that Israeli counterterrorism efforts were severely reduced. In effect, the peace process helped to establish the conditions under which suicide attacks would increase. The third period corresponds to the Second Palestinian Intifada, which began in 2000. Between 2000 and 2004, Israel rebuilt its capacity to counter Palestinian militancy. It was also during this time that suicide bombings peaked and later subsided. Israel's counterterrorism measures were successful in the short run, leading to a decrease in Palestinian militancy. More importantly, these efforts were successful in the long run in terms of reducing suicide bombings. Israel's counterterrorism approach stands out for this success.

First Period: Lebanon in the 1980s

Israel became a target of suicide bombings in Lebanon in the early 1980s. The context was Lebanon's civil war. Israel's initial invasion of Lebanon concentrated on southern parts of the country. The PLO, an umbrella organization dominated by Yasser Arafat's Fatah, sought to establish an autonomous "Fatahland" in this part of Lebanon, and Palestinian militants used this territory as a base for launching attacks on Israel.⁴⁶ Palestinian militancy threatened Lebanon's

⁴⁵ 'Terrorism and the Peace Process', 14 September 1998, Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Available at: mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/peace/guide/pages/terrorism%w0and%20the%20peace%20process.aspx.

⁴⁶ Rabinovich, Itamar, *The War for Lebanon: 1970-1985* (revised edition). Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 1985, pp. 101-104; Byman, Daniel L. and Kenneth M. Pollack, *Things Fall Apart: Containing Spillover from an Iraqi Civil War*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2007, pp. 136-141; Perliger, Arie, et al., 'Policing Terrorism in Israel'. *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 36.12 2009, pp. 1289-1290. Perliger et al. discuss Israel's policing response, including establishing networks of human intelligence in southern Lebanon (pp. 1285-1286).

sovereignty, including control over its southern territories, while Palestinian terrorism invited violent reprisals from Israel.⁴⁷

Israel's invasion of Lebanon led to greater involvement in the civil war. Israel allied with Lebanon's Christian militias, including the Phalangists. The Christian militias were Israel's "natural allies" in Lebanon.⁴⁸ The Christians were historically the largest of Lebanon's communities. They were also the least opposed to Israel and they had common adversaries. A Palestinian attack on the Phalangist leader had been a spark for the civil war.⁴⁹ Yet, the Christian militias were also weak and divided.⁵⁰

The PLO were pushed out of Lebanon in 1982, midway through the civil war, but Israel's adversaries in Lebanon had expanded in numbers to include Shia militants. Hezbollah, which appeared in 1982, was one of Israel's adversaries. It is also the group that later became known for weaponizing suicide tactics.⁵¹ Hezbollah began using suicide bombings against Israel's military while the Palestinian militants, most of whom were Sunni, were not yet turning to suicide tactics. These first suicide bombings were not aimed at civilians. Suicide bombers struck Israeli forces and pro-Israeli militias between 1982 and 1986.⁵² In mid-1985, Israel withdrew from much of Lebanon, though it maintained a presence in a smaller strip of Lebanese territory along the states' shared border. Suicide bombings against Israeli targets ceased for several years after Israel's withdrawal to this Security Zone.⁵³ This happened even before the end of Lebanon's civil war and before Hezbollah's transition to a coalition partner in government, and a decade before Israel withdrew completely from Lebanon's southernmost territory.

Second Period: Palestinian Self-Government, 1993-2000

As the war in Lebanon came to an end, Israel faced new challenges combatting terrorism at home. This soon included suicide terrorism. The First Palestinian Intifada had begun in 1987 as a popular protest movement, led by local Palestinians independent of the exiled PLO leadership. Suicide bombings were not part of this Intifada, nor were they tactics previously used in this context.

In 1993, Israel negotiated a transitional arrangement with Yasser Arafat's PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people. This was an important move for the PLO, as the group was in exile, away from its people and at risk of becoming increasingly irrelevant among younger Palestinians. Meanwhile, the group's political competitors, including Hamas, had gained popular support in the PLO's absence.

⁴⁷ Eisenberg, Laurie, 'History Revisited or Revamped? The Maronite Factor in Israel's 1982 Invasion of Lebanon', *Israel Affairs*, 15:4 2009.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 373.

⁴⁹ See, for instance, Byman and Pollack, 2007, p. 25.

⁵⁰ Eisenberg 2009, p. 379, p. 388, p. 391.

⁵¹ See, for example, Pedahzur, 2005, p. 52.

⁵² See, for example, Pape, 2005, pp. 130-133, pp. 253-254 (Appendix 1).

⁵³ See, for example, Ricolfi, 2005, p. 88.

The talks culminated in the signing of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements. This agreement set forth goals and guidelines for a peaceful transfer of power over governance and a measure of autonomy for Palestinians. The agreement would allow the PLO to return from exile, assume control of a transitional Palestinian government (the Palestinian Authority, PA), prepare for eventual democratic elections, and “strive to live in peaceful coexistence.”⁵⁴ There were also several immediate problems.

The prospects were not good for the new Palestinian Authority. The PA did not have a state to govern. The Declaration did not establish a Palestinian state, or even an entity that could become a state. The Palestinian-controlled areas of the West Bank were a noncontiguous collection of cities and towns connected by roads and surrounded by Israeli occupied territory. Israel reserved land and controlled settlements within the territories. The Gaza Strip was already separated from the West Bank by a span of Israeli territory, as it had been for more than four decades, and it was a stronghold for the PLO’s opposition. In terms of establishing self-governance, the Palestinians began with a disadvantage.

On top of this, the PLO was weak. The PLO had gained legitimacy as negotiating partner, signatory to the Declaration, and organizer of the transition to a form of autonomy within the Palestinian territories. At the same time, the initial Palestinian leadership was not chosen by the people, nor was the agreement it reached with Israel universally accepted. The group was disconnected from the Palestinian people and its top leaders had not resided in the Palestinian territories for some time. The organization also suffered from perceptions of corruption and enrichment at the expense of the Palestinian people.⁵⁵

Another disadvantage for the Palestinians was their lack of experience with governance. The PLO had prior experience with some types of administration, such as supporting schools and social projects, but with other aspects of state building it was less familiar. In addition, the PLO had no practical experience, and possibly little real interest, in the democracy for which the Declaration called.⁵⁶

Following the Declaration, the new PLO-led PA set about creating a police force, which would be responsible for maintaining law and order within the areas under Palestinian control. The PLO employed former militants as police and security forces. Militants were trained and armed, and

⁵⁴ United Nations, ‘Declaration on Principles for Interim Self-Government Arrangements’, A/48/486 S26560. New York, NY: United Nations, 11 October 1993, *passim*. Available at: https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/IL%20PS_930913_DeclarationPrinciplesninterimSelf-Government%28Oslo%20Accords%29.pdf (last accessed July 2020).

⁵⁵ See, for example, Ricolfi, 2005, , p. 89; Bloom, Mia, ‘Palestinian Suicide Bombing: Public Support, Market Share, and Outbidding’. *Political Science Quarterly* 119.1 2004, p. 68.

⁵⁶ United Nations, ‘Declaration on Principles for Interim Self-Government Arrangements’, A/48/486 S26560. New York, NY: United Nations, October 11, 1993, *passim*. Available at: https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/IL%20PS_930913_DeclarationPrinciplesninterimSelf-Government%28Oslo%20Accords%29.pdf (last accessed July 2020); Riley, Kevin Jack, et al., ‘Internal Security’; in: *Building a Successful Palestinian State*, the RAND Palestinian State Study Team. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation 2005, pp. 19-20. Available at: <https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG146-1.html> (last accessed July 2020).

their numbers swelled beyond the initial prescription.⁵⁷ Palestinians were charged with policing other Palestinians. This meant that Palestinians, including former militants-turned-police, would investigate Palestinian “terrorists” alongside Israeli counterterrorism forces.⁵⁸

Meanwhile, the PA created a security apparatus far larger and with a more expansive protocol than originally intended.⁵⁹ This included offensive capabilities. Not only did former terrorists become police officers and security officials, but they also became counterterrorism agents. The PA also created non-police forces, including military intelligence, military police, and paramilitary forces.⁶⁰ The forces were armed, trained, and tasked with policing themselves and their political opponents. They were given access to information regarding security threats, some of which originated with groups and individuals opposed to the PLO. At the same time, the PLO lacked incentives to police itself and to identify its own collections of weapons. The group prepared itself for a potential renegotiation of the interim agreement. One fear was that the new Palestinian forces, as a collection of armed groups, would be capable of projecting force against Israel,⁶¹ a concern that was shown to be legitimate during the Second Intifada.⁶² This was the backdrop for the initiation and eventual escalation of suicide bombings against Israeli civilians.

Adding to this, the new state of affairs in the Palestinian territories did not eliminate opposition to the PLO or to the agreement the PLO had made with Israel. Among the opponents were parties that had been excluded from the negotiations as they had disagreed with the very nature of the transitional peace. The PLO’s more religiously oriented and less compromising local competitors, Hamas and PIJ, were among them. Both groups opposed recognizing Israel through negotiations and opposed anything short of full Palestinian statehood. They were not supportive of the new Palestinian leadership or the compromise, which gave the PLO power. As opposition parties, they threatened the PLO’s dominance. Because they continued to use terrorism, they positioned themselves as “spoilers”⁶³ and as targets of the Palestinian police and the Palestinian and Israeli counterterrorism forces.

The agreement was not ideal for Israel either. Israel gained a weak, though empowered neighbor and counterterrorism partner. The Declaration called for Israel to vacate the Gaza Strip and Palestinian cities within the West Bank. Israel withdrew its military and relinquished power over policing in much of the West Bank. While Israel could retain control over some sources of intelligence, including visual and signal intelligence, the military withdrawal meant a loss of valuable human intelligence.

⁵⁷ Levin, Jamie, ‘Exploring Palestinian Weapon Proliferation during the Oslo Peace Process’. *The Middle East Journal* 72.1 2018, pp. 51-53.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 51-53.

⁶⁰ Levin, 2018, pp. 51-53; Riley, 2005, pp. 38-39, 40-44.

⁶¹ Levin, 2018, pp. 57-58.

⁶² Riley, 2005, pp. 34-36, 40-44; Levin 2018, p. 61; Moghadam, Assaf, ‘Palestinian Suicide Terrorism in the Second Intifada: Motivations and Organizational Aspects’. *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 26.2 2003, pp. 82-83.

⁶³ Kydd, Andrew, and Barbara Walter, ‘Sabotaging the Peace: The Politics of Extremist Violence’, *International Organization* 56.2 2002, *passim*; Kydd, Andrew, and Barbara Walter, ‘The Strategies of Terrorism’, *International Security* 31.1 2006, pp. 472-476.

These losses were disastrous for Israel's counterterrorism efforts. Although Israel retained authority over counterterrorism and border security, Israel no longer had access to the human intelligence the state had hitherto relied upon. Israel lost access to local informants, those who had provided information on potential threats. Information gathered through signal interceptions, such as through radio transmissions and over the internet, were less useful without the context provided by informants on the ground. Israel also lost access to the Palestinian communities from which terrorist threats emerged. These were communities that it could previously police. The result was a sharp reduction in information on Palestinian militants, operations, and, hence, potential threats. When Israel withdrew its military from the Gaza Strip in 1994, it lost access to the territory dominated by Hamas and PIJ, which could operate at distance even from the PLO and the new PA in the West Bank.

While the PLO was occupied with establishing the basis for a future government and building police and other forces, its competitors continued "sabotaging the peace."⁶⁴ The attacks leading up to the second Intifada demonstrated that the PLO could not negotiate peace for all Palestinians and could not guarantee the peace to which it had agreed.

Suicide bombings were a new tactic in the hands of Palestinians. While Israel's military had experience with suicide bombings in Lebanon, these had not been introduced within Israel, nor had these been used against Israeli civilians. The earliest suicide attacks were bombings and attempted bombings of commuter busses. The perpetrators were not from the PLO or Fatah, which took the lead in peace talks and governance; rather, the perpetrators were their political opponents, groups that were excluded from peace talks. Hamas took credit for the first of these attacks. PIJ soon joined in carrying out suicide bombings.

Hamas' first suicide bombing was in April 1993 in the West Bank. The targets were a civilian bus and a military bus. There was another suicide car bombing six months later in October 1993, this one aimed at a bus near a military site in Beit El, also in the West Bank. The timing of the first suicide bombing coincided with progress in the Oslo peace negotiations. The second successful attack followed shortly after the signing of the Declaration.

More suicide bombings followed between 1994 and 2000. The number of these attacks increased in 1994, though the number remained in the single digits each year through 2000.⁶⁵ Civilians were the frequent targets of suicide attacks, and attacks on busses and gathering places were more frequent and associated with more casualties than attacks on military or police.⁶⁶ Hamas and PIJ were the main perpetrators during this period.

Third Period: Second Palestinian Intifada 2000-2004

A dramatic increase in the number of terrorist attacks, including suicide attacks, followed the onset of the second Palestinian Intifada in December 2000. Suicide bombings peaked in 2002, with most

⁶⁴ Kydd and Walter, 2006, pp. 472-476; Pedahzur, 2005, pp. 59-67; Bloom, 2004, p. 66.

⁶⁵ Global Terrorism Database 2020; Pape, 2005, pp. 253-257, 260-262 (Appendix 1).

⁶⁶ Global Terrorism Database 2020; Perliger et al. 2009 pp. 1291-1295.

of these bombings taking place in Israeli towns and cities, and most of those targeted being noncombatants.⁶⁷ March 2002 was the deadliest month in terms of suicide bombings.⁶⁸

The Second Intifada differed from the first and from the interim “peace” in that terrorism, including high-casualty suicide attacks, became a more frequent occurrence. At the height of the new Intifada, suicide bombings were a big part of this threat. In previous rounds of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Palestinian deaths significantly outnumbered Israeli deaths. With suicide bombings, Palestinian groups raised the death toll for Israelis. Although suicide bombers carried out fewer than one percent of all anti-Israeli attacks, they were responsible for more than half of Israel’s casualties.⁶⁹ Palestinian groups used suicide tactics with a considerable degree of popular support, and it was not long before Fatah and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) joined in carrying out suicide bombings.⁷⁰

What stands out about this episode is the marked decrease of suicide attacks beginning in 2003. However, this not to say that terrorism in Israel has ended in the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The reduction in suicide bombings did not require the defeat of the groups that carried out so many of the attacks. The decrease likely resulted from a combination of efforts. The most effective were likely those that made it more difficult to carry out the types of attacks that had become commonplace during the Second Intifada, specifically the suicide bombings that had hitherto been able to reach peaceful cities in Israel.

Preventing Suicide Attacks

Israel’s COIN and counterterrorism operations during and after the second Intifada preceded the abrupt end of most suicide attacks. Two efforts stand out. One was Israel’s reoccupation of parts of the Palestinian territories.⁷¹ Another was the creation of barriers affecting militants’ movements within and between the territories and limiting access to Israel. Reoccupation allowed Israel to regain access to human intelligence.⁷² Creating barriers and walls allowed Israel to interfere with militants’ operations. These were not the only tactics used by Israel. However, there are reasons to believe that these were the most effective.⁷³

As part of its COIN, Israel’s military reentered areas that had been under Palestinian control. These included city centers within the areas known as “Category A” territories, which the Israel Defense

⁶⁷ Global Terrorism Database 2020.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ganor, p. 5.

⁷⁰ See, for example, Bloom, 2004, p. 73.

⁷¹ See, for example, Byman, Daniel, ‘Curious Victory: Explaining Israel’s Suppression of the Second Intifada.’ *Terrorism and Political Violence* 24.5, 2012, p. 826. In contrast to arguments that occupation is a cause of suicide terrorism, Byman describes Israel’s effort to prevent suicide bombings as effective because the state was “increasing the extent of its occupation.”

⁷² See, for instance, Perliger, Arie, and Ami Pedahzur, ‘Coping with Suicide Attacks: Lessons from Israel’. *Public Money and Management* 26.5 2006, pp. 282-283.

⁷³ See, for example, Jones, Seth G., ‘Fighting Networked Terrorist Groups: Lessons from Israel.’ *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 30.4, 2007, p. 293; Levin, 2018, p. 61.

Forces (IDF) had vacated years earlier as part of the Oslo Agreement.⁷⁴ One of Israel's objectives was to clear the densely populated refugee camps, neighborhoods, and city centers of Palestinian militants. The military's progress through the Palestinian cities was organized and methodical. Israel's ground forces surrounded the Palestinian communities and advanced house-by-house. They pressured militants toward a predetermined location from which they would be rounded up.⁷⁵ Moving through the cities, Israel confiscated weapons and destroyed the facilities used to produce arms, including bomb-making factories.⁷⁶

The progress continued day and night, with reinforcements for ground troops and, when feasible, support from large artillery on the ground and assistance from the air.⁷⁷ Israel had at this time, and still has, one of the strongest militaries in the world. The Palestinian militants, by contrast, lacked coherence in training and leadership. They belonged to competing groups and gangs. Some were affiliated with the PA and PLO. Others were part of the opposition to the PLO. Some were criminal rather than political.⁷⁸ In terms of resistance, the primary *modus operandi* for many of these groups was terrorism, a tactic carried out in secrecy, often with one or a few perpetrators directed by a local cell. As a result of the military incursion, the militants were forced to switch from their usual offensive posture to a defensive one. The Palestinian militants were poorly equipped for the fight that ensued. They lacked reinforcements, their supply lines were cut, and their weapons stocks were soon out of reach. The militants were essentially trapped with "nowhere to run."⁷⁹ Many were killed in the fighting. Once corralled, the Palestinians who were no longer fighting were subject to surrender and arrest. Through this effort,⁸⁰ the militant groups were weakened, though only in the short-term.⁸¹

Even more importantly, in the interest of counterterrorism, reentry into these areas and reoccupation allowed Israel to reestablish direct access to human intelligence, which had been lost with the earlier withdrawal. Human intelligence gives context to information gathered through other types of monitoring, such as that collected through signal and visual intelligence, and tends to be superior in cases in which militant activities are plotted privately.

Israel's other operation involved the construction of walls and barriers, including security fences, roadblocks, and checkpoints.⁸² Under Palestinian rule, would-be attackers, their handlers, and other militants could move with relative ease within and between the Palestinian-controlled areas. Militants could communicate in person and set-up operations outside the reach of Israel's visual and signal intelligence.

⁷⁴ Catignani, Sergio, 'The Security Imperative in Counterterror Operations: The Israeli Fight against Suicidal Terror.' *Terrorism and Political Violence* 17.1-2 2005, pp. 256-258.

⁷⁵ Jones, 2007, pp. 256-258.

⁷⁶ Catignani, 2005, pp. 256-258; Jones, Seth G. (2007). 'Fighting Networked Terrorist Groups: Lessons from Israel.' *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 30.4: pp. 285, 291-295, 297.

⁷⁷ See, for example, Jones 2007, pp. 290-291.

⁷⁸ See, for example, Jones, 2007.

⁷⁹ Catignani, 2005, p. 256.

⁸⁰ Frisch, Hillel (2006), 'Motivation or Capabilities? Israeli Counterterrorism against Palestinian Suicide Bombings and Violence'. *Journal of Strategic Studies* 29.5: pp. 844-845.

⁸¹ Jones, 2007, p. 294.

⁸² See, for example, Byman, 2012.

Reoccupation also facilitated the creation of barriers. After reoccupying the West Bank, Israel began building physical impediments to this coordination. Israel set out to separate militants from each other and from their potential targets. The barriers have done more than this. In addition to the disruptions they impose on terrorist activities, they also allow additional time for efforts to counter potential threats.⁸³ The barriers also separate Palestinians from each other and from Israel. The security fence made it more difficult for Palestinian people to enter Israel. Israel established roadblocks and checkpoints along roadways connecting Palestinian communities within the West Bank. The Israeli roadblocks were used to close off traffic and act as checkpoints. Checkpoints facilitated signal interceptions and added the additional constraint of direct surveillance.⁸⁴ For would-be suicide attackers, this meant a higher probability of detection prior to carrying out an attack.⁸⁵ For known militants, there was the added risk of being identified and detained. This combination was especially useful in cases in which attacks were known to be imminent.⁸⁶

In these ways, Israel limited access to the types of high-value targets Palestinian terrorists had previously sought. Would-be attackers could no longer expect to reach their preferred targets, the crowded civilian-filled destinations in Israel's largest cities, unencumbered. Roadblocks and checkpoints interrupted the daily business associated with militant activities. They limited terrorists' access to each other. Moving people and weapons became more difficult. Terrorists were no longer able to coordinate in person without fear of detection, or at least added surveillance. Other means of coordination, such as via phone or internet, remained subject to interception. With people on the ground within the Palestinian territories, signal and visual surveillance was again supplemented by human intelligence.⁸⁷ Israel regained the capacity to identify most threats before these materialized.

Near the Gaza Strip, Israel removed settlements and established a security barrier. Egypt supported the creation of a barrier on its Gaza border. The result was little movement between the communities and an abrupt end to suicide bombings originating from Gaza. As Gaza was also Hamas' and PIJ's main base of operations, this also eliminated much of the threat of suicide attacks posed by these groups.⁸⁸

There was an added deterrence associated with the hardening of civilian targets. Israeli businesses, such as malls, clubs, and markets, maintained trained security professionals, ready to intervene in cases of terrorist threats.⁸⁹ This deterrence only slightly hardened these targets, stopping attackers at entrances rather than stopping attackers altogether. What made these targets in Israel's cities more difficult to attack was that they were much harder to reach.

⁸³ Ibid., pp. 832-833.

⁸⁴ Byman, 2012, p. 833; Perliger et al. ,2009, pp. 1291-1294.

⁸⁵ See, for example, Perliger et al. 2009, p. 1292; Freilich, Charles David (2017). 'Israel's Counterterrorism Policy: How Effective?' *Terrorism and Political Violence* 29.2: pp. 363-364; Byman 2012, pp. 832-833; Weisburd, David, Tal Jonathan, and Simon Perry (2009), 'The Israeli Model for Policing Terrorism: Goals, Strategies, and Open Questions'. *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 36.12: p. 1267.

⁸⁶ Byman, 2012, p. 833; Perliger and Pedahzur 2006, pp. 282-283.

⁸⁷ See, for example, Perliger et al. 2009; Jones 2007, pp. 250-251.

⁸⁸ See, for example, Jones 2007, pp. 291-294.

⁸⁹ See, for example, Perliger et al. 2009, pp. 1293-1294.

Israel's reoccupation of the Palestinian territories and construction of barriers did not end terrorism, nor did these efforts result in an immediate end to suicide attacks. They did, however, make suicide bombings much more difficult to carry out. As a result, suicide bombing became less common and less debilitating.

Alternative Explanations

There are other possible explanations for the decrease in suicide bombings in Israel. For one, it is true that the decrease in suicide bombings corresponded with the end of the Intifada; however, the decrease has outlived the end of the Intifada. Violent resistance continues, but suicide attacks are an infrequent part of this violence. Second, the groups that first used suicide attacks did so during a time of relative peace and as a sign of opposition to Israel and the governing PLO. Given this, an end to the Intifada and a return to PLO-led governance would likely coincide with more attacks. Third, if suicide bombings were the best weapons available to the weaker militants, then it would make sense to see more suicide bombings as the Palestinians were losing the fight rather than fewer. Adding to this, Palestinians were ending the Second Intifada in a weakened position, with less autonomy, less territory and, probably, less optimism than they had at the end of the First Intifada. A better explanation for the reduction in suicide bombings takes account of enhanced intelligence gathering, the lack of access to desirable targets, and the higher likelihood of mission failure following the reoccupation and construction of barriers.

Another possible explanation for decreasing numbers of suicide bombings draws on changes in public opinion regarding support for suicide attacks and political necessity. Suicide attacks were potentially costly in political terms for the groups carrying out the attacks, domestically as well as with international audiences.⁹⁰ A decrease in suicide bombings could be explained by declining support for these tactics within the communities from which militants drew support.⁹¹ A return to political legitimacy after the Intifada could also help explain a shift away from suicide tactics.

The problem with this reasoning, however, is that changes in popular support cannot independently account for a decrease in suicide bombings. The groups that were most likely to be motivated by political considerations, including the affiliates of Fatah and the PFLP, joined in the suicide bombing campaign at a time when the overall numbers of attacks were beginning to decrease. If these groups were engaging in outbidding, essentially using increasing levels of violence to gain popular support, their participation should correspond with higher numbers of suicide bombings overall rather than fewer.⁹² In addition, repression, rather than preventing terrorism, may contribute to more terrorism as well as more support for terrorism.⁹³ In fact, it was becoming more difficult to carry out suicide bombings, especially for the groups based primarily in the Gaza Strip.

⁹⁰ Pape 2005, pp. 9-11.

⁹¹ See, for instance, Kydd and Walter Kydd, Andrew, and Barbara Walter. (2006). 'The Strategies of Terrorism', *International Security* 31.1: pp. 72-76. For an alternative understanding, which takes account of variations in popular support for militant groups and the status of the peace process, see Bloom, Mia (2004). 'Palestinian Suicide Bombing: Public Support, Market Share, and Outbidding'. *Political Science Quarterly* 119.1: *passim*.

⁹² See, for instance, Bloom 2004, pp. 72-76.

⁹³ See, for instance, Guelke, Adrian, *The New Age of Terrorism and the International Political System*. New York, NY: I.B. Tauris 2009, p. 180; Araj, Bader, 'Harsh State Repression as a Cause of Suicide Bombing: The Case of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict.' *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 31.4, 2008.

Another issue with this reasoning is that changes in popular support may not have a sizable influence on militants' operations. Militants rely on popular support to some extent, or at least popular complacency, yet they also rely on support from other influential power holders. These may include clans in the Palestinian context.⁹⁴ In other contexts, they may include tribes or other types of political entities. Also, to an important extent, terrorists have a tendency not to respect the opinions of the people whose interests they purport to represent. Again, representation is not understood in the democratic sense. These militants are authoritarian actors, guided by their own interests and ideas and often willing to use violence against their own people. Not only do the people residing under their control have few options in terms of representation, but they also have few outlets for opposition.

Another possible explanation for the reduction in suicide attacks around 2005 is that changes in popular support toward the end of the Intifada may have resulted in fewer volunteers for suicide missions, or at least fewer capable volunteers.⁹⁵ Volunteerism is one way to “voice” support or opposition to militants' activities. More likely, however, it would be an increasing likelihood of mission failure that would deter or reduce the supply of capable volunteers for these missions. If an individual-level logic for suicide attackers holds – if it is true that self-sacrifice will be celebrated, and that people participate in suicide attacks because they wish to be celebrated as martyrs – then the potential benefits of these attacks would diminish with the decreasing likelihood of a successful attack. The reduction in suicide bombings is more likely associated with the deterrent effect of reduced access to targets.

Another pattern is worth noting. The reduction in terrorism, in general, during the second Intifada appears to have coincided roughly with the reduction in suicide bombings. Suicide bombings made up a larger proportion of terrorist attacks between 2002 and 2004, and both suicide and non-suicide attacks declined in 2003 and 2004.⁹⁶ However, while terrorism increased again in 2005, after the end of the second Intifada, suicide bombings did not. Terrorists found new ways to attack Israel, such as with rockets fired from the Gaza Strip (coincidentally, an innovation that also belongs to Hezbollah). Rockets cross barriers that people cannot pass. After 2008, suicide bombers have not originated from Gaza and have been infrequent from and within the West Bank.⁹⁷

Yet another possible explanation for the decrease in suicide bombings draws on another of Israel's counterterrorism efforts during Operation Defensive Shield (ODS). Israel's initial reoccupation, including the arrests, confiscation of weapons, and destruction of terrorist infrastructure, posed an immediate blow to Palestinian militancy. Adding to this, Israel's long-held policy of targeted assassinations of terrorist leaders has weakened the most extreme groups. The problem with some of these explanations is that they do not independently explain the reduction in suicide bombings.

⁹⁴ See, for example, Ze'evi, Dror (2008). 'Clans and Militias in Palestinian Politics.' *Middle East Brief* 26: pp. 1-7; Available at: <https://www.brandeis.edu/crown/publications/middle-east-briefs/pdfs/1-100/meb26.pdf>; Byman, Daniel (2012). 'Curious Victory: Explaining Israel's Suppression of the Second Intifada.' *Terrorism and Political Violence* 24.5: p. 831.

⁹⁵ See, for example, Bueno de Mesquita, Ethan (2005). 'The Quality of Terror', *American Journal of Political Science* 49.3. Bueno de Mesquita argues that terrorist groups seek to employ the best, or most capable, among those who volunteer. He further asserts that increasing rewards may coincide with more capable volunteers within the pool of potential recruits, as observed during the second Intifada (pp. 524-525).

⁹⁶ Global Terrorism Database 2020; Perliger et al. 2009, p. 1286.

⁹⁷ Global Terrorism Database 2020.

The confiscation and destruction of weapons had a short-term impact. New weapons technologies have appeared, yet the decline in suicide bombings has been a durable trend. In addition, Israel did not defeat or destroy the groups responsible for the spate of suicide attacks. The groups survived the campaigns of arrests and assassinations. Terrorist leaders were replaceable, and their foot soldiers, the suicide bombers who were less central to the organizations employing them – many of them women – were even more so. There is also evidence suggesting that terrorist attacks increased in the immediate aftermath of assassinations of terrorist leaders during the second Intifada.⁹⁸ In contrast, arrests of militants during the same time, which were facilitated by the newly erected barriers and checkpoints, may have contributed to fewer suicide bombings.⁹⁹ Human intelligence in combination with barriers, including the roadblocks and checkpoints, are among the reasons why suicide attackers were captured and their missions curtailed.

Taken together, alternative explanations, such as the end of the second Intifada, changes in popular support, and losses of leaders and weapons, cannot independently account for the reduction in suicide bombings that began in 2003. It is more likely that with Israel's reoccupation of the West Bank and construction of barriers, suicide bombings no longer offered militants the potential payoffs they once enjoyed. The most valuable targets became increasingly difficult to reach. Fewer volunteers would be capable of carrying out the increasingly difficult task of passing through checkpoints to complete a suicide attack. Terrorism did not end with these efforts, nor did suicide attacks cease entirely. The same militant groups continue to operate, and the violence continues, yet suicide attacks are no longer a significant part of the story. Renewed access to human intelligence and barriers to movement and coordination more closely correspond to the changes in the numbers of suicide bombings in the West Bank.

Conclusion

There are issues with applying lessons from these cases to other contexts or types of attacks. The case of Israel is unique in important ways, as is the case of preventing suicide hijacking missions. Both are narrowly-focused – one is focused on a unique context, the other on a specific tactic – and neither prevention resulted in an end of terrorism, or even a reduction in terrorism. Neither effort resolved the reasons the groups responsible for suicide attacks resorted to violence in the first place, nor did they prevent these same groups from continuing to use violence. Both efforts have been associated with high costs.

While the case of Israel provides an example of how one country effectively prevented most suicide bombings within its borders, the case is not without problems. Israel's approach, effective though it was at halting suicide bombings, required reasserting authority over Palestinian communities. Security fences, roadblocks, and checkpoints are among the inconveniences that impact Palestinians regardless of their participation in, or support for, militancy.

⁹⁸ Kaplan, Edward H., Alex Mintz, and Shaul Mishal, 'Tactical Prevention of Suicide Bombings in Israel'. *Interfaces* 36. 6, 2006.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*; Kaplan, Edward H., et al., 'What Happened to Suicide Bombings in Israel? Insights from a Terror Stock Model.' *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 28.3, 2005, p. 230.

One could argue that widespread support among Palestinians for militant groups equates with complicity; however, some of those militants were affiliated with the leadership of the PA government, which also enjoyed support and legitimacy outside the Palestinian territories as a negotiating partner and leader of the post-Oslo government.

Assigning guilt to Palestinians as a group is also an oversimplification on par with blaming any people for the acts of their government. Such culpability, of course, assumes that the people have influence over their government. Palestinians, as a group, have limited influence. They do not reside in a democracy. The people did not elect their initial PLO-led government. They have had few opportunities to influence governance and few options in terms of representation, even in the post-Oslo era. As the Palestinian national elections of 2006 showed, the only viable alternative to Fatah's control of the Palestinian Authority was Hamas, and Hamas' electoral successes in that election, in which it won a majority in the PA parliament, cost Palestinians much of the foreign support on which they have relied. One can argue that Palestinians are simultaneously victims of the ongoing conflict with Israel, as well as of their own militant groups and the governments purporting to represent their interests.

There is another significant limitation of the discussion of Israel's operations. There are unlikely to be many opportunities to apply lessons learned in Israel to other cases. Few contexts resemble Israel and the Palestinian territories. Collecting intelligence, constructing barriers, and policing an entire population require considerable capacity, which Israel has. The Palestinians are both concentrated within territories, and divided between them. Their political leadership is also divided and relatively weak. Israel has a limited geographic space to oversee. Despite this, while Israel's COIN and counterterrorism operations provide some level of security for Israel, this security is gained at Palestinians' expense, and the relative security comes with the added costs of continued violence.

Preventing suicide attackers from using commercial airplanes has also come at a cost, though these costs and their benefits are borne, and enjoyed, largely by air travelers. Among the costs are those associated with redesigning airports, implementing security screening protocols along with new technologies, and employing the variety of screeners and other security personnel required to make these efforts effective. Closing the security gaps exploited by the 9/11 attackers required rethinking the nature of threats and building on existing security measures. It is possible to apply lessons from preventing attacks on air travel to the prevention of attacks on other types of targets. Some of the measures used for air travel have been employed with mass transit, such as with train travel, creating further barriers to attacks on these targets.

Despite successes, there are other issues associated with preventing suicide attacks by terrorists, which neither the case of Israel nor the case of increasing security at airports addresses. One such issue is ongoing support for suicide attacks and the groups using them. Efforts to prevent suicide attacks have not removed support for the types of violent resistance associated with these attacks, or with terrorism, in general. Israel halted suicide bombings, for the most part, but did not remove threats of terrorism. The hardening of air travel stifled attacks and attempted attacks on airplanes and airports, but the group associated with the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks has not been defeated. While its central command has been significantly weakened, the group's presumed 'network' has expanded since 9/11, and numbers of terrorist attacks, including suicide terrorist

attacks, have increased with the expansion of these groups' operations. Efforts to eliminate these groups and their competitors, including factions and former affiliates, have preceded an increase in suicide attacks and an increase in terrorism.

Neither the hardening of potential targets, which is an inherently defensive measure, nor the implementation of targeted military operations, which is an inherently offensive approach, is geared toward removing the grievances that fuel ongoing violent resistance. In fact, in important ways, both efforts have the capacity to augment grievances, such as can be observed among Palestinians, and increase insecurity and state weakness, as can also be observed among Iraqis and Afghans.

This discussion may lead to an understanding of past efforts at preventing suicide attacks by terrorists as offering limited value for future efforts. The value, however, comes from consideration of what has worked in the past and what may work better in the future. Much of the effort discussed here has been reactive. While counterterrorism responses have sought to remove vulnerabilities, terrorists have found new vulnerabilities to exploit, requiring further reaction. The terrorists that have used suicide attacks will adapt and innovate. The violence will continue, though it may take new forms. To be effective, efforts to counter terrorism may also require change.

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Web-Based Resources on Suicide Terrorism

- Chicago Project on Security and Terrorism (CPOST), University of Chicago. Available at: cpost.uchicago.edu/
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