

Analyzing the Rationale of Suicide Terrorism in Afghanistan

Muhammad Ahsan Jamal, Yue Xie

Abstract

After the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, the militants in the country adopted suicide bombing tactics and the war-torn country faced a new threat in the form of suicide terrorism. The main purpose of this research is to review the existing literature on the motives of suicide attackers, mostly from political science perspective. For many scholars and state actors, it is hard to understand the acts of terrorists especially of suicide terrorists. Thus, suicide terrorism and act of blowing oneself was often conceived as “irrational” but many political scientists argue otherwise. Although, most academics agree that there is no single motive for terrorists to conduct suicide attacks, great number of previous researches on suicide terrorism in Afghanistan suggests that religion has played a significant role in promoting suicide bombings in the country. However, this paper argues that militants in Afghanistan conduct suicide attacks mainly for strategic reasons and it is used as a military tactic to challenge well-resourced opponents. In addition to addressing the role of strategic reasons, this article also analyzes other factors including religious, altruistic, economic motivations as well as military and political advantages instigating militants to become suicide bombers.

Keywords

Terrorism, suicide terrorism, suicide attacks, Taliban, Afghanistan.

Introduction

After the events of 9/11, the U.S. initiated war on terror in Afghanistan with the purpose of eliminating Al Qaeda and their hosts Taliban - governing body of Afghanistan at that time. However, the operation of defeating the terrorists and getting rid of fundamentalists in the country faced serious setbacks and one of the major threats was the tactic of suicide attacks on the local forces, the U.S. troops in the country as well as the other foreign forces.

The militants in Afghanistan often use suicide attacks not only on the government and armed forces but also civilian sites and institutions, which led many scholars and policymakers to doubt the rationale of such attacks and raised an international hatred towards Taliban and other militant groups in the country. Since there are several groups and militants operating in Afghanistan, the main focus of this research will be the Afghan Taliban as the group is one of the major stakeholder and prominent militant organization in the country.

By 2005, the number of suicide attacks in Afghanistan had reached unprecedented levels and suicide terrorists were often labeled as irrational actors, while policymakers formulated counter-terrorism strategies accordingly. However, growing number of suicide attacks and a decade of violence led scholars and political scientists to question previous approaches on suicide terrorism and redefine war on terror doctrine, especially in dealing with Taliban. It is also crucial to understand the rationale of suicide terrorism and reexamine the major causes of such form of attacks in order to neutralize such threats.

Therefore, the central piece of this research is to review the literature on rationale of suicide terrorism and the motives of the militant organizations in Afghanistan behind conducting suicide attacks. The research aims to uncover the possible motives of Taliban to conduct suicide attacks and highlight useful viewpoints explaining the mindset of suicide terrorists. Finally, the article highlights the gaps in existing literature defining the rationale of suicide terrorism at a group level, underlines possible causes and approaches to define suicide attacks in Afghanistan and proposes policy recommendations to reduce terrorism and suicide attacks in the country.

Understanding Suicide Terrorism in Afghanistan

To say that suicide terrorism is rational is to say that terrorists, like everyone else, have specific goals that they wish to achieve through their actions; terroristic violence in this regard, is an instrument or means to an end. Therefore the militants in Afghanistan weighed the costs and benefits and chose the best alternative – suicide attacks. Although, it is believed that suicide terrorism is usually a weapon of the weaker groups, in any case for Taliban, suicide attacks proved to be one of the most effective tools.

To understand the logic of the suicide terrorists, we must identify the forces that drive terrorists to abandon their lives and choose premature death as well as kill their targets. Terrorists are usually made through political processes, and militants turn to suicide terrorism when they are exhausted by the other means to achieve their goals. Although, some of the demands terrorists make are unrealistic, that is not a reason to ignore the underlying logic that

informs their actions (Cronin, 2010).¹

Similarly, Trager and Zagorcheva believe that even fanatical terrorists, who are considered to be intensely motivated by religious beliefs, are not irrational in a sense that makes them impossible to deter.²

Suicide terrorism arises when the potential benefits of suicide attacks outweighs the costs. American political scientist, Robert Pape, who studied all the known suicide attacks from 1980 through to 2003, reached a conclusion that for terrorists, conducting suicide attack is a rational act because it is purposive.

The study suggests the suicide terrorists are rational actors, who are religiously, politically or economically motivated, well-organized and are engaged in suicide attacks in order to achieve certain goals. The means of suicide terrorists are rationale in a sense that they use such tactics to achieve certain goals or to justify and promote their cause. The suicide attackers are well aware of the consequences and believe that suicide attack is the only option and the most effective method to attain their objectives.

In the case of Afghanistan, Mujahidin neither used suicide attacks during the Soviet invasion nor during the political struggle between different factions in Afghanistan during 1992 and 2001.³ The Taliban did not conduct suicide operations before the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, and turned to suicide terrorism when they believed that no other viable option existed to achieve their political goals and to fight the invaders.

For militants, the costs of suicide attacks are low and cause relatively high damage to their opponents. In

1. Audrey Kurth Cronin, "Are terrorists rational?", *The Jewish Week*, April 29, 2010, accessed at: http://www.thejewishweek.com/blogs/well_versed/are_terrorists_rational

2. Robert F. Trager and Dessislava P. Zagorcheva, "Deterring

Terrorism: It Can Be Done", *International Security* 30, Winter 2005/2006, pp. 87-123.

3. Brian Glyn Williams, "Afghanistan Declassified: A Guide to America's Longest War", PENN: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011, p. 202.

most suicide operations, militants send low-level recruits to conduct suicide missions so they do not have worry about those attackers being caught and the organization's central authority remain intact and continue their struggle.

Understanding the Motives of Suicide Terrorists

Once we take suicide terrorists to be rational actors, then we need an appropriate theory to explain their rationale. In order to have clear understanding on the issue and comprehend the motives of suicide bombers in Afghanistan, this part analyzes the literature on suicide terrorism from following perspectives: religious motivations, economic incentives, psychological motivations, altruistic reasons, political gains and military tactics.

The most commonly used approach to describe the acts of suicide terrorists is religious motivation. The theory of religious extremism argues that the radical followers of Islam use violent means to achieve religious goals. Egger (2011) argues that the followers of Islam are radicalized through fundamental interpretations of the Quran's promise of paradise in the afterlife that motivates the Islamic extremists to commit martyrdom (suicide attacks) in the name of religion.⁴

The scholars who have studied suicide terrorism from religious perspective mainly argue that Islam is one of the major factor influencing terrorists to conduct suicide attacks, as Sam Harris (2004) claims that there is sufficient evidence that Islamic

doctrine inspire terrorists and asserted that Islam is the source of violence.⁵

However, such a notion has been disapproved by number of scholars⁶ who argue that religion or Islam is not a sufficient cause for suicide attacks.⁷ Bloom (2005) argues that "even the most religious organization that employs suicide terror is pragmatic and power seeking. Their political survival is ultimately more important than any ideology."⁸ Similarly, Robert Pape (2005) asserts that "religion is rarely the root cause, although it is often used as a tool by terrorist organizations in recruiting and in other efforts in service of the broader strategic objective."⁹

Bryan Caplan argues that although many people claim to agree with the methods used by suicide terrorists, they do not commit suicide themselves: "While millions believe that they earn vast rewards in the afterlife if they engage in terrorism or suicidal terrorism, only a handful put their lives on the line."¹⁰ Many suggest that religion is somewhat helpful to terrorist groups to recruit suicide terrorists and to justify the acts of suicide terrorism, but religion is neither a significant causal factor¹¹, nor encouraging individuals to conduct suicide attacks.

Director of the Center for Security Studies and Director of the Security Studies Program at Georgetown University, Bruce Hoffman argue that terrorism is a threat mainly for political effect; it is "a planned, calculated, and systematic act" which is designed to have comprehensive psychological

4. Bruce Andrew Egger, "Addressing the Cause: An Analysis of Suicide Terrorism", Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colorado, Spring 2011, p. 7.

5. Sam Harris, "The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason". New York: W.W. Norton & Co. 2004.

6. Mohammad Hafez, "Manufacturing Human Bombs: The making of Palestinian suicide bombers". Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2006.

7. Barbara Victor, "Army of Roses: Inside the World of Palestinian Women Suicide Bombers", Rodale: Distributed to the book trade by St. Martin's Press, 2003.

8. Mia Bloom, "Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror", New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.

9. Robert Pape, "Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism", New York: Random House, 2005, p. 4.

10. Bryan Caplan, "Terrorism: The Relevance of the Rational Choice Model", *Public Choice*, Vol. 128, July 2006, p. 92.

11. Vanessa Harmon, Edin Mujkic, Catherine Kaukinen, and Henriikka Weir. "Causes and Explanations of Suicide Terrorism: A Systematic Review." *Homeland Security Affairs* 14, Article 9, December 2018, accessed at: <https://www.hsaj.org/articles/14749>

effects beyond the immediate victims or targets.¹²

In explaining the connection between religion and suicide terrorism, Berman and Laitin (2008), extended the “club” model of religious groups and concluded that religious groups are more likely to adopt suicide bombing as a result of intragroup dynamics.¹³ According to Hoffman (2004) and Moghadam (2009) the spread of the suicide tactic and globalization of such campaigns was the result of theology of Salafi Jihadis.¹⁴ Moghadam (2009) argues that suicide missions were a central element of Al Qaeda’s ideology, and the extremists used selective readings of the Quran (Muslim’s Holy Book) to convince their followers to conduct suicide attacks.¹⁵

A study by Kushner suggests that most suicide bombers are voluntarily involved in suicide attacks, and already possess the intention to take part in suicide operations.¹⁶ Kushner argues that in most cases terrorist groups do not force the militants to conduct suicide missions and the attackers are usually volunteers who have chosen to conduct suicide bombings even when other options were available to them (Kushner, 1996). According to Kushner the attackers are already willing to take part in suicide missions and the leaders of terrorist groups just provide them with an opportunity and instructions to conduct the attacks.

Some researches argue that terrorists are more violent in places and suicide attacks are more likely where inequality, injustice, or oppression is high.

Ariel Merari (1998) asserts that religion or Islam is less constant in suicide terrorism and found that suicide attacks are more likely in the context of injuries done to communities by expulsion or occupation. Merari’s findings show that suicide attackers more frequently identified themselves associated with secular organizations rather than religious groups.¹⁷

Krueger and Laitin (2008) argue that there is ample evidence that sectarian division (measured in terms of national population percentages of Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and “other” religious groups) is not the main cause of terrorism, while violence is more likely to originate in countries where people are deprived of civil liberties. Krueger and Laitin (2008, p. 150) concluded from their analysis that the origins of terrorism can be traced to “countries that suffer from political oppression” – those that deny “civil liberties”.¹⁸

Researchers, who study suicide terrorism from the aspect of economic incentives, argue that poor economic conditions such as high unemployment can create incentives for groups to conduct suicide attacks (Santifort-Jordan & Sandler, 2014). As, suicide attacks are more common in relatively poor countries and in some cases terrorist groups offer tangible rewards to suicide attackers’ relatives¹⁹, many scholars assert that in order to understand the rationality of suicide terrorism, we must study the issue from financial, socio-economic and welfare benefits perspective.

12. Bruce Hoffman, “Inside Terrorism”, New York: Columbia University Press, 1998, p. 15.

13. Eli Berman, David D. Laitin, “Religion, terrorism and public goods: testing the club model”, *Journal of Public Economics*, Vol. 92, Issue 10-11, 1942-1967, 2008.

14. Bruce Hoffman, “The Changing Face of Al Qaeda and the Global War on Terrorism”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 27, Issue 6, 2004, pp. 549-60.

15. Assaf Moghadam, “Motives for Martyrdom: Al-Qaida, Salafi Jihad, and the Spread of Suicide Attacks”, *International Security*, Vol. 33, No. 3, 2009, pp. 46-78.

16. Harvey W. Kushner, “Suicide bombers: Business as usual”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Volume 19, 1996, pp. 329-338.

17. Ariel Merari, “The Readiness to Kill and Die: Suicidal Terrorism in the Middle East.” In Walter Reich, ed., *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind*, 192-207. Second edition, Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center and Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.

18. Alan B. Krueger and David D. Laitin, “A cross-country study of the origins and targets of terrorism”, in P. Keefer and N. Loayza (eds), *Terrorism, Economic Development, and Political Openness*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 148-173.

19. Charlinda Santifort-Jordan and Todd Sandler, “An Empirical Study of Suicide Terrorism: A Global Analysis”, *Southern Economic Journal*, Vol. 80, No. 4, 2014, pp. 981-1001.

Some studies find that higher per capita incomes and domestic economic growth decreases the risk of different kinds of violence, including conflict, civil war and terrorism (Krueger and Malecková 2003, Blomberg, Hess and Weerapana 2004).

In some cases, terrorist organizations exploit the economic situation of the individuals and offer social welfare benefits to the militants and their families or relatives²⁰ in return for services and loyalty to the group (Iannaccone and Berman, 2006), and sometimes such services also include conducting suicide missions.

Berman argues that terrorist sympathizers are attracted to religiously fanatically groups primarily because of the social services they provide. According to Berman, terrorist groups attract recruits in part because “they are able to offer very high levels of benefits—not just spiritual ones but real services.”²¹

Rosendorff & Sandler (2010) argue that individuals are more likely to join terrorist groups and conduct suicide attacks when the benefits outweigh their exogenous economic opportunities. However, Krueger (2003, 2007) and Maleckova (2003) concluded in their studies that suicide attackers have tendency to come from slightly higher levels of socioeconomic status within their society. Similarly, other researches also suggests that there is not enough evidence to prove the connection between the individuals’ socioeconomic background and tendency to conduct suicide attacks²²

Similarly, Pape argues that terrorists who commit the acts of suicide “are not mainly poor, uneducated,

and immature religious zealots or social losers”.²³ Pape asserts that terrorist organizations usually use suicide bombing tactic to attract attention towards their struggle and raise the costs to the occupier, in an attempt to force the invaders into leaving. Pape concluded that democratic occupiers were exclusively vulnerable to this type of pressure, and were most likely to suffer from suicide attacks.

Although, some scholars argue that terrorists involved in suicide missions exhibit some psychological tendencies associated with suicide.²⁴ Other scholars who studied the suicide terrorism from individual-level disagree and failed to find a link between tendencies to suicide and suicide bombers.

The vast majority of researchers who studied the psychology of terrorists argue that terrorists are not mentally abnormal (Horgan, 2005), in fact, Rasch (1979) found that terrorists are actually far more stable than other violent criminals and psychologically healthy individuals.

Researchers studying psychological perspective of terrorism assert that there is no clear definition ‘suicide terrorist personality’ and individuals carrying out a suicide attack are not psychologically abnormal but reach to such a point through long process.

Laqueur (1999) argues that terrorism does not have roots traceable to “genetic factors, psychological difficulties in early childhood, a disturbed family life, or identification with the underclass” and asserts that although “most terrorists have been young, and the vast majority have been male”, no aspects of race, ethnicity, education, income, employment or social status can distinguish terrorists from non-terrorist.²⁵

20. Laurence R. Iannaccone and Eli Berman, “Religious extremism: The good, the bad, and the deadly”, Public Choice, Springer, Vol. 128(1), pp. 109-129.

21. Eli Berman, “ Hamas, Taliban, and the Jewish underground: an economist’s view of radical religious militias”, NBER Working Paper No. 10004, 2003.

22. Alan B. Krueger and Jitka Maleckova, “Education, Poverty and Terrorism: Is there a causal connection?”, Journal of Economic Perspectives, 17(4), 2003, pp. 119-144.

23. Robert Pape, “Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism”, New York: Random House, 2005, p. 216.

24. Adam Lankford, “Could suicide terrorists actually be suicidal?” Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, Vol. 34, Issue 4, 2011, pp. 337-66.

25. Walter Laqueur, “The New Terrorism: Fanaticism and the Arms of Mass Destruction”, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 79.

Another aspect worth exploring is altruistic reason, which is considered by some scholars as one of the main causes of suicide bombing. Some scholars argue that individuals tend to conduct suicide attacks for altruistic reasons such as sense of responsibility towards their community members.²⁶ There is enough evidence suggesting that individuals' decision to participate in suicide attacks are influenced by their personal vengeance and they retaliate under pressure to the losses in the family or community.²⁷

Similarly, Moghadam argues that terrorists do not usually claim to conduct suicide attacks out of despair or for personal reasons, instead, "they usually claim to act as martyrs for altruistic reasons—that is, for the sake of their larger community, their country, or religion."²⁸

Azam (2005) argues that suicide terrorists' actions are based on a model of intergenerational wealth transfer, where attackers aim to protect more wealth for future generations by making sacrifices today. Azam (2005) observed that suicide terrorists transfer their wealth to their parents, siblings and/or children. Moreover, in some cases, suicide attackers believe that their actions may lead to the withdrawal of foreign invaders or creation of an independent state, and consider themselves as the saviors of future generations, who are bequeathing a public good to the next generation.²⁹

It is important to understand the mindset of terrorists, and worth noting that most terrorists

do not describe their acts as "suicide" instead they consider it a higher religious act or "martyrdom", the act of sacrificing oneself for a noble and justified cause. In terms of psychology this symbolizes an important factor in understanding the motives and beliefs of terrorists. David Aaron (2008) quoted Sheikh Yousef Al-Qaradhawi's comment, "those who oppose martyrdom operations and claim that they are suicide are making a great mistake. The goals of the one who carries out a martyrdom operation and of the one who commits suicide are completely different ... The suicide kills himself for himself, because he failed in business, love, an examination, or the like... In contrast, the one who carries out a martyrdom operation does not think of himself. He sacrifices himself for the sake of a higher goal."³⁰

Terrorists often consider themselves as victims and share a sense of injustice and persecution and therefore, the ideologies of sacrificing oneself for "higher goal" emerges and lead to conduct suicide missions for self-proclaimed greater good. As, Silke (2015) argues that it is difficult to comprehend suicide attacks and seeing the attackers as anything but evil psychopaths or brainwashed and manipulated vulnerable individuals without sympathizing with the cause.³¹

Many scholars believe that suicide attackers have tactical advantages on their much stronger opponents (regimes or foreign forces) and suicide bombings have no doubt played an important role in their asymmetric war against their powerful enemies.³²

26. Ami Pedahzur, Arie Perliger, and Leonard Weinberg, "Altruism and Fatalism: The Characteristics of Palestinian Suicide Terrorists." *Deviant Behavior*, Vol. 24, Issue 4, 2003, pp. 405-23

27. Ghulam Farooq Mujaddidi, "Suicide Attacks in Afghanistan: Why Now?," Political Science Department - Thesis, Dissertations, and Student Scholarship. 25, 2013, accessed at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/poliscitheses/25>

28. Assaf Moghadam, "The Globalization of Martyrdom: Al Qaeda, Salafi Jihad, and the Diffusion of Suicide Attacks". Baltimore: the Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008.

29. Jean-Paul Azam, "Suicide Bombing as Inter-Generational Investment." *Public Choice* 122, no. 1-2 (2005): 177-198,

p. 179.

30. David Aaron, "In Their Own Words: Voices of Jihad - Compilation and Commentary", Rand Corporation, 2008, p. 89.

31. Andrew Silke, "Understanding suicide terrorism: Insights from psychology, lessons from history", In J. Pearse (ed.), *Investigating Terrorism*, 2015, pp. 169-179.

32. Bruce Hoffman, "The Logic of Suicide Terrorism," *Atlantic Monthly*, June 1, 2003, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2003/06/the-logic-of-suicide-terrorism/302739>

According to Robert Pape, suicide attacks in Afghanistan are mainly a product of foreign occupation of the country (2003, 2005; Pape & Feldman 2010). Pape argues that nearly all suicide terrorist attacks have one thing in common that is they have specific strategic goal, which is to compel modern democracies to withdraw their armed forces from territories that the terrorists consider to be their homeland.³³

Pape argues that “American military policy in the Persian Gulf was most likely the pivotal factor leading to September 11”.³⁴ Therefore, according to Pape, the only effective way to prevent future attacks on the foreign forces would be for the U.S. to withdraw all its forces out of the Middle East. Robert Pape believes that in order to ensure security concerns the U.S. should form effective alliances with regional nations instead of deploying ground forces in Afghanistan.

Similarly, in “Explaining Suicide Terrorism: A Review History,” Martha Crenshaw argues that “there is an emerging consensus that suicide attacks are instrumental in or strategic from the perspective of a sponsoring organization.”³⁵ Crenshaw argues that these terrorists serve the political interests of non-states actors and challenging well-armed states, their methods are simple yet tactically efficient.

Some examples of the adoption of suicide methods by the terrorists appear unrelated to a reasonable definition of foreign occupation, as Wade & Reiter (2007) in their study from 1980 to 2003, found no relationship between democratic occupiers and suicide bombing. Nevertheless, Piazza (2009) argues that although the link between democracy and suicide bombing is not strong, the foreign occupation does make suicide attacks more

likely, as opposed to other types of terrorism.³⁶ However, Braun & Genkin (2014) found a positive relationship between occupation and the adoption of suicide bombing by using the group as the unit of analysis.

A senior Afghan Taliban commander Mullah Sabir, who attempted to justify Taliban position by stating that “fighting an American armored vehicle or an aircraft with an AK-47 is not much different from putting on an explosive vest, either way you will be killed”.³⁷ This notion explains the desperate situation the group was faced with and regarded their struggle against the U.S. forces as directly facing death.

Analysis

Most researches on suicide terrorism analyze the group level rationality of the terrorist organizations’ decision to adopt such tactics. Although scholars continue to have disagreements on terrorist groups’ decision to use suicide bombing as a last option when they fail to achieve their strategic goals in any other way (Hoffman 2004, Pape 2005, Crenshaw 2007), most scholars consider suicide attack as strategic choice by a group to achieve their desired goals.

Although, in some cases, suicide terrorists are motivated by religious ideology or political belief that their actions are justified for the greater good of the society, in the case of Afghanistan, suicide terrorism, to some extent, is driven by social injustice, lack of political and economic opportunities as well as the fact that Taliban were fighting a militarily superior opponent. Therefore, it is wise to assume that the tactic of suicide attacks adopted by Taliban is not primarily based on

33. *ibid* 23.

34. *ibid*.

35. Martha Crenshaw, “Explaining Suicide Terrorism: A Review Essay”, *Security Studies*, Vol. 16 No. 1, January 2007, p. 141.

36. James A. Piazza, “Is Islamist Terrorism More Danger-

ous?: An Empirical Study of Group Ideology, Organization and Goal Structure”, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 21, January 2009, pp. 62-88.

37. Sami Yousafzai and Ron Moreau, “Suicide Offensive.” *Newsweek* Vol. 149, Issue 16, 2007, pp. 34-36.

religious and psychological motivations but was mainly used as military tactic for political gains and some cases for altruistic reasons. The logic of suicide attacks in Afghanistan can be better understood from the perspectives of political and military advantages and therefore the militants carrying such attacks can be considered as rational actors.

In this regard, Robert Pape asserts that “offensive military action rarely works” against terrorism, he argues in his “nationalist theory of suicide terrorism” that the removal of the U.S. military from the Arabian Peninsula and other Muslim countries could be the solution to offensive terrorists’ attacks.

Similarly, many scholars and politicians assert that the U.S. occupation of Afghanistan was clearly not welcomed by the local population. In this regard Taliban provide a bleak example of how flawed policies and strategies during the war on terror have encouraged militants and extremists to gain political legitimacy, which they would have otherwise never achieved.³⁸

Although in most societies it is quite difficult to comprehend the act of suicide bombing and killing innocent people, and put these actions on a rational scale. However, from the theoretical perspective, the aim of suicide terrorists in Afghanistan is not to kill many people but demonstrate the act to a large number of spectators. As most of the terrorist attacks are well-planned and politically motivated, the terrorist organizations have certain ideological ideas to promote. Therefore, it is wise to assume that the actions of Taliban in Afghanistan are based on rational behavior, and suicide bombing is one of the military tactics which was adopted by the militants fighting to accomplish their political and strategic goals.

Conclusion

The analysis of the literature on suicide terrorism suggests that most militants use suicide attacks not with the aim to cause damage or kill civilians but to make their voices/ideas known to certain authorities. Although it seems that suicidal attacks in which the attackers kill certain members of the population or community as well as themselves are illogical and cannot be comprehended by the international community. Such attacks are conducted either under frustration, when the attackers who are operating under some kind of belief that they are doing it for honor, religion or for the good of their people, are ready to attack their opponents and literally dying to win. Similarly, in case of Taliban, the literature suggests that the militants in Afghanistan were not prone to suicide attacks prior to the U.S. invasion, and started to use suicide bombings as a tool to fight their much stronger opponents. As the main objective of terrorists is not to militarily defeat the governing regime of the country where they are fighting, but only to avoid losing (Hoffman, 1998).³⁹

Nevertheless, most suicide terrorists are unable to achieve their final objective and majority of the militant groups fail to survive mainly due to use of violence, destructive methods, ineffective policies, absence of long-term vision and lack of support. In the case of Taliban, the group emerged as somewhat successful with adaptableness and changes in their approach and managed to enter the peaceful dialogue with the U.S. as well as the local government. Similarly, the case of Taliban also set an example for other militants in the country who joined the peace process and gave up violent means that led to the decline in suicide attacks in Afghanistan.

It was observed that existing literature on the subject does not touch the issue from socio-economic, social injustice and reconciliation perspective, therefore lack of economic incentives, political opportunities

38. Security and Development Policy Group, “Chronic Failures in the War on Terror: From Afghanistan to Somalia”, MF Publishing Ltd 59 Russell Square, London WC1B 4HP, (May 2008).

39. Ibid 12. p. 52.

for reconciliation as well as widespread corruption are some of the issues worth exploring in further researches. In case of Taliban militants, they adopted suicide attacks as a last resort when they ran out of other options to fight their opponents and therefore it is important to focus on the causes leading to the adoption of suicide bombing tactics.

Moreover, considering the diversity of the militant groups in Afghanistan and low level of governance in the country, it is also worth exploring the aspects of sense of social injustice among certain members of the society who are often recruited by the militant groups for suicide missions as well as the rivalry or competition among different factions of militants which led to adoption of suicide attacks in order to attract more attention and popularity. The situation in Afghanistan suggests that the increasing number of militant groups in the country encourage terrorists to conduct suicide attacks in order to demonstrate their abilities to fight and commitment to the cause by adopting violent tactics.

Another aspect is the group's popularity and their degree of acceptance among the public.⁴⁰ One of the reasons that terrorists adopt suicide tactics largely depends on their relationship with the locals or people who are affected (Kalyvas & Sanchez-Cuenca, 2005). The researches on suicide terrorism have also suggested that militant groups who either have strong public support or completely disconnected from the public are more likely to adopt tactics of suicide bombing without the concern of consequences of their actions on population, while other groups are less likely to conduct suicide attacks in order to avoid public reaction. Therefore, this aspect is also worth examining, especially in the case of Afghanistan, where some of the groups enjoy support of the local community whereas others are completely disconnected from the local population. Future researches can also analyze Taliban's and other militant groups' relations with the local population as well as their reliance on public support.

As we already have discussed number of theories explaining when violent terrorists are more likely to use suicide bombing, it is important to test those theories with the case of Afghan Taliban as well as other militants operating in the country. By developing models of Afghan militants' decision concerning the use of suicide attack tactics at a group level as well as individual level, we can have a better understanding of the decision making process as well as crucial factors leading to such decisions.

Policy Recommendations

The people in terrorism affected Afghanistan have shown their will to get rid of fundamentalists, corrupt politicians and mafia gangs who are eager to return to power in the name of war on terror or fight against Taliban. Therefore, the Afghanistan case suggests that the suicide terrorism can be reduced by adopting effective measures and policies that address the root cause of the problem.

Since terrorism is a global menace therefore it can only be dealt by developing an effective alliance and sincere partnership to address the root causes of terrorism. A formulation of successful partnership with broad capacity of cooperation and collective interests can be achieved by gaining mutual trust and strengthening broader unity. Below mentioned policy recommendations can help reduce the terrorism threat in Afghanistan and decrease suicide attacks by the militant groups in the country.

- 1) The U.S. and allied forces can extend the peace talks with the other militants and give them a chance to join struggle for peace and turn the "war on terror" into a set of strategy i.e. war against crime and corruption, through mass participation and offering opportunities of employment for youths. As many consider corruption in Afghanistan a bigger problem than terrorism,⁴¹ therefore such a measure would

40. Stathis N. Kalyvas, Ignacio Sanchez-Cuenca, "Killing Without Dying: The Absence of Suicide Missions", In Making of Suicide Missions, edited by Diego Gambetta, Oxford University Press, 2005, pp. 209-32.

41. Anna Varfolomeeva, "Are Corruption and Poor Governance Bigger Threats for Afghan Army than Taliban?", IRIA, June 19, 2017, accessed at: <http://ir-ia.com/IRIA-Are-corruption-and-poor-governance-bigger-threats-than-taliban.html>

degrade the legitimacy of the militants, who in some cases enjoy support of the local population due to high levels of corruption by the local government officials.

2) All relevant parties and stakeholders must cooperate with each other and concentrate on efforts towards strong legitimate government and “nation-building” which is the centerpiece of any counter-terrorism strategy. Due to the diverse expectations and policies of different stakeholders to deal with the issue, the people of Afghanistan continue to suffer and the terrorists gain the most out it.

3) An initiative to establish an international aid and fund programs to assist the resettlement program for the victims of terrorism as well as the war on terrorism in Afghanistan can help dissuade the militant activities. This would not only benefit the locals of the country but would also discourage the less privileged members of the society to support the militants and their ideology.

4) The Afghans should be provided with an opportunity to elect or select a government model of their own choice without foreign intervention or influence in their country. This would provide encouragement to the local population to resolve their issues in accordance with their own system while discouraging the narrative of the militants. Such a measure would give no more room to the arguments of the militants and terrorists who claim that their actions are concentrated at getting rid of foreign invasion and they are fighting the freedom war.

5) A reconciliation process should be initiated which may include a general amnesty for militants who are ready to renounce terrorism, give up violent activities and join the peace talks. This will provide an opportunity to make a fresh start for misguided youths as well as members of militant groups to work together to achieve the common goal of peace and prosperity in the country.

6) A fast-track campaign should be launched to uplift the miserable conditions of poor people, particularly youngsters in the tribal areas as the region is still deprived of most basic necessities of life. The development initiative would ensure the essential needs of the poor members of the society and misguided youth would not fall into the traps of terrorists and would not look toward suicidal approaches to make their voices heard and achieve their goals.

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