

## The Making of a Martyr: Chechen Suicide Terrorism

ANNE SPECKHARD

Georgetown University Medical Center  
Washington, DC, USA  
and  
Vesalius College  
Free University of Brussels  
Brussels, Belgium

KHAPTA AHKMEDOVA

Grozny State University, Grozny, Chechnya

*Beginning in June of 2000 Chechen terrorists have carried out twenty-eight acts of suicide terrorism acts including two mass hostage taking operations combined with suicide terrorism (Beslan and Nord Ost). This paper reports the findings from psychological autopsies (interviews with close family members and friends) of thirty-four (out of 112 total) of these human bombers as well as augmenting them with material from hostage interviews from Beslan and Nord-Ost. The authors analyze the phenomena on the levels of the organization, individual, society and in terms of ideology and compare findings from other arenas also involving suicide terrorism. The main findings are that a lethal mix occurs when individuals in Chechnya are vulnerable to self recruitment into suicide terrorism due to traumatic experiences and feeling a duty to revenge and this vulnerability is combined with exposure to groups that recruit and equip suicide terrorists with both an ideology and the means to explode themselves. The ideology supporting Chechen suicide terrorism is very similar to the global jihadist ideology but remains more nationalist in its goals. It functions for the bombers much like short lived psychological first aid—answering their posttraumatic concerns in a way that shortly leads to their deaths. Unlike the Palestinian case, there is little social support for suicide terrorism in Chechnya.*

7 June 2000—the first act of Chechen suicide terrorism was successfully inaugurated—as two young women careened an explosive-laden truck into the temporary headquarters of an elite OMON (Russian Special Forces) detachment in the village of Alkhan Yurt in Chechnya, resulting in two deaths and five wounded. The tactic of suicide terror that has become the bane of the twenty first century had migrated to yet another conflict zone. Since then 112 terrorists have taken part in 28 suicide terror acts<sup>1</sup> attributed to Chechen terror groups.<sup>2</sup>

This article provides an empirical psychosocial analysis of Chechen suicide terrorism. It reports on a two-year study involving 51 individuals involved with suicide terrorism ( $n = 51$ ): 34 suicide terrorists and 2 would-be-suicide terrorists<sup>3</sup> about whom interviews

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Address correspondence to Anne Speckhard, Vesalius College, 3 Avenue des Fleurs, 1150 Brussels, Belgium. E-mail: [Aspeckhard@AnneSpeckhard.com](mailto:Aspeckhard@AnneSpeckhard.com)

made were with 31 of their close family members or close associates; 4 seriously radicalized individuals expressing interest in becoming suicide terrorists<sup>4</sup> (2 of these were additional interviews from within the group of 31 close family and associate interviews and 2 from the Chechen refugee camps in Ingushetia); and additional insights from 11 interviews in Russia and Belarus with hostages who observed and spoke with suicide terrorists holding them during the 2002 three-day siege in the Moscow Dubrovka theater (i.e., Nord Ost). The interviews of family members and close associates of the suicide bombers constitute a type of psychological post-mortem of the terrorists,<sup>5</sup> inquiring about their backgrounds, significant experiences, personality, and behavioral changes leading up to their suicide acts and builds on earlier research with their hostages. Also included is an analysis of community support for suicide terrorism based on questions put to 36 Chechen respondents. Likewise a summary and empirical analysis of all the suicide terrorism events themselves are provided by type, location, frequency, trends, and gender as well as further analysis for those events about which the authors have data regarding the perpetrators. (For these summary analyses see Tables 1–20.)

The aim of the project, which is ongoing, is to build through interviews and empirical analysis of events a descriptive model of the genesis and mechanisms of suicide terrorism in Chechnya and to compare this model with existing literature and data emerging from other regions in the world to learn if there are ideological, demographic, technological, and regional differences in how suicide terrorism is generated.

### **The Nature of Suicide Terrorism**

Suicide terrorism is one of the fastest growing and least understood global threats to modern-day democracies. As a terror tactic it functions as a relatively cheap and effective means of upsetting the political, economic, and military situation of a region and has become one of the major threats to peacekeeping and peacemaking efforts. Western coalition and NATO troops stationed abroad, particularly in Afghanistan and Iraq (where an average of one suicide attack occurs per day) are finding suicide terrorism to be one of their most difficult and lethal threats. Post reconstruction efforts in both areas are likely to be disrupted for years to come by suicide terrorists who with relatively small expense can carry on a war of attrition long after the larger battles are won. 9/11, the spring 2004 Madrid train bombings,<sup>6</sup> and recent London bombings made clear that Americans and their allies are not immune to this new security threat—even on their own soil—or in the case of the London bombings, by their own citizens.

Israel, Turkey, and Sri Lanka especially have been plagued by suicide terrorism during the past decade.<sup>7</sup> Suicide terrorism has also become a growing security threat in Russia where Chechen bombers have increasingly targeted civilians inside Russia, their most heinous acts including downing 2 domestic airliners, taking over 800 hostages in Moscow and more recently taking over a school in Beslan, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of parents and children.

As a strategic tactic, suicide terrorism is relatively inexpensive and simple to enact. Strategic analysis of repeated suicide attacks in conflicts such as that between Russia and Chechnya, Israel and Palestine, and lately the U.S. coalition and Iraq demonstrate that overwhelming counterforce does not alone stop or even significantly decrease suicide attacks<sup>8</sup> and that in the short-term repeated suicide attacks often impact the political process in ways that benefit the terrorist sponsoring organizations such as forcing withdrawal, creating changes in daily living, hampering reconstruction efforts, dominating the political discourse in the media, etc.<sup>9</sup> Suicide bombers can also have a profoundly negative effect

on the political, military, and economic circumstances of a region, especially thwarting peacekeeping and peace-building conditions.<sup>10</sup>

Yet as prevalence rates and death tolls from suicide attacks increase, policymakers are still working in the dark trying to find the most effective policy responses to the emergence of this new and poorly understood security threat. Currently there is an extremely small empirical research database on which policymakers may base their understanding of suicide terrorism; its genesis and prevention. Comprehending this growing threat and learning to combat it effectively on both the local and international level is extremely relevant to current public policies aimed at promoting peace and stability. This is particularly applicable to resolving ethnic conflicts and promoting peace in regions such as the Middle East and in the Russian Federation where militant suicide terror tactics continually derail hopes of peace.

### **Chechen Suicide Terrorism**

The first act of Chechen suicide terrorism (7 June 2000) involved an explosives-laden truck driven by two female terrorists (Khava Barayeva, cousin of well-known Chechen field commander Arbi Barayev and Luisa Magomadova) into the temporary headquarters of an elite OMON (Russian Special Forces) detachment in the village of Alkhan Yurt in Chechnya. Since then there have been a total of 28 acts of suicide terrorism attributed to Chechen terror groups involving 2,043 hostages, claiming the lives of 939 and 2913 wounded. One hundred and twelve terrorists were involved in these acts: 48 of them women (43 percent) and 64 men (57 percent).<sup>11</sup> Table 1 shows a summary of suicide terror acts attributed to Chechens to date (August 2005).<sup>12</sup>

#### *Type of Attacks*

The type of suicide acts attributed to Chechens have included:

- Eleven truck and car bombings;
- Ten terrorists carrying and detonating bombs strapped to their bodies, excluding metro, train, and plane bombings (two of these were would-be bombers who lived);
- One suicide detonation of bombs on commuter trains;
- Two suicide bombings in the metro (both in Moscow);
- Two suicide bombings on planes (the flights originating in Moscow); as well as
- Two major hostage taking-sieges (one in Moscow, the other in Beslan) in which the hostage-takers rigged bombs both to their bodies and inside the building where they held hostages and clearly made their intentions to be martyred known.

Table 2 shows a breakdown by type of attack.

#### *Targets*

Of the total suicide attacks (28) Chechen bombers have struck strictly civilian targets in 46 percent of cases, military bases in 39 percent of cases, and government places (which included many civilian victims) in 15 percent of cases. If one combines government and civilian targets—considering both as civilian targets—Chechen suicide terrorists have in the majority of cases targeted civilians (61 percent of cases). However, when one looks at attacks occurring only inside Chechnya the majority of attacks (57 percent) have been aimed at military bases. Table 3 shows a breakdown of attacks by type and location of target.

**Table 1**  
Summary of total number of suicide terror acts attributed to chechens to date (August, 2005)

	Date of terrorist act	Place of terrorist act	Total terrorists	Women terrorists	Men terrorists	Killed victims	Injured victims	Hostages	Terrorists death
1	June 7, 2000	Chechnya, Alkhan-Yurt Military base (Khava Baraeva, Luiza Magomadova)	2	2	0	2	5	0	Dead
2	June, 2000	Chechnya, Military checkpoint	1	0	1	?	?	0	Dead
3	July 2, 2000	Chechnya, Military base (Movladi)	1	0	1	33	81	0	Dead
4	Dec. 2000	Chechnya, MVD building (Mareta Duduyeva)	1	1	0	?	?	0	Wounded, later dead
5	Nov. 29, 2001	Chechnya, Urus-Martan, Military office	1	1	0	1	3	0	Dead
6	Feb. 5, 2002	(Elza Gazueva) Chechnya, Grozny, Zavodskoy ROVD	1	1	0	23	17	0	Wounded
7	Oct.23–26, 2002	(Zarema Inarkaeva) Moscow theatre	40	19	21	129	644	< 800	Dead

8	Dec. 27, 2002	Chechnya, Grozny, Governmental complex (Tumrievs family)	3	1	2	83	<200	0	Dead
9	May 12, 2003	Chechnya, Znamenskaya, Governmental complex	3	1	2	59	111	0	Dead
10	May 14, 2003	Chechnya, Iliskhan-Yurt, Religion festival	2	2	0	18	145	0	Dead
11	June 5, 2003	(Shahidat Shahbulatova, Zulay Abdurzakova) North Osetia, Mozdok Military bas (Lida Khildehoroeva)	1	1	0	17	16	0	Dead
12	June 20, 2003	Chechnya, Grozny, Governmental complex (Zakir Abdulazimov)	2	1	1	6	38	0	Dead
13	July 5, 2003	Moscow, Rock festival (Zulikhhan Eljhadjjeva, Mariam Sharapova)	2	2	0	14	60	0	Dead

*(Table continued on next page)*

**Table 1**  
Summary of total number of suicide terror acts attributed to chechens to date (August, 2005) (Continued)

Date of terrorist act	Place of terrorist act	Total terrorists	Women terrorists	Men terrorists	Killed victims	Injured victims	Hostages	Terrorists death
14 July 11, 2003	Moscow, Twerskaya str. (Zarema Mujikhoeva)	1	1	0	1	0	0	Lived
15 July 27, 2003	Chechnya, Grozny, Military building (Mariam Tashukhadjeva)	1	1	0	?	?	0	Dead
16 Aug. 1, 2003	North Osetia, Military hospital	1	0	1	35	300	0	Dead
17 Dec. 5, 2003	Southern Russian near Yessentuki, train (Khadijat Mangerieva)	4	3	1	41	<150	0	Dead
18 Sept. 15, 2003	Ingushetia, FSB office	2	1	1	2	31	0	Dead
19 Dec. 9, 2003	Moscow, National Hotel near Duma	1	1	0	6	14	0	Dead
20 Feb. 6, 2004	Moscow subway station Avtozavodskaya	1	0	1	41	<130	0	Dead
21 April 6, 2004	Ingushetia, president's car	1	0	1	2	25	0	Dead

22	Aug. 25, 2004	Airplane TU-134 Moscow-Volgograd (Sazita Jebirhanova)	1	1	0	43	0	0	0	Dead
23	Aug. 25, 2004	Airplane TU-154 Moscow-Sochi (Aminat Nogaeva)	1	1	0	42	0	0	0	Dead
24	Aug. 31, 2004	Moscow, subway station Rijskaya	1	1	0	10	33	0	0	Dead
25	Sept. 1-3, 2004	North Osetia, Beslan school (Roza Nogaeva, Mariam Tuburova)	32	2	30	330	470	1120	1120	Dead
26	May, 2005	Chechnya, Grozny	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	Dead
27	May, 2005	Chechnya, Assinovskaya	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	Dead
27	May, 2005	Chechnya, Assinovskaya	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	Dead
28	July, 2005	Chechnya, Grozny	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	Dead
			112	48	64	939	2913	2043	2043	
			100%	43%	57%					

**Table 2**  
Types of suicide attacks attributed to Chechen terrorists

Type of attack	Frequency
Truck and car bombs driven to and exploded at target	11
Attacker carrying explosive device on body and exploding it in a place other than metro, train, or airplane	10*
Hostage-taking with bombs strapped to body and rigged for detonation	2
Metro suicide bombings	2
Commuter train suicide bombings	1
Suicide bombing on airplanes	2
Total attacks	28

\*Two of these were by would-be-terrorists.

### *Changing Trends in Targeting*

In its first two years (2000–2001) Chechen suicide terrorism targeted only military bases and only inside Chechnya. This trend changed over time with the successful hardening of military targets inside Chechnya, increasing news blackouts from Chechnya, and deepening despair and anger in terrorist groups over their national situation. In 2002 and subsequently, Chechen terrorists moved their suicide operations increasingly to Russia including repeatedly striking Moscow itself. The first of these attacks in Moscow in 2002 involved the dramatic hostage-taking siege of the Dubrovka theater (Nord Ost) in which 40 armed terrorists (19 of them women with bombs strapped to their bodies) held approximately 800 theatergoers for nearly 3 days. One hundred twenty-nine hostages were killed in this event, the majority dying from gas introduced into the theater by Russian Special Forces who ended the siege by gassing and storming the theater.

Following this spectacular event that riveted worldwide attention to their cause Chechen terrorist groups likely learned the value of media amplification, especially when striking inside Moscow. They continued to target civilians inside Russia: targeting in 2003 a rock concert just outside Moscow and two downtown Moscow targets (one near the Duma) followed in 2004 by two Moscow metro bombings and bombings on two flights originating from Moscow.<sup>13</sup>

In terms of frequency the worst years for suicide attacks were 2003 and 2004 with 63 percent of attacks occurring during these years. Some argue that these years followed the

**Table 3**  
Type and location of Chechen suicide terrorist targets

Type of Target	Southern			Total
	Chechnya	Russian region	Moscow	
Military bases	8	3	0	11 (39%)
Governmental places	3	1	0	4 (14%)
Civilian places	3	2	8	13 (46%)
Total	14 (50%)	6 (21%)	8 (29%)	28 (100%)



**Table 4**  
Frequency of suicide attacks by year

Year	Frequency	Percent
2000	4	14
2001	1	4
2002	3	11
2003	11	39
2004	6	21
2005	3	11
Total	28	100

most brutal Russian counterterrorism operations in Chechnya and those in turn motivated terrorist groups to increase their frequency of suicide attacks as well as carry them out inside Russia, increasingly targeting Moscow.<sup>14</sup> Tables 4 and 5 show a breakdown of attacks by year, frequency, type, and location of target.

## Psycho-Social Analysis of Chechen Suicide Terrorists

### *Background of the Present Study*

Soon after the Dubrovka theater takeover the authors had the opportunity to interview surviving hostages and thereby collect indirect observations of the suicide terrorists. Rarely is it possible to observe or converse with a suicide terrorist in his or her last moments of life, especially in the final moments of being strapped to a bomb. The hostages not only observed, but also spoke with these terrorists over three days. They had spent 58 hours together while half of the terrorists (19 women) were strapped to bombs, and all of the terrorists sat ready to detonate nearby bombs placed throughout the theater.

The authors realized that the hostages' recollections of, interactions with, and observations of the terrorists represented a unique opportunity to collect naturalistic research

**Table 5**  
Suicide attacks by year, type of target, and location

Year	Military bases	Governmental places	Civilian places	Total	Southern Russian			Total
					Chechnya	region	Moscow	
2000	4	0	0	4	4	0	0	4
2001	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	1
2002	1	1	1	3	2	0	1	3
2003	4	2	5	11	4	4	3	11
2004	0	1	5	6	0	2	4	6
2005	1	0	2	2	3	0	0	2
Total	11 (39%)	4 (14%)	13 (47%)	28	14 (50%)	6 (21%)	8 (29%)	28 (100%)

data indirectly observing suicide terrorists at this unique psychological moment in time. By viewing the suicide terrorists through the eyes of their hostages valuable psychological insights were able to be gained about this type of terrorism and how suicide terrorists interact in a hostage-taking situation.<sup>15</sup> Following the study of the Dubrovka hostage-taking siege<sup>16</sup> the authors expanded their data collection efforts to interviews in Chechnya of family members and close associates of the Chechen suicide terrorists involved in that event as well as other events of Chechen suicide terrorism. The present study is a report of two years of data collection in that regard.

### **Methods**

*Sample.* This study reports on 51 individuals total ( $n = 51$ ): 34 suicide terrorists and 2 would-be-suicide terrorists about whom interviews were made with 32 of their close family members or close associates; 4 seriously radicalized individuals who appeared vulnerable to becoming suicide terrorists<sup>17</sup> (2 of these were additional interviews from within the group of 31 close family and associate interviews and 2 from the Chechen refugee camps in Ingushetia); and additional insights from the 11 hostage interviews from the Dubrovka hostage-taking siege. The close family and associate interviews were given mainly by mothers, sisters and brothers, aunts and uncles, first cousins, childhood friends, long-term neighbors, teachers, and so on. Table 6 gives a breakdown of this information.

All but the hostage interviews were collected in Chechnya over a two-year time period from March 2003 to June 2005. The sample universe of potential subjects for these interviews included any close family members or close associates to all known Chechen suicide terrorists<sup>18</sup> as well as interviews from any subjects the authors could locate who were seriously considering taking this path. As a result of their previous work with the Dubrovka theater hostages an effort was made in first overtures to interview close family members or close associates of the suicide terrorists who had been present there. This allowed two points of view on these particular terrorists (i.e., the hostages' observations during the event *and* family member observations prior to it).

*Recruitment of Research Subjects.* The method of recruitment of subjects for the study proceeded in the following manner. Once the target subjects were identified (i.e., the dead suicide terrorists) contacts were discreetly made. Many interviewees were at first fearful and reluctant to grant an interview, as nearly all had already been visited and interrogated by Russian special services and continued to fear retaliation. They agreed after being told that the interviews would be anonymous and confidential, that the authors were in

**Table 6**  
Relationship of respondents to suicide terrorist

Relationship of respondents	Frequency	Percent
Mothers	2	6.7
Sister/brother	6	20
Cousins, aunts, uncles	7	23.3
Neighbors, friends, teachers	15	50
Total	30	100.0

no way related to security services and simply trying to understand the psychosocial underpinnings of suicide terrorism and that the results were destined for publication in Western-based journals. No monetary compensation was offered, but those having psychological difficulties were offered immediate attention and an invitation to longer-term psychotherapy if so desired.

*The Research Interview.* The research interviews were semi-structured and focused on open-ended questions regarding family life, psychosocial history, life events previous to becoming terrorists, personality, and behavioral changes leading up to the terrorist act, statements and observations made about the terrorists' psychological state, ideological underpinnings and possible motivations for having taken on this act. Inquiry about the individual motivations of the suicide terrorists was made in regard to as their interactions with and potential recruitment by terror sponsoring organizations active in Chechnya (groups assumed to have their own differing organizational motives). Questions were included regarding how the family members and close associates viewed the acts of the terrorists, about their views of societal support for this type of act, and questions about its contagion effect on those persons close to the bombers.

### **Organizational, Individual, and Societal Motivations for Suicide Terrorism**

Analysis of motives for suicide terrorism may take place on three levels: organizational, individual, and societal.<sup>19</sup> Israeli suicide terrorism expert Ariel Merari states that no act of suicide terrorism takes place in a vacuum and that there is always a sponsoring organization that trains, equips, and sends out a bomber.<sup>20</sup> More recent research among Palestinian groups however has updated his claim: researchers have found individuals who equipped and sent themselves as suicide terrorists without any organizational support whatsoever.<sup>21</sup>

When one considers the interplay between the individual and organizational motivations for enacting suicide terrorism it must be acknowledged that motives of the terror organization often differ dramatically from those of the individuals who are recruited or who actively volunteer for suicide missions. Indeed current practices among Palestinian and Iraqi terror organizations confirms that frequently suicide bombers who are recruited or self recruit to these groups activate within a very short time period of first contact with the group (sometimes within days in Palestinian groups), leaving little time for group dynamics or organizational goals to overtake individual motivations.

Likewise, terror organizations find their support within the society they purport to represent. This societal support (or lack of it) also interacts within the interplay of individual and organizational motivations and may even form some of the groundswell and basis for the ideologies of which terror organizations make use. This research focused more heavily on the individuals enacting social terrorism and their social milieu than on the organizations that equipped them, but each level interacting with the others is important for consideration. On each level—individual, organizational, and societal—there are multiple influences, none of them occurring in isolation and each impacting the other.

#### ***Organizational Motivations***

On the organizational level, the sponsor provides the means, training, and group dynamic and often the ideology that underpins the terror act. In the case of Chechen suicide terrorism

the ideology in support of it, as is often the case, is not solely a product of the sponsoring terror group but of a much wider social milieu. In this case, Wahhabism as the Chechen terrorist ideology is labeled within Russia and Chechnya<sup>22</sup> in its militant form is the ideological underpinning of Chechen terror groups, which is linked ideologically to the global Salafi jihad<sup>23</sup> but fine tuned to fit local circumstances. Previous to 2000 there was no history of suicide terrorism in Chechnya nor community support for it, the tactic having migrated with fighters shifting from the jihad in Afghanistan to the Chechen conflict, bringing with them the external Wahabbi ideological influence which was combined into a militant form with well-established Afghan and Al Qaeda-type guerilla combat and terror techniques. An influx of foreign money and educational materials also flooded into Chechnya during the 1990s supporting adoption of these external ideologies.

It is clear from the public statements and demands made following suicide bombings and in suicide terrorist hostage-taking operations that the specific political goals of Chechen terror sponsoring organizations differ significantly from those of the global Salafi jihad. Where as the latter wishes to destroy Western domination and create a worldwide ummah,<sup>24</sup> the Chechen groups are primarily nationalist and separatist in their motivations with increasingly religious rhetoric thrown into the mix. Their demands are clear: to force withdrawal of all Russian military and security forces from Chechnya, to end the armed conflict, to gain national independence (recognition of the 1992 declaration of independence), occasionally to gain amnesty for prisoners of war, and increasingly as the terrorists have become more closely aligned in funding and ideology to the worldwide global jihad—to be left free to establish an Islamic state, although ending the war and having freedom from foreign occupation takes much greater precedence over this last desire.<sup>25</sup>

Chechen rebel attacks of all types (suicide and other) began by targeting Russian military targets but as these targets became more impenetrable and the rebels realized the impact of mass media attention, their attacks moved progressively from within Chechnya and in neighboring southern Russia, to more generalized civilian attacks inside Russia that have penetrated even to the heart of Moscow. A recent interview with the main terrorist leader Basayev clarifies that he like many other terror groups considers his organization to be in a defensive war. Spouting rhetoric similar to that espoused by the global Salafi jihadist groups he both demonizes his enemy and justifies extreme acts of terrorism as acts of defense in the face of a much greater power.<sup>26</sup>

Likewise it is clear that in his thinking it is only through terror operations that Basayev believes that his organization is able to draw attention in the international community to Russian attacks occurring within Chechnya. In the case of Beslan for instance he justifies targeting children stating that he never intended to kill but only to hold them as hostages and to force withdrawal of Russian troops from Chechnya and through media attention to draw attention to the plight of the many more Chechen children killed in the conflicts with Russia. Despite his stated intent, the cold facts were that the Beslan terrorists shot children in their backs as they fled the burning building. Claiming that he believed terrorism could be effective Basayev states, “I figured that the more brutal I could make it, the quicker they’d get the message. I thought it would work.”<sup>27</sup>

Basayev chillingly claims that his group intended to conduct an operation like Beslan in Moscow or St. Petersburg but found that their resources were too limited to pull it off and he promises more attacks like Beslan in the future until the organization’s nationalistic demands for an end of the conflict in Chechnya are met and Russian troops pull out of Chechen territory.<sup>28</sup>

### ***Community Support for Suicide Terrorism***

In contrast to the social climate of Palestinian terrorism where societal support for suicide terrorism sometimes reaches well over fifty percent of the population,<sup>29</sup> in Chechnya there is not currently an atmosphere of strong community support for suicide terrorism either as a politically expedient tactic or as a positive religious expression. Although the population of Chechnya is predominantly Islamic there does not currently exist that which in Palestine is often referred to as a “cult of martyrdom.”<sup>30</sup>

Unlike what commonly occurs in Palestine, in Chechnya there are no public community-wide celebrations that take place after a suicide act, nor are posters or other markers of honor placed in public places proclaiming the terrorists as either national or religious heroes. Although such celebrations may take place in Chechnya away from the Russian forces’ vigilance—in terrorist training grounds for instance, the population on the whole publicly decries acts of terrorism and in particular deplores suicide terrorism. It is possible that this trend could change over time as it did for the Palestinians between the first and second Intifada. Currently there is currently one song popular among young Chechens about Khava Barayeva, the first suicide bomber, and the Dubrovka theater bombers made a pre-event video (aired during the takeover) proclaiming themselves as martyrs for Allah. Likewise Chechen terrorists often film their acts as they are occurring as they did both in the Dubrovka and Beslan takeovers. The target audience for these films, however, appears to be external funders rather than for recruitment purposes inside Chechnya. For instance it was learned in the interviews with close associates of the Casa Blanca bombers<sup>31</sup> that Al Qaeda –type groups used such clips to show recruits in the wider worldwide “jihad” about the “fight for Islam” in Chechnya.

Despite small signs of limited public support, the public as a whole favor peace even at the price of national independence and do not support violence especially that targeted against civilians. Likewise as the terror groups often kill Chechen civilians as well as Russians there is not widespread community support.

That having been said it is clear that the entire Chechen population has been traumatized by eleven years of tumult and violence in Chechnya: two wars as well as the current particularly fearsome counterterrorist “cleansing” operations aimed at civilians suspected of links to or activities with terrorist groups that still take place today.<sup>32</sup> The population of Chechnya has been literally decimated by the recent wars with nearly half the population having been either killed or fled the country as refugees<sup>33</sup>—this demographic crisis echoing the deportations in Stalin’s time. Hence there is congruence between the wider population and the terror groups’ common goal—to bring an end to the conflict—but a sharp divergence on how this goal should be achieved.

On the societal level an ideology offered by terrorists groups that makes some sense of the widespread suffering while harking back to the history of former Islamic heroes is capable to galvanize vulnerable segments of society into action as has been witnessed over the past decade. The organizational ideology that is currently espoused by terrorists groups active in Chechnya, much of it imported from the middle east and similar to that currently espoused by loosely affiliated Al Qaeda groups, is not powerful solely on its own as Russian experts sometimes like to claim. It is only empowered when it finds a home in the minds of people and a society that finds some truth in the statements claimed within the terrorists’ ideology—such as its call to justice, purity, resisting, and fighting evil and corrupting outside influences, and safeguarding the lives of women and children, and so forth.

**Table 7**  
Respondents spontaneous expressions about suicide terror and fate of hostages

Relation to hostages	Respondents relationship to bomber				Total
	Mothers	Sisters, brothers	Cousins, aunts, uncles	Neighbors, friends, teachers	
Pity		3	3	11	17
Accomplished nothing	2	3	4	4	13
Total	2	6	7	15	30

The current societal ambivalence toward terrorism—demonstrating a lack of widespread support for it—while still finding resonance with its general aims was reflected in the interviews as well. In seventeen of the interviews the family member or close associate of the terrorist spontaneously expressed pity for the hostages. Likewise nearly all of the sample spontaneously deplored the tactic, thirteen saying it accomplished nothing, and two family members strongly blamed the terror sponsoring organization for having used the terrorist to further its own goals. Table 7 shows a breakdown of respondents' spontaneous expressions about the fate of hostages and Table 8 their expressions about the terrorists.

Unlike Palestinian samples where it is common for parents to simultaneously express grief and pride in martyred offspring, we did not find one parent who proudly acknowledged son or daughter as a martyr. However, at the same time nearly all of the respondents did not condemn the actions of their family member or former close associates and those few that made critical comments (4/30) were former friends, teachers, and neighbors but not family members. Twenty-six percent (8/30) expressed understanding for the actions of the bombers, sixteen percent (5/30) expressed pity for them, and forty-three percent (13/30) said that they had been used by the terror organization (see Table 8). In giving explanations for the bombers' actions the respondents generally did so with a sense of deep sympathy for both the victims as well as those loved ones who in their perception had been driven by current circumstances to terror groups. They offered rational explanations of how

**Table 8**  
Respondents expressions of empathy or criticism of the suicide bombers

Relation to suicide terrorists	Respondents relationship to bomber				Total
	Mothers	Sisters, brothers	Cousins, aunts, uncles	Neighbors, friends, teachers	
Pity for them			1	4	5
Understanding for their Actions	1	3	2	2	8
Used by the Terror Groups	1	3	4	5	13
Critical of Them				4	4
Total	2	6	7	15	30

the suicide terrorists' actions had been motivated, pointing out in *all* cases deep personal traumatization, feelings of hopelessness and loss at the hands of the Russians.

For example, a close friend (since childhood) of one of the female bombers said about the Dubrovka theater terrorists, "I would not like to judge them. As it is told (in Scriptures), do not judge and you will not be judged. I feel pity for them. All of them were killed. And for the hostages it is a pity too, they are not guilty in anything. It seems to me, they did not need to do it. What has it changed? Nothing has changed in Chechnya. Who have they helped? No one. They only have done a lot of harm to their relatives. My friend's family (of one of the Dubrovka bombers) was compelled to leave their village (for fear of retaliation from Russians). They left for somewhere where nobody knows them." (2)

### ***Individual Motivations***

Although the organizational motives and societal influence are of great importance, there is an equally important level of motivation to be considered—that of the individual.<sup>34</sup> Assuming that no one is born a suicide bomber, this research focused on understanding the significant changes that took place over time within the lives of the suicide terrorists studied, looking for those life events and social influences that impacted their transition in identity and action into this type of activity. By reconstructing their lives through interviews with close family members and close associates of the bombers a type of psychological autopsy<sup>35</sup> emerged in which, just like as with normal suicides, the motivations of these suicide bombers became more clear.

The individual motivations of suicide terrorists remain largely unknown and misunderstood without this type of analytical research. The important question is: What combination of community, social, and individual personality factors enable and even propel an individual to take the dramatic step of not only being willing to kill, but to deliberately die in order to kill others? The answer to understanding what mix of factors combined to create this lethal cocktail of becoming both willing to kill and to die doing so, lies in analysis of the community, sociological, familial, economic, nationalistic, religious, personal, and psychological reasons that interact on all levels—individual, societal, and organizational—to motivate an individual to step over a moral line and to become a suicide terrorist.<sup>36</sup> As much as the available data allow the each of these issues will now be discussed in depth in regard to individual, societal, and organizational motives for Chechen suicide terrorism and in comparison to other groups using the same tactic.

### **Political Aspects of Chechen Suicide Terrorism**

Terrorism as a tactic is most often used in undeclared wars and between groups unequal in armed power and like wars it results from a failed political process. The current conflict between Chechnya and Russia has long-established roots dating back to 1858 when Chechen Iman Shamil and his fighters attempted to establish an Islamic state. They were defeated by Russia after decades of bitter and violent resistance. The oppression of Chechens intensified in 1944 when following the end of the Great Patriotic War (as World War II fought on Soviet soil is called), Stalin accused the population of the then Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic of being Nazi collaborators and mass deportations of the entire Chechen nation occurred as a punishment. Certainly some Chechens had welcomed the Germans as potential liberators during World War II (just as some Ukrainians and Belarusians had similarly done so) but this had hardly been a majority action. Thousands died during the

deportations and those who lived were only allowed to return to Chechnya after Stalin's death in 1953. This painful page in history is still vividly alive in the memories of older Chechens and is one reason many Chechens are adamant about never being driven from their country again.

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, Chechnya's newly elected President Dudayev declared independence from Russia and in 1992 Chechnya like many other former Soviet states adopted a constitution defining it as an independent secular state governed by a president and parliament. This development was largely ignored by Moscow where Yeltsin had his own problems to preoccupy him. It was only in 1994 that Russian forces launched an armed attack to crush the Chechen independence movement. An estimated 100,000 persons, many of them civilians, were killed in the 20-month war lasting from 1994 to 1996, which ended in a stunning victory by the Chechen insurgents.

The second war in Chechnya beginning in 1999 followed a period of anarchy and lawlessness. Shortly before the war, then Chechen President Maskhadov under pressure from Islamists declared that Shari'ah law would be phased in over three years and rebel leader Basayev led a rebel incursion into neighboring Dagestan to recover former Chechen ethnic territory and to declare a reunited Islamic state. During the same time period a series of bomb attacks occurred in Russia—one in Dagestan targeting military housing, killing civilians and soldiers alike, and two bombings of civilian apartment blocks in Moscow. All were blamed on Chechen rebels although there still remains some controversy over the Moscow bombings.<sup>37</sup>

Putin came to power promising to answer these incitements and to put an end to the conflict in Chechnya. Unfortunately, guerilla warfare continues with Russian forces currently occupying Chechnya. An average of six Russian soldiers and/or policeman are killed there each day.<sup>38</sup> Likewise, widespread corruption in Russian military, security, and police forces active there has led to large networks of criminal activity and many human rights violations are currently carried out on both sides of the conflict.

The population on the whole is tired of war, and disgust with terror tactics and human rights violations occurring on both sides of the conflict is often heard. As one respondent, the brother of a male terrorist states, "Certainly, I feel a pity for the hostages; they are not guilty in anything. But many civil Chechens were killed too. Our brothers and sisters did not have any other way. The government and army do not understand any other language, except for the language of force." (1)<sup>39</sup>

The terrorism-sponsoring organizations in Chechnya are clearly nationalistic and independence-oriented in their outlook but as foreign funding flowed into the country during the 1990s rewarding those who adopted the militant Wahabbist ideology, these groups have become increasingly religiously oriented as well.

Although individual motives are difficult to separate out from societal and organizational influences, it does not appear that politics alone in this conflict is enough to motivate volunteers and recruits at the individual level to take the ultimate step to become suicide terrorists. Rather it was found that the experience of individual traumatization is used by terror-sponsoring organizations to politically sensitize individuals and move them into the path of fighting for a political cause that the organization espouses, while avenging their loss and fighting for "the cause," builds within them the hope of achieving some modicum of social justice through terrorism. Whereas these are ideological issues on the organizational level, the individuals involved as suicide terrorists—as will be discussed further on—appear less driven by the wider political realities as by individual personal traumatization and bereavement during the conflicts as well as by the lack of viable alternatives for voicing and enacting their hoped for goals. While clearly the sponsoring organizations motives are



political, the political statements of the individuals involved in terrorism appears less of a driving force for their participation than as a means of justifying their actions.

Many young men likewise find that although the politics of nationalism and war do not necessarily motivate them to become terrorists per se they also cannot escape the political forces surrounding them. For instance young men growing up in Chechnya over the last decade find that as they move out of adolescence into young adulthood they are increasingly perceived by Russian forces as a threat. Thus they are seen as potential enemy fighters whether or not they are. Frequently persecuted by Russian forces they are often driven into exile outside of the republic or into running away to fight with rebel forces out of fear, the only alternative being to wait helplessly for their possible kidnap and torture—an event that happens far too often in Chechnya.

### **Religious Aspects of Chechen Suicide Terrorism**

Throughout the world religious rhetoric is often used for political gain and Islam like any other religion can be used as an instrument for political and military mobilization.<sup>40</sup> There is nothing new about the use of religion as a rallying cry in behalf of revolution and pursuit of social justice. In 1858 Chechen leader Iman Shamil and his fighters also attempted to establish an Islamic state when then as now, Islam was used as a rallying force—a call to solidarity against those seen as outsiders and oppressors.

The more recent nationalist independence movement in Chechnya was not initially religiously based. In 1992 Chechnya adopted a constitution defining it as an independent secular state governed by a president and parliament. Four years later, however, Chechnya's first elected president, Dudayev, complained bitterly that, "Russia . . . has forced us to take the Islamic path."<sup>41</sup> He said this in response to the failure of both sides to find a suitable end to the war of independence. Dudayev was killed not long after by a Russian missile attack (in 1996) and succeeded by Chechen leaders who succumbed during the continuing struggle for independence to increasing pressure and funding from religiously based foreign sponsors. In 1999 Chechen President Maskhadov bowing to such pressure declared Shariah law to be phased in over three years and rebel leader Basayev funded by foreign Islamists money led a rebel incursion into neighboring Dagestan to recover former Chechen ethnic territory and to declare a reunited Islamic state.

### ***Foreign Influences—Imported Ideologies Promoting Islamists' Militant Goals***

Foreign money flooded into Chechnya during the 1990's complicating local politics and religious matters as Chechens undertook their fight for independence. During this time many new religious publications circulated within Chechnya, the most distinguished being an extremely well written and widely circulated book entitled *One God* that promoted the Salafite version of Islam (similar to that espoused by Al Qaeda-affiliated groups) that became known in Russia as Wahhabism. It took issue with many long-standing indigenous Muslim practices and claimed that Wahhabism was the only true form of Islam. Many Wahhabist mosques and schools were opened in Grozny and over time numerous rural regions became dominated by non-indigenous Wahhabi influences that instituted non-local practices of covering women and Shariah law. Financial rewards in these regions were often used to bind Muslim clerics and their constituents to adhering to this newly imported politicized version of Islam. Likewise, madrassas (religious schools) for children were opened in the capital Grozny and elsewhere and children of fathers killed in war

were specially targeted for recruitment. Unbeknownst to their families these schools and mosques promoted radical Islamic values very unlike those of the indigenous population and encouraged the children onto a militant jihadi path—to fight for national and religious independence and indeed worldwide jihad using terrorism as a method.

During the second half of the 1990s and to the present foreign fighters (mostly Arab) numbering in the hundreds, many experienced in the defeat of the former U.S.S.R. in Afghanistan came to Chechnya bringing funds, terrorist tactics—including suicide terrorism—and the ideology of international jihad.<sup>42</sup> The most prominent of these imported fighters was Jordanian-born warlord Khattab who participated in the Chechen incursion into Dagestan.

The politics and practices of many rebel camps during the 1990s transitioned from a major emphasis on nationalistic aims into terrorist bases with a more international religious agenda similar to those operating in Afghanistan during the Taliban regime. Large sums of foreign money (estimates range from hundreds of thousand to millions of dollars) were used to fund recruitment, weapons, and training to buy off corrupt Russian forces.<sup>43</sup> This money flowed alongside the widespread promotion of a non-indigenous form of politicized militant Islam. The two combined have been used to agitate over the past decade for an ideological view promoting the worldwide union of Muslim people and support for jihad against Western-based Christian oppressors.

### ***Ideological Resonance Within a Traumatized Society***

This foreign-based, religiously cloaked political ideology over time resonated well with the oppression of many Chechen victims of war and has overtaken to a considerable degree the political discourse between until recently still active (as a rebel) deposed President Mashkadov (who was killed in Spring 2005), rebel leader Basayev, and other rebel leaders in their discourse between themselves within Chechnya and to the outer world, including with Moscow. Thus the 1992 secular declaration of independence and subsequent wars that were at first solely nationalistically based have become ever more ensconced during the 1990s until the present, in radical religious militant ideology.

### ***The Politics of Counter terrorism***

Likewise, since 9/11 Moscow-based politicians have been adept in using the Islamist threat; the international “War on Terrorism”; the ideology of worldwide jihad; the fact of foreign money, fighters and ideology flowing in from Arabic states and claims of external influence to justify many of its political decisions, actions, and failures in regard to Chechnya. Religious ideology has overtaken the conflict. For instance, the Putin administration in 2000 said that it is time that everyone realized clearly that it is not only Basayev and Khattab that Russia is fighting in Chechnya, implying that the conflict was no longer inside only the borders of the Russian federation but involved outside players as well.<sup>44</sup>

### ***Increased Religiosity as an Indicator of Taking the Terrorist Path***

Thus, it is no surprise that in the sample the terrorists and respondents who reported about them also spoke in political terms that were heavily cloaked in religion in regard to the terrorists’ motivations. They often spoke about significantly changed religious beliefs as an

indicator of their loved ones having taken the first step in the terrorist's path, these beliefs functioning as a psychological mediator that helped the would-be bombers to overcome their fears of death and instill beliefs of hope in what comes after death. These beliefs thus provided them with the courage to move forward and ultimately to carry out acts of "martyrdom" on behalf of the terrorist cause.

For instance, a teacher speaking of her student who drove a truck bomb into a Russian military establishment inside Chechnya recalls that "She was one of first who dressed hidjab, its means that she was one of the first to accept the Wahhabit belief"(5). This student, as will be discussed further on, was drawn into a radical Mosque promoting the militant jihad shortly after her father was killed in war.

### ***Embracing Martyrdom***

Another respondent tells about the interaction she had with her close friend before her friend left for the Moscow theater. Her friend explained that she was leaving Moscow but covered the truth of her mission by making up a story about going to buy products to sell in Chechnya on her return. The respondent was delighted for the opportunity to purchase something and tried to press her friend with money to buy boots. The friend refused in confusion saying she would only later on her return to Chechnya accept the money. Two weeks later on learning of her friend's actual activities in Moscow the respondent picked up a book her friend had left behind. A note from her fluttered out onto the floor. In it the terrorist apologized explaining,

I could not tell you the truth. And I could not take money from you because I could not go to paradise with unpaid debts. I know that many people will not understand us, and will make accusations. But I believe, that you will understand all. Do not trust anything that will be said about us. They will say that we bargained and demanded dollars and a plane in exchange for the hostages. It's not the truth. We go on jihad. We know that all of us will die. We are ready for it. We will not bargain and we will stand to the end. Forgive me if there is anything I have done to hurt you. I do not say goodbye. I know that we shall meet in heaven. Comfort my mother. She will suffer very much, she never understood me. Tell her that I myself wanted it. I am happy that I have deserved jihad. (7)

This woman clearly knew that she was going to her death and embraced it as religious duty, believing that she was giving her life to a good cause and through her death would move on to a more rewarding afterlife. Her beliefs dictated that she left no debts behind and made amends for any wrongs she had done before going to her death, which she did.

The use of religious ideology as a means to move a suicide terrorist down the path to considering taking one's own life is common in terror groups that draw on Islamic-based ideologies that promote martyrdom. The individuals are emboldened by their beliefs to face death and told that to sacrifice themselves is a great honor and that death is only a doorway to rewards in a much better afterlife. The interaction between religious ideology promoting martyrdom with individuals suffering from posttraumatic stress will be discussed in detail further on.<sup>45</sup>

### ***The Brotherhood or Fictive Kin Created by Religious Communities***

Another respondent refers to the “brotherhood,” or fictive kin affiliations that develop between those who share ideological and religious beliefs saying, “The brothers invited him to go to Moscow with them. He agreed.” When asked if these were literally his brothers the respondent clarifies, “No, they were his friends, they are Muslim brothers” (1). This sense of “fictive kin” is also commonly created in terror groups that make use of Islamic-based ideologies building on common religious practices of considering a worldwide “brotherhood” of believers. This practice is in fact common to nearly all terror groups—even those that have no relationship to religion—in that they often try to instill a sense of familial ties in order to generate a sense of loyalty and willingness to die for one another just as blood relatives often are willing to do.<sup>46</sup> It is simply easier to instill among those that share a faith (such as Islam or Christianity) that already encourages this sense of relatedness within its belief structure.

### ***Seeking Comfort and Answers***

Many of the respondents recall that the terrorist changed dramatically first in response to the traumatic death of a loved one followed by their seeking out of their own accord a radical religious organization. In these cases it appeared that the individual was distraught following a traumatic loss and felt an overwhelming need for answers, comfort, substitute family ties, and the promise and means that were offered to him in these organizations to work toward enacting social justice (from their point of view)—albeit not through normally recognized channels—but by becoming terrorists.

For instance, one respondent tells about her cousin who went to the Moscow theater: “I think that she did this because of the death her brother. She said after his death that retribution will occur, that evil should be punished. Then some months after his death we sat at her home and looked at family photos. Looking at a photo of her brother she told me, “It is a dirty world in which evil reigns—that it is difficult to live in this world, remaining pure. Therefore my brother has left this world.” She told me that she frequently sees her brother in her dreams and that each time he calls her to him in paradise. But she felt that she has still not yet done anything to deserve paradise” (3).

This longing to reunite with a dead loved one, even if it means dying to do so and feeling that a loved one visits in vivid dreams or daydreams is actually a frequent attribute of traumatic bereavement and can be very confusing for the traumatized individual, making him or her much more susceptible to suicide during the unresolved grief period.

### ***Glorifying Death by Martyrdom***

Another subject described the changes that took place in her brother following the death of their mother in front of his eyes during the bombing in the second war:

Yes, he changed very much. He began to go to the mosque that was opened near our house after the first war. He studied about how to pray and told to us to pray as well. He brought some religious books from the mosque. He began to dress as a Muslim: he grew his hair long and grew a beard. Our father did not like all this very much. He tried to dissuade our brother but it was impossible. When the second war began in 1999 we were going to leave Grozny but our brother refused to go with us. He said that he would stay in the city that was to

be at war. In 2000 when the Russian armies came to Grozny, my brother and the other fighters have been compelled to disappear. During the last three years we lived in constant fear and stress. We were afraid that he would be arrested. We asked him to go abroad as many others did. But he refused. He said that he wasn't afraid of anything and of anyone except for Allah. He said, that he has followed the road of jihad and will not leave it. He told us that to die in jihad is the top happiness and it should be deserved. (1)

This view of death by martyrdom as the highest honor pervaded all of the interviews. The respondents nearly all had heard from their family members that to die is not the worst outcome because it was death by martyrdom in the cause of jihad. This appeared to be not only a comfort to the terrorists before they left on their missions but also to those they left behind. One respondent for example explains about her brother, "He was not killed, he became happy" (1). She clarifies that he did not tell the family exactly what he was leaving to do but made it clear that he was leaving to become a martyr. She states, "He did not say goodbye to us, but he did not tell us that he will return. He told us instead that we shall meet him in the best place—in paradise" (1).

Similarly, one of the young men who went to Moscow came home to his family before leaving. His sister recalls,

He sat down next to Mama and hugged her. Mama began to cry. He never did this before. He told us that he couldn't come home again to see us. He apologized before Mama and me for the pain he gave to us. Mama was very afraid and asked what he is preparing to do. But he answered that he speaks just in case. He left, and we cried and thought about what he has told us. Mama said that probably they want to take Grozny and the war will begin again. But I answered that in this case he would have warned us to leave the city. The terrorist act then occurred in Moscow and we did not depart from the TV. We understood at once that he was there. But we did not see him on the TV. In some days one of our relatives came to us and said that we should leave for the village. He told us that my brother was killed in "Nord Ost", and someone can come to us for interrogation. What we have survived only those people can understand who survive such. Within the month Mama turned completely grey. (8)

The hostages in Dubrovka house also reported this mentality conveyed to them from the suicide terrorists, one saying, "He told us, The most important thing for me is to die a martyr. He said, 'I feel that I am a martyr.'" <sup>47</sup> Another hostage recalled, "When I understood that they are suicidal, I understood they will die and we will die with them. They announced it, they said that we will all die together."<sup>48</sup>

### ***Significant Behavioral and Identity Changes After Adopting a Militant Jihadist Ideology***

Deep changes in the personalities of the terrorists were observed by the respondents who stated that in most cases the change originated with a personal trauma—the killing, torture, or wounding of a loved one—followed by committing to the religiously oriented terrorist group. In most cases the changes indicating commitment to the terror group were outward at

first—dressing and acting more conservative and gradually over time followed by speaking to family members and close associates about new beliefs that included the value of giving one's life to jihad, belief in a life following this life, the hope that militant actions in behalf of jihad would somehow make retribution for the loss of the loved one and contribute positively to cleansing an outrageously "dirty" world and promote positive social changes.

Many also expressed feelings of being dirty and undeserving perhaps feeling contaminated by the hopelessly corrupt environment surrounding them and guilt over having survived the death or deep suffering of a loved one and having been unable to prevent it. Survivor guilt is a frequent consequence of traumatic experience. Religious ideologies that promote a sense of cleansing can appeal to the need to overcome these feelings of being contaminated, dirty and guilty for surviving in a conflict torn and violent situation.

A respondent speaks about her neighbor who married a Wahhabi who was later killed by Russians. She changed very much after that and also became Wahhabi. . . . We communicated some after her marriage. Sometimes she came home to her parents and then I saw her. But we did not understand each other as we had earlier. She spoke about the great and endless jihad to which she had devoted herself. I told her that it would be a bad end for her. Every time she answered me that I lack wisdom, that I live in earthly pleasures, but that it is necessary to think about the soul" (2). This woman goes on to say, "I learned about the terrorist attack (the Dubrovka takeover) from the TV news. Two weeks before it she came to me and asked me to sew "hidjab" (special Muslim coverings) for twenty women. She asked me to sew these clothes quickly and without trying them on in sizes that she would name. At that time I had many orders, and I told her she would need to wait for some days. But she did not agree and told me that she will look for another seamstress. When they have taken the theatre and I have seen them in black Muslim clothes, I understood, for what purpose my neighbor wanted me to sew those clothes" (2).

Another respondent whose brother also went to the Moscow theater answers if her brother changed much after he left home to join the terrorists as a fighter. She explains, "No, not in the beginning. But after he has done some fighting he matured quickly, he began to look much older than his age. He grew a beard and long hair. He told me that I should wear the hidjab and should pray" She followed his religious move away from previous family values to the Wahhabi practices but explains that her mother became anxious (because it was dangerous to identify oneself outwardly as a Wahhabit). "I learned to pray at that time. (But) when I wore the hidjab, Mama was frightened, and asked me to take it off. She was afraid, that others would talk about me, and label me a wahhabit (a terrorist), as my brother" This woman was in a psychological transition at that time of the interview. She had and continues to distance herself from previous family values in response to traumatization and her present circumstances and is in the process of embracing a new ideology in support of jihad. As will be discussed in a further section she was considering becoming a suicide terrorist. (8)

### ***Traumatic Loss and Bereavement***

One of the respondents referring to a female bomber in the Moscow theater explained that her friend was greatly troubled by the deaths of her brother and father and had wanted to join her brother as a fighter in the second war, although while he was alive did not care

for the Wahabbis, but later became an adherent to their ways. When asked about potential motivations the respondent pointed to the deaths of her friend's father in the first war and her brother who was killed on a minefield retreating from Grozny during the second war. The respondent explained:

They could not bury him because nothing remained. . . . I think that she became involved (in the terrorist act) because of the death of her father and brother. . . . She was very attached to her brother. Generally she behaved as a boy, played boyish games, she made friends with the boys who were friends of her brother. After the death of their father, when her brother became a fighter, she wanted to go to war too. But her mother did not allow her to do it, saying that it will kill her. Her brother was a wahhabit, and they spoke about it, but she disliked this word very much. . . . (Later) She changed very much, especially after the death of her brother. She became closed. Always she was desperate and decisive, fundamental. At school she always argued with teachers, criticized them. She preferred to be friends of boys. I was the only girl she was a friend with. She said that girls are interested only in details. Before she trusted me in all things, but after she connected with the wahhabits, she became closed, she stopped smiling, stopped having fun. She learned to pray and even fasted for the whole month. (7)

Another respondent explains how her carefree cousin changed,

Yes, certainly, he has changed very much. He was about eighteen years old when the war began. Then he was a very sociable, cheerful young man. His family lived richly. They had cars, a big house. In general, they had all things. During the first war they lost everything. Certainly, he was very strongly affected with the death of his brothers. He came to us frequently, and communicated with me more than with other relatives. He became very embittered and trusted no one. He said that there are a lot of traitors among the fighters. He connected with the wahhabits. That is to say he attached himself to the group of Basayev, who was named the main wahhabit after the first war. He said that Basayev paid large sums of money for safe passage leaving the city (a bribe to Russian troops), but he was betrayed and was sent to the minefield (where many were killed and Basayev lost his lower leg). (6)

### ***Giving Meaning to Suffering***

One aspect of religion is that it gives meaning to suffering. This appeared to operate in many of the cases, this one in particular in which all previous meaningful life dreams had been shattered.

She told that her life has not developed how she dreamed about it in the childhood. She dreamed to become a surgeon but could not study because the war began and all has changed. She dreamed to have a husband and children but it has failed too for her. When I began to console and speak to her that the war

**Table 9**  
Suicide bombers' relationship to militant Wahhabists

Religiosity & relationship to militant Wahhabists	Frequency	Percent
Secular Muslim background—Previous to trauma	28	82
Traditional religious Muslim—Previous to trauma	6	18
Total	34	100
Relationship to Wahhabists by marriage—Previous to trauma	7	18
Sought out Wahhabists following trauma	27	82
Total	34	100

will end and she still can change her life, she answered that it is not necessary for her. She has understood why her life has not developed how she dreamed about it in her childhood and in her youth. She told me that its because she was destined absolutely for another life. She said that her mission was to suffer for others and she has already gotten used to suffering. (4)

### *Transitions to Terrorism*

In the interviews concerning the accomplished suicide terrorists 82 percent (28/34) were secular Muslims prior to their experiences of trauma. Of these 27 had no prior relationship to fundamental militant groups but sought out the militant Wahhabists radical groups in direct reaction to the traumas they had endured knowing full well of the groups' beliefs and terroristic practices. An additional seven of the terrorists had already been fundamentalists (most had married spouses steeped in militant Wahhabi beliefs following the first war) but within this group there was also an effect of strongly increased religiosity in response to personal traumatization—they became deeper adherents to fanatical militant Wahhabi beliefs. (See Table 9)

### **Economic Influences and Employment Status Related to Chechen Suicide Terrorism**

Social alienation, frustrated opportunities, despair, hopelessness and lack of alternative courses of action are often cited as reasons for becoming involved in terrorist activities although these arguments have been disputed by more recent studies.<sup>49</sup> Chechnya like many other conflict-ridden zones is economically depressed. Employment opportunities and pay are severely limited. The most flourishing economic activities are criminal—including illegal trafficking in weapons, drugs, kidnapped persons, and oil. Likewise, rebel fighters presumably paid by funds imported from foreign sources or from funds derived from criminal activities reportedly make between \$100–\$1,000 per month and field commanders make up to \$3,000 per month.<sup>50</sup> A professor in a Chechen university by contrast makes between \$150 to \$200 per month.

The majority of the suicide terrorists in the sample, 88 percent (30/34) were technically classified as unemployed as are many Chechens following the wars; six of these were fighters in rebel camps. It was unknown whether or not these latter were paid for their activities. Four of the sample traded on the market as their means of making a living (see Table 10).



**Table 10**  
Employment status of suicide bombers

Employment status	Frequency	Percent
Unemployed	30	88
Own business	4	12
Total	34	100

Of the four additional interviews of those radicalized individuals considering becoming terrorists only one of these was employed.

Given the huge material losses incurred during the war and high unemployment in Chechnya, it was nearly impossible to find objective measures of how to rate the socioeconomic status of families of the suicide bombers. To come up with some rating the Chechen researcher subjectively rated each bomber's family as poor, middle, good to high based on how she considered their situation from what the respondents reported and could be observed during in home interviews about their housing, income, living standards, and so on in comparison to others living in similar circumstances. Based on these ratings, the economic level of the majority of the suicide bombers' families was middle to good. Only two suicide bombers were from high status and two were from poor conditions (see Table 11).

It was clear from the interviews that the lack of legitimate employment opportunity is definitely a frustration felt by everyone in the sample but not the major impetus to becoming terrorists; however, it can certainly be seen as a creating a vacuum in the lives of young people still in the developmental phase of building their identities and even those a bit older who because of social disruptions have not been able to consolidate or continue building on previously forged identities. Those individuals who because of the stark social realities of their conflict-torn circumstances—blocked educations, thwarted employment opportunities—may be seen as trying to search inside themselves vis-à-vis their culture trying to understand what they can build for themselves in life and what hope exists both for themselves and for their families in the future. When they see nothing but suffering and injustice they can become vulnerable to ideologies and groups that promises them a positive sense of self, albeit even one that curtails their lifespan in favor of a positive identity. Many it seemed saw nothing but despair in the future against a backdrop of the horrors of war in the past and military occupation in the present. As one respondent explained her feelings about her friend who had died in Moscow as a bomber, "I understand and I feel very sorry

**Table 11**  
Socioeconomic status of bombers' families

Socioeconomic status	Frequency	Percent
Poor	2	6
Middle	20	59
Good	10	29
High	2	6
Total	34	100

**Table 12**  
Educational level of suicide bombers

Education level	Frequency	Percent
Completed high school	23	68
Completed college	2	6
Completed university	6	18
Studying at university or college	3	9
Total	34	100

for her. Certainly, I need her. She was very brave. It seems to me, if there were no war, she would have entirely another life and I also.”

### **Educational Level**

Whereas politicians in the West often deplore poverty and illiteracy as root causes of terrorism these factors are also unlikely solely at the root of suicide terrorism. Research shows in fact nearly the opposite. In Palestine suicide terrorists are generally equally or more highly educated and from equal or higher socioeconomic levels than their peers.<sup>51</sup> In this sample the same was true. Of the 34 suicide terrorists 67 percent (23/34) had finished high school, 6 percent (2/34) had finished college, 18 percent (6/34) had finished university, and 9 percent (3/34) were still in college or university at the time of their acts. Of the additional four interviews of those who appear radicalized the same was true—all were equally or better educated than the norm. Of the two youngest, one was still in university and the other in secondary, and the other two had finished high school (see Table 12).

Some authors point out and we would agree from this sample, that it is more likely frustrated aspirations among the higher educated groups that contributes to their higher representation within terrorists groups.<sup>52</sup> Likewise researcher Scott Atran argues that suicide terrorist organizations recruit the more highly educated because they have a proven track record of forgoing present pleasures for future gain. Our view is that foregoing the present for future gain is but a minor feature and the most accurate view in our sample is that the more educated are the most frustrated because they see what can be in their society, they know what they can give to it if it were delivered out of the waste of warfare, and they see how their own lives and educations are wasted in the current stalemate. Like most educated young people in all societies they have a desire to make something of themselves. The fact of being well educated by their community gives them a sense of wanting to pay society back—but they see few options and so much injustice. For many, especially those most sensitized by traumas in their own lives the only positive repaying option seemingly open to them is to become martyrs for their communities.<sup>53</sup>

### **Trauma and Bereavement as Potential Motivators**

As has already been mentioned in previous sections, according to the interviews *all* the suicide terrorists in the sample ( $n = 34$ ) as well as the additional four potential terrorists had experienced deep personal previous traumatization involving the death or near death (by torture) of a close family member and all had witnessed societal wide traumas. This was not true of the two would-be bombers who did not carry out their attacks (these two cases will be

**Table 13**  
Frequency of traumatic events in the lives of suicide bombers

Traumatic events	Frequency	Percent
More than 1 family member killed	16	47
Father or mother killed	5	15
Brother killed	8	23
Husband killed	1	3
Family member disappeared after arrest	3	9
Family member tortured	1	3
Total	34	100

discussed in more detail further on). *All* of the subjects ( $n = 34$ ) had personally witnessed the death and beatings of close family members or experienced torture themselves: for example, one subject witnessed his brother die on a minefield, another woman witnessed her brother and husband beaten and dragged from her home, another young man saw his mother wounded and die in front of him after being wounded by bombs, another saw two Chechens brought bound to the village square with grenades strapped to their legs and exploded by Russians in front of everyone, another had been tortured, two others recovered bodies of close family members and witnessed marks of torture on them (including in one case exploded body parts—grenades had been attached), and one saw his father returned to him after torture, another had been placed against a wall and “shot” having survived because the executioners aimed high. In addition all the subjects had experienced multiple societal traumas including having survived bombings, destruction of their homes and/or neighborhoods, and death and/or torture of others. Table 13 lists the frequency and type of traumatic events experienced by the suicide bombers prior to their actions.

Nearly everyone in Chechnya has had violent death touch close within their circle of family and friends. Traumatic experiences are not at all unusual. Nevertheless, experiences of trauma in this sample appeared to be of the deepest nature—reaching deep into the heart of their homes and often including serious human rights violations. Trauma in this sample appeared to be the strongest catalyst to deep psychological and behavioral changes that ultimately led to the choice of suicide terrorism. Indeed when the authors looked for the primary motivation among the sample of terrorists it was trauma in every case (although this was often combined with a feeling of survivor guilt—which is a common feature of posttraumatic stress disorder) and all those who had persons in their close family circle who had been killed and/or tortured expressed as well as traumatic responses, a deeply felt wish to avenge their deaths:

### *Psychological and Behavioral Transformation Following Traumas*

The sister of a suicide bomber acting in Chechnya recalls the events that led rather quickly to her sister’s transformation:

We were twins. She was married the year before to a man from our village. Approximately a month after their wedding our brother went to visit them. When he was getting ready to leave my sister asked him to remain because of the curfew—its forbidden to go out after six o’clock and he would not have

time to get home. So he agreed to spend the night there. At night the Russians carried out a spot-check and came to them. The spot-check was headed by the chief of the military commandant's office. The soldiers beat and bound the husband of my sister and our brother and took them away. The next morning our relatives searched for them in the commandant's offices and the filtration points (holding camps) but everywhere they were told that they there are not present. In two weeks their corpses were found on the outskirts of the village. There were many marks of tortures on them. After three months my sister tied explosives to herself and went to this commandant's office. She told the guards that she had very important information for the chief and they allowed her to pass. She approached the chief of the commandant's office and exploded herself there together with him. Both of them were killed along with some of his guards.

The surviving sister explains her surprise at these actions but gives this explanation: "She loved her husband very much. They have lived together only about one month. And she accused herself that she had asked our brother to spend the night. She spoke about it at his funeral" Neither of the killed men had been rebel fighters or fugitives from the law according to the sister: "My brother was not at war. My brother-in-law was also not at war, but he was connected with the wahhabits. . . . She knew that he was very religious, but she was ready to make all things for him. She changed after she began to communicate with him. We tried for her to dress fashionably always but after she began to meet with him she began to wear the hidjab. She advised me to take it also but I didn't want to."

Whereas the sister understood her twin's painful act of revenge, the mother focuses angrily on the organizational versus individual motives and her view that her daughter was used by the terrorists, "She is not guilty. She could not make it. This is a sin. She fell under the influence of the wahhabits. They gave her the explosives and have advised her to do it so. She never would do it." Quite rightly she asks, "Where would she find the explosives, how could she know what to do with it, how to make herself into a bomb? She was only seventeen years old."

Nevertheless, the mother goes on to lament the same traumas that motivated her daughter on the individual level to become an instrument for the terrorist group, "I had twelve children: five sons and seven daughters. Now I have nine children. The elder son was killed during the first war. He went by car and came under the bombardment. My other son was killed after he visited his sister. And because of it now my daughter is dead." She speaks of how the traumas in their lives pass like a painful thread throughout the family. "We are afraid to live in the village now. I have sent two sons to Europe; there is only a younger son here. The father of these children after the death of our daughter feels terrible. He cries every day and cannot believe that she did it. And my teeth began to drop out one by one. All my body hurts. I cannot sleep at night. All the time I think of my daughter" (9).

Similarly the sister of a young man who went to the Moscow theater siege recalls how her brother reacted to their mother dying in front them during days of bombing at the beginning of the first war:

In 1995 we stayed in Grozny. For a long time we were in a cellar under bombardments. We did not have the money or transport to leave the city. Once my mother left the cellar to take some water for us. At this moment airplanes arrived flying overhead and started to bomb. Mama was injured. We could not

do anything to save her. She was lying in the cellar for four days and then she was dead. They bombed continuously in those days. We could not even bury her properly. During calm we dug a shallow grave for her in the courtyard. My brother survived her loss very heavily. He begun to seclude himself and stopped associating with us. After the first war our father remarried. It was a shock for us. (1)

In 79 percent of the cases (27/34) the traumas proceeded joining a religious group that advocated terrorism. It is not clear if the desire to join the group was for comfort, belonging, religious solace, search for meaning in a world where all normal expectations and world assumptions had been shattered or if the person solely sought out the group hoping to become a terrorist and to avenge the death of loved ones. It appeared that it was more likely a combination of the former than the latter as the transitions were slow, with the religious ideology being adopted first followed by behavioral changes evidencing inner changes and only over time the militant jihadist mentality was adopted with behaviors of a religious warrior in evidence.

A respondent tells about his cousin age 22 who went to the Moscow theater siege. His father and elder brother had been killed in the first war in 1995. The cousin relates that their deaths,

Affected him very strongly. He was an adolescent (fifteen years old) when his father and brother were killed. He became closed and gloomy. He said that he should avenge them, that he hates Russians those who have killed them. All his interests became reduced only to the weapon, war and revenge. Then he began to be interested in religion though before he had not skills to pray even. He started to read the wahhabists' books that he took from his uncle. He changed externally, grew long hair and a beard. Then he has goneto "Jamaat" (the brotherhood of wahhabists) to Khattab (a Jordanian born rebel leader in the terrorists' camps).

The boy went there when he was sixteen and joined his uncle who had become a wahhabist after the first war. The cousin continues:

His mother was afraid very much of these change that occurred in him so quickly. But she had no longer any influence over him. She asked me to talk with him because I had good relations with him. When I tried to talk with him about his new beliefs he told me that if I will criticize him he would quarrel with me. In general, the conversation failed.

The cousin recalls that the uncle had filled in to become the father figure for this boy:

After the father's death this uncle was the biggest authority for my cousin. My cousin did not participate in the first war; he was still small then. But in 1997 he was invited to join the group where our uncle was included. He passed training in the base of Khattab. In the second war he remained in Grozny to be at war. After he went into hiding because he was listed as fugitive.

When asked how this cousin viewed his relative's act, he answers with a sadness reflecting his cousins traumatization and grief: "I understand him and I do not condemn him. It had

to happen. He told me that he dreams to die in jihad and that life is a burden, that happiness can be only in paradise” (12).

Another respondent speaks about the transition of a family that produced one of the terrorists in the Dubrovka Theater. She begins, “It was a usual family. They lived quite safely, but during the first war they have lost all things. Their house was completely destroyed during the bombardments. Her brother took up arms after his friend was killed. Then he was killed too.” This brother was killed in a manner that unfortunately is not completely out of the norm in Chechnya. The cousin tells about how the Russians caught him and what happened:

In 2001 he was seized and placed in filtration camp. All our relatives searched for him. All our relatives collected money (to ransom him from the camp) but they have not released him. After some days he was found, killed. They had adhered an explosive to his legs and have exploded him.” Our respondent describes the psychological transition that occurred in her cousin over time. “Before the war she was the normal usual girl. She loved details and beautiful hair-dos. Two or three times we were together at weddings of relatives. There she had fun with all her heart, always there were boyfriends near her. She changed immensely after the loss of her brother. She lost a lot of weight, and almost did not go out anywhere after it. She stopped paying attention to her appearance and began to dress as old woman putting on the big scarf. She became very religious. Earlier she absolutely did know how to pray, and after it began to pray all the time. She flatly refused those who were interested to marry her and she stopped contacts with former boyfriends. But she continued to communicate with the former friends of her brother that had been killed. (3)

Later, this respondent explains:

Somewhere in the middle of October she has announced that she wants to go to Moscow. She has said that she is going to be married and she needs to buy clothes for her dowry. Her parents are very strict, and they did not want to let her go. But then they agreed because it’s much cheaper to buy clothes in Moscow than in Grozny. And she told us that she will go to Moscow by the weekly bus that the women trading in the market use. She told us that her trip will be five days long and she goes with two girlfriends. It was a surprise for me that she was going to marry. It was strange, because I knew, that she does not meet with anybody at all and she does not pay attention to men. When I said this to her she answered me that she has unexpectedly fallen in love. (3)

### *Traumatic Dissociation*

Clearly the subject discussed earlier was a severe trauma victim and she appears by her cousin’s description to have been in a dissociative state as she anticipated her own suicide action. Over a course of seven years bombs had destroyed her home and her brother had been brutally exploded by the Russians who had apprehended him. She had responded at first by traumatic depression—withdrawing from life and as time went by committing to the only things that made sense to her—keeping contact with those fighting against the

people who had destroyed her family and home. Joining them in a suicide mission she entered a traumatic reenactment—adhering explosives to her own body (as had been done to her brother) and exploding herself. She gave as her excuse for leaving home that she was preparing for marriage but at that time she had likely already entered a dissociative state where she is observed by her cousin who recalls, “I believed her because she really was very much excited in those days, and a shine appeared in her eyes.” The cousin wrongly attributed these features as the result of being in love but understood afterward that it was a strange euphoria. Hostages in the Dubrovka Theater takeover also observed this euphoric or dissociative state in the Moscow bombers. One physician recalled her observations of the terrorists as they first went about their actions of securing the theater and placing the bombs, “There was only one woman with fear in her eyes. The others were in a very strange condition—euphoria. It was very strange looking.”<sup>54</sup>

This observation resonates with stories from Palestinian and Iraqi bombers who have been caught and interviewed after attempting suicide missions or interviewed beforehand by journalists or researchers. They often state that they were euphoric or in a state of bliss after they strapped on the suicide belt and were going toward their targets.<sup>55</sup> This effect has also been observed in an experimental setting with university students who briefly took on the role of a suicide terrorist in a fantasy role-play but who in reality had no intention of ever being suicidal or terrorists, yet when they described strapping on explosives became dissociative in their responses and in their descriptions of inner experience.<sup>56</sup>

The dissociative defense is likely a commonly activated defense perhaps mediated by endorphins (thus commonly described as blissful, euphoric, and peaceful) that is unconsciously activated in an individual that is about to face taking his own life by exploding himself. Likewise it is perhaps more easily activated in trauma victims who are already commonly dissociative in response to reminders of the traumatic event than in ordinary individuals explaining why it may be much less difficult than previously understood for trauma survivors to face taking their own lives in this way.

### ***Posttraumatic Time Distortions, A Sense of a Foreshortened Future and Survival Guilt***

A common feature of posttraumatic stress disorder is to suffer from distortions of time. For the victim, the traumatic past frequently intrudes into the present creating a sense of current threat and the horrors in the past often poison the victim’s view of the future as well.<sup>57</sup> In this regard, trauma victims often have a sense of a foreshortened future that in actuality corresponds to what they have lived through. Thus it is not uncommon to hear a trauma survivor state that he expects to live only a few more years—even when this is an unrealistic claim after he or she is completely removed from the danger and there is no longer any real threat to life. Likewise, guilt over having survived when others did not can contribute to a sense that one’s life is not really one’s own—that it is an undeserved gift—even a burden to bear.

These feelings in combination are a lethal cocktail for an individual exposed to the ideology of suicide terrorism. A trauma victim who really does not expect to live a long life and who feels he does not deserve to have survived when others did not is logically and much more easily than an individual with a normal history able to surrender his life for a cause. The person who believes he has a long life in front of him and that he deserves to live is much less likely to be susceptible to a suicide terrorism ideology. This effect of feeling guilty and not expecting a long life in combination with buying into the ideology

of self-sacrifice and having dissociative tendencies all appeared to be operational in many of the terrorists.<sup>58</sup>

### ***Choosing to Die vs. Being Killed***

The realities of life during war can create in a person the rational conclusion that it is preferable to choose to end one's own life on one's own terms—to give it for a cause—than to have it taken in an unknown manner at an unknown time for nothing. Once a person has decided to fight the enemy, the manner in which one fights is at least in part determined by the symmetry of the battleground. In an asymmetrical battle suicide terrorism is increasingly becoming an evil but rational choice when all other fighting options are similarly suicidal.

For instance, in Palestine there are terrorists who go on raids to kill Israelis with guns, often going to settlements. They rarely intend to return—they are killed while killing as many individuals as they can. It is understandable that these same individuals when facing a much better armed enemy can make the rational decision to exchange one form of warfare—acting as a guerilla soldier turned terrorist who has a slim expectation of living—to embracing suicide terrorism. In both cases he goes into a losing battle expecting to die. In the former he tries to kill as many as possible and sometimes escapes, but more often goes down shooting. It is in effect a “suicide” mission (which these groups often claim is against combatant armed settlers versus civilians). In the latter case if he becomes a suicide bomber—the only real difference is choosing with more certainty when and how to end his life with the knowledge that he is choosing to die and also making whatever damage he can in the enemies morale and territory.<sup>59</sup> This latter role requires that he strap on a bomb and detonate himself—the ultimate difference being only slight for a person who has already committed himself to terror excursions and warfare with a far more powerful and better equipped enemy. In the case of strapping on a bomb he exchanges the slight possibility of living as a fighter who can escape to die another day for the much greater glory that accrues to him for selflessly embracing what is sure to end in his “martyrdom.” Choosing to kill and die as a suicide terrorist can then be argued as a rational choice from the point of view of the frustrated warrior.<sup>60</sup> Of course, actions of warfare transition to terrorism when the “warrior” begins to target civilians rather than armed combatants.

This same thought process is operational in Chechen groups. Choosing to die on one's own terms can be extremely compelling especially for those rebels who have become fugitives of the law. Six of the subjects fell into this category. They had already committed themselves as fighters in the insurgency against the Russians. The Russian security forces knew who they were and were searching for them. For them there was no turning back. Knowing what they faced if caught by the Russians, suicide terrorism was likely a much less terrible and more heroic end from their point of view.

In this vein one respondent said “He did not have any other exit. He fought in the war and because of it became a fugitive. The Russians were searching for him. He did not participate in the first war” (1). Another respondent said “Recently he felt doomed. The Russians were searching for him and he could not spend the night at home. Every time he changed his place of a lodging for the night. He loved his sons very much. He told me that it is very hard for him that he cannot see them all time. I think that he did not see any other exit” (6). Another of the bombers discovered that she had terminal cancer after already becoming a rebel fighter. She too may have favored taking control over how and when she died using her death for the “cause.” Her case is discussed further on.



**Table 14**  
Participation in war

Participation in war	Frequency	Percent
Fighters	6	18
Helpers of fighters	7	21
No participation	21	62
Total	34	100

### *Trauma and Developmental Issues*

The terrorists ranged in age from 15 to 45 at the time they carried out their suicide attack with the mean and median age in this sample being in each case 24 years, with little difference in ages by gender. As is often pointed out when studying suicide terrorism, the cohort that will soon be enacting terrorism are likely already born and it behooves us to consider what types of experiences they encounter during development as it will likely make a difference in what life choices they make. If one considers that Chechnya has been wracked by armed conflicts since 1994 the average person in the sample was around 15 or 16 when the first war began and has had a developmental history shaped almost entirely by the traumatic events of war.

Indeed 39 percent of the sample of suicide bombers had participated in some way in war. Six of eight male suicide bombers that were studied were former fighters and five of them (15%) were fugitives of the law due to their resistance activities. Seven of 26 women had helped the fighters as medical nurses and couriers. Two sisters even learned to shoot and place land mines. Another woman (age 33) was able to shoot and drive a car, thus three of the women were ready as fighters. This latter woman also helped the fighters as a nurse (see Table 14).

### *Loss of Childhood*

It was clear in this sample that many of the subjects had not had the chance to develop normally, that the traumas in their lives had sidetracked healthy development and that the “fictive kin” offered by the brotherhood of believers and the religious aspects of the group ideology in some cases substituted for lost family relationships and filled deficits created in families due to personal and familial traumas. This was the case for one of the young men who went to the Moscow Theater at age nineteen. His cousin gives this explanation:

I think, that all this was because of his father. He was my uncle. During the first war his father didn't leave Grozny. He stayed to guard his home. In 1996 the Russian fighters have taken him away to a filtration camp and held there about a month. All the relatives gathered money and bought (bribed) him out of it. When they brought him home he was in very bad condition. He could not stand or walk himself because he was beaten and tortured with electric current and in other ways. Then my cousin was still a boy. He was thirteen years old, the oldest child of the family. The uncle gradually recovered but he started to drink. Nothing influenced him neither persuasions nor threats. And in those three years between our two wars it was dangerous to drink because the

Sharia tribunal could arrest and beat with him with canes. But all the same he continued to drink more and more. Conflicts have begun because of it in their family. During that time my cousin connected himself with the wahhabites. He spoke to his father that it is a shame for him that his father drinks. He began to compel his sisters to wear the hidjab. He has incited himself against all his family. I tried to talk with him some times. But already he was absolutely another person. He became so embittered. And then he went to “Jamaat” camp.

This boy who was eleven when the first war began and at thirteen had lost his father to drink after he was tortured and he ran away from home at sixteen to join the terrorist camp. His mother tried to pursue him but to no avail as the cousin recalls,

I drove his mother in my car to him in this training camp, but he has not come at all to talk with us. Guards permitted nobody inside. Approximately in two weeks we found out that he went to Dagestan together with the other fighters. The war began after it. We left Grozny and went to relatives in our village. And there wasn't any news about him anymore. His mother went everywhere and sought him or any information about him. One person told us that that he had died in Dagestan, others said that he was still in Grozny in 2000. In short we knew nothing exact but as he did not give any news about himself (for two years) we concluded that he was no longer alive.

The family learned that he was in the Dubrovka Theater from relatives who saw him on television. Afterward the militia interrogated the family. The cousin relates the family's sorrow over his loss:

For me it is a pity that he and others there were killed. He did not know at all any other life, a normal human life. We had time to live before the war. He was still a child when war began in 1994. And such as what happened with his father. I thought then probably it was impossible to bring his father after the “filter camp” home at once—that the children saw. But then nobody had thought about the children. And the uncle continues to drink now too. When he found out what happened with his son he cried without hiding himself. It is hard to understand all this. (10)

Likewise an uncle speaking about his nephew who was twelve when the first war began states, “I don't condemn him. He would be a good person if this war had not been. But he didn't see anything good in this life in order to become a good person. He didn't see anything except the war.” He goes on to blame the terror sponsoring organizations stating, “They couldn't do it themselves without the support of important persons.”

### ***Loss of Strong Role Models***

One of the sample of radicalized individuals; that is, of those radicalized individuals ( $n = 4$ ), who spoke in a manner that convinced that the interviewee was seriously considering becoming a suicide terrorist, was a 15 year, old boy. This boy carried in his passport a picture of Osama bin Laden—an act that in itself is suicidal for someone who frequently must cross Russian checkpoints where his documents are checked. When asked if he was

afraid when the soldiers looked, he answered, "No. Let them look. Bin Laden is a hero. Even America is afraid of him. Let the Russians know, that he will reach to them too." When asked if Chechens are not heroes, he answered, "Of course, they are not heroes. Chechens couldn't win in war with Russians." He went on to tell about his friends who are more than friends, fellow jihadists, "Muslim brothers" of two years standing.

This young boy's disappointment in Chechen men makes sense as he tells his story. He begins with a trauma that he frequently recalls:

I never will forget one event. It was in Zakan-Yurt. We came there in January of 2000. Before we stayed at home in Grozny. We did not want to leave Grozny because we thought that the war would end quickly. But then we didn't have food and we brought water from afar. Therefore we left for the village to our relatives. So every day we gathered with the people in the center of village. Once in the morning Russian soldiers brought two Chechen guys. Their hands were in handcuffs behind their backs and grenades had been taped to their legs. The soldiers exploded them. Their bodies were scattered into pieces. All the people stood and looked, all were afraid to approach them. Only my friend and I came and started to collect their remains. I shouted to these adult men that they should help. But they waited for the soldiers to leave. Then some women came and helped us. Their remains were placed in a mosque so that their relatives could identify and bury them.

He goes on to tell about how he sees Chechen men as failures based on his father's inability to protect their home in the first war and their family in the second. His father became an invalid in the first war. The boy recalls:

It was in the first war. My Daddy drove us to our relatives in a village and returned to Grozny to guard our house. He was shot when he went to take water. Russian soldiers shot at him from a helicopter. He lay for a long time and bled profusely. Nobody came to help him. Then our neighbor saw him there and brought him home. Nobody could transport him to a hospital for a long time because of bombardments. His wounded leg began to decay and then was amputated. It was already afterwards when he was transported to the hospital in Urus-Martan.

In the second war he recalls another event where his father was similarly unable to protect him and his family:

Once still before we have left Grozny Russian soldiers came to us. It was in December, we were fired on from all sides therefore we sat in a cellar. Soldiers accused us that we have stayed in Grozny to help Chechen fighters. They shouted and talked smut. My father told them not to speak so because women and children were in our cellar. They became angry and removed from the cellar my father our neighbor and me. They said that they will shoot us. Mama began to cry and screamed that my Daddy is an invalid; it is not necessary to shoot him because he cannot to participate in war. But they did not listen to her and led us into a courtyard. They ordered to us to stand with our faces to a wall. I closed my eyes and started to pray silently. They shot at this moment. It seemed to me that I have become deaf. Then I thought that I have died.

I thought where is my father and I looked to his side. When I looked to him he looked to me and I understood that we are alive. It was strange that they didn't kill us. They shot above our heads. Maybe they wanted to frighten us.

When asked what is most important to him now, this boy answers, "Jihad. To be killed in war is high happiness, because you will be in paradise." Asked if he is afraid of death he answers, "No, I am not. I already saw the face of death." Then showing the trapped mentality of a victim of war and preference for death over a life of humiliation and pain he states, "I am afraid to be a cripple like my father. But I don't want to die like a victim. I would like to die a worthy and heroic death." Asked if he has any dreams of a future life without war he answers as if he has depression that is imposed from outside—from his circumstances, "No, I don't. While the enemy is in our homeland, I cannot think about it" (14).

### ***Dramatic Changes in Behavior and the Search for Meaning in Reaction to Traumatic Experiences***

It is common in trauma victims to find a sense of shattered assumptions—the common expectation that most people carry within themselves that the world is a safe, predictable and benevolent place and that others act out of good motives is often completely shattered in those who have undergone traumatic experiences.<sup>61</sup> Likewise victims often have a very difficult time integrating their traumatic experiences into their life narrative. Frequently when posttraumatic stress disorder occurs, traumatic memories remain partially or wholly dissociated from conscious recall and the trauma memories intrude in disturbing flashbacks whenever reminders of it occur. The difficulty for a trauma victim is to endure working through integrating the experience into his life narrative so that he no longer has to continue avoiding reminders of it to keep it dissociated. This is often an extremely difficult healing process and involves in the trauma victim a search for new meanings—a desire to find a way to place the traumatic experience within his own life experiences as something acceptable and to orient his future expectations and actions in accordance with how he has attributed meaning to it.

Religion has always and likely always will play an important role in attributing meaning to experiences of suffering and those experiences which involve threat to life and death of both the self and of loved ones. Religious beliefs are often the guiding force to how trauma victims answer the question of "Why me?" when they suffer and they attribute meaning to their traumatic experiences and decide how best to respond. The sample clearly showed this search for meaning and reliance on religion for answers occurring in reaction to traumatic experiences.

### ***The Appeal of the Chechen Terror Ideology to Trauma Survivors***

All of the sample either sought out terror groups or deepened their involvement with them in response to deeply traumatic personal experiences. It is well known in Chechnya that the groups referred to there as Wahhabis are linked with terrorism—in fact, the Russians use this word interchangeable for terrorists. In seeking out these groups the subjects were not necessarily looking to become terrorists but they were at the same time most likely aware that this form of religious expression—an unfortunately distorted fanatical form of Islam—would offer them a balm for suffering in a number of distinct ways. These included:

- Offering substitute family relationships—a sense of “fictive kin” or brotherhood of believers who stood ready to die for each other, especially for those who had lost important family members;
- Teachings about God and the universe that offered them a belief in something greater than themselves and put the suffering they realized they had little control over into a larger cosmic context;
- Training in prayer and religious rituals that may have helped them to calm traumatic re-experiencing states; and that
- Likely reinforced and gave a positive aspect to dissociative trance states that are often a reaction to trauma;
- Thereby offering a method of keeping traumatic experiences from intruding into consciousness;
- Provided an active response versus a passive role in relationship to their traumas (i.e., the chance to be an actor versus a victim);
- Gave them the means to demonize their enemy and generalize their desire for revenge to the entire group, and
- Lastly offered an ideology that gave meaning to their suffering and offered a promise of social justice (albeit distorted as it was to be achieved through terrorism).

In the militant Wahhabi ideology being preached in Chechnya the struggle is portrayed as an age-long cosmic battle between groups of believers and nonbelievers in which the enemy is demonized and true believers must fight for their very survival as a group<sup>62</sup> and on behalf of what is sacred. The battle to defend the true believers and the sacred is deemed as being supported (if not commanded) by God, and because of this extreme measures that otherwise would be prohibited (i.e., terrorism, generalized revenge including targeting civilians of the enemy group, use of women as warriors, use of weapons of mass destruction, etc.) are sanctioned.<sup>63</sup>

One can understand how this type of defensive ideology resonates well with those Chechens who have been severely traumatized both because of their current experience and the history of their nation. In their grandparental generation there is the very real experience of mass deportations of the Chechen nation—an attempt by Stalin to exterminate an entire ethnic group. Likewise during Soviet times Mosques and religious expression was severely repressed. It is only recently in Chechnya that ethnic Islamic roots can be openly celebrated and this advent occurred nearly at the same time as declaring independence and shortly thereafter war broke out. The growth in Islam during the 1990s in Chechnya became deeply confused by the importation of a militant form of Wahhabi/Salafist beliefs that support a terrorist ideology and the fact that these new beliefs were introduced during the same period when the war for independence broke out. The violent conflicts then and now created fertile ground for militant ideologies and once implanted these very easily build on and take advantages of the personality changes that occur within trauma survivors.

### ***Posttraumatic Withdrawal, Social Alienation and the Move to Terrorist Ideologies***

According to the reports of family members and close associates the following changes were observed in the suicide bombers following their traumatic experiences: 94 percent (32/34) evidenced social alienation and isolation; 62 percent (21/34) were depressed; 29 percent (10/34) increased in suspiciousness; 26 percent (9/34) increased in aggression and in fanaticism; 20 percent (7/34) had conflicts in their family; and 8 percent (3/34) expressed guilt for not having done more to save a family member (See Table 15).

**Table 15**  
Posttraumatic behavioral and emotional changes

Posttraumatic changes	Frequency	Percent
Social alienation and isolation	32	94
Depression	21	62
Suspiciousness	10	29
Fanaticism	9	26.5
Aggression	9	26.5
Conflicts	7	21
Guilt	3	9

Probably most important in their move toward terrorism, 94 percent of the sample (32/34) evidenced extreme changes in reaction to their traumatization—usually withdrawing and disconnecting from remaining family members—this type of social alienation and withdrawal being a common attribute of extreme traumatization. Generally being attracted to the Mosques where militant Wahhabi beliefs were being preached followed this withdrawal. As the subject identified himself with this group externally observed changes generally occurred—for instance, adopting the practice of praying regularly and in males of wearing clothes more common to Arabic regions (e.g., rolling the cuffs of their pants, longer shirts), growing a more pronounced beard and longer hair and in women changing to more conservative clothes, using the hidjab and generally covering themselves (all of these evidencing transitions to more Arabic Muslim practices than those that are indigenous to Chechnya). Likewise as militant Wahhabists they generally became more closed and less talkative to those outside their groups.

Most of these subjects spoke to their families and friends about having found a renewed purpose and meaning in life as a result of their new beliefs. Many also distanced themselves from former practices and family members and friends who did not share their beliefs. Generally this distancing from former close associations in favor of the religious group simply amplified the earlier posttraumatic withdrawal and alienation that had occurred in response to shocking and painful experiences. The soon-to-be suicide terrorists spoke of jihad, duties of Islam, a desire to be pure and to gain entry to and the rewards of paradise and encouraged their family members and friends to join them in their new beliefs. Clearly their new religious beliefs provided an important function—help in overcoming shattered life assumptions and grief responses to trauma, torture, death and loss. At the same time it put them all on the road to jihad—a one-way street to ending their own lives Although taking others with them.

## Revenge

Cultures that teach a duty to avenge for the deaths of family members generally do so in a very specified manner—the guilty person who killed a family member is singled out for death versus a generalized response to his entire group and the elders of both groups can often meet to avert the act of revenge. The rules of revenge as practiced in traditional Chechen society are as follows:

1. Murder should be punished with murder;

2. Only males may revenge, females are only allowed to revenge if there are not males in her family and among her relatives;
3. For the murder of a female two males should be killed: the murderer and murderer's family member;
4. The revenge should be directed only to the murderer, not to his family members or close associates;
5. Revenge is not limited in time; it can be realized many years after murder;
6. The revenge can be averted if respected elders intervene to ask the victim's family to forgive the murderer and reach an agreement to stop the revenge;
7. Revenge does not mean that the avenger should kill himself while committing murder.

These culturally stipulated rules fall to the wayside as experiences of trauma mount according to the research of one of the authors. Akhmedova who clinically interviewed 653 individuals all traumatized in some way by the war in Chechnya found that those who had the highest levels of posttraumatic effects from war traumas had undergone a transformation in this regard.<sup>64</sup> They endorsed revenge in 39 percent of the cases and no longer regarded revenge as a duty to find and repay in kind the person who had harmed their family but instead generalized their revenge—to enact harm on the ethnic people from whom the harm had originated (i.e., the Russians military or civilians). With increased traumatization generalized revenge became both sufficient and acceptable. There were also positive correlations between their endorsement for revenge and increasing levels of religiosity, aggression, suspiciousness, and negativism.<sup>65</sup> Thus according to Akhmedova's research the greater the degree of traumatization and resultant PTSD, the more likely the individual was to sanction generalized revenge—that is, to conclude that it was no longer morally imperative to find the guilty party to enact revenge on but that the entire group could be targeted instead. Given this cultural mindset—the more Russian military and police actions wreak trauma on the population of Chechnya the more likely the civilian population of Russia can expect acts of retribution from those who no longer feel they must find the guilty party—any member(s) of the ethnic group can stand in his place.

## **Gender Issues**

In Palestine it is only recently (2002) that women have been active as suicide terrorists; previously they were barred by terror organizations from this role. This change seems to have occurred out of expediency—men were having too much difficulty crossing into the Israeli areas whereas women passed more easily and with less surveillance of what they carried on their bodies. As the need to use women emerged in the Palestinian case, Fatwas in the Arab world were issued affirming and encouraging their involvement.

Similarly, up to recently Al Qaeda-affiliated groups have shied away from using women as suicide bombers although there have been a minority of female suicide bombers active in Iraq. Curiously a group of them were used in a suicide operation on International Women's Day 2005. The PKK (Workers Party of Kurdistan) and LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) by contrast used women as suicide bombers far more often than groups representing primarily Islamic regions (this prior to when the Chechens became active) perhaps due to the fact that they were Marxist and atheist in their ideology.

None of the ambivalence concerning the role of women as suicide terrorists operating in other Islamic-linked terror groups has been present in Chechnya. Women have been active in suicide terrorism from the start (June 2000). Indeed, Ramzan Kadyrov, vice-premier of

**Table 16**  
Frequency of suicide attacks by gender

Gender	Frequency	%	Gender	Frequency	%
Only women	15	55.5	Lone woman	11	40.7
Only men	6	18.5	Lone man	6	18.5
Women and men	7	26.0	Pair of women	4	14.8
Total	28		Pair: woman and man	2	07.5
Involved women	22	81.5	Group: women and men	5	18.5
Involved men	12	43			
Total	28			28	100

the Russian-backed Chechen government recently claimed in an interview to Chechen TV that Chechen women are the most dangerous for national security because they have carried out the most risky operations.<sup>66</sup> Forty-three percent (48/112) of the total of Chechen suicide terrorists to date have been women.<sup>67</sup> Female bombers have without the presence of men carried out 55 percent of all suicide attacks attributed to Chechens and were involved in 81 percent of the total. Men working alone carried out only 18 percent of all suicide attacks. Table 16 shows a breakdown of attacks by the gender of those carrying them out.

### *Motivations of Women*

In all cases of suicide terrorism the involvement of women raises special concern. The general social presumption is that women are less violent than men. Although it is true that in most societies women officially participate less frequently in warfare, they often do participate unofficially and do so in many varied support roles. Likewise the presumption that women generally as a group refrain from violence is a social myth. There is plenty of evidence in every society that collects statistics on child abuse demonstrating that women do act violently, although logically their violence is more often turned against those less powerful than themselves (i.e., their children) who cannot easily retaliate.

Nevertheless it is an interesting question to pose: What social and individual factors would be likely to propel a woman to join men in warfare or terrorist activities and specifically suicide terrorism? The importance of traumatic loss and avenging deaths of family members in Chechen culture likely plays the greatest role in women's decisions to become "martyrs." Although this duty would usually be left to the men of the family, when brothers and fathers are removed from important roles within the family this duty may fall to the women. The desire to avenge the death of a loved one was operational in the sample for both men and women: according to respondents in all 34 cases of suicide bombers (but not counting the 2 would-be bombers who will be discussed further on) the terrorists were avenging the death, torture, or losses of close family members as a primary motivation for acting.

### *Closed Social Roles*

Journalist Barbara Victor<sup>68</sup> argues that among the Palestinian suicide terrorists there is frequently a dirth of social roles for women to fulfill aside from the traditional female role and that suicide terrorism offers a role that women can perform on par with men.



Likewise she argues that in a conservative society if a woman has been dishonored by rape or illegitimate sexual relations she may find the traditional roles of wife and mother closed to her or she may be facing honor killing, this driving her into considering self-sacrifice versus suffering other consequences. Victor argues that a substantial portion of the Palestinian female suicide terrorists that she studied were motivated at least in part to become “martyrs” because they were unable to fulfill the expected social roles allotted to women in their society. They had either fallen into disgrace—were soiled by unsanctioned relationships—rejected by their husbands due to their inability to bear children or frustrated by being forced into conservative social roles. However, Victor’s results may be questioned. Speckhard following in her footsteps interviewed the families of most of these same women in Palestine comprising Victor’s small sample and found very different reasons espoused by their families and claims that generally negated much of what Victor had argued.<sup>69</sup>

Suicide terrorism researcher Mia Bloom also makes a feminist argument stating that among the Tamil Tigers she found closed social roles, rape, infertility, and sexual disgrace as possible reasons for female involvement as suicide bombers and that among conservative Palestinians involvement in terror groups provided a socially approved alternative to sitting cooped up at home with children.<sup>70</sup> Reuven Paz has also argued that among Al Qaeda-affiliated groups conservative Islamic women who are active in chat rooms and forums on the Internet may find the freedom to actively engage with males as peers and to try on more emancipated roles that empower them to be on par with the men—including the role of suicide terrorist.<sup>71</sup>

In the sample, very few women fell into the category of being unable to fulfill traditional roles. Two women were infertile and of these both were divorced, as a result. Nearly half of the sample 16/34 were married, divorced, and/or widowed, and 8 of these 16 had children. Such cases are discussed later; how they do and do not fit such explanations.

One respondent, spoke about a female bomber from her village that was infertile and had been divorced by her husband. Its clear from her recounting that although this potential motivation existed—the need to search for an alternative role to fill—was only a slice of the total picture of her life. The respondent stated:

She told me, that first her two brothers went to war—they were even in the first war. One of them was killed and the other was among the “disappeared”. In the beginning of the first war she helped the fighters, cooked meals, bandaged those who were wounded and nursed them. Over time she learned to use arms and became a full fighter. It was strange; the fighters considered her an equal and respected her. She even drove a car—that is a huge rarity among our women. She carried a pistol on one side and drove an armed car with other fighters. Certainly, she shocked all our villagers and her girlfriend was the same. At first she dressed in camouflage and then began to wear the hidjab. In the village many spoke about her and members of this group—that they are wahhabits. Later her mother died and she left to her funeral. Soon after she also fell ill, a cancer was found in her. She went to Grozny for treatment and lay in hospital there. She had been married previously but was divorced. She told us that she could not have children and consequently her husband had divorced her and married another woman.” (4)

It seemed that given her infertility and loss of the marital role—along with the loss of her brothers—this woman had moved from any expectation of motherhood into another female role of solely supporting the fighters and transitioned over time into taking the “male” role

her brothers had enacted—dressing in ordinary combat clothes, driving trucks, carrying and using arms, laying landmines and doing all the things the men did. Although, over time, she adopted—while carrying out this male role, the traditional female hidjab perhaps a statement that she was still a woman who wished to be honored as such among her community or an imposition from the men—its unclear.

It appeared that the family traumas and losses and the fact of her brothers being active as fighters who were subsequently killed were the main things that had propelled her into the terrorist cause and that the loss of the traditional female role or motherhood simply opened the door for her to take on more fully the traditional man's role of warrior. This woman at first responded like most others to her traumatization and loss with a sense of alienation and removing herself from her former life and then later moved into actively pursuing a means of fighting what had been done to her family. She had multiple motivations for joining the terror organization and as the traditional role was no longer available to her due to infertility and later when she learned she had cancer it likely became easier to embrace fully taking on a warrior role—even moving to taking on the martyr role—as she knew if she did not get killed as a fighter, her cancer was likely going to kill her anyway. It was assumed that being both a trauma survivor and cancer patient she had developed a foreshortened life view. It is likely from her point of view that choosing death by martyrdom gave her an honorable way to die for her community versus simply having it happen to her in the near future.

In those women who were infertile and or divorced this aspect of their lives was only minor in their decision to join a terrorist group although the lack of having a traditional role to fill certainly allowed them the freedom to take on this other role. Although it must be repeated that within the militant Wahhabi terror ideology present in Chechnya being a parent and having children is seen as a plus, not a detriment, to becoming a suicide terrorist. It is considered best that one has fulfilled all social roles including having children before embarking on a suicide mission.

### ***Honor Killing, Honor Suicides***

Certainly there are many cultures where a woman's identity and role is bound up in honor defined in terms of sexual purity. Knowledge within her community of her involuntary experience of rape or molestation, or the voluntary experience of illicit sexual relations can in these cultures often become a force that drives her to take her own life or family members to kill her (so called honor killings, which also occur in Chechen society). When suicide terrorism is being promoted within these cultures as a means of resistance to an occupier this option can open a door to a meaningful and useful death. If committing suicide to regain one's honor is one of the only choices a woman has after being dishonored she can at least die a hero for her community, by choosing an act of "martyrdom" on behalf of the community instead of simply retreating quietly from her shame.

This phenomenon has been reported to occur among the Tamil Tigers where women molested at checkpoints by their enemy later become suicide bombers<sup>72</sup> and Barbara Victor has also reported it in some Palestinians female bombers, although as noted earlier the interviews among the families the authors spoke with of Palestinian female bombers did not support such a conclusion.<sup>73</sup>

Suicide terrorism wrapped up with honor suicide does not, however, appear in the sample. Perhaps this is because in Chechnya there is still not widespread community support for suicide terrorism glorifying it as in Palestine or among the Tamil Tigers, and one would thus not be likely to see this option as a meaningful way to regain one's honor. Hence this community function is less likely to be operating as strongly.

This being said, it is an interesting point to consider that the Russian press often circulates stories that present this view—that the so called cadre of Black Widows are not motivated so much by the traumas of the violent deaths of fathers, sons, or husbands at the hands of the Russians but that these women are enacting suicide after having been kidnapped and raped by their own people. These stories conclude that due to their being dishonored by Chechen terrorists the women are unable to return to their villages and thus acquiesce to coercion by the terrorists to become “shahidas.”<sup>74</sup>

Although it is still possible in rural Chechen culture to find examples of bride kidnapping (when a young man and his group kidnap a young woman from another group for him to marry) this is not widespread and when it does occur it is often a voluntary kidnapping and more of a “show” between families that may have been undecided about the marriage until the kidnapping solidifies it. Even given this longstanding cultural tradition among rural people no evidence was found that female suicide terrorists were kidnapped, raped, or molested or in any other way coerced sexually by their own people. They were as far as we could tell all voluntary participants of the activities they themselves sought out.

Although the need for a dishonored woman to find a suitable role to fulfill and to escape honor killing by self-sacrifice is entirely plausible only one woman was found who might even come near to fitting into this category—a radicalized individual who for a short time seriously considered becoming a bomber. This individual was a young woman living with her father in the refugee tent camps in Ingushetia. She had been the victim of paternal incest following the death of their mother by bombing but nevertheless as a young adult had been allowed to leave home and marry. After some time of being happily married, her father regretted relinquishing her to her husband and made up false complaints about him in order to demand that she return home. His rights as a father allowed him to terminate his daughter’s marriage. The daughter on returning home became once again virtually a prisoner in her home and again came under his unwanted sexual advances. Her in-laws came and tearfully begged for her to return to her husband—he was heartbroken that she had left him—but she had no choice in the matter.

This young woman began to tell her sister about the sexual abuse explaining that it was so intolerable that the only alternative she saw was to escape to the terrorist camps and volunteer for a suicide mission. The sister brought the case to the attention of the psychiatric staff and a rendezvous with the camp psychiatrist (a close colleague of Akhmedova) was arranged during a time when the father was not present. In this meeting the daughter admitted that her situation was so untenable that she had serious plans to run away to volunteer as a suicide terrorist. Fortunately the psychiatrist was able to intervene and prevent this course by bringing together certain camp elders to pressure the father to return his daughter to her husband and to relinquish further claims on her. Likewise it was arranged that the daughter and her husband would be moved to another camp far away from the father so he would find it hard to repeat his claims in the future. This successfully resolved the case and ended the woman’s desire to end her life in suicide terrorism, but it does give an insight into how a person who is in great psychic pain particularly a woman who has few escape options might use becoming a “martyr” as an honorable means out of an untenable situation.

### ***Coercion by Lovers or Family Members***

Another claim of coercion that is sometimes made by Russians is that within families brothers act to coerce or force their sisters into terror activities. In the sample all the women bombers recruited themselves willingly in order to avenge the deaths of loved ones,

however, there is evidence about one sister who was pressured and refused to become a bomber. This family (Ganiev—about whom the authors have many indirect and direct interviews) is in fact a complicated case discussed both here and further on, in which two sisters and a brother actively became involved in terror activities. The brother went to live in Basayev's camp and acted as a conduit for women wishing to become bombers. Two of his sisters enthusiastically embraced rebel activities and self-recruited, becoming bombers in the Dubrovka theater takeover. He also was involved with both Zarema Mujukhoeva (discussed later) and was later convicted for organizing the terror act in Mozdok, Northern Osetia 5 June 2003 in which a young Chechen woman (interview 15) blew herself up as she entered a bus carrying Russian servicemen. He is now in prison.

One of his sisters however, did claim coercion. She was 21 when her elder and younger sisters went to Moscow as terrorists. This sister later went to plead with Russian servicemen for help, claiming that her brother wanted to make her into a suicide terrorist but that she did not want to die. It may be that after successfully launching at least three enthusiastic female bombers and one who did not carry through her mission he turned to this sister and pressured her to take on this role. She refused, ran for help, and is now in a military garrison outside Chechnya. The neighbor who gave the history of this family and who did not support suicide terrorism against civilians claimed that this younger sister was unlike the rest of the siblings—was somewhat stupid, doing poorly in school in comparison to her sisters and brother, who were highly literary.

The neighbor who knew the family well reports about the family dynamics, which were also complicated. The father resisted his two daughters' warrior activities (prior to their becoming bombers) whereas their mother supported them. The neighbor explains, "In their family there were conflicts. Their father tried to resist their activity, and their mother on the contrary, was on the side of daughters, and supported their beliefs." The family conflict turned to violence as the neighbor recalls, "In the summer of 2002, some months before the takeover in Moscow, these two sisters again quarreled with their father who demanded them to end their connections with the militant wahhabites and this dangerous activity. In the evening they waited until their father went to bed, and threw a grenade into his window. Their father remained alive, but received some wounds; he was brought at once to hospital. After that the conflicts stopped in their family because they simply ceased to communicate with their father." In this family all the extremes can be seen: a father who fought to the point of inciting violence from his daughters to keep them from becoming terrorists and his son who tries to push the last living daughter to give her life in vengeance for the others (11).

The second case where coercion was most definitely operative is that of 16-year-old Zarema Inarkaeva, classified as a would-be bomber as this woman never intended to be a suicide bomber and did not even know she was carrying a bomb. Inarkaeva was born illegitimately, fathered by a Russian to a Chechen mother. She grew up in an orphanage and after the first war moved from family to family. As happens frequently with such girls she began to support herself through a series of sexual liaisons, one of which was her last boyfriend who worked in the pro-Russian Chechen police in Grozny. He wanted to revenge his personal enemy—the chief of Zavodskoy district police (ROVD). He asked Zarema to pass a bag into the station for him. When she asked what was in the bag and why he did not pass it, he did not explain his true reason but said that it was needed for his job. He drove her to the ROVD building and instructed her, "Tell them my name and they will let you in, then go to the office of the chief and tell him this bag is for him and leave at once." She went to the building without problem, and when she told her boyfriend's name they did not check her bag although it was large. When she went into the corridor she rested, placing it

on the floor because it was heavy. At that moment her boyfriend exploded the bag with a remote control. Inarkaeva was wounded but not killed. After, for four months she lived in the ROVD building because there was an investigation and she had no place to live and she did not want to return to her former boyfriend. Afterward she left Chechnya.

These three cases, the sister pushed but resisting her brother, the girlfriend tricked into unknowingly carrying a bomb, and the incest victim seriously contemplating becoming a bomber as an honorable way out of an untenable situation are the only cases in the authors experience where evidence was found of blocked roles or coercion of any type in action for women or men to become terrorists, and the only one of the three who carried a bomb because of coercion did it unknowingly.

In the case of the brother who tried to push his sister to follow in the footsteps of two other sisters who enthusiastically became bombers, this case may be reflecting divisions that normally may occur in families caught up in times of conflict about whether or not resistance activities are worth embarking on, although the family also sounds deeply troubled. Certainly it is normal in families in which some members are bent on revenge and in which so many traumas have occurred to try to convince each other that the militant path one has embarked on is the right one and that the others should join in. We find this to be similar to Sageman's reports that terrorists often originate from close friendship and kin groups, linked by family and friendship ties, one following the next into this type of activity. Although, clearly coercion is involved in the aspect of the younger sister. Other than this case, which is blended by enthusiasm on the side of two sisters and horror on the third, there is have no other evidence of active family coercion, despite claims in the Russian press to the contrary.

### ***Russian Press coverage of Black Widows***

The sample showed no basis in reality for the widespread claims made from time to time in the Russian press about Black Widows having been victims of rape and molestation by their own people. Thus it can only be assumed that these stories circulate in the Russian press because there is some factor in Russian society that is seeking to diminish recognition within Russia of the deep motivations that exist among these terrorists—extending even to women to motivate them into suicide terrorism. It appears there is a desire in some Russian circles to discredit the women bombers and deflect their motivations by blaming them not on Russian actions—but on actions occurring within their own communities when in sad fact in all the cases studied the successful (i.e., dead) suicide terrorists have been deeply traumatized, bereaved, and seeking revenge for the violent acts that have been enacted by Russian forces against themselves and their families.

Looking inside the sample the authors did find press reports that wrongly reported on the motivations of the female bombers (clarified shortly). Looking beyond the sample to press reports of all other cases of Chechen female suicide terrorism (i.e., those cases that lack interviews) when checked into there was found no other verifiable reports negating the conclusion that rape, sexual dishonoring, drugging and other coercion of women bombers is simply not operational in this arena. Thus, it is concluded that this is simply a fiction of the Russian press.

The one Chechen female suicide terrorist in the sample who did claim direct coercion, Zarema Mujukhoeva, is in fact the only living apprehended Chechen suicide terrorist. (She was designated along with Zarema Inarkaeva as a would-be rather than actual suicide bomber because she did not fit the profile of an actual willing and committed suicide

bomber.) she is currently serving time for her crime. Her story was prominent in the Russian press and has been used by many experts to make wrongly based conclusions about the motivations of the so-called Black Widows. Mujukhoeva was apprehended in Moscow, July 11, 2003 after placing her bomb-filled rucksack on the street and attempting to run away. Under arrest Mujukhoeva claimed that she was forced to carry the bomb and that a woman named “Black Fatima” followed her at a distance threatening to detonate the bomb if she failed to do so. The fact that Mujukhoeva was able to successfully place her bomb-filled backpack on the street and walk away from it made her claim implausible. If Black Fatima does in fact exist and was following her, why would she not have detonated it at that point if she were able to, when Mujukhoeva would be killed and her evidence with her? Later Mujukhoeva admitted this was a lie anyway as were many other claims she made about how Chechen women are motivated to become bombers.

Interviews in Chechnya with those who knew her reveal that Mujukhoeva was the only suicide terrorist who was thus far found who was not ideologically motivated by personal trauma and who was not as the others were—100 percent committed to her cause. Indeed Mujukhoeva’s motivation for going to the terrorist training camps and volunteering herself as a “shaheeda” was to avoid arrest and potentially to gain monetary recompense, although there is no evidence of any bomber or family of a bomber receiving any money for suicide operations, although at least some resistance fighters on the other hand receive sizeable salaries—in comparison to normal Chechen wages.

Quite unlike the other female bombers, Mujukhoeva was a criminal who had been previously involved in drugs. She had reportedly stolen money and jewelry from her estranged in-laws and was about to be arrested for it. In order to escape she went to recruiter Ganiev who offered her to go to the training camps where she hoped to gain a financial way out. There she trained as a suicide bomber for carrying out the suicide attack of a military bus in Mozdok in 2003, but when she was brought there by Ganiev she refused to carry it out. Interestingly again the facts make clear that coercion is not likely operative because Ganiev either did not or could not force her and found in her place another woman who later carried out the military bus explosion.(15)

Mujukhoeva was later sent to Moscow to enact a different suicide attack. There she backed out of her intent again—if it ever existed—of killing herself but she was unable to flee before being arrested. Unfortunately the detective who tried to defuse her bomb was killed by it. Because she appeared not to have in reality embraced her suicide mission, was clearly motivated by money, and perhaps knew she could escape fulfilling the bomber role and was using her recruiters (to get to Moscow or to escape arrest) as much as they were attempting to use her, she is considered such a huge outlier that she was not included in the data analysis but mentioned here only in fairness.

Thus it should be emphasized that despite the claims of Zarema Mujukhoeva that have been clearly established as false (she admitted to lying) there has not been a single female suicide bomber in all those who have been active in Chechnya about whom there was found any evidence of coercion of any type—sexual disgrace, or any other type of coercion, except for Zarema Inarkaeva who was not designated as a suicide bomber because she unknowingly carried a bomb and was not privy to the plan at all. Of the two women who claimed coercion: Mujukhoeva was lying and did not carry out her act and the sister of Ganiev escaped to the authorities and did not become a bomber. Likewise there was the case discussed earlier in which sexual molestation could have led to the decision to become a bomber but which was identified and remedied beforehand through a psychosocial intervention. Thus there is only one case of actual trickery—Inarkaeva and she was not in any way coerced into agreeing to be a suicide bomber.

### ***Women Compared to Men***

In nearly every way the women's motivations and decision-making processes in the sample appeared very similar to the men's. Unlike what is sometimes claimed about Palestinian and Tamil female bombers, the women in the sample did not appear terribly frustrated or caught in traditional roles nor coerced by having been raped or otherwise sexually dishonored. Indeed during peacetime many nontraditional roles had been open to them—many had been pursuing higher education and professional roles that had been disrupted by war. One woman in the sample for instance was studying history in the university and planned to transfer into law to become a lawyer. Her friend described her as someone who would have taken a very different life course had it been available to her. "She wanted to be a lawyer . . . It seems to me, if there were no war, she would have an absolutely other life and me too" (7).

What seemed most operational for men and women alike was that they found very little satisfying life options available to them and having been traumatically bereaved they had both a desire and a cultural duty to avenge the deaths of family members and were very psychologically vulnerable to the terrorist ideology. Following societal wide and individual experiences of trauma all the sample became newly or more deeply involved in an extreme form of religious ideology that promoted terrorism. This ideology working in combination with their traumatic stress became their entrée to the terrorist path.

### ***Dress and Fundamentalist Roles***

For both men and women an outward sign of having become adherents to the militant Wahhabist ideology is that they take on more conservative forms of Arabic dress. The hidjab for women and other types of conservative dress for both sexes and longer hair and longer beards for men all appeared in Chechnya after the first war with the appearance of the militant Wahhabist ideology. Indigenous Chechen conservative dress is in fact very different than that observed in the Gulf States. Before the war no Chechen women used this type of Muslim dress and historically Chechen women never wore the hidjab. Only elderly women wore (and still do wear) scarves tied around their heads in a traditional babushka manner similar to that of their Russian neighbors.

In some ways this is a very interesting pattern—that before the war Arab conservative dress for young women and being forced into solely traditional roles was not often observed. As citizens of the Soviet Union women were expected to work and nearly all of them did. It is interesting that in the sample it was only when the women had endured many traumas and also had been pushed back from the many professional and life options that had been open to them before the war that they moved in both dress and ideology into fundamentalist roles that did not even exist prior to the war. This dichotomously occurred, however, for many at the same moment of their taking on the more emancipated role of warrior—a role that previously was less open to them. Revenge is a function in Chechen society that is generally reserved for males unless there are no men in the family.

It seems that for both men and women the militant Wahhabist ideology serves as a type of psychological first aid (albeit short-lived). Expressed by changes in life choices and in dress both men and women outwardly make both a political and religious statement about their belief that they are part of a greater struggle between Muslims and their oppressors—in this case oppression by Russians. In both dress and ideology they proclaim militant jihad as a religious and political duty to struggle against this oppression, but that for Chechen

women traumatized by war this ideology offers additional specialized functions that serve their unique needs. These include that it:

- Creates in dress for women a means of drawing strong boundaries of respect and modesty—this occurring at a time when many men are absent in society and Russian forces have free reign in the streets. By adopting this new non-indigenous style of dress the women can be seen as willing to accept and demanding a sense respect for their gender and protection during a time of great danger;
- The group also demands and celebrates women falling back to more conservative female roles something that for many is not really a choice when they find that many work and professional roles previously open to them no longer exist (due to widespread societal upheaval, destruction of the societal infrastructure by war, and high unemployment); while at the same time
- The ideology also allows and encourages women to retain some sense of the feminism previously present in Chechen society but in this case to channel it into embracing violent retaliation against the enemy—to becoming avengers—a role that traditionally was less open to women in Chechnya.

This dynamic of how Chechen women adherents to militant Wahhabism blocked in their life paths by the continued conflicts can simultaneously embrace conservative roles although breaking out into more emancipated ones is illustrated well in the following case.

A neighbor describes the lives of the two Ganiev sisters (ages 22 and 15) who went to Dubrovka house as suicide terrorists. Their family (Chechen by nationality) had moved to Chechnya from Russia before the war and had bought a large house and begun a very successful business in their village. The neighbor recalls, “In comparison with us local girls, these sisters were very emancipated. They went in jeans and sneakers and played football (soccer) with boys. In the beginning all of us were surprised, but then we got used to it. When the war began, their two brothers were civil guardsmen at first, and have then left to be fighters. Then one brother was killed in the war. After the first war these two sisters and brother became the helpers of Basayev. They all became wahhabits. The brother didn’t live at home, but sometimes he came.” The neighbor recalls that these girls began an interesting transition in their female roles to conservative religious dress but at the same time taking on the male role of warriors. “The sisters began to wear the hidjab and they learned shooting in a court yard, in a garden behind their house. There were many weapons in their house. These two sisters even placed land mines in the road and blew up Russian military cars from time to time.”

### ***Leadership***

Although the motivations and the decision making of Chechen men and women suicide terrorists appear to be very similar it should be stated that the leadership of Chechen terror organizations is clearly male dominated. Contrary to Mujkoevha’s false claim of Black Fatima, men are the dominant force in Chechen terror groups. Women who are involved previously to self-recruiting as bombers play subservient roles in the terror organizations, mainly serving in support roles as nurses and cooks, although two were known to have helped place mines. If active with the group before becoming bombers, men have more active roles primarily as fighters. In the group’s hierarchy, men are the planners and decision makers and the women take orders. This does not mean that women are coerced, simply that they do not lead or make the decisions in terms of strategy. This fact was clear in the



**Table 17**  
Age by gender of suicide bombers

	Sample sizen	Minimum age	Maximum age	Mean	Std. Deviation
Females	26	15	38	24.9	6.17
Males	26	17	45	24.4	8.88

Dubrovka house takeover after which many of their hostages made statements about how the women terrorists in the Moscow siege were clearly in a subservient role to the men and lacked authority. This indeed may ultimately have played out in how it ended. When the Russian Special Forces stormed the theater the men left the main hall to fight and the women remained behind with the bombs. Lacking a clear order to detonate they failed to do so before becoming overtaken by the gas.<sup>75</sup>

### **Age, Marital and Familial Status**

#### *Age*

The mean age of the Chechen suicide terrorists was 24, and the age range was 15–45 (standard deviation—6.6) with little difference in age breakdowns by gender. Table 17 shows the breakdowns by age and gender.

#### *Marital and Familial Status*

In the Middle East up until recently, Lebanese and Palestinian terror-sponsoring organizations' practice of accepting candidates for suicide terrorism has been that young unmarried men were favored over those who would leave behind a wife or children—a practice likely instituted to ensure that the organizations were not responsible for a man leaving his impoverished family behind. In Chechnya the practice is the opposite. In the Wahabbist ideology men and women volunteering to be martyrs should have fulfilled their parental role, leaving children behind. Although rather horrific for the surviving children, the fact of close-knit extended families to raise the children left behind makes it less so. In the sample 16 of the 34 terrorists had been married, 9 of these were widowed or divorced. Of those who had been married 50 percent had children. Keeping in mind that some of these had been widowed before becoming parents and two were divorced due to infertility, this figure seems to indicate that as the militant Wahhabist doctrine dictates, having children is not an obstacle but is an enhancement to one's role as a bomber (see Table 18).

Lately other Middle Eastern terror groups have shown a similar pattern perhaps reflecting the same militant Wahhabist ideological view. Many of the foreign suicide bombers active in Iraq—from Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Syria—have also been married and left behind children.

Regarding leaving behind children one respondent speaks about one of the Dubrovka terrorists: "He married in 2001. He has two daughters. His younger daughter was borne after his death. When he went to Moscow [in 2002] his wife was pregnant" She goes on to explain, "The brothers have recommended him to his future wife. They considered that she approached him understanding his way of life. They named her sister. She knew that

**Table 18**  
Marital and familial status of suicide bombers

Marital status	Females	Percent	Males	Percent	Total	Percent
Single	13	50	5	62.5	18	53
Married	3	11.5	2	25	5	15
Divorced	4	15.4	0	0	4	12
Widowed	5	19.2	1	12.5	6	18
Second marriage	1	3.9	0	0	1	3
Total	26	100	8	100	34	100

he will go to the road of jihad and she was ready to help him in all things. He could not make jihad without marriage and children. He said that it's very important" (1).

Another respondent tells about her cousin, "Yes, he married just before the second war. His wife was two years older than him. They had two sons. When he was dead, the elder son was 2 years old, and younger son was only 1 month old. He has named his sons with the names of his killed brothers though all of us asked him not to do so. His mother asked about it, and warned that they would be as they were—unfortunate. But in this he has not obeyed anybody" (6).

Another respondent informs about her neighbor, "She had a daughter about three years old. Now she is in her father's family" (2).

The mindset of the terrorists in these groups is that their actions are honorable involving self-sacrifice (i.e., not suicidal) but that before taking on the role of martyr he or she must fulfill all other role obligations. He must create a family. Although this may simply be an affirmation of religious values that treasure creating a family before all else, a cynical observer could also see this as manipulation by his handlers to create even another generation of suicide bombers.

### Group and Family Dynamics among Bombers

The majority (61 percent) of suicide bombing acts in the sample were carried out by a lone man or woman. Second to this 18 percent of acts involved groups of 3 to 40 persons, 14 percent involved pairs of women, and 7 percent involved a man and woman acting together (these were never romantically involved pairs). Table 19 shows a summary of these details. Often the teams involved family members. Of those attacks where there was family participation the authors list the following (not all of which were involved in the sample):

Two sisters (Ganievs) in the Moscow theatre takeover;

Two sisters (Khadjievs) in the Moscow theatre takeover;

Two sisters (Nogaevs): one of them made a plane bombing in August 2004; another participated in the Beslan school takeover in September 2004;

Father, son, and daughter in December 2002 attacked a governmental complex in Grozny with two cars.

**Table 19**  
Group and family dynamics among suicide bombers

Actors	Number of Acts	Percentage of Total
Lone man or woman	17/28	61
Groups of 3–40 persons	5/28	18
Pairs of women	4/28	14
Pair: man and woman	2/28	7

### Contagion Effect and Suicide Terrorism

Psychological contagion of strong emotions and psychologically driven behaviors among young people is a well-known effect. For instance, in 1999 an outbreak of food poisoning blamed on contaminated Coca Cola in Belgium began a huge recall effort only to have the authorities and manufacturer conclude afterward that it was unlikely that the drink was contaminated but that the 42 young girls who became ill had psychologically “infected” one other with a strongly suggested psychosomatic effect passed among them.<sup>76</sup> Suicidal behavior is also known to have a strong contagion effect especially among young people. Often the suicide of one young person in a high school sets in motion a string of one or more suicides to follow. Indeed, treating clinicians in the West know that the personal risk of suicide is considered increased fourfold if a family member or close associate of an individual has committed suicide in the past year.

This contagion effect of suicidality was present in the present sample as well. Two of those interviewed about a family member or close associate who had become a suicide terrorist admitted that for them it had become an attractive option—they had become similarly radicalized both by exposure to the terrorist ideology through the family member and by strong emotions over his or her suicidal act. In both cases these respondents still had moral or emotional reservations that held them back. Two others respondents spoke about how the suicidal terror act of one family member led to similar suicidal actions and feelings in the self or another family member. Hence in a sample of 34 respondents the contagion effect was found to be high at 12 percent (4/34).

The first of these was the younger sister of a young man who had gone to take over the Moscow theater. Russians had killed their uncle who had returned from Moscow to protect the family in the first war—an event that strongly influenced the brother to run away a year or so later to join Khattab’s terrorist training camp. She as yet had not joined any terror movement but when asked if she would behave similarly, she answered, “I would like to make jihad very much, but I am afraid. I hate this fear, and I want to get rid of it” Then turning the question back on to a psychologist interviewer she asked, “Can you teach me not to be afraid? You are psychologist and may be you know how to make it?” The interviewer naturally tried to dissuade the respondent from this course of action, but the woman was insistent about her motivations for making jihad, stating that her only obstacle was that she could not overcome her fears to do so. She explained, “I cannot look calmly at how these Russians go on our land how they kill our brothers and sisters how they torment them.” When she was asked how her death and killing others would make things better, that it would do nothing she could only answer, “And why should only ours die? Why only we should always suffer?” (8).

Another respondent spoke about her thoughts about becoming a terrorist as well, “My brother was killed too in the last year, he was exploded on a mine. He was only 17 years old. Sometimes I feel such strong hatred to Russians for this war . . . (But) I will never go to kill civilians, who are not guilty in anything. But after the death of my brother I have thoughts about blowing myself up in some checkpoint with some military men. When I pray, I ask Allah to give me reason and patience to not make it.”

Despite her wish to remain peaceful this respondent found herself unable to deaden her feelings of rage against Russian soldiers. She was so traumatized over the loss of her brother and the societal-wide conflict that she found it difficult to carry on in the face of daily humiliations and dangers. It seemed almost as if she held a bomb of sorts inside herself that was waiting to be activated. For her the trigger for it nearly occurred at a crossing a checkpoint on the way out of Chechnya into Ingushetia. She recalls:

In the last checkpoint our bus was stopped by Russian service men. They ordered all of us to leave the bus and to show our passports. We left the bus and the servicemen with their dogs began to check the bus. After checking my passport I departed a little to the side and waited for the check to end. I saw nearby two soldiers drinking, and their automatics lay near them. I don't know how I did it or what for. During that moment there were not any thoughts in my head. I approached them and took their automatic and pointed it at these two soldiers and told them, “Hands up!” They turned pale, absolutely white, and such fear was in their eyes. I don't remember how long I held them under the barrel. Some women from our bus ran up to me and took away the gun away and put it back in its place, and put me into the bus quickly. Then all the people in the bus screamed at me, that I am not a normal person and so on. They were very frightened, but I didn't feel anything. Now I understand that I could have been arrested or killed in that place, but I don't know how I did it.

The respondent was obviously dissociative (separated from her own normal experience of consciousness) when this event occurred and facing what could be seen as a minor humiliation (having to disembark from her bus and wait as the Russian soldiers searched the bus and drank beer) triggered her violent reaction. It is assumed that like all Chechens she knew of and perhaps had witnessed incidences like this where Russian soldiers had done cruel and inhumane things. All Chechens fear the particular checkpoint where she responded so strongly as it has a “pit” into which Chechens are sometimes thrown for many days, their stories usually ending badly.

The respondent was a woman who was enraged over injustice, but prayed to God to stop her from taking violent actions. Yet she succumbed to re-enacting what had been done to her many times. Interestingly her reaction appears nonvolitional. She acted in a trance state taking the soldiers' gun and humiliating them with it. Given her traumatic grief and rage coupled with her posttraumatic dissociative tendencies this respondent seemed to be very vulnerable to falling prey to an ideology—if she were strongly exposed to it—that would tell her that instead of praying to God to help her restrain her traumatic rage, indeed God wants her to take up arms and to kill both her enemies and perhaps herself in doing so.

Another sister of a suicide bomber states that she is uncertain if she would have gone to Moscow had her brother invited her but that their younger brother already has committed to revenge, “Our younger brother (age 13) says that he will avenge our brother's death when he is grown up. Certainly, our sisters survived it very hard, but they are married and their families for them are the main things. For me the main thing is to get to heaven.” She

like many of the other family members of the Dubrovka siege terrorists saw images of her brother on TV footage of the aftermath of the event, in which close-ups were aired of the killed terrorists. She recalls it traumatically, "I have seen him on the TV when they have attacked the theatre. There were terrible days, I could not eat or sleep. Till now I have this image in front of my eyes when on the TV I have seen them killed. I cannot get rid of this image. I cannot forget it. The most awful—we could not bury him" She has now survived the death of two family members she could not properly bury (her mother was killed by bombs in front of both of them, and she viewed her killed brother on the TV although in the case of her brother his death was due to his own actions). When asked if she thinks about normal suicide the respondent answered, "It is a sin to think so, but I have such thoughts often. They have appeared after the death of our mother. Life does not deliver me any pleasure. But I will not kill myself because then I will not get into heaven" (1). In this case we see a clearly religious woman whose response of wanting to die in order to follow after deceased family members, a reaction that is normally observed in traumatic bereavement, is restrained from such action by her beliefs that suicide is a sin. It is not difficult to consider how easily her psychological vulnerability during her time of traumatic bereavement could be manipulated by an ideology that would tell her that to suicide is a sin, but to martyr oneself is to honor God and family.

It is also known that one of the terrorists who went to the Moscow theater, a young man of 22, was deeply influenced by the fate of his uncle who had stepped in as a father figure for him following the death of his father and elder brother who were killed fighting in the first war. This boy at age 16 had gone to join his uncle in the terrorist camps. The uncle died in a manner that may have set the stage for his nephew to follow some years later: "After the first war this uncle became a Wahhabist. He participated in the incursion into Dagestan in 1999. He was very courageous. He was killed in Dagestan in 2001. He was a fugitive there and hid in Dagestan in the house of relatives. Someone denounced him and as a result the Russians surrounded the house where he was hiding and opened fire. He answered their fire, but he was alone in the house and shot back until all his cartridges were expended. Then he exploded himself so that they couldn't take him alive." A year later the nephew followed on a similar suicidal path going to Moscow with explosives knowing he might fight before his death but that he would certainly die, most probably by exploding himself as his uncle had.

### **Dehumanizing Victims and Rationalizations for Killing Civilians**

Because there was little opportunity to speak to the terrorists themselves (they were already dead) and in speaking to potential terrorists the authors focused mostly on their motivations (and dissuading them) there is only minimal data on how the terrorists managed to dehumanize their victims and most of it from observations of them in action. One hostage recalls one of the terrorist telling them, "You are of another faith so according to the Koran we can kill all of you."<sup>77</sup> Likewise the terrorists in Dubrovka house told their hostages that the adolescents they held could be compared to children in Chechnya who are already soldiers.<sup>78</sup> Basayev in a recent interview also drew a similar comparison saying that the children killed in Beslan were only a small percentage of those killed in Chechnya.<sup>79</sup>

In Chechnya it may be less necessary for terrorists groups to dehumanize their victims through their ideology—at least when their targets are Russian military and police—because in many cases these targets have so often by their actions already dehumanized themselves.

**Table 20**  
Government responses following suicide terrorism

Repressions to family members	Frequency	Percent
Destroy house	5	15
Left home	9	26.5
Interrogation	20	59
Total	34	100

These include the mistreatment, torture and killing of civilians, acts that often cross way beyond the pale of human rights violations.

Although Israel is well known for using collective punishment of the community and family members of those involved in suicide terrorism, most notably including house destruction and often targeted assassinations that often kill or wound civilians as well, the Russian government has not adopted such an official policy to date. As far as government responses to the family members of suicide terrorism go the authors learned of the following: arrest and the possibility of mistreatment while in detention, destruction of the terrorist's home, the family fleeing their home out of fear, and interrogations of those who knew the bomber. Table 20 includes a summary of the government responses experienced by family members of the suicide terrorists in the sample.

## Conclusions

By tracking the patterns of Chechen suicide terror events in general and making interviews with those closest to the phenomena of suicide terrorism in Chechnya (close associates and family members of suicide bombers) the authors hoped to begin to understand its development and the motivations for it on the individual, societal, and organization level and from this to make comparisons to other areas of the world where this type of terrorism is also utilized.

Reflecting on what was learned some things are fairly obvious as to their contribution to suicide terrorism in Chechnya. Nationalistic conflicts involving the fight for independence and self governance that involve either the reality or perception of an occupying force can lead to a terror group's strategic decision to make use of a campaign of suicide terrorism: witness Iraqi, Chechen, Palestinian, Lebanese, and Tamil terrorist groups as examples. Ireland, which also relied on terror operations but never used suicide bombing could however serve as a counterexample. Although a key difference may be that in their case both sides shared Christian roots whereas in these other conflicts there was clearer religious and ethnic divides that increased the terror group's ease in dehumanizing and demonizing the enemy.

Researcher Robert Pape makes a similar argument about the primary strategic and political motivations of suicide terrorism from the point of view of the organization. Relying on a comprehensive analysis of his database of all suicide terrorist events from 1980 to 2003 he concludes, "what nearly all suicide terrorist attacks have in common is a specific secular and strategic goal: to compel modern democracies to withdraw military forces from territory that the terrorists consider to be their homeland."<sup>80</sup> We would not necessarily agree that it is specifically democracies that are the target. On the contrary, it is more likely that

the targets are perceived occupiers—democratic or otherwise—and the more repressive, the more abhorrent they are to those being occupied. The absence of rule of law, fair and due process, and of a participatory versus repressive or top-down forms of governance often present during occupations as well as when the more powerful group unfairly treats an ethnic or religious subgroup contributes in our view as well to the use of suicide terrorism.

Groups that see themselves as oppressed and militarily out powered have a limited arsenal of responses and when moving to the use of terror tactics may rationally consider suicide terrorism as their most strategically sound means of striking a much more powerful and repressive foe in order to achieve their freedom. They base this on the clear facts that suicide terrorism is highly lethal, not difficult to deploy nor expensive and often brings clear results in terms of coercing the target group into at least short-term concessions.

Like many groups, Chechen terrorists transitioned into a campaign of suicide terrorism after a lengthy but not fruitful period of engaging in other forms of terrorism. Like most groups they began their suicide terrorism campaign by targeting at first primarily military establishments but as the defenses for these targets became increasingly hardened the terrorists increasingly hit softer targets involving more civilian victims.

Like all terrorists engaging in suicide terrorism Chechen terror ideology demonizes and dehumanizes the enemy and glorifies self-sacrifice. In the case of Chechen suicide terrorism the ideology supporting it is very similar to that espoused by Palestinian groups, Al Qaeda-affiliated groups and other global jihad groups, but the core political goals differ from Al Qaeda groups in that they are nationalistic—bringing an end to what they claim is foreign occupation, to move foreign troops off their territory and to bring freedom to Chechnya and increasingly to claim the right to establish an Islamic state.

Chechen suicide terror sponsoring groups have been adept at using the media to amplify the horrific effects of their suicide attacks on their target audience and to garner increased worldwide attention to their cause. The Chechen terrorists more so than many other groups, have been highly successful in this regard, painstakingly planning and enacting spectacular and emotion-laden attacks. For instance, when they took over the Dubrovka Theater, and held 800 theatergoers hostage they created their own highly emotional drama. In this case they portrayed Chechen female suicide terrorists (i.e., the Black Widows) in black conservative mourning dress with bombs strapped to their bodies—horrifying and riveting worldwide attention and causing the world to ask what conditions in Chechnya could be so awful to motivate women to be willing to die in this manner? While this event captivated worldwide attention and likely created much sympathy for their cause, in his next big move Chechen terrorist leader Basayev overstepped, going too far in the Beslan school takeover. This event garnered much criticism for harming children—even from groups that up to then had been traditionally supportive to the Chechen cause. Especially negative for his cause was when the media showed his group of suicide terrorists shooting children running from the school.

Chechen suicide terrorists like all groups engaging in these acts teeter on a tightrope balancing media attention, both positive and negative, that they bring to their cause, the foreign funding and support it garners or disrupts, and the need to balance between popular support or lack of it and keeping common goals with the group they purport to represent.

Between the organizational and individual motivations for terrorism stands the community. Definitely community support for suicide terrorism is important in fueling it. Without a ready and continued supply of ‘martyrs’ this tactic would fall to the wayside. In Chechnya widespread community support has not yet been seen but over time if the political realities do not change, we may see the same community dynamics and willingness

to sacrifice young people for the group and glorifying their acts as currently occurs in Palestine, that is, the rising up of a “cult of martyrdom.” The most important aspect in determining this outcome is whether or not the Russian government continues to favor repressive counterterrorist measures that terrify and alienate the population who at this time want peace more than anything else. Likewise the Chechen terror groups willingness to kill their own citizens in their terror attacks has alienated many of those who might otherwise support them.

Although popular support for suicide terrorism is not strong at present within Chechnya, Chechen terror groups like Palestinians and increasingly Iraqi groups, do however enjoy strong support within a wider worldwide Muslim population sympathetic to what they see as human rights abuses and oppression of the Chechen population. These groups who are sympathetic to Chechens in general tend to view Chechen terrorists more as freedom fighters than terrorists and see them as deserving financial and other types of support.

Organizationally there are operational functions that must exist for suicide terrorism to be successful—that is, there must be an organizational infrastructure to provide the explosives, transport, funds, plans, false documents and so on when necessary. The terror-promoting organizations also function as a community: offering support for group bonding, identity building, and promoting the ideology that underpins the willingness of an individual to enact suicide terrorism in behalf of his “brothers.” In the case of Chechen terror groups external financing as well as funds derived from criminal activities provides the means for Chechen terror organizations to function. Likewise, widespread corruption in Russian military, police, and security services makes it possible for these groups to bribe their way into continued safe existence and enacting many of their crimes. Unlike Palestinian terror sponsoring groups who compete among themselves for market share and external finances there is little evidence of outbidding as a phenomena in the Chechen choice to use suicide terrorism.

In terms of the individuals involved in Chechen suicide terrorism it was found that Chechens have made much greater use of women from the start of their suicide terrorism campaign than any other Islamic-related terror groups and that they did so with no reservations or need for fatwas to support their decision (although fatwas later followed). Previous to the war Chechen women had enjoyed more freedoms and occupational choices than women within these other groups perhaps lending to their immediate unfettered inclusion as bombers on par with the men. Likewise as more men were killed and missing from their families Chechen women were increasingly freed to take on the culturally assigned role of avenging their deaths.

Chechen suicide terrorists also differ from Palestinian profiles in that they range considerably in age and many are quite a bit older than bombers from other groups. In this regard and also that they are also often married and leave behind young children differs from practices common in Palestinian and Lebanese groups—but is similar to the more recent national and foreign bombers active in Iraq (many from Syria, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia) who may share a more common ideology.

On the individual level, when it comes to Chechen suicide terrorism the personal experiences of extreme trauma and bereavement appear in many cases to be a necessary but not sufficient cause. All of those interviewed had suffered extreme traumatic stress and all but one had witnessed or experienced the traumatic death of a close loved one at the hands of the Russians. Although it is recognized that trauma is ubiquitous among Chechens there is a strong fit between the psychological needs of individuals suffering posttraumatic reactions and the militant ideology promoted by suicide terrorist groups. This sample found overwhelming evidence that the experience of extreme traumas and bereavement within



one's inner circle of family and friends contributed to glaring psychological vulnerabilities to a terrorist ideology promoting martyrdom. These included:

- The reaction of psychic and emotional numbing and dissociation in response to arousal states caused by traumatic recall (i.e., flashbacks) both of which create a psychological ability to dissociate oneself mentally from the fear of death;
- In the extreme case to even enter euphoric states when contemplating taking one's own life as a human bomb;
- Survivor guilt, that is feeling guilty for having lived when others did not, leading to a vulnerability to making amends for this by being willing to die;
- Foreshortened life expectation—making it less difficult to sacrifice a life that one expects to be short anyway;
- Extreme traumatic grief leading to a desire to reunite in death with loved ones gone before;
- Generalized revenge reaction in which normal feelings of wanting to enact revenge upon the person who committed a crime generalized to the entire ethnic group leading to an erosion of viewing civilians of the opposing group as appropriate potential targets of vengeance;
- Depression and despair over being unable to fight effectively or flee the continuing traumatic circumstances leading to a willingness to sacrifice oneself; and
- Suicide terrorism can also be seen as a means of re-enacting prior traumas—certainly many of the sample had family members who had been “exploded” intentionally, some as a death sentence with explosives strapped to their bodies. Those who followed suit may have been re-enacting this trauma by their actions.

When traumatic experiences are widespread in a society that is living in repressive conditions such as military occupation and these circumstances coexist with a religious ideology that

- Demonizes the enemy,
- Promotes jihad,
- Gives permission for extreme measures in conflict resolution;
- Glorifies martyrdom;
- Defines sacred values worth dying for;
- Promises an afterlife for martyrs, and
- Gives meaning to suffering and to giving one's life for the community good

these factors can combine to provide an explosive mix fueling suicide terrorism. All of the aforementioned features of a militant religious ideology, such as that currently present in the militant Wahhabi terror sponsoring groups, can be applied on the individual level as remedies for posttraumatic stress. They also interact synergistically with the well-established symptoms of acute and posttraumatic stress disorder (shattered life assumptions, alienation, a foreshortened life expectancy, depression, a tendency to dissociate, depersonalization and derealization, avoidance, and traumatic reexperiencing) to favor the choice to become a human bomb.

It is certainly realized that not all trauma survivors will become terrorists just as all those individuals abused in childhood will also not grow up to be abusers—although most abusers have been abused in childhood and similarly many suicide terrorists have identified with or experienced deep personal traumatization themselves. It is clear from the interviews that trauma creates a strong pathway for the militant terror ideology promoting martyrdom to take root.

Interestingly it has also been found that this pathway is present in Al Qaeda–affiliated groups where traumatic experiences are not ubiquitous and occupation is not present. For instance, Speckhard recently interviewed friends of the Moroccan 2002 bombers from the Sidi Moumen slum in Casa Blanca and learned that their radicalization process occurred in large part through viewing downloaded footage of traumatic images from the Palestinian and Chechen conflict zones.<sup>81</sup> This practice of using the traumas endured in Palestine and Chechnya to radicalize Muslims living far away from these conflicts is currently also in common use in the Internet recruitment of alienated Muslims in Europe to join the worldwide Salafi jihadist movement.

This practice is making use of secondary traumatization. The would-be martyrs indoctrinate themselves first by viewing traumatic footage, follow by identifying themselves with the victims of such traumas often by creating a fictive kinship with them (i.e., the brotherhood of Muslims or the Ummah) and beginning to believe that they can make a difference in stopping these traumatic events by joining the jihad. They join because of their own psychological needs for adventure, identity formation, their hopeless and alienated circumstances or whatever is problematic for them, but one key aspect that should not be overlooked in this sequence is the terror groups' successful use of trauma as a powerful pathway to activate emotions and open pathways to considering self-sacrifice on behalf of others as an appropriate response.

This brings up the importance of combating suicide terrorism the world over by containing and resolving conflicts in both Palestine and Chechnya and now Iraq and Afghanistan as well. Wherever Muslim lands are perceived as occupied and others can be emotionally engaged by being shown the traumatic events befalling these populations their circumstances and traumas can and are being used by Al Qaeda–affiliated groups (i.e., the worldwide Salafi jihadists) to radicalize recruits to act in their behalf by endorsing and enacting suicide terrorism.

In this sense its important to realize that although most people in the Western world could not place Chechnya on a world map it nevertheless is proving (like the Palestinian conflict) to be one of the most important conflicts that will be crucial to determining the future of world politics. If this conflict is not resolved well it will continue to be used to fuel secondary trauma responses in recruits to the worldwide jihad. Thus this conflict can be used for or against deepening the cultural rift between the West and Muslims who feel oppressed and occupied, creating an even stronger divide in what is now called the “War on Terrorism.”

In Chechnya it can certainly be said of the bombers about whom psychological post mortems were constructed that they have all acted out of deep psychological traumatization and loss. Trauma and loss it seems at least in Chechnya constitute a necessary prerequisite creating the vulnerability and psychological foundation on which is built a militant jihadist mentality. The building pressure from the moral erosion caused by a repressive and corrupt occupying force unfortunately makes a call from terror sponsoring organizations for extreme measures to fight for social justice extremely persuasive and gives many Chechen individuals exposed to both trauma and the militant jihadist ideology the mental set that suicide terrorism is their only honorable way out.

If one wishes to exit from this era of suicide terrorism this is perhaps the most crucial thing to be understood—Chechen suicide bombers for the most part are simply traumatized men and women turned misguided warriors, following a jihadist ideology that has taught them this strategy: to avenge themselves unto a generalized enemy and in doing so exit self-sacrificially on behalf of the group from their own intolerable psychic pain. To find the exit from this campaign of terror one must work toward successfully resolving this conflict

on the political as well as on the individual level so that continuing a campaign of suicide terrorism does not continue to be seen as the only viable option open to both the individuals carrying it out and to the terror groups equipping them to do so.

## Notes

1. This article classifies suicide bombers as anyone who goes so far as to strap on a bomb, drive a vehicle filled with explosives to a target, or who otherwise attempts to detonate an explosive device on an airplane, in a subway or train car, or elsewhere with the aim of dying to kill—irrespective of whether or not the bomber actually died in the attack or was successful in detonating—as that is often not within the bomber’s control. The authors take the fact of being to the point of willingly strapping on a bomb or other type of improvised explosive device or driving a vehicle loaded with explosives to a target as enough evidence of seriousness of the intent to suicide and see the end result that is often out of the hands of the bomber as less meaningful than the intent implied by these actions.

2. These numbers are based on the authors’ database of attacks attributed to Chechens as of the article’s writing in late August 2005. Quantifying the exact numbers of those killed and wounded in attacks, the gender of bombers and so on is difficult as reports vary by government and news source and specifics about the accomplished bombers are not always evident after an attack. In every case the more conservative estimates have been used, as the authors’ experience with journalists reporting in and about Chechnya is that they have difficulty getting reports and sometimes rely on rumors. See Tables 1–5 for summaries and empirical analysis regarding suicide terror acts attributed to Chechens.

3. All of the suicide bombers in the sample willingly carried or delivered bombs with the intent of killing themselves in order to kill others, although the events differed. Some carried bombs on their bodies detonating immediately at their target, others waiting while they held hostages—knowing full well their demands would never be met and intending to die by exploding themselves. Others exploded themselves with bombs in trucks and cars or on trains, airplanes, or the metro. Two bombers were designated as would-be bombers, holding them out of the main sample of suicide bombers because they did not willingly carry out their missions. The first one, Zarema Inarkaeva, was given a bomb that she delivered unknowingly that was detonated by remote control. The second would-be bomber (according to the classification scheme) was Zarema Mujukhoeva who carried her bomb to downtown Moscow but abandoned it attempting to flee. It detonated when a Special Forces officer tried to defuse it.

4. It should be emphasized that anyone met who gave serious evidence of considering self recruiting for an act of human bombing was immediately offered psychotherapeutic intervention and that in all cases the authors’ were able to steer the person away from continuing to entertain this possibility as a serious course of action.

5. See Edwin S. Shneidman, *The Suicidal Mind*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford 1996) in which he discusses the concept of a psychological autopsy following a normal suicide.

6. Although the Madrid train bombings did not involve suicide bombers at the site, later when they were nearly apprehended these terrorists blew themselves up leaving to question whether or not they are categorically suicide bombers or not, depending on how such is defined.

7. Suicide terrorism began with attacks by Hezbollah in Lebanon in 1983. From there the tactic migrated to the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka who began to use it since 1987. The Palestinian Hamas adopted it in 1993, the PKK in Turkey in 1996. Al Qaeda embraced suicide terrorism in the mid-1990s.

8. See Andrew Silke “Retaliating against terrorism” in *Terrorists, Victims and Society: Psychological Perspectives on Terrorism and its Consequences* (Chichester: Wiley, 2003).

9. Scott Atran<sup>a</sup>, *Genesis of Suicide Terrorism*. *Science*, 7 March 2003, vol 299. See Robert Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005), pp. 61–76. Speckhard, Anne, “Understanding Suicide Terrorism: Countering Human Bombs and Their Senders” in *Topics in Terrorism: Toward a Transatlantic Consensus on the Nature of the Threat*

(Volume I) Jason S. Purcell & Joshua D. Weintraub (Atlantic Council Publication Washington, D.C., 2005), pp. 1–21.

10. See Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror*, (Columbia University Press: New York, 2002).

11. These numbers are based on the database of attacks attributed to Chechens as of the article's writing in August 2005. Quantifying the exact number of attacks, gender of bombers, and so on is difficult as reports vary by government and news source and the gender of accomplished bombers is not always evident after an attack. In every case the more conservative estimates were used, as experience with journalists reporting in and about Chechnya is that they have difficulty getting reports and sometimes rely on rumors.

12. It is difficult to track terrorist activity in Russia as often there are not open reports and there are also frequently differences between media and official reports, especially in the reported numbers killed (official statistics generally give lower death rates).

13. In an interesting twist rebel and main terrorist leader Shamil Basaev claims taking over the planes with suicide terrorists but not bombing them, claiming that the terrorists hijacked the planes for media attention but that the Russians themselves downed the planes simultaneously upon learning of the hijackings. See ABC News Nightline, 28 July, 2005 "Reign of Terror" in which Basayev claims, "They were supposed to hijack the planes and demand an end to the war. And they were not supposed to let them land until there was some response. But they were immediately shot down. Whatever, our hijackers weren't supposed to blow up the planes just like that. And I wonder why both planes exploded at the same time." Basayev, it should be noted, is a well-known Chechen terrorist leader who nearly always paints himself as the victimized innocent while simultaneously claiming responsibility for very heinous terrorist acts. Nevertheless, while the official line from Russia is that the bombers brought the planes down it must be acknowledged that it is increasingly becoming agreed on policy by governments that domestic planes overtaken by suicide terrorists intent on using the plane as a weapon may be downed by military means.

14. See John Reuter, "Chechnya's Suicide Bombers: Desperate, Devout, or Deceived?" American Committee for Peace in Chechnya, 16 September 2004, pp. 19–20.

15. See Anne Speckhard, "Soldiers for God: A Study of the Suicide Terrorists in the Moscow Hostage Taking Siege," in *The Roots of Terrorism: Contemporary Trends and Traditional Analysis*, Oliver McTernan, (NATO Science Series, Brussels, 2004). Anne Speckhard, Nadejda Tarabrina, Valery Krasnov and Khapta Akhmedova, "Research Note: Observations of Suicidal Terrorists in Action," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 16(2) (Summer 2004), pp. 305–327. Speckhard, A., Tarabrina, N., Krasnov, V. & Mufel, N. (2005) Posttraumatic and acute stress responses in hostages held by suicidal terrorists in the takeover of a Moscow theater. *Traumatology*, Volume 11, Issue 1 (March, 2005). A. Speckhard, N. Tarabrina, V. Krasnov, and N. Mufel, "Stockholm Effects and Psychological Responses to Captivity in Hostages Held by Suicidal Terrorists," *Traumatology*: 11, (2) 2005. (reprinted in S. Wessely and V. Krasnov, eds., *Psychological Responses to the New Terrorism: A NATO Russia Dialogue*, 2005, IOS Press).

16. See aforementioned articles for a more in-depth discussion of this event from both the point of view of the hostages and from their observations of the terrorists. In particular the hostages observed that all of the terrorists were willing and ready to die, and expected and prepared for it—linking the bombs together for more easy detonation in one large blast as the siege wore on—and that they remarked often about their willingness and expectation to die as martyrs during the siege.

17. Because the authors are both practicing psychologists it was decided that on coming across anyone seriously considering becoming a suicide terrorist that every clinical effort would be made to dissuade them. In their opinion they were generally successful in offering persuasive therapeutic effect in most of these cases to push the subject into reconsidering. In all of these cases Akhmedova offered free clinical services to help the subjects work through the traumatic experiences that appeared to be a driving motivation for considering enacting suicide terrorism. One subject who was highly traumatized in childhood and has not made a good recovery is still being monitored.

18. Suicide bombers have been classified as anyone who goes so far as to strap on a bomb, drive a vehicle filled with explosives to a target, or who otherwise attempts to detonate an explosive device

on an airplane or elsewhere with the aim of dying to kill, irrespective of whether or not the bomber actually died in the attack or was successful in detonating as that is often not within the bomber's control. The fact of being to the point of strapping on any type of improvised explosive device or driving a vehicle loaded with explosives to a target are taken as enough evidence of seriousness of the intent to suicide, and the end result that is often out of the hands of the bomber is seen as less meaningful than the intent implied by these actions. There is some controversy as to whether or not the Dubrovka bombers were suicide bombers as they did not die by exploding themselves as their plan to do so was interrupted by the Russian special forces gassing and storming the building. Because there is strong confirmation from many family members, close associates, and hostages of these terrorists of their willingness to die by self-explosion and the fact that the women were already in suicide belts their intent and behavior of strapping on bombs is taken as strong enough evidence to classify them as suicide bombers for this analysis. To leave them out of the analysis would, in the authors' opinion, be a mistake as clearly they were intending to carry out their suicide mission if the Russian Special Forces had not thwarted it. This is considered analogous to the many now incarcerated Palestinian bombers who have been thwarted in the last moments before their attempts but who are also closely studied to understand the psychology and psychosocial aspects of suicide bombers.

19. See Assaf Moghadam, "Palestinian Suicide Terrorism in the Second Intifada: Motivations and Organizational Aspects," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 26 (2)(February/March 2003); Anne Speckhard and Khapta Akhmedova, "Talking to Terrorists," *Journal of Psychohistory*, (Fall and Anne Speckhard, 2005), "Understanding Suicide Terrorism: Countering Human Bombs and Their Senders," in *Topics in Terrorism: Toward a Transatlantic Consensus on the Nature of the Threat* (Volume I), Jason S. Purcell and Joshua D. Weintraub, eds., (Atlantic Council Publication, Washington, D.C., 2005), pp. 1–21.

20. Ariel Merari, *Suicide Terrorism*, unpublished manuscript (2003).

21. See Nichole Argo, *The Banality of Evil: Understanding and Defusing Today's Human Bombs*. Unpublished research proposal 2003. Anne Speckhard Unpublished interviews of Palestinian militants, March 2005.

22. It is important to note that the term Wahhabism has a unique meaning in Russia and Chechnya differing from its wider use elsewhere. Essentially it relates to the Chechen terrorist ideology specifically which is related to the global salafi jihad ideology and the label wahhabist is commonly used to refer to adherents of these militant terrorist ideologies and members of Chechen terrorist groups. Whereas Wahhabists in other parts of the world are peaceful and profoundly orthodox believers who may or may not agree that in some cases violence may be used even against other Muslims to defend the true faith (as in the ends justifies the means argument), Wahhabism in Chechnya relates specifically to a well-known and well-understood label given by Russians and Chechens to terrorists in this area who are promoting a militant jihadist ideology that allows for and promotes terrorism against civilians, Muslim and non-Muslim alike. The groups themselves do not refer to themselves as Wahhabists but rather as "true believers."

23. For an excellent discussion and definition of the global Salafi jihad, see Marc Sageman *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia:University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

24. *Ibid.*

25. There is controversy over the Beslan demands, the terrorists stating that they were given in a letter to Russian President Vladimir Putin passed through Ingush leader and negotiator Ruslan Aushev, a letter in which Basaev demanded the recognition of the independence of Chechnya and withdrawal of Russian troops from the republic. In this letter Basaev purportedly offered in exchange to stop all anti-Russian activities in the Caucasus and close all terrorist training camps. Basaev also promised that an independent Chechnya would become a member of the CIS and join the Collective Security Treaty. Later these same demands were placed by the Kavkaz center on their website. Similar demands by the Dubrovka hostage-takers were broadcast in a pre-made video aired over Al Jazeera.

26. See *Another Beslan?*, *Chechnya*, Jonathan Miller interview of Basaev 4 February 2005 in which Basaev, justifying his group's actions, mixes references to international law with ideological statements demonizing his enemy claiming, "We are not separatists; aggression has been committed against us according to international rights and law. Russia committed an act of aggression against

us because we left the Soviet Union in autumn 1991, when the Russian Federation, Russia didn't exist. We even passed a constitution of an independent, sovereign, democratic and state based on the rule of law on 12 March 1992, almost a month before the constitution of the Russian Federation. We have suffered aggression, but because Russia has a nuclear truncheon the whole world denies us the right to be free, the right given us by the Almighty Allah, the right given to us by God and they want to deprive us of it. This is not a war between Muslims and Christians. Not between confessions but between faith and faithlessness. The majority of Russians are godless, and we are fighting with Satanism. Islam has retained its inner strength most, and has the power and ability to stand against world Satanism. Of Christianity and Judaism only the name has remained, and also practically from Islam. Today we're fighting global Satanism that puts forward as its shield American imperialism and Russian chauvinism."

27. See ABC News Nightline, 28 July 2005 *Reign of Terror and Another Beslan? Chechnya*, Jonathan Miller interview of Basayev 4 February 2005.

28. Ibid.

29. Khahil Shakiki, "The View of Palestinian Society on Suicide Terrorism," *Countering Suicide Terrorism* (Herzilya, Israel: The International Policy Institute for Counter Terrorism, The Interdisciplinary Center, 2002).

30. See Nichole Argo, *The Banality of Evil: Understanding and Defusing Today's Human Bombs*. Unpublished research proposal 2003 and Nasra Hassan, "An Arsenal of Believers: Talking to Human Bombs." *The New Yorker*, 19 November 2001.

31. Speckhard, unpublished Casa Blanca suicide terrorism research interviews, May 2005.

32. See John Reuter, "Chechnya's Suicide Bombers: Desperate, Devout, or Deceived?" The American Committee for Peace in Chechnya publication (2004), available at "(<http://www.peaceinchechnya.org/reports/SuicideReport/>), accessed 1 June 2005, p. 23.

33. Ibid., pg. 21, where he states, "Having witnessed the almost total obliteration of their country in the past decade, the Chechen people have suffered immeasurably. This tiny mountain nation has endured an apocalyptic demographic crisis, with nearly 180,000 Chechens killed and over 300,000 displaced. These unfathomable numbers mean that one in two Chechens were either killed or driven from their homes in the past ten years. Moreover, Chechnya's cities have been reduced to rubble and the extent of the environmental catastrophe is yet to be fully understood. Every single person alive today in Chechnya has been deeply scarred by the bloody conflict raging in their midst."

34. See Assaf Moghadam, "Palestinian Suicide Terrorism in the Second Intifada: Motivations and Organizational Aspects," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 26 (2) (February/March 2003); Anne Speckhard and Khapta Akhmedova, "Talking to Terrorists," *Journal of Psychohistory* (Fall and Anne Speckhard, 2005), "Understanding Suicide Terrorism: Countering Human Bombs and Their Senders," in *Topics in Terrorism: Toward a Transatlantic Consensus on the Nature of the Threat* (Volume I) Jason S. Purcell & Joshua D. Weintraub eds. *Atlantic Council* Publication, 2005). Ariel Merari, *Suicide Terrorism*, unpublished manuscript (2003).

35. See Edwin S. Shneidman, *The Suicidal Mind*, (Oxford University Press, 1996) in which he discusses the concept of a psychological autopsy following a normal suicide. This term was coined by Schiedenmen.

36. See Assaf Moghadam, "Palestinian Suicide Terrorism in the Second Intifada: Motivations and Organizational Aspects," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 26 (2) (February/March 2003); Anne Speckhard and Khapta Akhmedova, "Talking to Terrorists," *Journal of Psychohistory* (Fall 2005) and Anne Speckhard "Understanding Suicide Terrorism: Countering Human Bombs and Their Senders," in *Topics in Terrorism: Toward a Transatlantic Consensus on the Nature of the Threat* (Volume I) eds (Jason S. Purcell & Joshua D. Weintraub *Atlantic Council* Publication 2005).

37. Dmitri Trenin, Aleksei Malashenko, and Anatol Lieven, *Russia's Restless Frontier: The Chechnya Factor in Post-Soviet Russia* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2004).

38. Ibid.

39. Stating that corrupt governments or any actors for that matter respond only to force is a common saying throughout the former Soviet Union.

40. Keeping in mind that terror-sponsoring organizations made use of Hinduism (the Aum Shinrykyo in Japan to poison the subways with sarin gas), Christianity (abortion clinic terrorists who bombed clinics and assassinated abortionists), and radical Jewish Zionism (Baruch Goldstein for instance on his shooting spree in a Mosque) each to justify its violent pursuits.

41. J. Dudaev and Y. Zarakhovich, "Terms of War and Peace" *Time*, 4 March 1996.

42. See Trenin, Malashenko, and Lieven, *Russia's Restless Frontier*.

43. *Ibid.*

44. *Ibid.*, p. 77.

45. See also Speckhard & Akhmedova, "Mechanisms of Generating Suicide Terrorism: Trauma and Bereavement as Psychological Vulnerabilities in Human Security—The Chechen Case," in Jill Donnelly, ed. *Trauma in Children on the NATO Periphery* (NATO Science Series, Brussels, 2004). See also Speckhard & Akhmedova, "Mechanisms of Generating Suicide Terrorism: Trauma and Bereavement as Psychological Vulnerabilities in Human Security—The Chechen Case," in Jill Donnelly, ed. NATO Science Series, Brussels, 2004. Speckhard, Anne & Akhmedova Khapta (2005) "Talking to Terrorists" *Journal of Psychohistory*, Fall 2005; and Speckhard, Anne. "Understanding Suicide Terrorism: Countering Human Bombs and Their Senders" in *Topics in Terrorism: Toward a Transatlantic Consensus on the Nature of the Threat* (Volume 11), eds. Jason S. Purcell & Joshua D. Weintraub, *Atlantic Council: Washington, D.C.* 2005, pp. 1–21.

46. See Scott Atran, "Genesis of Suicide Terrorism." *Science*, 7 March 2003, Vol. 299. p. 534 for a further discussion of this manipulation of normal genetically derived instincts.

47. Speckhard, Tarabrina, Krasnov, and Akhmedova, "Research Note."

48. See Speckhard, Tarabrina, Krasnov, and Mufel. *Posttraumatic and Acute Stress Responses in Hostages Held by Suicidal Terrorists in the Takeover of a Moscow Theater*, p. 4.

49. Atran, *Genesis of Suicide Terrorism*; Sageman *Understanding Terror Networks*.

50. See Trenin, Malashenko, and Lieven, *Russia's Restless Frontier*.

51. Atran, *Genesis of Suicide Terrorism*; Ariel Merari, *Suicide Terrorism*, unpublished manuscript (2003).

52. Atran, *Genesis of Suicide Terrorism*; Sageman *Understanding Terror Networks*.

53. See Hujayra al Arabi "Confessions of a Human Bomb from Palestine," in the *Free Arab Voice*, in which a young Palestinian female doctor admits that she is readying herself to become a human bomb and argues that she is certainly not doing so from lack of options or being blocked in her choices but out of a grave sense of injustice that she hopes to change as much as she can by sacrificing herself for others in her community.

54. Speckhard, Tarabrina, Krasnov, and Akhmedova, "Research Note."

55. Nasra Hassan, *An Arsenal of Believers: Talking to Human Bombs*. *The New Yorker*, (19 November 2001). Aparisim Ghosh, *Inside the Mind of a Suicide Bomber* Speckhard, Unpublished Palestinian militant interviews with failed bombers (2005).

56. See Anne Speckhard, Beatrice Jacuch and Val Vanrompay, "Taking on the Persona of a Suicide Bomber: A Thought Experiment," Unpublished research article (2005).

57. A. Kronik, R. Akhmerov, and A. Speckhard, "Trauma & Disaster as Life Disrupters: A Computer Assisted Model of Psychotherapy Applied to Adolescent Victims of the Chernobyl Disaster," *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice* 30(6), (December 1999), pp. 586–599, Norma Berkowitz ed. Anne Speckhard, "Psycho-Social & Physical Outcomes of Technological Disaster: Information as a Traumatic Stressor" in, *A Chernobyl Reader*, (University of Wisconsin Press 2005).

58. See Speckhard and Akhmedova, "Talking to Terrorists," and Speckhard and Akhmedova, "Mechanisms of Generating Suicide Terrorism."

59. See Hujayra al 'Arabi, "Confessions of a Human Bomb from Palestine."

60. See Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Suicide Bombings: Do Beliefs Matter?* Unpublished research paper (2004).

61. See R. Janoff-Bulman, *Shattered Assumptions: Towards a New Psychology of Trauma* (New York: The Free Press, 1992 and Speckhard & Akhmedova, "Mechanisms of Generating Suicide Terrorism.

62. Basayev speaking to ABC News Nightline, 28 July 2005, Reign of Terror.
63. See Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religion Violence*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000).
64. K. Akhmedova, (2003) "Fanatism and Revenge Idea of Civilians who had PTSD," *Social and Clinical Psychiatry*, 12 (3). P. 24–32.
65. Ibid.
66. Razman Kadyrov, Interview on Groznenskoye Televidenie, May 2005.
67. See Anne Speckhard, and Khapta Akhmedova, "Black Widows: The Chechen Female Suicide Terrorists," in Yoram Schweitzer ed. *Female Suicide Terrorists* Tel Aviv, Israel: (Jaffe Center Publication, 2005).
68. Mia Bloom, *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror*, (Columbia University Press, 2005); see Barbara Victor, *Army of Roses: Inside the World of Palestinian Women Suicide Bombers*, (New York: Rodale Books, 2003).
69. Speckhard, unpublished Palestinian interviews.
70. Bloom, *Dying to Kill*.
71. Reuven Paz, "Spreading Terrorist Ideologies over the Internet: The Explosive Allure of Jihadist Rhetoric." Paper presented to the NATO Advanced Research Workshop—Ideologies of Terrorism: Understanding and Countering the Social, Psychological and Political Underpinnings of Terrorism, 31 January 2005, NATO Headquarters, Brussels, Belgium.
72. Bloom *Dying to Kill*.
73. See Victor, *Army of Roses*.
74. See, for instance, Kim Murphy, "Cult of Reluctant Killers: The 'black widows' of Chechnya—suicide bombers who stalk Russia—are driven by hatred, ideology, coercion and fear." *Los Angeles Times* 4 February 2004.
75. See Speckhard, Tarabrina, Krasnov, and Akhmedova, "Research Note." See Speckhard, Tarabrina, Krasnov, and Mufel, "Posttraumatic and Acute Stress Responses in Hostages Held by Suicidal Terrorists in the Takeover of a Moscow Theater." Anne Speckhard, "Soldiers for God: A Study of the Suicide Terrorists in the Moscow Hostage Taking Siege," in *The Roots of Terrorism: Contemporary Trends and Traditional Analysis*, Oliver McTernan, ed. (NATO Science Series, Brussels, 2004); A. Speckhard, N. Tarabrina, V. Krasnov, and N. Mufel, "Stockholm Effects and Psychological Responses to Captivity in Hostages Held by Suicidal Terrorists," in *Traumatology*: 11 (2) 2005 (reprinted in S. Wessely and V. Krasnov, eds., *Psychological Responses to the new Terrorism: A NATO Russia Dialogue*, 2005, IOS Press) and Speckhard, and Akhmedova, "Black Widows;" for a more in-depth discussion of this event from both the point of view of the hostages and from their observations of the terrorists. In particular the hostages observed that all of the terrorists were willing and ready to die, and were expected and prepared for it—linking the bombs together for more easy detonation in one large blast as the siege wore on. They also remarked often about their willingness and expectation to die as martyrs during the siege. From their observations it seemed that perhaps the women did not detonate their bombs before the gas overtook them not because they were unable to during the storm, but because they were clearly in roles submissive to their male leaders and were waiting for an order from the men who had gone out of the main hall to fight with the onslaught of Russian storm troopers. Of course no one can know for sure as they died before anyone could ask them.
76. See Sightings "Coke pulled in Belgium, Luxembourg and Netherlands: Over 100 poisoned." 15 June 1999. Available at (<http://www.rense.com/politics2/coke.htm>), accessed 4 October 2005.
77. Anne Speckhard, Nadejda Tarabrina, Valery Krasnov, and Khapta Akhmedova, "Research Note: Observations of Suicidal Terrorists in Action," in *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 16(2) (Summer 2004), p. 317.
78. Ibid., p.318,
79. Basayev speaking to ABC News Nightline, 28 July 2005, Reign of Terror.
80. See Robert Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* New York: Random House, 2005).
81. Speckhard, unpublished Moroccan interviews, May 2005.