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Aoibhín de Búrca
(University College Dublin)

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Suicide Missions: the 'political opportunity structure' and constraints of constituency

Aoibhín de Búrca

Ad Astra Global Irish Studies Scholar, School of Politics and International Relations
University College Dublin

aoibhin.de-burca@ucdconnect.ie

The paper uses the 'political opportunity structure' model to show how suicide missions and political violence are legitimized by militant groups to their constituency, and how constituency can act as one of the constraints on the militant group. Militant groups in situations of contentious politics in ethno nationalist conflicts need the support and social sanction of the constituency they claim to represent. Research shows that suicide missions occur where there is social sanction and support from the constituency for the tactic, but constituencies in democracies do not support suicide missions and/or other militant attacks, carried out in their name, where there are high civilian casualty rates. The paper argues that groups in ethno nationalist conflicts legitimize the resort to extreme political violence, such as suicide missions, to their constituency using the political opportunity structure model. There are many explanations given for why suicide missions occur, such as religion, lethality, poverty and psychological problems, but current explanations focus primarily on the presence of suicide missions. However, this paper also looks at the absence of suicide missions by militant groups in situations of contentious politics and conflict. It does this using two case studies: one where suicide missions are absent (the IRA in Northern Ireland) and another where there is the presence of suicide missions (Hamas in Israel/Palestine).

Keywords: political opportunity structure, legitimacy, protest, nationality, identity

Suicide Missions: the 'political opportunity structure' and constraints of constituency¹

SUICIDE MISSIONS

When suicide bombers flew aeroplanes into the Twin Towers and killed almost 3,000 people on the 11th Sept 2001, it shook the world. People could not understand why they did it. What drove terrorists to kill themselves and so many innocent people? Why did they want to inflict so much suffering so badly? The attacks signified a major development, and while suicide missions are a relatively new phenomenon in the West, they have been proliferating worldwide since the 1980s, most notable being used by Islamic groups in the Middle East and the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka. What is

¹ I would like to thank participants of the 'Contested Constitutionalisation' workshop at ECPR's Joint Sessions in Rennes and UCD's Graduate Symposium, for their helpful comments and discussions of earlier versions of this paper. Specific thanks also goes to the anonymous ConWeb reviewers who provided excellent feedback.

worrying however is their increased use, the frequency of attacks, in the geographical spread of attacks and in the number of groups involved (Merari, 2005, 70).

What are these suicide missions, why are they being used, and why are they being used more frequently? Ariel Merari defines suicide missions as situations in which “a person intentionally kills himself (or herself) for the purpose of killing others, in the service of a political or ideological goal” (Merari, 2005, 71). There are varying reasons offered as to why they are being used, and why they are being used more frequently. Some explanations include: the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, suicide attacks are more lethal and effective than ordinary forms of terrorism, effects of poverty and psychological reasons.

The paper begins by explaining the ‘political opportunity structure’ model and how constituency can be seen to act as a constraint. It then maps out the existing research on suicide missions to show its limitations. While none of the existing explanations are mono-causal, the paper argues that the explanations reviewed are not sufficient without reference to the political context within which there are contentious politics. Therefore the paper will discuss two case studies, Hamas in Israel/Palestine and the IRA in Northern Ireland. Using two case studies permits an exploration of the utility of constituency as a partial factor in the resort to, or absence of, suicide missions. However, the author notes that there are limitations in using only two case studies, rather than a large N approach. The two case studies are Northern Ireland and Israel/Palestine. In Northern Ireland, where there was democracy, there was an absence of suicide missions, and in the occupied Palestinian territories, which is not a democracy, suicide missions were carried out. This begs the question: why are suicide missions accepted/rejected in certain societies? Finally the paper will look at the limits of examining ‘constituency’ with regards to transglobal religious groups, who are less constrained than ethno nationalist groups.

‘Political opportunity structure’ and constituency

Despite all the reasons as to why terrorist groups or individuals use, and/or engage in, suicide missions, it must be said that many groups do not use suicide missions because they didn’t know about them, there are moral and/or ideological constraints, counterproductive effects, constituency and technological costs (Kalyvas and

Sanchez-Cuenca, 2005, 210-228). The paper argues that constituency costs, as identified above, are one of the main constraints. Militant groups do not use tactics that they know will have constituency costs. They understand that violence limits the constituency and support base because violence “restrains and frightens off sympathisers” (Tarrow, 1998, 16). As Bloom has argued “supporters are needed to provide food, safe houses, recruits and ultimately political power” (Bloom, 2005, 78) and it is the constituency who determines if suicide missions will be used: “suicide terror will either be sanctioned or prohibited by the civilian population” (Bloom, 2005, 17).

Given that democracies do not sanction the use of anti civilian violence which targets and indiscriminately kills civilians we need to look at why this is so. The traditional meaning of ‘democracy’ is - rule by and of the people (Tully, 2006, 3). The word ‘democracy’ has its roots in the Greek term *demokratia*, the individual parts of which are *demos* (people) and *kratos* (rule). In its basic meaning democracy is therefore a political system in which ‘the people’ rule (Giddens, 2001, 422). Among the basic principles of democracy are constitutionalism, democratic elections, an independent judiciary, free media and freedom of expression, protection of minority rights and civilian control of the military. Democracy is generally seen as the political system which is most able to ensure political equality, protect liberty and freedom, defend the common interest, meet citizens’ needs, promote moral self-development and enable decision making which takes everyone’s interests into account (Held, 1996). A regime can be deemed to be democratic “to the degree that political relations between the state and its citizens feature broad, equal, protected and mutually binding consultation” (Tilly, 2007, 13-14).

If we look at democracies², such as Northern Ireland and Spain, we see that the IRA or ETA did not use extreme forms of violence, such as suicide missions. This is partly because both countries were democracies, and the principles of democracy, which the constituency adheres to, as well as social support, constrained the actions of both groups. For example the constituency of the IRA did not want extreme political violence to be carried out by the IRA, acting as their representatives, especially where

² But that is not to say that there can’t be de-democratization (Tilly, 2007) during a period of contentious politics.

there were other political avenues, and other forms of contestation and negotiation available. For the militants “a trade off exists between the intensity of killing or the selectivity of violence on the one hand and popular support on the other” (Kalyvas and Sanchez-Cuenca, 2005, 219). If the IRA carried out “systematic indiscriminate bombings, support among important sectors of the nationalist communities would wane and the pool of volunteers would probably shrink” (Kalyvas and Sanchez-Cuenca, 2005, 219). But militants are pursuing a political aim, and when there is lack of opportunity to forward a political agenda through contestation within the power structure they may resort to forwarding their agenda through violence, even if they live in a democracy. Both Hamas and the IRA legitimized their use of political violence by using the concepts from the classic social movement model of ‘political opportunity structure’.

The classic social movement model has a number of key concepts: in a situation of contentious politics social change processes happen when there are political opportunities, mobilizing structures, collective action frames and repertoires of contention (Tarrow, 1998). In a situation of contentious politics people “make discontinuous, public, collective claims” on one another and the claims, if realized, will “affect their objects’ interests” (Tilly, 2003, 26-30). Contentious politics can be viewed as a form of ‘collective political struggle’ (McAdam et al, 2001, 5) and some forms of contentious politics, which “almost always involve collective contention” include: rebellions, revolutions, social movements and demonstrations (Tilly, 2003, 30). Movements and militants involved in contentious politics realise that in order to attract people to the group the issues “must be presented or framed so that they fit or resonate with the beliefs, feelings, and desires of potential recruits” (Goodwin, 2003, 52).

The political opportunity structure model emerged from the work being done on social movements by political process theorists in the United States: McAdam (1982), Tarrow (1983) and Tilly (1978). It was part of the wider body of research being conducted on social movements, which grew enormously in the aftermath of the 1960s civil rights movements. There were a number of different approaches and conceptual “turns” (Goodwin and Jasper, 2003, 5) within social movement theory from the 1960s onwards: economic (Olson, 1965), rational choice and resource

mobilization (McCarthy and Zald, 1973), political process (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly) and cultural approaches, such as creating framing and collective identity (Snow, 1988; Gamson 1992; Klandersman, 1984). While this paper acknowledges the vast body of literature in social movement theory, it specifically uses the political opportunity structure model to deal with the issue of ethno nationalist conflicts and the militants who operate in these conflicts. In doing so, it adopts an "integrated study of contentious politics focusing on episodes of contention" and using a "mechanism-and-process approach" (McAdam et al, 2009, 7).

The political opportunity structure approach is a political process approach and pays "systematic attention to the political and institutional environment in which social movements operate" (Della Porta, 2006, 16) and "stresses the crucial importance of expanding political opportunities as the ultimate spur to collective action" (McAdam, 1996, 7). At different stages in the conflict militants will choose to use different tactics, depending on the levels of support and sanction, so it is important to look at the political developments, and the political opportunities, open to the militants when examining when they use political violence and when they don't. In a situation of contentious politics, when there is an absence of democracy, there are fewer opportunities to contest, negotiate and forward a political agenda. Militant groups can emerge at this point to forward a political agenda and challenge the political system through violence, in the absence of other political opportunities. But they must first mobilize and receive support from 'constituency', because they are constrained by the people they claim to represent, and require social sanction from them, in order to forward their agenda, especially if they are to use tactics such as suicide missions (Bloom, 2007).

The political process approach focuses on the political context within which social movements, and those wishing to challenge the status quo, operate. It recognises that "social movements and revolutions are shaped by the broader set of political constraints and opportunities unique to the national context in which they are embedded" (McAdam et al, 1996, 3). This is important, especially when examining why militants in the contexts of Northern Ireland and Israel/Palestine were attempting to forward their political agenda, but choose to forward that political agenda through violence, at certain times in the conflict. They had scope conditions and specific

political grievances, but they needed opportunity to act. They needed to seize opportunity, and in order to do so they needed to mobilize their constituency and frame the conflict in a way that appealed to the constituency. The political process approach uses these three sets of factors in order to analyse social movements: “political opportunities, mobilizing structures and framing processes” (McAdam et al, 1996, 2). These three factors are crucial to understanding how militant groups in ethno nationalist conflicts legitimise their actions to the constituency they claim to represent. The paper uses the political opportunity structure concept because it provides us with a concept that can show us how militant groups legitimise political violence, and in doing so shows us how we can constrain such violence.

Like any social movement, militant groups require opportunities, such as changes to the openness, stability, allies and the capacity of the state (McAdam et al, 1996, 10). But militants are also aware of threat, such as regime or government repression, where efforts are made “to suppress either contentious acts or groups and organisations responsible for them” (McAdam et al, 2001). Social movements must examine opportunity and threat, and they must decide whether to act or not, based on that opportunity and/or threat. “Opportunity is always in interaction with current and repressive threats” (Goldstone and Tilly, 2002, 193) and “increased repression leads to *increased* protest, mobilization and action” (Goldstone and Tilly, 2002, 181). Militants are aware of this and may provoke attacks against themselves, hoping for a heavy handed response which in turn gives them, and their cause, more legitimacy. This can be seen in the U shaped repression curve where “state responses shape the evolution of collective action” (Tarrow, 1998b, 133) and in Della Porta’s study of political violence and the state, where political violence can “be explained as an outcome of the interaction between the social movements and their opponents” (Della Porta, 1995, 8).

The political opportunity structure is a useful model with which to examine how militant groups legitimise political violence, but it is also a highly contested tool. It is contested because of the general methodological concerns of social movement theorists, but also because of different approaches within social movement theory itself. Methodological concerns have arisen regarding what constitutes variables of political opportunity, and some fear the concept runs the risk of becoming a “dustbin

for any and every variable relevant to the development of social movements” due to its lack of specificity (Della Porta and Diani, 2006, 19). A second methodological concern is how we “distinguish between ‘objective’ political reality and its social construction” (Della Porta and Diana, 2006, 19), whereby there can be “a mismatch” between the reality of opportunity and the perception of opportunity (Kurzman, 2003, 47). As well as the methodological issues within social movement theory there are also different approaches: structural and cultural, which examine different kinds of social movements and by adopting different tools, methods and concepts they have clashed and disagreed with one another (Goodwin and Jasper, 2003). However, by examining the key components of the political opportunity structure, in a structured, focused comparison (George and Bennett, 2005) the paper can deal with the methodological concerns that have been expressed. Also, despite the fact that the concept is contested, a synthesis of the main approaches actually enhances the explanatory power of the model (McAdam et al, 2009, 7), and highlights the poverty of other explanations in the literature.

Poverty of the current explanations of suicide missions

The resort to suicide missions is complex and there is no one singular explanation. The various explanations in the literature can be arranged into four different explanatory categories: religion and Islam, strategic logic, poverty and education, and psychological profiling.

Religion and Islam

One of the most popular explanations for the presence of suicide missions is Islam, and Al Qaeda and Islamic fundamentalism are usually blamed for the increased popularity of suicide missions. But many do not agree that religion, of any kind, is the actual reason or cause. Before the Iraq war in 2003³ groups with secular orientations accounted for about one third of suicide attacks, and the world’s leader in suicide missions was not actually an Islamic group but, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a group which recruits from the predominantly Hindu Tamil population in Sri Lanka and which has an ideology with Marxist/Leninist elements (Pape, 2003,

³ The large number of suicide missions and the resulting death casualties from suicide missions in the Iraq war has never been previously recorded and it drastically changes the statistics.

343). This means that no religion, let alone a specific one like Islam, is a necessary part of the explanation for suicide missions (Hopgood, 2005, 76).

However, religion can play a role in legitimizing suicide missions. People like Osama Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, the planners behind the suicide missions, exploit and use Islam and religious rhetoric to create a specific narrative of blame, in order to rally Muslim youth (Holmes, 2005, 169). Religious beliefs offer huge potential to the militants to exploit religion, and to use it to encourage patriotism, hatred of the enemy and a sense of victimization (Sprinzak, 2000, 4). The social movement approach regards religion as one of the key elements⁴ in terms of how a group frames its conflict and mobilizes people within that cultural, social and political grouping.

Strategic Logic and Lethality

Perhaps “the main reason suicide terrorism is growing is that terrorists have learned that it works” (Pape, 2003, 350). Suicide attacks have a strategic logic to achieve specific political purposes: to coerce a target government to change policy, to mobilize additional recruits and to gain financial support (Pape, 2003, 344), or they may also be used specifically “in competition with other terrorist groups for popular or financial support” (Bloom, 2005, 1). Also “suicide attacks on average kill four times as many people as other terrorist attacks” (Hoffmann, 2003, 42) and if the purpose is to kill as many people as possible and to inflict huge military damage then the militant has succeed. However, there are constituency costs to using forms of extreme political violence that targets civilians, especially in democracies as outlined above.

Poverty and Economics

World leaders and terrorism experts continually reinforce the idea that poverty and a lack of education are the root causes of terrorism, and that we should put money into addressing poverty and education⁵. But terrorists have levels of educational

⁴ Ethnicity, religion and nationalism (Tarrow, 1998) are three key mobilizing factors used by those using collective action frames and wishing to mobilize supporters.

⁵ For example Jessica Stern, Harvard terrorism lecturer and author of ‘The Ultimate Terrorists,’ points out: “We have a stake in the welfare of other peoples and need to devote a much higher priority to health, education, and economic development, or new Osamas will continue to arise” (Stern, 2001, 355-357).

attainment that are at, or slightly above, the societal mean and are less likely to live in poverty than the average person (De Mesquita, 2005, 1). Neither the participants nor the adherents of militant activities in the Middle East are recruited from the poor, and poverty on the national level does not predict the number of attacks carried out by individuals from a country (Maleckova, 2005, 41). Indeed” if there is a link between income level, education, and participation in terrorist activities, it is either very weak or in the opposite direction of what one intuitively might have expected” (Berrebi, 2003, 43- 45).

Psychological reasoning and profiling

There is also no apparent connection between violent militant activity and personality disorders (Ricolfi, 2005, 105). Many cases show “suicide terrorists do not differ in their psychological characteristics (and often also in their sociological features) from their peers” (Pedahzur, 2005, 23). In the Palestinian context, fragile and disturbed personalities are excluded because they affect group stability, they are a liability (Ricolfi, 2005) (Hudson, 1999) (Goldenberg, 2002a) and because suicide bombers need “the full control of their mental ability for succeeding in their lethal project (Azam, 2005, 177). “Suicide has had a long and explicit role in politics and in conflict,” and “the continued use of suicide (in however limited a fashion) within political and military conflicts is then not entirely bizarre nor inexplicable” (Silke, 2006, 44). Reducing the explanations for suicide bombing to the mental illness, evil and irrationality of the bombers, does not enlighten our understanding of why suicide bombings occur (Euben, 2002, 4). In fact studies found that the suicide bombers are not suicidal, and are not psychotic or mentally unstable.

The attacks on the Twin Towers, as well as suicide missions in Sri Lanka, Bali, Madrid, London, Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Israel-Palestine and Iraq all beg the question: why? And as the number of suicide missions increase, and spread geographically: there are more victims and we need to find answers, to that question: why? Various studies and researchers have offered hypotheses, models and theories to explain the phenomenon. Some causes put forth are: religion, strategic logic, poverty and economics, and psychological reasoning. But, the existence of secular groups rules out religion as the cause and not all suicide bombers are Muslim, so that rules out Islam as a cause. The absence of suicide missions in some conflicts rule out

strategic logic as a singular cause, because not all groups use suicide missions despite their lethality. The fact that the bombers range from rich to impoverished and from poorly educated to highly educated rules out poverty and lack of education. Finally, saying that the suicide bombers are crazy and evil, as well as being factually incorrect, is not a logical, reasoned, critical analysis.

The resort to suicide missions is complex and while the current explanations are not mono-causal the paper argues that the current set of explanations is incomplete without examining how militants legitimize the use of political violence to the constituency and is incomplete without reference to constituency (in democracies or otherwise). That is not to say that any singular explanatory approach is sufficient but rather that using the 'political opportunity structure' theory, which is a political process approach, offers a more contextualised theoretical framework, that at the very least supplements the other explanations, by identifying where there are political opportunities and constraints within a political system, for political and militant actors, and where violence may emerge at certain times. It does this by examining two case studies: Hamas in Israel/Palestine and the IRA in Northern Ireland.

CASE STUDY ONE: HAMAS IN ISRAEL/PALESTINE

The paper uses 'political opportunity structure' to show how suicide missions, and political violence, are legitimised to the constituency of the militant group, and the crucial role of constituency. In doing so it is crucial to examine the tactics used by the militant group in relation to the political process. In the case of Hamas, they began as a small militant resistance group with little support, and were outside of the formal political and peace negotiations. But gradually they overtook the dominant Palestinian party Fatah, in terms of political support, and the political wing of Hamas won the parliamentary elections. They started out with the view that militancy would serve them best but as they prepared to enter politics they observed a three year truce (2005-2008), which shows they can adapt and change with the demands of the constituency. As well as using suicide missions when there was a demand for such tactics, or not using them when there was no support, they also used suicide missions strategically as a tactic.

Regarding the use of suicide missions, analysis by Gupta and Mundra between 1991 and 2003 revealed that they were actually part of an intensely political series of moves by Hamas and Islamic Jihad and were a strategic weapon (Gupta and Mundra, 2005, 591). Suicide attacks, like other forms of terrorism, can be used by terrorists to break up peace processes, (Kydd and Walter, 2002, 263) or provoke attacks upon themselves, which in turn generate sympathy and support (De Figueiredo and Weingast, 2001, 2-3). Other tactical advantages include the fact that suicide missions are simple and low cost, the bombers die so there is no fear they will surrender information if caught, and psychologically it has a huge impact on the public, due to an overwhelming sense of helplessness (Sprinzak, 2000, 2-3).

This feeling of helplessness makes suicide missions a more effective form of psychological warfare because there is no justice for the victims; society cannot find the perpetrator and prosecute them because they are already dead, and with no justice it is more difficult for society to cope (Holmes, 2004, 163). As a military objective, "spreading fear among the Israelis was as important as killing them" for the suicide bombers Hassan spoke to; Anwar Aziz, an Islamic Jihad member who blew himself up in an ambulance in Gaza in December 1993, had often told friends, "Battles for Islam are won not through the gun but by striking fear into the enemy's heart" (Hassan, 2001, 5).

The first suicide mission where a suicide bomber blew himself up in Israel was to follow a depressingly familiar pattern in years to come. On the 16th April 1993 a Hamas suicide bomber blew himself up, as he drove into two buses at a rest stop in Mehola, killing another man and injuring eight people (Immanuel, 1993). Once again on the 16th April 1994 the bomber detonated a car bomb near a school bus in Afula, killing him and eight others, as well as injuring over fifty people. The bombing was claimed by Hamas, and was said to be in response to the deaths of the 29 Muslims who were killed by the Jewish settler Bernard Goldstein, in the Tomb of the Patriarchs shrine in Hebron (Brown, 1994). There have been over 140 suicide missions since that suicide mission on the 16th April 1993, in the Israel and Palestine area. The missions were planned and organized over a twenty year period, by a number of Palestinian groups, such as Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Fatah-

Tanzim, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades (De Búrca, 2006). The group being examined in the case study is Hamas.

Hamas

On the 9th of December 1987 the senior membership of the Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwan) in the Gaza Strip met and “took the historic decision to transform the Ikhwan organisation in Palestine into a resistance movement” called Hamas (Tamimi, 2007, 11). They emerged as an Islamic alternative to the PLO during the first Intifada in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Hamas began using suicide missions to destabilise the peace process and to undermine the PA (Bloom, 2007, 24). Their first suicide mission was on the 16th April 1993 when a Hamas suicide bomber blew himself up (Immanuel, 1993). Since then Hamas has been involved in over fifty suicide missions (De Búrca, 2006) and are now synonymous with its use worldwide.

As well as its military wing Hamas also had an “extensive network of social services, which bolstered its popularity among impoverished Palestinians” (Bloom, 2007, 25). Hamas was able to successfully put together a mass political movement that directly challenged the power and authority of the PLO. The rise of Hamas is further attributed to the frustration of the Palestinian populace regarding the inability of the PA to deliver a transparent, democratic, and efficient administration (Gupta, 2005, 576). This frustration was translated into democratic political action when the Palestinian people (77 per cent turnout) voted for Hamas in the Palestinian parliamentary elections on the 25th January 2006 and Hamas won 76 of the 132 seats in the chamber (BBC, 26.01.06).

There was international shock with the announcement of the results. But the official pollsters “were wrong in predicting Hamas would lose” (Tamimi, 2007, 218) and there had been indicators that a Hamas victory was possible. There had been the “gradual erosion of both the legitimacy and popularity of the PLO” (Hroub, 2006, xv), and in municipal and university elections Hamas regularly won 40 per cent of the vote. In the parliamentary elections they won 44.45 per cent (Tamimi, 2007, 219). The reason for the Hamas victory was quite simply: “half of voters supported Hamas for its programmes and declared objectives” which included more general Palestinian issues such as: “frustrations of the peace talks”, “Israeli brutality” and “failure of

Fatah” (Hroub, 2006, 66-67). But furthermore people voted for Hamas, as an organisation because of “Hamas’s fidelity to the Palestinian dream,” “as a provider of services” and its “Islamic ideology” (Tamimi, 2007, 220-221).

Social Support and Sanction

Even if the organisers and the bombers, such as Hamas, were willing to use suicide bombings, how did the community come to accept such an extreme form of violence and how were suicide bombings given social sanction? Militant groups are constrained by their constituencies, but the Palestinians became increasingly supportive of suicide missions, which in turn gave normative support to the use of extreme violence by militants. This support and sanction is then vocalised by the media, and reinforced by political and religious leaders, which in turn leads to a normative acceptance of, and basis for, suicide missions and creates opportunities for militants to carry out suicide missions.

There was a rise in support amongst Palestinians for suicide bomb attacks, for example a poll by the Palestinian Centre for Policy and Survey Research in September 2004 shows a large percentage of Palestinians supporting bombing attacks inside Israel, including the Beer Shiva attack of early September which received the support of 77 per cent of the people surveyed (Palestinian Centre for Policy and Survey Research, Sept 2004). As Tamimi explains: “the more the Palestinians have felt vulnerable, the more they supported martyrdom operations and even demanded more” (Tamimi, 2007, 161). This represents a normative change and as a result during the four years of al-Aqsa Intifada there was an increase in the incidences of suicide missions, and the number of participants and volunteers for suicide missions.

Suicide missions and terrorist attacks have two purposes: to gain support and to coerce opponents. Most terrorism accomplishes both, and simultaneously mobilizes support for the cause (Pape, 2003, 345). The media is increasingly instrumental in broadcasting the attack, the message and the violence, and adding to the fears of the public. As compared to direct attacks and person-to-person negotiation, broadcast of the social movements claims by means of public media reaches far more third parties (Tilly, 2003, 84). Violence is the most visible trace of collective action, in contemporary news coverage and it is guaranteed to make news headlines on a

national and international basis, bringing more attention to the political cause (Tarrow, 1998, 94).

As well as indirectly affecting public discourse through actions and indirect statements, political and religious leaders also give explicit and direct social sanction to suicide missions, both through their choice of language and by actually saying suicide missions are acceptable. For example, in 2001 the association of Palestinian religious scholars gave its sanction to ‘martyrdom operations.’ It said suicide attacks, were a legitimate part of jihad, or a just war, because they “destroy the enemy and put fear in the hearts of the enemy, provoke the enemy, shake the foundations of its establishment and make it think of leaving Palestine. It will reduce the numbers of Jewish immigrants to Palestine, and it will make them [Israel] suffer financially” (Goldenberg, 2002a).

Conditions and Political Opportunity Structure

Elements of social movement theory are used in both case studies, similar to work done by Hafez and De Búrca with regards to suicide missions in Iraq and Palestine (De Búrca, 2006; Hafez, 2007). In the Palestinian context, whatever the source of contentious claims that the militant groups voiced, it was, and is, political opportunities and constraints that translate claims into action, action such as using suicide missions to forward the political agenda. However, in order to undertake such extreme action the group must identify a common enemy, a source of injustice and frame contention through the construction of identity (Tarrow, 1998, 106). The conflict in Israel and Palestine provides a perfect opportunity, because Palestine has become “the Muslim grievance *par excellence*” (Ayoob, 2005, 960).

It’s hardly surprising that the issue of Palestine was to become a grievance *par excellence*. The Balfour Declaration, the massacre at Deir Yassin, and the UN Partition Plan were all historical sources of injustice and are frequently mentioned as sources of grievance by militants. For example, the UN Partition Plan gave 57 per cent of the land of Palestine to a third of the population, and after the 1948 war, “the Zionists, allotted 57 per cent of Palestine under the Partition Plan had occupied 77 per cent of the country. Of the 1,300,000 Arab inhabitants, they had displaced nearly 900,000” (Hirst, 2003, 267; Hroub, 2006, 4-5). Unjust actions were further imposed

and reinforced through laws such as the 1950 Law for Acquisition of Absentee Property and the Emergency Articles for the Exploitation of Uncultivated Areas (Hirst, 2003, 314-315; Pilger, 2006, 104).

There are still grievances: the situation of land grabs, demolition of Palestinian homes, and huge illegal settlement expansions, all of which provoke even more anger and despair (Fisk, 2005, 525), as do extra judicial killings, collective punishment, lack of fair trials, daily humiliation at checkpoints, economic hardship and personal grief (Hass, 2000; Chehab, 2007). Research by Saleh has shown that relative deprivation coupled with emotional grievance “are strongly associated with increasing use and public support for the most desperate and devastating form of contemporary political violence, the suicide attack” (Saleh, 2004, 1).

Palestinians inside the territories gradually developed a *common political consciousness*, and *infrastructure of cooperation and communication* and were fully *embedded within a conflict framework* (Alimi, 2003, 125). There was a subordinate/dominate relationship and Israel became the Palestinians’ direct target of discontent. But given the relationship structure the Palestinians still needed to seize an opportunity (Alimi, 2003, 126). Contentious politics are triggered and transformed when there are “identity shifts, brokerage, radicalisation and convergence” (McAdam, 2001, 187). Opportunities as such arose with the failure of political avenues, like Camp David, where there was an increased demand by Palestinians for action, a radicalisation and the framing of a common purpose and identity, as well as a common source of discontent: Israel.

If we look at the waves of suicide missions in Israel and Palestine, each has an opportunity basis. The first wave of suicide missions was in response to the massacre in Hebron by Bernard Goldstein, and was also the start of the Oslo wave, where political opportunities were limited, and deemed to be failing. The Al Aqsa Intifada was also a response to political opportunities. The al Aqsa Intifada broke out at the end of September 2000. Yassar Arafat had walked out of the Camp David Summit in July 2000 and frustrations that years of the negotiation had failed to deliver a Palestinian state were intensified by the collapse. The spark that ignited this Intifada “was the provocative visit of Ariel Sharon, accompanied by hundreds of Israeli

soldiers, to Al Haram al-Sharif,” the site in East Jerusalem, which houses the Muslim al-Aqsa mosque (Nasser & Ibrahim, 2002, 67). The second Intifada was much more violent than the first and was notable for the extensive use of suicide bombings (Bloom, 2007, 24).

Collective Action Frames

Framing contention creates a ‘them’ and ‘us’ mentality, and can be created by constructing a common enemy and identity around religion, nationalism and ethnicity (Tarrow, 1998, 6). Palestinian militants specifically use religious revivalism, nationalist conflict and community ties (Hafez, 2005, 19). Many militants involved with Hamas speak of the injustices, sheer desperation and personal grievances driving the Palestinian people towards suicide missions (Fisk, 2001; Rees, 2005, 126-127) (Hassan, 2001). Hamas also emphasises that the Palestinians have no other options and need to act in self-defence. In November of 2002, Hamas leaders announced that if they did not use the suicide bombers, then: “we shall be back in the situation of the first week of the Intifada when the Israelis killed us with impunity” (Hecht, 2003, 37-8). A Hamas leader, Ismail Abu Shanab, emphasised the suicide missions as the Palestinians only option against the sheer military might of the Israeli Defence Forces, when he asked journalist Philip Rees “if the Israeli tanks shell Palestinians, if their F-16s and Apache helicopters send missiles at us, how should we fight back? All we can do is send our children to Israel and sacrifice themselves” (Rees, 2005, 126). These messages are repeated and they frame the politics of contention between the Israelis and the Palestinians in the conflict.

Mobilizing Structures

As well as mobilizing Palestinians around a common enemy and identity, Hamas also use structures to mobilize and concrete their political agenda. They do this through their existing political wing, their social support networks, and organising suicide missions, marches and demonstrations, and by supplying financial help the families of the ‘martyrs.’ It takes a support team of several militants to plan and execute a suicide attack, and Hamas can provide this support. “Typically, each cell for a suicide bombing - or for other attacks on Israel - includes a strategist who is linked to the higher tiers of leadership and who controls finances, an explosives technician who makes the bomb, a procurer for the belt or vest that will carry it, a driver to deliver it,

and other support staff. The bomber is reduced to a delivery system, especially in Hamas operations” (Goldenberg, 2001a).

Following suicide missions, local chapters of Hamas set up processions to mark the event. “With their headgear of the *shahid*, slogans of martyrdom shouted, Israeli and American flags burned and puppets representing Israeli and American leaders stabbed by a frantic crowd, they arrive at the end of the procession, during which, invariably, they shoot abundantly in the air with illegal weapons – and then the harrowing orgy of ‘celebrations’ begins” (Israeli, 2002, 28). They also put up posters of the bombers and praise him or her as a hero of the Palestinian people. Furthermore, the bombers can also count on support from Hamas “whose political leaders make regular visits to their homes in the months after their attacks, and whose financial controllers keep the money flowing into family bank accounts” (Goldenberg, 2001a).

Constituency constraint?

The Palestinian people’s support and sanction of suicide missions falls and rises, and Hamas act accordingly. Groups that use suicide missions are not indifferent to the opinion and attitudes of their constituency: the population whose interest they claim to serve and from which they recruit. “In choosing tactics and targets, the group tends to act within the boundaries of its constituency’s approval” (Merari, 2005, 80). This can be seen in the last months of 1995 when Hamas stopped using suicide missions: mostly because “of the growing Palestinian resentment against the costs of the bus bombings (expressed in massive Israeli economic sanctions)” (Sprinzak, 2000, 71).

There was however approval for the use of suicide missions and extreme violence, during the first few weeks of the Al Aqsa Intifada. “With intensified Israeli policies of targeted assassinations, brutalizing reoccupation, mass incarceration and starvation, Palestinians were not willing to be the only recipients of death and terror” (Ahmed, 2005, 88). Corresponding to the social sanction, which was at its highest, the Intifada began, and it continued with social sanction and support, as well as with more volunteers than ever before (Merari, 2005, 81). But, Hamas also changed their tactics when it became strategically important to them, they went on ceasefire for a year prior to Palestinian elections and in total they did not carry out any suicide missions for

three years. They took advantage of the opportunity to move their struggle into a formal political setting and forward their political agenda.

Hamas are currently struggling in their new role in government in the Gaza Strip and are emerging from a three week invasion and attack by Israel. Israel claims the invasion was to put an end to Hamas rockets and to destroy the Hamas infrastructure. Regarding the use of suicide missions Hamas have claimed responsibility for a suicide mission in Israel in February 2008, breaking a three-year moratorium on such acts (NYT, 06.02.08). The truce ended after the Israelis fired artillery shells and one of them “hit a crowd of Palestinian civilians picnicking on a north Gaza beach wiping out almost an entire family” and killing seven people in total (Tamimi, 2007, 239). It also came on the back of crippling economic sanctions from Israel and the international community, who refused to speak with Hamas, and an internal divisive and violent Palestinian conflict between Hamas and Fatah, in which the international community supported Fatah. The sanctions deepened an already calamitous situation and ultimately left 80 per cent of the population in Gaza dependant on food aid (Makdisi, 2008, 275). Given the lack of opportunities at a political level and the “calls for revenge by the angry masses galvanised by the heartrendering pictures of 10 year old Huda Ghalia running wildly along the Gaza beach, then falling weeping beside the body of her slain father,” “Hamas could do no less than declare an end to its unilateral truce” (Tamimi, 2007, 239).

As well as being the first suicide bombers in the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, Hamas pursued an overtly political agenda as well as a military one. They remained popular with their constituency: they were the victors in the Palestinian parliamentary elections in January 2006 and currently control the Gaza Strip.⁶ There were both causal and constitutive factors at work in the Palestinian conflict prior to the use of suicide missions. What changed in the Palestinian context was support for, and the use of, suicide mission as a means of forwarding a political agenda. With change in the situation came political opportunities and constraints, and groups such as Hamas used collective action frames and mobilizing structures to construct a common identity, a common grievance and a common enemy. They did this through religious

⁶ However, it remains to be seen if they will retain this support following the latest Israeli invasion.

justifications, their existing political wing, their social support networks, and organising suicide missions, marches and demonstrations, and by supplying financial help the families of the ‘martyrs. They were always mindful not to alienate their constituency: the Palestinian people, for whom they were fighting this cause and from whom they recruited.

CASE STUDY TWO: THE IRA IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Like Hamas, the IRA was also a militant group that engaged in political violence, and in order to do so, they had to legitimize such actions and tactics to the constituency they were claiming to represent. They did this using collective action frames, mobilizing structures, repertoires of contention and by utilising political opportunities. They emerged as a militant organisation whose orders came from the IRA Army Council, but as time passed, and in line with political developments in Northern Ireland, they adopted new strategies. They moved from a military stance to the policy of “the Armalite and the ballot box,” which meant pursuing militancy, but also political engagement through their political wing, Sinn Fein. They eventually engaged in a successful peace process and pursued a political approach, and in later years they decommissioned their arms. As with the case study of Hamas, the political process is important in case study of the IRA and allows us to examine the tactics used in accordance to the politics of the time. The case of the IRA also allows us to concentrate on the constraints of constituency, because there was an absence of suicide missions in the case of Northern Ireland, and the constituency of the IRA rejected high civilian casualties.

During the Troubles in Northern Ireland, unlike in the Palestinian territories, there was democracy, although limited especially in the early years of the conflict, and Catholics could engage in some forms of negotiation and contestation. “All the normal, civilised, channels of politics and diplomacy remained open throughout,” the conflict and “elections, parliaments and governments in Britain and the Irish Republic functioned unhindered” (O’Brien, 1999, 241). But, that is not to underestimate the scale of the conflict. It was a serious conflict situation that claimed over three thousand six hundred lives, contentious politics became violent and many paramilitary groups emerged, and targeted and killed civilians indiscriminately.

‘The Troubles,’ as the conflict in Northern Ireland is known, claimed over three thousand six hundred lives in a 30-year period (McKittrick, 1999, 1474). But the Troubles, which broke out in the late 1960s, had roots going back many decades (McKittrick, 2001, 1). There are four basic elements that make up the Northern Ireland equation, most important of which are the Northern Irish Protestants and Northern Irish Catholics. The Protestants, made up roughly two thirds, of the one and a half million the population, and the Catholics made up the remaining third. The vast majority of Protestants were Unionists, and favoured the existing link with Britain. But, the Catholics generally regarded themselves as Irish, not British, and believed Northern Ireland was an unsatisfactory, illegitimate entity. Many of them wanted a united Ireland. “The heart of the Northern Ireland problem lies in this clash between two competing national aspirations.” The two others in the Northern Ireland equation were the Irish and British governments (McKittrick, 2001, 1-2).

The boundaries of Northern Ireland, which came into being in 1921, were essentially worked out by the Protestant Unionists and the British government. But, Catholics felt trapped and separated from the Irish state, and Protestants lived in a state of political nervousness, constantly fearing British policy might move to support a united Ireland. The basic competition was complicated further by issues of power, territory and justice (McKittrick, 2001, 2-3) and many of these issues remain to this day.

The Provisional IRA

For the IRA, their main objective was “to end British rule in Ireland” and “to establish an Irish Socialist Republic, based on the Proclamation of 1916” (O’Brien, 1999, 9). The Provisional IRA was the largest of the Northern Irish and Irish republican paramilitary groups. They emerged as a result of political and sectarian tensions in 1966, which foreshadowed ‘The Troubles’. Loyalist⁷ paramilitarism also re-emerged in 1966 to cause the first deaths from political violence since the 1950s IRA campaign (McKittrick, 1999, 23). By 1969 (the year generally regarded as the start of the troubles) the British army were on the streets. The increasing tension of the previous two years had spiralled out of control and the Provisional IRA emerged as an organisation (McKittrick, 1999, 30). They had split from the Official IRA in 1969 and

⁷ Loyalists: those loyal to the British Queen.

“the new Provisional IRA was led by men who represented traditional, conservative, republican values and who believed the only way to rid Ireland of the British, was by armed struggle” (Moloney, 2002, 74).

In the thirty years of the Troubles they were responsible for almost half the deaths (1771 of the 3636) (McKittrick, 1999, 1745), making them the main aggressor in the conflict (Alonso, 2007, 5). In the years to come they would be responsible for the Enniskillen bombing which killed eleven civilians, the Bloody Friday bombings in Belfast which killed nine people and further bombings in the UK, which caused huge structural damage in London and Manchester. The IRA’s political wing is Sinn Fein, which subsequently entered into the peace process and signed the Good Friday Agreement. Martin McGuinness, of Sinn Fein, is now the Deputy First Minister in the new Northern Irish Assembly.

Social Sanction and Support

“In the cases of Ireland and Spain, public opinion rejected the use of civilian casualties, including the rejection of suicide terror. This led the IRA to alter tactics that involved civilian deaths resulting from their bombing campaign” (Bloom, 2005, 134). The IRA “learned how to avoid being isolated from their own communities” (O’Brien, 1999, 20). This is not only clear from the behaviour of militant groups, it is also clear from their rhetoric. The IRA leader Sean MacStiofan wrote “the Republican interest in retaining popular support clearly lay in causing as few” casualties “as possible” (MacStiofan, 1975, 214), and Gerry Adams explained it was a necessity “to force the republican movement into a complete and utter reliance on the people’s support” (Kalyvas and Sanchez-Cuenca, 2005, 220). Gerry Adams also wrote in a column in the Republican News saying “the constant theme was the politicisation of the struggle, how to fight a long war without becoming isolated from the people” i.e. the constituency (O’Brien, 1999, 107).

This shows they were aware that their constituents, who lived in Northern Ireland, would reject tactics that targeted civilians. Indeed Bloom argues “the IRA abandoned violence against civilians when they observed public reaction to Derry, the 1974 pub bombings, and Omagh” (Bloom, 2005, 136). With regards to the Omagh bomb, which killed twenty nine civilians “the strength of the public backlash against the bombers

forced the Real IRA to declare a ceasefire” (Guelke, 2006, 103). The public reaction and the lack of social sanction for the use of human bombs, are outlined in the next section.

Conditions and Political Opportunity Structure

Applying the political opportunity structure we see that the Provisional IRA had social change, opportunities, contentious politics, repertoires of contention, mobilization and collective action frames. Repertoires of contention for the Catholic community were established first by marches by the civil rights movements, which were duly banned by the state and which saw police excesses broadcast around the world (Moloney, 2002, 74). Grievances and political injustices were apparent in gerrymandering⁸, internment without trial, police brutality and in the legal apparatus of the state, such as the Special Powers Act. The Act gave exceptional powers to arrest, detain without trial and suppress political dissent. So severe were its penalties that a South African prime minister during apartheid remarked he would swap all his emergency laws for one clause of the SPA (Moloney, 2002, 39).

These injustices and grievances allowed the IRA to use more extreme collective action frames and mobilization, and to justify the use of violence and armed struggle. The Provisionals also used certain events and opportunities, such as Bloody Sunday to mobilize recruits and further a sense of collective identity. Bloody Sunday happened on the 30th January 1972. Thirteen Catholics were killed when soldiers of a British paratroop regiment opened fire during a civil rights march in Londonderry (BBC Bloody Sunday Inquiry Report). Afterwards young people were said to be queuing up by the hundreds to join the IRA (Moloney, 2002, 110). The IRA also used the hunger strikes by IRA and republican prisoners, who were demanding political rights in jail, to form collective identity and to mobilise people. “The unplanned by-product of the hunger strikes was an almost volcanic upsurge in popular support for the Republican Movement” (O’Brien, 1999, 124). A sense of collective identity, oppression, and grievance were some of the reasons recruits joined up in such large numbers, as well as defined common enemy.

⁸ Gerrymandering: moving voting borders to give the maximum number of seats to the Unionists.

Constituency constraints

Despite all the political opportunities, the IRA did not use suicide missions, and while they used violence they did attempt to minimise casualties. But there were still instances of extreme violence and in total the IRA were responsible for 1,771 deaths (McKittrick, 1999, 1475). However, these instances of extreme violence resulted in constituency costs and had to be avoided. Most terrorist groups rely on their constituency for support so have to be careful not to alienate them, and when the IRA called in bomb warnings in London, they could successfully terrorise people but without killing them. It was enough to demonstrate that they could. “They knew that to have committed a large-scale atrocity would have alienated their supporters at home” (Richardson, 2006, 176). Indeed, “an analysis of the pattern of IRA violence shows a chronic concern on their part to tailor their targeting strategies in such a way as to inflict harm, gain attention and raise the costs for Britain of its presence in Northern Ireland, but not to alienate the Catholic population in the province” (Richardson, 2006, 84).

That is not to say that the IRA have never thought of using human bombs, they did. IRA members did not take their own lives; they forced others to do so by kidnapping their families and threatening them. The first happened on the 24th October 1990 in Coshquin on the Donegal-Derry Border when they kidnapped a man’s family and they forced him to drive into a British Army checkpoint. The IRA then detonated the bomb he was carrying and he was killed along with five British soldiers. Others followed in the weeks ahead, but it “was a public relations disaster.” There was criticism, public outrage and despair among IRA members, and the human bombs were never used again (Moloney, 2002, 348-349). The cost of using suicide and human bombs were too high and because they were not socially sanctioned they could not be used.

By the early 1990s the IRA campaign had become “deeply unpopular and deeply offensive to the vast majority of people and politicians in the Republic, as a series of elections had proven” (O’Brien, 1999, 225). Sinn Fein announced a new ‘peace initiative’ in 1992 and they signalled strongly that they wished to enter a peace process. In 1994 the IRA called a ceasefire and Sinn Fein entered into the peace process. Their ‘Towards a Lasting Peace’ paper explicitly accepted “the need to obtain the consent of the majority of people in the North” (O’Brien, 1999, 228).

However there was much internal strife within the IRA and there were numerous setbacks in negotiations with the Irish and British governments. The IRA broke its ceasefire with an attack on Canary Wharf in 1996, but still Sinn Fein gained a “record vote” in the Northern Irish elections (McKittrick, 1999, 1386). The peace process continued on, even if it was a slow process fraught with difficulties, and 1998 brought the historic Good Friday Agreement. In the Republic of Ireland 94.5 per cent of people voted in favour of the Agreement and 71 per cent voted in favour in Northern Ireland. But 1998 was also the year when the Real IRA bomb in Omagh killed twenty-nine people, the highest death toll of the conflict (McKittrick, 1999, 1422). Given the outrage and horror at such a display of violence against civilians, instead of derailing the peace process, it galvanised the politicians and the public who wanted to turn their back on such violence for good.

The IRA officially decommissioned and declared a ceasefire on the 25th July 2005, ending political violence and pursuing a purely political democratic route, constitutionally underpinned by the Good Friday Agreement, which was in accordance with the wishes of the majority of people in Ireland and Northern Ireland.⁹ The situation in Northern Ireland continues to be a situation of contentious politics, despite ceasefires and decommissioning. The unionist party, the DUP, and Sinn Fein are now in government together and there remain many difficulties surrounding policing and justice and how these are to be devolved to the Northern Irish Assembly in Stormont. There has also been increased activity by dissident republicans, and in recent months they have killed a police officer and two British Army soldiers.

With the signing of the Good Friday Agreement there is now democratic constitutionalism in Northern Ireland. The people of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland voted for the Agreement, and this democratic constitutionalism ensures that the people of Northern Ireland who are subject to the rules, under which they are governed, have the right to contest and negotiate those rules and norms, democratically and have them changed. But this was not always the case in Northern

⁹ IRA Ceasefire Statement July 28th 2005: "The leadership of Oglaiġ na hEireann has formally ordered an end to the armed campaign. All IRA units have been ordered to dump arms. All volunteers have been instructed to assist the development of purely political and democratic programmes through exclusively peaceful means. Volunteers must not engage in any other activities whatsoever." Available online from: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/northern_ireland/4724599.stm.

Ireland. While there were democratic institutions and democracy, it was limited at certain times and it was difficult for the Catholic nationalists to forward a political agenda through contestation and negotiation. Within this setting the IRA emerged to challenge the political structures using political violence. But because they were operating in a democracy their constituency rejected the use of extreme forms of political violence which targeted and indiscriminately killed civilians. The IRA did not use suicide attacks because if the IRA had carried out systematic indiscriminate violence, the constituency support would drop (Kalyvas and Sanchez-Cuenca, 2005, 221). This is illustrated by the manner in which the use of human bombers was condemned by the IRA's constituency. The IRA's constituency was not prepared for extreme political violence to be carried out by the IRA, acting as their representatives, especially where there were other political avenues, and other forms of contestation and negotiation available, through democratic institutions. Within this political setting the IRA pursued their "Armalite and ballot box" policy, and eventually as the military campaign held them back from gathering more social support and sanction, they pursued purely political policies, through the peace process.

LIMITS OF CONSTITUENCY: RELIGION AND TRANSNATIONAL ACTORS

From the two case studies above we can see how political opportunity structures allow militants to legitimize political violence and suicide missions to their constituency, and how constituency can act as a constraint on militant groups if there is no social sanction for suicide missions. However, the case studies refer to ethno nationalist and regionally defined conflicts, rather than religious and transnational conflicts. Where constituency is limited, as a constraint, is with regards to religious militants, and to transnational global militants. As explained earlier, religion is not the cause of suicide missions but this section of the paper discusses how religious and transnational groups are not *as* constrained by constituency, as regionally defined ethno nationalist groups. In particular many make the point that religious groups are not trying "to win favour with an external constituency" and therefore are not constrained by a regionally defined constituency but rather are constrained by their own religious leaders (Enders, 2002, 5; Sandler, 2003, 784). Transnational global actors are also problematic to constrain, because they do not "confine their actions to

a region where a conflict is already taking place” (Guelke, 2006) and therefore their constituency is not always local, and cannot necessarily constrain them. If the militant group carries out high levels of anti civilian violence without reference to constraints imposed by the constituency of the region where the conflict is already taking place, then they are operating for the benefit of a different constituency, most likely a global constituency, and will not be constrained by the local constituency. This is why the distinction between local and global is important.

We currently see a change from ‘old/classical terrorism’, to a ‘new terrorism’, which “operates indiscriminately and can inflict heavy losses on civilians who have no direct involvement in the conflict” (Khosrokhavar, 2005, 163). Religious fundamentalist terrorists operating on a global scale “seek out mass casualties, viewing anyone not with them as against them” (Enders, 2002, 14). It is of note that Britain lost sixty-seven of its citizens in the September 11 attacks, carried out by the global religious group al Qaeda, more than any single terrorist attack by the IRA in over thirty years (Richardson, 2006, 177). The link between ‘new terrorism’ and its high casualty levels and indiscriminate killings, is because the religious groups who carry out the attacks “seek to appeal to no other constituency than themselves” and God (Hoffman, 1998, 93-95). “Thus the restraints on violence that are imposed on secular terrorists by the desire to appeal to a tacitly supportive or uncommitted constituency are not relevant to the religious terrorist” (Hoffmann, 1998, 95).

But perhaps public opinion in the Muslim world may be able to act as a constraint on some Islamic religious transnational groups? Al Qaeda Iraq for example “intended to galvanise support for their cause, from the wider Muslim world” as well as Iraqis (Hafez, 2007, 158). But the unprecedented level and indiscriminate nature of civilian deaths carried out by them, resulted in a backlash within Iraq and the wider Muslim world. In 2006 the insurgents were openly turning against Al Qaeda and by 2007 Awakening groups, which comprised of Sunni Muslim tribesmen previously involved with the insurgency, were working with the occupying American force, against al Qaeda, and were being armed by the Americans (IHT, 11.06.07). They were a key factor in the “surge” by pushing al Qaeda out of the areas they control and taking over security (Kahl, 2008). Increasingly they are becoming integrated into the new Iraqi political system. “Members of the Baghdad Awakening, estimated to number about

54,000, move to the Iraqi government payroll on 1 October (2008), with others to follow” (BBC 01.10.08) and Nouri al Maliki, the Iraqi Prime Minister has promised to incorporate 20 per cent of the Sons of Iraq, “mostly Sunni tribal militia members and former insurgents,” into Iraq’s security and police forces and “provide the remainder with nonsecurity jobs” (Kahl, 2008).

With regard to world wide Muslim opinion there is also potential for the influence of ‘constituency’ and social movement. A 47-nation survey by the Pew Centre found that “the percentage of Muslims saying that suicide bombing is justified in the defense of Islam has declined dramatically over the past five years (2002-2007.) In Lebanon, for example, just 34% of Muslims say suicide bombings in the defense of Islam are often or sometimes justified; in 2002, 74% expressed this view” (Pew Centre Report, 24.07.07). This reflects a major change in terms of Muslim public opinion, during the Iraq war, and may impact on the use of suicide missions. It is also of note that Muslims are “on average more likely than the American public to unequivocally condemn attacks on civilians” according to the World Public Opinion report (Esposito and Mogahed, 2007, 94) and this could be used with regards to constituency when dealing with the resort of political violence directed against civilians. Many argue this point and say, “Islam may be a powerful weapon for discrediting terrorists and limiting the growth of terrorism” (Esposito and Mogahed, 2007, 161).

While religion may act as a powerful tool against the use of anti civilian violence, it is also used by militants as a “good source of framing” to sanction violence. This is because religion, as well as ethnicity and nationalism, allow militants the opportunity to create a collective identity, to frame the conflict in ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ terms and mobilize support from constituencies in situations of contentious politics (Tarrow, 1998, 112). Religion is being used and manipulated in conflicts worldwide, in order to achieve militant goals, but religion alone is not the cause of suicide missions and political violence. There is no doubt that religious groups are less constrained in their use of violence and they cause higher death tolls (Hoffmann, 1998, 93), but Khosrokhavar makes the point that while religion is no more than a pretext, the absence of a theological framework does not prevent groups such as Hamas, GIA or the Taliban from “justifying their actions in religious terms” to sanction their use violence (Khosrokhavar, 2005, 48). In the case of Osama Bin Laden, “his agenda is a

basically political one, though it is couched of course in religious language and imagery” (Burke, 2004, 23). However while this may be true, religious transnational groups, kill and attack more civilians than nonreligious groups, and it is not yet clear to what extent, if any, constituency and social movement can impact on this.

CONCLUSION

Suicide missions represent a particularly lethal and extreme form of political violence, which targets and indiscriminately kills civilians in unprecedented numbers. Suicide missions are successful in achieving both military and psychological aims. Militarily they are capable of huge structural damage, and on average kill four times as many people as an ordinary bomb. Psychologically, due to their indiscriminate nature and the fact that they frequently target civilians, they cause fear and uncertainty because civilians do not know when the suicide bomber will strike next. They are also a form of propaganda: the suicide mission is the poor man’s F16, for the oppressed to be able to fight back against the world’s largest armies and superpowers. Where this propaganda is successful it leads to more people being ‘inspired’ to commit such acts. Ultimately there is a devastating human cost, physically and mentally. Most worrying, as referred to earlier, is their increased use, the frequency of attacks, in the geographical spread of attacks and in the number of groups involved (Merari, 2005, 70).

It is vital that we “understand and act on the root causes” of suicide missions (Atran, 2004, 72) and we currently are working off the wrong understandings (Atran, 2004, 73). The poverty of singular explanations such as religion, economics, strategic logic and psychological approaches has been dealt with in earlier sections. The explanation for the resort to suicide missions is complex and is not mono-causal, and no one explanatory approach is sufficient. By using the political opportunity structure model the paper shows how suicide missions and other forms of political violence are sanctioned using collective action frames, mobilization and repertoires of contention, in situations of contentious politics. The current set of explanations is incomplete without reference to constituency and social sanction, which in certain contexts may act as a one of the constraints on the resort of suicide missions and other forms of extreme political violence, which are carried out by militant groups in situations of contentious politics. The paper uses the case studies of Hamas and the IRA to

illustrate the emergence of militant groups and the resort to violence to forward a political agenda, using the political opportunity structure approach and by focusing on constituency. Groups have different objectives, and use different tactics and levels of violence at different times of the conflict. This is because they are operating within a political process, and within political structures that provide constraints and opportunities at different times. If social movements are given the opportunity to contest and negotiate the power structures, they do so, as is the norm in democratic countries. However in the absence of such an opportunity, extreme political violence may occur and may be supported by constituency who see few or no other options.

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