

## Suicide Bombing in Afghanistan: A Multilevel Analysis

Kaneshka Nawabi

University of South Wales, kanawabi@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/jss>  
pp. 94-111

---

### Recommended Citation

Nawabi, Kaneshka. "Suicide Bombing in Afghanistan: A Multilevel Analysis." *Journal of Strategic Security* 17, no. 3 (2024) : 94-111.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.17.3.2273>

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/jss/vol17/iss3/6>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Open Access Journals at Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Strategic Security by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@usf.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@usf.edu).

---

## Suicide Bombing in Afghanistan: A Multilevel Analysis

### Abstract

In August 2021, an insurgency spearheaded by violent suicide campaigns saw the return of the Taliban to power in Afghanistan. A claimed four thousand suicide bombers remain a strategic asset at the hands of the Taliban and other extremist groups with extensive technical and logistical capabilities and a strong deterrence against their rivals. Despite this emanating threat, the majority of suicide terrorism research continues to rely on data from the Middle East, where social status, financial gains, and collective honour are cited as key factors. Using a multilevel framework and analysis, this article is based on field interviews with victims, proponents, and various stakeholders related to suicide terrorism. Findings suggest that suicide bombers in Afghanistan are usually young, poor, semi-literate Pashtun males with refugee backgrounds where they receive informal religious education in *madaris*. The culture and ideology of these religious institutions significantly encourage acts of violence, including suicide attacks. While foreign occupation and civilian casualties fuel the insurgency, poverty, lack of education, and the war economy are the main drivers of insurgency, not direct causes of suicide terrorism in Afghanistan.

### Acknowledgements

Declaration of interests: The author of this article declares that he has neither received any financial compensations nor any known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Funding: This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

## Introduction

Suicide bombing campaigns in Afghanistan are amongst the most prevalent, largest, and deadliest in the world. These campaigns evolved through two phases: from 2001 to 2005, al-Qaida foreign fighters aimed to drive out international forces, and then from 2004, the Taliban took over, leading to a sharp rise in suicide attacks as a tactic of war. Between 2001 and 2018, around 1,339 suicide attacks claimed 9,197 lives and wounded another 15,997 (see Figure 1).<sup>1</sup> In 2019, 45.5 percent of the world's suicide terrorism incidents occurred in Afghanistan.<sup>2</sup> Suicide terrorism in Afghanistan has been understudied compared to the Middle East, where research often highlights factors like social status, financial gain, and collective honor as key motivators.

Understanding the motivations behind such extreme acts of violence requires a comprehensive analysis considering various influence levels and causations. Therefore, this research aims to delve into the multilevel and multicausal dimensions of suicide terrorism in Afghanistan, exploring the interplay of individual, organizational, and environmental factors contributing to this phenomenon.

At the individual level, this article focuses on suicide bombers, predominantly young, impoverished males from the Pashtun ethnic group. Many have experienced displacement as refugees in neighboring countries like Pakistan and Iran, where they often receive informal religious education in *madaris* (religious seminaries). The personal histories of these individuals, marked by socio-economic hardships and limited educational opportunities, create a fertile ground for radicalisation.

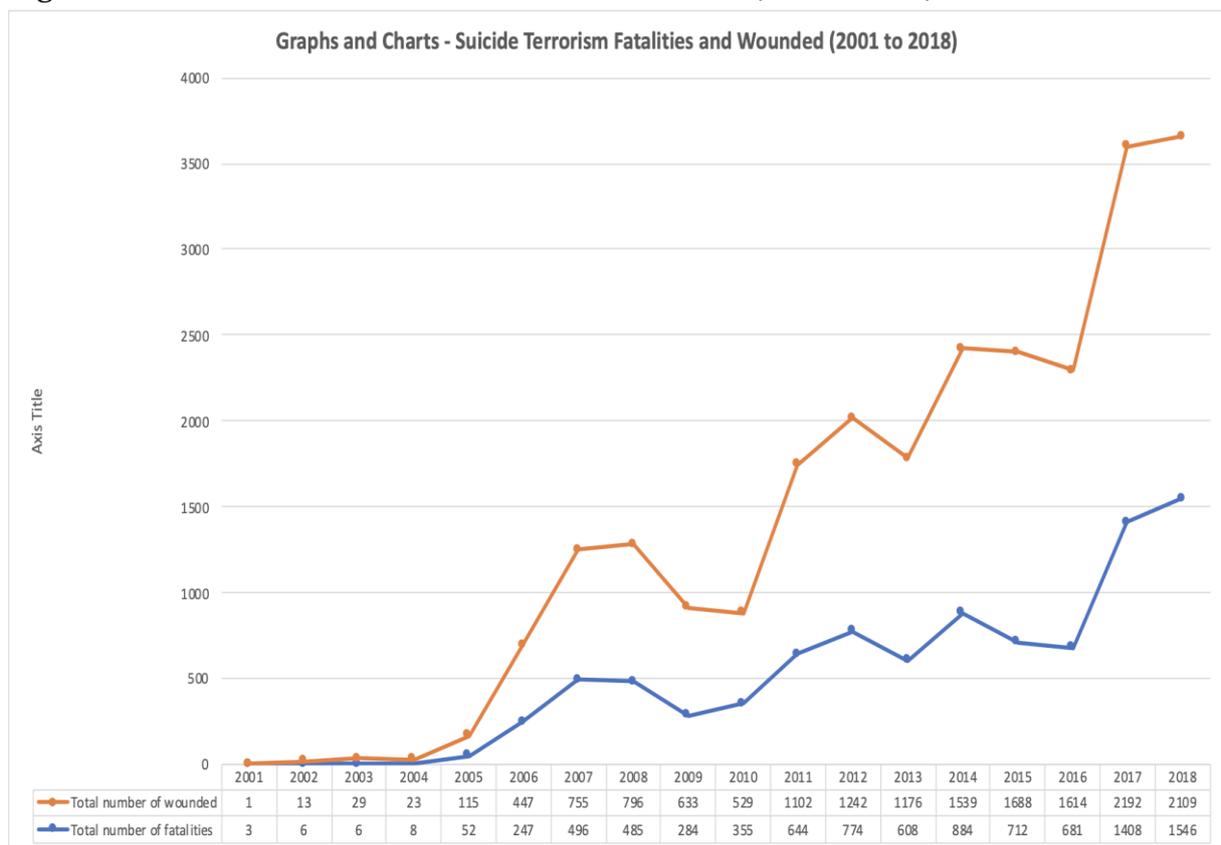
The organizational level analyses the impact of international terrorist networks, religious institutions, including *madaris*, and the strategic objectives of insurgent groups. These groups often exploit local grievances and socio-economic vulnerabilities to recruit and radicalize individuals for their causes. The proliferation of extremist ideologies through *madaris* further complicates the situation, providing ideological support and operational guidance to these suicide bombers.

On a broader environmental level analysis, this article examines Afghanistan's enduring conflict and instability, fostering an environment conducive to insurgency and violence. Factors such as poverty, limited education, and a war economy fuel insurgency,

compounded by foreign occupation and counterinsurgency casualties. Historical foreign intervention and internal strife disrupt social and economic structures, breeding disillusionment and despair. External actors, including neighboring countries and global powers, shape Afghanistan’s suicide terrorism dynamics, aligning strategic interests with local conflicts.

The study offers a holistic perspective by integrating qualitative insights from field interviews with qualitative and quantitative data available on suicide terrorism. This approach not only enhances our understanding of the underlying causes and dynamics of suicide terrorism but also contributes to the development of more effective strategies to prevent radicalization, disrupt terrorist networks, and weaken the suicide terrorism phenomenon in Afghanistan.

Figure 1: Suicide Terrorism Fatalities and Wounded (2001–2018)



“Source: GTD START”

## Methodological Considerations

The multilevel framework of this research follows a small but growing number of researchers who look beyond uni-causal explanations and seek to analyze suicide terrorism through a broader multilevel framework.<sup>3</sup> This framework seeks explanations for the individual suicide bomber's motivations, the organization's strategic logic, and the environmental push and pull factors, characteristics, and nature of suicide terrorism campaigns in Afghanistan.

At the individual level, the study focuses on young, impoverished Pashtun males, often displaced and educated in *madaris*, leading to radicalization due to socio-economic hardships. At the organizational level, it examines how terrorist networks, religious institutions, and insurgent groups exploit local grievances and vulnerabilities, with *madaris* spreading extremist ideologies. At the environmental level, the analysis highlights how Afghanistan's conflict, poverty, and foreign interventions create a conducive environment for the insurgency, influenced by external actors with strategic interests.

This article's primary source material is based on the field interviews conducted with 30 respondents in Afghanistan (see Annex-I). To capture the views of those involved in these attacks, victims of suicide terrorism, proponents of suicide violence, and specific political partisans supporting and opposing the Taliban's political violence, journalists and political analysts were selected for interviews. The study used snowball sampling, initially selecting a small group and expanding based on referrals. Participants were chosen purposefully and through civil society recommendations and political contacts. Data collection primarily involved semi-structured questionnaires, evolving into informal discussions on suicide terrorism. Follow-up interviews were conducted for deeper insights.

The application of this research framework aims to achieve two objectives: to assist in discovering the causes and motivations for suicide terrorism at each level. It examined whether a single 'level' contributing factor has more significance than others. Second, the approach helped discover whether common theories and hypotheses on issues such as social status, financial gains, and collective honor are relevant to suicide terrorism in the Afghan context. The result of achieving these aims is anticipated to deliver a series of helpful contextual insights usually missing from Afghan research works.

While this research covered a number of important and relevant multilevel causes and motivations of suicide terrorism in Afghanistan, it neither intended nor achieved a multilevel analysis of all the factors. Also, while parts of this framework achieved a multilevel analytical structure, others sufficed with a general inductive approach due to overlaps and inseparability of levels.

### **Afghanistan: A Multilevel Perspective on Suicide Terrorism**

The research inquiry starts with an overarching theme, what individual motivations, organizational goals, and environmental issues underlie suicide terrorism decisions in the Afghan context? The theme is then subdivided into further level enquiries: Is the suicide bomber motivated by self-sacrifice? Do the terror organization's strategic/operational gains motivate them?<sup>4</sup> What impact do social/religious/ideological push and pull factors have at an individual and/or organizational level? The overall theme and enquiries are part of the leading research questions adopted, developed, and integrated throughout this research process, including the framework and questionnaire development.

Understanding what motivates a suicide bomber in Afghanistan leads to the inquiry on finding the genesis of suicide terrorism in suicide bombers' attitudes, motives, and grievances. As Waltz argues, "the locus of the important causes of war is found in the nature and behavior of man."<sup>5</sup> Shay argues, "Man is apparently the only living creature cognizant that death awaits him. He cannot avoid death, yet he can bring it on himself with his own two hands: man can commit suicide, and many do so."<sup>6</sup> An individual's attitudes and characteristics are qualities that have a profound impact on their decision to carry out suicide attacks. However, the rationality of the individual bombers is much more unclear and harder to determine, and their motivations are certainly much more diverse. Just how can humans strap explosives around themselves with the explicit purpose of entering a packed place to kill and also maim as many individuals as possible with their very own deaths?<sup>7</sup>

Each of the sections begins with a literature review of the pertinent issues, followed by a presentation of the field interviews' results, offering practical insights and empirical data collected directly from the field.

### *Suicide Bomber's Mindset*

For some terrorism scholars, individual psychological motives are at the core of driving people to suicide terrorism.<sup>8</sup> They argue that depression and post-traumatic stress symptoms are, along with feelings of hopelessness, common among suicide bombers, pointing to individual motivations.<sup>9</sup> Victoroff and Lankford propose that suicide bombers may actually be *suicidal* and that death, rather than honor, may be the ultimate objective.<sup>10</sup> Dingley also argues that while mental health may not be the leading cause of encouraging individuals to carry out the act of suicide terrorism, “certain psychological types may be drawn to it, which would imply that at least part of their behavior is psychologically determined.”<sup>11</sup> The “rarity of suicide attackers seems to warrant the assumption that they have distinctive personality characteristics.”<sup>12</sup>

This research suggests that individual psychology plays an important role in their decision to carry out suicide attacks. Decades of war and conflict have caused widespread mental issues and increased the rate of suicide among Afghans. According to a 2019 survey by Big Think, “Afghanistan is the most depressed country on earth,” with one in five Afghans being severely depressed.<sup>13</sup> Afghanistan’s medical capacity to combat these mental health issues, including depression, is negligible: there were only 300 psychologists for an estimated 32 million population.<sup>14</sup> Suicidality and psychological issues linked to protracted wars and violent conflicts are a longstanding health crisis among Afghans. As an interviewee argued,

If an individual has pre-existing psychological conditions, including suicidal tendencies and ideations, he can be called a *mustahid* [مستعد: suicidally disposed of]. *Mustahid* individuals have pre-existing mental and psychological predispositions to commit suicide.<sup>15</sup>

The psychological characteristics and individuals’ motivations for deciding to commit suicide in Afghanistan are therefore central.

### *Counterinsurgency Operations and the Desire for Revenge*

Suicide terrorism literature also points out that another factor, the desire for revenge, as a motivating factor. Hafez, Singh, Kilcullen, and Gossman, amongst others, link the negative impact of

counterinsurgency to individual decisions to seek revenge and even sacrifice themselves through a suicide attack.<sup>16</sup> According to Singh, “The desire for revenge, commitment to political groups, deep individual belief in nationalism or religion, and/ or the desire to achieve immortality and capture material goods for the family can all motivate an individual to become a suicide bomber.”<sup>17</sup>

The text discusses the relevance of revenge and avenging defeat within Afghan tribal and warrior culture. It suggests that insurgents in Afghanistan are motivated by cultural values of honor to avenge the deaths of family and friends. When unable to achieve revenge through conventional means, some may resort to suicide terrorism. The desire for revenge, influenced by psychological and social factors, is a significant motivator for suicide bombers in Afghanistan.

The majority of interviewees repeatedly emphasized the effectiveness of suicide bombings against the well-guarded international forces and highly guarded Afghans. The Taliban proudly proclaim that their *hamalat istish-hadi* (martyrdom operations/suicide bombings) brought the foreign invaders’ highly advanced war machine to its knees: “The *istish-hadi* chooses his target, walks into the target, looks him in the eye and explodes his bomb. No smart bomb can do that; therefore, the insurgents use it as a weapon. It is a tested weapon, proven to be very effective.”<sup>18</sup> Another interviewee suggested that:

He [the victim] has no database [referring to multiple databases international forces maintain for registering Afghans] where he can enter that foreigner’s picture and find him. For him, all foreigners are the same and look alike. Since targeted killing is not possible, he, therefore, blows himself up amongst all of them and kills as many.<sup>19</sup>

The text confirms that while counterinsurgency-related revenge can motivate individuals to volunteer for suicide terrorism, suicide terrorism is primarily a method calculated for success across various ideologies.

While a culture of violence directly correlates with increased Afghan insurgency, culture on its own does not offer a linear relationship to suicide terrorism in Afghanistan. The act of suicide is the antithesis of Afghan values and is considered a cultural taboo. As described by one interviewee:

An individual committing suicide terrorism is believed to be a non-Afghan, a coward, or a madman that has nothing to do with the Afghan ways of honor and *ghairat*. Because they cannot comprehend its motivations, when a suicide attack takes place, Afghans express utter confusion on how and why an individual carries out the suicide attack.<sup>20</sup>

### *Does Religious Ideology Motivate Suicide Bombers?*

The belief in an afterlife is at the core of Islamic teachings and the hallmark of the majority of Afghan militants.<sup>21</sup> Many fighters in Afghanistan view death as the beginning of eternal life. Radical religious ideology plays a significant role in perpetuating suicide terrorism, as it motivates bombers with the belief in an afterlife that is better than their current life. Hence, the connection between religious ideology and suicide terrorism in Afghanistan is crucial to understand. According to one interviewee:

The problem with our interpretation of Islam is that we believe in the afterlife more than the present one. Therefore, suicide bombers believe that the sooner they go and kill themselves, the sooner they will end their miserable life to reach eternal life.<sup>22</sup>

The research indicates that radical religious ideology plays a key role in perpetuating suicide terrorism in Afghanistan. This extreme mindset is often the result of religious institutions' efforts to instill beliefs in an afterlife and its rewards. Consequently, extremist ideology is central to motivating and convincing individuals to become suicide bombers. As further described by one interviewee, who participated in the Afghan Civil War of 1990s: "You have to believe in the afterlife to be able to fight. You see this conviction that despite bomb strikes around these religious fighters, they still stand their ground."<sup>23</sup>

### *Suicide Bomber's Age*

Juvenile delinquency, associated with gang culture, drug and alcohol-related crimes, and suicides, is common in most countries.<sup>24</sup> In Afghanistan, this issue is further reinforced by the rampant poverty and the widespread presence of a war economy.<sup>25</sup> Insurgency, illicit drug, and other criminal industries are major competitors to the legal market economy in Afghanistan.

The average age of suicide bombers in Afghanistan is 14–25 years ( $m=19.5$ ), the youngest among suicide bombers worldwide.<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile, the majority of suicide bombers in Afghanistan are *madrassa* students. Since *madaris* are the recruitment and training ground, where children as young as five join to start their studies, young age becomes overwhelmingly relevant to Afghan suicide campaigns. Young age is also a critical vulnerability exploited by suicide organizations through these *madaris*. As confirmed by one interviewee:

These cases of suicide terrorism are mostly linked to young people who are sent to *madaris* for religious education. So, they are usually very young boys (10–12 years). Once enrolled in a *madrassa*, their Islamic studies impact their psyche. Therefore, age is crazily relevant to suicide missions in Afghanistan.”<sup>27</sup>

Young age is, therefore, central to recruitment, training and carrying out suicide attacks in Afghanistan.

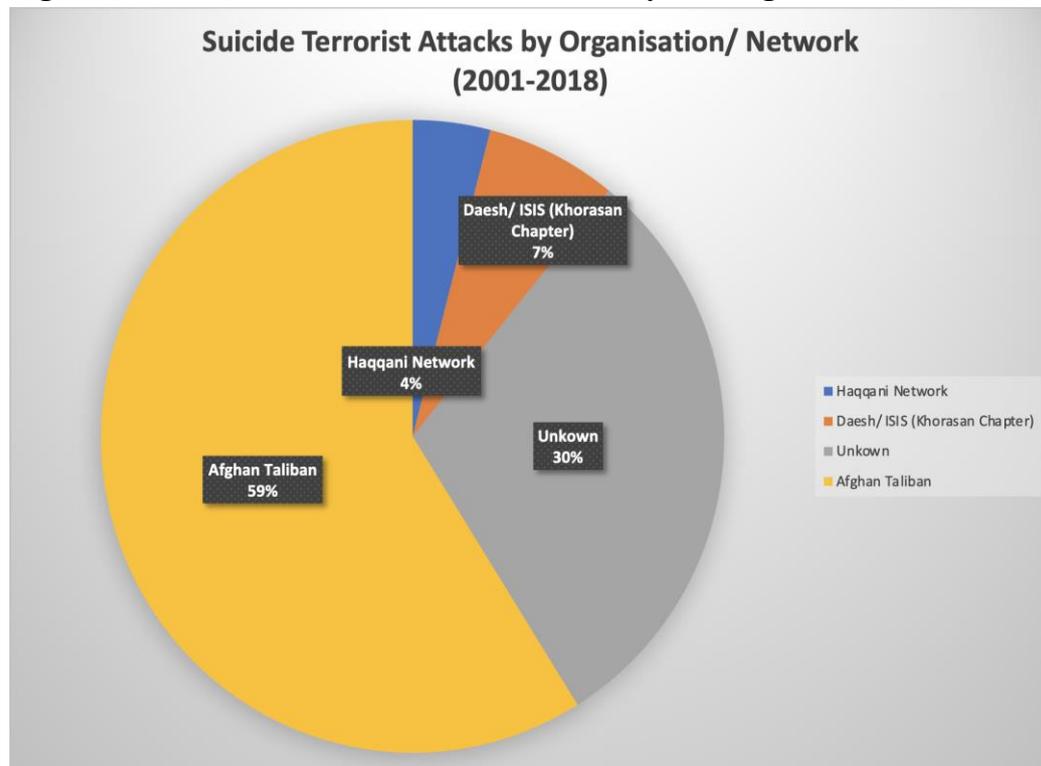
## Works and Functions of Suicide Terror Organizations

At the second level of analysis, the focus is on understanding the works and functions of the organizational strategic logic in promulgating suicide terrorism in Afghanistan. While individual psychology plays an important role in a suicide bomber’s decision to carry out this act, individuals without organizational support are unable to carry out and sustain these campaigns. “This complication is necessary as suicide attacks are a result of the interaction between agents and the institutions sponsoring them.”<sup>28</sup> Therefore, the relationships between organizations and individuals are the same.

Suicide attacks in Afghanistan are carried out mainly through four extremist organizations in Afghanistan: Al-Qaida (2001-2005), the Taliban (2004-2021), the Haqqani network (2004-ongoing), and the IS-K (2014-ongoing).<sup>29</sup> The September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2001, attack that killed Ahmad Shah Masood marked Al-Qaeda’s first campaign, targeting national and international entities in Afghanistan. By 2004, the Taliban took over the leadership of suicide campaigns inspired by successful IED and suicide attacks in Iraq. Al-Qaeda facilitated the transfer of skills from Middle East networks to the Afghan Taliban, with the Haqqani network aiding in skill transfer. By 2014, the Islamic State-

Khorasan (IS-K) emerged, conducting suicide attacks against the Taliban and Afghan civilians, especially *shi'as*.

Figure 3: Share of Suicide Terrorist Attacks by the Organisation (2001-2018)



“Source: GTD-START Database”<sup>30</sup>

### *The Organizational Strategic Logic*

Many terrorism scholars, including Pape, Piazza, Crenshaw, Horowitz, and Martin & Pedahzur, purported to examine the impact and reasoning of a terrorist organization on suicide terrorism campaigns.<sup>31</sup> Robert Pape is at the forefront of the argument on the importance of organizational motivation in suicide terrorism. He argues that suicide terror does not emanate from an individual’s choice and is not a function of religious indoctrination, nor is it a result of a psychological predisposition. Such acts are mainly because of organizational *strategic logic*.<sup>32</sup>

Terrorist organizations play a significant role in recruiting, training, and sustaining suicide campaigns in Afghanistan. These campaigns create insecurity, undermine the government’s legitimacy, and generate civilian discontent. Suicide bombings are highly effective for terrorists, causing significant casualties and posing a minimal risk of exposure. The intellectual leaders, including those from Al-Qaeda, continue to

persuade the Afghan Taliban to adopt suicide terrorism as a legitimate tactic. As one interviewee confirmed, “When Afghans questioned the religious legitimacy of suicide tactics, Al-Qaeda scholars justified them using theological grounds from the Prophet’s time, citing the need to counter a strong enemy.”<sup>33</sup>

### *The Role of Religious Institutions in Promoting Suicide Terrorism in Afghanistan*

As discussed in previous sections, religious institutions help in the psychological conditioning of suicide bombers. Over the last five decades, many Afghans trained in the Deobandi *madaris*, where they were increasingly exposed to radical teachings.<sup>34</sup> Exposure to strict Deobandism in seminaries led to the generational radicalization of Afghans, fostering a divisive and violent religious worldview. Without modern education, these ideologies persist, with extremist teachers playing key roles in the Afghan insurgency. As one interviewee, Ghafoor described, “Students at *madaris* are shown provocative clips and violent videos to incite them against the Afghan government and international forces, portraying them as infidels and aggressors.”<sup>35</sup>

*Madaris* on the Pakistani side were also the leading purveyor of foot soldiers to the Afghan *jihad* and later for the Taliban regime. As an interviewee, Majid added that *madaris* played a crucial role in the Taliban’s consolidation of power against the Northern Alliance between 1994 and 1996:

On the Pakistani side, *madaris* was the leading force supplier during their wars with the Northern Alliance. During *madaris* summer and winter breaks, the Afghan front lines were flooded by the fighting forces from these *madaris*. His friend had a contract to provide *dough* (lassi) to the Taliban. So, when it was the *madrassa* holiday season in Pakistan, the demand was so high that his friend was panicking as he could not meet the *dough* demand in the Taliban front line in Afghanistan.<sup>36</sup>

While generally, *madaris* are a leading driver of radicalization in South Asia, some *madaris* are explicitly created to recruit and train suicide bombers for Afghanistan. Militant *madaris* are usually located deeper in Pakistan’s lawless and hard-to-reach tribal regions. *Madaris* in North Waziristan, mainly under Haqqani network leadership, use curricula and training regimes that involve physical and military training, vehicle

maneuvering, and other techniques for conducting suicide missions.<sup>37</sup> As one interviewee added,

As part of their training, they also provide video content of *jihadi* violence to their students, encouraging them to choose the path of martyrdom. Some of these *madaris* have murals depicting heaven, helping these pupils visualize the afterlife vividly and creating a firm belief in the young person about what is to come after this earthly life.<sup>38</sup>

## Environmental Factors and Suicide Terrorism in Afghanistan

The analysis focuses on the social, cultural, and political factors influencing suicide terrorism in Afghanistan. Social scientists challenge the view that individual psychology is the primary driver of suicide terrorism, arguing that societal influences are more significant. The study aims to test these theories by analyzing field interview data to validate these assumptions.

### *Suicide Terrorism and the Afghan Culture*

Decades of war have promoted a culture of violence in Afghanistan, impacting its ethical contours and pushing the boundaries for violence within its cultural practices. The central worth of honor and kin loyalty that held sway early to resolve local conflicts has competed and given way to various new ethos.<sup>39</sup> This evolution is a culmination of expressive values of *ghairat* (bravery) and *ghoroor* (honor) cross-pollinating with religious values of *jihad* and martyrdom in an environment rifted with extremism, radicalization and violence.<sup>40</sup>

Despite a widespread culture of violence, as suggested in prior sections, this article argues that the Afghan culture on its own does not offer a linear, causal relationship with suicide terrorism and presents a number of factors to show the absence of this link. First, the Afghan culture repudiates all forms of suicide. An individual committing suicide terrorism is believed to be a *non-Afghan*, a *coward*, or a *madman* that has nothing to do with the Afghan ways of *ghoroor* and *ghairat*. The general perception is that suicide terrorism in Afghanistan is associated with foreigners, especially Pakistanis and Arabs. Majid elaborates further:

Afghans never say, 'I am proud of [so-and-so] committing suicide terrorism. The Afghan way is to fight the enemy face-to-face. Therefore, Afghan culture repudiates all types of suicide. Afghan languages are also alien to the suicide terrorism terminologies used elsewhere: hardly any Afghans know the meaning of *estish-hadi*.<sup>41</sup>

Afghans are bewildered by the motivations behind suicide attacks, often attributing them to lunatics or drug addicts. Unlike in Palestinian society, where suicide bombers are revered, Afghan society despises such acts. Therefore, in the Afghan context, cultural factors are not a contributing factor to an individual's decision to become a suicide bomber.

### *Pashtun Vulnerability to Suicide Terrorism*

An important characteristic of suicide bombers in Afghanistan is related to their ethnicity. Afghan suicide bombers are mainly Pashtuns. Afghanistan is multi-ethnic, with Pashtuns making the majority ethnic group. Tajik estimates that 90% of suicide bombers joining suicide terrorism training camps in Waziristan, Pakistan, are Pashtuns.<sup>42</sup> Scholars argue that *Pashtunwali*, with the tradition of revenge, including codes of honor such as *badal* (reciprocation), usually causes violence amongst the locals and also leads to suicide terrorism amongst Pashtuns. Within the Pashtun culture, *Pashtunwali* is a non-written ethical and traditional code, or a set of values, rules of behavior, and a code of honor "which can be understood as the way of Pashtuns."<sup>43</sup> Rzehak argues that "the concept of *badal* conveys the demand for compensation without condition."<sup>44</sup>

The research finds no direct link between *Pashtunwali* and suicide terrorism. Instead, Deobandi *madaris* in Pakistan, especially in Pakhtunkhwa and FATA, significantly influence the recruitment of Pashtun students for militant training. The proximity to terror organizations in these areas also facilitates supply and demand. There is also a growing trend of recruiting and training non-Pashtun suicide bombers. "Northern Afghan provinces with Tajik majority populations, such as Takhar and Badakhshan, are vulnerable to recruitment into insurgency and suicide terrorism due to historical links with religious groups and major terror networks from Central Asia, including the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and Al-Qaeda."<sup>45</sup>

As far as the environmental push and pull factors are concerned, suicide bombers in Afghanistan are mainly Pashtuns influenced by Pashtunwali's emphasis on revenge. Pakistani Deobandi *madaris* in Pakhtunkhwa and FATA exploit these vulnerabilities for recruitment. Non-Pashtun areas like Takhar and Badakhshan are also vulnerable due to links with Central Asian terror networks and exposure to Pakistani *madaris*.

## Conclusion

This research identifies various causes and motivations behind suicide terrorism in Afghanistan, emphasizing the complexity of the issue. Unlike Middle Eastern contexts, Afghan culture, despite Islamic influence, largely opposes suicide terrorism. The study challenges the idea that societal support sustains suicide bombers, noting that most are recruited and trained in refugee camps and *madaris* outside Afghanistan.

As far as the organizational level analysis is concerned, the article argues that in Afghanistan, extremist organizations, rather than social conformity, are the primary drivers of suicide terrorism. Groups like Al-Qaeda, Taliban, the Haqqani network, and IS-K are crucial in recruitment, training, and logistical support. Religious education through *madaris*, especially Deobandi *madaris* in Pakistan, plays a key role in indoctrinating young Afghans into extreme ideologies, sustaining the suicide terrorism campaign.

Finally, at the individual level analysis, the findings suggest that causes and motivations, including psychology and widespread mental health issues, apply to suicide bombers in Afghanistan. This article, however, underplayed factors such as counterinsurgency-related revenge and personal grievances as direct causes of recruitment into suicide terrorism. While these factors can motivate individuals to consider joining militant groups, the stringent vetting, training processes, and organizational priorities often overshadow these factors in the path to becoming a suicide bomber.

This research explored the complexities of suicide terrorism in Afghanistan, highlighting that societal support is minimal, with most recruits groomed outside Afghanistan. Extremist organizations like Al-Qaeda, Taliban, Haqqani network, and IS-K are the main drivers, leveraging religious education in Pakistani *madaris* for indoctrination.

Individual motivations like psychological issues are relevant, but counterinsurgency revenge and personal grievances are less significant than the impact of the organizational recruitment and training process.

## Annex-I: Interviewees List (Anonymized):

No	Code No,	Job Title	Anonymized Name	Sector	Nationality	Gender	Marital Status
1	101	NATO Civilian	Peter	Civ-Mil*	German	M	Single
2	102	NATO Civilian	Rebecca	Civ-Mil	Australian	F	Single
3	103	Ex-Governor	Azeem	Government	Afghan	M	Married
4	104	International Aid	Aziz	Aid/ prisons	Afghan	M	Married
5	105	Professor	Baqi	Academia	Afghan	M	Married
6	106	Ex-Minister	Fatah	Government	Afghan	M	Married
7	107	Ex-Ambassador	Bashir	Government	Afghan-US	M	Married
8	108	Ex-ONSC**	Basir	Security-Government/ prisons	Afghan-European	M	Married
9	109	Community Leader	Ghafar	Civil Society	Afghan	M	Married
10	110	Aid Director	Ghani	Civil Society/ prison	Afghan	M	Married
11	111	Intelligence/ Prison	Ghafoor	Security-Government/ prisons	Afghan	M	Married
12	112	Writer-Professor	Janet	Academia	USA	F	Married
13	113	Ex-ONSC	Jawid	Security-Government	Afghan	M	Married
14	114	Professor	Karim	Academia	Afghan	M	Married
15	115	Ex-Minister	Khaliq	Security-Government	Afghan	M	Married
16	116	Ex-Deputy Minister	Malik	Security-Government/ prisons	Afghan	M	Single
17	117	Director Media Outlet	Majid	International Media	British	M	Married
18	118	Researcher	Manan	International Organisation	Afghan	M	Married
19	119	Reporter	Muhsin	International Media	Afghan	M	Married
20	120	Ex-Deputy Minister	Mateen	Security-Government	Afghan	M	Married
21	121	Ex-ONSC	Qadir	Security-Government	Afghan	M	Married
22	122	Police	Nasir	MOI/ prison	Afghan	M	Married
23	123	Diplomat	Jane	Diplomat	Swedish	F	Married
24	124	APC***	Rahman	Independent	Afghan	M	Married
25	125	APC	Rauf	Independent	Afghan	M	Married

26	126	Journalist/ Reporter	Razaq	International Media	Afghan	M	Single
27	127	Jihadi Leader	Wahab	Afghan Mujahid Against the Soviets	Afghan	M	Married
28	128	Shi'a Jihadi Leader	Wakil	Afghan Mujahid Against the Soviets	Afghan	M	Married
29	129	Ex-Advisor - President	Kabir	Afghan Government	Afghan	M	Married
30	130	Ex-ONSC	Afzal	Security- Government	Afghan	M	Married

Notes. \*Civil-Military (Civ-Mil); \*\*Afghan Office of National Security (ONSA); \*\*\*Afghan Peace Council (APC). Interviews were conducted between 28 June 2019 and 1 September 2019.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), *Global Terrorism Database (1971-2021)*, University of Maryland. Accessed May 2022, from <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/>.
- <sup>2</sup> Schweitzer, Yoram. "Suicide Bombings Worldwide in 2020." (2021).
- <sup>3</sup> Moghadam, Assaf. "The roots of suicide terrorism: A multi-causal approach." In *Root causes of suicide terrorism*, pp. 101-127. Routledge, 2006; Gill, Paul. "A multi-dimensional approach to suicide bombing." *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* 1, no. 2 (2007): 142-159; Singh, Rashmi. *Conceptualising suicide bombings and rethinking international relations theory: The case of Hamas 1987-2006*. London School of Economics and Political Science (United Kingdom), 2008; Singh, Rashmi. *Hamas and suicide terrorism: Multi-causal and multi-level approaches*. Routledge, 2013.
- <sup>4</sup> Singh, Rashmi. *Conceptualising suicide bombings and rethinking international relations theory: The case of Hamas 1987-2006*. London School of Economics and Political Science (United Kingdom), 2008.
- <sup>5</sup> Waltz, Kenneth. *Man, the state, and war: A theoretical analysis*. Columbia University Press, 1959, p. 16
- <sup>6</sup> Shay, Shaul. *The shahids: Islam and suicide attacks*. Routledge, 2017, p. 5.
- <sup>7</sup> Singh, Rashmi. *Conceptualising suicide bombings and rethinking international relations theory: The case of Hamas 1987-2006*. London School of Economics and Political Science (United Kingdom), 2008.
- <sup>8</sup> Merari, Ariel, Ilan Diamant, Arie Bibi, Yoav Broshi, and Giora Zakin. "Personality characteristics of "self martyrs"/"suicide bombers" and organizers of suicide attacks." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22, no. 1 (2009): 87-101.
- <sup>9</sup> Martin, Susanne, and Ami Pedahzur. "Suicide terrorism theories." In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. 2017.
- <sup>10</sup> Victoroff, Jeff. "The mind of the terrorist: A review and critique of psychological approaches." *Journal of Conflict resolution* 49, no. 1 (2005): 3-42; Lankford, Adam. "Could suicide terrorists actually be suicidal?." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 34, no. 4 (2011): 337-366.
- <sup>11</sup> Dingley, James C. "Durkheim, Mayo, morality and management." *Journal of Business Ethics* 16 (1997): 1117-1129, p. 28.

- 
- <sup>12</sup> Merari, Ariel. *Driven to death: Psychological and social aspects of suicide terrorism*. Oxford University Press, USA, 2010, p. 248.
- <sup>13</sup> Jacobs, Frank. "Afghanistan is the most depressed country on earth" *Big Think* (2019), para 1.
- <sup>14</sup> Kavalier, Tara. "Afghanistan's mental illness emergency", *The medialine* (2020).
- <sup>15</sup> Interviewee: Kabir, Ex-Advisor to the Afghan President – No. 129, Kabul.
- <sup>16</sup> Hafez, Mohammed M. *Suicide bombers in Iraq: The strategy and ideology of martyrdom*. US Institute of Peace Press, 2007; Singh, Rashmi. *Hamas and suicide terrorism: Multi-causal and multi-level approaches*. Routledge, 2012; Kilcullen, David. *Blood year: The unraveling of Western counterterrorism*. Oxford University Press, 2016; Gossman, Patricia. "They've Shot Many Like This": *Abusive Night Raids by CIA-backed Afghan Strike Forces*.
- <sup>17</sup> Singh, Rashmi. *Hamas and suicide terrorism: Multi-causal and multi-level approaches*. Routledge, 2012, p. 11.
- <sup>18</sup> Interviewee: Kabir, Ex-Advisor to the Afghan President – No. 129, Kabul.
- <sup>19</sup> Interviewee: Aziz, Civil Society/Prisons Support – No. 104, Kabul.
- <sup>20</sup> Interviewee: Majid, International Media – No. 117, Kabul.
- <sup>21</sup> Watts, Stephen Baldwin, Jason H. Campbell, Patrick B. Johnston, Sarah H. Bana, and Sameer Lalwani. *Countering others' insurgencies: Understanding US small-footprint interventions in local context*. Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 2014.
- <sup>22</sup> Interviewee: Malik, Ex-Deputy Minister – No. 129, Kabul.
- <sup>23</sup> Interviewee: Kabir, Ex-Advisor to the Afghan President – No. 129, Kabul.
- <sup>24</sup> Macfarlane, Alastair. "Gangs and adolescent mental health: A narrative review." *Journal of child & adolescent trauma* 12, no. 3 (2019): 411-420.
- <sup>25</sup> Goodhand, Jonathan. "From war economy to peace economy?" *London School of Economics* (2003): 1-19.
- <sup>26</sup> Merari, Ariel. *Driven to death: Psychological and social aspects of suicide terrorism*. Oxford University Press, USA, 2010, pp. 69-72.
- <sup>27</sup> Interviewee: Majid, International Media – No. 117, Kabul.
- <sup>28</sup> Gambetta, Diego, ed. *Making sense of suicide missions*. Oxford University Press, USA, 2005, p. 120.
- <sup>29</sup> Although with the return of the Taliban to power, leadership of the network hold cabinet positions, it continues to maintain its suicide terror assets as a deterrent.
- <sup>30</sup> National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), *Global Terrorism Database (1971-2021)*, University of Maryland. Accessed May 2022, from <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/>.
- <sup>31</sup> Pape, Robert. *Dying to win: The strategic logic of suicide terrorism*. Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2006; Piazza, James A. "A Supply-Side View of Suicide Terrorism: A Cross-National Study." *The Journal of Politics* 70, no. 1 (2008): 28–39; Crenshaw, Martha. "The logic of terrorism." *Terrorism in perspective* 24 (2007): 24-33; Horowitz, Michael C. *The diffusion of military power: Causes and consequences for international politics*. Princeton University Press, 2010; Martin, Susanne, and Ami Pedahzur. "Suicide terrorism theories." In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. 2017.
- <sup>32</sup> Pape, Robert A. "The strategic logic of suicide terrorism." *American political science review* 97, no. 3 (2003): 343-361.
- <sup>33</sup> Interviewee: Manan, International Organisation – No. 118, Kabul.
- <sup>34</sup> Reetz, Dietrich. "The Deoband universe: What makes a transcultural and transnational educational movement of Islam?" *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27, no. 1 (2007): 139-159.
- <sup>35</sup> Interviewee: Ghafoor, Security/Government Prisons – No. 111, Kabul.
- <sup>36</sup> Interviewee: Majid, International Media – No. 117, Kabul.
- <sup>37</sup> Tajik, S. H. "Insight into a suicide bomber training camp in Waziristan." *CTC Sentinel* 3, no. 3 (2010): 10-13.
- <sup>38</sup> Interviewee: Muhsin, International Media – No. 119, Kabul.
- <sup>39</sup> Edwards, David B. *Caravan of martyrs: sacrifice and suicide bombing in Afghanistan*. University of California Press, 2017.
- <sup>40</sup> Singh, Rashmi. *Conceptualising suicide bombings and rethinking international relations theory: The case of Hamas 1987-2006*. London School of Economics and Political Science (United Kingdom), 2008.
- <sup>41</sup> Interviewee: Majid, International Media – No. 117, Kabul.

- 
- <sup>42</sup> Tajik, S. H. "Insight into a suicide bomber training camp in Waziristan." *CTC Sentinel* 3, no. 3 (2010): 10-13.
- <sup>43</sup> Rzehak, Lutz. "Doing Pashto." *Pashtunwali as the ideal of honourable behaviour and tribal life among the Pashtuns. March* (2011), p. 2.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, p. 14.
- <sup>45</sup> Interviewee: Majid, International Media – No. 117, Kabul.