Understanding Suicide Terrorism: Problem-Solving Approach to Suicide Terrorism

Tanya Narozhna and W. Andy Knight[1]

Introduction

Over the past few years, the problem of suicide terrorism has garnered significant scholarly interest.[2] Recent literature on suicide terrorism eschews earlier claims about the profound irrationality or psychopathology of attackers and focuses instead on the strategic dimension of this phenomenon, introducing rational choice cost-benefit analysis of the strategic calculations on the part of sponsoring organisations. Such analysis is often supplemented by the discussion of individual motives and the role of society in moulding the attackers. Amidst this literature one finds remarkably little serious reflection on the ways in which the rejection of earlier claims about the irrationality of suicide terrorism contributes to the reframing of the problem in line with the logic of rationality; how rationalist approaches advance our knowledge of suicide terrorism; and whether interpretive perspectives can offer any fresh insights into the nature of this phenomenon. Ironically, the narrow limits of rationalist literature on suicide terrorism have often been self-imposed by a commitment (implicit or explicit) to produce policy relevant research that offers governments practical recommendations for countering terrorism. This instrumental problem-solving approach is no doubt important, in that it certainly provides a practical 'tool-box' guide for policy-makers. But the problem-solving approach is limited in perspective in terms of the problem and its solutions. At the same

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[1] Tanya Narozhna is an Assistant Professor of Global Politics at the University of Winnipeg and may be reached at: t.narozhna@uwinnipeg.ca; W. Andy Knight is Chair of the Department of Political Science at the University of Alberta and Governor of the International Development Research Centre. He may be reached at: andy.knight@ualberta.ca.

[2] A number of scholarly publications including, but not limited to, Mohammed Hafez's *Manufacturing Human Bombs: The Making of Palestinian Suicide Bombers* (2006), Robert Pape's *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (2005), Diego Gambetta's *Making Sense of Suicide Missions* (2005), Mia Bloom's *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror* (2005), Ami Pedahzur's *Suicide Terrorism* (2005), Christoph Reuter's *My Life is a Weapon: A Modern History of Suicide Bombing* (2004) indicate increased attention to suicide terrorism among social scientists.

time, the dominance of rationalist explanations of this phenomenon leaves little room for reflectivist approaches to the study of suicide terrorism within the field of international relations (IR).

This article draws on Robert Cox's distinction between problem-solving and critical theories (Cox, 1996:85–123) to demonstrate that academic engagement with the problem of suicide terrorism has thus far been overly determined by an instrumentalist problem-solving approach. While acknowledging the relative merits of both critical and problem-solving perspectives, we put forth the argument that rationalist problem-solving analysis of suicide terrorism is inherently limited in that it is inextricably linked to the political agendas of dominant states. As such, it validates a very limited spectrum of opinions within the confines of mainstream IR. Critical theory, with its explicit normative agenda, calls into question global ideational and material structures, within which suicide terrorism originates. Therefore, a critical theoretical perspective offers an important insight into the phenomenon of suicide terrorism. Our argument proceeds through the following steps. First, we outline the difference between problem-solving and critical theories, highlighting their respective strengths and weaknesses. Second, we demonstrate where the problem-solving analysis falls short and how the critical theoretical approach can provide a different explanation of suicide terrorism as a problem of the socio-political complex as a whole.

Mapping the Theoretical Terrain: Two Kinds of Theories

Robert Cox (1996:87) reminds us that 'theory is always for someone and for some purpose.' The purpose of theory, according to Cox, is either to provide a guide for solving specific problems within a particular history-bound perspective, or to reflect upon its initial perspective and attempt to transcend the institutional and relational parameters within which a particular theory originates. Accordingly, theories can be categorised as 'problem-solving' or 'critical'. Problem-solving theories are predicated on an implicit assumption of fixity with regard to the socio-political order. The objective of problem-solving analysis and praxis is to maintain the existing institutional and power-relational *status quo* by confronting any destabilising pressures within the international system. Since the general form and practice of existing institutional and power relations is not questioned, specific problems tend to be compartmentalised within specialised spheres. Other spheres of social reality are implicitly considered unproblematic and unaffected by the problems outside their limits. Reducing a problem to a manageable set of parameters allows for a fairly quick and precise examination of the problem. This, in turn, makes it possible to produce parsimonious explanations and circumscribed recommendations for immediate policy measures. However, without questioning their own normative

assumptions, problem-solving theorists can offer only short-term managerial solutions to the particular problems. They are unable to offer comprehensive long-term solutions.

Unlike problem-solving scholarship, critical theories are concerned with the larger picture of the socio-political order and historical change. Many observers have noted that the multiplicity of critical theories makes it difficult to group them within a single category. However, for the purpose of our analysis, we refer to critical theory as a broad category that is defined by 'four common intellectual orientations' – questioning of the positivist epistemology, rejection of scientific methods, challenging of the rationalist ontology, and normative condemnation of value neutral theorizing (Price and Reus-Smit, 1998:261). While embracing a historically conditioned perspective as their point of departure, critical theorists attempt to transcend their initial perspective by engaging in in-depth reflections on the normative framework within which problems originate. They give serious consideration to alternative perspectives and entertain scenarios of potential transformations of the prevailing socio-political order. Whereas problem-solving theorists end up objectifying their initial perspective, critical theorists are concerned with becoming 'clearly aware of the perspective which gives rise to theorizing, and its relation to other perspectives' (Cox, 1996:88).

Within the IR discipline, critical and problem-solving theories have been widely perceived as inevitably irreconcilable, given the difference in their levels of abstraction; their normative, epistemological, ontological, and methodological orientation; and their programmatic agendas. Such dichotomy resulted from a particular appropriation of Cox's initial categorisation by mainstream academe in its attempt to set limits on the acceptable approaches to knowledge. Implicit in this dichotomous framing is the idea that some theories are more focused on real world issues and therefore more 'useful', while other theories offer critique for the sake of criticism alone (Duvall and Varadarajan, 2003:81). Such disconnect between problem-solving, and critical IR theories, is grossly overdrawn. For instance, the 'problem-solving/critical theory' binary is rightly criticised for imposing dubious categorisation and simplifying all research into either being policy relevant or having no bearing on policy-making. However, as Duvall and Varadarajan (2003:81) point out, '[all] theory is political and [all] political action is theory-laden.' Therefore, at the most basic level, all theoretical research bears implications for practical political action in distinct ways for different actors. Secondly, a different level of theory in these two approaches makes them complementary, rather than opposites. What distinguishes problem-solving and critical theoretical perspectives is not so much their level of analysis and practical relevance, but rather the nature of their relationship to the exercise of power and social practices through which power is projected (Duvall and Varadarajan, 2003:81). Problem-solving IR theorists (realists, liberalists, and mainstream constructivists) share a common

commitment to a positivist ontology and methodology, which determines the way they view existing institutions and power structures and makes them ideal for reinforcing the status quo. The practical relevance of problem-solving theories to those in positions of power is self-evident. In contrast, critical IR theories, from modernist and post-structural forms, consider problems as potential indicators of the need for structural change. Critical theories focus on 'inequalities engendered by the existing structures, practices, and/or discourses of power; they challenge the naturalness (and, by extension, the desirability) of the existing order. These theories speak, therefore, not to those in positions of power, but to those who seek to resist and challenge them' (Duvall and Varadarajan, 2003:81).

The Problem-Solving Approach to Suicide Terrorism

A considerable portion of the recent literature on suicide terrorism is a by-product of the problem-solving perspective.[3] In an attempt to understand specific patterns of the attacks, their spatial and temporal embeddedness, and the role of organisations behind them, problem-solving scholarship develops explanatory models that focus on multiple causal paths to suicide terrorism across individual, organisational, and societal levels. A number of major common threads can be detected in the recent problem-solving literature on suicide terrorism. First, problem-solvers generally shun psychological and grievance-based explanations of relative deprivation, frustration, alienation, etc.[4] Instead, they emphasise the crucial importance of group context and dynamics and portray individual acts of suicide bombings as the final link in a long organisational chain and/or as the result of strategic interactions among insurgent groups. Robert Pape (2005:232–249 at 233) argues, for example, that the 'vast majority of suicide terrorist attacks are not isolated or random acts by individual fanatics but, rather, occur in clusters as part of a larger campaign by an organized group to achieve a specific political goal.' Bloom (2005:78), too, elaborates on the process of strategic outbidding between multiple insurgent groups and contends that when violence is perceived positively and even demanded by the local population, suicide terrorism gives a sponsoring organisation an upper hand

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[3]   The most illustrative works on the strategic nature of suicide terrorism include, but are not limited to Mia Bloom, *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror* (New York, *NY: Columbia University Press, 2005*); Robert Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (Random House, 2005); Diego Gambetta, ed., *Making Sense of Suicide Missions* (Oxford University Press, 2005); and Ami Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005)

[4]   Ami Pedahzur, while embracing rationalist approach, nevertheless argues that local organisations sponsor suicide missions to create outlets for expressing community-wide feelings of injustice, frustration, desperation. See, Ami Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005).

vis-à-vis its rivals in local power struggle. Her argument also implies an *a priori* propensity toward violence within society. However, Ami Pedahzur (2005:159) believes that such demand for radical violent tactics is 'a highly cultivated top-down phenomenon,' fostered by local organisations in the context of prolonged conflicts. Generally, reliance on radical tactics, including suicide bombings, is said to be driven by the desire on the part of sponsoring organisations to distinguish themselves from and outbid local political opponents, as well as garner greater popular support. Bloom, Pape and Gambetta agree that the latter is crucial for the success of suicide terror strategy.

Second, there appears to be an emerging consensus in the recent problem-solving literature on suicide terrorism that this phenomenon is a strategy employed mostly by non-state organisations that represent a weaker side in an asymmetric warfare. Suicide terrorism, in other words, is the weapon of the weak, an extreme form of 'the rationality of irrationality' (Pape, 2005b), in which the weaker side becomes stronger through 'irrational' individual acts of self-sacrifice in pursuit of a 'rational' coercive strategy designed to achieve specific political objectives. Presumably, insurgent organisations reap a number of benefits on different levels given tactical and coercive efficiency of these attacks, difficulties in deterring them, their symbolic value, as well as popular and financial support generated by suicide bombings framed as martyrdom. Suicide bombings work more effectively when insurgent groups (whether they are the occupied, the state or the occupier) represent different ethnic, linguistic and religious groups. Pape (2005a), in particular, suggests that religious dif-ferences between the occupier and the occupied can inflame local nationalism and facilitate the legitimisation of suicide terrorism. In such circumstances, the ideas of otherness are exploited to dehumanise those on the 'other' side and treat them as a legitimate target (Bloom, 2005:79). Most problem-solving scholars agree that religion blended with nationalism, foreign occupation, and excessively violent counter-terror measures may affect participation and sup-port, but generally reject the idea that religion per se is a sufficient cause for suicide terrorism. Consistent with rationalist logic, religion and culture are reduced either to the level of 'incentives,'(Bloom, 2005:85) or a recruiting and indoctrinating tool for achieving a 'secular and strategic goal' (Pape, 2005a:22), such as national liberation.

Third, there is also a general recognition by problem-solving scholars of the limited utility of profiling suicide terrorists. The broad range of backgrounds and lifestyles that characterise modern suicide perpetrators, as well as the complexity of context-dependent personal motivations driving individuals to commit acts of suicide terrorism makes it exceedingly difficult to identify who these individuals are in advance. This kind of behaviour is rendered exceptional in view of the relatively small number of suicide bombers and low frequency of attacks.

The Critical Theoretical Perspective on Suicide Terrorism

From a critical theoretical perspective, there are three key issues with the recent problem-solving research on suicide terrorism: 1) the rationalization of suicide terrorism; 2) the tendency to conceal the politics and power of naming; and 3) the reductionist treatment of suicide terrorism as a state security issue. First, the problem-solving approach operates on the assumption that suicide terrorism is a problem conducive to rational choice analysis, which implies the possibility of developing an objective definition of this phenomenon. Scholars embracing the critical theoretical perspective, however, have questioned this assumption, arguing instead for the need to recognise the multiplicity of more 'contextualised' and culturally specific kinds of suicide terrorism (Euben, 2007:129–133). Their position seems to be validated by the fact that to this point problem-solvers have failed to develop a comprehensive, generally accepted definition of suicide terrorism or even to agree on the use of this term. While Bloom, Pape and Pedahzur refer explicitly to 'suicide terrorism,' other authors avoid the use of the term 'terrorism' or both 'suicide' and 'terrorism', replacing them instead with 'suicide missions' (Gambetta, 2005), 'suicide bombings' (Reuter, 2004), or 'martyrdom' (Victor, 2003; Davis, 2003). Still others propose a definition as a matter of formality, without meaningfully engaging in serious conceptual explorations. In this context, Christopher Ankersen's (2007:2) conclusion that 'there is no one understanding of terrorism, but rather a plethora of differentiated meanings … [that] vary across the spectrum of terrorist perpetrators, victims of terrorist violence, decision-makers aiming to respond to terrorism, and the "rest of us"' certainly applies to suicide terrorism.

From the problem-solving perspective, a failure to develop a general definition of suicide terrorism can be attributed, in part, to the fact that the subject of suicide terrorism has attracted serious scholarly attention relatively recently. However, despite the significant history of scholarly explorations, the study of terrorism in general has resulted in only two major attempts at developing a comprehensive consensus definition of the term – one undertaken by Alex Schmid (Alex Schmid, Albert Jongman et.al., 1988) in the 1980s, and the other in a more recent collaborative work by Leonard Weinberg, Ami Pedahzur and Sivan Hirsch-Hoefler (2004). Both attempts yielded a number of 'definitional elements', but confirmed that terrorism is an 'essentially contested concept,' subject to endless interpretations and dispute, but no consensus (Weinberg, et.al., 2004:778). Existing definitions of terrorism, while containing certain common threads, such as the centrality of coercive nature, intentional generation of massive fear, and political goals, tend to focus overwhelmingly on motivational issues. The need to weave motivational aspects into the definition of terrorism is necessitated by the fact that terrorism's coercive nature makes it strikingly similar to the corrective and deterrent functions vested in

the state. The latter, as Pape suggests, applies to suicide terrorism as well. In Pape's words (2005b:237), 'the heart of the strategy of suicide terrorism is the same as the coercive logic used by states when they employ air power or economic sanctions to punish an adversary.' Herein, however, lies a dilemma. If terrorism comprises all acts of deliberate targeting of civilians, regardless of whether those acts are committed by state or non-state actors, then in its destruction and ruthlessness state sponsored coercion far exceeds other acts of terrorism, including suicide terrorism committed by (semi)-clandestine groups and individuals.[5] While considerable debate revolves around the question of the right to coerce and which actors can legitimately exercise it, the motivational factors enable some problem-solving researchers to draw a line between coercion that is state-sanctioned and 'legitimate' and terrorism. However, at the conceptual level, inclusion of motives into the definition of terrorism makes it an inherently value-laden term, open to subjective interpretations. It makes the concept devoid of any significant consistency and defies the rationalist precept of objectivity. This explains why recent problem-solving scholarship on suicide terrorism generally eschews explanations focused on personal grievances and motives and focuses instead on the strategic nature of this phenomenon.

From the perspective of critical theory, however, this new focus of the problem-solving literature remains problematic. Critical theorists can certainly appreciate the arguments about strategic behaviour of suicide bombers and those who recruit, train and deploy them. Nevertheless, from the critical theoretical perspective, problem-solvers' analyses of the strategic dimension of suicide terrorism are inherently limited in that they 'derive meaning from function' without recognising that 'the particular significance of such tactics, the standards by which success is measured, and the contexts relevant to determining the particular function they perform actually depends upon the kind of interpretive frame operative at particular moments in particular places' (Euben, 2007:130). The logic and language of instrumental rationality render deeply held religious beliefs, cultural norms and moral commitments either marginally relevant or too complex to quantify (Euben, 2007). This is not to reinstate a simplistic Orientalist notion that Islam leads to suicide terror, but rather to argue that contextual exploration of the discourses of contemporary jihadism could provide important insights into our understanding of the rise of the culture of martyrdom in some parts of the world. This explains why critical theorists challenge the reductionist treatment of cultural, religious, and moral norms as 'incentives' in the problem-solving literature on suicide terrorism. From a critical theoretical perspective, religion, culture, and morality are complex 'interlocking system[s] of meanings' that define identities, provide interpretive frameworks, create collective memory, determine the limits of

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[5]   See also Rudolph Rummel, *Death by Government* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1994).

acceptable practices (Euben, 2007:129–133), and render the very assumption of the possibility of developing an objective general definition of suicide terrorism incongruous. We need to explore the reasons why and the ways in which Islam has been linked to the recent culture and practice of martyrdom. And, considering that Islam prohibits both 'suicide' and 'terrorism', such exploration should, according to critical theorists, start with the shift in terminology.

This brings us to the second key issue with the problem-solving approach to suicide terrorism, namely its tendency to conceal the politics of naming certain acts, groups, and individuals as terrorist, as well as the epistemological consequences of essentialising an adversary as terrorist. At its core, suicide terrorism, according to problem-solvers, is a naked struggle for power by individuals and organisations with a clear political agenda. This struggle manifests itself not only in physical violence, but also in discursive battles over establishing and controlling dominant interpretive frames, over the ability to disempower dissent by rendering certain world-views illegitimate, and over the power of naming and names (Duvall and Varadarajan, 2003; Bhatia, 2005:5-22). The conflict over names and naming between insurgent groups and states became exceedingly pronounced with the launching of the 'Global War on Terror' that 'forced many to verbally negotiate and assert who they are, who they are allied with, and who they are against' (Bhatia, 2005:7). The power of established names is such that it commands the monopoly on truth, obscures the disputes through which the names were selected in the first place, and dictates inclusions and exclusions. Identifying a 'terrorist' is, therefore, a political matter contingent on a particular political context, which adds considerable confusion in both legal and political realms.

Despite an unresolved controversy around the highly politicised issue of designating terrorist groups and individuals, problem-solving theorists insist on the possibility of objective identification. An implicitly rationalist ontology that informs problem-solving analysis of suicide terrorism denies the formative function of its narrative in categorising and labelling this phenomenon. Problem-solving scholars consider language and terms as objective representations of reality, in effect naturalising and normalising the vocabulary they employ and downplaying the epistemological implications of their theorising. Such implications include rationalisation of state-endorsed violence, mobilisation of support for state policies, and communication to the opponents that they will be treated similarly to other groups designated with the same term (Harb and Leenders, 2005:174). Critical theoretical works that examine and challenge the name-giving authority of the problem-solving approach are either accused of justifying suicide terrorism or are openly ridiculed, as demonstrated by Crenshaw's (2005:88) reaction to a 2005 special issue of *Third World Quarterly* on the politics of naming. 'The terrorist label may impede American understanding of Hezbollah,' she wrote, 'but it is unclear how much that understanding would improve if the term were not applied.'

By silencing non-mainstream discourses in academic and political circles, and by ostensibly serving particular interests in today's global power relations, the problem-solving approach produces a series of binary juxtapositions, inscribing 'others' with a series of negative characteristics and motives, assigning the brutality of 'their' acts to the fundamentally evil character of the actors, and contrasting 'them' with 'us'. For problem-solvers, a suicide terrorist is always 'the other,' who directs violence against 'us.' The 'us versus them' dichotomy is subtly woven into an intricate net of other oppositions, such as 'innocent-vicious', 'stability-chaos', 'friends-enemies', 'progressive/ superior/civilised-backward/savage'. Problem-solving scholarship on suicide terrorism is therefore a particular way of attaching meanings, stereotypes, moral connotations and labels to acts, groups, individuals, and societies using a highly politicised process of name-giving. The hidden structure of knowledge produced by problem-solving analysts combined with the focus on practical relevance of their analyses serve as a self-reinforcing foundation for the preservation of the global power-relational status quo. Critical theoretical perspective reveals the ideological bias of the 'objective' problem-solving scholarship on suicide terrorism and calls for a need to carefully examine 'the verbal tools and strategies of both governments and non-state movements as they compete for legitimacy' (Bhatia, 2005:19).

Finally, the third difficulty with the recent problem-solving literature on suicide terrorism is that it compartmentalises our knowledge of this phenomenon, sets fixed parameters on how the problem is analysed, and reduces it to a limited number of variables, i.e. violence, fear, threat, coercion, strategy, tactic, etc. Suicide terrorism is confined to the realm of state security. It is often overlooked, however, that the framing of terrorism as a state security issue is only a matter of convention. Such convention emerged during the Cold War period, which was characterised by a seemingly immutable fixity in global institutional and power relations – an assumption that privileged problem-solving approaches (Cox, 1996:90). Since the bipolar power dynamics appeared to persist indefinitely, much of the problem-solving theorising at the time focused on how to manage pressures within the existing world order (terrorism being one of them) without seeking to understand the opportunities for the feasible transformation(s) of the Cold War order. Dominated by the security-as-state-survival logic, problem-solving theorists viewed terrorism as an existential threat – a sufficient condition to elevate terrorism into the realm of state security, or to securitise the issue.[6] A far more significant

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[6]   Securitisation model is closely associated with the Copenhagen School, represented most prominently by Buzan, Waever, and de Wilde. This model offers the possibility for a systematic analysis of the processes by which certain issues become elevated to the status of 'security problems' (securitised) and shifted out of the security sphere (desecuritised). According to this model, the success of securitisation is dependent on the persuasiveness of discourse employed by the securitising actors, be they the government, military, elite or

attempt at the securitisation of terrorism took place more recently, following the 2001 Al-Qaeda attacks on the United States (Buzan, 2006:1101–1118). One aspect of the post-9/11 securitisation of terrorism, which is particularly important in the context of this discussion, has been an attempt to securitise development by drawing a link, albeit indirect, between terrorism and poverty. Evident in the 2002 US National Security Strategy (NSS), which replaced the concept of deterrence with a pre-emptive strategy, this move indicated deliberate depreciation of traditional military threats of the past and asserted that addressing global poverty was important to US national security, as 'poverty, weak institutions, and corruption make weak states vulnerable to terrorist networks…'(NSS, 2002). Sustainable development was deemed both a 'compelling moral and humanitarian issue,' as well as a 'security imperative' (Powell, 2002).

Despite being met with significant criticism in academic circles,[7] the tenuous connection between poverty and terrorism received recognition and support from several top political figures, including the President of the World Bank (IBRD) and the head of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The practical outcome of such consensus was the undisputed subordination of development to the singular purpose of fighting terrorism (Cosgrave, 2007). Such repackaging of 'development' through the identification of poverty as one of the root causes of terrorism posed a serious dilemma in that it framed poverty as a 'security threat.' The entanglement of poverty and terrorism was a clear attempt to securitise poverty as one of the components of the securitisation of terrorism, rather than evidence of the desecuritisation of terrorism. The latter would require recognition that terrorism is more than strictly a state security problem, and that at the very least it is also a socio-economic problem. However, 'relocating' terrorism from the realm of state security to the socio-economic one would logically imply the need for a set of socio-economic,

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civil society groups, as well as the acceptance of a threat constructed through 'speech act' by a relevant audience. For more, see Barry Buzan, Waever O., De Wilde J., *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1998).

[7] For example, M.I. Lichbach's comprehensive evaluation of the literature on economic inequality and political violence found support for and against such relationship. M.I. Lichbach, 'An Evaluation of "Does Inequality Breed Political Conflict?" Studies,' *World Politics* 41(July 1989), pp. 431–470. Also, Jeffrey Ross and Helga Tawil Souri both recognise the link between terrorism and poverty (see, Jeffrey Ross 'Structural Causes of Oppositional Political Terrorism: Towards a Causal Model,' *Journal of Peace Research* 30:3(1993), pp.317–329. Helga Tawil Souri, 'Marginalizing Palestinian Development: Lessons Against Peace,' Development 49:2 (2006), pp. 75–80). Yet, contrary to their argument, recent study by James Piazza on the relationship between terrorism and any of the measures of economic development discovered no significant link between the two. Rather, demographic conditions, ethno-religious diversity, increased state repression, and the structure of party politics have been found to correlate significantly with terrorism. See, James Piazza, 'Rooted in Poverty?: Terrorism, Poor Economic Development, and Social Cleavages,' *Terrorism and Political Violence* 18:1 (2006), pp. 159–177.

rather than police and military measures to address this problem. For Western democracies it is much easier to fight terrorism with military force, than introducing complex economic measures, such as an equitable redistributive mechanism in the global market.

Post-9/11 securitisation of terrorism left its imprint on the recent problem-solving works on suicide terrorism, which is reflected in a generally limited engagement of this literature with the issue of structural violence, particularly foreign occupation and political oppression, and its role in shaping popular support for the culture of martyrdom. Pape (2005a), for instance, finds no correlation between foreign occupation and repressive policies of the occupier and suicide terrorism. However, other scholars and studies have found a direct link between occupation and the rise of radicalism.[8] Even some problem-solvers have been more receptive of the idea that collective experience of structural violence is directly linked to the rise of suicide terrorism. Kalyvas and Sanchez-Cuenca (2005:228), for instance, maintain that 'what matters is not that the individual personally experiences political repression or economic deprivation but, rather, that the living conditions of the community are so grim and hopeless as to move people to extreme acts.' What also matters is the fact that problem-solvers' reliance on rational choice theories makes them ill-equipped to account for the sociology and social psychology of structural violence. Rational choice theories operate relatively well at the individual level, which makes them a good source for explaining strategic calculations behind individual decisions to deploy (or not) suicide bombers. However, the rational choice literature is less helpful when it comes to explaining the group dimension of collective resistance. The rationalist approach is inherently limited in its ability to account for group solidarity and other complex dynamics of collective support for martyrdom and sends us instead 'in search of selective incentives to get individuals to contribute to the provision of collective goods' (Shapiro, 2007:136). The treatment of general conditions as 'selective incentives' by recent works on suicide terrorism, while problematic from critical theoretical perspective, allows problem-solvers to view socio-economic, demographic, political and other conditions as secondary in comparison with the strategic side of this phenomenon, and enables them to frame suicide terrorism, explicitly or implicitly, as a state security problem.

To reiterate an earlier point, framing suicide terrorism strictly as a state security problem is largely a result of convention. But we ought not to forget

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[8]   In particular, Rasler refers to Sean Yom and Basel Saleh's study of Palestinian suicide bombers, as well as Robert White's research on IRA. See, Robert White, 'From Peaceful Protest to Guerrilla War: Micromobilization of the Provisional Irish Republican Army,' *American Journal of Sociology* 94:6 (1989), pp. 1277–1302; Sean Yom, and Basel Saleh, 'Palestinian Violence and the Second. Intifada: Explaining Suicide Attacks,' Presented at the 19th Middle East History and Theory Conference (2004), University of Chicago, Chicago. Both in Rasler, Review Symposium (2007).

that 'a conventional cutting up of reality is at best just a convenience of the mind' (Cox, 1996:85). In time, as the organisation and practice of human affairs change, conventional understandings and classifications become increasingly arbitrary as the pressures of an evolving social reality necessitate the adjustment or even rejection of old concepts (Cox, 1996:87). Such adjustment can be seen in the attempts of some critical security scholars to reorient the focus of security studies from the state to the individual and community through the notion of human security. While not a monolithic idea, human security has evolved into an umbrella concept unifying all those who believe in the necessity of replacing the state with the individual – and people collectively – as the referent object of security.

For its advocates, human security is not simply an updated version of the anachronistic state-centered security framework. Rather, supporters of human security regard this concept as signalling a paradigmatic shift in the theory and practice of security towards protecting and empowering the individual and community (MacLean, Black and Shaw, 2006). By reorienting the focus, proponents of human security reinforce the agency of the individual and community vis-à-vis the state. This contributes to 'a rebalancing of the liberal paradigm of governance towards more individual [and community] rights, agency, and freedom, and away from the notion that individuals [are] merely subjects of regimes of constraint and regulation in which they often [have] little say' (Richmond, 2007:467). In this sense, human security poses an emancipatory challenge to the traditional state security framework. And, as Thomas (2002:114-5) notes, human security as a norm goes even further than merely securing the individual, it 'describes a condition of existence in which basic material needs are met, and in which human dignity, including meaningful participation in the life of the community can be realized… Such human security is indivisible; it cannot be pursued by or for one group at the expense of another.'

Human security has drawn new normative lines of inquiry regarding the degree of its theoretical 'revisionism'; the nature of state sovereignty and the relationship between people and the state; and the structure-agency binary, especially as it relates to the potential of human agency to challenge structural factors and the distribution of power (Newman, 2004:358-9). These issues inflamed highly controversial debates that raised old concerns about redressing the structural inequalities of the global economic infrastructure, creating a level political playing field, reconciling market mechanisms with social considerations, to name just a few. The only consensus appears to be that while normatively attractive, human security is analytically weak (Thomas, 2002). The concept eschews a precise, scientific, workable definition and is criticised as extraordinarily ambiguous and too 'slippery by design' to be of practical significance either for academic research or policy-making.

However, from a critical theoretical perspective, the lack of the universal definition of human security, as well as its inclusiveness, holism, open-endedness, broad sweep and elasticity, rather than being viewed as the reasons for disqualifying the concept as 'unworkable', should be treated as strengths. These characteristics of human security allow one to contextualise sources of insecurity. In this sense, different, and at times competing, concepts of human security reflect different security concerns specific to each sociological/cultural context (Newman, 2001:239–51). Therefore human security may provide important context-specific insights into the collective experience that leads people to support suicide terrorism. Analytically, this makes human security more sensitive toward specific people and places. Considering that this concept is oriented more to human needs than state security, examining suicide terrorism through the lens of human security allows one to engage meaningfully with sociological and social psychological factors at the heart of suicide terrorism. In other words, the concept of human security can expand our understanding of suicide terrorism by enabling us to account for culture, religion, economy, gender and other 'low politics' issues in the analysis of this phenomenon.

Furthermore, the fact that human security does not yield a universal definition means that the concept cannot be pinned down as either status-quo-oriented or transformative. As a result, critical definitions of human security that pose a fundamental challenge to political and economic institutions and values are not discursively discarded. For example, Thomas and Wilkin (1999:3) understand human security not as 'some inevitable occurrence, but as a direct result of existing structures of power that determine who enjoys the entitlement to security and who does not.' This means that the 'emancipation from oppressive power structures – be they global, national, or local in origin and scope – is necessary for human security.' Therefore, examining the problem of suicide terrorism through the prism of critical definitions of human security offers a broader explanatory frame that focuses on the links between the existing global order, on the one hand, and local actors (suicide terrorists, organisations employing them, and societies supporting them), on the other. This enables critical theorists to view suicide terrorism as a problem of the social and political complex as a whole.

By the same token, the rise of suicide terrorism is an indicator of pressures within the existing world order to change the power relational status quo. Embracing a critical theoretical perspective on suicide terrorism thus requires that we call into question existing institutional and social power relations and examine whether and how they are changing. We need to reveal the developments that triggered recent exponential growth in the number and worldwide impact of suicide terror attacks. This means that we ought to examine the dynamics within the present world order or, to use a Coxian term, within the current 'historical structure of world order' (Cox, 1996:97).

Suicide Terrorism: A Historical Structure Lens

Each historical structure, according to Cox, is represented by a configuration of three categories of forces: material conditions, ideas, and institutions. With regard to suicide terrorism, critical theory urges us to explore how the interplay of material conditions with dominant ideas and institutions facilitates the radicalisation of Muslims in some societies and the spread of martyrdom through suicide. In all likelihood, the recent upsurge of suicide terrorism has as much to do with the weakening of fixity in global power relations and the doctrinal vacuum in the aftermath of the Soviet collapse,[9] as with the structural violence blamed on the West, its global institutions, and (neo)liberal ideologies. Homer-Dixon (2001) notes that grievances exploited by terrorists are, in fact, compounded by 'an international political and economic system that's more concerned about Realpolitik, oil supply, and the interests of global finance than about the well-being of the region's human beings.' His argument reflects the idea that violence in the form of suicide terrorism can emanate from the interplay of material, institutional and ideational dimensions of the existing world order. Therefore, it makes sense to take a closer look at the recent changes in each of these dimensions.

In the last two decades, the politico-military dimension of historical structure has been characterised by two strong moves on the part of the US from Cold War limited hegemony to post-Cold War expanded hegemonic multilateralism to post-9/11 (neo)-imperial unipolarity. During the Cold War, the US - a limited hegemon –exercised a relatively high degree of soft power within its sphere of influence, spreading American values, social norms, and lifestyle beyond its borders. The evolving Cold War conflict played a significant role in moulding and reinforcing limited American hegemony. Much of the acquiescence to US leadership was sustained by the provision of benefits to loyal and subordinate states in the form of aid, security guarantees against Soviet threat and participation in the liberal economic order. While violent conflict was controlled in the relations between collaborative adherents to US hegemony, recourse to force helped establish and/or maintain American presence in the periphery. However, it was the periphery that became severely disadvantaged by liberal economic institutional arrangements, 'through which the asymmetries of exchange relations …[worked to the] benefit [of] the hegemonic power' (Harvey, 2003:181). Therefore, the periphery displayed little consent to US leadership. It is also in the periphery

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[9]   See, for example, Cornelia Beyer, *Violent Globalisms: Conflict in Response to Empire* (Ashgate 2008); Adrian Guelke, *Terrorism and Global Disorder: Political Violence in the Contemporary World* (I.B.Tauris, 2006). Of relevance here is also Gambetta's argument that suicide terrorism needs to be understood in terms of both its historical continuity and its diffusion across insurgencies. We argue that the collapse of Cold War bipolarity contributed to the spread of suicide terrorism.

that the US efforts at establishing control through the use of force clashed with Soviet attempts, backed by the coercive power of its military machine and competing communist ideology. Faced with the paucity of acquiescence and a serious contestant, the United States had no choice but to rely on a combination of benign hegemonic and coercive dictatorial forms of power to retain control over the periphery.

Following the demise of a communism Eastern Bloc, the United States faced a unique opportunity (a unipolar moment) to internationally expand its hegemony. But the growing resort to aggressive unilateral action in the aftermath of 9/11 contributed to increased tensions with the periphery, especially among so-called 'rogue states.' The challenge to increasingly dictatorial American domination came in different forms – suicide terrorism being one of them. To terrorists, US hegemony with its institutional and ideational underpinnings is both implicated in attempts at, and through the outcome of, exclusive control over trade, finance, production, and services (Chaturvedi and Painter, 2007:386). Harvey (2003:181) argues that American hegemony represents 'accumulation by dispossession [of which the] …primary vehicle … has been the forcing open of markets throughout the world by institutional pressures exercised through the IMF and the WTO, backed by the power of the United States (and to a lesser extent Europe) to deny access to its own vast market to those countries that refuse to dismantle their protections.' Against this backdrop, it is worth mentioning that Cox himself ascribed considerable importance to institutions, which he saw as crucial for the stability of any particular world order. Institutions, at least initially, perpetuate the status quo by promoting normative underpinnings for the power configuration existing at the time of their origin (Cox, 1996:99). Hegemonic institutions ensure domination of the strong by legitimising prevailing power relations; they offer 'softer' means of power for resolving conflicts, such as persuasion, manipulation, and bribery. By doing so, they ensure the distinctiveness of hegemonic domination from dictatorial domination (the latter relying primarily on the 'hard' power of the strong).

As mentioned above, both Cold War and post-Cold War orders reflected consistent efforts on the part of the US to expand its political, military and economic power through the process of institution-building and creating a relatively stable liberal institutionalised order. Even in the aftermath of the 2001 terror attacks, the US – a major architect of multilateral institutionalism – did not abandon the broader goal of promoting liberal political and economic institutions globally, even though in some cases some of these institutions became seriously weakened. (Sorensen, 2006:353) The dominant position of Western capitalist democracies within most of the global multilateral institutions, especially the international financial institutions, remained firmly in place. This can explain why Western efforts to promote liberal institutions and values often ignite resistance, including from radical Islamist elements. Githens-Mazer

(2008:19–26) contends that individual and collective interactions with state and international institutions, along with ideological commitments and individual experiences, account for support and participation in radical violent Islamism.

Indeed, much of the terrorist discourse is directed against global liberal institutions. These institutions are seen from the global south as embodiments of American dominance. Created in 1944, these institutions underwent significant transformation from a system of 'embedded liberal compromise' (Ruggie, 1982:379–415) to one that advocated economic neoliberalism. Despite this transformation, the Bretton Woods institutions are reflective largely of the collective images prevalent in the West. They provide little room for non-Western ideas, thus hampering the development of truly inter-cultural universal values. It is no surprise, then, that terrorists often incorporate into their discourse fierce critiques of the complicity of US-dominated economic institutional arrangements in generating and sustaining structural conditions of poverty, social inequality, exclusion, dispossession, and poor distribution on a global scale. Mousseau (2002:5-6) refers to terrorism as 'the deeply embedded anti-market rage brought on by the forces of globalization.' This rage is directed not only against institutions that typify Western 'accumulation by dispossession,' but also against (neo)liberal ideology in general.

From a critical theoretical perspective, suicide terrorism is a way of expressing divergent collective views on the nature and legitimacy of current power relations, distinct meanings of justice, as well as opposing values held by those on the periphery of the current historical structure. The dynamics of globalisation brought modern and traditional value systems into contact and, at times, into conflict, generating fear among marginalised groups of US or western cultural domination (Newman, 2006). Modernity with its emphasis on secularism and rationality brought not only freedom, democracy, and diversity, but also devastating social and economic disruption, profound nihilism, and materialism – all of which are tightly connected with the structure and nature of US power, and therefore strongly detested by terrorists and their supporters. Such contestation of rival collective images of social order is evidence of the existence of alternative collective views on the nature of world order. In this respect, critical theory provides the possibility of exploring the heterogeneity of the present historical structure by recognising the forces, sources and patterns of contestation and resistance by the excluded, marginalised and silenced. A critical theoretical perspective requires that we understand suicide terrorism within a *longue durée* dynamic framework and treat it as a problem of the socio-political complex as a whole. This is not to suggest that critical theoretical scholarship is 'better' than the problem-solving approach, but to demonstrate that its distinctive relationship to the structures and practices of power enables critical theoretical perspective to reveal deeply problematic and contentious conceptual issues generally masked by the problem-solving research. Unable to address these issues effectively, problem-solving scholarship is trapped in

objectifying suicide terrorism, in concealing both the theory-laden and contentious essence of the very basic terms it employs and implicit political commitments of its theorising, and in reducing the phenomenon of suicide terrorism to the sphere of state security. In the face of these unresolved conceptual issues, problem-solving analysis relies on a string of assumptions that frame a latent normative project, which reinforces the prevailing global status quo.

Conclusion

The above discussion highlighted the tendency of recent problem-solving literature on suicide terrorism to focus on the strategic nature of this phenomenon. Problem-solving scholarship provides important insights into the issue of suicide terrorism by reorienting the discussion from the earlier emphasis on irrationality of suicide bombers to a more sophisticated theoretical engagement with rational calculations made by organisations and leaders employing this tactic. However, the entanglement of the rationalist works on suicide terrorism with the political agendas of dominant states circumscribes the scope of problem-solving analysis and carries hegemonic implications. Critical theoretical approach reveals some deeply problematic, unresolved conceptual issues, confronting problem-solving literature (the rationalisation and securitisation of suicide terrorism, as well as the politics of naming). Some may charge that the distinction between the two approaches is not as sharp as first proposed, considering that even problem-solving approach suggests measures, such as poverty eradication, narrowing of the gap between the haves and have-nots, fostering of the intercultural dialogue, and supplementing military security with human security. However, critical theoretical and problem-solving perspectives on suicide terrorism operate at the different levels of abstraction, and embrace distinct epistemological, ontological and methodological orientations and programmatic agendas. For instance, critical theorists replace the rationalist explanatory framework with an interpretive one, thus emphasising the need to contextualise suicide terrorism, that is, to account for the complex web of political, material and discursive factors at play within each specific context. Most importantly, what really separates these two approaches is the orientation. Problem-solving approaches are status-quo in orientation and view suicide terrorism as a problem to be managed within the context of securitized agenda, whereas critical theory contextualizes suicide terrorism and tries to understand the deeper societal sources of this problem. This has implications for policy making. While they do not offer a simple way of explaining and addressing the issue, critical scholars view suicide terrorism as a problem of the socio-political complex as a whole, rather than a self-contained security issue. Such a broader view of the problem allows critical theorists to engage with the considerations of how existing discourses, practices and structures of power are implicated in the exponential rise of suicide terrorism and to suggest that

effective counter-terror strategies require a shift away from problem-solving status quo management of the problem to recognising the need for major social, economic, and political changes to the existing world order.

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