

Suicide Bombing: The Ultimate Rejection? A Critical Study Of The Responses Of Muslim Scholars

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Abstract

The dangerous escalation of suicide bombing as a means for the destruction of humanity all over the world stemming from the never ending Israel-Palestine conflict, September 11, Bali Bombing, Sunni - Shiite conflict in Iraq and Pakistan, the civil unrests following the US occupation of Iraq, and other random acts of violence perpetrated at innocent civilians is perturbing to all humanity. However, some Muslims and non-Muslims alike attempt to justify the suicide bombing and killing of innocent civilians in the name of religion. Of course, Islam permits one to strive to safeguard basic human rights and defend the religion with freedom and tolerance. This article examines the responses of Muslim scholars to suicide bombing. It argues that proper understanding of religions in a cooperative and stable environment constitutes the vital element of a peaceful society, which is necessary for the development of humanity. The study of responses of various scholars shows that one has to understand terminologies such as suicide (*al-intihar*), martyrdom (*al-istishhad*), and striving (*al-Jihad*), which play an essential role in understanding individuals and organizations. It also appears that the world community can survive without threat from terrorists providing there is sincere and mutual understanding of the religions. This paper makes some suggestions on the basis of the responses of Muslim scholars, which could help in preventing suicide bombing and promote living together peacefully.

Keywords:

Suicide Bombing, Humanity, Responses, Muslim Scholars, Oppression.

Introduction

Suicide is not a new phenomenon. Nevertheless, the extensive use of suicide bombers and the lethal consequences of this activity have turned suicide terror into a strategic threat against the security, stability and well-being of society. Suicide bombing is used as a "strategic weapon" in the cultural conflict between Muslims and western culture.

Suicide, or self-annihilation in any form, is generally prohibited in all religions. However, Islam specifically forbids suicide or self-killing in any form in the name of Allah or religion.¹ The extensive description of the issue is based on the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) who neither encouraged nor even permitted any of his companions to commit suicide. There is no counter example from his twenty-three years prophetic period. It is very unfortunate that some misguided Muslims commit suicide in the name of Allah and use religion as a means to justify it. The majority of Muslim scholars have decreed that committing suicide is wrong, in accordance with the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). However, some western educated intellectuals condemn Islam and Muslims without studying or understanding the true spirit of Islam.

From the Islamic perspective, in the case of suicide bombings, whosoever takes his life by any means or destroys it by any form of action has unjustly taken a life which Allah has gifted him. Since man did not create himself, not even as much as a single cell in his body, his life does not belong to him but a trust given by Allah S.W.T. He is not allowed to diminish it, let alone to harm or to destroy it. Allah S.W.T. says:

"... Do not kill (don't destroy) yourselves, for truly Allah has been to you Most Merciful. If any do that in rancour and injustice- soon shall we cast him into the fire"²

Islam permits Muslims to stand for their rights and defend their lives, property and freedom. It also emphasizes the need to resort to peace, advocates tolerance and disparages ignorance and destruction. As mentioned in this verse of the Qur'an:

¹ Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, *The lawful and the prohibited in Islam*. K.L.: Islamic Book Trust. P.p. 305-12

² *Al-Qur'an, Surah an-Nisaa* (4): 29-30.

"You shall spend in the cause of Allah; make not your own hands contribute to your destruction. But do good, Allah loves those who do good".³

No matter what wrongs Muslims perceived as being done against them, they must not lash out against an entire population of people. They must have faith in Allah as he admonishes those who oppress others and transgress the bounds of what is right and what is wrong.⁴

Suicide bombers have been indoctrinated and they have carried out what was not taught or promised by Allah S.W.T. in the Qur'an or His prophet's (S.A.W) Sunnah. Prophet Muhammad S.A.W warned that anyone who commits the crime of suicide would be deprived of the mercy of Allah and would not enter the Garden; he would deserve Allah's wrath and be cast into the fire. The Prophet S.A.W. said, "In the time before you, a man was wounded. His wounds troubled him so much that he took a knife and cut his wrist and bled himself to death. Thereupon Allah said, "My slave hurried in the matter of his life, therefore he is deprived of the Garden".⁵

If a person is deprived of the Garden because he cannot bear the pain of his wounds and kills himself, or does so because he has suffered a loss in his business, or has failed an examination, or has been rejected by a woman, it is even worse if he takes his life by suicide bombing and murdering innocent civilians. The following Hadith illustrates how grave a sin a suicide bomber has committed:

"He who throws himself down from a rock and commits suicide will be throwing himself into the fire of hell; he who drinks poison and kills himself will have the poison in his hand, drinking it forever in the fire of Hell; and he who kills himself with a weapon will have that weapon in his hand, stabbing himself forever in the fire of Hell".⁶

³ Al-Qur'an, Surah al-Baqarah (2): 195.

⁴ See, Al-Qur'an, Surah ash-Shoorah (42): 42.

⁵ Sahih Al-Bukhary, Kitabul Ambiyaa chapter on "What has Been Mentioned About Bani Israel"; Hadis no.: 3463

⁶ Bukhary and Muslim. Sahih Al-Bukhary 'Kitabut-TibV (the Book of Medicine), Hadith no.:5778. And Sahih Al-Muslim 'Kitabul Iman', Hadith no.: 1675

Suicide is also a state of disbelief and loss of faith that is condemned by Allah throughout the Qur'an. Allah commands the believers never to despair or lose hope and instead work for a brighter future. Prophet Jacob had advised his children, saying

*"None despairs of Allah's soothing mercy except the disbelieving people."*⁷

One needs to understand the difference between *'amaliyaat al-Intihar* and *'amaliyaat al-istishhad* and *al-Jihad* in order to clarify the terminology used in Islam. *'Amaliyaat al-Intihar* is self-killing in achieving worldly affairs, while *'amaliyaat al-istishhad* and *al-Jihad* (strive) mean self-sacrifice in the name of Allah according to religious guidance. The Qur'an says:

*"And fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you. But do not transgress limits. Truly Allah loves not the transgressors."*⁸

This paper aims to identify the causes of suicide bombing and analyze the responses of Muslim scholars from an Islamic perspective. Terminologies such as *al-Intihar*, *al-istishhad*, and *al-Jihad* will be discussed critically, and their stance. This paper also discusses remedies for preventing people from committing suicide and its effects on Islam and Muslims in particular, and humanity in general.

Usage of "Suicide" and related terms

The phenomenon of suicide attacks is nothing new. Throughout history, there were people who chose to sacrifice their lives for society, religion, ideology and national interests individually and collectively. At present, a few suicide attackers abuse the Islamic terms "*amaliyat istishhadiya*" and *al-Jihad* in the name of Allah. One has to understand the difference between "*amaliyat intihariya*" and "*amalat istishhadiya*" towards understanding the stance of Islam and Muslims. According to Muslim scholars, the Islamic terminologies such as *al-istishhad* and *al-Jihad* are cogent and comprehensive, and are not related in any form with *al-Intihar*, which has been strongly opposed by Islam.

⁷ Al-Qur'an, Surah Yusuf(12): 87

⁸ Al-Qur'an, Surah al-Baqarah (2): 190

A. *Al-Intihar* (suicide):

The word suicide is derived from the Latin origin, where 'sui' means "of oneself, and 'cide' means "killing"; hence 'suicide' means "the killing of oneself".⁹ Davis defined it as a death caused by the initiation of a deliberate set of actions leading to loss of life.¹⁰

Suicide in Arabic language is '*al-Intihar*' "self-killing".¹¹ In Islam, suicide means death but one's own hand for a worldly purpose, because one is in the state of indignation or fury.¹² *Intihar*, however, could also mean to carry out materially motivated actions that lead ones life towards destruction.¹³

One author expressed her emotional feeling while defining suicide as follows:

"Suicide is an especially terrible way to die. The emotional suffering leading to it is in most cases prolonged, sharp and hard. There is no morphine capable of alleviating the anguish, and often death is violent and gloomy. The suicide's suffering is personal and unexpressed, and he leaves behind him relatives, friends and associates who carry the pain of loss which is almost indescribable together with a sense of guilt. Suicide carries a level of confusion and a feeling of destruction which in most cases cannot be expressed in words".¹⁴

B. *Al-istishhad* [Martyrdom]

Al-istishhad is a religious ruling permitting self-sacrifice on behalf of Islam in order to safeguard life, religion, wealth and society. *Shahid* (martyr) is a Muslim who fights in the name of Allah in order to gain the approval of his Lord. The main difference between self-sacrifice

⁹ John M. Davis, *Suicidal Youth: School-Based Intervention and Prevention*, Oxford: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1991, p.3.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p.4

¹¹ "Fairuj Abadi, *Al-Qamus al-Muhit*, p.616.

¹² Al-Qurtubi, *Tafsir al-Qurtubi*, vol. 5, p. 157.

¹³ Nawaf Hael al-Takruri, *Al-'Amaliyyat al-Istishhadiyyah fil Mizan al-Fiqhi*,

¹⁴ Dr Yoram Yovel, *An Emotional storm*, Keshet Publishing, Tel Aviv, 2001, pg. 215 and see Shaul Shay, *Shahids: Islam and Suicide Attacks*.

and suicide attack lies in the method of operation. *Al-istishhad* is only fighting against the enemy of Islam and Muslims in the name of Allah in order to carry out the responsibility assigned by Him, not for achieving personal gain or agenda. Shahid may die at the hands of the enemy, while the suicide attacker detonates himself at his chosen site. Through his death, he intends the mission's success. Suicide attack is "a violent, politically motivated action executed consciously, actively and with prior intent by a single individual or individuals who kills himself in the course of the operation together with his chosen target".¹⁵

A Contemporary Muslim scholar, Yusuf al-Qaradawi states that Islam has made human life sacred and has safeguarded it, and aggression against human life is the second greatest sin in the sight of Allah.¹⁶ It was also the teachings of all prophets in order to live mutually and peacefully. The Qur'an declares for the children of Israel:

"We ordained for the children of Israel, that if anyone slew a person-unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land- it would be as if he slew the whole humanity; and if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people. Then there although came to them our messengers with clear signs, yet, even after that many of them continued to commit mischief and aggression in the land."¹⁷

The verse is self-explanatory and the crime is more serious if the slain is a Muslim.

"And for the one who kills a Believer intentionally, his recompense is Hell, to abide therein; and the wrath of Allah is upon him and His curse, and a tremendous punishment has been prepared for him".¹⁸

¹⁵ Shaul Shay, *Shahids: Islam and suicide Attacks*, pg.6

¹⁶ Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *TTze Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam*. Kamal El-Helbawy (et.al trans.) KL: Islamic Book Trust, 1995. pp. 327-328.

¹⁷ Al-Qur'an, Surah al-Maidah (5): 32.

¹⁸ Al-Qur'an, Surah an-Nisaa (4): 93 Also said, "A Believer remains within the scope of his religion as long as he does not kill anyone unlawfully". And again, "Allah may forgive every sin except in the case of one who dies a mushrik (polytheist) or one who kills a Believer intentionally".

The Prophet S.A.W. considered fighting between two Muslims as a door to unbelief and a deed pertaining to pre-Islamic *Jahiliyah*, during which people used to wage wars and shed blood over merely a camel or a horse. He said,

"Insulting a Muslim is wickedness and fighting him is unbelief. And "Do not become unbelievers after I pass away, killing one another". He further said, "When two Muslims draw weapons against each other, they are at the brink of Hell. If one of them, kills the other, they both enter it together. Someone asked, "O Messenger of Allah, this one was the murderer but what was the fault of the murdered?" He replied, "He was eager to kill the other".¹⁹

Islamic teaching requires the Muslim to be resolute in facing hardships; he is not permitted to give up and to run away from his responsibilities, when a tragedy befalls or some of his hopes are dashed. Indeed the believer (*Mu'min*) is meant to be striving (*jihad*), not sitting idle, engaging in combat, not escaping nor fleeing. His faith and character do not permit him to run away from the battlefield of life.²⁰

C. *Al-Jihad* [Strive]

Al-Jihad means to strive or struggle in order to achieve an objecting. Maududi defined the word '*al-Jihad*' as 'to exert one's utmost for the achievement of an object. It is not a synonym of for 'holy war' but has a far wider meaning than this. It covers every kind of effort. *Mujahid*

¹⁹ Al-Bukhary and Muslim, cit in Yusuf al-Qaradawi, op cit. p.324. The Prophet S.A.W. also forbade any act which might lead a Muslim to commit murder or to fight, even pointing a weapon, saying, "None of you should point a weapon at his brother. Perhaps Satan may make his hand slip and the he will fall into the pit of Fire ". He even went on to say, "It is not permissible for a Muslim to frighten his brother".

²⁰ The sin of murder is not limited to the murderer alone. Each individual who participated in this crime or even happened to be at the scene of the murder, by deed, or by word, will be the recipient of Allah's punishment in proportion to his share of the sin. A Hadith states, "None of you should remain where a man is being killed unjustly, for the curse (of Allah) descends on anyone who was present and did not defend him".

is the one who always struggles to achieve his goal as well as to propagate it conveying the message of Allah to others with his tongue, pen, papers, heart and body. He spends all his efforts and resources for its achievement and fights against all those forces that oppose it. In achieving the pleasure of Allah, he does not hesitate to put even every moment of his life in danger. The struggle and fight of such a person is considered technically as al-Jihad. A Muslim, however, is required to do all this in the name of Allah alone under certain moral restrictions for establishing the way prescribed by Him and for elevating His word above all. There should be no other object than this before performing al-Jihad. It is certain that the Jihad of a Muslim does not refer to the general war of extermination against infidels.²¹

There are times, in certain circumstances, when Islam tolerates and permits war. However, Islam strongly emphasizes the ideas of peace, justice, freedom, opposition to oppression and fighting in self-defence. War is tolerated in these conditions, but if there is a possibility of avoiding war, then this alternative, as long as it is reasonable, must be taken.²² As the Qur'an declares:

*"You shall prepare for them all the power you can muster, and all the equipment you can mobilize, to strike terror in hearts of the enemies of Allah, your enemies, as well as others who are not known to you; Allah knows them. Whatever you spend in the cause of Allah will be repaid to you generously, without the least injustice. If they resort to peace, so shall you, and put your trust in ALLAH. He is the Hearer, the Omniscient."*²³

Self-defence involves fighting against oppression, aggression and tyranny. In fact, this is what Islam demands:

"Permission (to fight) is granted to those who are being persecuted, since injustice has befallen them, and Allah is

²¹ Maududi, Tafticemul Qur'an, (The Meaning of the Qur'an), Muhammad Akbar (tr.), Lahore: Islamic Publications Limited, V.I, Surah al-Baqarah (2), verse: 218, pg. 161.

²² "Jihad in Islam," Submission.org. Published online: www.submission.org/muhammed/jihad/html. " Accessed on: 17th May, 2007

²³ Al-Qur'an, Surah al-Anfal (8): 60-61.

*certainly able to support them. They were evicted from their homes unjustly, for no reason other than saying, "Our Lord is Allah." If it were not for Allah's supporting of some people against others, monasteries, churches, synagogues, and masjids -where the name of Allah is commemorated frequently- would have been destroyed. Absolutely, Allah supports those who support Him. Allah is Powerful, Almighty.*²⁴

The other fact is that Jihad is often confused with 'Holy War.' Allah does not encourage war but rather encourages peace whenever possible. Fighting an oppressor or aggressor is fighting against oppression or aggression, thus it is fighting for justice and therefore in the name (cause) of Allah.²⁵

The Factors of Suicide Bombing

It is true that suicide is most often associated with mental illness but there are also four other causal factors, which may motivate a person to commit self-killing and self-destruction such as psychological, historical, ideological and survival factors, giving an additional twist to the complexities of suicide.

a. Psychological roots

Suicide bombing is in fact a sort of extremism. There are two viewpoints on explaining the psychological roots of suicide bombings. Some opine that it is in effect the suicide bombers' own actions. On the other hand, a good number of researchers see it as a response to the situation the person is living in. In this case the response becomes stronger the more intense the situation.

Abdul Rahman al Mutairi concludes, after thorough research, that extremism is not an in-born phenomenon of the extremists; rather it is ignited through the adverse situations he or she faced. It is a natural response to the political, social, economical and other problems faced. Likewise, suicide bombings are also the results of psychological tensions and stresses.

²⁴ Al-Qur'an, Surah al-Hajj: 39-40.

²⁵ See Al-Qur'an, Surah al-Baqarah (2): 244, Surah al-Hajj (22): 78, and Surah an-Nisaa (4): 74-75.

b. Ideological roots:

The ideological roots of contemporary extremism, which leads towards suicidal activities besides other extremisms, are mainly in the diversified opinions on the concept of *Haakimiyyah*, and flawed understanding of ideologies.

The *Haakimiyyah*:

The term *Haakimiyyah* signifies submitting to Allah SWT alone and accepting only His rules as legislative authority. It has been widely mentioned in the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet SAW, though not by this exact term.²⁶ The term itself is a new term, though its meaning and ideas are parts of the basic creed '*Tawhid al-Uluhiyyah*.' It has been widely discussed in the writings on *tawhid*; it is just the term was not coined until recently. It should be noted that *haakimiyyah*, being the ideological root of extremism, does not mean that in itself is extremism.

Maududi holds the view that the *haakimiyyah* is used for supreme and absolute authority. Thus, one who has no authority cannot be Allah, and He (Allah) alone should be taken as Allah.²⁷ In the same view, Sayyid Qutb, who has written extensively on this topic, holds that *Haakimiyyah* is for Allah and it is His right that humans should worship Him alone. The right to lay down laws for them also belongs to Him.²⁸

It is considered to be a major ideological root of extremism in contemporary times. The key debate was raised from the question of the status of rules beside the revealed Shari'ah from Allah SWT. This gave rise to the much heated debates on *taqleed* (blind imitation) of rulers who do not rule according to Allah's command, justification of revolts against these rulers, and *takfeer* (declaring one an unbeliever) of people who live in un-Islamic societies and do not migrate to Islamic societies.

²⁶ *Surah An-Nisaa* (4):65, *Surah Al-Maidah* (5):50, *Surah Yusuf* (12): 40, *Surah Al-Ahzab* (33):36

²⁷ Maududi *Tadween al-Dustur*. Cited in Al-Mutairi, Abdul Rahman ibn Mualaa. *Religious Extremism the Lives of Contemporary Muslims*, Zarabozo, Jamal al-Din M. (trans.). Denver, CO, USA: Al-Basheer Company for Publications and Translations, 2001, p.107.

²⁸ Sayyid Qutb, *Muqawwimat al-Tasawwur al-Islami*. Cairo: Dar-al-Shurooq, 1406 A.H. cited in *Ibid*.

Similarly, the debate on the concept of *Haakimiyyah* influenced many to take suicidal actions. Recently, in Bangladesh, a group of people²⁹ in the name of establishing an Islamic Shari'ah based state, adopted suicide bombing as a strategy to achieve their goal.

Flaws in formulating of ideology:

Flaws are always causes of shortcomings in thinking, and a flawed idea would surely bring about wrong concepts. It is no surprise that Muslim scholars of the past gave immense significance to methodology in Islamic jurisprudence, in particular the source of the law and the methodology of deriving of the law.

Contemporary extremism in suicide activities could be said to be mainly due to ignorance and flawed method of thoughts. Ignorance includes the following:

1. lack of knowledge about the Qur'an,
2. lack of knowledge of the Sunnah,
3. lack of in-depth knowledge of the objectives of Shari'ah (Maqasid al-Shari'ah),
4. lack of knowledge of proofs and tools in drawing conclusions,
5. lack of knowledge of the statements of the scholars and their legacies,
6. lack of knowledge of the Arabic language and its rhetoric,
7. lack of historical knowledge,
8. ignorance of the nature of reality and the environment,
9. ignorance of the diversing people and their different worldviews.

The flawed method of thought is evident in:

1. taking a very literal approach to the Qur'an and Hadith,
2. failure to understand items comprehensively
3. reinterpreting the texts,
4. quoting directly from the texts, without proper background
5. following equivocal evidence
6. failure to reconcile seemingly contradictory evidence,
7. lack of objectivity
8. making *ijtihad* while not being qualified to do so.

²⁹ There are more than one group in these bombings. The most widely known is the "Ahlul Hadith" group, lead by Dr. Ghalib.

c. Historical Factor

Suicide attack is, a significant form of extremism. Extremism (*ghuluw*) is an ancient phenomenon which predates the time of Noah (A.S.). Noah (A.S.) was in fact, sent to his people to correct extreme views, to the point that they raised some of their pious men to divine status. Even among the people of Israel great forms of extremism were apparent. It is of no surprise that two verses³⁰ prohibiting extremism were directly addressed to them.³¹

During the time of the Prophet (SAW) though extremism appeared in many different instances, it took either of two forms, i.e. extremism related to belief, and extremism in individual deeds. Right after the assassination of Uthman (rd.) a disastrous *fitnah* (division) arose where even the Companions of the Prophet (SAW) differed among themselves. This division became apparent in the Battle of Jamal and later at the Battle of Siffeen, leading towards the incident of arbitration which gave rise to the two extremist schools of thought, the Khawarij and the Shiites.

Both of these schools of thought were extreme, and they strongly opposed each other on some issues; for example, 'loyalty and disassociation' (*al-wala wal-baraa*). The Khawarij were extreme in disassociating themselves from the Companions (even Ali ibn Abi Talib), whereas the Shiites were extreme in regards to loyalty towards Ali ibn Abi Talib (rd.) and his family. Another example of their contrast in extremism is seen in *takfeer* (declaring one an infidel). They both agree in *takfeer*, and they did that. However, the issues that makes one an infidel is completely different and opposite to each other in both the schools. In the long run, the issue of *takfeer*, created the platform for the appearance of other schools of extreme thought, such as the Murji'ah, Qadariyyah, Mu'tazilah, and others.

However, the question on the root or the basis of the extreme thoughts in the contemporary Muslim societies, we find two different views. One group thinks that these extreme thoughts are enrooted in the beliefs of the Shiites and the Khawarij.³² The other group does not

³⁰ The two verses are Surah An-Nisaa: 171, and Surah Al-Maidah: 77.

³¹ See Al-Mutairi, op cit. p.95.

³² Among the supporters of this opinion Ahmad Kamal Abu al-Majd (in his *Hawaar la Muajahah*) Al-Bahinsaawi (in his *Al-Hukmu wa Qadhiyyatu Takfeeril Muslim*), Lieutenant Hasan Saadiq (in *The Roots of the Fitnah Among Islamic Sects from the Time of the Prophet until the Assassination of Sadat*.) are some examples.

consider the Shiites and the Khawarij as the root of contemporary extremism. In fact, they view it as a coincidence that led to the same results.³³

To conclude this argumentation, Al-Mutairi remarks that contemporary extremism is not linked with that of the Khawarij and the Shiites; rather it was a brainchild of the contemporary extremists, which coincidentally matched the ideas of the previous schools though they did not ascribe their thoughts to them. The influence was a later observation, not an earlier attribution.

d. Survival Factor

Suicide attacks are not new and the root causes are many. For example, Israel has dealt with Palestinian suicide bombers for years and in recent years, the intensity of the Intifada attacks on the Israeli civilian population by Palestinians have increased daily, as suicide bombers specifically targeted public areas in order to create fear and induce terror. But why do Palestinian youths including women carry out suicide bombings almost routinely? The reason is that they saw this as the only means of revenge available to them in the Middle East conflict.

A Critical Study of the Responses of Muslim Scholars

Muslim scholars unanimously agree that self-killing, motivated by a worldly interest or in an attempt to avoid one's fate, or to escape from disease, or when facing disaster or confronting the enemy in battle field, or being confined as prisoner, or when faced with losses in trade or failure in one's studies, is not allowed. Committing suicide is a grave sin and a suicide is a great sinner.³⁴ The majority of Muslim scholars, based on the Qur'an and Sunnah, saw suicide as a prohibited act, while martyrdom is allowed.

The conflict between Palestine and Israel and the occupation of Iraq has led some Muslims to become involved in suicide and martyrdom in order to obtain justice or to show their anger. That is why some Sunni Muslim scholars, political officials and senior columnists support

³³ See Numan Samura'ee, *Al-Takfeer: Judhuruhu, Asbabuhu wa Mabru'atuhu*. Beirut: al-Manarah lil-Taba'ah wan-Nashr wat-Tauzi', 1986, p.8.

³⁴ *Al-Qurtubi, Tafseer Al-Qurnubi*, V.5, pg. 140, also see Rashid Ridha, *Tafsir al-Manor* V.5, pg.440

suicide bombing. The Arab media has been engaged in a heated debate over the religious, political and moral legitimacy of martyrdom operations against Israel. Even though, according to the majority of Muslim scholars, support for suicide operations in the Arab media was not based upon religious foundations but on political and emotional arguments. They considered the Palestinian conflict as morally legitimizing martyrdom operations. Among the Muslim scholars there are two different opinions, one group who basically considers suicide operation as martyrdom operation, while the other group considers suicide operation as prohibited. Those who consider suicide to be martyrdom include:

- * Amru Nasif, a columnist for *Al-Usbu*, ("the Egyptian weekly), who in a previous column volunteered to carry out a suicide bombing himself, criticized Arab intellectuals who denounced a Tel-Aviv bombing and claimed the bombing damaged the Palestinian image in the world. He encouraged Muslims to continue their struggle until they get their land back. He said: "The Martyrdom operations should continue, Allah willing, and their anger should increase. We must use the panic and the intensive Zionist presence at the site after each attack to strike another blow that will harvest twice as many of their stinking souls."³⁵
- * Dr. Lutfi Nasif, a columnist for the Egyptian government daily, *Al-Gumhuriya*, wrote: "We salute all the *Shahids* and are sorry for their departure, but the freedom tax must be paid, even if it is expensive".³⁶
- * Bahjat Ibrahim Al-Dsuqi, a columnist for the Egyptian government weekly *Al-Akhbar* stated that with suicide bombings "the rats who came from the US, Europe, and Russia will flee," and added "whoever is killed by the Israeli arsenal or by the Israeli settlers is a *Shahid*," but "whoever blows himself up as a revenge against the enemies is a *Shahid* of the highest rank of Martyrdom, because he has sold his soul and bought Jannah. We are not afraid of [sacrificing] thousands of Martyrs."³⁷

³⁵ In an article entitled "Debating the Religious, Political and moral Legitimacy of suicide Bombings" by Yotam Feldner, published at the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI) Inquiry and Analysis Series, at website <http://memri.org/bin/articles>, it was mentioned that over the years, in the light of increased Palestinian suicide bombings.

³⁶ Ibid. Also see: The Estimate, op cit.

³⁷ Ibid.

- * Walid Badran, also an *Al-Akhbar* columnist, expressed his conviction that the operations present the Israelis two options: "to return to the places from where they came, or to accept a just agreement," because "nobody disputes that Jerusalem is more precious to the Muslims and Arabs than life itself, while the Jews consider their lives more precious than Jerusalem."³⁸
Al-Istiqlal's Egyptian columnist, Dr. Rifat Sayyed Ahmad criticized the Arab regimes for their lack of action and saluted the suicide bomber's body who protested their silence.
- * Another columnist, Said Al-Hotari saluted the Shahid who gave the most beautiful presentations to the people in Palestine and in Egypt, when he "happily plunged towards his Allah."
- * In March 1996, Shaikh Yusuf al-Qardawi stated in a sermon aired over Qatar television that suicide operations could be legitimized as martyrdom operations in the name of Allah, conducted by the Palestinian Muslims. His spokesman published several *fatwas* in favour of suicide operation, based on the Qur'anic verse which reads:

*"Make ready your strength against them to the utmost of your power, including steeds of war, to strike terror into the hearts of the enemies of Allah and your enemies and 'others..... whatever you shall spend in the cause of Allah shall be repaid unto you, and you shall not be treated unjustly."*³⁹

He argued that the Palestinian *Fedayeen* operation is wrong and a misinterpretation to consider it a suicidal operation. These are *fedayeen*, heroic and martyrdom operations and far away from suicide. A suicide kills himself for the sake of his own and out of frustrations with what Allah has provided for him. He sacrifices his life out of selfish consideration, which motivated him to lose his faith and firm belief in Allah. Whereas a martyr sacrifices his life for the sake of his *Deen* (religion) as well as his nation in the name of Allah and he keeps hope of Allah's grace and completely submits himself to His will as he sees. To protest against the enemy, he becomes a human bomb, and fights his enemies and the enemies of Allah with this new weapon which fate

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Al-Qur'an, Surah al-Anfaal (8): 60.

has placed in the hands of the weak so that he can defeat his enemy. A martyr also lays down his life for the cause of Allah, and is granted *Shahadah*.⁴⁰ In the light of the above, a group of researchers at the Al-Azhar Centre for Islamic Studies, in Cairo, viewed similarly that *fidaai*, is the one who sacrifices himself towards achieving greater closeness to Allah and out of an aspiration towards protecting the rights, honour and lands of the Muslims. On the other hand, a suicide loses his soul due to desperation and a desire to end his life, not for any lofty, religious or national purpose, or to liberate his stolen land. Al-Azhar researchers believe that if Muslims are attacked in their homes and their lands, self sacrifice becomes the highest duty of every Muslim according to the Shari'ah in order to safeguard life, home and land, religion, dignity, and prosperity.⁴¹

They rationalize that these actions are legitimate even if the victims are civilians, because the Israeli nation is militaristic in character. Men and women serve in the army and can be mobilized for military service at any time. On the other hand, if a child or elderly person is hurt, this is not a premeditated act, but rather an error or unavoidable consequence of a military campaign, according to necessity.⁴²

Sheikh al-Azhar Sayyid Tantawi considered the suicide operations as acts of self defence and self sacrifice, as long as the intention is to kill enemy soldiers, but not women and children.⁴³ After the attacks on American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1948, he stated that any explosion that causes the death of women and children to be considered a criminal act of cowardice. In this regard his stance is moderate. Among those Muslim scholars who agreed that suicide operation in any form is prohibited in accordance with the Qur'an, the

⁴⁰ Nawaf Hael Takruri, *Al- Amaliyyat al-Istishadiyyah ft al-Mizan al-Fiqhi*, p.102. Also see *Al-Muslima* journal, Palestine, issue: September, 1996. *Al-Ahram al-Arabi*, Egypt, February 3, 2001 and *Al-Istiqlal*, August 20, 1999, cited in Shaul Shay, *The Shahids: Islam and Suicide Attacks*, Rachel Lieberman (trans.). Herzliya, London, and US: Interdisciplinary Center, and International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism, 2004, pg. 9-10.

⁴¹ *Al-Hayaat al-Jadidah*, Palestine, April 27, 2001. Also see Shaul Shay, *op cit*, p.p. 10-11.

⁴² *Ibid*.

⁴³ *Sout al-Ama*, Egypt, April 26, 2001, in *Al-Hayat*, London-Beirut, April 27, 2001, *cit in* Shaul Shay, *op cit*, pg. 11.

Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and Muslim jurists, their critical opinions are stated below:

In the Qur'an, Allah imposes a decree prohibiting self-killing in many verses such as al Nisa (4) 29-30. In this regard, Imam Qurtubi said: commentators agree on the injunction of this verse that it carries a prohibition against killing each other as well as self-killing for the purpose of any worldly interest. From his statement, for the same reason, self-killing in furtherance of worldly interest can be perceived as a suicide.⁴⁴ Similarly, Maududi states that "self-killing" itself is prohibited.⁴⁵

Maududi also commented on verse 32 of *Surah al-Maidah*, where it is commanded the Israelites to refrain from murder and killing each other, as they did before. However, in the Talmud, it is mentioned in a similar voice "To him who kills a single individual of Israel, it shall be reckoned as if he had slain the whole race and he who preserves a single individual of Israel, according to the Book of Allah he preserves the whole world."⁴⁶ Furthermore, the same verse demands respect for the sanctity of human life, which should be safeguarded as a sacred duty.

Commenting on the same verse, Hafiz Ibn Katheer mentions that whosoever murders any child of Adam, inequitably and out of aggression, without any proper reason or creating chaos in the society, it is as if he killed the whole of humanity. 'Akramah and 'Aufi, narrates from 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas (rd.) regarding this verse, whosoever kills a prophet or a just ruler he has indeed killed the whole community. On the other hand, whosoever strengthens and supports a prophet or a just ruler, it is as if he saved the whole community.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ However, none of them, among Qurtubi or Maududi and others, clearly made a distinction between the suicide as *intihaar*, and martyrdom as *istishhad* discussed in the paper. Although, they did not outrightly reject martyrdom. It was because suicide bombing as martyrdom was not a demand in their times.

⁴⁵ Maududi, *Tafheemul Qur'an (The Meaning of the Qur'an)*, Muhammad Akbar (tr.), Lahore: Islamic Publications Limited, V.1, (*Surah An-Nisaa*) pg.1 18-9.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, V.1 (*Surah al-Maidah*), pg 37.

⁴⁷ Ibn Katheer, *Tafseerul Qur'an al-'Azeem*, Egypt: Darul Yaqeen, 2003, V.2, pg. 61.

In the Hadith, for instance, the Prophet S.A.W. proscribed Muslims from desiring death if any harm comes upon them. Anas (Rd.) narrated, the prophet S.A.W. said: nobody from you should desire death being affected by harm, in this case, he should pray to Allah saying "Oh My Lord! Let me die if life is no longer blissful for me, and let me live if life is blissful for me."⁴⁸

Narrated by Abu Hurayrah (rd.), the Prophet (SAW) said: "One who chokes his own self will choke him in the hellfire, and one who stabs his own self will stab him in the hellfire too."⁴⁹ A Hadith from Bukhary reported from Thabit ibn Dahhak (rd.), where the Prophet (SAW) said: "One who vows for communities (*millah*) other than Islam, he is as he said⁵⁰, and whoever kills himself with something he will be punished with that in the hellfire. 'and a curse of a Mu'min is tantamount to kill him, and whoever projects a Mu'min as 'Kafir' (infidel) it is tantamount to killing him."⁵¹

Al- Qurtubi explains the word *Tahlukah*⁵² as engrossment with wealth, fleeing from the battle field and abstaining from spending in the way of Allah, which are destructive acts. Zaid bin Aslam also elaborates as follow:

⁴⁸ Bukhary and Muslim. Sahih al-Bukhary, 'Kitabul-Mard' (Book of Disease), "Chapter on Wishing death-sick"; Hadith no.: 5671. And Sahih al-Muslim, 'Kitabuz-Zikr wad-Du'aa' (Book of Zikr and Prayers), Hadith no.: 2680. Similarly, in another Hadith narrated from Abu Hurayrah (rd.), the Prophet (SAW) said: "Whoever kills himself throwing from a mountain would be (continuously) thrown from mountains in the hellfire imperishably. Whoever kills himself with poison, would (always) taste that (same) poison on his hand in the hellfire. And whoever takes his life with iron (rod), that iron would pierce his stomach in the hellfire. [Bukhary and Muslim. Sahih Al-Bukhary 'Kitabut-Tib' (the Book of Medicine), Hadith no.:5778. And Sahih Al-Muslim 'Kitabul Iman', Hadith no.: 1675]

⁴⁹ Sahih Al-Bukhary, 'Kitabul Janaiz', Hadith no.: 1365

⁵⁰ It is to swear saying like "if I do this I shall be a Christian/Jew Hindu..." or "if I did this I am Christian/Jew/Hindu..." These types of swearing are not allowed.

⁵¹ Sahih Al-Bukhary, 'Kitabul Iman wan-nuzur' (book of belief and vows), Hadith no.: 6652

⁵² This is term used in the Qur'anic verse of Surah al-Baqarah (2): 195, which literally means 'destruction.'

"Do not travel for jihad without inputs or supplies, because it may cause difficulties, then you will be burden for other people".⁵³

Al Shawkani commented that "This verse includes people who attack on enemies without enough strength or equipments or insufficient influence, which may defeat Muslims".⁵⁴ Zaid and Shawkani seem to be referring to two basic perceptions to find out the relationship with suicide: (1) identification of the form of self-destruction and (2) deliberation over the word *al-Tahlukah* to discover a link with suicide bombing, which is self-destruction. Zaid bin Aslam said that anything that results in weakness, backwardness and defeat of Muslims or empowers the enemy over them is considered as *Tahlukah*. So Muslims should not leave their fellows in *tahlukah*. Moreover, every attack on enemies in which there is no hope of success or no hope of any kind of benefit is also considered *tahlukah*. But if there is any hope of achieving them, then it will not be considered as *tahlukah*.⁵⁵

The Muslim who struggles against the enemies of Islam in the hope of attaining fame and honour will be considered as a suicide, Al-Qurtubi said: *Tahlukah* (destroying) refers to being engrossed in wealth, avoiding battle and abstaining from donation in the way of Allah. Barra Ibn Azeb said: "*al Tahlukah* means disappointment of the Grace of Allah."⁵⁶

Self-sacrifice is permissible under Islamic rules of jihad when a ruler directs him to do so, it is not permissible for a Muslim to decide for himself to do so, and self-killing, in an attempt to kill non-Muslims is prohibited. The Prophet S.A.W. said:

"Who imitate me, he imitates Allah, and who imitates my representative, he imitates me. As for, if a combatant or non combatant comes - as happens now a days - and commits suicide attempting to kill unbelievers is not allowed because it is a personal conduct of a suicide".⁵⁷

⁵³ Qurtubi, Tafseer al-Qurtubi, V.2, pg. 261-5.

⁵⁴ Shawkani, Tafseer Fathul Qadir, V.1, pg.297.

⁵⁵ Nawaf Hael Takrury, op cit. pp. 57-59.

⁵⁶ Qurtubi, Tafseer al-Qurtubi, V.2, pg. 261-5.

⁵⁷ Ibid: p. 86

Some Jordanian scholars also consider that martyrdom operations are valid as part of al-Jihad and a Mujahid will be rewarded accordingly. Moreover, he will be honoured as he were a martyr if he is killed and there is no way to consider it as a *Tahluka* because martyrs desire martyrdom and hope for the rewards of martyrdom and honor from Allah. They do not depend of Allah's bounty, and their hearts are replete with fear of Him.⁵⁸

Another scholar, Wahbah al-Zuhayli also emphasized that martyrdom operation is permissible. In our recent reality, when confronting the enemies to reach desired a goal by an organized army is not possible, then such operations may contribute effectively to defeating the enemies.⁵⁹ Ramadan al-Buti distinguished between suicide and martyrdom and argued that if the intention is to defeat the enemies, not to kill them, in this situation, the martyrdom operation is completely permissible while if the attacker intends to take the lives of non-Muslims, the person will be considered as a suicide not as martyr. Allah may save him miraculously.⁶⁰ A columnist Hammam Sayed argued that one should not distinguish between a suicide and martyr. In Islam, Jihad is obligatory because a Muslim sacrifices his life in the service of Allah with two objectives i.e. triumph and martyrdom, and being highly appreciated and honoured.⁶¹

Al-Istiqlal columnist Tareq Nasrallah opposed suicide bombing and commented that in the conflict between Palestine and Israel that suicide bombing is a Palestinian reaction aimed at establishing a Palestinian state. These human missiles (the Martyrs) know only one route that reaches Jerusalem and [from there] climb to the tree in the seventh heaven and to Jannah... As can be seen, the disunity of the ulama and the political arguments of those in the Muslim media without any basis on the Qur'an and Hadith have contributed to the sorry state of affairs in the Muslim world and contributed to the escalation of suicide bombings. It has left the Muslim world, especially the ignorant, in a confused state, not knowing what is right or wrong, and instead has

⁵⁸ Asafir (daily news paper) 29/3/1996, cit in Nawaf Hael al-Takruri, *Al-Amaliyyat al-Istishadiyyah fi al-Mizan al-Fiqhi*, p. 102

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 102

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 102

⁶¹ *Al-SabEI*, weekly magazine, Jordan, issue: 121, year:3, Tuesday, 12-18 March, 1996

fuelled their hatred on the US, Israel and the West. The oppressor, the disunited Muslim ulama and Muslim media have each in a way contributed to the root causes of suicide bombings. However, at the end of the day, Muslims must admit that the main reason lay in the failure to learn and follow the teachings of Islam based on the Qur'an and the sunnah of Prophet Muhammad S.A.W. It is obvious that Allah S.W.T. and His Prophet S.A.W. forbade suicide bombing but out of ignorance or sheer refusal to accept the true teachings of Islam, some Muslims simply chose to carry out what they thought was right. Islam is not about what a person thinks is right or wrong or based on logic but it is based on the Qur'an and Hadith; anything which goes beyond that is unacceptable as mentioned in the Qur'an,

"you who believe! Obey Allah (base on the Qur'an), and obey the Messenger (Muhammad) (base on his Sunnah) and render not vain your deeds." ⁶² and "... and if you differ in anything amongst yourselves, refer it to Allah and His Messenger..." ⁶³

Based on the above discussion, it is understood that suicide is perceived as a crime in Islam. Life is not the private property of an individual and it is therefore forbidden for him to take. Human life is the property of Allah and therefore it is forbidden to take a life. But, martyrdom is an Islamic obligation for the sake of Allah because when a person sacrifices his life in a mission in the way of Allah, is deemed as a martyr. However, it is approved in Islam to take lives of others only in five circumstances: intentional murder, opposition to Islam where there is no alternative other than fighting him, wrong doer who creates chaos in the Islamic state, married adulterer, and apostates. Among these five, the first three instances have been mentioned in the Qur'an while the other two are from the Sunnah of the Prophet (SAW).⁶⁴ It is for Muslim scholars to make a clear declaration to all communities about the issues of suicide and martyrdom in Islam.

⁶² Al-Qur'an, Surah Muhammad (47): 33

⁶³ Al-Qur'an, Surah an-Nisaa (4): 59

⁶⁴ See Maududi, V.I, Surah al-An'aam, op cit, p. 170.

Effects of suicide bombing on human life

The escalating acts of suicide bombings by some misguided Muslims have had negative impacts on Islam as a whole life. Though some Muslims would argue that September 11 has opened the eyes and minds of non-Muslims especially the Americans to know and learn about Islam, there is nothing for Muslims to be proud of as such acts are forbidden by the Qur'an and Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad S.A.W. September 11, Bali bombings and other related attacks carried out by terrorist groups, have tarnished the image of Islam and caused the Muslim population to be insecure throughout the whole world and to suffer a backlash against their freedom and rights. They have given a negative impression about Muslims to the non-Muslims as narrow-minded, violent, emotional and blood-thirsty.

Due to subsequent suicide bombings in various places, many nations have introduced strict counter-terrorism laws and measures in order to curtail further terrorist attacks by misguided believers. Sadly, these laws have affected innocent Muslims, who are genuine believers, travelers, migrants and peace-loving people because immigration rules were tightened against them all indiscriminately. Genuine travelers with Muslim names were harassed at many entry points to various countries. Muslims who wish to apply for a job are viewed with suspicion especially those who wear a beard or the *hijab*. Thus, Muslims lose out. In this situation, humanity is distressed and the world community is upset. In order to recuperate, all nations must respect one another and work together for rebuilding a peaceful human society.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Suicide bombing is condemned by Allah S.W.T, and no excuse is given under any circumstances. The Qur'an does not promise *Jannah* (paradise) to those who commit such acts but rather warns of condemnation in *Jahannam* (Hell). The promise of eternal peace in *Jannah* for suicide bombers and those who kill the innocent civilians has no basis in Islam and cannot be found anywhere in the Qur'an. These fabrications were taught to poor desperate and ignorant Muslims by people with their own interpretation of the Shari'ah, which are contrary to the teachings of Islam. Many Muslims do understand the dire situation in which Muslims like those in Palestine lived and fully sympathize with suffering and oppression, but Muslims cannot agree

with breaking Allah's commandment. Oppression is not a reason to break Allah's laws; on the contrary, oppression is a good reason to hold tight to these commandments and to show the world the true and peaceful face of Islam. Muslims should know that it is by following Allah's law in the Qur'an and the Prophet's Hadith that they will gain dignity and sovereignty over their land while achieving peace, tolerance and love for the whole world around them. Now after thousands of wrongs carried out by both sides in conflicts like the Israeli - Palestinian conflict, no right has emerged and will never emerge unless Muslims go back to Allah's commandments in the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet S.A.W.. There will be neither success nor victory for any group as the Qur'an and Sunnah calls on the people to live in peace and harmony and to advocate tolerance. Victory as far as Allah is concerned is achieved by the guarantee of freedom and justice for all and not by the domination of one group or nation above another.

Would-be suicide bombers can contribute more and better to society if they direct their efforts into teaching the world about their cause and work with their neighbors to strengthen their stance against oppression, or be a part of the peaceful solution of the problem they have been facing instead of being a reason for its failure. To achieve the goal, other nations should show their sincere cooperation, mutual understanding and assistance, and sacrifices.

Indeed, Muslims are created for combating misdeeds, not for escaping their influence, for striving towards the betterment of humanity, not for sitting silently, and letting evil penetrate society. A Muslim's faith and character do not permit him to run away from the battlefield of life, and he possesses a weapon which never fails and ammunition which is never exhausted, unshakable *iman* and the ammunition of moral steadfastness. Peace can only be achieved when mutual respect for human life and properties are achieved. This was clearly mentioned in the following Qur'anic verses,

*"If the enemy inclines towards peace, do you (also) incline towards peace, and trust in Allah. He is the Hearer the Omniscient."*⁶⁵ *In another verse, "Allah advocates justice, doing of good, and liberality to kith and kin, and He*

⁶⁵ *Al-Qur'an, Surah al-Anfal (8): 61*, also see: "You shall resort to pardon, advocate tolerance, and disregard the ignorant". [Surah al-A'raf(7):199].

forbids all shameful deeds, injustice, and rebellion He instructs you, that you may receive admonition."⁶⁶

Recommendations:

Solving the problem of suicide bombing is a commonly felt concern for all strata of society, from the rulers to the bombers. Jamal Badawi recommends that Muslim-non-Muslim relations be based on the Qur'anic approach in the following manner:⁶⁷

1. Faith in the one universal God, who is the universal Creator, Sustainer, and Cherisher of all.
2. The unity and universality of the core teachings of all prophets, which are the message of peace, solidarity, cooperation and coexistence in submission to Allah.⁶⁸ As the Qur'an narrates:

"In matters of faith, He (god) has ordained for you that which He had enjoined upon Abraham, Moses and Jesus: steadfastly uphold the faith and make no division therein."
[42:13]

3. Universal human dignity, which means that human beings must be honoured and dignified on account of being human irrespective of his or her chosen belief.⁶⁹
4. Universal justice ('adalah): achieving balance among children of Adam which is inherent in the cosmic order and ecology as much as it is inherent in spiritual and ethical values. The core message is not to disturb one another. Justice is a prerequisite for peace.⁷⁰
5. Universal human brotherhood, as the Qur'an addresses to the entire human race "O humankind, We (Allah) have created you from a single of a male and a female and have made you into nations and tribes, so that may come to know one another" [49:13]

⁶⁶ *Surah al-Nahl* (16):90

⁶⁷ Jamal Badawi, "Muslim/Non-Muslim Relations: An Integrative Approach" in A. R. Moten and Noraim M. Noor (Edited), *Terrorism, Democracy, The West and The Muslim World*. Thomson, Singapore. 2007, pp.97-118

⁶⁸ *Al-Qur'an*, 2:285, 4:163, 42:13 etc.

⁶⁹ *Al-Qur'an*, 95:4, 2:43, 2:30, 31:20, and 5:32.

⁷⁰ *Al-Qur'an*, 5:8, 4:134.

6. Acceptance of plurality in human societies.⁷¹
7. The prohibition of compulsion in faith.⁷²
8. Universal mercy, which is the essence of Islam and its prophet's mission.
9. Universal peaceful co-existence.⁷³
10. Peaceful dialogue.⁷⁴

The above ten values should be practised for a peaceful relationship and coexistence with all, irrespective of their religious choice; genuine and lasting peace must be protected and safeguarded against those who try to destroy it.

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⁷¹ Al-Qur'an, 5:48, 11:118, 10:99 etc.

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