

A Manual of Islamic Fundamentalist Terrorism

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The current wave of so-called 'suicide-bombings' perpetrated by Muslims has been part of Shi'ite Islamic idealization of suffering and death, meant for the Believer to identify with the ordeal of Imam Hussein in the seventh century CE. It was revived by the Shi'ite Hizballah in Lebanon against the Americans and the Israelis, and then expanded by Sunnite Palestinian Islamists, such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad, and even by avowedly 'secular' Palestinian groups such as the Fatah's al-Aqsa Brigades and Tanzim. But the justifications for all those groups are, nevertheless, curiously Islamic. This article presents the text written by a prominent cleric and diffused in the Palestinian media, rationalizing suicide-bombing as the ultimate mode of struggle against Muslim enemies.

Apologia

In June 1988, at the height of the first *intifada* declared by the Palestinians against 'Israeli occupation and repression', a text was published as an appendix to an issue of the Muslim fundamentalist organ *al-Islam wa-Filastin* (Islam and Palestine), which carried a very detailed and intriguing analysis of what it took to become an 'Islamikaze'.¹ This term was coined by the present author in 1997, when he described the making of the new brand of Muslim terrorists in Afghanistan. It was a fallacy to dub these people 'suicide-bombers', because their primary concern was to kill their enemies, not themselves, though they were ready to sacrifice themselves in the process.

Typologically, they came closest to the Japanese *kamikaze* of the Pacific War in World War II, and therefore it was suggested to combine that term with Islam and create a new word.² When that Arabic text came to the attention of this author, after the 'Islamikaze' term had been coined and diffused, *post factum* justification was added to warrant the present article which establishes a linkage between the outer-objective definition of 'Islamikaze', and the inner-subjective terminology suggested by the Arab-Muslim writer of that text.

Introduction

A.J. Wensinck has demonstrated the resemblance between the Christian and Muslim doctrines of martyrology, down to small details and to the parallel development of the two. He has also shown that the ancient roots of both go back to the Jewish monotheistic concepts of death and martyrdom for the sake of God (*kiddush Hashem*), and also included philosophical and ascetic elements from Hellenic tradition.³ Incidentally, even the etymological transition from the Qur'anic *shahid* as a 'witness' into the self-sacrificing martyr of later times⁴ can be traced in Christian tradition as well, inasmuch as the 'witness' to the deeds of God in the New Testament, developed into martyrs.⁵ Also in the domain of the rewards of the martyr, both traditions maintain he is promised an eternal life of bliss in the highest position in Paradise, close to God Himself and above the righteous and regular pious Believers. The martyr is assured of exoneration for his sins and from the torments of the Day of Judgment, and in both the martyr is the mediator who intercedes before God on behalf of Believers in order to alleviate the burden of their sins.

Understandably, during the lifetime of the Prophet and the expansion of Islam, the martyrs who perished in the battle acquired precedence over all other Believers. But when the Islamic Empire settled down and the fighting zeal receded, the expansion of Islam was pursued more by Sufi mystics and the question of martyrdom through other avenues came to the fore. If the mystic missionary put himself in the service of Islam at great risk, by traveling distances and penetrating uncharted territory, then why was his brand of martyrdom less than the classic fighter who died in combat? Interpretations of martyrdom as the supreme spiritual state of the Believer, who knows how to control his worldly desires and rein in his ambitions advanced to the forefront. Ghazali, the eminent medieval mystic (d. 1111), said that 'Anyone submitting (*Islam* = submission to the Will of Allah) totally to Allah in his battle against desires, is himself a martyr...'.⁶

Roots of the 'Islamikaze'

In the contemporary Middle East, due to the vicious conflict opposing the Arab-Muslims to Israel, and in consequence of the sustaining support the United States of America, and to a lesser extent the rest of the West, are perceived as extending to Israel, there has been a revival of the old notions of martyrdom. It is true that all Arab casualties of the half-dozen wars between Israel and its neighbors in the twentieth century were considered martyrs. But the Hizballah in Lebanon gave it the greatest impetus in the last two decades of the century. A new model of martyrdom was introduced,

one where the Believer died in the process of destroying the enemy. The Hizballah derives from Shi'ite Islam, dominant in Iran, and one has to look at the trunk in order to comprehend the branches.

The re-living of the legendary suffering of Hussein in Karbalah in AD 680, before he was annihilated with his followers by Yazid – the son of the Umayyad founder – Mu'awiyya, is central in Shi'ite communities. The *ta'zia*, a kind of passion play, displayed on 'Ashura Day by processions of the pious who beat themselves, is the apex of identification with the suffering of Hussein.

Suffering as a theme unto itself, including self-inflicted bleeding and death, has become a way of life for the devout Shi'ite, a fashion of expressing selfless sacrifice in honor of the assassinated son of Ali, the first true Imam and successor of the Prophet, who had been skipped over by three 'imposter' Caliphs who took over power before him. The bitterness of the Shi'ia, the downtrodden and persecuted branch of Islam (a branch in Lebanon called itself the 'Downtrodden on Earth', as a sign of honor), is best expressed in the anger and rush for self-sacrifice on the one hand, and the posthumous glorification of the martyrs after their death.

When young Iranians were encouraged to clear minefields during the first Gulf War (1980–88), with 'keys to Paradise' hanging on their innocent necks, their parents were congratulated by family friends for the martyrdom of their children. All those horrendous sacrifices were immortalized in the memorial for the martyrs in Teheran, a water fountain colored blood-red, symbolizing the endless flow of suffering and blood.

'The skies are shrouded in black, rivers of tears are flowing, Hussein arrives in Karbalah to sacrifice himself for Allah. This is the 'Ashura story, tend your ears to listen to its sadness, let your tears flow for the King of the Martyrs, because he will bring you to Paradise'.⁷ These are lyrics to a song of those mourning 'musical-passions' re-enacted in Iran and elsewhere to commemorate the martyrdom of Hussein. These reenactments, and the generally militant demands by the Shi'ites for their rights, adopted a low profile for centuries (a state of *intidhar* – namely waiting and expectation), associated with the principle of *Taqiyya* (dissimulation), adopted after the mysterious disappearance (not death) of the Twelfth Imam for self-preservation in a hostile environment. That state of expectation for the return of the absent Imam provided the driving power behind Twelver Shi'ism, inasmuch as it encouraged the Believers to suffer and wait. The more they waited and suffered, the closer was his return (like the 'pangs of the Messiah' in Judaism). If anyone claimed to be the re-appearing Imam, he was immediately condemned as an imposter, and treated accordingly.

The last decades of the twentieth century, however, saw an ideological and political quantum jump under Ayatullah Khomeini, which has taken the

Shi'a from passivity and expectation to activity and aggression, namely making the human will predominate over fate or over the 'natural course of events'. This is possible in Shi'ite theology which recognizes the head of the clerical hierarchy as the *marja' taqlid*, the supreme reference who commands the emulation of the Believers.

In fact this major figure, who gains his superior status through his scholarship and religious authority, is the supreme *mujtahid*, the 'striver' to interpret the will of the Hidden Imam who is the actual ruler of the world. The *mujtahid* thus acquires in the Shi'a the power of legislator, and his rulings are the law. This is the reason why Khomeini spoke about *wilayat faqih* (the rule of the jurist), for only such Heaven- and Imam-inspired jurists, who are the upper echelon of the mullahs, could be *clairvoyant* enough to detect the Truth and pass it on to others. Khomeini himself wrote that 'only the mullahs are able to take people to the streets and motivate them to die for Islam, and bring them to beg that they be allowed to spill their blood for Islam'.⁸

The new activism brought about by the Islamic Revolution in Iran has taken up the tragic death of Hussein, which used to be viewed as a murderous and cowardly act. Hussein becomes not someone to be mourned, but a heroic leader in battle and a model worthy of emulation on the way to Paradise. He, the paradigm of martyrdom, will ensure the admission to heaven of the new generations of martyrs. Hence we learned of the flocking of millions of adults and children to the mosques in Tehran when the war with Iraq broke out (October 1980) and a call for volunteers to the front was sounded by the government.

The demand for martyrdom by far exceeded the needs of the military. Children were urged to go to the front without their parents' permission, and were used to clear minefields. They expressed their happiness at 'rushing to Paradise in unison with their friends', under the promise that in Paradise they would be able to unite and pursue their worldly worry-free life.

The eagerness for death through martyrdom often prompts young Iranian demonstrators to join processions, covered by their death shrouds, to signify that not only they defy death, but that they are also ready for it. They were swept under the magic rhetoric of their leader, whom some saw an incarnation of the Hidden one, when he said that life was illusory and merely a corridor to the real life in Paradise, and therefore not worth living. The activation of the martyrdom of Hussein, which in Iran has involved a real change in the *ta'zia* ceremonies on 'Ashura Day, has also transcended Iran's boundaries and been made a model for other Shi'ites, as in Lebanon where Hizballah and the Amal Shi'ites have adopted the same style.

Moreover, Hizballah, the active long arm of Iran in its quest to internationalize the Iranian Islamic Revolution, has been adopting a militant

and aggressive stance in its pursuance. It not only routinely uses violence on the Israeli–Lebanese borders, but is known to aid terrorism across the world against Israeli and Jewish interests, such as blowing up the Jewish Community Center and the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires in the 1990s. It also cooperates with the Palestinian *intifada*, both in coordinating joint operations against Israel and in supplying arms and instruction in terrorist warfare. The Karine A affair, which exploded into the open when a ship loaded with Hizballah weapons was seized by Israel in the Red Sea on its way to Gaza (2002), illustrates this connection.

Above all, the doctrine of the ‘Islamikaze’, that is, active death in martyrdom, was revived by the Hizballah. The first acts were performed in the early 1980s against the American and Israeli presence in Lebanon, but as the Israeli presence in the southern part of that country wore on, those operations were intensified until they became routine. It took another decade or so before that mode of action was emulated by other Muslim terrorist groups, most notoriously the Sunnite Hamas and Jihad.

The transition occurred when fundamentalist Sunnite scholars, such as Sheikh Qardawi, provided the missing link between the ‘natural’ vying for suffering of fundamentalist Shi’ism, which pushed martyrdom to emulate the slain Imam Hussein; and the general Islamic hallowed idea of martyrdom and its rewards, now to inflict damage on the enemy, even at the cost of one’s life. The long succession of *fatwas* (religious verdicts) delivered to fill this gap provided rationalization to the now mostly Palestinian Sunnite ‘Islamikaze’ groups to launch their deadly attacks.

Palestinian ‘Islamikaze’

The Sunnite fundamentalist groups adopted the Shi’ite ways, not only by embracing the Iranian and Hizballah mode of operation, but also by creating their own version of the supreme sacrifice and suffering inherent in the Shi’ite *ta’zia* ceremony. In the field of battle and terrorism for the sake of Allah, we have seen 19 members of al-Qaeda committing collective ‘Islamikaze’ acts on American soil on 11 September 2001. Al-Qaeda fighters in Afghanistan defied death in the face of American air power, as do Hamas and Islamic Jihad in the Palestinian Authority, the Gama’at in Egypt, the Abu Sayyaf group in the Philippines, or the Muslim terrorists in Kashmir and India. In Algeria they kill their own compatriots as they attack foreigners.

This Sunni terrorism becomes more daring in the operations, to the extent that it becomes more common and banal. Not only the massive ‘Islamikaze’ attack on 11 September, with probably more to come, but

especially the almost daily attacks in Israel against civilians by Hamas and Islamic Jihad, have rendered these harrowing acts routine, to the point that they risk becoming accepted as 'part of life', as if they were God-ordained and impervious to human preventive initiative.

The Sunni fundamentalist groups are able to draw other Sunnis into the circle of self-sacrificing terrorist groups, like the *Tanzim*, the *Aqsa* or the Popular Front among the Palestinians, who are not avowedly fundamentalists or Muslim zealots. It is quite extraordinary to watch members of the Marxist-oriented Popular Front talking of *jihād* and *istishhad* (martyrdom) when they set out for their operations. They realize the high status of the 'Islamikaze' in their society, and since they act against the same enemy, they have no compunction gaining popularity through using fundamentalist vocabulary and discourse. The Sunni 'Islamikaze' are edging towards their Iranian model not only ideologically, but even in the mores and patterns of behavior. For example, the headgear of the Hamas people parading in the streets of the Palestinian Authority, under the permissive eyes of its security forces, the video cassettes they leave behind for their loved ones are often used by their operators as a 'patrimony', as an 'educational' tool to recruit others; the slogans, citations from the Holy Scriptures, and words of praise about martyrdom, are all ominous imitations of the Shi'ite model.

Most intriguing, however, is the example of the Sunnite *ta'zia*-in-reverse, widely and repeatedly practiced by Hamas and perhaps others. We have seen that the Shi'ite martyrdom was closely associated with suffering and bitterness, first out of passive identification with the supreme martyr, Imam Hussein, and then the Islamic Revolution, which pushed the protest into the domain of action, remained essentially a 'within-the-family' sort of affair. Hamas and Islamic Jihad have developed a new pattern to replay, re-emphasize, boast about and delight in the suffering they inflict on their victims.

Indeed, every now and then, especially when the Palestinian Authority fails to intervene following major acts of terrorism which leave dozens of Israelis dead or maimed, local chapters of Hamas set up processions to mark the event. With their headgear of the *shahid*, slogans of martyrdom shouted, Israeli and American flags burned and puppets representing Israeli and American leaders stabbed by a frantic crowd, they arrive at the end of the procession, during which, invariably, they shoot abundantly in the air with illegal weapons – and then the harrowing orgy of 'celebrations' begins.

We have become 'accustomed' to the sights of Palestinians and other Muslims deliriously and ecstatically exhibiting jubilation after a 'successful' terrorist attack against America has been carried out –

exemplified in the Twin Towers and Pentagon attacks – or against Israel or Jews at large, with no one to rein them in. On these occasions they distribute sweets, dance in the streets, and cry slogans of ‘Allah Akbar’ – the war-cry of Muslims in general – as if to attribute to Him those great deeds against their sworn enemies.

What the demonstrators in person are unable to deal their enemies they perform symbolically, praising Allah for His intercession on their behalf. Often, the latest target destroyed, for example an Israeli bus with dozens of passengers, is meticulously reconstructed in paper, cardboard and cloth, painted so as to imitate the original, and then set ablaze to cries of delight of watching crowds. All the while, the perpetrators of the actual horror against the actual Israeli bus or its successors run around the stage shooting long bursts in the air, shouting blood-freezing war cries, invoking the Power of Allah, smashing the burned bus carcass, and stabbing with their bayonets the ‘remnants’ of the slain ‘passengers’.

In Nablus, an ‘exhibition’ of this kind was presented to the general public in the city public square, which showed in detail the replicas of blown-up limbs and body pieces of Israelis that had perished in a restaurant attack by Hamas ‘Islamikaze’. The reports of the deeply disgusted foreign correspondents, and the protests of the Israelis, convinced the Palestinian Authority to move the exhibition indoors – but not to close it down and arrest its promoters. It is understood that by widening the scope of the viewers of those scenes among the Muslims, who are not fundamentalists, to the point of rendering them a sort of popular street theater, the organizers came to elicit respect and esteem for the deceased heroes to encourage the *shahids* of tomorrow.

Unlike the inward-turning stories of suffering reenacted by the Shi’ites for the sake of commemoration, identification and self-hardening to stand the excruciating things to come, Hamas hardens its crowds and cultivates audiences by boasting about gruesome suffering inflicted upon the enemies. This change of focus, or a *ta’zia* in reverse, emanates from the difference between the Shi’ite universal doctrine of *istishhad* as the ultimate way to identify spiritually with Hussein, and Hamas whose most urgent goal is to bring down its enemy.

In Palestinian thinking, the most atrocious injustice was done to them by Israel by its very birth and continued existence. Not only is its occupation of their territory resented, but its very presence in their midst and vicinity exposes their own helplessness. Both had begun from the same departure point half a century ago, but while their sworn enemy had progressed, settled down its refugees, prospered and advanced, they are still rotting in refugee camps for the third generation with the gap between them and Israel growing. Their refugees have remained dependent upon UN flour supplies

and foreign aid (which is, ironically, American and Western, which they detest, rather than Arab and Islamic).

Nothing is more humiliating to the Palestinians than that. They hate Israel, which shows them what they had failed to achieve, and they spurn America, to whom they must turn as beggars. Rather than striving to equal Israel, to eliminate their dependence on America, they would rather attack them both and wipe out the constructive model which constantly exposes them to shame. This is why when the Oslo process was at its hopeful beginnings, it was the fundamentalist Hamas which rejected it for fear that it might reinforce and eternalize the superior stature of Israel, which they could neither bear nor tolerate. The ensuing demonizing of Jews, Zionists and Israel, and the legitimization of ruthless attacks, aimed at intimidating the Israelis and wrecking their economy, are part of the mechanism of this externalized *ta'zia* in reverse, which focuses on the suffering inflicted on the enemies, instead of extolling their own suffering and sacrifice. The Twin Towers horror, also inflicted by Sunnite 'Islamikaze' (al-Qaeda is one of their organizations), can be interpreted in the same vein. Bin Laden and other Muslims throughout the world delighted in the humiliation of America.

In Shi'ite Islam after the end of the Gulf War (1988), acts of 'Islamikaze' were restrained after they peaked in the 1980s. In Lebanon, where it all started, the Hizballah leadership concluded that the exaggerated use of overzealous youth for those acts often ended in the death of the perpetrator without inflicting enough casualties on the enemy to justify that sacrifice. Sheikh Fadlallah issued a *fatwa*, allowing acts of 'Islamikaze' only on special occasions.⁹ Sheikh Na'im Qassem, the Deputy Secretary of Hizballah, translated the guideline of his spiritual leader into specific directives, which he issued to the organization and released to the public in a press interview:

First, one must obtain the authorization of an accredited Mufti. Anyone seeking to sacrifice himself, especially by car-bomb or blowing himself up, must first consult with a cleric of the Holy Law, because the soul is dear and can be expended only for the sake of the Islamic Umma.

Secondly, after the religious authority delivers its verdict, the political leadership of the movement must deliberate on the political and military merits thereof. For when the same goals can be obtained without self-sacrifice, we do not send any martyr to his death. The Islamikaze act is efficient only when other means are not deemed [by the leadership] to attain the same results.¹⁰

When the 'Islamikaze' martyrdom was adopted by the Palestinians in the 1990s there were tremendous debates among Palestinian scholars of the

Holy Law whether or not they should be sanctioned. Dr Hamza Mustafa, Head of the Shari'a College at al-Quds University, and himself a member of the Jerusalem-based Supreme Islamic Council, was emphatic in a press interview:

Allah has determined that whoever commits suicide will end up in Hell. It is clear that suicide is unreservedly prohibited, because his soul is not his private property but belongs to Allah. There are those who believe that when suicide is committed as part of an act of war against the enemy, it is not forbidden, but most believe that suicide is prohibited in any case.¹¹

A perception had crystallized in those days that while the tiny Islamic Jihad group opted for 'Islamikaze' bombings, as part of its world of self-sacrifice,¹² the larger and more popular Hamas did not encourage its membership to engage in this operation. For example, Sheikh Jamil Tamimi, one of the leaders of the Muslim Movement in the West Bank, was often quoted as totally opposing these acts, not only due to the loss of life involved, but mainly because of the categorical prohibition against self-immolation in Islam. He recognized that some Muslim scholars did permit this operation in the context of war, but he emphasized that he personally was opposed to this interpretation.¹³

At the same time, however, Izz a-Din al-Qassam,¹⁴ a hallowed name and symbol for both the Hamas and the Islamic Jihad, was cited as urging his followers to martyrdom, because 'martyrdom is only the beginning of the road ... *jihad* is either victory or martyrdom ...'.¹⁵ 'Victory or martyrdom' as a slogan and battle-cry naturally encouraged people to sacrifice themselves. After the first 'Islamikaze' act against Israelis in Beit Lid in 1994, perpetrated by Islamic Jihad, one of the Gaza mosques' loud speakers proclaimed: 'Islamic Jihad has announced long ago that we have hundreds of volunteers for martyrdom, ready at any minute to hurt the Zionist enemy and burn the land under his feet'.¹⁶

The Manual of Martyrology

So while no authority in Islam permits suicide *per se*, those who allow, indeed urge, the martyr to sacrifice his life, use the commonly held view that the soul belongs to Allah to facilitate its return to Him. An accidental or incidental death incurred during battle, which is commonly dubbed *istishhad*, even when the martyr did not willingly and by choice embrace it, is not a '*amalyya istishhadiyya* (an *act* of martyrdom), which would mean that the individual has taken the conscious decision to sacrifice his life for the Islamic cause. In this case, where the martyr has considered his act as

imperative to achieve his goal, he has 'purposely thrown himself to his death, confident that he is rushing to Paradise'.¹⁷ And since he neither wished nor prepared any way of retreat, he must perish together with his targeted, or incidental, victims. Martyrdom is, however, limited by the prohibition against killing innocent people, and the essence of the matter then becomes the definition of who is innocent and who is not.

The author of the *Readings in Islamic Martyrology*¹⁸ indeed addresses himself to these basic dilemmas. He cites *shari'ah* sources which negate suicide, from the Qur'an and the authoritative collections of Hadith. It is unlawful for any Muslim to commit suicide by poison, jumping from a high place, self-stabbing, or suffocation, under the threat of Hell punishment. Islam prohibits suicide out of despair from life, with a view of avoiding suffering due to illness, injury, poverty, fear, disaster, imprisonment and torture.

Killing others can only be undertaken 'justly', based on a Qur'anic injunction, namely for adultery, murder, apostasy and those who deserted the company of the Believers.¹⁹ By avoiding generalizations and overarching and abstract principles, and keeping strictly faithful to the detailed cases of prohibition mentioned in the sources, the writer thus prepares his readers to conclude that everything not expressly forbidden is allowed.

The most fascinating aspect of these prohibitions is that they rest on the requirement in the Qur'an²⁰ regarding the sanctity of human life, and the superior role of humans in Allah's creation. It is fascinating because it stands in stark contradiction to the seemingly unbearable facility with which the 'Islamikaze' kill themselves. The resolution of this contradiction is the whole innovative import of the new convoluted interpretations undertaken by fundamentalist Muslim scholars, as in the text under discussion. Man was created, according to the *Qira'a*, with the belief in Allah imprinted in his heart, and all his strength and spirit are devoted to the straightening up of the created world. In order to guide man to follow the right path, Allah sent prophets, apostles and His Messenger Muhammad, together with the Qur'an and the *sunna* (tradition of the Prophet). Hence, the purpose of man on earth is to worship Allah (*'ibadat Allah*), which is more important even than human life. However, this treatise claims, these two themes of the sanctity of human life and the worship of Allah are not contradictory.

This world is the scene of the struggle between good and evil, between the worship of God and the worship of Satan, the choice between a life of belief and the option of disbelief. The right choice will bring one to eternal life in Paradise. Namely, if one devotes his life in this world to worship Allah, he will achieve eternal life. Thus, the laws of *jihad* do not contradict

the prohibitions of self-immolation and of killing others unjustifiably, but are complementary to them.

And this is precisely what makes Islam a perfect religion in terms of its regard for human life: namely, the preservation of human life on the one hand, but also self-sacrifice for the sake of Allah on the other. For contrary to other doctrines, which permit killing in the pursuit of material benefit, Islam values human life. But Islam values the worship of Allah more. Setting human life as the supreme value, it permits injustice to persist without opposition, thus violating human dignity. Conversely, the worship of Allah which applies the tenets of making justice and upholding right (*iqamat al-'adl wa-ihqaq al-haqq*), in itself constitutes the delicate balance between these two values. This balance exists only in Islam, making it as the supreme human and cultural model.

Naturally, when the author of this dissertation posits the worship of Allah as supreme, and the way of *jihad* as the superior apex of worship, he inescapably comes to the conclusion that any Believer who follows divine guidance with regard to *jihad* and emulates the Prophet in this respect, must evince his willingness to die for Allah.²¹

To support his conclusion, the author relates to a famous Hadith, where the Prophet undertook to die for Allah, to come back to life and then die once again.²² This means that there was no bigger goal in the Prophet's own existence than to die for Allah, and repeatedly so. Therefore, this tenet constitutes, in the author's mind, a divine guideline that applies everywhere at all times. Hence the necessity for believers to embrace the road of self-sacrifice (*tad'hia*) and spiritual devotion (*badhl a-nafs*), which thereby become central motifs in the author's concept of *jihad*. He recounts many episodes from the life of the Prophet where the latter proved his devotion to these themes in his *jihad* battles against his enemies.²³ This ought to be the standard behavior of all Muslims who seek battle at the highest level of risk. For this purpose, the author recognizes three kinds of battles, graded in accordance with the level of risk involved:

1. Where the chances to die or to emerge alive are even. In this case, the surviving fighter would deserve honor (*karama*), and if he should perish, his death would be considered martyrdom (*shahada*). An illustrious Muslim fighter, Khalid ibn al-Walid, was quoted as wondering every day during his battles whether he was escaping from the day of *karama* or that of *shahada*. That meant that dying in this fashion was a winning proposition in either case.²⁴
2. Where the balance of power is against the Muslims, the Muslim fighter needs to display much more audacity. Once again in many such battles, in which the Companions of the Prophet (*sahaba*) participated, the

Messenger of Allah provided a personal example by fighting very close to the eye of the storm, in defiance of the dangers the enemy posed to him. Such harsh battles, where some of the *sahaba* made the ultimate sacrifice after they sustained so many wounds that their corpses became unrecognizable,²⁵ become the high standards of combat to be followed by other Believers.

3. A third category of battle is when self-sacrifice becomes imperative. This is where the act of *jihad*, itself highly regarded and lavishly rewarded in Heaven, transcends into an act of martyrdom (*istishhad*). The difference between standard self-sacrifice and spiritual devotion on the one hand, and deliberate act of martyrdom on the other, is that here a special strategy is adopted by a group of Muslims to rescue the entire Muslim army or Muslim *umma* with a view to disrupting the enemy's war plans or sow disarray in its ranks; or is geared to hurt the enemy's morale and boost the Muslims', or is likely to bring such a disaster upon the enemy as to increase his losses and decrease those of the Muslims.

The latter mode of combat is the highest in the eyes of the author and conforms typologically to the 'Islamikaze' *modus operandi*. The author regards the 'Islamikaze' not as a current, normal and routine strategy to fight the enemy in the battlefield, but as a tactical device to be used when regular conventional battles are about to be lost, and no other avenues available. In this context, we may digress to find grounds to interpret the Twin Towers disaster, or the daily attacks by Hamas and Islamic Jihad against Israel, once the Palestinian *intifada* had failed to bring Israel to its knees. It is also noteworthy that when Yasser Arafat realized that his declared campaign against Israel was falling flat on its face, out of despair he joined the fray by stating before delirious and equally dispirited crowds that he was ready to be a *shahid* for the sake of 'liberating' Jerusalem – and urged his followers to launch the *jihad* to realize the evasive dreams of the Palestinians.²⁶

In this ultimate model of self-sacrifice, it is the Prophet himself or his *sahaba* who makes daring self-sacrificing moves to save the entire Muslim strategy on the battlefield. From cases of this sort, drawn from the personal histories at the time of the Prophet, the author deduces implicit permission to Muslim sacrifice for the public interest.²⁷ The author says that, today, the 'Islamikaze' carries explosives on his body in order to carry out his mission; in the times of the Prophet the audacious fighter threw himself on the swords of the enemy, but both modes of action are essentially the same.

Similarly, valiant Muslim fighters had to dismount their horses which were no match for the elephants of the enemy, and attacked those immense

and frightening animals with their swords, even though they were trampled upon and slaughtered. So today, an 'Islamikaze' can defy with his body the enemy's planes and tanks, and perish under their weight, or blow himself up in a minefield, in order to facilitate the passage of his fellow fighters into enemy territory, or their retreat into safety. In both cases, the gates of Paradise are open to receive the new martyrs.²⁸

Thus, the author builds his argument tier after tier: first, he designates the value of the worship of Allah over the value of human life; then the *jihad* as the supreme form of worship. Since the *jihad* involves self-sacrifice, three levels thereof are identified, the highest and most commendable is the *act of martyrdom*. All stages are soundly grounded on the precedents set by the Prophet himself or his Companions.

This piece, which has been considered as having the power of a *fatwa*, confronts the contradiction between its sanctification of death and the Qur'anic injunction to preserve life and escape peril. Once again precedents from the time of the Prophet and his Companions are cited, for example of the fighter who threw himself literally to his death when he attacked single-handedly an entire Byzantine column, whereupon a discussion ensued about whether that hero did not unnecessarily throw himself into certain death. The real peril is not death in battle, but in turning one's attention to material life and neglecting *jihad* activity.²⁹

The same goes for the explicit Qur'anic prohibition to commit suicide,³⁰ and the author has to perform an intellectual somersault in order to circumvent the issue and prove his point. He says that while both suicide and acts of martyrdom require the express act of will of the perpetrator, what matters is not the act, but the intention (*nia*) of the martyr. A case in point was of a martyr who appeared on the Day of Judgment and claimed that he fought for Allah, but Allah reminded him that his courage was displayed only so that it could be said of him that he was courageous, whereupon he was dragged on his face and consumed by the fire of Hell.³¹

This turn of the argument is extremely important, for it leaves the final judgment to Heaven, inasmuch as even when a man is considered by his peers, eye-witnesses and contemporaries as a well-deserved martyr, Allah may scrutinize his intention and decide otherwise. Conversely, a man may be considered by humans to have committed a despicable suicide, but when Allah examines his intentions, He might reward him with the highest degree of martyrdom and in Paradise. And this is precisely what sets suicide, a flight from the vagaries of life, apart from an act of martyrdom, which is a human response to the call of Allah to sacrifice oneself for the sake of Islam, and to inflict loss on the enemies of Allah.

The remaining question is whether martyrdom is the domain of the elected few who can cultivate the requisite pious intention, or is given to the

choice of every willing individual Muslim. An analogy is suggested in laws of conversion. Muslims are allowed to renege on their faith outwardly, under duress or threat on their lives, as long as in their hearts they did not budge from their creed.³²

However, as against that permission (*rukhsa*), there exists also personal resolve ('*azima*'), which is admittedly more difficult to pursue and to experience, and refusing to abandon the faith even in the face of certain death. But those who choose this course out of their own resolve, in spite of the allowance made by the Shari'a in cases of imminent peril, of course attain the highest levels of martyrdom and reward.³³ And since in every operation against the enemy there is a danger of death, the only issue is one of the degree of the threat. Any act of martyrdom of the 'Islamikaze' kind carries with it certain death, though everything is ultimately in Allah's hand, and this is what places it at the apex of martyrdom.

Summary

The problem remains to discern the circumstances under which this weapon is to be used, and to detect the enemy to be targeted. First of all, the act of martyrdom is an expression of *jihad*, and is often pursued as an act of self-defense against an enemy who has invaded Muslims in their own homes and territory, when it becomes incumbent upon individual Muslims to use force. Therefore, unlike state-led *jihad*, the duty of the entire Islamic polity, in this case an individual duty (*fard 'ayn*) is to be performed by the Muslims closest to the enemy.

In Palestine, the arena discussed specifically by the author, he focuses on the duty of *jihad* against the combined 'Judeo-Western onslaught'. There, attacks and oppressive acts against Muslims are physical and concrete: expulsion, killing, wounding and imprisoning. They concern the take-over of Muslim Holy Places to replace them by Jewish ones, Judaization of Muslim land and violation of the honor of Muslim women. The expansion of Israel especially serves as a launching pad to conquer more Muslim countries and form a Western base to 'diffuse Jewish corruption, Westernization, humiliation, enslavement and exploitation'.³⁴

These combined actions by the enemy amount to a war of annihilation against Islam, something that impels any Muslim to take up *jihad* without waiting for permission from Muslim authorities. 'The Zionist enemy must be attacked by all means permitted by the Shari'a, not only by the Palestinians but by the entire Muslim Umma. Zionism is not a local enemy, it is a universal one, it is the sword that tears apart this blessed land'.³⁵ This analysis leads the author to conclude that the actual battle is of the third

category which makes acts of martyrdom imperative and entails an individual commitment by every Muslim to engage the enemy.

The current danger to the Muslim *umma* is great both due to the rifts and splits within Muslims, and the combined power of the Zionist enemy and his allies. The situation of the Muslims today is worse than in Crusader times, therefore *jihad* in Palestine acquires its own imperative and urgent character, and requires acts of martyrdom to take precedence over all other modes of warfare. All the pre-required conditions to launch such acts exist in Palestine with regard to the Zionist enemy, particularly when all other conventional military avenues have proved insufficient or ineffective, in view of the military superiority of enemy tactics, equipment and technology. Even laying explosives in enemy targets and then seeking refuge would not help, due to his vigilance or due to the random effect on victims – who may turn out to be women and children.³⁶

On the other hand, in an act of martyrdom, the explosive is focused on precise targets. Moreover, due to the interception of weapons and explosives by Israel before they could be activated, it becomes imperative to use the little there is in the most focused and infallible manner, through the 'Islamikaze'. Many consequences flow from this conclusion:

1. The precise targets chosen for these acts of martyrdom, which are supposed to spare children and women, seem to be ignored by the perpetrators, who seek soft spots, and most of the victims have been women, children and aged people;
2. the more counter-terrorist attacks succeed in paralyzing the terrorists, such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad, the more their members will be pushed to resort to acts of 'Islamikaze'; and
3. the more frequent the acts of 'Islamikaze', the more evident is the failure of the Islamist organizations in the overall campaign.

Another advantage that the author seems to ascribe to the acts of 'Islamikaze', is their effect on morale, inasmuch as 'by Allah's grace, one or two fighters succeed in breaking into the lines of the enemy, then attack a group of the enemy's forces by an act of martyrdom, thereby inflicting on him heavy damage and tottering his morale in the face of the indestructible fighting spirit of the martyrs'. By this kind of operation, the entire Islamic *umma* is rescued, as it minimizes its own casualties, maximizes the enemy's and weakens the latter's ability to retaliate. All this is certainly worth the sacrifice of a few fighters. It is imperative, however, that those who embrace this road should do it with *nia*, namely not as an escape from life and its vagaries, but with the intention of *jihad* for Allah, in order to kill the enemies. This is, in fact, the best and most

economical possible way to engage in *jihad* in Palestine under the prevailing circumstances.³⁷

To sum up the doctrine, which first pays lip service to the value of human life, but then posits the value of worship of Allah above it, and then *jihad* as the highest degree of worship, it may be said that it actually overlooks, dismisses and makes banal the entire humanistic concept of sanctity of life as it is understood in Western tradition. Even though the injunction to self-sacrifice in *jihad* is graduated into three levels of necessity: unnecessary if there is an equilibrium of forces with the enemy, desirable when the rapport of forces is in the Muslims' disfavor, and imperative when perilous danger threatens the community, one cannot escape the impression that this edifice of rationalizations is geared to dwarf human life in the final analysis and make it subservient to religious fanaticism.

The author seems to say that death for Allah, as long as the intention is there, has a special significance and is considered the highest form of martyrdom. In fact he is indeed speaking about the sanctity of death, which in a very round-about and paradoxical way stems from the basic assumption of the sanctity of life. Noteworthy is, however, his reluctance to bind the Muslims in general with such a harrowing and demanding injunction, and he limits it to the few who have attained such a degree of self-sacrifice as to commit it without hesitation, and who would be rewarded in the higher reaches of Paradise.

Characteristic of this treatise is that it almost disregards the 13 centuries of Shari'a developments since the era of the Prophet. For had he surveyed the entire span of Muslim Law, it is doubtful whether he would have come to the ultimate conclusion that every 'true Muslim' must be ready, eager and willing to sacrifice his life in the course of *jihad*. He himself complains in his essay, on more than one occasion, against the attempts made throughout history to 'hide the true meanings of *jihad* and martyrdom', therefore it was only natural for him to connect directly to the sources to extract his fundamentalist interpretations. For him the 'true Muslims' are those who follow the early interpretations, in contrast to those who have been spoiled and diluted by Western and modern outside accretions.

Even so, the Hadith stories cited by the author are not always accurate and sometimes are turned around as to illustrate his point. It is interesting to draw some comparisons with other versions that appear in books of other scholars such as Ibn al-Athir, but that is beyond the scope of this article. At any rate, it is clear that because some radical Muslim movements who have sanctified self-sacrifice are accused of adopting Shi'ite theology, the author is clearly making an effort to stay within the bounds of the Sunna, even if it is the most puritanical and strict interpretation thereof.

In the context of a universal Muslim combat for survival, when 'Islamikaze' acts are imperative, one is led to believe that without the supreme act of martyrdom, there is no other way to rescue Islam. Paradoxically, it is precisely the perceived impending peril to Islam which forces the martyrs to their fanatic act of self-immolation, and it is their desperate act of self-sacrifice which signals that they failed to transmit their message in some more acceptable and less horrific way.

NOTES

1. Raphael Israeli, 'Islamikaze and their Significance', *Journal of Terrorism and Political Violence* 9/3 (Autumn 1997) pp.96–112.
2. Ibid.
3. A.J. Wensinck, 'The Oriental Doctrine of the Martyrs', in *Med, Akad* (Amsterdam: 1921) Series A, No.6, pp.1–28.
4. Ignaz Goldziher, *Muhammedanische Studien* (Halle, 1989) p.387.
5. Wensinck (note 3) p.9.
6. Cited by ibid. pp.5–6.
7. Amir Taheri (a former pre-revolutionary editor of the daily *Kaihan*), *The Spirit of Allah* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved 1986) p.148 (in Hebrew). See also Emanuel Sivan, *Muslim Radicals* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved 1985) pp.192–5 (in Hebrew).
8. Tahiri (note 7) p.55. See also Hamid Algar, *Islam and Revolution* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 1981) pp.329–43; and Martin Kramer (ed.), *Protest and Revolution in Shi'ite Islam* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University 1985) p.29 (in Hebrew).
9. Report by Guy Bechor, Arab Affairs commentator, *Ha'aretz*, 6 Dec. 1995, p.b2.
10. Ibid.
11. *Ha'aretz*, 23 Jan. 1995, p.6a.
12. Meir Hatina, *Palestinian Radicalism: The Islamic Jihad Movement* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University 1994) pp.79–80 (in Hebrew).
13. *Ha'aretz*, 23 Jan. 1995.
14. Izz a-Din al Qassam was the founder and hero of the Islamic movement in Palestine in the 1930s, which engaged in battle both against the British Mandatory forces and the Jewish self-defense groups, until his death in combat in Samaria in 1935. His name was picked up by the Hamas, upon its foundation in 1988, and given to the military arm of the organization.
15. Hatina (note 12) p.82.
16. A citation from an Islamic Jihad distributed leaflet, *Ha'aretz*, 23 Jan. 1995, p.6a. The leaflet was reportedly headed by a citation from the Repentance Sura in the Qur'an which promises Paradise to those who kill and are killed in the battles of Allah.
17. *Qira'a fi Fiqh al-Shahada* (Readings in Islamic Martyrology) was published in 1988 as a special addendum to *al-Islam wa Filastin* (Islam and Palestine), which appears in Nicosia, Cyprus, but has been the ideological supporter of the Islamikaze operations against Israel. See *Al-Islam wa Filastin*, 5 June 1988, p.9.
18. Ibid.
19. *Qira'a fi Fiqh al-Shahada* (note 17) p.3.
20. The Cow Sura, verses 28–36.
21. *Qira'a fi Fiqh al-Shahada* (note 17) p.4.
22. Citing Malik ibn Anas, *Ahadith al-Jami' al'Saghir*, in *Qira'a fi Fiqh al-Shahada* (note 17) p.4.
23. Ibid. p.7.
24. Ibid. p.8.
25. Ibid pp.8–9.



26. Palestinian Authority Broadcasting, shown on Israeli television, 24 Jan. 2002, 20:00 News Bulletin.
27. *Qira'a fi Fiqh al-Shahada* (note 17) p.12.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid. p.10.
30. *Qur'an*, Women Sura, verse 29.
31. *Qira'a fi Fiqh al-Shahada* (note 17) p.6. How that fake hero could appear before God prior to the expected Day of Judgment, the author does not explain, unless he means not the eschatological Day of Judgment, but the personal day of judgment of that imaginary individual.
32. The Bee Sura, verse 108.
33. *Qira'a fi Fiqh al-Shahada* (note 17) pp.10–11.
34. Ibid. p.7.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid. pp.14–15.
37. Ibid.

