The Psychology of Palestinian Suicide Bombers

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Abstract

Despite the vast amount of research done on the Israeli and Palestinian conflict, very little is understood about what motivates Palestinian suicide bombers. During the peak in violence from 2000-2004, Palestinian bombers accounted for 44 percent of Israeli deaths and injuries despite only making up 1 percent of total attacks. The mainstream image projected of these attackers is one of radicalized individuals committing suicide for the sake of causing maximum damage, yet their motivations remain widely unknown. This thesis questions what these motivations are. It examines possible primary and secondary factors that provoke some Palestinians to become suicide bombers through examining the post-colonial history of the Israeli and Palestinian conflict. The primary factors that have motivated some Palestinian bombers are the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories and the role of Hamas in perpetuating the attacks. Secondary factors include political powerlessness, economics, resources, housing, humiliation, and revenge. By understanding how both sets of factors motivated some Palestinian bombers, we can expand our knowledge of suicide bombers and develop a policy to address the root causes behind Palestinian suicide bombings.
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I. Introduction

"Jihad and the resistance begin with the word, then with the sword, then with the stone, then with the gun, then with planting bombs, and then transforming human bodies into human bombs." — Munir al Makdah, head of the Fatah militia in Lebanon (Bloom 27).

Imagine what kind of conditions individuals must be exposed to that would motivate them to choose self-sacrifice than to live. Just before they commit suicide, are they scared? Are they angry?

What are the factors that have pushed people to become Palestinian suicide bombers? To answer that question, this thesis explains some of the factors that motivate many Palestinians to become suicide bombers. The timeline starts from the post-colonial period in 1947 to the current state of affairs in 2017; the emphasis is placed on the 2000-2004 period, during the Second Intifada. It was during this time that there were the most suicide bombings in both Israel and the Palestinian territories. Therefore, by understanding the factors that pushed some Palestinians to become suicide bombers during the height of the attacks, we will have a stronger idea of what the general motivations are for many suicide bombers in the Palestinian territories.

Palestinian suicide bombers are imperative to understand because of the damage a single person could cause along with their ability to attack anyone, anywhere. Similarly, suicide bombings have frightened individuals across the world and have attracted wide attention by mainstream media. For example, in May 2017, a suicide bombing during an Ariana Grande concert resulted in 22 deaths and plastered the front covers of most major news outlets.
(MacGuire). Despite the attention suicide bombers receive, very little is known about their motivations.

My motivation to study suicide bombers comes from my fascination with understanding what kinds of convictions drive an individual to commit suicide in order to murder another person. I am interested in understanding Palestinian suicide bombers in particular because I spent several months in Israel, and I wanted to focus my research on a region I was familiar with and enjoyed.

Suicide bombers in Israel have targeted shopping malls, popular cafes and restaurants, and commuter buses. Their target is everyday life and they create the illusion that anyone could be a target, anywhere (“Erased”). From 2000-2004, there were 132 suicide bombings that resulted in 502 deaths and over 3,000 injured (Israel, “Suicide”; Yom 8). With that said, for every suicide bombing came the death or injury of at least 27 people. Although these attacks only accounted for less than 1 percent of all violent incidents in Israel and the Palestinian territories, they still resulted in 44 percent of Israeli deaths and injuries from violence (Moghadam 71).
II. **Post-Colonial History**

Understanding post-colonial history is relevant to Palestinian suicide bombers because the problems created during this period are factors that still motivate many Palestinians to pursue violence.

During the World War II period, British soldiers occupied Palestine and used the land as an enormous army camp and logistics center (Pappe, “The 1948” 117). However, after WWII the British could no longer afford to occupy Palestine because of numerous economic and military challenges facing the British empire. As they prepared to decolonize most of Palestine, Britain promised Zionist leaders their own Jewish state as agreed upon through the Balfour Declaration in 1917 (Segev 121). On the other hand, the British agreement with the Zionists meant they would not support their previous agreement with the Palestinian Arabs from 1915-1916. This agreement promised Palestinians their own country in return for their help in combatting the Ottoman Empire in World War I. The outcome from the British agreement with the Zionists was the beginning of a Jewish state at the expense of the Palestinians and a large influx of Jewish settlers in 1947.

**UN Partition Plan 1947 Resolution 181**

The UN Partition Plan 1947 Resolution 181 was an official plan created by the British to create permanent Jewish and Palestinian governments in Palestine, and to create an economic union between both governments (Israel, “UN”). By November 29, 1947, the UN Partition Plan Resolution 181 was approved— with minor changes— the Plan of Partition with Economic Union as proposed by the majority in the special committee on Palestine. This plan set up the
withdrawal of British troops along with the delineation of borders between Israel and Palestine followed by an economic union. After this point in Israeli and Palestinian history, there have been frequent disputes regarding their borders and the overall occupation of what is seen by many as Palestinian land.

**1948 Expulsion of the Palestinians**

On March 10, 1948, roughly two months before the start of the Arab-Israeli war, eleven Zionist leaders with young military officers put the final touches on a plan to clear out Palestinian villages to make way for a larger Israeli state (Pappe, *A History* 6). The order was to enact large scale tactics of intimidation, bombings, fires, home demolitions, and murder (Pappe, *A History* 6). By the end of the destruction, 750,000 Palestinians were either killed or displaced and 531 villages and 11 urban neighborhoods were destroyed in a six month period (Pappe, *A History* 7). After the conflict, the surviving Palestinians fled to Jordan and lost their right to return to their native land and have since been exiled from Israel. Palestinians are now the largest ethnic group in Jordan and make up 18 percent of the population (United Nations, *Jordan*). There are currently 2 million Palestinians living in Jordan, and 370,000 of them live in 10 refugee camps provided by the Jordanian government— making these camps one of the most densely populated locations in the world.

By the early 1950s, half of the Jewish immigrants moving to Israel lived in homes abandoned by these Palestinians. The tactic of moving settlers into Palestinian homes was so widespread that a quarter of the buildings used by Jewish settlers were originally Palestinian. Jewish settlers also occupied over 10,000 Palestinian shops and stores (Pappe, *A History* 7).
Since 1948, the Israeli government continues to reject any responsibility for the removal of the 750,000 Palestinians (Pappe, *A History* 9). Israel’s government has instead insisted that the Palestinians in that area voluntarily left. However, historical archives from the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) show that the expulsion of the Palestinians in 1948 was an operation handed down to brigade commanders not as vague guidelines, but as clear orders to attack (Pappe, *A History* 16). The significance this event has towards modern Palestinians is that it perpetuated the inequality, injustice, hardship, and an increase in occupation that have radicalized Palestinian society.

1967 Six Day War

Leading up to the Six Day war were two other conflicts between Arab nations and Israel. The first Arab-Israeli war was in May 14, 1948, directly after Israel declared statehood and expelled the 750,000 Palestinians (Pappe, *A History* 6). The second Arab-Israeli war, known as the Suez Crisis, started in October 1956 after Egyptian President Nasser nationalized the Suez canal and prohibited Israeli ships from using the canal (United States, “The Suez”). In retaliation, Israel captured Gaza, Rafah, Al-Arish, and most of the Sinai peninsula east of the Suez Canal. In March 1957, the IDF withdrew from the Sinai peninsula and regained the freedom of navigation through the Straits of Tiran.

Six years after the Suez crisis came the Six Day war, otherwise known as the Third Arab-Israeli war, which lasted from June 5-11, 1967 (Louis 1). The war started from an array of attacks against Israel from Palestinian guerrilla forces stationed in Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon. As a result, Israel launched attacks into Arab controlled land to counter Palestinian attacks. For instance, an Israeli strike on the village of Al-Samu, located in the Jordanian controlled West
Bank left 18 dead and 54 wounded (Louis xiii). Attacks between Palestinians guerrillas and the Israeli military continued until May 1967, when Soviet intelligence indicated that Israel was planning a large attack against Syria and, although it was false, pushed tensions to the brink of war. A month later came the start of the Six Day War between Israel, Egypt, Jordan, and Syria (United States, “The Suez”).

The result of the war was a decisive victory for Israel as they managed to take control of the Sinai peninsula, Gaza Strip, West Bank, Old City of Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights in just six days (“Six Day War”). Each of these locations still provokes a significant amount of friction between Israel, the Palestinian territories, and local Arab countries. Since the Six Day War, Israel has set up military administrations in the occupied territories and permanently annexed East Jerusalem in the West Bank. These acts have led to increased resentment by Palestinians towards Israel and the radicalization of Palestinian society (Tahhan).

First Intifada (1987-93)

The First Intifada, or first uprising, started in 1987 (Brym). This year was the 20th anniversary of the occupation of Palestine, which escalated the hostile tensions between the Israelis and Palestinians. Also in 1987, the Israeli population increased with an extra 2,200 armed Jewish settlers. These settlers occupied 40 percent of the Gaza Strip while 650,000 impoverished Palestinians were crowded into the other 60 percent. As tensions mounted, there was an uprising against Israel in reaction to the deaths of three Palestinians who were killed from an Israeli military vehicle (Tamimi). The reaction supplemented with pre-existing tensions from the increased occupation led to the First Intifada which lasted from December 1987 to September 1993 (Brym). The beginning of the Intifada was primarily civil disobedience to the Israeli
occupation and increased settlement building. Despite this peaceful beginning, *Al Jazeera* reported that the protests quickly turned into violent riots as Palestinians began using molotov cocktails along with other weapons to attack Israeli forces and citizens (Tamimi).

According to an estimate by the Swedish branch of Save the Children, after the peak in violence during the Intifada from 1987-1989, 29,900 children required medical treatment for injuries caused by beatings from Israeli soldiers, nearly a third of them were aged ten or under (“Casualty”). Save the Children also estimated that in the same two years, between 6,500-8,500 Palestinian minors were wounded by Israeli gunfire. The total amount of Palestinian deaths in the Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, in these two years was 596 along with 9 Israeli deaths (“Fatalities”). By the end of the Intifada in 1993, data from B’Tselem, the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, shows 1,265 deaths occurred in the 69 months of the Intifada, and 90 percent of them Palestinian (Brym).

The First Intifada ended with a new sign of hope for Palestinians with the signing of the Oslo accords (Brym). These Accords, officially known as the “Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements,” were designed to open and direct peace negotiations between the Israeli government and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) (United States, *Foreign Terrorist*). With the signing of the Accords came optimism by Israelis and Palestinians because the agreement signaled peace to come and an end to the conflict.

**Palestinian Conditions during the 1990s**

After the Oslo Accords were signed, most Palestinians experienced a deterioration of living conditions through the 1990s from an increase in unemployment, poverty, and Israeli restrictions (Munson 46). Although when the agreement was signed many Palestinians were
ecstatic, that joyfulness eventually turned into disillusionment. According to the Population Reference Bureau, a private and nonprofit organization dedicated to collecting statistics for research and academics, between 1992 and 1996, the real per capita GDP in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip declined by 37 percent (Fischbach). Part of the increased unemployment and poverty was because of the lack of employment opportunities presented by Israel. During this period of time the support for the Palestinian Authority, which is the overarching source of authority in the Palestinian territories, also began to decline. Furthermore, restrictions during the Oslo peace process left many Palestinians with the impossibility of leaving their towns and villages without the humiliating and enduring interrogations by Israeli soldiers at checkpoints (Munson 46). As an example, the village of Nahalin located in the West Bank is only a 15 minute drive from Jerusalem, yet many Palestinians were forced to endure 5 security checkpoints and were required to carry a temporary permit which could take a day or two to receive just to be able to stay in Jerusalem for a few hours to a day. When a soldier at an Israeli checkpoint prevented Ahmad Qurei, one of the key negotiators of the Oslo Accord and the president of the Palestinian Authority’s parliament, from travelling to his home in the West Bank, he declared: “Soon, I too will join Hamas” (Munson 46). Qurei, may not have meant this, but his fury reflected the humiliation experienced by the Palestinian people on a daily basis.

By the end of the 1990s, the stagnant negotiations during the Oslo Accords along with deteriorating living conditions left many Palestinians hopeless for a positive future and a resolution to the occupation. The result of the breakdown in the Oslo process was the rise in suicide bombings from 1994-1999 (Pape 218). These bombings were meant to remove oppressive Israeli policies by forcing Israel into compliance with the key provisions of the Oslo
agreement, and to stop Israel’s targeting of Hamas leadership. However, there are many other hypotheses regarding the intentions behind the suicide operations. Some scholars believe that the attacks were meant to “spoil” the negotiations between the PLO and Israel to increase the power and legitimacy of Hamas (Kydd and Walter 26).

**The Second Intifada (2000-05)**

The Second Intifada was from 2000-2005 and was the second Palestinian armed uprising that was in response to a mixture of issues that were also motivations for individuals to pursue suicide bombings (Pressman 118). Although tensions progressively rose between the Israelis and Palestinians leading up to the Second Intifada, the official start of the uprising began on September 28, 2000, and ended at the Sharm El Sheikh Summit on February 8, 2005. This event, however, is not unanimously agreed to be the end of the Intifada. Violence decreased significantly by 2004 after the Israeli government stated their plan to disengage from the West Bank and Gaza Strip in December 2003 (Oliver). Nonetheless, by the end of the Intifada, over three thousand Palestinians and nearly one thousand Israelis were killed, and more than 34,000 Palestinians and six thousand Israelis injured (“World”).

**Years Following the Second Intifada**

On February 6, 2005, after an intense campaign of suicide bombings in Israel and the Palestinian territories, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and the new leader of the Palestinian Authority Mahmoud Abbas agreed to a ceasefire (Oliver). The agreement took place during the Sharm el-Sheikh summit hosted by the Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak. Following the ceasefire, on August 15, 2005, Israel followed through with their disengagement plan as promised in 2004 (United Nations, “Israel’s Disengagement”). According to the UN, the
evacuation proceeded smoothly and militant Palestinian factions restrained from using violence through this process.

In 2006, Hamas won the Palestinian Parliamentary elections with 74 of 132 seats (Pape 223). After the elections, Iran pledged $50 million to the nearly bankrupt Palestinian Authority and continued to support Hamas with weapons and training. As Hamas’ popularity continued to rise, they won legislative elections in 2006 and would continue to win until 2016 (“Palestinian”). Ismail Haniya, the leader of Hamas, also claimed to be the sole leader of the Palestinian Authority. Although there were now hopes of continued peace between Israel and the Palestinian territories, the Islamic Jihad militant group began rocket attacks against Israel from Gaza, which was met with frequent Israeli raids and incursions (“Katyusha Rocket”).

From December 27, 2008 to January 18, 2009, Israelis and Palestinians fought another war known as Operation Cast Lead (Gaita 1). The Operation started from a staged raid into the Gaza Strip, killing six Hamas members. Shortly after, tensions quickly escalated and Israel began the Operation. According to the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, 1,419 Palestinians were killed and 1,167 of those were non combatants. To put these numbers into perspective, over 82 percent of the people who were killed were civilians. This Operation also led to 5,000 people wounded, and Amnesty International along with Human Rights Watch concluded that there were war crimes and crimes against humanity by both the Israeli military and Palestinian militias (“Operation”). The 2009 elections would later be held off for another year until the end of the war.

Five years later in 2014, after multiple failed negotiations for peace between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, Israel responded to attacks by armed groups in Gaza with a military
campaign by air and land to knock out missile launching sites and attack tunnels. The clashes ended in uneasy Egyptian-brokered ceasefire in August ("Casualty").

According to the Argentinian newspaper La Nacion, starting in September 2015 and lasting until the middle of 2016, a new wave of attacks known as the “Knife Intifada” began over the status of Temple Mount, one of Islam’s holiest sites ("El Cuchillo"). By the end of the attacks, there were 166 stabbings, 89 attempted stabbings, 108 shootings, 47 vehicular rammings, and one bus bombing (Israel, “Wave”). Palestinian elections were later halted until peace in the Palestinian territories could be established (Sanz).

In April 2017, after a period of relative peace, Hamas agreed to a two state solution on the 1967 borders. What made this peace offer notable is that the proposed borders primarily benefited Israel because it accepted the expansion of Israel’s internationally recognized borders, and reduced the size of the Palestinian territories. Hamas’ peace proposal was also surprising because it did not suit their original goal of the destruction of Israel and raised questions about whether or not Hamas was becoming more moderate (Shobaki). On the other hand, Hamas still did not officially acknowledge Israel as a legitimate state.

What the conflicts and elections indicated from the years following the Second Intifada was a change in Palestinian society. Many extreme organizations who could not hold a significant amount of support, like Hamas, became more popular and remained in power. What was not changing, though, were steps towards any long term peace deal. Also, despite fears of an increase in suicide bombings following the Second Intifada, there has been a significant decline in attacks (Pape 240). Some scholars like Pape argued that any decline in Palestinian suicide bombings is a reaction to the Israeli disengagement from Gaza and large parts of the West Bank
But contrary to Pape’s claim, Israel did, in fact, re-engage the Palestinian territories in 2008 during Operation Cast Lead for roughly a month. Therefore, if occupation was the sole factor in motivating some Palestinians to become suicide bombers, why was there no influx in these attacks during a period of increased occupation? I do not have the answer to this question, but this situation demonstrates that there is still much to be understood about Palestinian bombers.
III. **Primary Motivating Factors**

There are a myriad of motivating factors that have pushed individuals to become suicide bombers in the Palestinian territories. Many of these factors overlap and are interconnected because they are derived from many of the same events and situations. Nevertheless, it is hard to decipher every single motivation, and there is no academic consensus behind the significance of every possible influence. However, there are some primary factors that have indefinitely played a large role in pushing individuals to pursue suicide bombings. These factors are the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory and Hamas in perpetuating the attacks.

**Occupation**

The first motivating factor during the Second Intifada, and arguably one of the most significant influences for Palestinian suicide bombers was the increase in occupation.

In 2000, just before the Second Intifada and as the Camp David II talks were continuing, negotiations were beginning to break down due to the disagreement between Israeli Prime Minister Barak and Yasser Arafat over the withdrawal of Israeli forces in the West Bank (“What”). Barak also greatly expanded Jewish-only settlements in East Jerusalem at a much higher rate than his predecessors. The Camp David II talks eventually failed and tensions escalated as Hamas declared October 6, 2000 to be "a day of rage," and urged Palestinians to attack Israeli army outposts in Israeli occupied Palestinian territories (Tamimi). Shortly after, the Israeli troops who were securing the ancient Jewish site of Joseph’s tomb in Palestinian-controlled Nablus withdrew.
In the wake of continued violence, hopes of a final peace agreement were completely abandoned in 2001 after Israel launched one of its strictest occupation policies since 1993 (Yom 9). Israeli authorities sealed off the West Bank and Gaza Strip, while restricting movement of Palestinians between and within those areas as well as into Israel. The IDF also blocked or controlled all access to towns and villages using military checkpoints and blocks (“Israel” 462). For example, 30,000 Palestinian residents in the Israeli-controlled area of Hebron, known as H2, were kept under a 24 hour curfew, though no restrictions were placed on the five hundred Israeli settlers living in the H2 area. Palestinian drivers also complained that Israeli soldiers often beat and humiliated them and their passengers, slashed tires, bullets pierced vehicles, and soldiers confiscated the drivers’ keys for lengthy periods of time.

As a result of the abuse experienced by many Palestinians followed by an increase in occupation via restrictions, along with other factors in 2001, public support for violence against Israeli policies increased along with the number of Palestinian suicide bombings (Yom 9). Midway through 2001, after a year and nine months of clashes with the IDF, Palestinian researchers found that 92 percent of Palestinians supported armed confrontations against Israeli troops and 58 percent supported attacks against civilians inside Israel (“Erased”). Public support for the organizations that support militancy, like Hamas, increased as well. According to Mia Bloom, a scholar in political science from Columbia University, with every major attack since November 2000, support for suicide bombings increased and support for the Palestinian Authority decreased (19). The reason for the decline in support was because of the Palestinian Authority’s political ineffectiveness in finding resolutions to the Israeli restrictions and settlement building.
From March to May 2002, the Israeli army launched Operation Defensive Shield in the West Bank and Gaza Strip ("Israel, the Occupied" 460). Defensive Shield was the largest military operation in West Bank since 1967 and the IDF occupied 7 of the 8 major towns in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The goal of the Operation was to enter and occupy the West Bank and destroy the infrastructure of militant organizations, and to create a barrier between the Palestinian territories and Israel to prevent suicide bombers from entering Israel (Issacharoff). However, there was a significant amount of criticism regarding reoccupation under Operation Defensive Shield (Bloom 34). Many Palestinians believed the dividing wall built during the Operation, also known as the segregation wall, was created through Palestinian territory to solidify Israel’s possession of more Palestinian land. Their argument noted that the wall itself does not actually keep people out of Israel because there are gaps in the wall, therefore it poses more of a symbol of Israeli occupation and possession of Palestinian land. The construction of the wall was eventually halted in 2006 after it was only half built (Qabaja 5). The wall still created many barriers inside the West Bank because it separated many Palestinian villages from their farmland and nearby cities, which made travelling extremely difficult. Along with the wall, Israeli restrictions during the Operation prohibited Palestinians from using 41 roads that covered over 700 km of roadway, including several main roads. The wall and restrictions effectively turned the West Bank into isolated islands. The consequences from Defensive Shield was wide criticism against the Israeli government from people in the Palestinian territories, abroad, and within Israel. One Israeli reserve soldier criticized the Operation and discussed the difficulties with winning the war on terror through occupation and defeating the new waves of suicide bombers:
“The government talks about how many guns and bomb factories and suicide belts it’s capturing in the offensive, of how we are going to break the terrorist infrastructure. But what infrastructure? I think the most terrifying thing here—and maybe it’s something that a lot of people don’t want to see—is that there’s very little infrastructure to break” (Bloom 39).

What the Israeli soldier was referring to was the fact that resisting against Israeli occupation was not simply a piece of infrastructure that can be dismantled. Resisting occupation was ingrained into the minds of many Palestinians, and armed struggle was the preferred means to resist. Regardless, many Israelis still supported their government’s occupation policies under the hope that it would deter future attacks (Bloom 35).

In 2003, both Operation Defensive Shield and suicide bombings continued, attempts for peace deals failed, while hopelessness, humiliation, and revenge transcended much of Palestinian society (Tamimi). On December 18, 2003, after a series of suicide bombings, Prime Minister Sharon announced a plan to disengage from Gaza and the West Bank saying, “It is not in our interest to to govern you. We will not remain in all the places where we are today” (Pape 239). The plan stated its goal to be a step towards “improving the situation and breaking the current deadlock” (“Gaza Disengagement”). The Israeli government was also having to spend millions of dollars to protect a few thousand settlers while hundreds of Israelis were killed and wounded from Palestinian attacks.

A year later on June 6, 2004, the disengagement plan was approved and the enactment was delayed until August 15, 2005, to provide Israeli settlers with enough time to evacuate settlements (Pape 239). Because the disengagement plan was announced at the end of 2003, 2004
experienced significantly fewer bombings than any year since the beginning of the Second Intifada (Pape 217). The reduction in the bombings was because the Israeli government provided hope to the Palestinians for a future free from Israeli occupation (“Gaza Disengagement”). By the time Israel approved the Gaza disengagement plan, the government agreed to dismantle and evacuate 24 settlements for a total of roughly 9,000 Israelis along with the extensive military infrastructure. Many people in both Israel, the Palestinian territories, and abroad viewed the situation in 2004 as an indication of the success of violence in pressuring the Israeli government to shift their policies from an increase in settlement building to disengagement (Pape 240). For example, on July 18, 2005, Haaretz’s Danny Rubinstein wrote, “Sharon, who never once mentioned or alluded to the need to withdraw from Gaza before, needed suicide bombers, rockets, and mortars to persuade him” (Pape 240).

Overall, occupation played the largest role in motivating individuals to become a suicide bomber in the Palestinian territory. Although there is an array of other factors that motivate Palestinians, occupation is at the heart of their concern. As Palestinian desires for an end to the occupation increased, along with hopelessness and despair, so came a strong preference for armed struggle (Bloom 36). What made the Second Intifada different than other clashes between Israelis and Palestinians in the past was the transition to suicide bombings (Pape 237). Hamas leader Mash’al best explained this transition:

“Like the Intifada in 1987, the current Intifada has taught us that we should move forward normally from popular confrontation to the rifle to suicide operations. This is the normal development...We always have the Lebanese experience before our eyes. It was a great model of which we are proud” (Pape 237).
As confrontation continued through the history of the Palestinian territory, so came the preference for more violent means to counter Israeli occupation.

**Hamas**

Because of the extreme conditions experienced by a large number of Palestinians that left them impoverished, powerless, and desperate, some individuals decided to join extremist organizations to vent their anger. While there are many organizations in Palestinian territories that promote suicide bombings, Hamas alone accounted for 40 percent of the suicide attacks during the Second Intifada (Yom 9). They were successful in launching so many bombings because they were able to *promote* the attacks, *supply* the means to deploy the bombings, and they could later *fund* the families of the attacker.

To understand how Hamas created the foundations that allow them to perpetrate suicide attacks, it is important to understand several aspects of the organization including their: history, ideology, motives, funding, and their structure.

As a background of Hamas, the name of the organization is an acronym for “Harakat al Muqawamah al Islamiyya” (Islamic Resistance Movement) (Bloom 31). Hamas started in 1974 as an outgrowth of the Muslim Brotherhood and provided many social services to Palestinians under occupation (Bloom 31). However, Hamas was officially formed in 1987 by Sheikh Ahmed Yassin. During the First Intifada in 1987, Hamas deployed militant tactics while they participated in street violence and murder, which boosted its appeal in the eyes of the Palestinians. Shortly after, Hamas was outlawed in September 1989, and have since been seen as an outlet for Palestinians to fight back against Israel (Bloom 32).
Hamas appears to have several goals: to destroy Israel with a sovereign Palestinian state, to enhance its prestige among Palestinians vis-a-vis the Palestinian Authority, increase its appearance as a legitimate opposition, and prove that it maintains the power to be able to challenge Israel using unconventional means (Satloff 5).

With an understanding of Hamas’ background and ideology, the question now is how did suicide bombings conform with the organization's long and short term goals? Suicide bombings are important to Hamas because of the large numbers of casualties they can create (“Suicide Bombing”). As one senior Hamas leader put it, "The main thing is to guarantee that a large number of the enemy will be affected," he continued, "With an explosive belt or bag, the bomber has control over vision, location, and timing" (“Suicide Bombing”). Suicide bombers and the explosives they use are beneficial towards the organization’s goals because they empower and enable Hamas to attack when they see fit, especially against civilians. Jane’s Defence Weekly argued that, “While some attacks are successful against military targets, most are carried out against civilians. As Hamas training manual notes: it is foolish to hunt the tiger when there are plenty of sheep around” (Bloom 34). Besides the devastating effectiveness of suicide bombings in killing civilians, they were used to build publicity for the organization’s cause, drum up new recruits for suicide missions, and sow anxiety and terror among Israelis (Bloom 74). Bloom adds that, “organizations that send the bombers do so because such attacks are an effective means to intimidate and demoralize the enemy” (3).

Hamas viewed suicide bombings as an effective means to achieve its long term goals of increasing their prestige and to fight for the independence of Palestinian territory (Bloom 3). In the words of Sheikh Ahmad Yasin, the founder and spiritual leader of the Hamas, “Once we have
warplanes and missiles, then we can think of changing our means of legitimate self-defense. But right now, we can only tackle the fire with our bare hands and sacrifice ourselves” (Bloom 3). Although suicide bombings sacrifice one supporter, it exacted no significant cost to Hamas while, at the same time, it proved to be an easy way to counter Israeli policies.

As Hamas and other organization’s power and legitimacy increased in Palestinian politics, groups prioritized local support in an attempt to outbid and out compete each other for power (Bloom 27). One method to gain support was to increase suicide bombings. According to Bloom, organizations that utilized suicide attacks increased in popularity while the support for the Palestinian Authority decreased (19). For instance, by April 2003, after three years of suicide bombings, Hamas’ popularity finally matched the popularity of Fatah, who led the Palestinian Authority, at precisely 22 percent each (Bloom 26). Hamas in particular began to shift its focus to suicide attacks to raise its profile and win external donor support (Bloom 26). However, Bloom does not cite where she received this information and many scholars reject the notion that the organizations that promoted suicide attacks received an increase in popularity as a result of the bombings (Pape 245).

The general funding of Hamas is difficult to find because of a lack of public information. Some estimates about their wealth have be anywhere from $10 million to $150 million with a small fraction going to the Qassam Brigades, and the majority of the funding going to its social programs (Long 136). According to Hamas, their sources of funding have been primarily from individual donors, yet their donations can range from individuals abroad to wealthy middle class Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (Long 137). In contrary to Hamas’ claim, surveillance from Israeli and U.S governments made it difficult for money to transfer from
outside the West Bank and the Gaza Strip to Hamas. For this reason, many believe that much of
the donations to Hamas were from local mosques whose local attendees made contributions that
end up in the hands of the organization (Long 138). Despite this argument, there is a large
question about how much of a role other countries have in Hamas’ funding. The U.S and Israeli
governments said Iran was still a direct contributor to Hamas and other reports say private
beneficiaries donated up to $5 million every year. Nonetheless, Hamas received significant
financial support to create cheap means to oppose Israeli policies, which then increased
recruitment and inevitably led to more funding (Bloom 37).

Although we know how suicide bombings benefit Hamas, the question now is why do
individuals choose to join Hamas, specifically, to fulfill these bombings? To answer that
question, it is important to know the structure of Hamas and how each component of their
organization benefits Palestinians. The two fundamentally different sections of Hamas discussed
are the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades (Qassam Brigades) and Hamas’ social movement.

The Qassam Brigades were established in 1991 to provide Hamas with a paramilitary
capability but became more of a traditional military unit in 2007 after forming government in
Gaza (Australia, “Hamas”).

According to the Qassam Brigades’ official website, their objectives are, “to invoke the
spirit of Jihad (resistance) amongst fellow Palestinians, Arabs, and Muslims; defend Palestinians
and their land against Zionist occupation and its aggression; liberate Palestinians and the land
usurped by the Zionist occupation forces and settlers” (“Ezzeedeen”). We can also reasonably
define their strategy as the deployment of threats and violence using unconventional means like
kidnappings, assassinations, indiscriminate rocket attacks, mortars and suicide bombings (Australia, “Hamas”).

The benefits of the Qassam brigades for Palestinians motivated to become suicide bombers was an organizational structure to pursue an attack. Without this branch, individuals may not have the means to pursue a suicide bombing. After multiple grievances, some individuals were motivated to attack Israel and seek the retribution, but still needed a foundation that would empower them with the means to attack. The Qassam Brigades claimed they could offer Palestinians a sense of personal agency to force Israel to pay for the damage they caused (“Ezzedeen”).

Even though there were many organizations during the Intifada that provided an organizational foundation to attack Israel from, what ultimately separated Hamas was their social movement. The purpose of the movement was to gain community support for Hamas and resistance against Israel through various social programs. Hamas spokespeople even acknowledged that the group sees its sizeable social movement as a means to build and maintain popular support for its political goals and programs—including its militant activities against Israeli occupation (Bloom 27). According to Ismail Abu Shanab, one of the founders of Hamas, “If nobody supports these needy families, maybe nobody would think of martyrdom and the resistance of occupation” (Bloom 28). Ismail Abu Shanab added that Hamas’ objective is, “the liberation of all Palestine from the tyrannical Israeli occupation… which is the main part of its concern,” then continued, “social work is carried out in support of this aim” (Bloom 28).

Hamas considered a branch of itself to be a social movement due to the fact that they have thousands of activists who remained dedicated to help hundreds of thousands of
Palestinians (Bloom 27). The movement has created facilities dedicated to health and education to improve the lives of thousands of Palestinians. For example, Hamas created the Scientific Medical Association in 1997 that operated medical clinics and blood banks (Robinson 127). The movement also built schools in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Through these programs along with many others, Hamas was able to generate more community support than most other militant organizations in the Palestinian territories.

With Hamas’ increased support during the Second Intifada, not only were they able to continue to connect their organization with the local community, but they also used their funding to pay the families of suicide bombers (Laub). However, there is not a unanimous consensus on whether the suicide bombers’ families are paid by the social movement or by the Qassam Brigades (Long 136). Some scholars argue it was Hamas’ social movement that paid the families of the bombers enough money to last them for many months, or even years (Moghadam 72). Therefore, many suicide bombers may have been motivated by the financial benefits to their families along with a desire to seek retribution against Israel.

Through the variety of ways the social movement was able to invest resources into bettering Palestinian lives, they were deeply embedded into the Palestinian society. There may have been many organizations available to the Palestinians, but Hamas, through their social movement, gained wide attention because it provided more resources to Palestinians than most other organizations (Bloom 28).

From the benefits of Hamas’ movement along with the Qassam Brigades, many Palestinians became reliant on Hamas. Some people went to Hamas to become suicide bombers because the organization was deeply embedded into communities, and they provided Palestinians
with a foundation to fight Israel. Hamas was also deeply aware of Palestinian anxieties, they shared Palestinian concerns, and expressed Palestinian aspirations. Furthermore, Hamas, like many other organizations, took advantage of the resentment against Israel while capitalizing on the social, political, and economic hardships as well as the mass inequalities facing Palestinians. For these reasons, Palestinians motivated to attack Israel chose Hamas. In return, the organization used the bombings to pursue their own goals. Overall, through the ways Hamas perpetrated suicide bombings, they were indefinitely a motivating factor for why some Palestinians became suicide bombers (Munson 40).
IV. **Secondary Motivating Factors**

Secondary motivating factors are influences that may have helped push some Palestinians to become suicide attackers, yet they may not have posed as much significance to bombers as primary factors. The secondary factors that are discussed include: political powerlessness, economics, resources, housing, humiliation, and revenge.

**Political Powerlessness**

A part of the growing frustration among Palestinians during the Second Intifada was the lack of political power to peacefully change the occupation, oppression, and hardships they experienced. This sense of political powerlessness is derived from several different sources including the failure to negotiate a peace deal with Israel on a governmental level, and the inability to politically demonstrate on a grassroots level. Both of these sources of political powerlessness led to widespread backlashes against Israel because violence was seen as a means to create the change that could not be made peacefully (Bloom 22).

Before the start of the Second Intifada in 2000, there was a set of negotiations known as the Camp David II talks between Israel and the Palestinian Authority (Shamir 64). These talks were a controversial set of negotiations meant to provide a foundation for Israel and the Palestinian leadership to reach an agreement for a two state solution. At the beginning of the talks, the Palestinian Authority leader Yasser Arafat was reluctant to join because Israel did not halt their settlement building on Palestinian land while the talks continued (Laub). Notwithstanding Arafat’s hesitation, Bill Clinton assured Arafat that the Palestinians would not
be blamed if the talks failed to achieve a resolution. After Arafat joined the negotiations, the Israeli proposal for a peace deal would have split the Palestinian region into four sections, separated by Israeli settlements and roads. This proposal was immediately disregarded by Arafat, and outrage ensued as Israel and the Palestinian leadership could not strike a reasonable deal.

Eventually the Camp David II talks failed and in August 2000, contrary to Clinton’s promise not to “point fingers,” he ultimately blamed the Palestinian leadership and claimed there was no Palestinian partner for peace (Laub). The talks proved to the Palestinian leadership and the Palestinian public that Israel would never accept a compromise, even after years of negotiations that were supported by the U.S (Shamir 64). Israel’s lack of interest in a compromise outraged many Palestinians and eventually tensions rose so high that any provocation was likely to start an uprising.

The Camp David II talks radicalized Palestinian society because it showed a lack of willingness by Israel, a sign of hopelessness for the Palestinians, and a complete lack of power by the Palestinian leadership to be able to end Israeli oppression (Pape 218). In August 2000, after the failing of the Camp David II talks, came the initial start of the suicide bombing campaign, and a month later came the official start of the Second Intifada in September 2000 (Pape 237).

On January 1, 2001, roughly a year after the start of the Intifada and the initiation of suicide bombings, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak left office, and the upcoming Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon began to take his place (“Sharon Induction”). As Sharon started his presidency, Hamas threatened to greet the new prime minister with a series of suicide bombings because Sharon was viewed by Hamas, and by many Palestinians, as an enemy of Palestine.
Sharon’s negative standing with Palestinians was because of his actions while running for prime minister, like the infamous event known as “Sharon’s Walk” where he stated that Israel would control the Al-Aqsa mosque, and because he appeared to be a leader whom Palestinians could not negotiate with. On March 4, 2001, two months after Hamas’ statement to launch a series of suicide bombings, came the first suicide attack since the early months of the Second Intifada. Three people including the bomber died in the explosion and Hamas claimed responsibility (“Suicide Bombing”). After the bombing came an increase in the frequency and intensity of Palestinian suicide bombings, and the tactic was embraced by a larger group of the Palestinian public (Bloom 22). Many people felt extremely disempowered and that extreme tactics were necessary to pressure the Israeli government. For example, according to Mia Bloom, after the assassination of the lieutenant of President Arafat, Arafat’s supporters were convinced that negotiations with Sharon would be not possible, therefore the only possibility to fight Israel was through suicide bombings and other violent methods (22). Hopes of a final peace agreement were eventually abandoned in 2001 after Prime Minister Sharon announced the end to any attempt for a peace negotiation (“Israel Profile”). The Palestinian public was exposed to decades of failed peace negotiations, and the recent failures only reinforced all thoughts of hopelessness and political powerlessness against Israeli policies of occupation and oppression.

By late February 2003, Israeli sources revealed a paper submitted by the Palestinian Authority to Israel, which offered a pledge to stop armed operations against Israel if they gradually withdrew the IDF to its pre-September 28, 2000 locations (Tamimi). A month later on March 28, Saudi Arabia announced a peace plan endorsed by the Arab League that would have Israel withdraw from all occupied Arab land. In return, Israel would receive normal ties with all
Arab states, and a formal end to the state of war between the Arab nations and Israel. However, a few hours after the Arab initiative, Israel started a new offensive and killed scores of Palestinians during Operation Defensive Shield in response to a series of suicide bombings (“Israel, the Occupied” 460). Despite the launch of this new offensive, the suicide attacks persisted.

Midway through 2003, less than 17 percent of Palestinians were optimistic that violence would end soon and negotiations would ever begin (Bloom 26). Since the start of the Second Intifada, Israel’s rejection of any peace negotiations signaled to the Palestinians that their government possessed no political leverage to create any change. As a result, many violent extremists made a number of moral claims that their violent tactics were only used as a last resort after peaceful means and peace agreements failed to achieve a resolution (Bloom 36).

In addition to the failures of the Palestinian government, many Palestinians grew frustrated over the fact that they maintained no political leverage on a grassroots level either. Non-violent protests were often a preferred means for local political empowerment. Regardless, according to Human Rights Watch, starting in 2000 after violence ensued following the start of the Second Intifada, Israeli security forces were responsible for indiscriminate and excessive use of lethal force against unarmed Palestinian demonstrators (“Israel, the Occupied” 440). This violence not only prevented local political action against Israel’s oppressive policies, but they served as more justifications for some Palestinians to pursue violence. Israel’s heavy-handed response to demonstrations only exacerbated tensions and provided more room for extremist organizations to further infiltrate and radicalize Palestinian society (Bloom 23).

As the inability to utilize any sort of political leverage either on a grassroots level or on a collective state level continued, many Palestinians believed that the Israeli government would
not tolerate any political action, even if it was non-violent (“Israel, the Occupied” 440). The result was an increased preference for the most extreme tactics to accomplish political endeavors that many believed could not have been accomplished any other way (Bloom 22). For this reason, political powerlessness can be seen as a motivation to push some Palestinians to become suicide bombers.

**Economics**

Economic issues are significant motivating factors for suicide bombers because poverty destroyed the lives of thousands of Palestinians and forced many to become bombers so their families could receive financial benefits.

When the Second Intifada started, many Palestinians in the self-rule territories became increasingly resentful over their lack of economic development as promised by the Camp David II talks (Munson 46). Some individuals believed the superpowers, which hosted the peace process, did little to help them improve their livelihood. By 2003, the Intifada thrust bleak economic, social, and health conditions onto the Palestinian territories (Yom 9). According to the World Bank, in 2003 every segment of the Palestinian lands, with the exception of the wealthiest 10 percent, experienced economic deterioration (*Four Years 29*). Poverty became so severe that many Palestinians struggled to even buy food. As one Palestinian, a father of eight living in the Gaza Strip, told Sara Roy, a senior research scholar at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies specializing in the Palestinian economy, “How can I tell my children that I do not have enough money to buy them proper food? What am I supposed to do? Where am I supposed to go? This is not peace. This is a war but I cannot fight. With what? For what?” (“Gaza Disengagement”).
What this man’s situation illustrated was a common struggle against poverty, a fight for survival, and a sense hopelessness and desperation.

One explanation for the economic hardship was because the Palestinian economy depended on Israel for absorbing from one third to half of its labor force, and a majority of the Palestinian market (Yom 9). The Palestinian economy was vulnerable and heavily dependent on Israel because 75 percent of Palestinian imports transited through or originated in Israel, while the Israeli market accounts for 90 percent of Palestinian exports (Qabaja 4) From 2000 to 2004, the Palestinian economy was destroyed from the numerous closures between the Palestinians and their place of employment within Israel (Yom 9). Because many of the Palestinians could not work from the closures, they fell deeply into an economic crises. Consequently, the Palestinian unemployment statistics are set in a unique pattern: The rate varies considerably within a given year because of the Israeli closures, not as a result of cyclical or seasonal fluctuations in business conditions. For instance, in 2000, the lowest unemployment rate was 9 percent when there were no closures, and with a high of 28 percent when closures began. The same issue can be seen in 2001 when the unemployment low was 26.9 percent with reduced closures, then at a high of 35.5 percent with strict closures.

The World Bank estimated that in 2004 the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the Palestinian territories was 20 percent lower than in 1999, and the GDP per capita was lowered by 37 percent (Bloom 4). The average Palestinian income also decreased by 40 percent and over two-thirds of the population became impoverished in a region already plagued with poverty and unemployment (Qabaja 5). For some Palestinians, there was a necessity to find unconventional means to financially support their families.
If a Palestinian became a suicide bomber, they would be able to provide their family with significant financial returns, and the lives of the bomber’s family could improve dramatically (Payne 72). The family of the attacker usually received a cash payment of between $1,000 to several thousand dollars from Hamas, as well as other local Islamist organizations, and sometimes from third parties. In the city of Tulkarm located in the West Bank, roughly 46 families each received around $25,000 for each suicide bomber, and an extra $10,000 for each Palestinian shot by Israeli troops from Saddam Hussein (Payne 89). One journalist who visited the family of Ismail al-Masawabi, who killed himself and two Israeli sergeants with a suicide device on June 22, 2001, described the material improvement of the family in an article in the *New York Times Magazine*. The Al-Masawabis, who used to live in a rundown refugee camp prior to the bombing, now live in an apartment that is “spacious by Gaza standards… Everything in it looked new—the appliances, rugs and stuffed furniture, the gaudy wall clocks, even the bracelet and rings Ismail’s mother was wearing” (Payne 72). What the Al-Masawabi family’s story represented was the harsh reality that although many Palestinians suffered economically, suicide bombings provided an unconventional means to secure a more comfortable future for one’s family.

**Resources**

With a lack of employment opportunities and a depletion of finances during the Intifada, many Palestinians were completely reliant on scavenging for basic resources to survive. However, the scarcity of resources marked the final obstacle before Palestinians could no longer survive (*5 Broken Cameras*). Many of these individuals also blamed Israel for the destruction of their resources. For these reasons, resources, or the lack thereof, can motivate some Palestinians
to become suicide bombers. It is important to note that there is not a lot of research correlating the scarcity of vital resources with Palestinian motivations to become suicide bombers. On the other hand, because Israel restricted resources that many Palestinians were reliant on to survive, there can be an argument made that the lack of resources can motivate some Palestinians to become suicide bombers (United Nations, “United” i).

Particular resources that were restricted by Israel, and vital to the survival of many Palestinians, were land and agriculture. Both of these resources symbolized Palestinian resilience and perseverance in the face of ongoing land loss due to prolonged occupation and the expansion of Israeli settlements. The practical and symbolic importance of the agricultural sector is heightened even further by the fact that the key factors of agricultural production, land and water, are relatively scarce in the Palestinian territory and the occupation has made the situation worse (United Nations, “United” i).

The documentary 5 Broken Cameras provided an exceptional example of the scarcity of resources in the Palestinian territory as it illustrated dozens of Palestinian families who were forced to find sufficient food from the land surrounding their village. Although land was vital to these communities, IDF soldiers reportedly destroyed many important crops and imposed multiple restrictive policies to ensure that Palestinians can neither survive off the land nor travel to other locations for food (“Israel, the Occupied” 463). For instance, from September to October 2001, Israeli forces uprooted 385,000 fruit and olive trees and imposed multiple restrictions throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip. These months alone serve as a small sample of the large scale destruction of Palestinian agriculture by the IDF. Unfortunately, finding concrete information regarding the overall destruction of agriculture is difficult to find. What we can still
reasonably say is that surviving of the land became almost impossible because many Palestinians were forced off of their land for new Israeli settlements (Yom 9). Along with the factors that make subsistence farming extremely difficult, growing enough food to survive in the available land is a challenging obstacle as well. The Palestinians may live in the same natural environment as the Israelis and the Jordanians, but the yield per acre in the Palestinian territory is half that in Jordan and only 43 percent of the yield in Israel (United Nations, “United” i). According to the United Nations during the Conference on Trade and Development, the reason for the lack of agricultural development in the Palestinian regions is because of the Israeli occupation (“United” i). In this regard, Israeli restrictions on the importation of fertilizers have destroyed much of the Palestinian agriculture along with what some Palestinians claim to be other Israeli methods to destroy agriculture like field burnings (“The Besieged” 4). The result of the fertilizer alone has lowered Palestinian agricultural activity by between 20 to 33 percent since the enforcement of restrictions (United Nations, “United” 4). Agricultural deterioration grew so severe that the bottom 90 percent of the population only consumed 60 percent of the total share of food during the Intifada, which can be compared to the 76 percent of the share of food the same group consumed back in 1990s. With the decrease in food, more than 600,000 Palestinians were living in subsistence poverty.

As poverty increased with depleted resources, Israeli water security led to shortages across the Palestinian territories. The government of Israel controlled water allocation and exercised veto power over Palestinian drilling, rehabilitation, and investment in water infrastructure (United Nations, “United” i). Even worse, the Palestinian Authority and Palestinian farmers were denied the right to construct wells to meet the growing demand for
water, even when that water originated almost entirely in the West Bank (United Nations, “United” ii). What this meant for Palestinians was that the Israeli government had virtually full control over the use of water. On a per capita basis, water consumption in Israel was more than five times that of Palestinians in the West Bank (United Nations, “United” 26).

The restrictions on water in Palestinian territories followed by the depletion of other vital resources forced many Palestinian communities to struggle to survive. Some villagers could not feed themselves or their families, many people were exposed to mass starvation, and the shortages were primarily caused by Israeli occupation. Suicide bombings could then be seen as a way out, both as a final act of retribution and also as a way for the bomber’s family to receive funding to survive. As we find more information regarding Palestinian resources, we may eventually be able to better understand the correlation between the scarcity of resources and Palestinian suicide bombers (United Nations, “United” i).

**Housing**

From 2000 to 2004, thousands of Palestinians lost their homes because of Israeli demolitions. Housing could be a factor to motivate some bombers because the destruction of one’s home led to the destruction of one’s livelihood. Many families could not afford to relocate and fell deeper into complete poverty (*5 Broken Cameras*).

The destruction of housing by Israel was meant to make more land available for Israeli settlements, and as a response from Israel to specific Palestinian towns where offenses occurred (Farrell 871). Additionally, in 90 percent of cases, demolitions were imposed on a homeowner who was not an offender (Farrell 903). This tactic of collective punishment not only received
wide international criticism for its human rights abuses, but it generated severe opposition from Palestinians as well.

Between September 2000 to October 2001, the U.N special Rapporteur on Human Rights in the Palestinian territories reported that the IDF destroyed over three hundred Palestinian homes throughout the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (“Israel, the Occupied” 443). Israeli authorities also confiscated Palestinian lands to expand Israeli settlements and for the construction of bypass roads, which was a violation of international humanitarian law (“Israel, the Occupied” 463).

Housing demolition in 2002 resulted in the destruction of around 1,600 homes, 14,000 damaged, and $650 million worth of damage was done to public infrastructure (Yom 9). Sixteen thousand people, or more than ten percent of the population of Rafah, lost their homes and many of these people were already dispossessed for the second or third time (“Razing Rafah”). One Palestinian, who had two of his homes destroyed in 2001 and 2004, explained how IDF tactics force Palestinians near the border to leave their homes, "If [the Israelis] want to make you leave the home, they shoot the walls, they shoot the windows," he continued, "Then they can come and say 'It is empty,' and bulldoze the house" (“Razing Rafah”). While many other Palestinians were continually, and forcibly removed, their entire livelihoods disappeared because shelter became a priority, jobs became farther, resources become scarcer, and communities deteriorated.

As the destruction of housing continued until 2004, the World Bank estimated that the total accumulated cost of all of the destruction was $2.2 billion (Qabaja 5). In total, 16,000 Palestinians became homeless during the four years of conflict (“Israel: Despite Gaza”). After the loss of thousands of homes, some individuals saw suicide bombings as a strategic success
because for the first time, Israel was forced to pay for the extended occupation of the territories rather than simply enjoy its fruits (Schweitzer). After Israel’s disengagement plan to halt the destruction of Palestinian houses and settlement building, many Palestinians could have taken comfort in knowing that they would not be displaced, at least temporarily.

**Humiliation**

According to the Historian Dr. Faisal Devji, shame and humiliation are important psychological determinants for suicide bombers (36). For Palestinians, humiliation exists both as a collective as well as an individual fact. Humiliation is so ingrained into the lives of many Palestinians that it became as much of a social category as it was psychological.

During the Second Intifada, feelings of humiliation were sparked from the sheer lack of human rights for the Palestinians (Tamimi). The disrespect and denial of basic rights led some Palestinians to feel the need to regain their power, dignity, and honor in any way they can, notably through violence. However, some scholars like Mia Bloom question the significance of humiliation in motivating suicide bombers (6). Bloom argues that, “Humiliation and persecution are a ‘constant’ under the occupation and cannot account for why there has been an upsurge in [suicide bombings] or why public opinion shifts in favor of suicide attacks at different times” (36). Bloom then discusses the significance of regaining honor through violence, specifically martyrdom in Palestinian society, yet she disregards the notion that violence for the sake of regaining honor is to compensate for the humiliation many Palestinians encountered. Although I agree that humiliation is not the *single* factor to motivate individuals to become suicide bombers, and cannot account for the influx in bombings, to say that humiliation played *no role* in
motivating bombers is to miss the conditions that have caused extreme grievances during the height of the bombings.

One specific event out of many that perpetuated humiliation for Palestinians as a collective group was a situation that would be later known as “Sharon’s Walk”. This event represents a particular time many Palestinians were directly humiliated thus causing a large backlash that resulted in the increase in attacks along with the official start of the Second Intifada. On September 28, 2000, Sharon the (then) opposition leader, heavily guarded by 1,000 Israeli security forces, “visited” the al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem. This mosque is one of the most important sites for Muslims in the world, and Sharon stopped to declare that, “the holy Muslim site of al-Aqsa will remain under Jewish sovereignty” (Pressman 118). It was a move to inevitably provoke an angry reaction from the Muslim population who were already extremely tense from the failed Camp David II talks (Pressman 118). The result was a fight between the Palestinians defending al-Aqsa mosque and security forces guarding Sharon. By the end of the fight, seven Palestinians were killed, which prompted the start of the Second Intifada (Pressman 118).

On the first day of the uprisings, 30 Palestinians died, hundreds were wounded, and there were two Israeli casualties (Bloom 23). Only two days after Sharon’s Walk, the Intifada spread across Palestine and into Israel where the Israeli army faced off against unarmed civilians, and soon after came the beginning of a series of suicide bombings (“Israel, the Occupied” 440).

On November 2001, less than two months after Sharon’s Walk, over seven hundred Palestinians and over two hundred Israelis were killed in the violence. In response to the riots came the IDF’s excessive force to respond to all Palestinian demonstrations (Pressman 131).
After extreme public anger over the blatant disrespect from Sharon’s Walk and the extreme human rights abuses to follow, much of the Palestinian public had no choice but to remain helpless as Israel imposed their will onto Palestinian crowds.

Sharon’s Walk became a one of the most significant moments during the Intifada because it reinforced all the feelings of powerlessness and humiliation strong enough to convince some individuals to become suicide bombers (Yom 9). Because of the significance of this event, Palestinian President Yasser Arafat named the military wing of the Fatah political party the “Al ‘Aqsa Martyrs Brigade” (Bloom 33). Although Bloom argues that humiliation does not play a role because it is a “constant” in Palestinian society, Sharon’s Walk was a new event that can be seen as a trigger which set in motion a series of backlashes that were the result of years of grievances against Israel.

With Sharon’s walk, other specific instances to cause significant humiliation were the military operations because of the extensive abuses to follow. On March 2002, Human Rights Watch reported that Israeli soldiers repeatedly used excessive force both legally and illegally (“Israel, the Occupied” 440). There have been multiple instances of Israeli soldiers using Palestinians as human shields, forced civilians to help conduct military operations, and illegal killings of Palestinian civilians all while impeding the entrance of outside observers (“Israel, the Occupied” 460). One example of human shielding was the case of four brothers, along with a father and his fourteen-year-old son, and two other men who were used to shield IDF soldiers from attacks by Palestinian militants. It is not hard to imagine how being forced to act as a human shield while viewing one’s friend or family as human shields would spark extreme feelings of humiliation. In April 2002, a month into Operation Defensive Shield, in the city of
Jenin located in the West Bank, Human Rights Watch documented twenty-two civilian killings during the IDF operations. One Palestinian illegally killed was fifty seven year old Kamal Zghair. This man was wheelchair-bound and was shot and run over by IDF tanks on April 10 as he was moving in his wheelchair equipped with a white flag down a major road in Jenin. Another example of an unarmed civilian death was thirty seven year old Jamal Fayid, a quadriplegic, who was crushed to death in the rubble of his home on April 7 after IDF soldiers refused to allow his family to remove him from their home before a bulldozer demolished their home. Under international law the Israeli authorities were required to criminally investigate these and other killings to ascertain individual responsibility. The IDF remained silent on this incident even after repeated requests by Human Rights Watch for information as to whether these killings were investigated (“Israel, the Occupied” 461). By and large, what Operation Defensive Shield indicated was the brutal tendencies of the IDF during the Second Intifada. Although many Palestinians have experienced constant humiliation throughout their lives, there has not been any recent military operations of this size causing as much widespread punishment to the Palestinians. Out of all the hardships experienced by Palestinians up to the Second Intifada, the grievances from this Operation ranked above all others.

Because of Israel’s cruel and inhumane treatment of Palestinians, different Palestinian militant groups used Israel’s actions to justify the use of suicide bombings. As Nabil Sha'ath, the PA minister of planning and international cooperation, said following an alleged Israeli booby trap that killed five Palestinians in Khan Yunis, Gaza Strip, “Everyone should realize that atrocities lead to atrocities," he continued, "This is the inevitable outcome of the accumulation of
atrocities committed by the Israeli army against our civilians, the humiliation, the torment, the unmitigated persecution” (“Erased”).

There is no scarcity of references of instances that provoke feelings of humiliation strong enough to motivate individuals to become suicide bombers. Excessive violence as a disproportionate response like Sharon’s Walk and Operation Defensive Shield along with the civilian abuse, murders, heavy handed and brutal occupation policies, and a multitude of other factors only exacerbated the conflict. It also hardened the convictions of some Palestinians to become suicide bombers. Although there has only been a few examples mentioned, the humiliation experienced transcended all aspects of Palestinian life with scarce possibilities for individuals to regain their rights and dignity. Even though humiliation may not be the only factor to motivate individuals to become suicide bombers, it could motivate some attackers. For this reason, many Palestinians preferred suicide bombings as a way to regain their dignity and empower themselves to stand up against Israeli abuse and occupation. As one individual who volunteered for martyrdom and was undergoing training said during his interview with Al Majallah, a London-based and Saudi-owned weekly newspaper, “Martyrdom is a duty and a right. There is no humiliation like that of living under the occupation” (Moghadam 73).

With the degradation experienced by many Palestinians, some decided to pursue suicide bombings as a way to regain their honor (Bloom 29). Honor through violence is felt not only for the individual who committed the act, and their family, but for the community as well. Dr. Abdel Aziz Rantisi, who was the co-founder of Hamas, once said that, “For Hamas, and the Palestinian society in general, becoming a martyr is among the highest, if not the highest, honor” (Bloom 30). When an individual becomes a suicide bomber, everyone experiences pride because Israel is
forced to pay for the oppression and atrocities it caused the Palestinian people. Nicole Argo argues that honor and violence are so closely connected in Palestinian society that martyrdom became a public good as well as the primary source of honor. Martyrdom is the final and irrefutable statement of group worth and dignity against the humiliating and oppressive Israeli regime.

**Revenge**

Revenge is a strong drive for both the individual committing the suicide bombing and the militant organizations who launched the suicide bombings. For this reason, the examples here describe how revenge affected the individual first, then how organizations used these soon to be suicide bombers to conduct their own form of revenge.

Numerous Palestinians wanted revenge against Israel because of their interaction with the IDF. More specifically, some Palestinians experienced extreme grievances from IDF detentions, house searches, and the brutal use of force during the occupation of Palestinian territory.

In 2002, interactions between the IDF and Palestinians worsened after Israel passed a law allowing the IDF to legitimately detain individuals for an undefined amount of time on the basis of assumption rather than proven guilty (“Israel, the Occupied” 460). The law, known by many as the Illegal Combatants Law, was passed by the Knesset—Israel’s legislative assembly—and destroyed all rights pertaining to a fair trial and can be used without any evidence. After its enactment in 2002, Israel used this law to detain Palestinians for renewable periods of time (“Gaza: ‘Unlawful Combatants Law’”). From February to late March 2002, during two major military incursions into the occupied Palestinian territory, 10,000 Palestinians were arrested and although many were released, 4,000 remained in custody for an undefined period of time (United
Nations, “General” 5). With the detentions came the invasive house searches that affected from 30 to 50 percent of Palestinian homes in various areas of the occupied Palestinian territory, and between 12 and 36 percent of households reported the arrest of at least one family member (United Nations, “General” 4). Detentions and the brutal treatment that can came with it resulted in a multitude of Palestinians to erupt in anger with an escapable desire to seek revenge. Emud Burnet, the Palestinian producer of 5 Broken Cameras, commented that after the detentions, beatings, and illegal killings in the Palestinian territory, people’s anger became so strong that rebellion erupted to the point that they were ready to die for their cause.

Revenge against the IDF was so relevant to Palestinian suicide bombers that many of the bombers had a prior history of violent encounters with the IDF prior to their attacks (Yom 9). These encounters resulted in either a family member being killed or the future suicide bomber being injured or arrested. For example, there were roughly 44 attacks, or roughly half of the suicide bombings, where the operators had been exposed in the past to IDF force. Also, 11 of the 44 suicide attackers had a relative killed as well. These grievances combined with personal injuries, or injuries to one’s family, make many of these Palestinians relatively easy targets for Hamas recruiters. Nasra Hassan, one of the leaders of the military arm of Hamas known as the Al-Qassam Brigades, said, “It is easy for us to sweep the streets for boys who want to do a martyrdom operation. Fending off the crowds who demand revenge and retaliation and insisting on a human bomb operation—that becomes our biggest problem” (Moghadam 71). For many Palestinians, martyrdom was seen as a complete form of revenge as people sacrificed their life while taking their enemy’s life in a final act of retaliation. As Emad Burnet said, “Clinging to non-violent actions isn’t easy when death is all around” (5 Broken Cameras). For many
Palestinians who experienced detentions, killings, beatings and other hardships from Israel, non-violent means were discarded for a stronger and final act of retaliation. On many occasions the desire to seek revenge was called for during the funeral processions of the Palestinians killed by the Israeli forces (Moghadam 73). It is also common for the body of the individual who was killed by IDF forces to be carried throughout the streets, along with posters of that individual plastered over older posters of other slain Palestinians while people called for revenge against Israel (5 Broken Cameras). In addition, some suicide bombers have admitted that revenge was their primary motive to become a suicide bomber (Moghadam 73). Nafez al-Nether, who detonated himself, killing several Israeli soldiers on July 9, 2001, said he wanted to avenge the blood of Palestinians killed by Israel. One of those Palestinians was Nafez’s brother Fayez, who was killed during the First Intifada in clashes that took place in the Jabalya refugee camp located in the northern region of the Gaza Strip.

With the increased desire for revenge by Palestinian society came the implementation of suicide bombings by organizations who also wanted to conduct their own form of revenge (Bloom 24). What makes an organization's desire generally different is that extremist groups in the Palestinian territory launch these bombings primarily in retaliation to targeted assassinations by leaders of the organizations. For example, on January 14, 2002, Israeli forces killed a local West Bank leader of the al-Aqsa Brigades (“Suicide Bombing”). In retaliation, the al-Aqsa Brigades carried out their first suicide bombing two weeks later. This bombing was also the first to be carried out by a female perpetrator. The blast killed one civilian and injured one hundred. Two years later on March 22, 2004, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, who was the founder of Hamas, was assassinated by Israeli helicopter gun ships (Bloom 31). After Yassin’s death came a series of
suicide bombings in retaliation. In response to the bombings, Israel intensified restrictions and curfews on major population centers in the Palestinian territories, increased military operations, and implemented mass arrests. This crackdown hurt the lives of entire cities of Palestinians and motivated many individuals to become bombers, which then sparked an even greater crackdown by IDF forces in retaliation. As this cycle continued, the Israelis and Palestinians appeared to be deadlocked in a battle of assassinations, suicide bombings, assassinations, suicide bombings, in a never ending battle (Bloom 37). This back and forth cycle further radicalized Palestinian society and encouraged more people to become martyrs to seek retribution

Because of the relevance between revenge and suicide attacks, its role exists as an individual and collective fact. Many Palestinians seek revenge for many different reasons, but revenge against the IDF in retaliation for violent interactions is a consistent theme. Other reasons for revenge can vary from failed negotiations, repressed Palestinian political voices, bombed Palestinian cities, destroyed Palestinian towns, increased occupation, ended employment opportunities, and the killing Palestinian youth. Regardless of the motives, martyrdom became the sweetest form of revenge, and violent extremist groups can provide the means for suicide bombings while they seek their own revenge.
V. **Conclusion and Recommendations for Further Research**

As we have seen, there are a variety of reasons for why some Palestinians pursue suicide attacks. At the core their motivations, however, are the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and Hamas’ role in perpetuating the attacks. Occupation itself acts as the foundation by which most other factors stemmed from. What we can see from the Second Intifada is a general trend that shows the increase in occupation closely related to the increase in suicide bombings. Along with occupation, Hamas was a primary motivation for many Palestinian bombers because the organization *promoted* attacks, *supplied* the means to pursue the bombings, and *provided* financial benefits to the families of the bombers. Although there are many other organizations in the Palestinian territories that advocate for suicide bombings and supply the means to do so, they lack the capacity to launch anywhere close to the quantity of attacks as Hamas; therefore, they do not play nearly as significant of a role as Hamas in pushing individuals to pursue a suicide bombing.

Secondary factors that may have motivated some Palestinians to pursue suicide attacks include: political powerlessness, economics, resources, housing, humiliation, and revenge.

Because of the Palestinian government’s inability to adequately negotiate with the Israeli government, many Palestinians felt hopeless for any political resolution to the occupation. On a grassroots level, Palestinian efforts to politically empower themselves through protests were swiftly hampered by Israel’s crackdown on all forms of demonstrations. Without the ability to counter Israel’s actions using non-violent methods, suicide attacks were used to force Israel’s compliance and to deter them from continuing their oppressive and occupational policies.
Through continued conflict came significant deterioration of Palestinian economics. People could neither financially support themselves nor their families. One reason for the extreme decline in the Palestinian territories’ GDP and average income was because of Israeli restrictions. As thousands of Palestinians fell deeper into poverty, many were forced to find unconventional means to survive. One solution for many Palestinians was to scavenge for resources. However, Israeli destruction of land and water wells complemented with restrictions on agricultural products and water tarnished many Palestinians’ final hopes of survival. With no options left, some individuals may have seen suicide bombings as the only solution to ensure the survival of their families while seeking retribution against Israel.

The decline in economics and resources were not the only factors to cause extreme desperation and hopelessness among Palestinians. The demolition of housing solidified the destruction of one’s livelihood and forcibly displaced thousands of people, sometimes for the second or third time. Two reasons for the demolition were to create space for Israeli settlements and to punish communities where offenses occurred. Not only were these tactics of group punishment internationally illegal, but 90 percent of the cases of home demolition were against homeowners who did not commit an offense. As a result, the destruction of housing became another factor to radicalize Palestinian society and cause extreme grievances that may have helped push some individuals to commit an attack.

With Palestinian grievances, humiliation may have helped push some Palestinians to commit and attack. Humiliation existed on both an individual and collective level. Although humiliation was consistent through most Palestinian lives, large political events and military operations along with the abuses to follow brought an already radicalized Palestinian society to a
boiling point. Violence then became the preferred means to regain honor for their self, their families, and their communities.

As extreme grievances transcended Palestinian society, suicide attacks were pursued as a form of revenge. Some bombers may have sought revenge because of past experiences with the IDF and the abuse of either the bombers themselves, their families, the Palestinian nation, or a combination of all three. Revenge was also conducted at the organizational level in retaliation to targeted assassinations.

Overall, suicide bombers create devastation and the message conveys desperation and powerlessness as they sacrifice their life for one final act of retribution against a state that they view as having severely wronged either them or their loved ones. During the Second Intifada, the emergence of suicidal operations disturbed observers due to their devastating effectiveness and the readiness of the attacker to face imminent death, and for this reason they were the weapon of choice of many who felt extremely powerless.

The large use of suicide attacks have led some bombers to be viewed as heroes because they sacrificed their personal good for the general welfare of Palestinians. Some of the attackers, in essence, were seen as selfless, honorable, powerful, and heroic, an image that those who feel powerless typically wish to gain. In return for assisting in the attacks, Hamas was also seen as powerful with the proven ability to challenge Israel and cause it severe damage.

Unfortunately we cannot say with certainty every factor that motivated every Palestinian suicide bomber, and to what degree. What we can do is examine larger trends that have caused extreme grievances among Palestinians. We can also understand our roles in these issues. Are we intensifying the factors that may motivate bombers, or are we ensuring that we do not perpetuate
the grievances and hardships that harden the convictions of some Palestinians for violence? As we expand our understanding of suicide bombers, we can address the root causes for Palestinian suicide attacks, and work together to develop a policy to counteract these motives. Through these endeavors, we must remember that the Second Intifada demonstrated the fact that violence breeds violence; therefore, we must place human rights and the respect for life at the forefront of our goals.
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