

Devotion and Religious Terrorism

THE TARGETS OF modern suicide terrorist campaigns have been democratic states which have stationed heavy combat troops on the territory that the terrorists viewed as their national homeland. What accounts for this? Why do some foreign occupations result in suicide terrorism, while others do not? Why, for instance, did Hezbollah in the 1980s and the Tamil Tigers in the 1990s rely on suicide terrorism to achieve self-determination for their local communities, whereas the ETA, which sought independence for Spain's Basques, did not?

Existing accounts of suicide terrorism focus on personal alienation, mass unemployment, social humiliation, or religious totalitarianism. Each of these fits aspects of some cases, but all miss the central feature of modern suicide terrorist campaigns.

My hypothesis is that the taproot of suicide terrorism is nationalism — the belief among members of a community that they share a distinct set of ethnic, linguistic, and historical characteristics and are entitled to govern their national homeland without interference from foreigners.¹ Since the French Revolution, nationalism has been a powerful force in international politics. It has created nation-states, undermined multinational empires, and contributed to some of the bloodiest struggles in history. Nationalism is also the main reason why local communities resist foreign occupation. Some occupations inflame nationalist sentiments more than

others, the hottest situations arise when the predominate religion in the occupier's society is different from the predominate religion in the occupied society. Under the conditions of a foreign occupation, religious *difference*—more than Islam or any other particular religion—hardens the boundaries between national communities and so makes it easier for terrorist leaders to portend the conflict in zero-sum terms, demonize the opponent, and gain legitimacy for martyrdom from the local community. That is, religious difference helps to create conditions that encourage resistance movements to use suicide terrorism. Although it is not the bedrock cause of national resistance and may not be a necessary or sufficient condition for suicide terrorism, religious difference significantly increases the risk that a nationalistic rebellion against foreign occupation by a democratic state will escalate to the use of suicide terrorism.

The first section of this book explained why suicide terrorism makes strategic sense for terrorist leaders. This chapter and the next two explain the social logic of suicide terrorism—that is, the conditions under which it gains mass support and which, in turn, determine when suicide terrorist campaigns can occur. Suicide terrorist campaigns are more likely when (1) a national community is occupied by a foreign power; (2) the foreign power is of a different religion; (3) the foreign power is a democracy. Of nine occupations that have generated suicide terrorist campaigns, eight met all three conditions, and the last, of the Kurds in Turkey, met two of the three.² Further, with respect to the fourteen nationalistic rebellions that have taken place since 1980 and that were directed against a democracy with a different religion, these three conditions account for the presence or absence of suicide terrorism in all fourteen, once concessions to ordinary rebellion alone are taken into account. Suicide terrorism occurred in seven, while the rebels were able to gain concessions without resorting to suicide terrorism in the other seven. By contrast, only one of twenty-two nationalistic rebellions that did not meet all three criteria produced a suicide terrorist campaign—again, the Kurds in Turkey. The next two chapters add robustness to the theory by tracing the causal effects of the three key variables through numerous important cases, including al-Qaeda.

WHAT IS TO BE EXPLAINED?

Suicide terrorism is an extreme strategy for national liberation. Although isolated incidents do occur, the overwhelming majority of suicide terrorist

attacks take place as part of organized, coherent campaigns in which individuals act after individual, or team after team, voluntarily kill themselves as a means to kill the maximum number of people in the target society in order to compel that state to end a foreign occupation of their homeland.

Protracted campaigns of suicide terrorism require significant community support, for three reasons. The first does not necessarily require wide popular support, but the other two do.

First, community support enables a suicide terrorist group to replenish its membership. Other kinds of terrorists can try to husband their human resources by hiding from society, but suicide terrorist organizations cannot operate without losses. Most suicide attackers are walk-in volunteers, and thus the terrorist organization must have a relatively high profile so that it is easy to find, especially if the flow of volunteers is to be maintained over time or expanded substantially, as has happened in several suicide terrorist campaigns.³ Hence, suicide terrorist organizations have strong incentives to become deeply embedded in social institutions such as schools, universities, charities, and religious congregations. However, since the number of suicide attackers is never large—the most active suicide terrorist group, the Tamil Tigers, used 143 suicide attackers between 1987 and 2001—sufficient volunteers might be obtainable from a relatively narrow subpopulation of the national community. So replenishment in itself requires deep, but not necessarily wide, popular support.

Second, community support is essential to enable a suicide terrorist group to avoid detection, surveillance, and elimination by the security forces of the target society. Given that recruitment needs oblige them to keep a relatively high profile, suicide terrorist groups cannot prevent many members of the local community from gaining basic information that would be useful to the enemy (for instance, the identity of recruits, common locations for recruitment, and even locations of frequently used safe houses, means of communication, and other logistics).⁴ As a result, without broad sympathy among the local population, suicide terrorist groups would be especially vulnerable to penetration, defection, and informants. They must therefore be popular enough that society as a whole would be willing to silence potential informants. Everyone may know who the terrorists are. No one must tell.

Third, and most important, community support is necessary for martyrdom. If at all possible, terrorist groups need their suicide attackers to be accepted as martyrs by the wider community. This is important because individuals are more likely to volunteer if they can expect to be accorded

high status after their deaths than if their sacrifices will go unnoticed. In addition, if the community refuses to accept that the suicide attackers qualify as martyrs, their acts risk condemnation as socially unacceptable. Such condemnation could undermine support for the terrorist campaign.

Martyrdom—death for the sake of one's community—is a social construct. An individual may wish to become a martyr and may voluntarily sacrifice his or her life to achieve this aim. However, it is the community that designates the qualifications for martyrdom and judges whether the self-sacrifice of specific individuals meets the requirements for this special status. Communities commonly reserve a prominent place for the names of their martyrs. Streets and schools are named in their honor. Monuments list their names. By adding new names is up to the community. An individual can die. Only a community can make a martyr.

By using elaborate ceremonies and other means to identify the death of a suicide attacker with the good of the community—such as high-profile funerals, “martyr videos,” and murals and graffiti—suicide terrorist organizations can promote the idea that their members should be accorded martyr status. Such propaganda may influence social responses to suicide terrorism. Still, it is the community as a whole, not the terrorists, that decides to whom it will accord the status of martyr.⁵

Evidence from prominent cases suggests that mass support for suicide terrorist campaigns usually goes far beyond a tiny fringe. Hard data are limited, since active rebellions usually make it impossible to conduct accurate polls. However, we do have reliable data directly on the issue in one case, that of the Palestinians. Since the mid-1990s, surveys of Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza have shown levels of popular support for suicide terrorist attacks against Israel rising from roughly a third of respondents in 1994 to 1999 to more than two thirds since the start of the second intifada in 2001.⁶ We also have indirect evidence of mass support in three other cases. A poll of Saudis taken after September 11, 2001, found that over 95 percent of respondents agreed with Osama bin Laden's objection to American forces in the region, although the respondents were not asked specifically about suicide terrorism.⁷ In Sri Lanka, after more than a decade of suicide attacks by the Tamil Tigers, a survey of Tamils in 2002 found that 77 percent supported the use of force to achieve an independent homeland.⁸ In Iraq, American estimates of the number of “active supporters” of the Sunni insurgency grew from 5,000 in spring 2004 to 20,000 by fall 2004, while in January 2005 the Iraqi government estimated the number as 100,000.⁹ The main exception is the PKK's suicide terrorism in

Turkey, which lacked wide support in the occupied community and was also the least aggressive suicide campaign, killing twenty-two people in fourteen attacks.¹⁰

The close conjunction between community support and protracted campaigns of suicide terrorism compels us to ask how such violent behavior can become acceptable and supported by a society at large. From the perspective of the terrorist organization, the central problem in suicide terrorism is to persuade the local community to re-define acts of suicide and murder as acts of martyrdom on behalf of the community. There are powerful prohibitions against suicide in virtually every society. (Although Muslims have committed more suicide attacks than non-Muslims, Muslim societies' norms against suicide are among the strongest in the world, as Chapter 9 shows in detail.) Hence, terrorist organizations must typically overcome deep religious and social norms in order to persuade their communities to support suicide campaigns. Absent a foreign military presence that threatens core elements in a community's national identity, such a transubstantiation of communal norms is likely to be rare.

A NATIONALIST THEORY OF SUICIDE TERRORISM

A theory that predicts when suicide terrorism will occur and when it will not must focus on the occupied community's support for individual self-sacrifice: that support, in turn, is affected by the relationship between the identity of the foreign occupier and nationalist sentiments in the occupied community.

Defining “Occupation”

For the purpose of understanding suicide terrorism, it is imperative to view occupation from the perspective of the resistance movement (e.g., terrorists, revolutionaries), because it is the behavior of the local actors, not the foreign power, that determines whether suicide terrorism occurs. Whether the foreign power regards itself as a “stabilizing” ally rather than an “occupying” power is not relevant.

“Occupation” means the exertion of political control over territory by an outside group.¹¹ The critical requirement is that the occupying power's political control must depend on employing coercive assets—whether troops, police, or other security forces—that are controlled from outside the occupied territory. The number of troops actually stationed in the oc-

occupied territory may or may not be large, so long as enough are available, if necessary, to suppress any effort at independence. The best test is the political decisiveness of foreign-controlled coercive power: if the local government requires the power of foreign "stabilizing" troops or police in order to maintain order—or if most of the local community believes that this is the case—then, from the perspective of the resistance, these foreign troops are occupying forces that are preventing a change of government that would otherwise occur. The contention that the foreign troops are occupying forces is made stronger if the local government is engaged in actions that benefit the foreign power at the expense of the local populace.¹²

By this standard, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Qatar all qualify today, because (1) U.S. combat troops have been present on their soil or in nations immediately adjacent to them for over a decade; and (2) owing to the United States' strong economic interest in maintaining the flow of oil from the Persian Gulf, the troops might well be used to prop up these pro-Western regimes if necessary. The other Persian Gulf regimes—Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman—also qualify, since U.S. troops are available in neighboring countries. In short, the presence of heavy American military power—tens of thousands of frontline combat troops since 1990) on the Arabian Peninsula constitutes a foreign occupation, certainly in the eyes of opponents of the local regimes. This is so even if the United States disputes the characterization.

The Value of the Homeland

Although foreign occupation of any territory creates a motivation for resistance, the prospect of the homeland being occupied and ruled by foreigners usually constitutes an especially severe provocation to nationalist sentiments. Once a community no longer governs its homeland, it loses the ability to protect the political, economic, and social interests of its members. Worse, the occupiers may threaten the local community's ability to perpetuate the special characteristics that purportedly form the basis of its distinct national identity.¹³ Even when the constituent elements of a community's identity are contested—as is often true apart from any external threat—the fact of an occupation means that the future trajectory of the "nation" is no longer determined by the members of the community, who now must compete with the powerful foreigners who are in political control of the territory most associated with the community's identity. In such a situation, people who love their nation can come to feel intense loathing toward the nation occupying their homeland and may develop a

heroic sense of duty to inflict terrible punishment on the enemy society in order to compel it to leave. Accordingly, people and communities often go to extreme lengths to regain self-determination, that is, the ability to maintain and reproduce a community's national heritage without interference from others.

Even in today's globalizing world, the territory that national groups perceive as the birthplace of their community usually evokes special commitment. Although boundaries may be ambiguous and history may be contested, the homeland is imbued with memories, meanings, and emotional attachments. The homeland is also a space on which to establish political power. As Gauthier H. Herb says, "Over time, as a group occupies and narrows a particular territory, a transformation occurs. Instead of the group defining the territory, the territory comes to define the group."¹⁴

Even when many or most members of the local community were not especially nationalist before, foreign occupation commonly unifies them by creating a sense of shared threat. The foreign forces' efforts to police the occupied territory or to suppress even mild resistance often kill or injure the innocent as well as the guilty, because the occupiers' intelligence about the loyalties and behavior of the local population is often poor, and as a result the occupiers may resort to indiscriminate use of heavy firepower. This, in turn, can lead members of the occupied community to believe that their lives are being treated as more expendable than are the lives of occupation forces. These conditions often intensify nationalist commitment and help to explain the willingness of individuals to sacrifice personal interests to fight and die for the nation.¹⁵ As Vranitz Tanon famously said of Algerian resistance to French occupation:

Individualism is the first to disappear . . . Henceforward, the interests of one will be the interests of all, for in concrete fact everyone will be discovered by the troops, everyone will be massacred—or everyone will be saved. The motto "look out for yourself," the atheist's method of salvation, is in this context forbidden.¹⁶

The Importance of the Occupier's Identity

National identities are constructed in relation to other nations. Without a boundary based on purported differences between "us" and "them," nationalism could not exist. If there is no "them," there is no "us." Further, a national identity can only be defined fully in relation to a particular other nation and a particular moment in time. Understandings of the nation's

special properties depend in part on the nature of the purported differences that separate one's own nation from the other, and on understandings of both the history and the current state of relations between the two nations. When one country is in political control of another, the national identities of both communities usually include more negative images of the other than do the identities of the same two nations when they are at peace. The boundary between the nations hardens, as well.

The main exception is when the occupied community would face an even greater threat from a different foreign enemy, if it were not occupied. As David Edelstein has shown, the threat from the Soviet Union dampened nationalist resistance to the American occupation of Germany and Japan during the Cold War and created a powerful basis for the establishment of deep institutional bonds that reinforced cooperation among the alliance partners.¹⁷

Absent a superior external threat, however, the identity of the foreign occupier is normally the most important "other" in relation to the occupied community. A group's identity comprises the distinct set of attributes that a body of individuals believes it has in common. These attributes include not only common objective elements, such as language, history, customs, and institutions, but also people's subjective self-identification. Although nationalism depends on the belief that a community has a unique set of ethnic, linguistic, religious, and other cultural traits that separate it from other communities, all communities do not differ equally across prominent social characteristics. People living in Chicago may view themselves as Chicagoans, Irish, Catholics, Americans, Westerners, and Christians. They may share many attributes with people living in Dublin (Irish heritage, Catholic, Westerner, Christian), some attributes with people living in Berlin (Westerner, Christian), and few attributes with people living in Sudan.

The wider the difference between the identities of the foreign occupier and of the local community—the fewer prominent attributes they share—the more the local community is likely to view the occupier as "alien," the more it will fear that the occupation will lead to radical and permanent transformation of its national characteristics, and the more it will seek to end the occupation at almost any price. The occupying power already is stronger than any military force in the occupied community—otherwise, the condition of occupation would not exist—and so has the power to damage its political, economic, social, and religious institutions with in-eradicable effects on other aspects of local culture as well. Even if the occu-

pier does not directly use this power, it necessarily poses an existential threat to the ability of the local community to determine and perpetuate its national identity. Accordingly, we should expect national resistance in general, and suicide terrorism in particular, to be greater in an "alien occupation," when there are few social attributes in common between the foreign rulers and the local community, than in a "kindred" occupation, when both share many social attributes.

"Alien" Occupation and Religious Difference

What, exactly, defines an "alien" occupation? In principle, there are no hard-and-fast rules. Since national identity is partly subjective, it is susceptible to manipulation, at least over long periods of time. In practice, however, some national attributes are likely to be more important than others in distinguishing the social relationship between an occupier and the local community.

For example, ancestral heritage, customs, and language are less crucial than one might at first expect. These attributes almost always differ between a foreign occupier and a local community, so using them to distinguish alien occupation from kindred occupation would largely collapse the meaning of these concepts together. Political ideology, often viewed as a crucial difference between nation-states, is also less important in the context of an occupation, precisely because the occupation itself defines the most salient political difference between the groups: the occupier controls the government, while the local population does not.

Although exceptions can occur, religious difference is probably the most important attribute separating the identity of foreign rulers from the local community.¹⁸ The reason is not that some occupied communities are more intensely religious than others. The reason is also not that some religions guard their independence more fiercely than others. Rather, the fact that the occupier is associated with a different religion in *itself* enables specific dynamics that can increase the fear that the occupation will permanently alter the ability of the occupied community to determine its national characteristics—secular as well as religious.¹⁹

The main mechanism is exclusivity. The harder the boundary between groups—the more exclusive are membership rules—the more extreme is the "us" versus "Jew" dichotomy. Religion is normally more exclusive than other national differences (except for race) under the conditions of an occupation and so often becomes the principal defining boundary between an occupier and the local community. People can learn the occu-

pier's language without abandoning their own, and can ever participate in many social practices associated with the occupier's society without rejecting their own, but a person cannot be a member of two religions at once, except under the rarest circumstances. (Indeed, most of the world's major religions prohibit simultaneous practice of or membership in another religion.²⁰) Even when members of the occupied community have no religious commitment at all, religious difference tells them that they and other members of their society are not part of the occupier's society, while the need for national cohesion for resistance to an occupation intensifies this sense of difference between the two communities. Such nonreligious individuals need not be motivated by a new commitment to the predominant religion of "us" (although some may), but can be motivated simply against the clearly defined "other."

Religious Versus Linguistic Differences

To explain the mechanism of exclusivity, it is helpful to compare the effects of religious difference and linguistic difference on the intensity of nationalist sentiments under the conditions of an occupation. Many scholars of nationalism argue that language differences are more important to the formation of national identities than are religious differences. Language helps circumscribe national communities through its impact on economic incentives. In an industrial or post-industrial world, most people are employable only in places where they speak the locally dominant language. A—perhaps the—most important difference between Germans and Danes is that neither could function well economically in the other's country.²¹

How identities are constructed, however, is different in peace and in war.²² When external threats to national self-determination are low, language differences may be more important than religious differences in constructing the boundaries between one's own nation and others. When threats to self-determination are high, such as when the nation is at war, or extreme, as when it is under foreign military occupation, the relative importance of religious and linguistic differences reverses. To be clear: *under the circumstances of a foreign occupation, the relative importance of religious and linguistic differences normally reverses and religious differences can inflame nationalist sentiments in ways that encourage mass support for martyrdom and suicide terrorism.*

In an intense conflict, religious differences make for a harder—more exclusive—boundary than do language differences. Under foreign occu-

pation, individuals can learn the enemy's language without changing their membership in their own community, but anyone who converts to the enemy's religion will be understood as having defected from his or her own nation to the enemy nation. The reason that this matters in a foreign occupation is rarely that anyone fears that mass conversion to the occupier's religion will sharply diminish the numbers of the occupied community. Of the eight occupations with a religious difference that are studied in this book, there were few or no such conversions in any of them.²³ Rather, the fact that such conversions are virtually unthinkable helps demonstrate just how exclusive religious differences become under occupation conditions.

When occupation hardens communal boundaries along a religious difference, there are three factors that manifestly intensify nationalist resistance and encourage mass support for extreme self-sacrifice required for suicide terrorism.

1. *Zero-Sum Conflict.* The presence of a religious difference reduces room for compromise between the occupying power and the occupied community, because the conflict is seen as zero-sum. Local resources (land, water, minerals) are divisible and the occupier has the power to redistribute them. The more the occupier is viewed as a distinct entity, the more members of the occupied community—secular and religious—are likely to fear that any redistribution of those resources would come at their expense. Hence, to the population of an occupied land, the most tangible evidence of increased autonomy is a retreat by the occupying power in its control of these resources. As Chapter 8 shows, Hezbollah could recruit many secular Lebanese (and several Christians) as well as Islamists to carry out suicide attacks, largely because of the common belief that Israel would use Lebanese resources at the expense of the community as a whole.

Moreover, religious symbols themselves often become focal points in occupations involving a religious difference, precisely because the central structures and ground associated with a particular religion are genuinely indivisible across a religious divide. Churches, mosques, temples, and monasteries are sacred spaces that cannot be shared with another religion and always have some restrictions on access or behavior that are considered inviolable.²⁴ Also, religious symbols are normally central in the histories, memories, and emotional attachments that most members of the society—secular and religious—share. Few secular Jews, even among

those who would hand over the West Bank and Gaza to Palestinian control, would also willingly surrender Jerusalem. One UNFICJ suicide attacker was motivated by the thought that the Sinhalese Buddhists would destroy the Hindu temples near her village, even though she had never visited them.

2. *Demoralization.* Religious difference can enable extreme demonization—the belief that the enemy is morally inferior as well as militarily dangerous, and so must be dealt with harshly.²³ To most people brought up in any religion, the dogmas and practices of any other religion will seem strange, perhaps inexplicable or pointless, and possibly immoral. This sense of moral difference can heighten fears that the occupying forces may use their superior power to indiscriminately kill members of their own community. Further, most religions claim to possess superior insight into ultimate truths, from which it follows that devotees of any other religion must be misguided, amoral, immoral, or even actively evil. Especially when nationalist sentiments are intensified by war or foreign occupation, the religious inferiority of the enemy can promote a feeling that he is less than fully human. These problems are often made worse by resistance leaders who often exploit religious differences to depict the enemy in as negative a way as possible to mobilize mass support for the resistance. Although any cultural difference between rivals can be manipulated by resistance leaders, religious difference is ready-made for the purpose because it goes to the heart of the moral code attributed to the opponent.

Demoralization encourages the two main features of suicide terrorism—the willingness to die and the willingness to kill innocents. The more a foreign occupation threatens a community's national identity, the more patriotic sentiments can inspire members of the occupied community to voluntarily accept great personal sacrifice to maintain the community's original identity. The more the foreign culture is viewed with scorn and revulsion, the more malignant sentiments can justify cruel treatment of even innocent members of the foreign society.

Accordingly, even individuals with no religious commitment at all can support and sacrifice for a national rebellion against a foreign occupier identified with a religion different from the local community's. The Tamil Tigers, a secular group drawn from Hindu families in Sri Lanka, used suicide terrorism to gain national independence largely because they do not accept the decision by the Sinhalese majority that Buddhism should be the dominant religion for the island as a whole.

3. *Legitimacy for Martyrdom.* Religious difference lends greater credibility to extremist groups who seek to use the language of martyrdom to legitimate their violence. The main problem for a community wishing to applaud the self-sacrifice of a martyr is that the act is a direct violation of one of the most common and absolute community norms, the prohibition against suicide. Since the suicide taboo is usually grounded in religious doctrine, if these same doctrines can be reinterpreted to justify self-inflicted death in certain circumstances, then this directly undermines the basis for the suicide taboo, at least in those circumstances.

A religious difference does not solve the extremists' problem, but it reduces the degree of manipulation necessary to redefine acts of suicide and murder as acts of martyrdom for the defense of the community. There are two reasons for this. First, the rhetoric intended to mobilize resistance to occupations with a religious difference is likely to use religious terms, even among secular groups. Although both secular and religious groups honor "martyrs," the idea of martyrdom is religious in origin and remains primarily a religious concept even today.²⁴ "Martyrdom" means death for the sake of faith, and it or closely related terms are common to all the world's major religions as the sole exception to the prohibition on voluntary death. For instance, the Jewish concept of *Kiddush ha-Shem*—"sanctification of God's Name"—is an exception to the prohibitions against suicide and is reserved for individuals who voluntarily died for their religion.²⁵

Second, a religious difference is itself a common standard for martyrdom. Although other qualifications vary, all the world's primary religions hold that the main indicator that one has died for faith is that one has been killed by someone from outside the faith, who is part of a community hostile to the faith. A Jew cannot be martyred by a Jew, a Muslim by a Muslim, or a Christian by a Christian, barring highly exceptional circumstances—for example, that the killer was part of a heretical community acting to undermine the faith.²⁶ To be sure, the mainstream understanding of martyrdom in all the world's religions still prohibits a person from killing himself or herself. If, however, a religious schism exists and the enemy is viewed as from an alien faith, one of the common qualifications for martyrdom is fulfilled and the suicide terrorist group need only argue that the difference between high-risk missions and self-inflicted-death missions against the foreign enemy should be overlooked. Under the conditions of foreign occupation, manipulation of the normal definition of martyrdom can succeed, because what matters is persuading the community to temporarily suspend the prohibition against voluntary death with respect to

those who die for the sake of the community, not to accept voluntary death as legitimate beyond this circumstance.

Together, these effects of religious difference can increase mass support for suicide terrorism in three direct ways: by increasing people's willingness to support rebellion; by increasing support for killing any members of the enemy community, even those who would otherwise be considered innocent; and by convincing some individuals that they have a duty to kill as many of the enemy as possible even at the cost of their own lives.

We cannot measure quantitatively how much these mechanisms increase the likelihood of suicide terrorism. What we can say is that the presence of a religious difference tends to promote suicide terrorism in ways that a language difference would not.

Last Resort Against Democratic Opponents

Although public attention is understandably drawn to the rhetoric of suicide terrorist groups themselves, the central issue in explaining the onset of suicide terrorism is not why one or several extremist leaders call for suicide operations against an occupier, but why the occupied community as a whole would lend significant support to calls for martyrdom.

Expediency is a key factor in determining when a community will promote martyrdom for the sake of national liberation. For a community to re-define what counts as legitimate martyrdom requires the broad acceptance of new interpretations of existing norms, a process that would make little sense if a community already had an effective strategy to achieve self-determination through more conventional means. Hence, we should expect that, even in cases of religious difference, suicide terrorism would be a last resort, typically coming once more conventional means of resistance have been exhausted or were obvious non-starters in the first place.

Occupation is a situation in which there is extreme asymmetry between the strength of the occupier and the strength of the local community. This power asymmetry virtually rules out conventional military confrontation, because the occupied community no longer controls sufficient territory and resources to train, arm, or equip large military formations. In many cases, the power asymmetry is so stark that even minimally organized resistance cannot get off the ground.²⁵

When resistance does occur, the most common strategy is guerrilla warfare. This strategy was used frequently to resist imperial control in the

twentieth century and is still the main strategy of rebellion in the world today.

Although guerrillas often seek self-determination from government forces, guerrilla resistance commonly escalates into deliberate attacks against innocents associated with the foreign occupier. Partly, the reason is the nature of guerrilla warfare. Guerrillas are too weak to confront the occupier's military forces directly. Instead, they aim to gradually wear down the occupier, fighting in small units dispersed over large areas in order to steadily inflict losses over a protracted period of time, rather than seeking to destroy those forces in major battles.²⁶ As a result, the line between isolated and easily targeted combatants, and noncombatants, is blurred in guerrilla warfare.

If guerrilla resistance succeeds and the foreign power leaves, then the local community again has no reason to resort to more extreme measures. However, if guerrilla resistance does not succeed (or is not feasible from the outset), then resistance leaders face a sharp choice: accept rule by what may now be an even more hostile occupier, or escalate to more extreme measures. Over the past twenty years, suicide terrorism has increasingly become the choice for groups that choose to escalate rather than quit.

This helps to explain an important fact about suicide terrorist groups. Many people assume that suicide terrorist groups are similar to ordinary terrorist groups—small in number, committed to a single cause that is unpopular within their own local community—and that such groups are choosing between ordinary forms of terrorism and suicide attack. However, suicide terrorist groups and ordinary terrorist groups have quite different organizational profiles and relationships to their local community.²⁷ Suicide terrorism rarely evolves from tiny bands of ordinary terrorists, but instead commonly arises from broad-based nationalist liberation movements, those that typically have pursued guerrilla warfare and found that a guerrilla strategy is inadequate to achieve their nationalist aspirations. In other words, suicide terrorist groups are not choosing between ordinary terrorism and suicide terrorism, but are deciding whether to use suicide attack as an extension of a broader guerrilla warfare strategy. This is why suicide terrorism often appears to be a strategy of “last resort.”

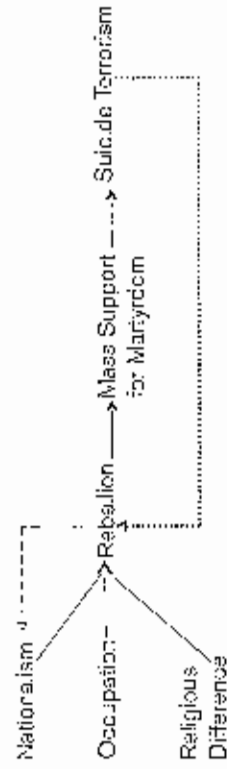
The evolution from guerrilla warfare also helps to account for the willingness of suicide terrorists to target noncombatants. Although this is the most horrifying element in the strategy, most resistance movements have

organization as early as 1988 in Afghanistan, and its first attack on U.S. forces took place in 1992, when it sent 250 fighters to combat them in Somalia. Although al-Qaeda's suicide terrorism was not an outgrowth of a popular rebellion, formation of a guerrilla army did precede its first suicide terrorist attack by seven years.

Thus, in six cases rebellion led to terrorism, in two cases they happened nearly simultaneously, and in one case mass rebellion did not precede the use of suicide terrorism, although the creation of a substantial military organization outside the country did.

In short, in occupations that have generated suicide terrorism, the causal effects run mainly in the direction that I claim: from nationalism to rebellion and terrorism.

ALTERNATIVE CAUSAL PATHWAYS OF SUICIDE TERRORISM



Solid arrows represent the theory proposed in this book.

The dashed arrow represents a causal path that sometimes increases the probability of national identity, but that plays little role in determining when suicide terrorism campaigns occur.

The dotted arrow represents a causal path that al-Qaeda and perhaps other terrorist organizations have hoped will occur, but that has not done so.

TESTING THE THEORY

To test my theory, I employ a methodology that combines the features of focused-comparison and statistical-correlative analysis using the universe of foreign occupations, 1980–2003. Correlative analysis of this universe enhances confidence that my theory can predict future events by showing that the patterns predicted by the theory actually occur over a large class of

cases. Detailed analysis of historical cases enhances confidence that the correlations found in the larger universe are not spurious—that is, that my theory accurately identifies the causal dynamics that determine outcomes.

Testing the theory requires three steps. First, relevant historical evidence must be identified. Second, the theory must be put into operational terms to provide falsifiable predictions that can easily be observed in historical cases. Third, the predictions of the theory must be compared with the evidence.

This study investigates the universe of foreign occupations in which a democratic state controlled the homeland of a distinct national community (other than the majority in the democratic state) for the period 1980 to 2003, fifty-eight cases in all. The definition of “occupation” is deliberately broad, including not only cases in which a democratic state moved military forces across an internationally recognized boundary to govern the homeland of another community but also the far larger number of cases in which a democratic state controlled the homeland of a distinct national minority within its own borders.

Using this broad definition of “occupation” provides a strong test of the role of religious difference in determining the degree of self-sacrifice by rebel groups. First, it enhances confidence that the findings are not due to the effect of selecting a narrow class of cases, because it tests the theory against all instances in which a local community could plausibly view itself as under foreign occupation. Second, it allows the analysis to control for the effect of prior rebellion on the onset of suicide terrorism. Since rebellion is common in response to a foreign occupation preceded by a military invasion but less common when a distinct minority is ruled by a different majority community within a state, including both situations enhances confidence that the study can determine whether the presence or absence of a nationalist rebellion is a prior condition for suicide terrorism. Finally, the broad definition of “occupation” enhances the robustness of my study by reducing the likelihood that there are a great number of missing cases that would contradict my findings.

Cases were identified according to three criteria. First, cases are restricted to those in which the foreign rulers had military or security forces operating on the ancestral homeland of a local community that constitutes a majority in that area. Minority or diaspora communities, such as Jews and Gypsies in Europe, would not be able to establish control of local communities under any circumstances and so are excluded.

Second, cases are limited to the period 1980 to 2003. The early 1980s appear to be a watershed with respect to suicide terrorism. Although one might expect to find instances in earlier conflicts, such as the Algerian civil war in the 1950s, the Vietnam War in the 1960s, or even the Chinese civil war or Iranian Revolution in the 1970s, this is not the case. Hence, cases prior to 1980 have no variation on the dependent variable, making it impossible to determine cause and effect.

Third, cases are restricted to occupations by states with a democratic political system, and specifically those with a system of contested national elections, open to a substantial fraction of citizens, for at least five consecutive years during the period.²⁶ As Chapter 4 shows, all suicide terrorist campaigns have been targeted against democracies. My study uses a generous definition of “democracy,” excluding only states whose experience with national elections is so limited that terrorist groups could not reasonably hope to affect the policy of the occupying state through attacks that punish its citizens in order to pressure elected officials.

The two independent variables in the study are the existence of a religious difference and the existence of rebellion between the foreign occupier and the local community. Religious differences are coded using standard lists of primary religions and major sectarian differences, which include Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Sikhism, Shinto, and Taoism as well as tribalism and agnosticism. Some lists also include other religions, such as Bahá'í, Jainism, Shamanism, and Zoroastrianism, but adding these would not change the results of this study.²⁷ “Rebellion” counts any organized resistance by a militant group beyond political protests or other forms of non-violent civil disobedience.

The dependent variable is the presence or absence of a suicide terrorist campaign.

To select cases and code the independent variables, I relied mainly on the “Minorities at Risk” database. This database already codes every country in the world for almost the entire period for the concentration of distinct minorities within states, level of rebellion by the minorities, and existence of religious difference between the minority and majority in the states.²⁸ I supplemented this database with a list of foreign occupations consequent on invasion during the period as well as with additional material to bring the database up to the present.²⁹

The key question in assessing the significance of correlations between

independent and dependent variables is how they compare with chance. There are two possible outcomes, a suicide terrorist campaign and no suicide terrorist campaign, and four possible combinations of independent variables: religious difference and rebellion; religious difference and no rebellion; no religious difference and rebellion; and no religious difference and no rebellion. Accordingly, we can readily determine whether the suicide terrorist campaigns did or did not occur along with these combinations of independent variables and whether these results differ from what would be obtained by simply flipping a coin.

The nationalist theory of suicide terrorism predicts that suicide terrorism would occur in tandem with only one of the combinations of independent variables—that is, when there is both a religious difference and rebellion. This theory correctly predicts 49 of 58 cases, a result that is statistically significant at the highest common benchmark of .001, meaning that it could be achieved by chance less than once in 1000 times.³⁰

TABLE 11. Suicide Terrorism and Democratic Occupations, 1980–2003

	Religious Difference	No Religious Difference
Rebellion	7/14	1/9
No Rebellion	1/15	0/20

Sources: See Appendix for cases and coding of variables.

Further, the predictive value of the nationalist theory of suicide terrorism is even higher once we consider the role of concessions in limiting the rise of suicide terrorism. In seven of the fourteen cases involving a rebellion and a religious difference, the rebels were able to gain concessions without resorting to suicide terrorism. In the other seven cases, prior concessions were either not made or were quickly withdrawn, and the rebels went on to use suicide terrorism in an attempt to gain concessions they otherwise could not get. This means that if we expand the conditions of suicide terrorism from the initial three—foreign occupation, by a democratic state, with a religious difference—to include the presence of concessions to rebellion alone, the nationalist theory of suicide terrorism accounts for 14 of 14 cases (see Table 12), in which all four conditions were met and 55 of 58 cases overall.

TABLE 12. Concessions and Causal Factors of Suicide Terrorism

Case	Democratic Occupation	Nationalist Rebellion	Religious Differences	Prior Concessions	Suicide Terrorism
1. Japanese State vs. U.S. Occupation	X	X	X	X	X
2. Tamil vs Sri Lanka	X	X	X	X	X
3. Palestinians vs. Israel	X	X	X	X	X
4. SIMA vs. India	X	X	X	X	X
5. Naderians vs. Turkey	X	X	X	X	X
6. Christians vs. Russia	X	X	X	X	X
7. Tamil rebels vs. U.S.	X	X	X	X	X
8. Continuing Hindu-Tibet vs. Singapore	X	X	X	X	X
9. Tripuras vs. India	X	X	X	X	X
10. Americans vs. India	X	X	X	X	X
11. Niggers vs. India	X	X	X	X	X
12. Malays vs. Philippines	X	X	X	X	X
13. USA vs. Great Britain	X	X	X	X	X
14. Muslims/Indians vs. Thailand	X	X	X	X	X

Reference: 1. Concessions: The Chittagang Hill Tracts signed a peace agreement with Bangladesh in 1957, granting them autonomy over local public administration and law and order; the Tripura signed a peace agreement with India in 1958, granting them greater participation in the government and compensation for loss of tribal lands; the Assamese signed an agreement with India in 1953, granting them greater political representation; in both agreement and more control over immigration into the region, and several kinds of regulations for further limits on immigration occurred in 1952 and 2002; the Nagas signed a peace agreement with India in 1997 and numerous negotiations have been under way since; the Philippines granted the Moro region an Mindanao substantial autonomy with its own executive, legislative, and judicial branches in 1996. Thailand addressed a series of policies in the 1980s that increased religious, and economic benefits for Malay-Muslims; the British government increased a series of peace negotiations with the politics in Northern Ireland beginning in 1998 that led to the 1998 "Good Friday Accords" for a power-sharing government. In India, concessions were immediately ended the violence, but often diminished it, and no broad community support for it.

Sources: Claitor (2006), "Peace and Livable Solutions to Ethnic Civil Wars," *International Security*, vol. 31, no. 4, Spring 1986, p. 160; and Robert Conroy, "Ethnic Warfare on the March," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 79, no. 3, May/June 2001, pp. 52-54;idem, "Ethnicity and State," *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 33, no. 3, September 1989, pp. 369-75; Alexander R. Downes, "Separate States or a Sense of Anomie?," *Security Studies* (forthcoming); Soble Bharadwaj, "Negotiating Access: Northeast India," *Religion & Society Quarterly*, vol. 19, no. 2, pp. 1-27; "India's Technical Nuclear," *South Asia Monitor*, no. 35 July 3, 2001; Linda T. Triss, "Indonesia: Militaries A Study of Southeast Thailand," *SIAS Working Paper*, no. W2002-07, May 2004; and Roger MacGraw and John Dube, *Guns and Government: Management of the North in Ireland Peace Process* (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

This chapter develops a theory of the causes of suicide terrorism, contending that nationalist rebellion and religious difference between the rebels and a dominant democratic state are the main conditions under which the foreign occupation of a community's homeland is likely to lead to a campaign of suicide terrorism as part of a national liberation strategy. Testing this theory in the relevant universe of cases since suicide terrorism became prominent twenty-five years ago provides strong verification for this proposition. Since 1980, religious difference has accounted for much of the variance in the pattern of when nationalist rebellions against occupation by a democratic state evolve into suicide terrorist campaigns.

Although these findings give us confidence that future cases are likely to follow a similar pattern, we should not overread the evidence. Suicide terrorism is a relatively recent phenomenon and it generates significant coercive pressure against democratic states. Moreover, religious identity is partly a subjective experience and so is vulnerable to manipulation by local elites as they seek ways to mobilize support for nationalist causes. Accordingly, we cannot rule out the possibility that future terrorist organizations would succeed in carrying out suicide campaigns even when the religious difference between the foreign rulers and occupied community is narrower than in past cases. On the basis of existing data, however, we would anticipate that suicide terrorism is more likely to spread when there is a religious difference than when there is not.

We also want to know more about the relationship between religious difference and suicide terrorism. Most important is further evidence that the results of this analysis are not spurious and that the causal dynamics expected by the theory actually appear in individual cases. For these purposes, the detailed case studies in the next chapters are required.