Phenomenology of Suicide Attacks

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Abstract

Suicide attack manifests itself as a symbolic expression that reflects the true situation of criminal groups. In certain respects, this situation corresponds to the individual situation or to the psychological state of candidates for suicide missions. The other truth that this analysis brings to light from the very outset is that the components of the life of the group to which the candidate adheres on his own initiative (its characters and way of life) are not unrelated to the characteristics of his own background. This being so, it is easy to understand the process of identification that lies at the origin of this projection, and which therefore allows the candidate to adopt the group drama as his own.

Keywords: Suicide Attacks, Terrorism

Fenomenología de los ataques suicidas

Resumen

El ataque suicida se manifiesta como una expresión simbólica que refleja la verdadera situación de los grupos delictivos. En ciertos aspectos, esta situación corresponde a la situación individual o al estado psicológico de los candidatos para misiones suicidas. La otra verdad que este análisis saca a la luz desde el principio es que los componentes de la vida del grupo al que el candidato se adhiere por su propia iniciativa (sus personajes y forma de vida) no están relacionados con las características de su propio origen. Siendo así, es fácil entender el proceso de identificación que se encuentra en el origen de esta proyección y que, por lo tanto, permite al candidato adoptar el drama grupal como propio.

Palabras clave: ataques suicidas, terrorismo

生态恐怖主义：愈演愈烈还是昙花一现？

摘要

上个月出现了以保护动物为宗旨的原教旨主义者所发起的一项运动。传统的低强度行动、破坏公务行为的扩散、传递信息的袭击、以及使用临时制作的爆炸性设备，这些都表明：扰乱秩序的趋势朝着高强度行动发展。这些充满暴力且引人注目的趋势，导致了FBI将这些小团体列入恐怖主义机构名单。

关键词：生态恐怖主义，美国，加拿大，法国，红色旅，动物解放阵线，地球解放阵线，EcoGuerilla（生态游击队）

Introduction

Before addressing the operational aspects of suicide attacks, which will emerge from the analysis of the phenomenon, let us remark that the suicide attack manifests itself as a symbolic expression that reflects the true situation of criminal groups. In certain respects, this situation corresponds to the individual situation or to the psychological state of candidates for suicide missions.

The other truth that this analysis brings to light from the very outset is that the components of the life of the group to which the candidate adheres on his own initiative (its characters and way of life) are not unrelated to the characteristics of his own background. This being so, it is easy to understand the process of identification that lies at the origin of this projection, and which therefore allows the candidate to adopt the group drama as his own.

But what allows us to make such a claim about so complex a phenomenon?

It is precisely this complexity that places us on our guard against any simplistic approach liable to lead us astray, and which would have an influence on our most crucial decisions when it comes to developing methods to combat terrorism.

The dozens of terrorists I have interrogated during my career have taught me a great deal about errors of vision resulting from the hasty conclusions one can be tempted to draw in the heat of the moment. Schematic interpretations have been at the root of many a blunder.

While it may be true that knowledge and familiarity dispel the fear of danger, it is also true that an erroneous vision of things, although it may momentarily protect against fear, will ultimately propagate fear and help render it endemic.

This claim follows from a simple, but not simplistic, analysis, a "naive vision" free of any prior assumptions, as we shall see in the following presentation.

For a Singular Approach to the Phenomenon

Looking at the phenomenon as it presents itself—that is to say, as a signifying act that, at first glance, seems to relate to questions of an existential order (the choice of death, the extreme of language), and as the expression of a lived experience—will keep us clear of fanciful, simplistic conjectures based on alienist and miserabilist theories.

Such theories have no hesitation in conceiving the candidate for a suicide attack as an unstable person or as a social microbe, generated from the breeding ground of a criminal subculture, itself the result of psychological and social poverty.

Such theories are certainly seductive, in that they are simple and therefore have mass appeal. But in no way do they account for the nature of a phenomenon that, each time it emerges, has a different aspect, linked to the personality of the actor, his social background, his age, and his intellectual level.

The problem is methodological in nature. It lies in the fact that the analysis cannot be carried out without a risk of subjectivism, because it is always done after the event and in the absence of the suicidal subject himself, although we may be aware of certain elements of his life experience deemed to have made the act possible.

The material we have at our disposal consists of the personal history of the individual who has committed suicide, his immediate environment, in some cases declarations made by him before the act, and information pertaining to the group that sponsored the act.

However, subjectivism, understood in its purely human sense—that is to say recourse to the self as the primary source of psychological information—is, by this very token, a source of intuition unencumbered by any alienating effect of egocentrism. It may allow us to benefit from a small amount of credibility that in general we accord to rational discourse.

The approach will certainly be an ambitious one, but original in its vision, in the way it looks at this thing that expresses itself through an act that defies common sense and the instinct of life, thus erecting itself into an outrageous language. The suicidal act is the expression of a being, a reaction to the feeling of psychological imprisonment.

The Art of Manipulation

Attempting to grasp the phenomenon of suicide attacks, at least in its existential appearance, requires genuine intellectual effort, because in certain respects it bears the stamp of a metapsychological dimension.

Here, therefore, we come across the first difficulty that counsels prudence as to the adoption of a selective approach based on appearances alone.

For even if the conscious rationale of the sponsoring organization is that of a strategy of terror, with the intention of undermining the rule of law and, in the first instance, forcing political leaders to give in to the demands of a given group, or to their discourse, their claim to be in control of the security situation, it remains no less true that the suicidal act itself, as such, bears the imprint of an unconscious discourse.

An underlying discourse that is the royal road for the preachers of terror, allowing them to gain access to the very depths of credulous candidates' souls.

This metapsychological aspect emerges, however, at the point where an amalgam is formed by the superposition of the individual psychological state and the discourses of leaders with evil intent.

They manage to establish a connection between an individual spiritual state, that of the suicide candidate, and a collective experience, that of the group.

Suicide is then experienced as a liberation of the individual, as salvation for a soul taken hostage by a highly criminogenic discourse, as I shall explain below.

It also constitutes a new benchmark for the group, which lacks any other means to impress or seduce its other members and at the same time is able to loosen the psychological encirclement by influencing public opinion. In short, a media coup.

Using a human bomb to loosen the vise that paralyzes the group both psychologically and spatially is a giant step forward in the psychology of terror, one that is promoted by the sponsors, who are masters in the art of manipulation.

The identification of the individual's psychology with that of the group is an established fact, without which the fabrication of a human bomb would be impossible.

Recall Durkheim's remarks on suicides. According to him, what they express is "the relaxation of social bonds, a sort of collective asthenia, or social malaise, just as individual sadness, when chronic, in its way reflects the poor organic state of the individual. Then metaphysical and religious systems spring up which, by reducing these obscure sentiments to formulae, attempt to prove to men the senselessness of life and that it is self-deception to believe that it has purpose [...] [But] they merely symbolize in abstract language and systematic form the physiological distress of the body social."[1]

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1 Émile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, translated by John A. Spaulding and George Simpson (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2002), 172–173.

The Ante Delictum Psychological Situation of the Suicide Candidate

The subject, the potential candidate for suicide, is singled out because of his predisposition, signs of which are easily identifiable to the terrorists.

The subject is then subjected to a series of sessions in preparation for his Indoctrination by way of a mass of rhetoric specially formulated for this purpose.

A mass of language made up of disparate elements drawn from all different categories of jargon, but whose homogeneity, paradoxically, is incontestably proven by its convergence on the designation of the subject as he who has been celestially chosen for a divine mission.

The product of this mass is what is fondly known, especially among avant-garde criminologists, as a sense of having suffered injustice. Its ingredients, ascending and immediate, combined and orchestrated, will unfailingly heighten the individual's psychological disposition to carry out the act.

All of this seems rather complicated, especially when we speak of this mass and its ingredients.

But the phenomenon becomes easier to grasp if we think of this mass as the ensemble of material and psychological elements that make up the subject's environment throughout his life, up to the moment when he decides to join the group; and if we consider that this act does not constitute a break with the individual's former life, but an extension of it.

The change will, however, be reflected in the discourse of unconscious activities, which will deploy an active strategy to justify the new behavior, now in the service of a criminal horde and at the mercy of the sponsors of terror. Aspects of the sponsors' personality will be integrated into the imaginary of the subject qua psychic representative of a real authority.

The Suicide Attack, or the Extreme of Language

Coming back, then, to the most salient aspects of what we call a "suicide attack," let us look at it without any prior assumptions. Let us try to leave behind our first impressions, to imagine the event and listen to those who have been direct witnesses of it, and to try to grasp what they reveal about the nature of such attacks.

What comes to mind when we think about, or even say, the expression "suicide attacks" are words, which we consider to be keywords: explosion, to blow up or more precisely to blow oneself up, to surprise, to destroy others while destroying yourself. And impacting on the environment in this spectacular manner, defying, causing shock, sets off an avalanche of questions in our minds.

On the other hand, if we were to consider the two halves of the phrase separately—"suicide" and "attack"—they would not immediately bring the same ideas to mind, nor the same questions.

It is, so to speak, the pair of ideas that interest us here, because it constitutes a unique phenomenon by virtue of its expected aims.

All the same, the most compelling idea will remain that of "blowing oneself up, by blowing up an environment." Here then is what immediately springs to mind, each time we represent the idea of the suicide attack. These are the expressions that recur in the declarations of terrorists when interrogated.

Let us now, for a brief imaginary moment, and keeping within the bounds of reason, accompany the suicide attacker in his attempt, and this in the hope of divining what he may have been thinking in the moments that preceded the act.

What did he hope for, what psychological chains shackled him to the urge to blow himself up, by what irresistible force was he driven? In short, can we imagine ourselves in the same psychological situation? (This is the crux of the matter.)

It is a moment that the suicide attacker understands perfectly well and knows that the human being is capable of replacing another by way of the imaginary. To try and understand what drives him to embrace the extreme of language, however, is another matter.

To detonate a truth that, according to the perpetrator, can only be expressed through this act as it is envisaged and executed.

And yet we are certain that the perpetrator achieved his objective: to live the fatal moment at any price, defying all obstacles of a moral, ethical, and especially psychological order. An abrupt detachment from the strong ties of the impulse to live.

To detonate his own truth, which is spoken through a singular story that cannot be held in common with others. Because, despite the similarities, each member of the group has his own history.

This being so, the choice of the extreme solution, the ultimate recourse, leads us to imagine a situation in which the suicide attacker would find himself before the act, and whose real and symbolic objective is to loosen the psychological vise.

A situation that, in his mind, renders conventional language ineffective.

Far from being an act of resignation, the suicidal act is a highly active participation in the persistent discourse of a "being there," a defiance, the negation of the possibility of the resurgence of that which has a right to appear, or quite simply to be, without needing any authorization from another being, for no other beings have the power to decree on the permission to exercise this right, whatever their power or status: be they the father, the state, or anything else that bears the symbol of authority.

"The finitude of the subjective will in the immediacy of action," writes Hegel, "consists immediately in the fact that the action of the will presupposes an external object with various attendant circumstances. The deed posits an alteration to this given existence, and the will is entirely responsible for it in so far as the abstract predicate 'mine' attaches to the existence so altered."[2]

To try and get as close as possible an idea of the situation in which the subject finds himself before the act, it will be useful to turn to a comparative presentation of two different forms of suicide.

Commonalities between Ordinary Suicide and Suicide Attacks

Generally speaking, we can think about the suicide attack within the interpretative frameworks abstractly formed by the psychology of suicide.

Namely, in both cases we find ourselves faced with a situation in which the protagonist uses his own person, or rather his life, to try to express a complex emotional state.

Hence the act is elevated to the rank of language, or at least symbolic expression.

The suicide attacker tries to save something that cannot be said in words: to detonate a truth about his own person, to say, for example: I cannot accept this, even if I'm incapable of doing anything about it! You will not have me, despite your power!

This message may be addressed to someone close such as a father or symbolic father figure, or to a group of people such as family or friends, or society as a whole. A well-known psychological process will be responsible for transposing this lived experience into the current situation by projection.

It is in this way that the image of power, of the state, becomes the target. Certain similarities between the two entities, such as their real or symbolic power, play a preponderant role in the transference of aggressive feelings.

Consequently, the suicidal act takes on the psychological function of an "ordeal," a reparative, vengeful, or punitive function (punishing the other or oneself).

The criminogenic mass imposes upon the suicide candidate the idea that, for him, the only way out, the only loophole, is suicide—that this is the only way for him to save something that cannot be said with words.

In this sense, the thing he wishes to save often has a relation to the duality between dignity and humiliation. Even when it is a matter of a sense of guilt, which can be a powerful factor in processes of self-deprecation, it also involves a

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2   G.W.F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, translated by H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 143 (§115).

dignity that acts as a restorative process.

To act on the environment by attacking one's own life: it is here, and in this sense, that "Being," in its different appearances and attributes, asserts its supremacy over conventional values of a social and moral order.

"Being" does not necessarily mean being alive in the purely biological sense, and to blow oneself up is also an expression of Being: a way of existing beyond dominant reason, and by defying that reason.

In his 1807 speech to the nation, Johann Gottlieb Fichte reminded the audience of the wartime German tradition that dictates liberation through death in order to escape subjection.

The candidate for a suicide attack is not desperate; on the contrary, he is a tragic player, moved by the conviction that his murderous sacrifice will lead to a better situation for the cause and the community to which he belongs (as François Géré discusses in his article "Kamikaze: Le suicide comme arme "[3]).

Differences between the Two Forms of Suicide

Nevertheless, criminal suicide, or what is commonly known as a "suicide attack," in so far as it claims others as victims, differs in many aspects from a suicide that does not harm anyone else.

First of all, the candidate is often subject to external pressure exerted by way of indoctrination, and which aims to stimulate a suicidal tendency already present within him, so as to facilitate the process of committing the act.

Whereas in the case of solitary suicide or suicide that is harmless to others (physically speaking, for such an act does envision a psychological offense), if there is pressure, it is purely of a psychological nature. It originates in the subject's own being, even if, in the mind of the suicide attacker himself, it is dictated by the attitude of the other or others.

The case of the inoffensive suicide involves a highly symbolic self-destruction in order to merge with the Universe.

In the criminal suicide or suicide attack, on the contrary, the notion of destruction is overt and ostentatious; it is expressed by way of an actual explosion, which attempts to reduce the environment to nothing, to merge with the other by way of an explosion, to embrace existence through a violent act.

If, as we have emphasized, the phenomenon cannot be reduced to the simplistic schemas fabricated by theories of pathology, it also makes no sense to look at it through the theoretical microscope forged by some nihilist theory or other.

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3   François Géré, "Kamikaze: Le suicide comme arme," *Sciences Humaines* 166 (2005). Available at: https://www.cairn.info/magazine-sciences-humaines-2005-12.htm.

The concept of nirvana, the quest for a state of absolute tranquility, does not appropriately account for certain aspects of this phenomenon related to the function of language.

Taking up the most salient aspects of the phenomenon, looking at them without any prior assumptions, with a "naive vision," to borrow a term from phenomenology, we shall see that what is called a "suicide attack" is far from being a detachment from life, a product of mere disinterest, or the withdrawal of interest from the positive attributes of life.

Far from being an act of resignation, the suicidal act is a highly active participation in the persistent discourse of a "being there," a defiance, the negation of the possibility of the resurgence of that which has a right to appear, or quite simply to be, without needing any authorization from another being, for no other beings have the power to decree on the permission to exercise this right, whatever their power or status: be they the father, the state, or anything that bears the symbol of authority.

Whereas ordinary suicide attempts often fail, in the case of the suicide attack such failure cannot be envisaged, at least not in the mind of the determined candidate. In ordinary suicide there are even cases where subjects consciously or unconsciously plans for the attempt to fail, so as to draw attention to their psychological distress.

In short, for the suicide attack candidate, true suicide would be the failure of the attempt.

Because, on one hand, his action is not experienced as a suicide, since he hopes for a better life; and on the other hand, death is experienced before the action. The psychological preparation is so thorough that the candidate is already living in his new virtual world. Failure would destroy this state of mind, and would make it unimaginable to start again.

Certain terrorist groups, in particular the GIA, the Armed Islamic Group of Algeria, have enshrined a practice that has become widespread in the process of indoctrination. It involves performing the farewell prayer for the soul of the suicide candidate. Members of the group bid one other farewell before going on to carry out the act, promising that they will meet again soon in the beyond.

Suicide candidates never mention a testament. In their pre-operation speeches, often recorded or written and read to their acolytes, they instead celebrate a happy event, at least apparently so. These speeches are subsequently used as "pedagogical" materials, consolidating the indoctrination process.

Going on to carry out the act is conceived in the suicide attacker's mind as a brief transitory stage—a conception that acts as a powerful anesthetic against the pain they must expect from the explosion.

Operational Aspects

Global Strategy and the Personal Message of the Suicide Attack

I have pointed out that, by way of identification or projection, the personality of the suicide candidate becomes conflated with the group body and hence, evidently, with the group mind too.

And yet, as paradoxical as it may seem, the meaning of the act is not, in reality, the same for the candidate as it is for the sponsors, even if their respective rationales and discourses are apparently identical.

The candidate's own message is addressed to a limited milieu, namely to the family, the neighborhood, in fact the micro-society. Whereas the sponsors' message is intended for a national and international public, as well as for the members of their own group.

Even if they address different milieus, though, the content of the messages may be similar: You cannot imagine what I am capable of. Except that whereas, for the suicide, this is spoken in the present ("I am"), for the sponsors it is spoken in the present and future tense ("We are … and will be"). In this sense, the suicide is only one element in a wider enterprise: an instrument.

Meanwhile, the sponsors try to shift responsibility for the death of others onto their enemy: Because of what you have said, there will be more deaths—this is the apparent message of certain targeted actions, which can only be read properly if we take into account their successive nature, and where they occur in time and in space.

The Attack Conceived as a Means of Communication

The sponsors are on the lookout for any part of the official discourse that can be ostentatiously contradicted. That is to say, contradicted via an action that proves the very opposite, even if it must cost the life of the suicide candidate as well as other innocent persons.

In this sense, and setting out from the principle that communication is an integral part of war, certain expressions or claims about the terrorist phenomenon itself which, to the average man, may seem questionable, can be provocative and contribute to indiscriminate escalation, since the response to them can be immediate:

- They are madmen

- Teenagers indoctrinated by adults

- Residues of terrorism

- Refusing to recognize the existence of a terrorist entity as it names itself (Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb)

For the terrorists, contradicting or challenging the declarations of a minister or official via an undeniable fact (an attack) is worth more than a thousand speeches discrediting them.

"Speech-attacks" target the "fault lines" of official discourses, thus guaranteeing a greater credibility of the sponsors, in the eyes of the terrorist groups and potential candidates and recruits.

In general, official speeches after an attack are not addressed to the criminals themselves, but to national and international opinion. And for this reason, they are usually devoid of any considered counter-strategy addressed to new but as yet hesitant candidates.

Indeed, there is an essential difference between declaring, after a suicide attack, that "terrorists will use every trick and any means to commit their crimes" and claiming that they use manipulated and indoctrinated teenagers. The difference is one of scale for those who are listening, on both sides.

This is a double-edged sword, though: on one hand, parents are alerted and must be concerned for their child, but on the other the sponsors must absolutely prove the contrary, for fear of internal dissidence. A sixteen-year-old adolescent blows himself up at the entrance to a barracks in Algeria, and then some months after, on December 11, 2007, a sixty-year-old man does the same in front of the UN headquarters. Here is another winning strategy for the terrorists, because in one blow they undermine any misunderstanding within the group, and discredit the official discourse.

Another instructive case is that of the mother of the terrorist minor responsible for the attack on the marines barracks in Algeria on September 15, 2008. She had to paint her son as a hostage, and even declared to a journalist that he had telephoned her wanting to escape. The terrorists' response was not long in coming: they were able to publish his declarations and a photo of him in combat to challenge his mother's claims, which, they claimed, had been fabricated by the authorities.

Ultimately, not to call things by their name is to fail that postulate of rationality according to which the identification of the phenomenon, as it presents itself, is the first step toward defining it, so it can then be combatted.

If this does not happen, then all subsequent steps will be tainted by the inadequacy. To fail to name things is to fail to be prepared, or to prepare using obsolete concepts—which renders all foresight unreliable.

The Choice of the Candidate is No Chance Matter

Indeed, the challenge comes from the variation in the aspect of attacks, through which the perpetrators and their sponsors address these simplistic discourses, which betoken a patent intellectual apathy.

The variation in the personality traits of suicide candidates is a message addressed by the sponsors to precisely these simplistic discourses, in order to place them on notice, and to indicate the confusion of their hasty assertions.

Describing Kamikazes as madmen or lunatics, as the US president did the day after the September 11 attacks, describing the social milieu in which they grow up as fertile for this sort of criminality, or questioning their level of education or their age, does not get to the essence of the thing.

Let us make it clear that certain choices made by the sponsors about the place of the attack, the age of kamikazes, their gender, their social background and educational level, are made specifically as a response to the official discourses which, in the heat of the moment, provide overhasty explanations for such a complex phenomenon.

It is not impossible, therefore, that a woman could be chosen to commit this type of attack, should this be deemed necessary by the terrorists' "communications strategy."

The Irresistible Desire to Contemplate the Scene

Filming the sites, being on the scene before and after—that this happens is a proven fact.

Contemplating the scene before and imagining it after the attack, even if the prior visit is justified for operational reasons: a site survey, to employ a term used by the security services.

Here is an interesting fact that may be of use to investigators. The presence of the perpetrator or one or his accomplices on site is almost a certainty, both before and after the attack. Although presence on site after the attack may be too risky, there will be widespread media coverage, allowing the sponsors to watch the spectacle at a distance.

This supposes that some presence is necessary among the crowd, perhaps even among the rescuers, after the attack, in order to listen to the commentaries in the heat of the moment. Contemplation of the desolation and the shock is a highly sought-after prize.

It is understood that the sponsor of the Paris attacks of November 13, 2015 returned to the scene; there is evidence of his return around the Bataclan at the very time when the police entered the building.

The Vise

The word "vise" has a double meaning here. It is related both to the true situation of the group and to the psychological state of the candidate for the crime.

From the outset the primary objective of the group is to loosen the vise that

is tightening around them; and it will use the ultimate means to escape this pressure, encirclement, harassment, be it psychological or material.

Now, the candidate has the same feeling of being psychologically ensnared or enclosed, and it is suggested to them that peace of mind can come only via the inevitable explosion, but one that serves a purpose.

An good example of this is the hasty way in which the attacks targeting Belgium on March 22, 2016 were carried out, bearing in mind that the dangerous terrorist Salah Abdelsalam had been arrested four days before. The mistakes and blunders made by the terrorists in the execution of these attacks are flagrant, and can only testify to a feeling of being closed in upon. These attacks, carried out in haste, unplanned, and insufficiently prepared, led to the arrest of some of them and the recovery of caches of arms and explosives.

Suicide attacks, the ultimate and most terrible way to loosen the vise, appeared quite late in the history of terrorism in Algeria.

At the beginning of the nineties, the terrorists' extortions consisted largely in targeting the police or the army with individual attacks or ambushes. Patrols were often trapped, so as to ensure as many victims as possible.

The turn to suicide attacks came late: it was only after the mobilization of the general population, when the public joined the security services in the struggle against the terrorists, that the vise began to tighten around the criminal hordes, who then found it hard to enter urban areas. Above all, they could no longer count on the help of the population to gather information. Retrenched in their bunkers in the mountains, with no media profile, turning to suicide attacks thus became the salutary solution for them.

The first suicide attack perpetrated with the aid of a car bomb, on January 31, 1995, near the central police station in Algiers, followed a twenty-day sweep of the mountains of Kabul and the hills of Ain Defla, an unprecedented encirclement by the military forces.

And yet, whatever their media resonance, suicide attacks are very limited in time and space, compared to atrocities that have claimed hundreds of lives.

On the Criminal Capacity of the Sponsors to Produce Human Bombs

Indoctrination: the sponsors' strategy must correspond, in its psychological aspects, to the candidate's own unconscious psychological motives.

Identify the person through criteria linked to his predisposition to total submission to the group, and thus to the group chief—usually invoking their symbolic orphanhood.

The charismatic capacity of the group chief to assume a total ascendency over the potential candidate, who will sometimes voluntarily offer his services.

This charisma is manifested in a continual accusatory discourse against the Other .

The chief, a terrifying charismatic archaic father figure who nurtures the cult of heroes and martyrs and celebrates its rituals, organizes the deadly economy of a memory maintained for the purposes of replenishing the stock of future suicides. (see the above-mentioned article by François Géré)

Nevertheless, the charisma of the criminal chief is not enough in itself to transform a human person into a murderous machine, who is thus relegated to the rank of a mere instrument fulfilling its function within a global criminal system.

Perfectly conscious of the diabolical procedures of indoctrination, and familiar with certain components of the human mind relating to the primary drives, the preachers of devastation do not hesitate for a moment to make use of them to fabricate human bombs. But which components of the psyche can be of use in such an enterprise?

The Utopia of Terrorism and the Suicidal Tendency of Terrorists

The suicidal tendency of terrorists is one of the essential components in their psychology.

This component, hitherto repressed, is stimulated from the moment the person decides to join the terrorist group, aiming to enlist within its ranks.

The culmination of his activities being known from the outset, the person who decides to adopt violence to express his internal psychic conflicts on the scene of struggle within society inevitably places himself at the mercy of society's counterattack.

The criminal, delivered to the torment of the death drive, will practice violence, by which he also will perish.

However intelligent he may be, he must realize that the force of society, with all of its institutions, far surpasses his means to combat it. So it is that the idea of martyrdom takes shape in his mind before he takes up arms—and no discourse, no philosophy, can contradict his profound conviction as to the fatal end. This is a fatalism that was sought, and even coveted.

One might say that it is the internal acquiescence to death that is the motor of adhesion to the philosophy of terror. This is why the terrorist's methods of execution are characterized by fatalism and a scorched earth policy.

And yet here the idea of death, which in mysticism gains a positive value, no longer has any restraining effect on temptations.

Quite to the contrary: onto the idea of pain is grafted another idea, that of ambivalent sadomasochistic pleasure. It consists in inflicting pain on others while undergoing it oneself through identification with the victim, or while awaiting one's own death or its inevitable interpellation.

Apart from the deadly, anaesthetizing speeches that are explicitly pronounced in order to produce a desire for death, the names of the brigades that make up Algerian terrorist groups are eloquent on this subject: The Death Brigade, the Martyr's Brigade, and so on.

Recall also the existence of a ritual among terrorists that consists in practicing farewell prayers on the souls of the volunteers, before the commission of certain suicidal acts, as described above. On these occasions a true funerary ceremony is celebrated, with all its decorative and ritual aspects, just like a real burial.

In all of the above we see a very complex psychic mechanism, but one that is characteristic of the terrorist psychology.

Disdain for Death and Credulity

Since it is known that, in undertaking terrorist acts, the participants risk dying at any moment, death is glorified so as to allay the fear that may afflict certain hesitant minds. For the terrorists, death becomes a sort of deliverance from the ills of life, experienced as a vise around them. A remedy for existential anguish. This logic is also the guiding principle of the suicidal tendencies that govern the various ideologies of cults.

In issue 203 of *El Tabsira* (The Enlightenment), a communiqué published by the accomplices of terrorists in England in 1995, in a message addressed to Algerian terrorists who may feel anxious when faced with the fear of death, we read the following: "The best dose of medicine we can prescribe you, dear brother, is to think of the end of your life and the truth that is inevitable and puts an end to all our states of mind, all our vainglory and pride. The Prophet was once asked about the subtlety of believers, and responded that the most ingenious believer is he for whom death is constantly present to his mind, and he who is the best prepared to confront the beyond."

Thus, thanks to this conversion of the fear of death into a desire for annihilation, the partisans of acts of terror forearm themselves against anguish and hesitation.

It is obvious that the eloquent aspect of criminal behavior appears in its relation to the other, as a representative of the destructive drive. Self-affirmation and the quest for reference points for identity are expressed clearly, using this language. "The quest for the self passes via the other and the limits fixed by laws," as J. Nadal points out, evoking the paradoxes and aporias characteristic of the subject at the moment of the cure.

If we accept the scientific postulate according to which the psychic energy behind those phenomena commonly known as love and hate is one and the same, without passing any moral judgment on the latter, we will find no difficulty in accepting that a suicide attack using explosives relates exclusively to a fusional relation with the other.

This understanding will then also help us to grasp the latent force by which the fear of death and pain is transformed into an ardent desire to fuse spectacularly with the universe via an irreversible explosion.

Pain and the fear of death have been transformed into an object of desire via the provocation of the latent desire that animates every human being, the desire to be delivered of existential anguish. The force of evil is manipulated, mocking all moral obstacles. The banalization of pain and of the fear of death, and the glorification of the latter, have become redoubtable weapons in the service of contemporary terrorists, who follow an ancient tradition.

Using this procedure, Algerian terrorists elicited a disdain for death, or even a desire for death. In doing so, the idea of the mortification of their bodies, but also their victims' bodies, was adorned with mysticism. In their speeches they used the Koranic verses most suited to the circumstance, often removed from their original context, so as to persuade hesitant consciences. They promised a better life to the martyrs of the holy war against the infidels.

The history of terrorism throughout the world teaches us that, everywhere and at all times, the same anesthetic has been applied to the conscience, following the same procedures. Fascist terrorists and Russian terrorists alike were convinced, as were their families, that they were going to die for the "Holy" cause. Russian and German mysticism played a part in the reasoning of Romanian, Japanese, Indian, and Arab terrorists. The idea of the martyr who will win eternal life appears in the history of Irish terrorism from its first beginnings up to the present day.

Flavius Josephus declared that among the Zealot assassins there was a religious passion, an inclination to consider death for a venerated cause as a joyous thing. The same attraction to death was at work amongst the Thugs.

And yet in order to have this attractive power, commendations of death, whether drawn from religion or from some nihilist philosophy or other, must correspond to the disguised motives of the death drive and the suicidal tendency of the human.

In a communiqué from the Armed Islamic Group of Algeria (GIA) signed by Djamel Zitouni, chief terrorist of the organization, we read that one of the causes of the defeat of the Muslims is their hatred of death and attachment to life. The writers of this communiqué refer to a saying (Hadith) of the Prophet: "If you detest death and cling onto life, God will weaken you in relation to your enemy, however powerful you may be."

Here the scorning of death is constructed as a motivational principle for the struggle.

To render the idea of death more agreeable, and to stimulate the destructive drive, subversive writings repeat Koranic verses and sayings of the Prophet that speak of Paradise and of an eternal life after death where all pleasures are

permitted. Death itself becomes an object of lust and is sought for the enjoyment suggested by the terrorists' reasoning. Suggestive quotations of this sort abound in the speeches of the preachers of death. Martyr status is reserved for those who die on the battlefield.

Not only is death on the battlefield conceived as a celestial vault giving access to a better life, it cleanses all sins the individual may have committed in his lifetime.

Conclusion

While one of the most formidable of these components, these ingredients, is indoctrination, it is only one isolated and inoffensive element. It can have no effect on minds protected from the mass[4] that makes up the explosive matter. In this sense, indoctrination is only a detonator.

Obviously, the propositions above result from a study of the phenomenon that cannot be exhaustive, on one hand because of the novelty of the subject, and on the other because of the difficulties encountered in approaching it.

Nevertheless, its most salient aspects, particularly on the psychological level and the linguistic aspect that follows from it, enable us to make some recommendations, dictated both by experience and by analysis. These recommendations must however be revised as work on the phenomenon and its future manifestations advances.

- The promoters of various anti-terrorist discourses—religious, political, legal, and media—must come together, their message must be harmonized. At least in terms of a common moral reference point, inspired by universal principles.

- Limit the number of spokesmen, agree on a common strategy, and put forward productive proposals that go beyond disagreements and personal beliefs. The watchwords "unity" and "coherence" embellish the image of the strong and generous symbolic father.

- The state's authority is exercised through the law. To be consistent with this principle, judges should be involved in public statements following an attack.

- Avoid divergences in public statements, they are harmful and damage the image of a unity of authority.

- Establish a culture of constructive self-criticism of the methods of counter-terrorism; they should be constantly reevaluated in the light of new security information.

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4   This mass is the platform upon which a being evolves from its birth, and even before it is constituted of an ensemble of psychological, social, historical, economic, and political elements whose combination decides the future character of the person.

- Create a team or body responsible for high-level communication, whose mission would be to analyze terrorist speeches, their methods of communication (including attacks), and to suggest adequate responses to political decision makers.

- Give back scientific research its proper place in the fight against terrorism.

- Take the advice of security services, which must be substantiated, as well as that of specialists in psychology, before granting a pardon, conditional discharge, or any other legal advantage to incarcerated terrorists.

- Involve the prison administration more in the fight against terrorism, identifying the truly remorseful, and those who cannot be tackled by the means offered by the legal system—and there are some.

- Involve schools, which are essential vectors for the transmission of the culture of peace, and for promoting the prevention of indoctrination.

- Raise awareness among journalists by organizing seminars on the potential dangers of their role, for they can become devils' advocates without meaning to.

- Setting out from the principle that the fight against terrorism is not the business of the security services alone, and that there is a danger of new forms of terrorism becoming endemic and contagious, the creation of an office or national observatory for the fight against terrorism is a pressing imperative. This body should be made up of specialists from different areas. Its reasoned and substantiated recommendations should be transmitted to leaders, who should study their content with a view to extracting the essential points to serve as a basis for the overall strategy of the fight against terrorism.

Should We Talk with Terrorists?

There is no greater repugnance than that of feeling compelled to engage in dialogue, even indirectly, with criminals, for it gives us the sense of a reversal of our moral and ethical values, especially when we maintain power by force of law.

Such aversion is greatest of all when we know that the criminals aim to abolish the rule of law, in the hope of replacing it with a malicious Manichean system whose undeclared watchword is the exercise of vice and perversion.

In this sense, dialogue is understood as a concession, as a reversal of roles, even if only on a symbolic level.

Nevertheless, dialogue can take the form of an intelligent method of response, to put across messages addressed to the psychological hostages who populate criminal groups, or to protect potential victims whom they plan to murder for the sole purpose of discrediting official discourse.

These are the principles upon which we should base any communication: a communication with a neutralizing effect, addressed less to national and international public opinion than to the criminals themselves, since communication is an integral part of the fight.

But communication must not be understood in the sense of an open and declared negotiation. It must be understood symbolically as a response to terrorist atrocities that establish themselves as a language that replaces words.

Although in certain cases indifference is part of the strategy of communication in times of war, aiming to minimize the enemy or render him ridiculous, we must not lose sight of certain scientific truths in the matter of individual psychology. These tell us that indifference is a powerful motor that activates the desire to make oneself heard by any means necessary, including blowing oneself up.

When it comes to serious incidents, an attitude of indifference will only fuel the discourse through which indoctrination is effectuated. We must also take into account the mechanism of identification that is stimulated by this kind of attitude, and which will inevitably refer the potential suicide candidate back to the negative image of the tyrannical father or some other symbol of authority—the same figure whose affective coldness is at the origin of the psychological vulnerability of the person preyed upon by the growing influence of the sponsors of terror.

In this sense, official statements following an attack are an extremely delicate task, of vital importance for future atrocities.

The sponsors are on the lookout for what will be said, so as to prepare a response capable of questioning the credibility of officials and throwing their discourse into question. They will use all means at their disposal to do so, even opening their "war chest," ignoring all the usual precautions meant to guarantee the survival of the group, human potential, and munitions alike.

Their response must be immediate, so as to mark memories and to lay the blame on the speeches made after the preceding attack: to designate this speech as the immediate cause of their action. This is one of the most important operational findings to emerge from this study, informed by dramatic, but extremely instructive, experience!

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