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Dispatch: Scent of Weakness

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Dogs have been trained to carry bombs to attack enemies for decades. The Soviets and others have used dogs as low-tech smart bombs. Yet canine platoons likely would rebel if they caught scent they were being duped to die.

Today, more sophisticated people employ men (mostly) to deliver bombs in Afghanistan. Gullible souls are selected, conditioned, trained and deployed. Malleable minds are identified then loaded with psychic software that uses their minds to create a vision. Evil persons of superior intellect identify the raw material—that raw material might be an engineer from a stable family—and trains them to fetch myths.

Suicide attackers have murdered countless thousands of people around the world. They go by various names, such as Kamikaze, Black Tiger, and Martyr.

The attackers are not all men. Some are Tigresses. My friend Alex Perry met a wannabe Black Tigress in Sri Lanka. She was 18. Alex described the girl in *Time Magazine*:

“But asked when she hoped to achieve her dream of being a suicide bomber, she grinned, squirmed and buried her face in her arms. "She's already written her application," said her commander, Lt. Col. Dewarsara Banu, smiling at her charge's shyness. "But there's still no reply." "Why hasn't there been a reply?" whined Samandi, looking up with the one eye, her left, that survived a shot to the head and fiddling with the capsule of cyanide powder around her neck. "I want this. I want to be a Black Tiger. I want to blast myself for freedom."

--How Sri Lanka's Rebels Build a Suicide Bomber

Many people are persuaded by cult artifices into any sort of behavior, including ritual suicide and murder. It's crucial to understand that many suicide-murders are part of a religious ceremony. The attack is the climax of the ceremony. This is neither complicated, nor subtle.

Suicide murders are merely a small fraction of cult behaviors. Cults often do not revolve around religions. Communist cadres once fanned across the globe, teaching that capitalism must die on a global scale for communism to reach its imagined grandeur. Yet even as communist countries have failed across the world, true believers intoned the conviction that “real communism” had never been tried, and if it were, it would fulfill its promises. This “willing suspension of disbelief” demonstrates an important aspect often organic to cults: when cult prophecies are proven wrong, we might expect the cult to disintegrate in face of the evidence. Yet instead of disintegrating, powerful cults often refortify, strengthen, and redouble recruitment. Failure can cause them to grow.

Some cult leaders are true believers while others are true deceivers. From the outside, cults often can be easy to spot, though the hardest cult to see is the one you are in.

We face an increasing number of suicide murders here in the “Muslim world”—in places where suicide attacks were previously unheard of. Some people are coerced into suicide, such as the unfortunate women who were raped and defiled in Iraq, then shamed and coerced into suicide for the sake of “honor.” Or the case of a young Libyan, captured by soldiers from a unit I was with in Iraq. The Libyan was thankful for his capture: Iraqis were trying to force him to wear a suicide bomb.

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Others are “brainwashed” and reloaded with brainware whose program creates suicide murderers.

A few weeks ago, on the morning of March 1st, just close by Kandahar Airfield, a suicide murderer waited in ambush. An American convoy from the 82nd Airborne was crossing the Tarnak River Bridge when the man detonated his car bomb, sending a heavily armored American MRAP off the bridge. At 0735, the boom thundered across Kandahar Airfield. I felt the explosion and turned around to look for a mushroom. The sound was vigorous enough that I thought we may have been hit on base. There it was: the orange mushroom cloud of dust gathered and could be seen floating away. It was off base in the direction of Highway 4 to Kandahar.

American Soldier Ian Gelig and several Afghans were killed. It's difficult to know how many locals are killed and wounded in attacks; often they die later or are never taken to hospitals.

Soldiers from 5/2 Stryker Brigade Combat team were planning to conduct a mission that morning that required crossing the now badly damaged bridge. Our mission was cancelled, as were many other missions for the next couple days. In addition to killing Ian Gelig, the single attacker impacted the flow of the war in this crucial battle space.

Nearly two weeks later, on Saturday 13 March, I was preparing to go on another mission with 5/2 SBCT soldiers. Shortly before our departure, just up the road in Kandahar City, a serious attack unfolded at night, including three or four suicide attackers. About 35 people were killed and roughly another 50 wounded. Again, our mission was cancelled because the roads were closed, though by morning we took helicopters and bypassed the incident. Turns out, the enemy was disappointed with their attack. About half the attacks apparently did not go off, while American and Afghan forces responded more quickly than the enemy had expected and limited the damage. According to intelligence, the Taliban are extremely paranoid. Taliban leadership suspected there had been an inside informant. They planned to conduct a purge. Meanwhile, I got one report from the ground that Afghans believed most of the casualties were caused by Afghan police who are said to have fired wildly during the attack. One man told me that an Afghan position randomly fired his 12.7mm DsHK machine gun across the city. (These guns are so large they can rip a man in two.) Whether the allegation is true or false is not known by me, though it stands alone as a bullet in the information war.

Ground Sign

On 8 April 2006, I was driving with a friend from Lashkar Gah to Camp Bastion when shortly after we left the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) at Lash, a suicide attacker struck. We escaped entirely, hearing about the attack later. Some days later, we drove back to Lash. On 13 April, a second suicide attack happened at the same place, shaking the building while I was writing a dispatch about how the war was going sour.

These were the first two suicide attacks in Lashkar Gah.

(A couple more suicide attackers were killed in that same close area in Lash while I was writing this dispatch in neighboring Kandahar.)

Lone Wolf suicide murders occur, but the context of these first two bombings in Lashkar Gah indicated that a system was in place, and the suicide bombers were not terribly expensive to buy. If those suicide bombers were expensive or hard to come by, the commander likely would have saved them for special missions of high specific significance. Yet the targets of the two attacks were small and tactical, of little specific significance. Why would a commander waste “smart ammo” on tactical targets? Perhaps the “price” of the ammo—whether through coercion or bribery—must be reasonable, and he can buy more.

One intelligence report indicates that a certain Mullah paid cash and wheat seed to the father of Shafiqullah Rahman and Mohammed Hashim who detonated suicide car bombs on 11 November and 19 November 2009.

Suicide attackers come in different “grades.” Some are illiterate, unsophisticated people, unsuited for complex targeting. A plotter could not expect to select an illiterate village boy from the hinterlands of Zabul Province to move to Florida, obtain a place to live and begin flight training to crash airplanes into buildings.

Just days before 9/11, in Afghanistan, attackers passed themselves off as international journalists and managed to kill Ahmad Shah Massoud. A couple days later, on 9/11, hijackers attacked the United States. The killers were polyglots who combined savvy with international experience to wage complex attacks, such as was seen in Mumbai, India. Another sophisticated international suicide attack occurred in Afghanistan in December 2009, killing seven CIA agents.

More locally, within a short distance of this keyboard, suicide attackers who are spent on random convoys or “common targets” probably tend to be simple folk. Many suicide attackers in Afghanistan are believed to be street children or young people from dirt-poor villages, for instance from Zabul Province. Most are thought to be young, uneducated and impoverished. These unfortunates are believed to be conditioned in madrassas in Pakistan, and in fact our intelligence people believe that there might be three madrassas in one particular town, where suicide bombers are conditioned and shipped straight into Kandahar Province.

IEDs are by far our biggest threat here, yet suicide attacks are also deadly while generating more press. Also, IEDs generally only affect people who go where the IEDs are, while suicide murderers are known to hijack “random” airplanes far away from the perceived battlefield. Most victims of the suicide murderers we face are other Muslims. This was also true in Iraq where murderers would attack mosques or funeral processions, as an example.



In both Iraq and Afghanistan, civilian casualties cause the people to turn against the side perpetrating the casualties. This photo was taken after a suicide bombing in Mosul, Iraq, in May 2005. The neighborhood had been pro-insurgent. After this bomb in the midst of children, the neighborhood turned against the terrorists. The little girl's name was Farah. She died shortly after this moment.

There was a time when Americans seemed to view suicide attacks as a sign of the complete conviction of the enemy, an immutable dedication to their cause that many people found terrifying and cause for soul-searching. "What could we have done to provoke such anger?" Yet with time, American views of suicide attacks have matured and become more grounded. Firstly, Americans in particular are far less afraid of suicide attackers and extremely unlikely to capitulate with anyone who attacks on American soil. Suicide attackers hit American soil. In Iraq and Afghanistan, they have become commonplace. Secondly, most importantly, wild use of suicide attackers is seen not as evidence that we are attacking the "wrong people" whose dedication to their cause is unstoppable, but as concrete evidence that we are attacking the right people and that they should be destroyed. Japanese Kamikaze attacks are ingrained in the psyche of generations of Americans born post-World War II. Despite enemy demonstrations of absolute conviction, our military is today stationed peacefully in Japan.

Overuse of suicide attackers does not appear to cause Americans to cower, but to evoke Americans to want to kill the perpetrator.

Al Qaeda in Iraq was partially but significantly undone by overuse of suicide attackers. The Taliban is marching down the same path, but top-tier Taliban are smarter than al Qaeda and are trying to avert backlash.

Savage behavior continues to turn people against the Taliban. Realizing this, Mullah Omar and his Taliban issued a code of conduct in 2009: "Rules and Regulations for Mujahidin."

Item 41

Make sure you meet these 4 conditions in conducting suicide attacks:

- A-Before he goes for the mission, he should be very educated in his mission.
- B-Suicide attacks should be done always against high ranking people.
- C-Try your best to avoid killing local people.
- D-Unless they have special permission from higher authority, every suicide attack must be approved by higher authority.

In 2009, one report indicated there were 148 suicide bombings or attempts in Afghanistan. Suicide murders continue to occur a short drive from here that are not meeting the above requirements. Taliban continue to hit all manner of targets, and regularly slaughter non-combatant men, women and children.

Within a week subsequent to the publication of this dispatch, suicide murderers will likely kill innocent people here. The Taliban's efforts at repackaging themselves as kinder, gentler mass-murderers is failing. Their suicide bombing campaign is backfiring. The Taliban are losing their cool. Something is in the air. The enemy remains very deadly, yet the scent of their weakness is growing stronger while our people close the in.

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