THE TERROR OF SUICIDE

Irina IOANA, Edmond CRACSNER

Ecological University of Bucharest, Romania (ira_ioana@yahoo.com; edypsy@yahoo.com)

Abstract: According to the World Health Organization (WHO), one person commits suicide every 40 seconds, and the figures seem to be much higher than reported, indicating a worrying increase in recent years. In general, people commit suicide because they do not see any other solution to their turmoil, and because they lose any hope for improvement. The reasons, be they financial, personal, or due to mental disorders, push the individual toward despair. For the suicide bombers though, the reasons vary from military orders to nationalism or religious fanaticism, but most commonly, suicide bombings are based on fundamentalist-religious motivation, thus their overwhelming majority were justified in the name of the Islamist ideology, according to data provided by the literature. Suicide attacks are a form of extreme violence, whose dimensions lie at the intersection of politics, religion, history, and clinical psychology. If a soldier dies for his country, he is the hero. If a believer dies for his God, he is a martyr. If an individual overwhelmed with pain and sadness dies to put an end to it all, it is considered pathological suicide. But are suicide bombers really suicidal? The acts themselves, their motivations and intentions, the circumstances are different, and the present paper intends to analyze the aspects that enable the existence of these suicides.

Keywords: suicide, terrorism, criminal behaviour, prevention, intervention

1. THE SUICIDE MARTYRS

Suicide bombers turned along the last three decades into the most deadly and efficient terrorist weapon, but also the only form of attack in which the assailant is no longer expected to survive the mission. This dangerous and difficult to explain behaviour can be seen as the result of the criminal mind's cruelty combined with the suicidal despair, since the attacker decides, on the one hand, to end his own life, and on the other hand, to kill others. Accordingly, the suicide attacker invokes a wide range of reasons, starting with religious hatred against the West, ending with the eternal paradise awaiting him, however trying to explain these reasons could be the path to a possible solution.

Since the early 1980s, suicide bombings have become the terrorists' favourite killing method in Iraq and Afghanistan, but gaining fast in popularity in territories like Chechnya, the West Bank and Gaza Strip, but spreading also in some Western countries such as the United States of America, Spain, the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, Germany or Sweden.

In 1981, Hossein Fahmideh, a 13-year-old, fanatical Shiite boy, set the tone for this practice by throwing himself under an Iraqi tank with a grenade in his hand during the war between Iran and Iraq. Ayatollah Ali Khomeini declared him a national hero and, as a result, thousands of young Iranians died slaughtered on mine fields, while trying to ensure a clear passage for their soldiers [1].

Two years later, in 1983, the first attack of this kind took place against a Western target, when a suicide attacker drove a vehicle filled with explosives in the lobby of the American Embassy in Beirut killing 63 people: 32 Lebanese, 17 Americans and 14 visitors [2]. Iranian authorities have denied any involvement in the attack, but Hezbollah claimed the bombing shortly after, proving that the executions were approved and financed by Iranian officials. Iran's role in the suicide bombings was crucial not only by the officials' attitude, but most notably by reinterpreting Quran, making suicide an act of courage and transforming suicide into martyrdom and killers into heroes.

Suicide bombings involve a paradox within Islam. On the one hand, verses relating to jihad show unequivocally that fighters should not take the lives of non-combatants such as women, children, the sick or the elderly. At the same time, any individual who dies in battle with non-Muslims is considered a martyr, and is guaranteed the highest rank in Paradise [3].

Whether political, religious or derived from hatred, the reasons behind these acts of extreme violence have nothing to do with suicide. To explain this claim we must examine the entire historical, religious, and nationalist context, and also the psychological roots and cultural Islamic interpretation concerning paradise, sexuality, shame and honour.

Those willing to execute such acts, most of them teenagers or young adults are called "martyrs" (*pl.* Shuhada, *sg.* Shahid) or "the ones who sacrifice themselves" (*pl.* Fida'iyun, *sg.* Fida'i). Therefore, they don't commit suicide because suicide is a sin [4], but any violent action, even murder, in order to cause harm to non-Muslims is an act of profound piety. This contradiction has been examined by many experts, who point out that the prohibition of suicide was actually very effective, as shown in Figure 1, which presents information provided by the World Health Organisation [2], showing a small number of suicides in Muslim countries.
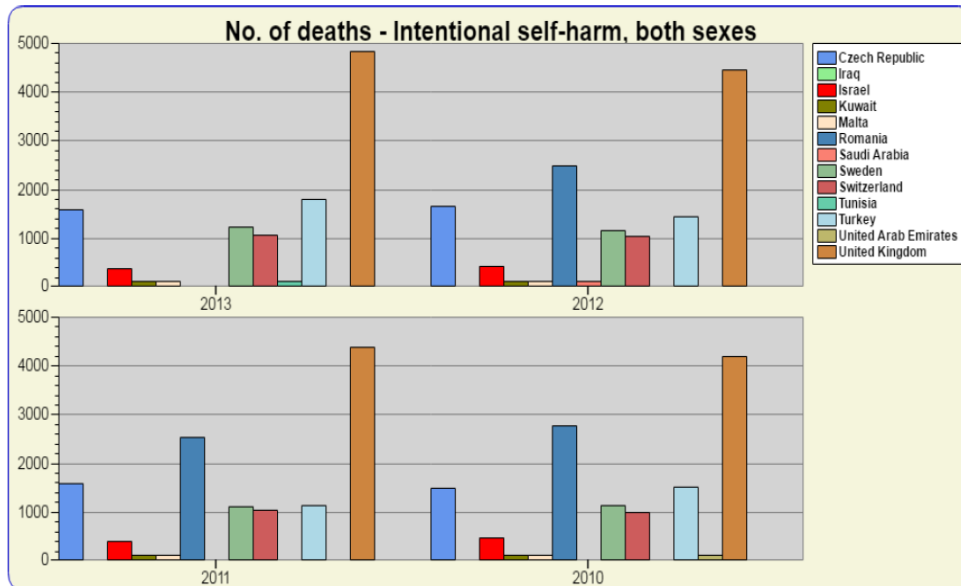

FIG. 1 The number of deaths due to suicide, both sexes, between 2010 and 2013, the selected countries

But when one's death is done in the name of Jihad, when it promotes the values of Islam, then it raises the individual to the rank of martyr [5], [6].
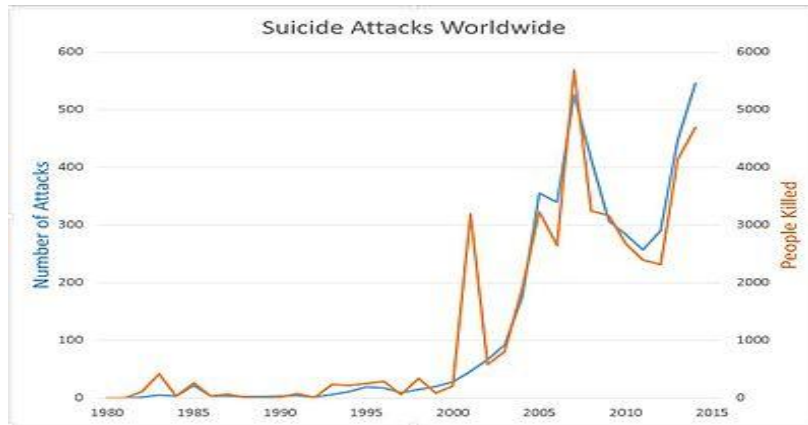
FIG. 2 The number of suicide attacks and the victims of these attacks between 1982-2015

Figure 2 shows the number of suicide attacks and victims of such attacks from1982 to 2015, according to the Chicago Project on Security and Terrorism [6] database, which leads to the conclusion of an alarming increase in both attacks, and number of victims.

The number of martyrs (mujahidin) who die in battle and end up in paradise to enjoy an infinitely greater heavenly reward than that of mere mortals, has increased dramatically in the last 15 years, and the fact that Islamic clergy rarely condemns such practices as being anti-Muslim, offers the possibility to use religion as motivation. Interpreting that Quran is steeped in the blood of the martyrs; leads to the conclusion that murder and suicide are not violations of the law. But, on the contrary, can be regarded as the greatest achievements of Islamic Spirituality, martyrs enjoying unexpected pleasures in Paradise [7].

2. PURPOSE AND METHODS

Our paper offers a review of the literature, with the purpose of examining the profile of psychopathologic suicide bomber. As research methods we use qualitative analysis (literature review/desk research), secondary analysis of quantitative data resulting from scientific research carried out by profile institutes, as well as the comparative analysis method.

We believe that the secondary analysis of quantitative data is an appropriate method, most suitable when the researcher does not have the opportunity to collect their own data, but still aiming to advance beyond the initial results of an empirical research previously carried out.

Our research and findings, which have been obtained as a result of qualitative analysis, comparative analysis, and analysis of secondary data, can be found in the content of this paper.

3. RESULTS

The few studies on terrorists' or suicide attackers' psychopathology presents mixed results.

Some authors who have come to the conclusion that there is no particular psychological typology to describe the personality of the suicide attacker, believe that these perpetrators present a solid mental health, and have no criminal past.

Other authors, who consider that there can be identified a particular psychological typology of the suicide attacker, believe those who sacrifice for the cause of the terrorist organisation they belong to, are at least mentally unstable and materialize in a demonstrative manner their suicidal ideation.

Paradoxically, even research based on interviews of suicide attackers arrested after failed bombings, shows some discrepancies, as some are completely mentally unstable, but others are not. Of course, we can assert that those who exhibit cognitive impairment, as a result of a failed attack, were so close to death that derealisation can be considered normal.

4. SUICIDE AND RELIGION

Although mainstream references are to be avoided, we do not see any risk in stating that in the dogma of all religions suicide is severely condemned and discouraged by any means, each cult within its own gradient.

The literature shows that Judaism leaves some "escape routes" for believers who commit the ultimate sin, deeming suicide as preferable where there is the possibility for the individual to commit certain cardinal sins. Some of these involve murder, sexual deviancy and idolatry. Therefore, rather than kill, rape, or change your religion, in Jewish usage, it is preferable to commit suicide. Suicide victims, however, are buried in a special area in cemetery and are deprived of certain specific rituals.

From the Roman Catholic perspective the commandment "thou shalt not kill!" is translated also on one's own person, but the Catholic Church allows for the suicide victim to have a burial service, recognizing that serious mental disorders can affect judgment, pushing the individual to take his life. This is not an act of accepting suicide, but an act of forgiveness of the suicide victim, considering that God will find the suitable punishment for sinful.

The Orthodox Church forbids any the burial privileges for the suicide victim, although there are always exceptions. Thus, the Orthodox teachings assure us that the souls of the suicidal will spend eternity in the fires of hell, to discourage any intention to commit this spiritual catastrophe and, in this case, does not grant religious assistance to those who take their own life. The exception is that a funeral service can be conducted for those who killed themselves as a result of mental suffering, but a specialist has to confirm. In such cases, the priest can conduct the funeral, but with greater sobriety and temperance.

Protestants see suicide as a crime, and because the last sacrament cannot be administered before death, as required by this religion, the saving of the soul is impossible. Consequently, to deny your soul's salvation is the ultimate sin, in the present case.

In Islam a few sins are more serious than suicide; it is expressly described in the Quran as a capital sin, having as a consequence the fact that the sinner will never escape from hell. In the light of the last decade's events, Islamic clerics have tried in innumerable occasions to explain that "human bombs" do not make an exception, they are considered to be cases of suicide and not martyrs.

The urge is "... do not kill yourself! Allah is merciful [*Rahim*] with you! ", as it is written in the Quran, Surah 4 (An-Nisa), ayat 29.

Religious Idealism cannot fully explain this despair, this intense longing for death, but without such a framework, it is highly unlikely that this phenomenon exists. Although these acts of violence are not part of Islam and are not exclusive to the Muslim world, most are taking place in the Arab countries [8].

116

We should acknowledge that the martyrs and suicide cases have nothing in common. In the case of suicide, the goal itself is the death of the individual in order to end the suffering. In the case of martyrdom, the goal itself is not the death of the individual. While it is true that one is not a martyr if one is not dead, the act itself is not to commit suicide, but to glorify God, without desire or propose to kill someone, including oneself.

In probably all religions we might discuss a martyr is an individual who wants to transcend death, as this represents a sacrifice of oneself made for the absolute ideal of immortality.

5. SUICIDAL OR CRIMINAL

Although suicide attacks accounted for less than 3% of all terrorist attacks, they amounted to about 22% of all deaths related to terrorism. Even though most of these cases are related to Islam, they are not exclusive Muslim world [9].

Research has highlighted numerous aspects of the general phenomenon of suicide including socio-economic factors, age, sex and marital status, issues that focus on personality characteristics of people with suicidal tendencies, as well as life-experiences that increase the probability of committing suicide. Terrorism-related studies have captivated researchers' attention, and still do, yet a consensus on the personality profile and the common characteristics of suicide bombers, cannot be reached.

To be able to understand if these terrorists have suicidal tendencies, or not, we should compare suicide attackers with other cases of suicide. Emile Durkheim postulated that the act of suicide cannot be understood by ignoring the social or cultural conditions of its occurrence. The French sociologist identified four types of suicide: selfish suicide, anomic suicide, selfless suicide and fatalistic suicide [10], and Alec Roy presents three main categories: anomic suicide, selfish suicide and selfless suicide [11]. With referral to the concept of selfish suicide, Bruce Bongar states that this is most frequently associated with depressive symptoms, loss of hope, mental pain [12] and was the cause of approximately 18,000 deaths between 2010 and 2013 in the United Kingdom and over 10,000, between the same years, in Romania, as shown in Figure 3, according to the data provided by the World Health Organisation [13].
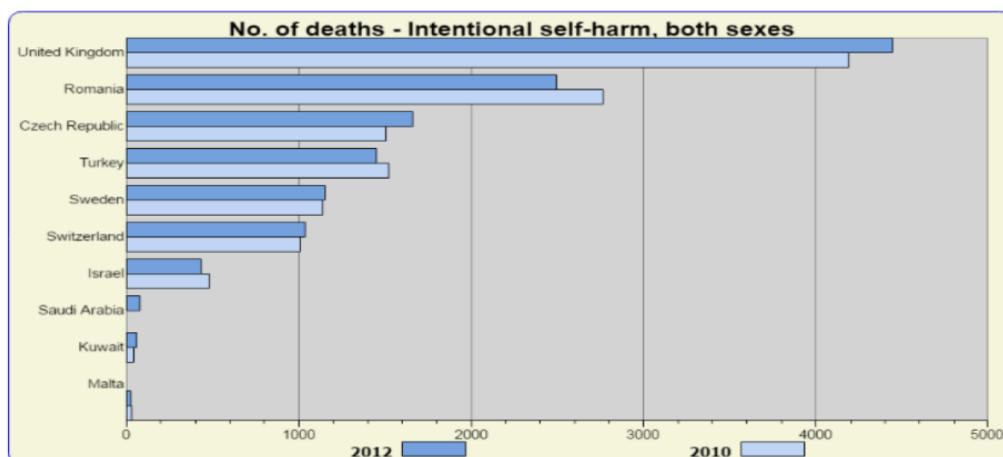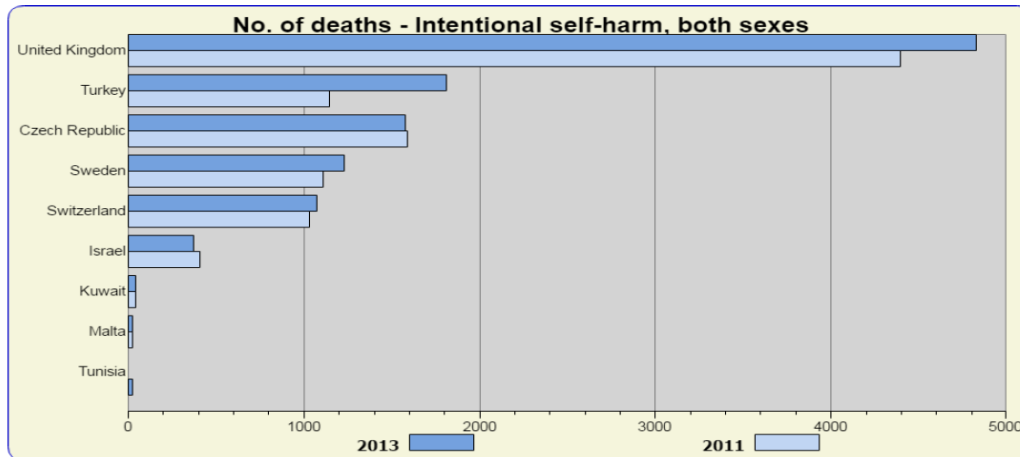
FIG. 3 The number of deaths due to suicide, of both sexes, between 2010-2013, the selected countries

Durkheim differentiates three forms of selfless suicide: mandatory, optional and acute [13]. An example of selfless suicide would be the wives' mandatory suicide after the death of their spouses. We are in the presence of selfless optional suicide when this act is considered a merit, but it is not required, as in "seppuku". Finally, selfless acute the suicide represents the desire of an individual to die in order to unite with divinity, and comes as s conclusive expression of a religious belief.

Loss of control over one's own destiny leads to fatalistic suicide, which can be exemplified by the mass suicides we see within sects.

In order to establish a profile of the suicide bomber it is necessary to ask ourselves whether these terrorists, who sacrifice their lives in order to kill others, are actually suicidal and if their psychological mechanisms are different from those that push the individual towards selfish suicide.

Currently, the literature does not show a consensus regarding the personality factors, or risk factors, which might help determine profiles of potential suicide attackers [14]. This is due, largely, to the fact that the suicide attacks and, especially, the process behind it, is multidimensional and multi-determined [15], as it includes psychological, social, spiritual factors, as well as issues of honour and morality, over which is placed the homogeneous cultural veil.

6. SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

According to some opinions, there can identified similarities between the suicide bombers and cases of selfless or selfish suicide. Adam Lankford posits that these attackers might have in fact suicidal tendencies, showing some key features of selfish suicide: desire to escape the world; the desire to escape the moral responsibility for their actions; inability to cope with a crisis; feeling of low self-worth [16]. However, individuals overwhelmed by the pain of their own existence do not manifest cruelty against those around them. According to Emile Durkheim, selfishness appears in the state in which the individual self develops in excess in comparison to the social self and to the detriment of the latter [10], but violence manifests itself only against one's own person. Nothing leads us to conclude that there is any factor which turns the selfish suicidal into a murderer.

There are also opinions according to which one can identify similarities between the suicide terrorists and the Japanese kamikaze pilots, who in World War II collapsed with their planes intentionally, as a tactic against the U.S. Navy.

In this note, references were made to these suicide terrorists as "Islamikaze", out of the desire to emphasize the similarity between the kamikaze pilots, and suicide bombers, who, in most cases, are Muslims. However, the kamikaze attacks of the second world war and the terrorist suicide attacks have an essential difference, namely that the Japanese pilots and had directed the attacks only at military targets, while suicide terrorists are largely targeting civilians, and national landmarks, in order to terrify the population.

Even if there can be identified some similarities, they are only apparent, because an in-depth analysis shows significant differences between suicide bombings and other suicide cases. In consequence, the authors suggest that suicide terrorism is really a unique phenomenon [17] [18].

Accordingly, we can identify a number of differences with respect to the act itself, the motives behind it and the author's profile.

6.1. The suicidal act itself

We find, by means of literature, some significant differences between the suicide bomber and selfish suicide, as follows:

☐in terrorism, self-destruction is intended to frighten the target population, while in selfish suicide it usually aims to drawing the attention of those closest to the individual. Furthermore, selfish suicide ends only the days of its author, as opposed to suicide terrorism, which aims to commit mass murder;

☐suicide terrorism is not perceived by its author as an act of suicide, but rather as an act of martyrdom based on Islamic principles of Jihad [19];

☐while through selfish suicide one chooses death as an escape from their miserable existence, suicide terrorists choose death to become immortal [20], thus their sacrifice becoming a continuation of life;

☐suicide attackers are most often backed by an organization and, as such, are used as a strategic and tactic weapons [21].

A suicide attack is carried out after intense preparation, which includes several steps:

☐ the recruitment of the author;

☐ initiation of the future martyr, which is usually done with the help of a high-ranking member of the organization or community, who represents a spiritual authority;

☐ isolation and training, which include religious and political indoctrination, training in the use of weapons or explosives involved in the attack, as well as preparing for death;

☐ preparation of the last days before the attack in which the suicide terrorist disrupts from reality, and focuses on the importance of his action and on purifying their soul through fasting and prayer before becoming immortal [20].
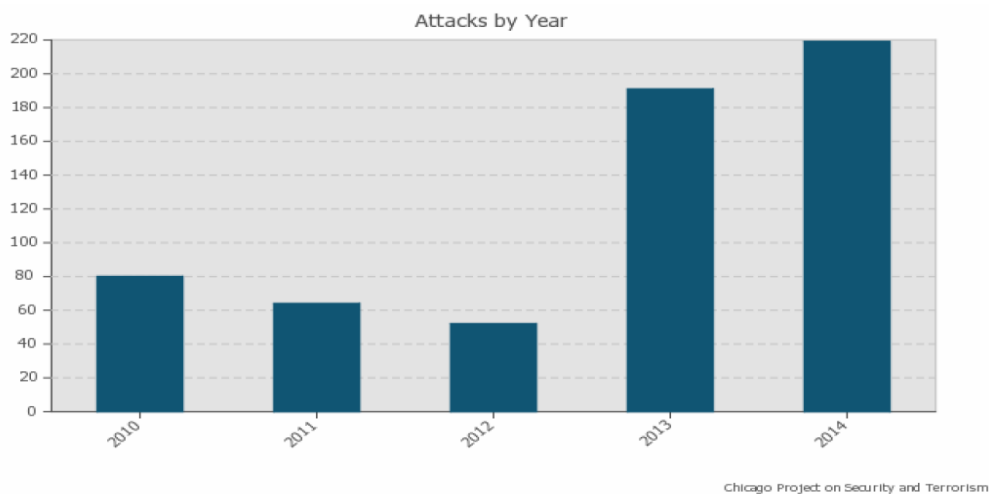

Fig.4 The number of suicide attacks in the period 2010-2014

Fig. 4 shows a graph put together from the data provided by the Chicago Project on Security and Terrorism [6], with regard to the number of suicide attacks in the period 2010-2014, from which we can infer a notable growth in the involvement of terrorist organisations in preparing suicide attacks.

6.2. The reasons for the suicide attacker

The difference between the motivation of selfish suicide and terrorist suicide is clear enough. If, in the first case, the individual's desire focuses on cessation of suffering, in the second case the emphasis is on personal achievements, family, political, emotional and material gains. The main motivation in selfish suicide is to put an end to psychological pain [12], while the suicide attacker's motivation is to create terror [22]. Israel Orbach described the motivation behind suicide attacks as follows: determination and enthusiasm consolidated by the success of previous attacks; the ideological hatred and anger directed against different religious, cultural and ethnic groups, the suicide bombers' martyrdom's glorification and heavenly rewards; recognition of the merits of the author's family [20].

Karen Pittel and Dirk Rübbelke suggest three ideas that underlie the various suicide attacks: post-mortem effects, as well as increasing social and financial status of the attacker's family; the effects of the announcement, as the increasing admiration for the attacker; effects of ceasing, referring to the negative consequences that may occur if the attacker does not carry out the attack [23].

Table 1 The number of suicide attacks and the victims of such attacks during the period 2010-2014,Depending on the location

Attacks and Casualties by Location

Country	Attacks	Killed	Wounded	Lethality
Iraq	597	5751	13879	9.6
Israel	1	2	0	2.0
Kuwait	0	0	0	-
Tunisia	1	0	0	0.0
Turkey	7	16	78	2.3
United Kingdom	0	0	0	-

Table 1 shows the number of suicide attacks and their victims during the period 2010-2014, we can obviously see an increase in the involvement of terrorist organisations in organizing suicide attacks. The data is provided by the Chicago Project on Security and Terrorism [6] database.

6.3. The suicide attacker's profile

So far there is no consensus with regard to the suicide attacker's profile, but what is certain is the fact that this individual's personality differs significantly from the profile of an person who commits selfish suicide [22] [15] [17]. Most terrorists do not show suicide tendencies, have not been diagnosed with any mental disorders, nor conduct self-mutilating behaviour. Most often, the suicide attackers are susceptible to foreign influences, are suggestible and are easily indoctrinated. Therefore, it seems that terrorist organizations are interested in recruiting individuals with dependent/avoidant personality disorder. Moreover, there are important elements in achieving a suicide bombing which are not present in the selfish suicide, such as: indoctrination, culture, ideology and doctrine, a strong belief in the ideals of the group; commitment to the cause of the group; commitment to the leader of the group, and a deeply personal public support.

Therefore, we can say that, in most cases, terrorists who sacrifice their own life to take that of others, do not show suicidal tendencies, having nothing in common with the profile or characteristics of the classical suicidal tendencies.

Taking into account the factors mentioned above, we share the opinion that suicide terrorism belongs to a different subtype of behaviour, being incomparable to any other type of suicide, or to martyrdom.

Suicide attacks cannot be placed without a doubt in mental pathology because the authors, who consciously accept death in order to cause the loss of the enemy, do not do this because they are suffering from a mental illness, but because they ensure their group's survival by doing so. The causes of suicide bombings that are not in individual psychopathology can be identified in the social conditions that favour the existence of this phenomenon, and the understanding and knowledge of these conditions is essential for the development of appropriate policies to stop it, or at least reduce its effects. These attacks are carried out by people motivated by the organizations to which they belong, considering themselves, metaphorically, as the blood that flows through the veins of the terrorist group. In the book *Dying to Win*, Pape argues that 95% of suicide attacks were not carried out for reasons of religious or ideological, but rather as part of clear political strategy [22].

Suicide attacks are a form of extreme violence, a weapon of psychological war having the sole purpose of frightening the target population, the strategy being to eliminate or diminish drastically areas where the public feels safe [21].

Through the horrendous spectacle of dismembered bodies suicide bombings create a horrible scene of destruction of the human face of the enemy, killing him and at the same time depriving him of the right to be buried, thus depriving him of this life and of the afterlife. With regard to the offender, he is convinced that his transformation into a martyr will give him joy without end in the afterlife and the eternal love of the countless maiden.

Table 2 The number of suicide attacks and the victims of such attacks during the period 2010-2014,
Depending on the method used

Attacks and Casualties by Weapon

Weapon	Attacks	Killed	Wounded	Lethality
Airplane	0	0	0	0.0
Belt Bomb	222	2641	5824	11.9
Car Bomb	360	2887	7728	8.0
Other	3	5	38	1.7
Unknown	5	69	13	13.8

In table 1, based on data from the Chicago Project on Security and Terrorism [6], with regard to the number of suicide attacks and their victims during the period 2010-2014, we can see the great variety of forms of attack and their lethal effectiveness.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Psychology plays a fundamental role in the understanding of the individual and group processes that favour the occurrence of suicide bombings and the psychological autopsy technique could be an important tool, perhaps the only one, in the psychopathologic study of suicide terrorists, and it may ultimately contribute to the prevention of future attacks.

Currently, psychologists and specialists in counter-terrorism agencies do not have a standardized measure, which could indicate the extent to which an individual fits the profile of a suicide terrorist. In addition, it is becoming increasingly clear that suicide terrorists have a diverse cultural, psychological and economical background, which makes this task even more difficult.

In his findings, Ariel Merari identifies the dependent/avoidant personality type as the most common factor in the psychological structure of suicide terrorists. Thus, the individual is rather shy, socially withdrawn, a doer rather than a leader, not very good at school, at work, feeling like a disappointment for the family [17].

Identification of potential suspects is a difficult but very important task. From existing data, outlining the perpetrators' psychological profile should include the following: potential suicide terrorists are people susceptible to external influences, thus easily falling into the recruiter's net; recruiter who generally is an individual with a great capacity to influence people; a special degree of concern should present the places where individuals may be conscripted by agents of the terrorist organisations, and such locations could include Madrasas, mosques and prisons; two of the most fertile environments for growing suicide terrorists are the refugees camps and custodial environments through the dehumanizing treatment of prisoners; suicide attacks are most often based on organizations, rather than a single individual.

These terror attacks within the Muslim world cannot, unfortunately, be separated from religion because of those who believe that jihad is synonymous with war, and who feel empowered by the Quran to take radical measures.

The ideological basis of such interpretation has deep roots in the Islamic theology. Any attempt to explain suicide terrorist attacks that omits the fact that religion, exploitation by the Western powers, political oppression, poverty and lack of education can constitute grounds for those who decide to blow themselves up in order to kill others, is on the road to failure. And, moreover, virtually all data and information suggest that for the majority of the suicide attackers, Islam is the main motivation. The causes of suicide bombings are not solely in the individual's psychopathology, but in society as a whole.

REFERENCES

[1] "http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/841/3435.htm," [Online]. [Accessed 14 August 2016];

[2] "http://apps.who.int/healthinfo/statistics/mortality/whodpms/," [Online];

[3] V. D. Volkan, *"Suicide Bombers, Virginia University"*;

[4] "http://archive.islamonline.net/?p=5915," [Online]. [Accessed 14 August 2016];

[5] D. Pipes, "http://www.danielpipes.org/386/the-suicide-jihad-menace," [Online];

[6] "http://cpostdata.uchicago.edu/search_new.php?clear=1," [Online]. [Accessed 14 August 2016];

[7] "Bukhari, Sahih al-Bukhari, vol. 4, book 52, hadith 48," [Online];

[8] "http://www.gendercide.org/case_honour.html," [Online]. [Accessed 16 August 2016];

[9] G. Burnham, "Suicide attacks—the rationale and consequences.," *The Lancet,* no. 37, p. 855–857, 2011;

[10] E. Durkheim, Sinuciderea, Antet, 2005;

[11] A. Roy, "Risk factors in suicide," in *Symposium of the Suicide Education Institute of Boston, in collaboration with the Center of Suicide Research and Prevention*, Montreal, 1988;

[12] B. Bongar, "The suicidal patient: Clinical and legal standards of care, 2nd ed," Washington, DC, American Psychological Association, 2002, p. 3–38;

[13] S. Stack, "Emile Durkheim and altruistic suicide," *Archives Of Suicide Research,* vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 9-22, 2004;

[14] Ariel Merari, Ilan Diamant, Arie Bibi, Yoav Broshi, and Giora Zakin, "Personality characteristics of "self-martyrs"/"suicide bombers" and organizers of suicide attacks," *Terrorism and Political Violence,* vol. 22, pp. 87-101, 2009;

[15] E. Townsend, "Suicide terrorists: Are they suicidal?," *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior,* vol. 37, no. 1, pp. 35-49, 2007;

[16] A. Lankford, "Do suicide terrorists exhibit clinically suicidal risk factors?," *Aggression and Violent Behavior,* vol. 15, no. 5, p. 334–340, 2010;

[17] A. Merari, Driven to Death: Psychological and Social Aspects of Suicide Terrorism, Oxford University Press, 2010;

[18] A. Moghadam, "Suicide Terrorism, Occupation, and the Globalization of Martyrdom: A Critique of Dying to Win," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism,* no. 29, p. 707–729, 2006;

[19] A. Abdel-Khalek, "Neither altruistic suicide, nor terrorism but Martyrdom: A Muslim perspective.," *Archives of Suicide Research,* vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 99-113, 2004;

[20] I. Orbach, "Terror suicide: How is it possible?," *Archives of Suicide Research,* vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 115-130, 2004;

[21] W. Hutchinson, "The systemic roots of suicide bombing," *Systems Research and Behavioral Science. 24 (2),* p. 191–200, March 2007;

[22] R. Pape, Dying to win: The strategic logic of suicide terrorism., New York: Random House, 2005;

[23] D. R. Karen Pittel, "Decision Processes of a Suicide Bomber – the Economics and Psychology of Attacking and Defecting," *Defence and Peace Economics,* vol. 23, no. 3, p. 251–272, 2012.