

Review article

Suicide that “makes sense” – the mechanism of suicide terrorism

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ABSTRACT

Suicide should be considered one of the most drastic ways of solving life problems by an individual, and today it is increasingly becoming an effective tool for terrorists. Statistics show an increase in the number of terrorist operations, in which the intended effect is the bomber's suicide, and the number of victims is also growing. The research problem posed in the article is: “How does the need to make sense of the surrounding reality foster the motivation of suicide terrorists?”. The hypothesis formulated for the analysis is as follows: “Suicide is the sense-making factor around which most potential terrorist-suicides organize their lives. The factors conducive to forming an attitude of readiness to commit suicide are part of a culture that glorifies suicide, giving it new meanings, attractive to the individual's personal and social identity”. The statistics and literature concerning the issue of suicides, especially those of a terrorist nature, are subject to analysis. According to the authors of the article, suicide committed by a terrorist is not an effect of loss of will to live, helplessness, or depression, but it is a factor that generates important existential senses motivating to act. For that reason, the popularity of terrorist suicide operations and the effectiveness of organizations applying terror as a tool to fight for their goals are increasing.

KEYWORDS

suicide, terrorism, suicide terrorism

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Introduction

Suicide is a phenomenon encountered in all societies worldwide. In work “Man's search for meaning”, Viktor E. Frankl claimed that lack of will to live is a consequence of loss of meaning. He built a logotherapy school – a method of treating mental disorders – around the thesis [1, p. 149-197]. We usually think about suicides in a way like V.E. Frankl – as people who have lost the sense of existence and the will to live. The presented analysis proposes a reversed approach to the phenomenon of suicide attacks perpetrated by terrorists – as an act that gives life meaning and significance and motivates action.

According to the World Health Organization, approximately 800,000 people die by suicide every year [2]. Following the statistics in Poland, the scale of suicides has remained at a similar

level since 2013. In 2013-2019, more than 6 thousand cases of suicide were reported. Against the background of the European Union countries, Poland is in the “lead” of the countries with the highest number of suicides. An increase in their number committed by children and adolescents is observed. The suicide rate for Poland is 16.2 per 100 thousand inhabitants, while the world average is 10.5 per 100 thousand and the European one – 13.7 [3].

Suicide affects people representing all age categories. In 2019, 5255 people committed suicide in Poland [4] (for comparison – 2909 people died in road accidents in 2019 [3; 5]). In developing and developed countries, men end their lives three times more often than women. The World Health Organization has seen a reduction in such events over the years, but stresses that the situation imperatively calls for immediate improvement [3].

A special case of suicide is the act of a terrorist who treats their death as a tool to achieve a goal (usually the organization he/she represents, but not exclusively). Although cases of death by suicide as an act of terror have been recorded long ago, modern times have seen an increase in the number of such attacks. Organizations like Al-Qaeda, Islamic Jihad, or Islamic State “inspire” susceptible individuals to sacrifice their lives in the name of the organization’s goals. Religious fanaticism, the fight against Western domination, or the desire to create one’s state are the reasons for such acts. Suicide terrorist attacks are usually carried out in large gatherings of people (e.g., airports, subways) and objects crucial to the state’s functioning. Their victims are often public figures but also “ordinary” people. Terrorists have discovered that “a human weapon” is highly mobile and adapts to changing conditions. That is where its effectiveness lies. Suicide seems to be an act of despair, hopelessness, and desperation of a person who has lost the will to live. That is how Viktor E. Frankl saw suicide, treating this act as an expression of a human’s surrender to life’s hardship and loss of meaning. In this article, it is assumed that in the case of suicide bombers who most often act as volunteers, it is connected to “creating” a new, attractive meaning for them – salvation, gaining fame, fighting for values more essential than human life. Therefore, suicide makes sense and is not an expression of losing it, although, for some suicides, such an act is a desperate attempt to end their worthless lives. However, the motive for “fatalistic” suicide is a minority among other ones accompanying suicide-terrorists. Most of these motivations have their origins in culture – in politics, religion, ideology. Throughout history, we observe the evolution of suicide as a social phenomenon. We can say that contemporary religious and political conflicts have created its new kind, which we will call “sense-making suicide” for this paper. The research problem posed in the paper is: “How does the need to make sense of the surrounding reality foster the motivation of suicide terrorists?”. For this analysis, the hypothesis posed is as follows: “Suicide is a sense-making factor around which many potential suicide bombers organize their lives. The factors conducive to forming an attitude of readiness to commit suicide are part of a culture that glorifies suicide, giving it new meanings, attractive to the individual’s personal and social identity”.

1. The concept of suicide and suicide terrorism

Suicide is a consequence of many psychological, social, and biological conditions. The concept of suicide is defined variously, depending on the scientific discipline (sociology, psychiatry, theology, forensics).

According to E. Durkheim, suicide means “any case of death resulting from a direct or indirect, negative or positive action performed by the victim who knows what the result of this action will be” [6, p. 94]. E. Durkheim distinguished four types of suicide, as described in Table 1.

B. Hołyst indicates that “suicide is a demonstrative destruction of human life”. According to the author, fear of life, which may result in suicide, is a serious social problem [7, p. 35].

I. Pospiszyl calls suicide “such a conscious behavior of an individual of whom at least one of the direct goals is to deprive themselves of life” [6, p. 94-95]. Thus, suicide is an intentional act whose causes can be associated with a sense of helplessness and failure to see another way out of a difficult situation.

I. Wiciak explains suicide not only in terms of the act of ending one’s own life but also takes account of the reasons that lead to it. The author defines it as the result of the inability to cope with problems, inability to satisfy one’s needs, or lack of contact with other people, which brings the loss of hope for a better future and a sense of meaning in life [8, p. 49].

According to M. Kuć, “suicide is an extremely destructive act, resulting from frustration on the ground of a serious conflict, which, according to the suicidal person, cannot be solved otherwise than by taking his/her own life” [9, p. 146].

Emil Durkheim created one of the best-known typologies of suicide in the second half of the 19th century. Its description is presented in Table 1.

B. Hołyst treats suicide not so much as an event, but as a process, which can start very early from the imagination and mature until the individual is ready to effectively deprive himself/herself of life. According to the author, suicide is not just a case of tragic self-destruction but a sequence of interrelated thoughts and actions that can last for years. Hołyst introduced the term of “suicidal behavior” for a sequence of reactions that occur when the consciousness develops the will to commit suicide. The author distinguishes four related stages in this process:

- imagined suicide,
- desired suicide,
- attempted suicide,
- accomplished suicide.

Table 1. Typology of suicides according to E. Durkheim

Types of suicides	Description
Egoistic suicide	The main motive for the action taken is a personal problem or difficulty from which the suicide is escaping. This type predominates in individuals who have never been able to form a strong bond with the social environment. The individual is not interested in the challenges of life.
Altruistic suicide	It manifests itself in people characterized by too strong a social bond. It is mainly caused by the expectation of improving others’ situation, sacrificing oneself as a victim for others’ good. This type is often seen in heroic behavior, such as a soldier throwing a grenade close to themselves to save others, a firefighter dying in a fire to save another person’s life, or sacrificing oneself for an idea.
Anomic suicide	It is committed because of loosening or breaking emotional and social ties and results from the conviction that life no longer has meaning. The factor that causes anomic processes can be a sudden enrichment, loss of a job, or an unexpected social promotion, leading to the separation of the individual from their previous environment.
Fatalistic suicide	It is caused by fortuitous events with which the individual cannot come to terms, e.g., disability, imprisonment. Sometimes we can meet with this type of suicide in oncological patients.

Source: Own study based on [10, p. 14].

Imagined suicide occurs when a person realizes that it is a way to solve life’s problems. Most people quickly abandon such a thought. However, if the idea of suicide persists, it may evolve into a goal that becomes desirable. Hołyst calls the stage a desired suicide. People can live with such a desire for a very long time. Thoughts of suicide can trigger attempts to take one’s own life, which is an attempted suicide. The stage ending with death is the last action in the suicidal process described by the author (accomplished suicide) [7, p. 121].

I. Wiciak proposes a division of suicides, considering the criterion of intention and outcome of the action (Table 2).

Table 2. Types of suicide

Type A	Intentional suicide	The person wants to die and achieves the intended effect
Type B	Unintentional failure	The person wants to die, but their actions do not reach the effect sought
Type C	Mistaken suicide	Unlike the previous two types, the person does not want to die, but his/her action results in death
Type D	Intentional failure	This is a classic action, which aims to “cry for help”

Source: Own study based on [8, p. 49-50].

Violence, like terror, has been a part of social life since the dawn of time. Violence is often used in the name of establishing dominance or maintaining existing power relations. Terrorism is a relatively new phenomenon; it can be said that in the modern era, terrorism and its various forms “flourish”. Technological progress and the development of mass media contribute to that [11, p. 23].

To explain the concept of suicide terrorism, let us start with the definition of “terror” and “terrorism”. “Terror” (from Latin: “fear”, “horror”) means the use of violence, rape, cruelty against an opponent to destroy or intimidate him. Terror is one of the components of terrorism [12, p. 52]. “Terrorism” is a concept in which the ideology associated with politics and religion appears in addition to fear and violence. Terrorism, in the literal sense of the word, means “the use of terror, especially by an extremist group that, through political assassinations, hostage kidnappings, hijacking of air, sea, and other vessels, tries to draw public attention to the slogans and demands it puts forward or to force certain concessions from the governments of states” [12, p. 52].

According to T. Białek, “terrorism is the exertion of political influence through the unlawful use of force – coercion or violence, associated with the violation of elementary social norms and the rules of political struggle established in a given circle, based on deliberate intimidation and manipulation; achieving political goals through creating an atmosphere of threat by acts of violence, hindering the functioning of the hostile social system, and forcing decisions, as well as the opponent’s actions employing drastic tactics of accomplished facts or blackmail by force” [13, p. 563].

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) understands terrorism as “the unlawful use of force and violence against persons and things (property rights) to intimidate or coerce a government, civilian population, or any other segment of a state’s system to support political or social objectives” [14, p. 11].

Modern terrorism is evolving; it constantly changes its forms and methods. Terrorists who aim to create fear focus on planning and executing attacks to kill as many people as possible. The more victims, the greater the publicity and fear: "Whether or not susceptibility to fear is lessened in our time, it constitutes an important component of the experience, despite efforts undertaken to overcome it" [15, p. 14].

According to M. Zimny, suicide terrorism "is one of the forms of modern terrorism, in which the success of the attack depends on the main performer's death (readiness to die)" [11, p. 24].

A terrorist suicide attack can occur when its executor directly kills himself/herself. In the second case, the bomber is indifferent to his/her fate – he/she subconsciously accepts death or even expects it. M. Zimny indicated two categories of a terrorist suicide attack:

- terrorist suicide bombing that is defined as a terrorist act in which the perpetrator's death is a single incident, necessary to achieve the assumed goals,
- terrorist suicide operation that is not a single but a complex terrorist act in which the perpetrator or perpetrators' death is one of the elements of cooperation in a planned operation [11, p. 24-25].

Suicide terrorism represents an incident that is difficult to predict. For this reason, among others, its impact is so much destructive and its symbolism is striking. Suicide terrorism in most cases is directed at:

- "forcing states to make changes to their political systems, internal and external policies,
- forcing young democracies to make significant political or other changes that will be more beneficial to terrorist organizations,
- forcing the withdrawal of military forces from areas that those organizations consider to be their homelands or places of particular religious importance".

Suicide terrorism exploits fear, destroys the lives of civilians unrelated to the conflict, and uses violence as a bargaining chip. Security is a state of freedom from threats, while suicide terrorism is its negation [11, p. 25].

An example of another category of suicide terrorism is the so-called "suicide by cop" (suicide by police officers/by the police), where the bomber deliberately behaves in a way that provokes police officers to kill him/her. The phenomenon was first described in 1981 in the press and has gained popularity in the 21st century. A common scenario for a suicide bomber is to point a gun at a police officer or another defenseless person so as to provoke the police to inflict death on the terrorist [16].

2. Suicide as a social fact

Suicide is a complex phenomenon that needs to be described and explained using multiple perspectives. The phenomenon of suicide has been present in various cultures throughout the centuries. It is evidenced by the contents of legends, myths, fairy tales, many historical documents, and nowadays by the social research results and statistics of institutions dealing with preventing and monitoring social pathologies. It is supposed that the earlier functions of suicide were based on the fact that it could be an expression of submission to the rules of collective life or a consequence of betraying those rules. It could also have been an act of escape from responsibility or the result of assuming responsibility, blind obedience, or

a manifestation of the individual’s will. Nevertheless, suicide was not common in some societies. These include few cultural circles, narrow and isolated ethnic groups such as some Aboriginal tribes, the Andaman Islanders, or the Yaghan Indians of the Fire Land [6, p. 99].

In some cultures, suicide was forced, especially on individuals who held a high position in the community. The ancient Thracian community used self-immolation rituals – a wife was burned at stake along with her husband’s corpse. In ancient Germany, suicide took the form of throwing oneself into the sea from a cliff to get free from the sufferings and ailments of old age. In the Far East, suicide was often practiced and even glorified. In China, the primary motive for suicides committed by women was the loss of a mother’s will to live after the loss of a child, a widow after her husband’s death, or a maiden who wanted to release herself from the obligation of marriage. In Japan, suicides were committed by warriors who did not want to give themselves up as slaves, couples in love who could not get married, or people suffering from an illness or financial hardship [10, p. 29-30].

The motives for suicide indicated in people living in the ancient and medieval periods were as follows:

- mental breakdown after the loss of material things,
- despair after the loss of someone close,
- unhappy love,
- the fulfillment of prophecies, oracles,
- resulting from patriotism to avoid disgrace.

It should be added that, in contrast to the ancient period, in the Middle Ages, suicide was condemned, mainly by the Catholic Church – suicides were considered madmen possessed by the devil, not worthy of prayer. Over time, attitudes towards suicide and suicide have changed. Although many philosophers continued to condemn suicidal acts after the medieval period, they began to see a connection between suicide and melancholy (which is now called depression) and other mental disorders. The increased interest in the individual and his autonomy contributed to a change in the way suicide was evaluated. In the 16th and 17th centuries, more and more authorities emerged to justify suicide attempts. I. Kant criticized the phenomenon in question while describing it as “self-death” and treating it as annihilation. Ch. Montesquieu, J.J. Rousseau, and A. Schopenhauer were the defenders of suicide and saw in the act the expression of freedom and the individual’s right to decide about himself/herself [10, p. 40-41].

The scientific and technical progress did not reduce the number of suicides. E. Durkheim, who made a sociological analysis of this phenomenon in the 19th century, drew attention to the next category of suicide – imitators. He identified many places and reasons that motivated people to imitate the behavior of those who ended their own lives. Imitation can occur between people who have no social ties. People can replicate behaviors observed in others [17, p. 152].

Suicide has increased significantly in the modern era. The reasons should be seen in the weakening of social ties, the feeling that numerous threats exist, and the uncertainty of a modern human being. Research on suicide allows distinguishing several essential factors that motivate individuals to take their own lives. These include:

- sudden loss of livelihood,
- misunderstandings/violence in the family,
- disappointment in love,

- mental illness,
- death of a loved one,
- deterioration of health,
- imitation.

When referring to suicide terrorism, it should be noted that it is a relatively new phenomenon. The terrorist suicide attacks had their beginning in the 1980s. They were used in the struggle for power or territory. Muslim suicide killers were active in Asia from the 17th to the 20th century. They attacked representatives of colonial authorities, by which they wanted to instill fear and apprehension in them. They were usually killed in attempted attacks, which they saw as a sacrifice made for society's good. In the early twentieth century, some groups saw an opportunity to achieve their own goals by exploiting people who agreed to their deaths. In the Russo-Japanese War in the early 20th century, the companies of Japanese soldiers armed only with swords attacked Russian machine gun positions. That was consistent with the Japanese's mentality, for whom death on the battlefield was something natural, while retreat or being taken prisoners was the shame. The attitude stemmed from centuries-old samurai tradition, which was interpreted by the Bushido Code and its cult of bravery, sacrifice, and readiness to die [11, p. 67].

At the end of World War II, Japan fought the United States in the Pacific using kamikaze, i.e., suicide pilots. Although the pilots' sacrifice did not change the fate of the war in favor of the Japanese, it nevertheless went down as a symbolic act of courage and patriotism. The German army also planned similar suicide actions in late 1944. Although many volunteers willing to give their lives in battle came forward, the idea was not implemented because it did not appeal to Adolf Hitler. It might have seemed that the end of World War II would bring an end to the practice of suicide in armed conflict. Even though this form of warfare was not used for several years, its return came in one of the bloodiest modern wars, the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-1988. The basis for using people in suicide was the Iranian Revolution and the rise of the first religious state to introduce medieval Islamic principles in the late 20th century. The return to the several-centuries-old principles and the adaptation of the Quranic provisions to current political needs led to the establishment of special camps to prepare children for potential attacks [11, p. 68-69].

The major terrorist organizations that specialize in suicide bombings predominantly come from Islamic backgrounds. Nevertheless, it does not mean that only religious motives drive people to sacrifice their lives. The perpetrators are usually deeply manipulated people that treat the need to attack other people at the cost of their death as a simple duty. A surge in suicide terrorist attacks occurred in 2000 in Israel, known as the Second Palestinian Intifada. However, it was not a Palestinian invention of recent years, as such attacks have occurred in Chechnya, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Iraq and Afghanistan contributed significantly to suicide terrorism. These were no longer incidental attacks but became a standard combat tactic that prevails to this day. Earlier terrorist attacks were planned according to the scheme – action, demand, effect. The change is that the terrorist-suicide attack is not preceded by the organization's announcement of any demands; the suicide attackers detonate the explosive charges they are wearing. The shift in the attack strategy has caused shock and horror in the communities of countries that have become victims of violence. The effectiveness of attacks carried out using suicide tactics is very high. Such a "human weapon" meets the requirements for modern weapons since it is cheap, mobile, intelligent, and extremely dangerous [11, p. 59].

Suicide attacks are becoming more frequent and, thanks to the media, we hear increasingly more about them. Terrorists have discovered that this is the most effective and least costly way to fight. The goal of suicide bombers is to instill fear, media coverage, create terror, and pressure various entities to obtain the terrorist’s intended targets.

3. Characteristics of selected terrorist organizations that use suicide attacks – Al-Qaeda, Hezbollah, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and the Islamic State

It is now recognized that the first person to commit a terrorist suicide bombing is Ahmad Kasir, a seventeen-year-old Lebanese who drove a car filled with explosives into the Israeli Command building in Tyre, Lebanon, on November 11, 1982. Soldiers protecting the building had no time to react. The explosion destroyed the building, killing 75 Israeli soldiers and 15 Palestinian prisoners. The attack showed that despite the differences in equipment and technical level between Lebanese and Israeli soldiers, it is possible to fight the enemy effectively. Thus, a new tactic, which is suicide terrorism, was discovered [18, p. 691]. A description of the operation of selected terrorist organizations is presented below.

Osama bin Laden founded Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan in 1988. It is one of the largest organizations, which, together with other groups, forms an extensive network. It possesses independently operating “affiliates” in various regions of the world. Although Al-Qaeda was created in 1988, it was not until 1996 that its current ideological doctrine was finally established. Osama bin Laden announced the “Declaration of War against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places”. It involved going to war with those Arab countries that cooperated with the US. In February 1998, bin Laden announced the creation of the World Holy War Front against the Jews and the Crusaders, thus giving Al-Qaeda a new organizational shape. The announced Front included Egyptian terrorist organizations such as Al-Jama’a Al-Islamiyya and Egyptian Islamic Jihad – Al-Jihad. Al-Qaeda members are considered to have personally prepared and carried out, as well as substantially sponsored or otherwise participated in, the terrorist attacks on:

- World Trade Center in New York – February 1993,
- President Mubarak in Addis Ababa – June 1995,
- Deir al-Bahari Hotel, Luxor, Egypt – October 1997,
- U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar es-Salaam – August 1998,
- World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon building – September 11, 2001,
- London subway and bus in London – July 2005,
- United Nations building in Algeria – November 2007,
- Former Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in Karachi–December 2007 [11, p. 27-30].

Al-Qaeda has become a symbol of struggle and resistance against Western domination. In many parts of the world, bin Laden was regarded as a man capable of defeating the United States. He was able to persuade people, get sponsors and supporters, and on top of that, he always supported those who were fighting against US domination. Bin Laden believed that the United States posed a threat to Islam and its values. He viewed Israel, India, Russia, and Western European countries similarly. Osama bin Laden’s organization continues to carry out terrorist attacks on public buildings that are important to the functioning of states (embassies, government buildings of religious and cultural significance), objects of military and economic importance, as well as public figures. The attacks carried out took the form of:

1. Terrorist suicide bombings with the use of explosives.
2. Terrorist suicide operations, i.e., several attacks at the same time.

Osama bin Laden was killed in Pakistan on May 2, 2011, during Operation Neptune Spear (USA). Ayman al-Zawahiri took over the leadership of the organization. It should be noted that bin Laden was a spiritual guide and mentor until his death. The way of influencing people who served the organization's goals breaks the common stereotype that terrorists' main inspiration is the lack of life prospects and poverty.

Hezbollah belongs to the terrorist organizations that use suicide bombings. The organization also goes by other names: Revolutionary Justice Organization, Party of God, or Islamic Jihad. It operates in the Middle East. It has gained notoriety by kidnapping foreigners such as soldiers, diplomats, and civilians. Suicide terrorist attacks have become popular among Hezbollah members because they believe that committing the act assures the martyr a place in heaven. One of the more powerful attacks carried out by Hezbollah is the blowing up of the Israeli embassy and the Jewish organization's building in Buenos Aires in July 1994. The organization's members have also carried out hijackings of passenger planes, thus leading to many casualties. Hezbollah operates an office for contacting foreign journalists in Beirut and has its television station. Despite the organization's evolution into a political party in Lebanon, it has not changed its primary goal of the operation, which is to create an Islamic state based on Sharia law. The organization's forms of operation have altered. Currently, Hezbollah has abandoned kidnapping and assassination in favor of suicide bombings [11, p. 31-36].

Another example of a terrorist organization that uses suicide bombings is Islamic Jihad. The organization was founded in 1982 in Gaza at the Islamic University, and its current name was solidified in 1987. Initially, it was formed mainly by young, educated people. With time, many activists and students from other Islamic universities joined it. The organization's slogan is "Palestine from the river (Jordan) to the sea, as an Islamic state that forbids giving up even an inch of land" [11, p. 38-39]. Under pressure from various factions, a merger with Hamas took place, leading to forming the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). The current PIJ's leader is Abdullah Shallah. Palestinian Islamic Jihad announced a change in strategy in 2003. The change included allowing women to participate in suicide terrorist attacks. PIJ has headquarters in Damascus, Tehran, Khartoum, and Beirut, while its central sphere of influence is the Islamic University of Gaza. PIJ is currently among the most prominent terrorist organizations carrying out suicide attacks. Another terrorist organization is the Islamic State (the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, often translated as Islamic State of Iraq and Syria – ISIS for short). ISIS is an organization formed by fighters with a literal understanding of jihad and Sunni constitute most of its members. In 2014, a worldwide caliphate was declared in northern Iraq and Syria. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi headed it. In a short time, he recognized his right to be the most important religious, political, and military authority in the Muslim world. The resulting so-called state then controlled the areas of northern Iraq and Syria and small areas in Afghanistan, Nigeria, and Libya. That was manifested by the introduction of Sharia law in these areas. ISIS's primary goal was the creation of a Sunni Islamic State. To achieve its goal in areas other than Iraq or Syria, the organization finds its supporters and mobilizes them to perform spectacular attacks in those countries (e.g., the Paris attacks in November 2015). ISIS's preferred tactic is suicide bombings or, rather, suicide operations. One famous suicide operation was the attack in Brussels on March 22, 2016. It was a series of three coordinated attacks – two at the airport and one at a metro station – in consequence of which 32 people were killed, and 316 were injured. The perpetrators of the attacks are citizens of the target country of the planned attack, allowing these individuals to build the perfect camouflage for

their beliefs and the potential threat they represent. The attackers can function in a manner consistent with cultural norms. In their neighbors' perception, they remain ordinary citizens who do not stand out from the crowd. ISIS members are mainly young men of Arab descent with European passports and people of other nationalities. Belonging to the organization enables many of them to obtain education or social position, which they could not get in their countries or communities of origin. The organization skillfully manipulates people using information about their weaknesses, personality, complexes, traumas, personal situations, etc. [11, p. 49-51].

The statistics provided below present the number of terrorist attacks over the years and the number of victims.

Figure 1 and Table 3 indicate that the numbers of both attacks carried out by suicide terrorists and their casualties have increased over the past two decades. That has to do with the greater effectiveness of these attacks than “regular” terrorist attacks. Open borders encourage the influx of refugees and migration. The victims of the attackers are not only foreigners or non-Muslims. Many attacks have been organized in Turkey, which is a Muslim country. Suicide bombers blow themselves up in large gatherings of people in front of or inside a mosque, killing their co-religionists who differ from them ethnically or religiously (followers of a different faction of Islam). In attacks in France or Belgium, terrorists took advantage of the rights

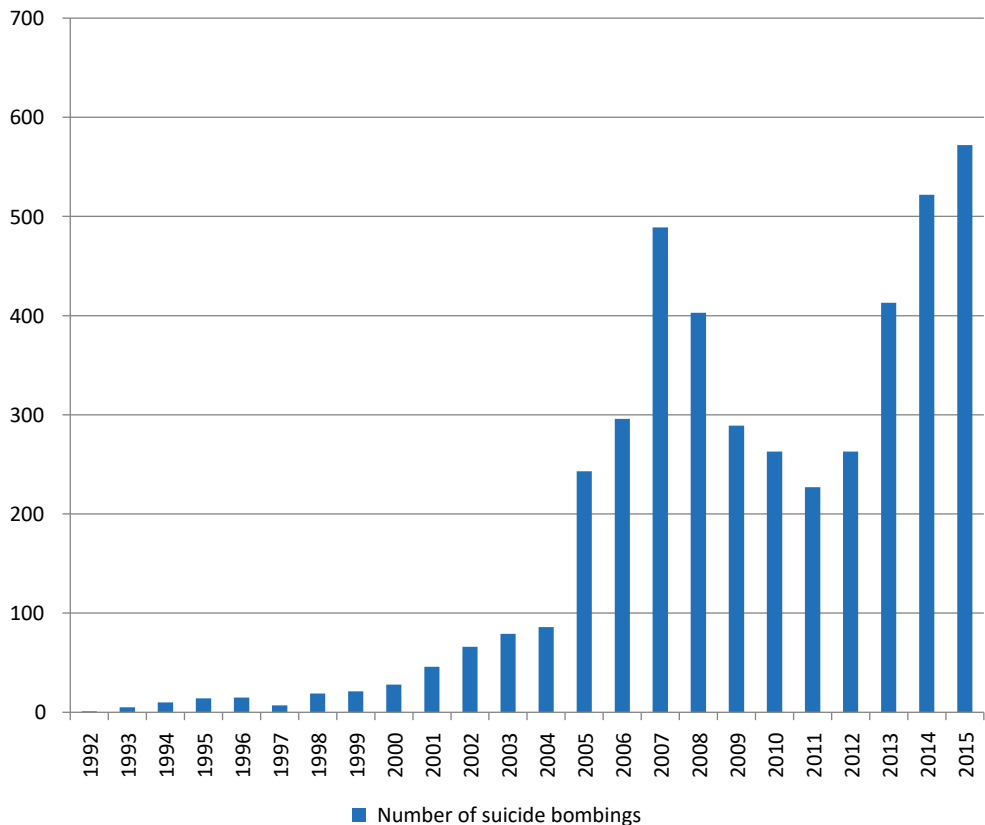


Fig. 1. Number of suicide terrorist attacks (1992-2015)

Source: Own study based on [11, p. 179].

Table 3. The number of people killed during suicide terrorist attacks in 1992-2015

Year	Number of people killed
1992	11
1993	36
1994	244
1995	129
1996	182
1997	27
1998	121
1999	107
2000	232
2001	3065
2002	756
2003	766
2004	1248
2005	2552
2006	2728
2007	5923
2008	3122
2009	3097
2010	2283
2011	2177
2012	2118
2013	4025
2014	4372
2015	5246

Source: Own study based on [11, p. 178-179].

inherent in Western civilization – human and civil rights, particularly the right to freedom of movement or easy access to public facilities. Places where large communities gather are set a target. Terrorist operations are increasingly replacing separate suicide bombings. It might be justified by the possibility of killing a significant number of people at the same time and create fear on a global scale.

4. Suicide as the meaning of life; selected examples of suicide terrorists

The motives of suicide terrorists indicated in the literature can be reduced to several categories:

- Civilizational,
- Religious,
- Cultural,
- Individual [19, p. 81].

Civilizational factors influencing the suicide terrorists’ motivations are conflicts of value systems contained in different cultures. Areas of conflict include discrimination against national and ethnic minorities, removing them from a country’s territory, and imposing their values on people from another cultural background. Conflict-creating factors can be language, lifestyle, religion, tradition, attitude to civil liberties, etc. The attack by al-Qaeda on the World Trade Center (WTC) in New York and the Pentagon building on September 11, 2001, is given as an example of a suicide attack based on civilizational conflict factors. The subsequent investigation revealed that three of the terrorists (out of 19 ones involved in the attacks) had prepared for the attack in Germany. The leader of this group, Mohammed Atta, studied architecture at the Technical University in Hamburg. He founded the organization “Islam AG”. Atta was a very religious person, leading a modest life centered around the plan to attack the WTC. Similarly, two other group members, Ziad Samir Jarrah and Marwan Youssef Mohamed Al-Shehhi, were dedicated Islamists. Ziad Samir Jarrah acquired his piloting skills in the United States. Although they had all received education in Europe and the United States and had spent many years in the circle of Western civilization, they did not integrate with its values [19, p. 89-91].

Therefore, one can legitimately conclude that the lives of the perpetrators of the WTC attacks were not hopeless or devoid of purpose and passion. Hatred of the Western civilization, particularly of the United States, was the strong bond of this group that organized a long-term sense of action. It should be noted that the suicide bombing was not the result of ad hoc factors but a long process. These young men subordinated their existence to a single goal and deliberately chose their kind of death, with the conviction that such a scenario of their own lives made sense.

Religious conditioning very often leads perpetrators of attacks to a suicide death. The religious commitment was the main reason for the Palestinian woman-bomber Yusra, who was sentenced to prison for terrorist activities (then Anat Berko conducted a bio-graphic interview with her, during which Yusra revealed many essential facts from her life. That helped to understand the importance of religious motives and personal revenge in Yusra’s assumption of the role of shahid). The woman became a shahid because of her hope to receive a better place in paradise than others, a desire for revenge for the brother’s death, and hatred of Israelis. The girl’s brothers were involved in terrorist activities and served prison sentences for that reason. Moreover, one of the brothers was killed as a shahid. Like all her sisters, Yusra was very religious, and commitment to religion became a significant part of her identity; she was proud of it and ready to make sacrifices. She volunteered to join Hamas and declared her intention to carry out a suicide bombing. A month before the planned attack, she spent much time praying and reading the Quran. In this way, she successfully maintained her motivation to kill as many Jews as possible. The suicide plan was not entirely successful. Later, while in prison, she recalled the period of preparation for the attack as the most beautiful in her life. She believed that suicide in the name of her values would make her life more wonderful [19, p. 98-99].

Cultural factors leading to suicide attacks are related to the specific manner individuals are indoctrinated. It begins at a very early age in the children’s lives. It is carried out both in the family, as well as in religious communities and even in schools and camps for children and adolescents: “during summer camps organized, among others, by Hamas and Islamic Jihad, to which parents send their children very eagerly, the participants visit the suicide bombers’ homes, and while teaching Islamic history they are shown portraits of martyrs. The training provided also includes assembling, disassembling, using various weapons that can be employed in future combat, and techniques for organizing ambushes. Instruction on how to blow

up Israeli buses is also presented. During the camps, children aged 8-12 are also trained to perform suicide attacks. When participating in special parades and demonstrations, children are dressed in shahida belts to strengthen their belief in the “righteousness of the cause” and the cult of martyrdom” [20, p. 111].

Thus, a potential suicide grows up in the atmosphere of consent to violence in the name of specific values. Many social rewards (reinforcements) such as respect, acknowledgment, suicide cult, and even financial resources can provide compensation for the willingness to sacrifice one’s own life for socially valued values. Thereby, the meaning of suicidal death is “encased” in many other meanings, in which people become entangled already at a very young age. Indoctrination becomes the essential “frame of mind” of a young person who knows no other world than the one that surrounds him/her and is a source of positive reinforcement. The meaning of suicide death becomes impressively packaged – it is a magnet attracting individuals who, automatically as it were, over time will place suicide at the center of their lives. The maturation process to suicide is similar to how other senses are usually discovered (realized by most people in mortality – to get an education, high status, or to have a family, getting rich, etc.).

An example of an individual being prepared at a very young age for the role of a shahid was Musa Zijad. By the age of 10, the boy did the cleaning works at the mosque, which brought him into frequent contact with the Muslim community and made him very religious. At the age of 15, Musa was recruited by Hamas at the mosque. The organization’s members taught him a lot about the heroic martyrs of Islam who were closest to God after death and about his chance to join that group. He was also convinced that Israelis deserved to die. Musa felt that he was special because he was chosen for the suicide mission together with five other boys. Musa Zijad found no support in his family for his terrorist activities (his father was a policeman) since they were among those who denounced their children for fear that they would commit crimes. Nevertheless, numerous examples of parents taking pride in suicide terrorist acts in which their children were the bombers have been described. These are stable families in which children receive love and support from their relatives [19, p. 108-115].

Individual factors that inspire terrorist suicide acts are often revenge for the death of a loved one or a desire to cleanse oneself of sins (e.g., marital infidelity, collaboration, homosexuality, other personal problems). An example of undertaking of such an action is the Chechen, Aiza Guzayeva. The woman made a suicide attempt on November 29, 2001, which resulted in the of Commander Geidar Gadzhiyev’s death, the perpetrator of her husband’s torture and cruel death. Shortly before the murder of her husband by the Russians, Guzayeva also lost her brother (he was shot by Russian soldiers). Guzayeva’s husband was captured along with other Chechen fighters and interrogated by Gadzhiyev. Since he refused to give any information about his activities, his wife was brought in and had to watch the cruel torture inflicted on her husband. After his death, Guzayeva’s attitude became radicalized. She joined the ranks of the terrorist organization and from now on the meaning of her life became revenge for her loved ones’ death. It should be added that terrorist organizations surround people in this situation with care, concern, and respect. They treat them as family members – give support and hope [19, p. 141-142].

Terrorism has changed its face over the decades, and a similar phenomenon applies to suicide terrorism. Therefore, women have become very desirable targets for recruitment into terrorist organizations. Shahid women are used by Hamas, Al-Qaeda, and Chechen terrorist organizations (“Black Widows”). The reasons why women take the path of suicide terrorism are varied; the most common ones include the desire for personal revenge, retaliation for the

occupation of the country, duress due to rape, blackmail or kidnapping, the need to provide money to support the family, the desire to wash away disgrace, and the will to participate in jihad [21, p. 53].

The example of Guzayeva cited above allows believing that the process of future suicide indoctrination consists precisely in integrating the sense of personal revenge with the sense of the organization’s existence. The individual sense (in this case, the perpetrator’s death as retribution for the victim’s irreparable loss) is replaced by a collective one. The fusion occurs in a specific way – the individual “self” is replaced by the collective “selves” The individual perceives new possibilities and new meanings of his/her situation owing to interactions with other people. Her husband and brother’s death could have caused Guzayeva’s mental breakdown, lack of will to act, depression, and loss of meaning in life. Nevertheless, things took a new turn: membership in a terrorist organization enabled her to construct the meaning of life, which Guzayeva based on revenge. It became possible through suicide. Indoctrination provides new meanings to the situation in which the individual finds himself/herself, making his/her victim a value for which one must strive, mobilize, and organize [21, p. 53].

Conclusions

A human formed in the circle of Western civilization values perceives death by suicide as an aberration or a pathology that should be prevented. A high suicide rate is a sign of social problems. According to E. Durkheim, it is a result of anomie, namely an undesirable state of society. The meaning of suicide in Western civilization is always problematic. Suicide is a tragedy that makes no sense and continually raises the question of the suicide’s social environment whether it could have been prevented.

The perversity of the terrorist organizations’ impact lies in their ability to convince individuals that they live to die, and only then does their existence acquire significance. The vital need to produce meaning, which distinguishes the human species from others, is paradoxically satisfied through suicide. Under circumstances of the potential killer – suicide’s intense cultural indoctrination, this terrifying life project ceases to be scary in his/her perception; it becomes “banal”, just as banal is evil described by H. Arend [22].

Given E. Durkheim’s typology of suicides, it seems that suicide terrorism falls into the category of altruistic suicide. However, in our opinion, the concepts of “sense-making suicide” and “altruistic suicide” are not the same. Table 4 compares the two afore-mentioned categories of the phenomena.

Altruistic suicide is committed to saving others’ life or well-being. It happens very often, so to speak, “on the way”, in the process of helping, saving, or trying to save other people. A terrorist’s suicide only gains meaning when others are killed and, unlike heroic acts of saving people from fire, drowning, etc., frequently becomes the warp of the “life project”. The individual’s life goes on, sometimes for many years, in the shadow of the sacrifice that sooner or later must be made. The “shadow” makes the existence of a potential terrorist – suicide acquire significance. If we think today of the direction the phenomenon of suicide is evolving in the culture, we can say that world terrorism has raised suicide to a pedestal. It has glorified it, re-evaluated it, and “wrapped” it in an attractive package with the label “SENSE”. That is why, among other things, the fight against this problem is so challenging.

The case studies of terrorists – suicides cited in Chapter 4 allowed positive verification of the hypothesis: “Suicide is the sense-making factor around which most potential terrorist-suicides

Table 4. Comparison of altruistic and “sense-making” suicide

Altruistic suicide (according to E. Durkheim)	“Sense-making” suicide
It manifests itself in people in whom there is too strong social bonding.	Some terrorist-suicides kill people from the communities of which they were a part. The bond with the community is not an obstacle to the attack.
It is mainly caused by the expectation of improving other people’s situation, sacrificing oneself as a victim, for the good of others.	The reasons for suicide lie outside the welfare of the community to which the terrorist-suicide belongs. The suicide terrorist “inflicts punishment” in the name of ideas, the organization’s values, religion, political power, personal revenge, etc.
Often this type manifests itself in heroic behavior, such as a soldier throwing a grenade close to himself/herself to save others, a firefighter dying in a fire to save another person’s life, or sacrificing himself/herself for an idea.	Heroic behavior – the sacrifice of one’s own life – is not ad hoc but the effect of deliberate action, sometimes a strategy that an individual matures into for many years before becoming ready to commit a suicide bombing. The idea of suicide attack becomes a “shadow” constantly accompanying a person. All other activities – family, work, career – are only socially approved staffage for what is in the “foreground” – the mission to sacrifice one’s own life.

Source: Own study.

organize their lives. The factors conducive to forming an attitude of readiness to commit suicide are part of a culture that glorifies suicide, giving it new meanings, attractive to the individual’s personal and social identity”. The framework of this article limits the possibility of quoting more examples of terrorists – suicides than the selected cases included in Chapter 4. Regardless of the differences that the researchers of this phenomenon indicate when analyzing the sources of suicidal terrorism (personal, religious, cultural, political, etc.), the suicide of the bomber serves as a meta-motif, which organizes/her his life around the chosen goals (political, religious, personal, etc.). Without suicide, the implementation of the life plan would be impossible. Suicide is necessary for the individual’s life to gain its due meaning, in his/her own eyes and the eyes of other people.

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Author contributions


The authors contributed equally (50%) to the analysis, interpretation of results and writing of the article. The authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

Ethical statement

The research complies with all national and international ethical requirements.

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Samobójstwo, które „tworzy sens” – mechanizm terroryzmu samobójczego

STRESZCZENIE

Samobójstwo należy uznać za jeden z najbardziej drastycznych sposobów rozwiązywania problemów życiowych przez jednostkę, współcześnie zaś coraz częściej staje się ono skutecznym narzędziem walki terrorystów. Statystyki wskazują na wzrost liczby operacji terrorystycznych, w których zamierzonym skutkiem jest samobójstwo zamachowca, rośnie również liczba ofiar. Problem badawczy stawiany w artykule brzmi: „W jaki sposób potrzeba nadawania sensu otaczającej rzeczywistości sprzyja budowaniu motywacji terrorystów – samobójców?”. Hipoteza sformułowana na użytek tej analizy jest następująca: „Samobójstwo jest czynnikiem sensotwórczym, wokół którego większość potencjalnych terrorystów – samobójców organizuje swoje życie. Czynniki sprzyjające ukształtowaniu postawy gotowości do samobójstwa są częścią kultury gloryfikującej samobójstwo, nadającej mu nowe znaczenia, atrakcyjne dla indywidualnej i społecznej tożsamości jednostki”. Przedmiotem analizy są statystyki oraz literatura odnoszące się do problematyki samobójstw, w szczególności o charakterze terrorystycznym. Zdaniem autorki artykułu samobójstwo dokonane przez terrorystę nie jest efektem utraty woli życia, bezradności czy depresji, lecz jest czynnikiem, który wytwarza ważne egzystencjalne sensory motywujące do działania. Z tego powodu rośnie popularność terrorystycznych operacji samobójczych i skuteczność działania organizacji posługujących się terrorem jako narzędziem walki o swoje cele.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE samobójstwo, terroryzm, terroryzm samobójczy

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