Chapter 1

To Die to Kill: Suicide as a Weapon. Some Historical Antecedents of Suicide Terrorism

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Samson: An Example From the Bible

The story of Samson and his legendary feats are widely described in the Bible. As everybody knows, his strength was located in his long hair that should not be cut in order to preserve this unique characteristic. Unfortunately, Samson revealed his secret to Delilah, his lover, and one of her servants cut his hair while he was sleeping. In this way, he lost his strength and was made blind by the Philistines. What happened later is well known: Samson was taken to a temple and asked to rest against one of its supporting pillars, where he prayed to God to recover his strength, grasped the columns and tore them down with the famous words "Let me die with the Philistines," killing himself and all the Philistines with him.

With no doubt, Samson used his suicide as a weapon and represents one of the first examples of individuals who chose death deliberately and freely in order to kill their enemies.

An Example From Aesop's Fables

> A wasp was buzzing around the head of a snake, so that it became very disturbing, while stunning it over and over again. The snake felt pain because of those awful stabs, but it could not escape from the aggressor, so that it put its head under the wheel of a carriage and died together with the wasp.[1]

This Aesop's fable describes well those individuals who choose to die together with their enemies when there is no other way to escape; in other words, they prefer to kill their enemy while losing their own life. There might be different reasons for this choice: the suicide is carried out to stop the distress, or for a cognitive distortion to be stronger than the enemies, or to provoke real harm to the enemy. At the time of the Roman Empire, it was not uncommon that slaves committed suicide in order to cause economic damage to their merciless owners. This damage was very significant to the point that Roman law regulated slaves' suicide attempts: when this event occurred, his/her value decreased significantly.

Zealots

Zealots (from the Greek word *zelotes*, meaning full of zeal, excited, ardent) were the members of a Jewish political-religious party with national-theocratic roots, born in Palestine at the end of the first century BC and lasting for about three decades. Zealots followed the norms of the Pharisonical doctrine and according to Titus Flavius Josephus (103–37? BC), a Jewish historian of Greek language: "they firmly loved freedom and only God was their king and nobody else."[2] They were nationalistic and refused to pay taxes or venerate the emperor. They played a determinant role during the insurrections against the Romans in the years 70–66 BC, although they had no real cohesion and no possibility of winning.[3] When the emperor Titus Vespasian conquered Jerusalem, they entrenched themselves in the fortress of Masada near the Dead Sea, with their commandant Eleazaro, where 960 of them committed suicide as they had no chance of overcoming or surviving their enemies. Again, Josephus wrote:

> Judah Galileans ... disregard the different kinds of death and the tortures ... In Jerusalem a new form of banditism was born, the so-called ekariots or hired killers, who killed people during the day and also in the populous market town. Under their garments they hide a little dagger (called *sica* by Romans), and killed their rivals ... They called themselves zealots, as they were "zealoters" ... Their victims were mainly the brave and the nobles, the first being them full of fear and the second because of envy: they believed their only safety was the elimination of all the important people.

Some researchers consider this movement to be one of the first examples of a social mass protest of the poor against wealthy invaders, while others cast doubt on their role as the "ancestors" of partisans. Indeed, it seems these fanatics had a great impact on the masses, offering their religious and political rules to get rid of Roman domination, but their motivations were not deep, although comprising patriotism.

The Assassins

Hasan-i-Sabbah (1034?–1124) was an eminent Persian belonging to a wealthy and influential family, a member of a branch of the Ismailian Nizaris, a dissident group of the Sciite schism, also called "the old man of the mountains" or the "prince of the mountains" by the crusaders. He used to live in the fortress of Alamut, conquered in 1091, within the mountains of Elbourz, south of the Caspian Sea, in northern Persia. Because he claimed to be the reincarnation of Ismail who had come back to earth in order to make the Muslim religion prevail, in 1090 he founded a fundamentalist Muslim sect called the Assassins.[4] This name derives from the fact that the adepts very often used hashish before their actions (in Arabic the word *hachachim* means

hashish smokers). His adepts were totally submissive to him and were named the "loyal subjects" (fidawis, fidais, fedayeen, the self-sacrifice men, or the faithful friends). The old man of the mountains provided them with different drugs, and made them confused in his palace full of amenities, so that, when they were awoken, they believed they were in paradise, as is also described in Marco Polo's book *The Travels of Marco Polo*.[5,6]

Well-trained, these fanatics became cold killers for political reasons with the promise of a wonderful life after death. Generally, the murders they committed were of a political-religious nature and occurred in crowded places, at courts or sacred sites, and were followed by their killing on the spot by their victims' bodyguards. It seems they did not try either to escape, or some even to react; therefore, they killed in order to be killed without, however, committing a real suicide.[5–7] To survive was shameful and a reporter of the twelfth century reports: "When each of them decided to die in this way . . . [the Boss] gave him the knife that is, so-called, consecrated."

These killers terrified the Middle East for 150 years, while destabilizing different local governments, with the aim of creating uncertainty and destabilization, so that the Prince might become the only ruling sovereign. (Indeed, in the Muslim world, the basis of power was based on one person: when a sultan died, his troops were scattered, and if an emir died, his country became ungovernable.) Hassan ben Sabbah chose his victims carefully, while contributing to toppling the Egyptian empire of Fatimids, the caliphate of Abassids, and the empire of Seldjuk.

To facilitate his intent, he organized supporting "cells" in different towns through corruption or threats. In order to increase confusion and suspicion, they spread lies everywhere. Very often they introduced an adept among a political, military, or religious group who, after remaining silent and loyal for several years, when ordered would commit a murder. In this way, many politicians or military officers were killed: the first was Nizam al'Musk Tusi, visir of Isfahan, then the visir Fakhr-el-Shah, the sultan Melik Saha, the Egyptian calif Abu Ali Mansur, and many others. According to some sources, the Assassins also tried to kill Edward I King of England and Saladin.[8]

When the French king Philip VI planned to start a new crusade, a German priest warned him:

> Let the Assassins be cursed and repulsed. They sell themselves, they drink human blood and kill the innocents for money, and they have no care neither of the life nor of the salvation . . . As the devil they disguised themselves as an angel of the light and fake habits, language, act, clothing of different people and country . . . I know a unique way to warrant the care and the safety of the king: all the servants, for every duty, important or not, must be done by persons surely, totally and clearly well known.

When Hassan ben Sabbah died, the power did not pass to any of his sons, one of whom was killed because he was suspected of conspiring against him, but to one of his more trusty adepts, Kya Buzurg-Umido. The organization continued to make killings until 1256, when the Alamut fortress was defeated by Hulagu, a Mongolian leader. In 1272 the suviving adepts, now called Ismailites, moved to Lebanon taking the name of Druses, to Iran, Syria, and to India near Bombay with the name of Khodijas.

Prince Karim Aga Khan is the 47th descendant of the Nizari family.

Some Examples in South East Asia

The presence of the first Arabian merchants in eastern Asia may date back even before Mohammed's era (570–632); however, their number increased significantly after his death. It is generally believed that they sailed from the Persian Gulf to the Indian Malabar coast, which now belongs to the states of Kerala and Karnataka, as well as to Atjah on the northern side of the island of Sumatra, and to the south of China, from where they reached Solu and Mindanao in the Philippines. The spread of the Arabian merchants was an important factor in the economies of different governments, with particular reference to the trading of fragrances, spices, wood, and Indonesian gold. In fact, since the tenth century every market of that area belonged to the Arabian population, and so Arabic became the official trading language. Their importance grew together with that of the ulamas, the Muslim doctors of religion and laws, especially when the Muslims increased to constitute 20 per cent of the local population. In 1511 when the Portuguese controlled the Strait of Malacca, there was already a powerful sultanate in Atjeh, dominating the north and south of Sumatra, and another in the Solu archipelago. Unavoidably, the Arabian trade collided with the Spanish and Portuguese colonization. In 1510 the Portuguese tried to seize Calcutta and burned down the main mosque, but then were pushed back by the local population. At that time, a commercial war began and lasted for 300 years, finishing only when the English took over the land definitively.[9]

When Spain began to conquer the Philippines in 1565, besides economic interests, there were other reasons to intervene: the general hostility against the Arabian people (the Moors), and because the fall of Granada had occurred only a few decades before. The Philippines were the main base of the Spanish people: they started fighting against their rivals with religious zeal, destroyed their harbors, ships and symbols, the mosque of Brunei and the sacred graves of the Muslims in order to lessen their importance, while at the same time beginning a partially successful evangelism by the Jesuits.[10]

Unsurprisingly, the Muslims reacted. In 1512 Alphons of Albuquerque, viceroy of the Portuguese in Calcutta, described the case of a Muslim who was

considered holy because he had died while fighting against the Christians. In Malabar there occurred what is considered the first suicide attack; in Atjeh and in the Philippines this kind of struggle only began in the second half of the sixteenth century. Subsequently, thousands of Muslims died and were considered *shahids*, but they soon understood they could not resist and began to frighten the Europeans with their death. In 1592 an agent of the Society of Eastern India in Malabar wrote in his report:

> Many treacherous acts perpetrated by the Moors of Malabar frightened Christians living in the coast very much so that they seldom go out without arms . . . although the Muslims who decide to kill a Christian are a few, thay are proud to do a deserving action when they die, such as the one killing a sergeant . . . even if the most part of the Moors denies these crimes are consistent with their religion.

The quoted report reflects the point of view of a European living there, but does not highlight that "the one" was a merchant blocked by the English sergeant because he was competing with some English shipping businessmen.

Later, at the end of the sixteenth century, the Muslim Zayn alDin al Ma'bari, in his book entitled *The Gift of the Sacred Warriors with regard to some Actions of the Portuguese*, incited all Muslims to start a *jihad* against the Portuguese in order to stop their assaults against the Muslim community and the encroachment of their tradings. A holy war was considered necessary because their trades were stopped, the mosque destroyed, and there were many victims: in the future, those who would have died during this war should be venerated as a *shahids*, that is to say martyrs.

In any case, the aims of these suicide attacks are not comparable to current attacks, as they were mainly for economic reasons; political-religious reasons were added later.

From the point of view of the Muslims from Malabar their actions were simply a way to fight against the invasion of "their" lands by the Europeans, or even against the Hindu population. However, they never achieved significant success in this area, and terrorist activity persisted until the dawn of the twentieth century.

Differently from Malabar, in Atjeh the Muslims had their own government and started a *jihad* after their victory against the Dutch in a war lasting 35 years from 1873 to 1908. Just before the end of the war, *ulamas* replaced sultans. They built fortresses with many men and received money from surroundings villages to support the holy war, but they were too weak against a European army, and at the end of the war suicide attacks became the only way to fight.[11] Resistance to the colonial government was limited to the isolated killing of Europeans by the Atjenese Muslims that became a private method of *prang sabi* (to fight with the name of God). When a *kaffir* (infidel) was killed, the murderer hoped to reach paradise [9,11] After the fall of the island

of Jolo, some Muslim gangs began guerrilla warfare and others turned to what the Spanish called *juramentado*, or the man that swears, the so-called *fi sabil Allah*, that is, "to fight under the name of God." *Juramentados*, after a series of rituals and prayers, assaulted their enemies with the aim of killing as many as they could before being killed themselves. Many foreign soldiers died and there is no report of any *juramentado* surviving. Even after the Spanish government reached an agreement with the sultan, the *ulamas* continued to promote suicide actions through their *juramentados*.[10]

The Muslims of Malabar produced a lot of literature, poetries, and songs about the martyrdom of their *shahids* and on the *jihad* that were used in the twenty-first century to influence others to commit similar suicide attacks.[12] Therefore, it seems that since that time *ulamas* were the ideologists and sometimes also the political leaders and commanders, but very few are known to have committed suicide and to have choosen martyrdrom. There is more precise information about suicide terrorists of the nineteenth century in Malabar: generally, they were very young or very old, enthusiastic, simple and daring men, belonging to poorer classes and prone to the extreme sacrifice of their lives out of desperation.[13]

Some Notes on the Past Two Centuries

Throughout the centuries, terrorism has often been considered only a revolutionary phenomenon, in order to obtain freedom and rights, and as such even a positive phenomenon, as some of its aims were judged legitimate. Francois Noel Baboeuf (1760–1797) claimed: "Every ways are legitimate against oppressors" and Filippo Buonarroti (1761–1837) from Pisa wrote: "Nothing is criminal if it is used in order to get a sacred aim." Even before then, the Florentine Niccolò Macchiavelli (1469–1527) coined the famous sentence "The aim justifies the means."[14]

The first "terrorist bomb" (a barrel full of powder with some rockets tied on a rifle) was invented in Paris at the end of the eighteenth century and was used in 1800 by conspirators who wanted to kill Napoleon, with no success.

In 1848, when some revolutionary insurrections occurred, Karl Heinzen (1809–1880), a German radical democratic, in his book *Der Mord* (*The Assassin*) produced the thesis that a murder might be politically legal if perpetrated against a dictator. The principles of "propaganda through the action" are mentioned to justify the unsuccessful mission of Carlo Pisacane in Campania, a southern Italian region in 1857. This concept was also expressed by the Italian anarchic Enrico Malatesta (1853–1932) and Carlo Cafiero (1846–1892), who created a manifesto about it, although the former was hostile to terrorism.

The first modern work on terrorism can be considered Nachaev's (1872) book entitled *The Revolutionary Foundamental Tenets*, where it is written:

> The revolutionary [terrorist] knows only one science, the science of the distruction. For this reason, and only for this reason, he will study mechanics, chemistry, and maybe medicine. During the day and the night he will study people's sociology, their peculiarities and the entire phenomena of the today's social order. The matter is always the same: the destruction of this dirty world.

According to some Russian sociologists, the terrorism was not only effective, but humanitarian. In order to get a better world, only a few had to die, favoring the community.

Herein, we list some examples of modern terrorist activities that were never suicide. From 1878 to 1913 the Narodnaya Volya (the will of the people) and the party of the Fighting Organization of the Revolutionary Socialists in Russia; the anarchic terrorism at the end of 1800 in Europe and particularly in France; the Irish Republican Army (IRA) starting in 1922; the Irgun Zwai Leumi in Palestine from 1937 to 1947 that chose individualistic terrorism; Mau-Mau in Kenya from 1952 to 1956; The National Liberation Front in Algeria from1954 to 1962; the EOKA in Cyprus from 1957; the Islamic Jama'at El in Egypt; the Jaish Mohambut in India; the Abn Sayyaf in the Philippines; Muslim terrorism in Kashmir; the OLP in Palestine from 1968 to present; the ETA in Spain until October 2011; the Red Army Faction and the Movement of June 2 in Germany until 1968; Tupamaros in Uruguay; the Red Brigades (Brigate Rosse) in Italy between 1970 and 1987.

Only the members of the Narodnaya Volya accepted to die on the spot after an attempt with one hand granade, or when they were convicted to death after a trial: they exploited the sentence in order to further accuse the political system and to convince many observers to believe their death was not more important than their desire to kill.[14]

A Peculiar Japanese Example: the Kamikazes

Kublai Khan (1215?–1295), nephew of Genghis Khan, conquered China, became an emperor and founded the Yuan dynasty. He welcomed Marco Polo in Cambaluc, today's Peking. In 1274 he decided to conquer Japan and sailed from the Hakaka Bay towards the Japanese archipelago, but an unpredicted typhoon obliged the devastated fleet to turn back.

After seven years he tried again and landed in Kyushu Island, where he met unforeseen resistance from the local people. When his fleet composed of 4,000 ships began the decisive battle, the sun stopped shining and a huge cloud appeared in the sky, completely obscuring the daylight, even though it was only late afternoon. A violent typhoon appeared on the horizon moving toward the Mongolian fleet, the sea surged and destroyed the ships, which sank with no pity, as if unknown forces had been allied with the Japanese people to defeat their enemies.[15] Therefore, the so-called *shimpu* or *kamikaze*

(*kami*: divine; *kaze*: wind), the wind of the gods, saved Japan from the Mongolian assaults, so that in subsequent centuries nobody attempted to replicate the attack. Although the word *kamikaze* entered the chronicles and the history, it is unclear when and who coined this term. A common notion is that it was coined by soldiers born in USA from Japanese-American parents who fought in the Pacific Ocean in the US Navy, but this version has never been verified. Nowadays, this word is not adopted by the Japanese press, which defines suicide terrorists with the term *jibaku tero* (auto-exploding terrorist).

In the Pacific Ocean the activities of this special corps began officially on October 25, 1944, when the course of the war in Japan was already compromised. Before this date, during the battle of Bougainville in New Guinea, Japanese soldiers threw themselves loaded with explosives against the enemy tanks, a technique called *nikudan* (bullet men). However, the results of the *nikudan* were not positive, as the Americans continued to make progress. Other scattered cases of desperate action had already occurred in the previous months. For example, in September of the same year, when some Japanese planes were shot down during an attempted suicide attack against an American carrier around the Negro Islands, or when an officer of a Japanese fighter plane successfully collided with a B-17 bomber.[16] This tactic was named *tai-atari* or clash between two corps, and led on October 21 to severe damage to the Australian flagship *Australia* by an unidentified Japanese pilot. Vice-Admiral Takijiro Onishi, a man with great charisma, proposed and obtained approval to organize a special corps, against the advice of other reliable members of the high command. It seems that even Emperor Hirohito was not convinced to continue the war, while officially adopting that kind of last-hope solution, probably without approving it. However, in view of the unfavorable state of the military operations, Onishi did not see any other way to reverse the outcome of the operations than to delay the unavoidable defeat. Unfortunately, since the Battle of Midway, American planes had conquered the sky while the Japanese airforce was decimated, and the chance of a pilot returning from a mission was unusual, which the pilot knew. "My plane shall crash to an enemy's aircraft carrier . . . and it will become a mass of metal . . . My enemies, who will die because of my attack, will also become a part of it. My plane and an enemy carrier . . . me and my enemy . . . we shall melt all together."[16] Again, "Maybe you do not understand why I am going to die . . . You and me belong to different times and then we think in different way."[17] These few lines are perfect examples of the feelings of the young pilots, generally university students between 20 and 25 years of age who became "kamikazes." Why did they accept the moral constraint to sacrifice themselves? Existing evidence would suggest that the main reason was the adherence to moral and higher order and duty. One detail is non-negligible: they were fighting in a declared war; this was a sufficient reason to kill their enemies and defend themselves and their country.

The tactic of these pilots was peculiar. Their first aim was to frighten the enemy with the noises of their famous Zero fighters, which contained 250 kg of explosives and 800 kg of bombs, inducing fear and psychological distress, and then to do real damage to the ships. A special target of their attacks was the flight decks of the American aircraft carriers, which were made of wood. Another important target to hit was the lift, an unlikely outcome because the Japanese pilots underwent only a short training of a few weeks that, unfortunately, did not include landing.[18] When the target was a troopship, a cargo ship, another ship or a convoy, the exact aim was to damage the steering instruments and then the bridge. The best result was obviously the sinking of the ship.[18,19]

After the first successful attacks, the Japanese started to build planes that were more suitable for kamikaze activity: they utilized engines that could not fly for too long and had a wooden structure; the undercarriage was neither retractile nor steady: it had to be unfastened after take-off in order to be retrieved and reused. In spite of the visualization by radars, interception and massive anti-aircraft fire, 14 per cent of the kamikaze attacks crashed on a ship, and about 8.5 per cent caused severe damage. The most important role of the kamikazes was during the last two big battles: Iwo Jima (February 1945) and Okinawa (April 1945).[20]

At the end of the war, there was a large, controversial debate among the Japanese public regarding this special corps: the main criticism being that it seemed absurd to oblige so many young men to sacrifice themselves only to prolong the agony of defeat and hide military mistakes. In his book *The End of a War*, Admiral Suzuki wrote: "The essence of the special corps elicits a religious admiration, but it symbolizes the result af the Japanese defeat".[21] Again, the US Navy commissioned a report about Japanese national spirit from the anthropologist Ruth Benedict. In her book *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture*, she highlighted that in Japan spirituality is superior to materialism, and how much religiousity can characterize both individuals and the whole nation's sum of values and life. In Japan during the 1930s, Shintoism, the main Japanese religion, based on the values and the cult of the ancestors, shifted towards the values of the *bushido*, a set of codes and ideals inspiring the samurai's life, so that everyone's life identified with that of all the country. The *bushido* considered death as a privileged feature to join the *kami*, the spirits of the national heroes. The military ruling class introduced this principle to modify mass psychology to the point that there were many suicides among the armed forces and civilians, even when hostilities were over.[22]

The role of kamikazes has also been highly debated outside of Japan. One conclusion is that if they delayed the end of war in the Pacific Ocean, they might be one of the factors that forced the USA to use the atomic bomb in Japan. In any case, kamikazes fought neither for revenge, nor hate or

fanaticism, but because their sacrifice was considered useful to their country and the emperor. Their shout *Banzai*, which means "10,000 years of life to the emperor," underlines how their life could be lost in front of the well-being of their country.[19,20] In one *haiku* (poetry), Captain Seki Yu Kio wrote: "Fall my followers / as cherry blossom / as I shall fall in a short / at the duty of my country." Again, a famous song about a kamikaze says: "If I go into the sea, my body shall come back driven by the waves / If my duty bring me on the mountains / a carpet of grass will be my blanket / To save the emperor / I shall die in peace inside my home." In one letter, a kamikaze wrote to his parents: "I am disgusted, while thinking of the tricks that innocent citizens are victims by some of our devious politicians. I accept to receive orders from the high commanders and also from the politicians because I believe in the state. The Japanese way of life is nice and I am proud of it, as of its history and mythology reporting purity . . . it is an honour to give my life in exchanging of so fine and high values."[23]

Obviously kamikaze were not terrorists, although they used suicide as a weapon.

Conclusions

In this chapter, some possible antecedents of terrorism have been reviewed and presented. It is evident that possible similarities with modern expressions of suicide terrorism are weak or non-existent. The motivations of the past examples were generally political or economic, or they represented extreme self-sacrifice for the benefit of the whole nation, such as in the case of Japanese kamikazes, or showed the birth of a national spirit, typical of some European countries of the mid-nineteenth century. In some cases, public murders were apparently driven by religious values (Palestinian Zealots, or Muslim merchants in South East Asia). Again, it was not unusual that religion had been used to mark the difference and manipulate adepts, for increasing personal power, like the old man of the mountains used to do, or by Asian ulamas to fight against invaders to reaffirm the existence of the Muslim world and heritage.

This idealistic zeal is totally lacking in modern suicide bombers. Although affirming to belong to the Muslim religion and to fight a holy war against the corrupted Western way of life, it seems that there are no other aims than those to provoke and increase terror, while killing thousands of innocents through their own deaths. As such, they represent a totally new phenomenon that requires novel and specific instruments of investigation.

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