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Introduction

Primary differences between historical models of suicide and today's suicide bombers are two fold. First, prior to the Islamic model, targets of suicide attacks have exclusively been military. The inclusion and explicit targeting of civilian population centers is a relatively new and disturbing phenomenon. However, as our particular discussion will be launched from a security viewpoint, it suffices to understand that this specific enemy is devious and will stop at nothing to achieve the destruction of either a military or civilian site in pursuit of his immoral aims. From the military perspective, the only differences between historical suicidal warriors and the bombers of today are a proliferation of technology, a misplaced sense of oppression, and a twisted concept of religious morality encouraging sacrifice of one's life to higher cause and killing as many infidels as possible in the process.

The first use of suicide bombing came in December, 1981 when Shia militia Amal (later connected to Hezbollah) attacked the Iraqi Embassy in Lebanon.¹ Hezbollah followed suit with powerful detonations on the U.S. Embassy in Beirut (April, 1982) and more noticeably with the October 23, 1983 destruction of the U.S. Marine Corps barracks in Beirut, killing 241 U.S. servicemen.² Suicide bombing as a tactic was quickly embraced by the LTTE in 1987 and Hamas in 1993.³ Over the next decade, suicide tactics were employed by a wide array of terrorist groups including: Palestinian Islamic Jihad in 1994, Kurdistan Workers Party in 1996, al-Qaeda in 1998, Chechens in 2000, and al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades in 2002.⁴ "With the exception of the Kurdistan Workers Party, this pattern has been part of a radical Islamic global insurgency against the United States and its allies since 1993."⁵ The decision by many Islamic authorities to issue Fatwas in support of suicide tactics has greatly added to their popularity and acceptance among insurgents in Iraq and Afghanistan.

A suicide attack is an offensive force capability most often utilized by those lacking practical offensive firepower. It serves to create maximum devastation with minimal expense and has proven particularly effective striking at hard targets, where defensive measures are in place to counter more sophisticated methods of attack. An effective suicide bomber delivers his device precisely to the target and reveals himself only at the moment of detonation, creating an intelligent 'stealth' weapon. Beyond the physical damage, suicide attacks carry a profound psychological effect and increase anxiety in soldiers stationed close by. Suicide bombers can also become vessels for the delivery of biological agents. "Suicide bombers infected with hepatitis and HIV can create a hazmat incident by spreading disease to targeted personnel. Bone fragments and blood-covered bolts and nails might directly transmit pathogens from the bomber to nearby victims."⁶

This brief will examine two types of suicide attacks, Body Borne and Vehicle Borne.

SBBIEDs (Suicide Body Borne Improvised Explosive Devices)



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Body Borne IEDs usually come in explosive vest and belt varieties. In most cases the explosives are wrapped around the body of the attacker and worn under heavier clothing in an effort to reduce public awareness of the bombers presence and not draw attention to the device. The explosives are attached to a trigger which the bomber presses upon reaching his destination; a large enough crowd or is being pursued by security personnel. It is quite common for the vest to contain a radio transmitter which allows for remote detonation from a handler's cell phone. Such a fail safe increases the likelihood of operational success, even under circumstances where the attacker is intercepted, incapacitated or loses heart. Additionally, this greatly reduces the likelihood that the bomber will end up in the hands of law enforcement and be able to speak during interrogation.

Explosive vests routinely carry TNT and are often packed with some sort of shrapnel to cause greater damage on impact. In Iraq however, the far more potent c4 plastic explosive has been used in SBBIED attacks, destroying everything nearby, while launching a deadly spray of ball bearings and / or bolts and nails.⁸

In Afghanistan, SBBIEDs are increasingly becoming the norm as insurgents waltz into bazaars or near government buildings in Helmand Province and turn the street red with blood, both civilian and military. Elsewhere in the country, signs are also pointing to more brazen attacks and a higher level of training. On September 10, 2006 a suicide bomber penetrated security surrounding the compound of the Governor of Paktia Province by claiming to have a letter of recommendation addressed to the governor. The attacker "then threw himself onto the hood of the governor's car, detonating his explosive vest up against the windshield" killing everyone inside the vehicle.⁹

SBBIED attacks are particularly popular methods of attack since they require less material and are less expensive than VBIEDs, and they are more difficult to detect and counter. A charging vehicle provides a window, albeit a very small one, in which to react. A body borne suicide attack, when pulled off correctly gives no warning at all.

Discussion now turns to VBIEDs which provide an escalation in insurgent tactics against coalition forces.

VBIEDs (Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Devices)



VBIED recovered in Afghanistan showing blocks of TNT and bolts for fragmentation

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VBIEDs can be found in the shape and size of any vehicle on the road, from small sedans to large cargo trucks. There have even been instances where dump trucks and ambulances have been used to cargo explosive charges. Obviously, larger vehicles allow for higher payload and greater potency and effect.

VBIEDs have been increasing in both weight and potency of explosive. Explosive charges now range anywhere from 100lbs to well over 1000 pounds. The explosive charges have included combustibles from gasoline and TNT to mortar rounds, rocket motors, rocket warheads, PE4 explosives, and artillery rounds.¹¹

An increasing trend in Iraq is the use of multiple vehicles in SVBIED attacks. In such circumstances, a lead vehicle often destroys a gate or barrier, or is used as a decoy. Once it has detonated, or been neutralized, a second vehicle bursts through the entrance or detonates in the midst of spectators or medical crews, causing greater devastation and increasing the casualty count dramatically.



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Artillery shells and gasoline combine to form a particularly effective VBIED.



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Main charge is hidden in gas canisters below side panel of the truck






POTENTIAL VBIED INDICATORS¹⁴

- License plates inconsistent with vehicle registration
- Obviously carrying a heavy load, heavy rear end
- Modification of truck or van with heavy duty springs to handle heavier loads
- Loose wires protruding from inside or outside the vehicle.
- Unusual odor especially of chestnuts (nuts) and chemicals. C4 and Cemtex give off a nut smell with oily texture.

Additionally, a popular technique in Afghanistan in the creation of VBIEDs is the removal of seats to make room for additional explosives.¹⁵

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms has created a standard for the amount of destruction causable by different classes of VBIEDs.

BATF Explosive Standards

ATF	Vehicle Description	Maximum Explosives Capacity	Lethal Air Blast Range	Minimum Evacuation Distance	Falling Glass Hazard
	Compact Sedan	300 pounds 227 Kilos (In Trunk)	100 Feet 30 Meters	1,500 Feet 457 Meters	1,250 Feet 381 Meters
	Full Size Sedan	1,000 Pounds 455 Kilos (In Trunk)	125 Feet 38 Meters	1,750 Feet 534 Meters	1,750 Feet 534 Meters
	Passenger Van or Cargo Van	4,000 Pounds 1,818 Kilos	200 Feet 61 Meters	2,750 Feet 838 Meters	2,750 Feet 838 Meters
	Small Box Van (14 Ft. box)	10,000 Pounds 4,545 Kilos	300 Feet 91 Meters	3,750 Feet 1,143 Meters	3,750 Feet 1,143 Meters
	Box Van or Water/Fuel Truck	33,000 Pounds 15,000 Kilos	400 Feet 127 Meters	5,000 Feet 1,524 Meters	5,000 Feet 1,524 Meters
	Semi-Trailer	60,000 Pounds 27,273 Kilos	600 Feet 183 Meters	7,000 Feet 2,134 Meters	7,000 Feet 2,134 Meters

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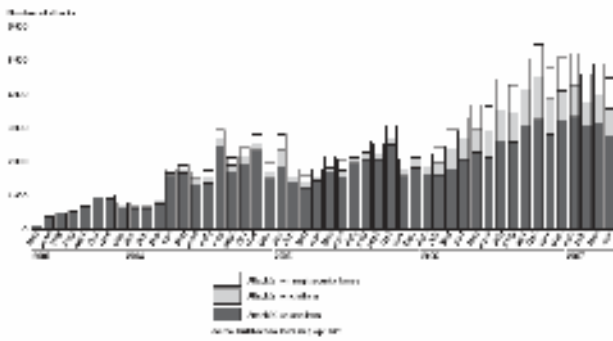
Iraq Overview



Although attacks by insurgents and militias on coalition troops have decreased slightly since a peak in October, the frequency of such assaults remains well ahead of this period last year. While recent focus has been on the growing trend and prevalence of roadside attack by IED, SBBIEDs and SVBIEDs remain a paramount threat in efforts to stabilize Iraq and protect Coalition and ISF soldiers.

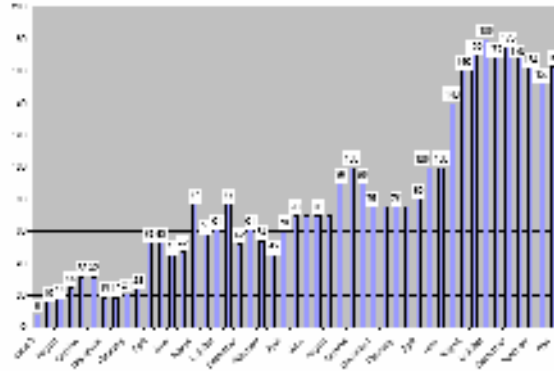
To emphasize the reality of this threat, this past Wednesday, July 11 Iraqi Police confiscated 200 suicide belts and packs of explosives on a truck stopped crossing into Iraq on the Syrian-Iraqi border.¹⁷ In Baghdad on Wednesday, a suicide car bomber attacked a U.S. military patrol near Beirut Square in Palestine Street destroying a Humvee and wounding several soldiers.¹⁸ And in Fallujah on Tuesday, a suicide motorcycle bomber attacked a police patrol wounding two policemen.¹⁹

ENEMY INITIATED ATTACKS AGAINST THE COALITION AND ITS PARTNERS



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ENEMY OPERATIONS AGAINST CIVILIAN INFRASTRUCTURE



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Private security contractors in Iraq should be particularly vigilant in the following areas.²²

North Iraq

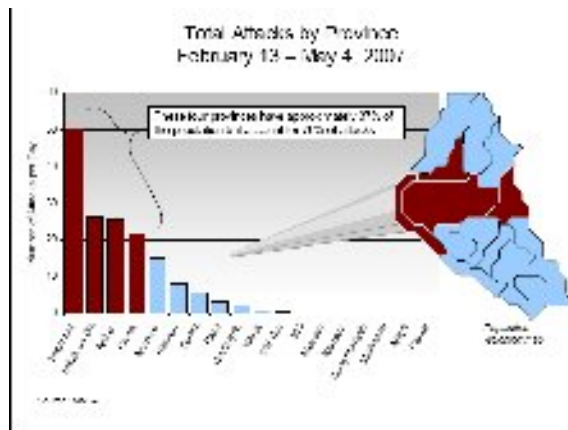
Mosul, (Ninewah Province), Kirkuk, Hawijah (Tamim Province), Zarkho (Dahuk Province)

Central

International/Green Zone, Baladiyat, al-Jaderiyah, Sulaykh, Karadah, Kharkh, Bayaa', Mansour, Sadr City (Baghdad), Fallujah, Karmah, (al-Anbar Province), Samarra, Shirqat, Bayji, Tikrit, Balad (Salah ad-Din Province), Muqdadayah, Ba'qubah, Salman Bak (Diyala Province), Iskandariyah, Latifiyah, Mada'in (Babil Province)

South

Basrah (Basrah Province) Nasiriyah (Dhi Qar Province)



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Some of the most common explosives being utilized are TNT, gasoline, household cleaning supplies and leftover or confiscated shells and mortars, although the use of c4 is on the rise. Of particular importance is the increase in use of TATP (Tri-Acetone Tri-Peroxide) which can be created by combining standard household elements; hydrogen peroxide and acetone. Hydrogen peroxide is a disinfectant and hair bleacher and acetone is a commonly used paint thinner or remover. When ‘cooked together,’ the result is an extremely unstable, highly combustible compound which cannot be detected by bomb-sniffing dogs.²⁴ Hallmarks of the use of TATP include explosive ‘work-accidents’ in bomb factories and premature detonation of explosive vests.

Beyond TATP, insurgents have become adept at increasing explosive potency with enhancement techniques, and it is likely some are copying the al-Qaeda method of adding aluminum powder to TNT, thereby increasing the explosive’s thermal effect and creating greater devastation. Additionally, the advent of cell phone and other remote detonators have increased the potency of suicide attacks allowing for the detonation of a device if the attacker becomes incapacitated or has second thoughts to finalize the mission objective.

Afghanistan Overview



Suicide attacks are a relatively recent phenomenon in Afghanistan. During the Soviet occupation and resulting civil war, suicide attacks were non-existent. The first such attack occurred in 1992, when one of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar’s fighters killed Jamil Rahman, the Salafi leader of the Jamaat al-Dawat w’al-Quran, a Sunna group opposed to Hekmatyar²⁵. Despite the effectiveness of this technique, suicide attacks did not really catch on until after the September 9, 2001 assassination of Ahmad Shah Masoud, the charismatic leader of the Northern Alliance, by explosive laden militants of bin Laden’s al-Qaeda network.²⁶

Suicide attacks continue to be on the rise in Afghanistan where a resurgent Taliban is desperate to retake territory from Afghan and ISAF coalition forces. As military convoys pass through treacherous terrain, suicide bombers often ram their explosive packed vehicles into military convoys hoping to kill as many soldiers as possible.

In Afghanistan where poverty and lack of education lead to an eager acceptance of religious doctrine, whether authentic or radical, suicide volunteers are a dime a dozen. As an Afghan official commented, “The thrust of suicide-bomber training is on religious indoctrination motivating would-be bombers to kill themselves for Allah.”²⁷



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This religious indoctrination has caused an evolution in the terrorist dynamic in Afghanistan. An Afghan Police officer from Kandahar explains, "Their tactics are changing. They used to hire Afghans to drive cars to a target, and not tell them that there were explosives inside. But the Afghans were not very effective and they didn't get close enough to the target. So now they are sending in voluntary suicide bombers, and their effectiveness has improved a lot."²⁸

Mukhtar Pidran, and Afghan political analyst explains, "Insurgents brought suicide terrorism to Afghanistan since it had worked in Iraq. Mostly here [Afghanistan], people are illiterate and know less about the complicated issues of Islam like jihad or martyrdom and can therefore be easily duped into adopting them."²⁹

Once indoctrinated, bombers are given brief lessons in driving cars, trucks or motorcycles, strapped in explosive-filled vehicles or given a vest, and send on their way.³⁰

Private security contractors can expect the number of SVBIEDs and SBBIEDs to continue increasing in the near future with increasing accuracy. Insurgent elements and the Taliban are desperate to score a big victory against ISAF soldiers. Unlike in Iraq, the insurgency has not been embraced by the Afghan populace and to date, suicide attacks have been wildly ineffective. According to U.S. military sources, 84% of the victims of suicide attacks in Afghanistan have been civilians.³¹ The Taliban understands they have a narrow window of opportunity before public opinion turns considering the impacts to the local populace. For this reason, there should be a spike in suicide attacks in the short term as the Taliban and their allies attempt to gain momentum in stabilization efforts and build information networks within local communities via tribal elders.

They have also attempted to foster an image of a clash of civilizations in which the Muslims need to drive out the infidel invaders. Mullah Dadullah, head of the Taliban's military wing declared boldly, "We have sent thousands of Taliban suicide bombers to all Afghan cities for attacks on foreign troops and their Afghan puppets, and we will turn our motherland into the graveyard of the U.S. forces and their families should wait for their dead bodies. The Taliban's war is only for the freedom of Afghanistan from the enemies of Muslims."³²

As a result of the Taliban's latest offensive, the situation remains unstable around Kabul in the Center of the country, Kandahar and Helmand in the South and the bustling Eastern provinces. Taliban forces are becoming more adept at striking travelling ISAF convoys with SVBIEDs, killing three soldiers on July 5 in Kabul City and four on July 7 in Kandahar Province. Another SIED detonated near a group of Canadian soldiers in Kandahar on July 7, wounding four and destroying a vehicle. Suicide attacks are expected to continue throughout the summer months stressing the importance of adhering to guidance on personnel security precautions with regards to varying routes timings and profile where possible.

Female Bombers – Mujahidat

While men have played the primary role in the suicide attacks, women are beginning to take on a more substantial role in the delivery of bombs, especially in Afghanistan. A pool of women has slowly been recruited from the outlying areas within rural Afghanistan. Women have been successfully used for suicide bombings in Jordan, Indonesia and Israel. Operations in Islamic environments make this delivery model even more deadly as cultural restrictions make it impossible to approach a female to speak to her, let alone touch her under any circumstances. Subsequently, a woman should not approach your vehicle. If she does, she should be considered an immediate threat because she could also be a man in disguise.

The use of female suicide bombers by Islamist militant groups in countries such as Iraq, Jordan, Afghanistan and Indian Kashmir has exceeded the traditional constraints imposed on women by a Salafi-Jihadi ideology. There has been an increase in the number of websites dedicated to mujahidat (female mujahideen), linked either directly or



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ideologically to al-Qaeda. The physical and spiritual preparation of the mujahidat has recently spread to many jihadi websites. Salafi-Jihadis are attempting all possible methods to present military training to their followers through secret camps in Afghanistan, Iraq and online literature targeting a female audience with training documents.

Interviews with female mujahidat in Afghanistan, Palestine and elsewhere indicate female Islamists are being trained for military operations. In an interview as early as March 12, 2003 with a mujahidah in charge of training women in Afghanistan (Arab Islamic site), the woman identified herself by the alias Umm Osama bin Laden (the choice of alias shows her endearment toward Osama bin Laden) and said women of al-Qaeda had been active in furthering the organization's cause and managed to stay out of the limelight and scrutiny of the enemy. "The mujahidat are trained in camps in Afghanistan and through the internet," Umm Osama said, adding that the mujahidat know how to use M16 assault rifles, AK-47's, hand grenades and pistols. According to Umm Osama, although females normally operate as reconnaissance and gather intelligence, provide logistical support and convey messages between mujahideen leaders, they have received training on explosives and suicide operations. These operations will be carried out in the future.

The female suicide bombers in Palestine inspired this shift in operational tactics. Umm Osama asserts that the female section of al-Qaeda is multinational and reports to Mullah Saif al-Din who, in turn, reports directly to the Taliban and Osama bin Laden.³³ Umm Osama was arrested by Saudi authorities in 2005 and while incarcerated, she subsequently retracted her adherence to Salafi-Jihadi ideology and allegiance to al-Qaeda. But a campaign, Hamlat al-Sakeena (serenity campaign) was successful in recruiting and training and not all mujahidat were dissuaded from participating in this movement.

Additional mujahidate sites post first-aid training for females needed in combat. The training includes 12 subjects including injections, how to make stretchers, basic CPR, apply tourniquets, setting broken bones and treat gunshot wounds. This enables them to save the lives of mujahadeen.³⁴ More material exists online from the al-Qassam Martyr Brigades in Gaza as recently as 2005³⁵. This site does not contain tactical training, photos exist of covered women training with Ak-47 assault rifles and RPG launches. A trainee on this site training to set booby traps said, "We consider this hard and dangerous training as worship to God. By implementing this training, we will achieve one of two merits, victory or martyrdom." She added, "women like Rim are a crown on our heads." She refers to Rim Salih al-Riyashi, the first Hamas female suicide bomber who blew herself up in January 2004 at Erez industrial park checkpoint in Gaza. It is not an instant process to prepare and send male suicide bombers but a cadre of young followers is being created. Female suicide bombers have even more to lose since many will leave orphaned children. If al-Qaeda is able to increase the number of women engaged in the jihad, counter-terrorism and security forces will need to better prepare for this new threat.³⁶

In short, women are answering the call to Jihad. Women are no longer playing an invisible role in support of their male counterparts. They are proclaiming their voice as part of the global jihad.

Profiling and Conclusion

Suicide bombers represent the ultimate, smart bomb and as such carry operational advantages over other means of detonation. They are inexpensive, accurate and have proven effective in the face of superior firepower. Private security personnel need to be vigilant and constantly on the lookout for suspicious characters. This may seem like a generic statement to make to a contractor with a proficient military background working in such regional deployments but contractors are not familiar with local customs and becoming as familiar as possible with your surroundings and local customs can save your life.

While attackers can be either gender, old or young, most suicide bombers are male, between the ages of 18 and 23. The identification of age is often made difficult in both Iraq and Afghanistan by beards. They will normally be seen



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alone wearing unseasonably warm or heavy clothing. The heavier fabric obscures the device from view to a much greater degree than lighter cotton which is typically worn in warmer weather. Some bombers may have just had a haircut or be clean shaved due to the fulfilment of a religious tradition requiring a bomber to purify him or herself before ascension to the next life can begin. Subsequently, this purification often includes the removal of body hair. A clean shaved male is not unusual in Iraq but would be uncommon in the ethnic areas of rural Afghanistan.

A proposed model for female suicide bombers is to use pregnancy as a cover. A pregnant female requesting aid of an outsider would violate nearly every local custom in Afghanistan, but less so in Iraq and should raise immediate warnings within a team. While the explosive vest would not be visible under a woman's clothes, the core shape will ride higher on the chest than a normal "full term" pregnancy. This may be difficult to determine within a specific vantage point but a pregnant woman would not beg in Islamic society and should be an immediate indication of potential threat.

The best advice for new security personnel operating in Iraq or Afghanistan is to be alert and keep your eyes open, be sensitive to local customs including the trends in fabric patterns worn by different groups in the area. If you become familiar with your local market or the streets during a normal patrol or run, you may notice a shift in the behaviour of locals just before an attack. Pay particular attention if faces you always see are missing, shops are closed or friendly locals are suddenly weary of having a conversation with you. Realize the goal of the operation is to keep their target relaxed so they can approach as closely as possible for maximum impact of the weapon.

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⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Picture of Explosive Vest 2 - <http://cache.gizmodo.com/images/suicide-bomb1.jpg> (Accessed July 12, 2007)

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