

Palestinian Suicide Bombing Revisited: A Critique of the Outbidding Thesis

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Social scientists have argued that numerous factors motivate the outbreak of waves of Palestinian suicide attacks. These factors include the desire to liberate occupied territory, disrupt peace negotiations, seek retaliation and revenge, and win popular support by “outbidding” internal political competitors, using suicide attacks as a kind of currency in the bidding war.¹ Recently, an attempt has begun to disentangle the factors listed above by showing that motives are often mixed and their relative importance varies in different circumstances.² In this paper we continue that effort by focusing on the outbid-

¹ Respectively: Robert A. Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005); Andrew Kydd and Barbara F. Walter, “Sabotaging the Peace: The Politics of Extremist Violence,” *International Organization* 56 (Spring 2002): 263–296; Rui J. de Figueiredo and Barry R. Weingast, “Vicious Cycles: Endogenous Political Extremism and Political Violence,” 2001, accessed on the website of the Institute of Governmental Studies, University of California, Berkeley at <http://repositories.cdlib.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1006&context=igs>, 16 November 2005; and Mia M. Bloom, “Palestinian Suicide Bombing: Public Support, Market Share, and Outbidding,” *Political Science Quarterly* 119 (Spring 2004): 61–88; Mia M. Bloom, *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

² Robert J. Brym and Bader Araj, “Suicide Bombing as Strategy and Interaction: The Case of the Second Intifada,” *Social Forces* 84 (June 2006): 1969–1986; Robert J. Brym, “Six Lessons of Suicide Bombers,” *Contexts* 6 (Fall 2007): 40–45; Robert J. Brym, “Religion, Politics, and Suicide Bombing: An Interpretive Essay,” *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 33 (Winter 2008): 89–108, accessed on the website of the *Canadian Journal of Sociology* at <http://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/CJS/article/view/1537/1061>, 29 May 2008; Bader Araj, “Harsh State Repression as a Cause of Suicide Bombing: The Case of the Palestinian–Israeli Conflict,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 31 (April 2008): 284–303.

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ding thesis, most forcefully stated by Mia Bloom in *Political Science Quarterly*.³ Our analysis leads us to conclude that the explanatory power of the outbidding thesis is considerably weaker than Bloom makes it appear and that an alternative explanation is required. We propose an alternative below.

Bloom's goal is to "account for the variance in public support for [suicide] operations over time."⁴ She attempts to do so by underlining the intense political competition that took place among Palestinian organizations in the context of widespread and mounting disillusion, anger, and despair at the end of 2000.

In September 2000, peace negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians broke down, bringing to a bitter end the optimism that greeted the signing of the Oslo Accords seven years earlier. The Palestinian economy was in ruins. Ariel Sharon, facing a challenge from the right wing of his Likud Party, provocatively visited the Temple Mount (*al-Haram al-Sharif*) to reinforce his nationalist credentials.⁵ Rioting broke out immediately and Israel responded aggressively.

According to Bloom, this was the context in which various political organizations competed against each other for the leadership of the Palestinian community:

With every major [suicide] attack since November 2000, support for suicide bombings has increased and support for the Palestinian Authority has decreased. In addition to building support for martyrdom, groups that use the tactic become more popular. The support for militant Islamic movements appears to capture previously non-aligned groups among the Palestinians, demonstrating that martyrdom operations boost the organizational profile of the groups using them.⁶

Some data concerning the involvement of Palestinian political organizations in suicide attacks are consistent with Bloom's argument (see Table 1). For example, suicide attacks were first initiated by Islamic fundamentalist organizations (Palestinian Islamic Jihad [PIJ] and Hamas) and were only taken up fourteen months later by secular, nationalist organizations (the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine [PFLP] and the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade [AMB], the latter associated with Fatah). It is possible that the leaders of fundamentalist organizations saw suicide attacks as a means of increasing popular support and undermining the legitimacy of the Palestinian Authority in the crisis that developed at the end of 2000. It is also possible that secular, nationalist organizations, fearing a slide in popular trust, responded by launching their own suicide operations in 2001. The number of organizations involved in suicide attacks increased over time (from one in 2000 to five in 2004) and no sin-

³ Bloom, "Palestinian Suicide Bombing."

⁴ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁵ Amos Harel and Avi Isacharoff, *ha-Milkhama ha-Shvi'it: Aikh Nitzakhnu v'Lama Hifsadnu ba-Milkhama im ha-Falestinim* (Hebrew: *The Seventh War: How We Won and Why We Lost the War with the Palestinians*) (Tel Aviv: Yediot Akhronot, 2004), 14.

⁶ Bloom, "Palestinian Suicide Bombing," 61–62; Bloom, *Dying to Kill*, 70.

TABLE 1

Organizational Involvements in Suicide Bombings, 26 October 2000 to 12 July 2005 (in percent)

<i>Political Organization</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2001</i>	<i>2002</i>	<i>2003</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>2005</i>
Palestinian Islamic Jihad	100	26	24	19	16	50
Hamas	0	71	22	44	32	50
Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine	0	3	8	7	11	0
al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade (Fatah)	0	0	45	30	37	0
Popular Resistance Committee	0	0	0	0	5	0
Total	100	100	99*	100	101*	100
Number of involvements	2	31	49	27	19	2
Number of organizations involved	1	3	4	4	5	2

Sources: See note 9.

*Does not equal 100 because of rounding.

gle organization dominated suicide attacks for more than a year at a time. This pattern is also consistent with the view that organizations used suicide attacks as a currency for outbidding rivals in the competition for popular support.

It is, however, difficult to reconstruct the intentions of organizational leaders, not least because the historical record is fragmentary and often self-serving. Fortunately, therefore, the empirical basis of Bloom's argument lies in the realm of popular support for suicide attacks and the organizations that initiate them. We can rely on public opinion polls for data on these subjects.

One hypothesis that we can derive from Bloom's work and that readily lends itself to empirical testing is the following:

H1: Increased frequency of suicide bombing was followed by increased popular support for the tactic.

This hypothesis is not central to Bloom's argument, however, because it says nothing about whether organizations increase their popularity by adopting suicide bombing as a tactic. Bloom is ambiguous on the latter issue. She first holds that frequency of suicide bombing resulted in *declining* popular support for the Palestinian Authority and the overwhelmingly dominant organization within it—Fatah. She then asserts that organizations employing suicide bombing as a tactic enjoyed *increasing* popular support. Yet through its affiliate, the AMB, Fatah was responsible for nearly 30 percent of all suicide attacks during the second *intifada*. Since it cannot be the case that when Fatah engaged in suicide bombing it enjoyed both decreasing and increasing support, one or both of Bloom's organizational arguments must be false. Despite this inconsistency, we test both possibilities:

H2: Increased frequency of suicide bombings by all organizations was followed by decreased popular support for Fatah.

H3A: Increased frequency of suicide bombing by Fatah (through the AMB) was followed by increased popular support for Fatah.

H3B: Increased frequency of suicide bombing by Hamas was followed by increased popular support for Hamas.

Let us consider each of our hypotheses in turn.

CORRELATES OF SUICIDE BOMBING

Between December 2000 and December 2004, a series of public opinion polls asked representative samples of Palestinians about their support for Palestinian political organizations and suicide attacks on Israelis. Bloom cited data from these polls in her work and we follow suit below.⁷ We corrected six errors she made in recording the poll results, most seriously (because the error adds considerable weight to her case) the remarkably high 85 percent support for suicide bombing in September 2001. (This was actually the figure for support of military operations *excluding suicide bombing*; no data are available on support for suicide bombing in September 2001.) In addition, we determined the number of suicide attacks that took place in the month preceding each poll. We would have preferred to use data on the frequency of *attempted* suicide attacks since Israeli action to counter suicide bombers is a key variable affecting the number of suicide bombings. Unfortunately, such data are available only on a yearly basis from the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs so we had to content ourselves with data on the number of suicide attacks that are reported in our sources. In most cases, we were also able to identify the organizations that took responsibility for the attacks.⁸ From these data we constructed Table 2, which shows bivariate correlations for key variables relevant to the out-bidding thesis.

⁷ "Palestine Opinion Pulse," 2005, accessed on the website of the Jerusalem Media and Communication Center at <http://www.jmcc.org/publicpoll/opinion.html>, 14 November 2005; Bloom, "Palestinian Suicide Bombing," 68, 70.

⁸ We define suicide bombing as the use of explosives against one or more people by one or more attackers. The attackers enjoy organizational support and know in advance and with certainty that their action will result in their death. By our definition, merely planning an attack does not qualify as a suicide bombing; the attacker must be *en route* to his or her target. Nor is death or injury a necessary part of our definition since on occasion a suicide bomber is apprehended and disarmed after an attack has been launched but before detonation and the incident is subsequently publicized. Three suicide bombings listed by Israeli sources do not qualify as such by our definition. Fourteen suicide bombings by our definition are not listed as such by Israeli sources. See "Search the Incidents & Casualties Database," accessed on the website of the International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism at <http://www.ict.org.il>, 1 November 2004; "Palestinian violence and terrorism since September 2000," accessed on the website of the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs at <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Terrorism+Obstacle+to+Peace/Palestinian+terror+since+2000/Palestinian%20violence%20and%20terrorism%20since%20September>, 1 November 2004; William Robert Johnston, "Chronology of Terrorist Attacks in Israel, Part IV: 1993–2000," accessed at <http://www.johnstonsarchive.net/terrorism/terrisrael-4.html>, 25 October 2004; New York Times, East Coast Final Edition, 2000–2005; *al-Quds* (Arabic: *Jerusalem*), 2000–2005; *al-Quds al-Arabi* (Arabic: *Arab Jerusalem*), 2000–2005.

TABLE 2

Correlates of Suicide Bombing, December 2000–December 2004 (n in parentheses)

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Bivariate Correlation</i>
H1. Lagged suicide bombings and popular support for suicide bombings	0.516 (11)
H2. Lagged suicide bombings and popular support for Fatah	−0.033 (13)
H3A. Lagged suicide bombings by Fatah and popular support for Fatah	0.015 (13)
H3B. Lagged suicide bombings by Hamas and popular support for Hamas	−0.117 (13)
H6. Popular support for suicide bombings and popular support for Fatah	0.958* (4)

Sources: "Palestine Opinion Pulse" and sources cited in note 9.

* $p < 0.05$, one-tailed.

According to H1, frequency of suicide bombing at time 1 was followed by increasing popular support for the tactic at time 2. Our data fail to support the hypothesis. The correlation between popular support for suicide bombing and the frequency of suicide bombings in the preceding month just fails to reach statistical significance at the 0.05 level.

Nor do the data support H2. The correlation between popular support for Fatah and the frequency of suicide bombings by all organizations in the preceding month is not statistically significant. Finally, the data fail to support hypotheses H3A and H3B. Increased popular support for Fatah was not preceded by a statistically significant increase in the frequency of suicide bombings by Fatah. Nor was increased popular support for Hamas preceded by a statistically significant increase in the frequency of suicide bombings by Hamas. The correlations relevant to H1, H2, H3A, and H3B are likely due to chance. Our results are uniformly disappointing from the point of view of the outbidding thesis.⁹

THREE PRINCIPLES OF GROUP CONFLICT

How then can we explain variation over time in support for, and use of, suicide missions by Palestinians? One possibility is suggested by students of inter-group conflict. Georg Simmel and Lewis Coser argue that inter-group conflict usually increases group cohesion. As group members come into conflict with others, they typically mobilize resources to defend themselves, intensify internal social interaction, draw stark boundaries between themselves and their opponents, accentuate common values, and develop a heightened sense of group trust, identity, and loyalty.¹⁰

Simmel and Coser also contend that intergroup conflict often leads to co-operation among previously unrelated or even antagonistic organizations within groups. The need to cooperate arises from the common goal of group survival,

⁹ We arrived at essentially the same results using nonlagged independent variables.

¹⁰ Lewis Coser, *The Functions of Social Conflict* (New York: Free Press, 1956), 87–103.

which, in the face of protracted and intense intergroup conflict, overrides the less salient interests that previously separated the organizations.¹¹

Finally, as Mark Lichbach argues in perhaps the most frequently cited article on the relationship between repression and collective action, protest organizations choose tactics that maximize benefits and minimize costs. When an opponent represses the use of a chosen tactic, thus increasing its cost, organization members tend to replace it with another tactic. For example, the substitution of less violent tactics for more violent tactics is largely a response to the repression of less violent tactics by opponents.¹²

Among the testable hypotheses that may be derived from the principles of group conflict just outlined, the following are relevant in the present context:

- H4: In the face of repression of less violent tactics, protest organizations tend to choose more violent tactics. For example, in the Palestinian case we may expect that the introduction of suicide bombing by a protest organization was preceded by extreme repression of that organization.
- H5: Extreme repression of protest activities typically encourages members of organizations to pool resources and cooperate at least on a tactical level so that they can continue to engage in protest. For example, in the Palestinian case we may expect that suicide bombing operations were sometimes characterized by tactical cooperation among previously antagonistic organizations.
- H6: As involvement in violent conflict increases, so does social solidarity. Following Durkheim (see below), heightened social solidarity should cause the rates of different types of suicide to change, and trust in authoritative institutions to increase. For example, in the Palestinian case we may expect that increased social solidarity caused the rate of suicide bombing to rise and the rate of what Durkheim called “egoistic” and “anomic” suicide to fall. We may also expect that increasing support for suicide bombing was associated with increasing trust in Fatah, the dominant political organization at the time.

Testing these hypotheses is the next task we set ourselves.

VIOLENCE (H4)

Bloom writes that suicide bombing allows “organizations which use the tactic to reap multiple benefits without incurring significant costs.”¹³ We find the cost side of her ledger implausible. After their experience with the consequences of

¹¹ Coser, *The Functions*, 139–149.

¹² Mark Lichbach, “Deterrence or Escalation? The Puzzle of Aggregate Studies of Repression and Dissent,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 31 (June 1987): 266–297.

¹³ Bloom, *Dying to Kill*, 76.

suicide bombing from 1993 to 1997, it is inconceivable that Palestinian organizational leaders at the beginning of the second *intifada* were unaware that the reintroduction of suicide bombing would be costly. International condemnation, frozen bank accounts, mass arrests, violent reprisals (including the assassination of organizational leaders), and the disruption of operations by Israeli counterterrorist forces followed hard on the heels of suicide bombings. Yet despite these high costs, Palestinian insurgents employed the tactic throughout the second *intifada*. They did so because other tactics were found to be more costly still. As Robert Pape notes: “When rebels are strong enough to achieve their territorial aims through conventional or guerilla means alone, there is little reason for them to accept the disapproval and costs that follow from resorting to suicide terrorism.”¹⁴ We concur with Pape’s view that suicide bombing is usually a costly weapon of last resort.

Support for the view that Palestinian insurgents switch tactics when the cost of employing current tactics becomes too high was first suggested by Marwan Khawaja. In his quantitative analysis of data on collective action in the West Bank from 1976 to 1985, he found that, in general, the exercise of high levels of most forms of state repression led to increased rioting and other forms of violent collective action on the part of the Palestinians.¹⁵ Similarly, in her recent, qualitative analysis of counterinsurgency and rebellion during the first and second *intifadas*, Ruth Margolies Beitler convincingly demonstrated that “the implementation of Israeli counterinsurgency tactics since 1967 was a major factor influencing the Palestinians’ choice of tactics and subsequently their decision to resort to mass rebellion in 1987, but also to revert to more violent tactics in 2000.”¹⁶

Three Turning Points

The pattern that Khawaja and Beitler discerned—increased state repression leading to the adoption of alternative and, in this case, more violent insurgent tactics—is also visible in three turning points in the history of the second *intifada*: the first use of suicide bombing during the second *intifada* in 2000, the first use of suicide bombing by a secular Palestinian organization in 2001, and the first use of suicide bombing by Fatah, the leading secular, nationalist Palestinian organization in 2002. Each of these turning points was precipitated by heightened repression on the part of Israeli forces that sharply increased the cost to Palestinian insurgents of using alternative tactics.

The first suicide bombing of the second intifada. The first riot of the second *intifada* broke out on the esplanade of al-Aqsa Mosque in September

¹⁴ Pape, *Dying to Win*, 30.

¹⁵ Marwan Khawaja, “Repression and Popular Collective Action: Evidence from the West Bank,” *Sociological Forum* 8 (Winter 1993): 47–71.

¹⁶ Ruth Margolies Beitler, *The Path to Mass Rebellion: An Analysis of Two Intifadas* (Lanham MD: Lexington Books, 2004), xii.

2000. Israel's reaction to the rock throwing was highly aggressive, even by the admission of its own officials.¹⁷ Security forces fired live ammunition into the crowd, killing seven people. The rioting spread quickly, and by the end of the year, Israeli security forces had killed 319 Palestinians. (In the same period, Israeli victims totaled 43, including 22 civilians.)¹⁸ In the face of such extreme repression, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, a fundamentalist Islamic organization, shifted tactics and launched the first suicide attack of the second *intifada*. A man riding a bicycle, who appeared to be heading toward an Israeli Army outpost at the entrance to the Jewish settlement of Kisufim in Gaza, struck a concrete barrier, detonating his bomb and wounding a soldier. In a press release, PIJ took responsibility for the attack and clearly implied that the operation was a reaction to the killing of Palestinians during the first days of the *intifada*; it named the cell responsible for the operation the "al-Aqsa martyrs cell," for the first time invoking the image of al-Aqsa Mosque in the name of suicide bombing and in honor of those who died on the mosque's esplanade.¹⁹ The suicide operation may also have been timed to coincide with the anniversary of the assassination of PIJ's founder, Fathi al-Shiqaqi, by Mossad agents in Malta in 1995. Subsequent "firsts" made it clear that there is often a connection between suicide bombings and the assassination of Palestinian organizational leaders by Israel.²⁰

The first suicide bombing by a secular organization. On 27 August 2001, Israeli forces assassinated the Secretary-General of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Abu Ali Mustafa (Mustafa Zubari), in a missile strike on his office in Ramallah in the West Bank. Earlier Israeli assassinations had been restricted to field operatives and local militia commanders who had been involved in suicide missions; this was the first to involve the head of a militant organization. A few hours after the assassination, Palestinian gunmen shot and killed a Jewish settler. A caller to Reuters said the shooting was only the first act of revenge by the PFLP. The shooting was followed by the spectacular assassination of the far-right Israeli Minister of Tourism, Rehavam

¹⁷ Raviv Drucker and Ofer Shelah, *Boomerang: Kishalon ha-Manhigut ba-Intifada ha-Shniya* (Hebrew: *Boomerang: The Failure of Leadership in the Second Intifada*), (Jerusalem: Keter, 2005), 28 ff.; Luca Ricolfi, "Palestinians, 1981–2003," in Diego Gambetta, ed., *Making Sense of Suicide Missions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 94.

¹⁸ Amal Jamal, *The Palestinian National Movement: Politics of Contention, 1967–2005* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 157; Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2005, special tabulation on Palestinians killed in the al-Aqsa *intifada* (in Arabic); "Victims of Palestinian Violence and Terrorism since September 2000," accessed on the website of the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs at <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Terrorism-+Obstacle+to+Peace/Palestinian+terror+since+2000/Victims%20of%20Palestinian%20Violence%20and%20Terrorism%20sinc>, 25 January 2006.

¹⁹ "Umalieh Intihariah l'Jihad al-Islami Tustuhdif Muqe'a Israelia fi Qita' Ghaza," (Arabic: "A Suicide Operation by the Islamic Jihad against an Israeli Position") *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 27 October 2000, 5.

²⁰ For details concerning this link, see Brym and Araj, "Suicide Bombing," 2006.

Ze'evi, in a Jerusalem hotel on 17 October and, on the same day, the first suicide bombing involving a secular, nationalist organization. The suicide attack occurred at Kibbutz Nakhal Oz between Israel and the Gaza Strip. Nobody was killed except the bomber. Two Israeli soldiers were wounded. The military wing of the PFLP declared in a press release that the assassination of Ze'evi and the suicide bombing were responses to the assassination of Abu Ali Mustafa. PFLP activists used loudspeakers to broadcast the same message in the Gaza Strip.²¹ Here again we see that an important turning point in the second *intifada* involving suicide bombing was preceded by an escalation of Israeli repression.

The first suicide bombing by Fatah (AMB). On 14 January 2002, Israeli forces assassinated Raed al-Karmi, a folk hero and leader of an AMB militia in Tulkarem in the West Bank, by detonating a high-powered bomb beside his house. Within hours, the AMB issued a press release entitled "Revenge is Coming" (*al-Intiqm Qadim*) and ambushed some Israeli soldiers just east of Tulkarem, killing one and injuring another.²² It was the first of a series of increasingly violent attacks over the next two weeks, culminating in the suicide mission of 27 January. On that day a Fatah-affiliated attacker detonated a powerful bomb on a busy Jerusalem street corner during lunch hour. The bomber and an elderly Israeli were killed. Eleven Israelis were seriously wounded and more than 150 others were treated for shock and lacerations from flying glass and other debris. In an interview with a *New York Times* reporter the day after al-Karmi's assassination, his comrades insisted they would stand by precedent and avoid suicide attacks.²³ It did not take long for them to change their mind.

We conclude that in the face of repression of less violent tactics, groups often tend to choose more violent tactics. If, as we have argued, competition among Palestinian organizations seems to have contributed relatively little to the introduction and persistent use of suicide bombing during the second *intifada*, we are obliged to conclude that conflict between the Israeli state and Palestinian organizations over territorial control seems to have contributed a great deal.

COOPERATION (H5)

Palestinian organizations have been intensely competitive for decades. They have jockeyed for power and legitimacy, promoted conflicting goals, and vied

²¹ "Felsteeni Yufujer Nufssuh ya Ausseb Jundiein Bijorouh," (Arabic: "A Palestinian Blows Himself Up and Injures Two Soldiers") *al-Quds*, 18 October 2001, 1, 18; James Bennet, "Widening Hostilities, Israel Kills Chief of P.L.O. Faction," *New York Times*, 28 August 2001, A6; James Bennet, "Far-Right Leader Is Slain in Israel; A Blow to Peace," *New York Times*, 18 October 2000, A1, A10.

²² "Hurekut Fatih Turud ula Ightiyyal Ahud Ashiteeha," (Arabic: "Fatah Movement Reacts to the Assassination of One of its Activists") *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 15 January 2002, 1.

²³ James Bennet, "Key Militia Leader Dies in Bomb Blast in the West Bank," *New York Times*, 15 January 2002.

for the trust and support of the public. Local leaders have clashed with leaders-in-exile; Islamic fundamentalist leaders have quarreled with secular, nationalist leaders; and senior, upper-tier leaders have been at odds with junior, middle-tier leaders. We know little about the conditions that exacerbate political competition among Palestinian organizations. We do know that political competition has not been constant. It has been more intense in some periods than others. Nor has political competition been monolithic. It has been more evident at the level of ideology and strategy than at the level of tactics. We believe that in the face of high levels of Israeli repression during the second *intifada*, political competition among Palestinian organizations became somewhat subdued and some signs of tactical cooperation emerged (H5).

Soon after the rioting began in September 2000, Israel altered its techniques of repression and began arresting and detaining large number of Palestinians, a policy it pursued with increasing vigor throughout the second *intifada*. In November 2000, it started assassinating Palestinian field operatives and militia commanders, extending its targets to upper-tier leaders in October 2001. Also in October 2001, Israel resumed demolishing homes owned by the families of people involved in anti-Israel activities, a practice it had abandoned in 1997. In March 2002, following a rash of especially horrific suicide bombings, Israel re-occupied most of the West Bank and parts of Gaza and started conducting house-to-house searches to eradicate the infrastructure of the insurgency.

One effect of these counterinsurgency techniques was to encourage some level of tactical cooperation among Palestinian organizations as a matter of necessity. In August 2001, *The Economist* reported that “Israel’s policy of assassinating Hamas and Fatah men alike has encouraged the formation of cross-factional groups, binding together the national and Islamic resistance.”²⁴ We calculate that 8 percent of suicide and guerilla attacks between September 2000 and July 2005 involved participants from more than one organization, and an additional unknown (but undoubtedly larger) percentage involved logistical cooperation between organizations.²⁵ As one Palestinian political scientist correctly observed:

The core of the PA’s [Palestinian Authority’s] loyalists not only supported Hamas’s actions, but also participated in them. On the eve of the Camp David negotiations of July 2000 and especially upon their failure, Fatah’s leaders were, in their determination to frustrate Israel’s policies of occupation and settlement, not far from the declared position of Hamas’s leadership. This change in Fatah’s position

²⁴ “The consequences of selective killing: Israel and the Palestinians,” *The Economist* 360, 8233 (4 August 2001), 40.

²⁵ “al-Muquemuh Kubedit al-Ado al-Suhioni Alf Kutteel yu 6 Alaf Jureeh Khilal ‘Intifadut al-Aqsa’... Nusfuhum Husselut al-Hassad al-Qussami,” (Arabic: “The Resistance Inflicted 1,000 Deaths and 6,000 Injuries on the Zionist Enemy in the ‘al-Aqsa Intifada’... Half of them Killed by the al-Qassam Battalions”), accessed on the website of Hizballah at <http://www.moqawama.org/israel.php>, 29 January 2006.

closed the gap between activists of the rival movements, leading to common military and suicide activities against the Israeli army and settlers and other Israeli civilians. In contrast to previous clashes between Fatah and Hamas activists, the new public mood facilitated cooperative military operations.²⁶

Israeli political scientists Ami Pedahzur and Arie Perliger recently provided additional evidence supporting observations of inter-organizational cooperation. They identified and analyzed members of four networks of Palestinian militants who were engaged in suicide missions. The networks ranged in size from 22 to 49 members and operated in Nablus, northern Samaria, Hebron, and Jenin, one of them in 1996 and three in the period 2000–2004. The network that was active in 1996, before the outbreak of the second *intifada*, was comprised of Hamas members exclusively. The networks that were active during the second *intifada*, when Israeli repression was much stiffer, were each dominated by one organization but contained a significant admixture of members of other organizations. Pedahzur and Perliger comment: “Some of the suicide attacker cells ... were comprised of youths who belonged to different groups, so that if one speaks of any type of association among the groups, it is more a matter of cooperation than competition.”²⁷

SOCIAL SOLIDARITY (H6)

The conflict with Israel and, in particular, Israel’s use of extreme repression during the second *intifada* caused more than just increased cooperation among Palestinian organizations. In general, the conflict increased Palestinian social solidarity. Heightened social solidarity, in turn, had important consequences for patterns of suicidal behavior and trust in authority.

In Durkheim’s usage, social solidarity refers to the frequency of interaction, the sharing of values, and the sense of trust that exist in any social collectivity to varying degrees. Indicative of a collectivity’s level of social solidarity are the types and rates of suicide that may be observed within it. For example, if social solidarity is low, individuals may be poorly integrated into the groups to which they belong and they consequently tend to disregard rules of behavior that are not based on their private interests. They may also be poorly regulated by collective norms so there is little control over the limits of their needs and passions. High rates of “egoistic” and “anomic” suicide are typical in such settings according to Durkheim. In contrast, if social solidarity is high there is little space for individuality because collective life is too intense to allow for the expression of individual needs, passions, and personality development. In such cases, when a person commits suicide, it is typically “not because he assumes the right to do so but, on the contrary, *because*

²⁶ Jamal, *The Palestinian National Movement*, 154.

²⁷ Ami Pedahzur and Arie Perliger, “The Changing Nature of Suicide Attacks: A Social Network Perspective.” *Social Forces* 84 (June 2006): 1987–2008.

it is his duty."²⁸ Accordingly, Durkheim refers to suicide committed in conditions of high social solidarity as "altruistic suicide." Suicide missions are a form of altruistic suicide in the Durkheimian sense. It is only under conditions of moderate integration and regulation that egoistic, anomic, and altruistic suicide rates are low.

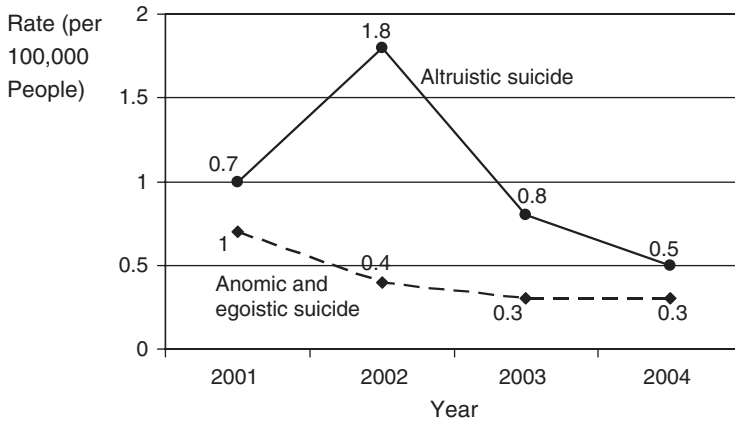
If, as we have argued, the conflict with Israel heightened social solidarity among Palestinians, we should observe a relatively low level of egoistic and anomic suicide and a relatively high level of altruistic suicide in Palestinian society, especially during periods of intense collective violence. This is indeed what we find during the second *intifada* (see Figure 1). Between 2001 and 2004, the rate of altruistic suicide (the number of suicide bombers who died during their missions per 100,000 Palestinians) averaged 1.0 (or 33 people per year) while the rate of anomic and egoistic suicide averaged just 0.4 (or 13 people per year). The curves for the rate of altruistic and anomic/egoistic suicide are not quite mirror images of each other, but the high point for altruistic suicide (2002) did witness a sharp decline in the rate of anomic/egoistic suicide. (The curve for the rate of *attempted* anomic/egoistic suicide, not shown in Figure 1, is an almost perfect mirror image of the curve for the rate of altruistic suicide.)²⁹

If the conflict with Israel heightened social solidarity among Palestinians, the level of support for suicide bombing should have been positively associated with the level of support for authoritative organizations. And in fact, in line with H6, during the second *intifada* the correlation between popular support for suicide bombing and popular support for Fatah, the most popular and trusted political organization in Palestinian society at the time, was strong, positive, and statistically significant ($r = 0.958$; see Table 2). We thus see that, to the degree that conflict with Israel heightened social solidarity in Palestinian society, it had the Durkheimian consequences one would expect.

²⁸ Émile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, G. Simpson, ed., J. Spaulding and G. Simpson, trans. (New York: Free Press 1951 [1897]), 219, emphasis in the original.

²⁹ Anomic/egoistic and attempted anomic/egoistic suicide data are from Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2006, "Reported and Attempted Suicide in the Palestinian Territory by Region, 2001–2004," special tabulation. Population data for the year 2000 are from the home page of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2005, accessed at <http://www.pcbs.org/>, 9 September 2005. We assume a 4 percent annual rate of population increase after 2000. Altruistic suicide data are our calculations from the sources cited in note 9. Nadia Taysir Dabbagh's data from the period just before, during, and just after the first *intifada* show that during the first *intifada* the anomic/egoistic suicide rate remained low and steady while the attempted anomic/egoistic suicide rate dipped. See Nadia Taysir Dabbagh, *Suicide in Palestine: Narratives of Despair* (Northampton MA: Olive Branch Press, 2005), 129, 131–132. Incidentally, increases in social solidarity as indicated by periodic collective religious celebrations are associated with a decline in the anomic/egoistic suicide rate among Palestinians but not, apparently, with an increase in the altruistic suicide rate. This pattern is compatible with the view that culture plays an independent role in shaping suicidal behavior. See Dabbagh, *Suicide in Palestine...*, 98; Daradkeh, "Parasuicide during Ramadan in Jordan," *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica* 86 (February, 1992): 253–254; Cynthia Hamlin and Robert J. Brym "The Return of the Native: A Cultural and Social-psychological Critique of Durkheim's *Suicide* Based on the Guarani-Kaiowá of Southwestern Brazil," *Sociological Theory* 24 (Winter 2006): 42–57.

FIGURE 1



DISCUSSION: THE DYNAMICS OF STATE REPRESSION AND INSURGENCY

The second *intifada* broke out in September 2000 and its first suicide bombing occurred a month later. In July 2000, Palestinian support for Fatah stood at 37 percent and support for Hamas at 10 percent. Sometime thereafter, both parties experienced a reversal of fortune. By July 2001, support for Fatah and Hamas stood at 29 percent and 17 percent, respectively. In March 1999, 26 percent of Palestinians supported suicide bombing. Support for suicide bombing then began to soar, reaching 66 percent in December 2000. Thus, in the period July to December 2000, increasing support for suicide bombing was associated with falling support for Fatah and rising support for Hamas, as the outbidding thesis predicts.

Whether these correlations amount to support for the outbidding thesis is another matter. We do not dismiss out of hand the notion that intense competition among militant organizations may on occasion result in tactical outbidding. Three hypotheses are worth researching in this regard. First, security cooperation between Fatah, on the one hand, and Israel or the United States, on the other, may anger Hamas and incite strife between Hamas and Fatah. Second, the outbreak of discord between moderate and radical factions *within* Fatah may result in the formation of alliances between Fatah radicals and Hamas that, in turn, exacerbate interorganizational conflict. And third, policies that encourage Palestinians to think of only one organization as the proximate cause of their suffering (such as the financial squeeze imposed by Israel and the West on Hamas following its electoral victory in 2006) may increase discord between organizations. These hypotheses notwithstanding, much of the available information pertaining to what was happening on the ground during the second *intifada* suggests a certain level of cooperation, not just competition, among Pal-

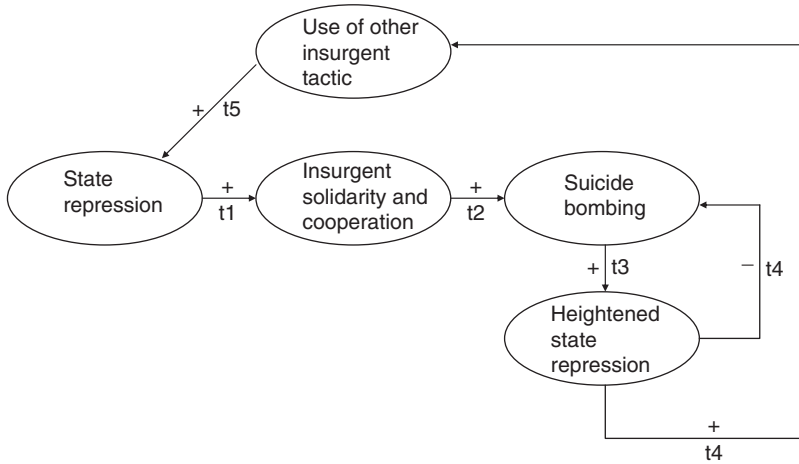
estinian political organizations. And it is clear that beginning shortly after the outbreak of the second *intifada*, outbidding had little to do with variation in support for suicide bombing. Heteroscedastic is the term statisticians use to describe a regression model that is unequally accurate across the range of a dependent variable. We have shown that the regression model implicit in Bloom's analysis is, at best, heteroscedastic. The outbidding thesis is inapplicable to most of the second *intifada* insofar as it fails to account for variation in public support for suicide operations between December 2000 and December 2004 and insofar as the frequency of suicide bombings was not significantly associated with decreased support for secular organizations such as Fatah and increased support for Islamic fundamentalist organizations such as Hamas in that period.

After Arafat's death in November 2004, Fatah assumed a nonviolent stance toward Israel. Hamas declared a ceasefire (*hudna*) and stuck to it quite closely. PIJ launched three suicide missions in the following fourteen months. Significantly, however, the popularity of Hamas continued to grow throughout this period of relative calm, contrary to what the outbidding thesis would predict.³⁰ Hamas won the January 2006 parliamentary election with a solid majority of 74 out of 132 seats despite abstaining from suicide bombing for more than a year. Meanwhile, the intransigent PIJ was wiped off the electoral map. The popularity of Hamas is the result of many factors, but it is an oversimplification to think that Hamas has attracted popular support simply by engaging in suicide bombing as a means of outbidding competing organizations.

The dynamics of suicide bombing during the second *intifada* are portrayed in Figure 2. We contend that increasing Israeli state repression at time 1, in the second *intifada*'s early stages, heightened social solidarity in Palestinian society and cooperation among insurgent organizations. These social processes led to a shift in insurgent tactics at time 2; rioting became less common and the frequency of suicide bombing increased. Israel's response to the wave of suicide attacks was to exercise more (and more effective) state repression at time 3. But events reached a turning point in March 2002. When Israel reoccupied the West Bank and parts of the Gaza Strip, its policy of conducting thorough house-to-house searches and stepping up the assassination and imprisonment of insurgent leaders thoroughly disrupted the planning and conduct of suicide operations. The construction of Israel's security wall cordoning off the West Bank from Israel proper had a similar effect. However, the effect of heightened state repression was twofold. First, the frequency of suicide bombing fell at time 4. Second, at the same time, heightened state repression led to a change of tactic. Thus, the insurgency did not die. Suicide bombers were replaced by Qassam rockets and kidnapping. At time 5, renewed state repression may be

³⁰ Hamas and PIJ were responsible for the 1993–1997 wave of suicide bombings. During that period, support for Hamas was low, in the 9 to 10 percent range. Support for suicide bombing was also relatively low and it declined from 33 percent in June 1995 to 28 percent in August 1997. This is again contrary to what the outbidding thesis would predict. See "Palestine Opinion Pulse."

FIGURE 2



expected to encourage a new round of violence. Throughout most of the second *intifada*, it seems, outbidding among Palestinian organizations had little to do with change in the frequency of suicide bombing.

Some scholars have recently made sweeping generalizations about the applicability of the outbidding thesis to all four waves of suicide attacks conducted by Palestinians since 1981 as well as suicide bombing campaigns launched by the Tamil Tigers of Sri Lanka, the *fedayeen* in Kashmir, and the Kurdistan Workers' Party.³¹ These generalizations seem to be part of a broader tendency to adopt monocausal theories to explain the increasing popularity of suicide bombing. Robert Pape's widely publicized argument that suicide bombing is a strategic choice aimed at coercing occupying powers to give up territory is perhaps the best known of these monocausal theories, and we have criticized it in detail elsewhere.³² Our analysis points to the need to move in the opposite direction—toward multivariate models that account for variation over time and place in the frequency of suicide bombings and support for the tactic. Motives for suicide bombing—the desire to liberate territory, the urge to disrupt peace negotiations, the search for retaliation and revenge, and the attempt to win popular support by outbidding internal political competitors—may all come into play to varying degrees in different times and places. On close inspection, monocausal explanations of suicide bombing are bound to fail.*

³¹ Ricolfi, "Palestinians," 92–101.

³² Brym and Araj, "Suicide Bombing," 2006.

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