



Martyr Mindset Growing Among Palestinians

Some See Growing Suicide Bomber Aspirations Among Palestinian Kids

By **RON CLAIBORNE**

Dec. 29, 2002 — - In the summer of 2001, a 22-year-old Palestinian man walked into a crowded Sbarro pizzeria in downtown Jerusalem and calmly detonated a bomb strapped to his back, killing 15 people — including a 15-year-old Israeli girl — and injuring 130.

The bomber was assisted by Mohammad Daghlas, a 22-year-old college student from the West Bank village of Burqa who provided the bomb involved in the attack. Via a cell phone smuggled into a prison where he's serving a 1,500-year sentence, Daghlas told ABCNEWS he regrets nothing.

"If the Israelis were not committed to killing children, we would be the first to accept this," he said through a translator. "But they are not, so we have to send them a message that their children are not safe if they continue killing our children."

Daghlas, himself, was shot and severely wounded by Israeli soldiers during street demonstrations, something Palestinian psychiatrist Eyad R. El Serraj said is not unusual in the backgrounds of suicide bombers, who he's studied. He says every one of them had a history of trauma as a child. Almost none of them was mentally ill or even suicidal.

"Seeing people killed or injured, having your home demolished, having your landscape destroyed — these are the kinds of traumas Palestinian children have been subjected to," Serraj said. "And from this pool of traumatized children, you have suicide bombers."

According to Serraj, Palestinians — not just the bombers, but society — see themselves as victims of an oppressor who has evicted them from their own land, and who has shamed and humiliated them. He says the suicide bomber acts out of a sense of rage and a desire for revenge.

'You Have to Get Revenge'

At Bir Zeit University, a Palestinian college in the occupied West Bank, several students called the suicide killings revenge for what they consider humiliating checkpoints, harsh living conditions and the killing of Palestinian civilians.

"It's the only way to react to such killings," said a student named Katreena. "These people, the soldiers, are killing our children, are killing our men, our women. This is the only way to respond. Killing a civilian is wrong, but what they did to us is wrong. ... You have to get revenge."

"When we see helicopters shooting us, we want to do strong things," said Ahmed el Muzaini, another Palestinian student. "And suicide bombers is a very effective and very efficient thing that we can do."

'Incomprehensible'

At the popular Moment Cafe in West Jerusalem, where a suicide bomber blew himself up last March, killing 11 people, the cafe has been rebuilt and it is, again, popular.

"My friend said, 'Should we go get blown up?'" said Wendy Geller, a patron. "It's been blown up once. Chances are small it will get blown up again. But I was a little nervous."

"I know they hate us, and I can understand that because they are being humiliated every day, every single day," said Yaron Nazarian, another patron. "This kind of act, I can't understand as a human being. I just can't understand."

Among the victims in the Sbarro pizzeria bombing was a 15-year-old Israeli girl named Malkie Roth — and her father, Arnold Roth, still has a hard time comprehending it: "I think the overwhelming feeling is not so much anger as a tremendous sense of, "This is wrong. This is so unjust. This is incomprehensible."

Palestinian Support

Yet, as incomprehensible as suicide bombings are to Israelis, a recent poll showed that more than 64 percent of Palestinians support these attacks on civilians.

In Palestinian areas, suicide bombers are called martyrs. And they are considered victims of the Israeli occupation, their lives celebrated and memorialized on posters, just the same as civilians killed by Israeli troops.

"We now have a young generation of children," Serraj said, "who, when you ask them 'What would you like to be when you are 20?'

he would respond by saying, 'I want to be a martyr.' He don't say, 'I want to be a doctor, or engineer or a TV person.' They say, 'I want to be a martyr.' This is now the hero example. And this is very dangerous."

Shortly after Malkie Roth was killed in the Sbarro pizzeria bombing, Nablus University hosted an art exhibit celebrating the attack.

"The group thinking here, of course, is that you reach a status that is so high in the eyes of the society when you are a martyr," Serraj said. "It is almost a status of prophets."

But the Israelis say if the goal of the suicide bombings is to demoralize them, it's not working. They call them criminal acts, not acts of war. And increasingly, Israelis are supporting stronger measures to try to stop the attacks.

"There is a process of radical radicalization in Israelis," said Zeev Sternhell of Hebrew University. "The Israeli society is going more to the right, more nationalist, tougher. And the response is more repression."

"Once you're caught in responding to violence by violence, that's the end of it," said Dr. Arie Shalev of Hadassah Hospital. "That's the beginning of a vicious cycle. ... Even clinically, [it] is much more difficult to treat an angry patient than to treat the frightened patient."

On the Palestinian side, the anger, the rage, and the desperation only grow.

"We're creating, unconsciously, a culture of death," Serraj said. "Imagine if we have our children believing, collectively, that you are to die when they are 20. So, why should they go to school? Why should they look for hope in life?"

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