

Child Abuse
The New Islamic Cult of Martyrdom
Justus Reid Weiner*

On April 19, 2000, seventeen year-old Afaq Ahmed Shah got into a car filled with explosives and drove it to the Indian Army headquarters in Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir. Stopped by guards at the entrance, the teenager detonated a bomb inside the vehicle, triggering a massive explosion that injured four people. In the months leading up to the bombing, Shah, along with other youngsters in the contested region of Kashmir, spent a great deal of his time in the local mosque, falling under the influence of local terrorist groups. Thus motivated, he became the first suicide bomber¹ of the Kashmiri conflict.²

In June of 2002, a 16 year-old Palestinian boy by the name Issa Bdir was dispatched by the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades to carry out a terror attack in Rishon Letzion, a suburb of Tel Aviv. After dying his hair blond so as to appear European, he entered a

* Justus Reid Weiner is an international human rights lawyer and a member of the Israel and New York Bar Associations. He is currently a Scholar in Residence at the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, an independent policy studies center, and an adjunct lecturer at the Hebrew University. The author expresses his indebtedness to Dr. Rita Kropf and Shira Zamir for their assistance.

¹ "Suicide bombings" might more aptly be called "homicide bombings" or "genocide bombings" if one examines the intent of the bombers and their handlers.

² Robert Marquand, "New Faces Join Fray in Kashmir," *Christian Science Monitor*, Boston, May 2, 2000.

crowded pedestrian mall packed with elderly people and foreign workers and blew himself up, killing two Israelis (including one teenager), and wounding over 30 others. At that point Bdir became the youngest person ever to successfully complete a suicide mission in Israel.³

On November 1, 2004, Amar al-Faar, another 16 year-old Palestinian boy, entered Israel through a gap in the security fence. He carried out a suicide bombing in the densely populated Carmel outdoor market in Tel Aviv. The boy's attack killed four Israelis and wounded thirty-two, six of them seriously. Al-Faar was recruited by members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), a neo-Marxist faction of Yasser Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). In interviews following the attack, Al-Faars' mother condemned the terrorists who recruited her son, claiming, "It's immoral to send someone so young. They should have sent an adult who understands the meaning of his deeds."⁴

In August of 2003, two Kashmiri Muslim boys, aged 13 and 17, were kidnapped at gunpoint by the Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT, Army of the Pure) terrorist organization. The boys were among hundreds of Muslim youth who have been forcibly recruited and trained to commit acts of terror against the Indian military and civilian populations.⁵ The kidnappers were most likely responding to the dictates of the LeT ordering local villages "to contribute one recruit each to the organization, or face reprisals."⁶

Recently, the involvement of minors in Palestinian terror touched a new low, as an 11 year-old boy was caught while unwittingly trying to transport a bag holding a 7-to-10 kilogram bomb past an Israeli military roadblock. The young porter had been hired by the Fatah Tanzim terrorist organization, affiliated

³ Ha'aretz Staff and Agencies, "16 Year-Old Rishon Bomber Was Youngest to Strike in Israel," *Ha'aretz*, Tel Aviv, June 9, 2002.

⁴ Setven Erlanger, "Suicide Blast Kills 4 at Tel Aviv Market: 16 year-old Bomber Injures 32 Others at Outdoor Stalls," *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 2, 2004.

⁵ Lashkar-e-Toiba, or Army of the Pure, is on the list of U.S. Designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations. Founded in 1989, the Pakistan-based group targets Indian troops and civilians in Jammu and Kashmir and elsewhere in India.

⁶ Praveen Swami, "Jehadi Groups Step Up Recruitment of Children," *The Hindu*, Chennai, September 9, 2003.

with Yasser Arafat. The terrorists had two equally appalling scenarios in mind. If the bomb was successfully smuggled past the roadblock, it would have been given to a suicide bomber and used to launch a deadly attack somewhere in Israel. Alternately, if the boy were caught, his dispatchers had intended to blow him up along with the soldiers at the roadblock by detonating the explosive charge via a cell phone detonator. Fortunately, due to a technical glitch, the bomb failed to go off and the terrorist plot was foiled.⁷

Unfortunately, the episodes described above are not isolated. This disturbing practice of deadly child abuse is on the rise in Muslim societies all over the world, most notably in the Palestinian areas and in Pakistan as also in Jammu & Kashmir (J&K). While the average Israeli or Indian citizen does not usually make the connection, there are striking similarities between the threats that face their two countries. Muslim terrorist organizations that recruit – sometimes forcibly – these teenagers, justify this illegal and immoral practice by noting that children, much like females, are less likely to be intercepted by security forces before they carry out their missions of death. In both conflicts, the value of a child's life (not to mention the lives of those unfortunates who find themselves within the radius of death and destruction when the bomb is detonated) has become subordinate to the aspirations of militant Islam and militant nationalism. And while the recruitment and indoctrination of Muslim children to engage in terrorism and armed conflict in Indian Kashmir has not reached the unprecedented levels of the current *Intifada* that targets Israel; concerned Indian citizens (indeed persons living in *any* region where militant Islam has declared a *Jihad*) should be aware of the threat that the cult of martyrdom directs at democracies worldwide.⁸

Many of this Journal's readers live in India and the surrounding region. While generally familiar with the problems emanating from Jammu and Kashmir, they remain largely unaware of the highly troubling direction taken by wide-scale

⁷ Margot Dudkevitch, "Fatah Tries to Use 11 Year-old Boy as Human Bomb," *Jerusalem Post*, March 16, 2004.

⁸ William Safire, writing in his *New York Times* "On Language" column on December 9, 2001, defines *Jihad* as, "holy war, literally 'struggle'".

Palestinian recruitment and training of children to engage in terrorist violence. This paper attempts to address the following vexing questions, in the hope that the lessons learned will be relevant to those facing similar threats in South Asia and elsewhere: How pervasive is this form of child abuse in the present Israeli–Palestinian conflict? How is it inspired? Can it be justified within the context of current international law? What will be the consequences of ‘education for hate’ on the upcoming generation, and for the possibility of peace in the region?

Child Martyrs: Welcoming Death

From the outset of the current *Intifada*, Palestinian children and teenagers have assumed an integral role. In the early months, children acted as decoys, burning tires and shooting slingshots to attract the television cameras, often making it harder for the world to identify the gunmen lying in ambush. Knowing that the soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) are ordered not to shoot live ammunition at children, Palestinian snipers hid among and behind groups of youngsters, on rooftops, in alleys or orchards, often using kids as shields when aiming at exposed IDF soldiers. On some occasions, Palestinian gunmen may have inadvertently shot these children from behind.

As the intensity of the *Intifada* increased, Palestinian children and teenagers became more directly involved in terror attacks, especially suicide bombings. On March 30, 2002, a 16 year-old Palestinian girl named Ayat Akhras walked into a Jerusalem supermarket and detonated a bomb hidden under her clothing, killing two Israelis and wounding 22 others. Andaleeb Taqataqah was only 17 years-old when she was recruited by a terror squad and dispatched to blow herself up in a crowded Jerusalem open-air market on April 12, 2002. One week later, three teenagers from Gaza – Anwar Hamduna, Yusef Zakut, and Abu Nada – attempted to crawl under a perimeter fence and attack the residents of the Jewish community of Netzarim, only to be shot dead by guards. In May 2002, a 16 year-old Palestinian boy with a suicide bomb on his body was arrested at an IDF roadblock near Jenin. On June 13, 2002, a 15 year-old Palestinian girl, arrested for throwing a firebomb at IDF soldiers, admitted during

interrogation that she had previously been recruited as a suicide terrorist. Finally, on March 24, 2004, 14 year-old Hussam Abdu was caught at an IDF roadblock with an explosive belt wrapped around his chest. He told investigators that he had been paid 100 shekels (approximately \$22 US) to carry out a suicide bombing.⁹

With the IDF's successful *Operation Defensive Shield*,¹⁰ the number of suicide attacks has dramatically decreased as the security forces have interrupted the planning and execution of most of these deadly bombing missions. But, children are still being employed in other types of terrorist activities; they are recruited to carry ammunition and explosives or are left behind to trigger booby-traps that terrorists set for troops.¹¹ On January 1, 2003, three young teenagers were sent by the self-styled terrorist faction 'Popular Resistance Committees' (PRC) to infiltrate and attack the Jewish community of Elei Sinai. They were killed by the IDF personnel. A similar incident occurred one week later when two Palestinian teenagers, brothers, 14 and 17 years of age, infiltrated the community of Netzarim in the Gaza Strip, armed with knives. They attacked a Jewish boy, entered a house, and were shot. The brothers were apprehended by the IDF and hospitalized with light injuries. Brigadier General Yisrael Ziv, the IDF Commander in Gaza, commented, "It's clear that the terrorists did not think that by sending these children they would succeed in killing anyone; instead, their criminal thoughts were that the very [likely] deaths [of these children] would give Israel a bad name."¹² On March 24, 2003, two 13 year-olds were shot and killed, one as he climbed on top of an IDF personnel carrier to

⁹ Amos Harel, "Palestinians: Policeman Hurt in IDF Raid in Gaza Refugee Camp," *Ha'aretz*, March 25, 2004.

¹⁰ *Operation Defensive Shield* was launched on March 29, 2002. It was triggered by a spate of suicide bombings, including one on March 27 that killed 26 Israelis attending a holiday meal in a hotel. The operation, intended to dismantle the terrorist infrastructure developed by the Palestinian Authority, involved the deployment of IDF forces into the West Bank and Gaza.

¹¹ Justus Reid Weiner, "The Recruitment of Children in Current Palestinian Strategy," *Jerusalem Issue Brief*, October 1, 2002, Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs.

¹² Arutz 7 News (email), January 12, 2003 (Hebrew).

steal a machine gun, and another as he threw a Molotov cocktail. Another youth was burnt by his own firebomb.¹³

Although some elements in Palestinian society oppose using children, or at least their own children, in what they euphemistically call ‘martyrdom’ operations, these voices remain isolated. In June 2002, Mahmud Abbas, also known as Abu Mazen, a senior Arafat aide who later served a brief term as Prime Minister in Yasser Arafat’s Government, criticized the tactics of Palestinian organizations in Gaza. Abbas told a Kuwaiti newspaper, “I am against little children going out to die. It is a terrible thing. At least 40 children in Rafah [in the Gaza Strip] lost an arm from the throwing of Bangalore torpedoes [a form of pipe bomb]. They received five shekels [approximately \$1 US] in order to throw them.”¹⁴

Why are these young people willing to throw away their lives? Who led them to believe that assuming dangerous roles in the violence would result in improving their personal, family, or political situation? How did the celebration of violence against Israelis become so deeply ingrained in Palestinian culture? What cause, no matter how deeply held, can motivate a society to sacrifice its children, its future? To find the answers to these questions it is necessary to examine the influences at work in Palestinian society that incite children to violence, with the approval and encouragement of their political and religious leadership, parents, and peers.

The use of child martyrs and terrorists is also a major problem in Pakistan, where easily manipulated children are being programmed to undertake the objectives of their fundamentalist ‘controllers’. These children are being coerced into carrying out *jihād* missions through various means including kidnapping, threats to their lives and the lives of their family members, and most commonly, being brainwashed into believing that *jihād* is a spiritual fulfilment to God.¹⁵ In most cases these children are

¹³ Erik Schechter, “Two Palestinian Youths Shot Dead by the IDF,” *Jerusalem Post*, March 25, 2003.

¹⁴ Interview in Alzamin, June 20, 2002 (Arabic).

¹⁵ Jessica Stern, “Pakistan’s Jihad Culture.” *Foreign Affairs*, New York, November/December 2000.

unaware of the meaning or consequences of their actions and equally unaware of any alternatives.

In one example, Mohammad Abdulla, a 17 year-old boy along with an accomplice – both members of the notorious terrorist group, the Lashkar-e-Toiba– carried out a terrorist attack on a crowded residential housing development in Jammu (part of Indian controlled J&K). Within minutes, the two emptied four AK-47 assault rifle magazines – containing 32 rounds each – and detonated five hand grenades, killing 28 people, including eight women and ten children.¹⁶ When apprehended and questioned by the Indian police, Abdulla replied, “I was not happy about it but my controllers in Pakistan said it was necessary to establish terror... I had my orders and had to follow them. It was not a question of liking the job but simply executing it.”¹⁷ Abdulla’s story is one of many in Kashmir, in which Pakistani children have been used as instruments of terror against Indian civilians in the conflict over Kashmir.¹⁸

Indian sources estimate between 2,000 and 4,000 *Mujahideen*¹⁹ (militants) to be in J&K; of this figure they believe 40 percent to be from Pakistan/Afghanistan and 80 percent to be in their teens.²⁰ In recent years, the tactics used by these groups in terrorist attacks have intensified, switching from bullets and guns to explosives and advanced communications.²¹ Similar to the situation in Israel, this has escalated the conflict, increasing the number and severity of civilian casualties; as well as, making it more difficult for security forces to prevent terrorist activity.

¹⁶ Rahul Bedi, “Schoolboy recruit who killed 28 in first operation,” *Telegraph*, Kolkata, September 22, 2002.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ *Mujahideen* are Muslim guerrilla fighting under the name of Jihad and Islam. Although sometimes assisted by the Pakistani Government and military, these groups are a separate entity governed by radical Islamist ideology.

²⁰ N. S. Rajaram, “Meltdown in Pakistan,” *The Voice of Dharma*, www.voi.org/books/cpak/ch1.html.

²¹ Jessica Stern, “Meeting With the Muj.” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Chicago, vol. 57 no. 1, pp. 42-50; http://www.thebulletin.org/article.php?art_ofn=jf01stern.

Inciting Children to Violence

The close connection between incitement and violence is implicit in all the signed interim peace agreements between Israel and the Palestinians. For example, the Cairo Agreement, signed by Arafat in 1994, obligates the Palestinian Authority (PA) to “foster mutual understanding and tolerance” and “abstain from incitement, including hostile propaganda, [and]... take legal measures to prevent such incitement by any organizations, groups, or individuals.” Yet, various measures adopted by the Palestinian leadership and media are clearly aimed at provoking children to violence, inciting them in direct contravention of the interim agreements.

While the phenomenon of suicide bombing in Israel is usually associated with radical militant groups such as Hamas and Islamic *Jihad*, it is the PA – the very Palestinian entity established, empowered, funded and armed to carry out the Oslo peace process – that is the primary force promoting *Shahada*, literally “testimony of faith,” or martyrdom. Incitement in Palestinian society is both authoritative and nearly omnipresent, and emanates straight from the top of the PA, including the late Arafat himself. Television and radio stations, religious sermons, school textbooks, newspapers and magazines, and even summer camp curricula are all directly or indirectly controlled by the PA, which uses them to glorify martyrdom and to convince Palestinian children to engage in life-threatening behaviour. PA-controlled television, with its powerful visual and visceral images, is one medium employed to manipulate children’s minds and emotions. Images of blood and dead children are frequently broadcast, followed by scenes of children playing, captioned with the slogan, “Seek Death – The Life Will Be Given To You.” This slogan is also the title of a report published by the Palestine Media Watch, which extensively documents the multi-layered pressures exerted on children to give up life and seek martyrdom.²² The report features video clips of footage from PA-controlled television that have been specifically produced for

²² “Seek Death—The Life Will Be Given To You,” *Palestinian Media Watch*, <http://www.pmw.org.il>.

children. It also includes passages from school textbooks, and quotes from statements made by Palestinian politicians, clerics and educators.

One powerful video clip, shown regularly on PA-controlled TV over the past three years, shows a schoolboy writing a farewell letter to his parents. "Do not be sad, my dear, and do not cry over my parting, my dear father. For my country, I shall sacrifice myself." The child leaves home and joins his friends in a riot. He places himself in front of the soldiers, is shot in the chest and collapses. His words are sung: "How sweet is martyrdom when I embrace you, my land," as he falls to the ground, 'embracing' the land. As the boy's mother is seen crying, the letter continues: "My beloved, my mother, my most dear, be joyous over my blood and do not cry for me." The message is clear: it should be the goal of every Palestinian child to die confronting Israel.²³

In another clip, a child actor playing the role of Mohammed Dura, the most widely recognized child victim of the fighting, is shown waving to his young viewers, calling on them to follow him to paradise. We then see snippets of his joyous life in heaven with a backdrop of beaches and waterfalls. The actor walks through an amusement park and flies a kite. He says, "I am not waving goodbye, I am waving to tell you to follow in my footsteps." On the accompanying soundtrack a song plays, "How pleasant is the smell of martyrs, how pleasant the smell of land, the land enriched by the blood, the blood pouring out of a fresh body."²⁴

Many popular cultural programmes encourage martyrdom and show approval for those who are killed. Cultural events broadcast on Palestinian television often include elements glorifying violence. According to an article in the Israeli daily newspaper *Ha'aretz*, "television broadcasts include songs and dances accompanied by photographs of violence, all emphasizing

²³ Itamar Marcus, "Palestinian Authority Renews Efforts to Have Palestinian Children Die in Confrontations," *Palestinian Media Watch Bulletin*, October 1, 2002.

²⁴ The theme of "blood" is frequently used in lyrics and pictures directed towards inciting children.

how noble it is to die for the sake of Allah.”²⁵ A Palestinian TV children’s show called “The Children’s Club,” which is modelled on the American programme “Sesame Street,” aired an episode in which young boys with raised arms chanted “we are ready with our guns; revolution until victory; victory.”²⁶ On the same show, an 8 year-old boy announced to an audience of children: “I come here to say that we will throw them to the quiet sea. Occupiers, your day is near, then we will settle our account. We will settle our claims with stones and bullets.”²⁷ In a current television series, one young interviewee screams, “They should just give us guns, we ourselves, the children, the young boys and girls, will fight, just give us guns; guns they should give us, we won’t leave even one Jew, won’t leave even one Jew here.” Even commercials on Palestinian TV have urged children to leave their toys, pick up rocks, and join the battle against Israel.²⁸

In a PA-run summer camp, a *New York Times* reporter observed campers staging the kidnapping of Israeli leaders, stripping and assembling Kalashnikov assault rifles, and learning how to stage an ambush. The campers were given camouflage uniforms and imitation guns.²⁹ They paraded in military formation and practiced infiltration, crawling on their stomachs through obstacles. Intoxicated by the challenge of being recognized as heroes, tempted by martyrdom, and lacking the emotional maturity to calculate the dangers they are taking on, these young people are easily motivated to place themselves in harm’s way. Arafat himself frequently referred to Palestinian children as “the generals of the stones,”³⁰ playing to their pride and young egos. Speaking to an audience of children on Palestinian TV, Arafat commonly referred to Faris Ouda, a 14 year-old who planned his

²⁵ Nadav Shragai, “Child writes to Mother, ‘Rejoice over My Death,’” *Ha’aretz*, January 8, 2003.

²⁶ Matthew Dorf, “Palestinian Children’s Show Sparks Anger in Washington,” *Jewish Telegraph Agency*, New York, August 17, 1998.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Marion Fletcher, “Palestinian Propaganda Encouraging Children to Join Fight Against Israel,” *NBC News Transcripts*, May 8, 2001.

²⁹ John F. Burns, “Palestinian Summer Camp Offers the Games of War,” *New York Times*, August 3, 2000.

³⁰ In a rally on November 15, 1998, Arafat threatened Israel, declaring that the “Generals of the Stones are ready.” *Al-Ayyam*, Jerusalem, November 16, 1998.

own death, as a *Shahid*, extolling him as an icon for children to emulate. In another television appearance, before a cheering and chanting auditorium full of children, Arafat exhorted them: “You are the peers of Faris Ouda! One of you, a boy or a girl, shall raise the [Palestinian] flag over the walls of Jerusalem, its mosques and its churches... Onwards together to Jerusalem!” The children call out in response: “Millions of *Shahids* marching to Jerusalem!”³¹

In Arafat’s words, “The *Shahid* constitutes the fundamental and victorious force of our people.” In an interview in a PA-controlled newspaper, Youssef Jamah, the Palestinian Minister of Holy Sites, states, “The suicide bombings are a legitimate means through which the Palestinians fight the enemy... The attacks are the command of Allah.” Although some Islamic authorities oppose suicide bombing, Sheik ’Ikrim Sabri, the PA-appointed Mufti of Jerusalem, believes, “There is no doubt that a child [*Shahid*] suggests that the new generation will carry on the mission with determination. The younger the *Shahid* – the greater and the more I respect him.”³² Sermons delivered in mosques frequently include unequivocal calls to violence. The official media broadcasts the sermons of the PA-appointed cleric at the Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, who has called for his followers to “eradicate the Jews from Palestine.”³³

Also heard live on Palestinian television was a sermon by Dr. Ahmad Abu Halabiya, a member of the PA-appointed Fatwa Council and former acting Rector of the Islamic University in Gaza, who called for Israelis to be humiliated, tortured, and butchered.³⁴ He continued, “Have no mercy on the Jews, no matter where they are, in any country. Fight them, wherever you are. Wherever you meet them, kill them. Wherever you are, kill those Americans who are like them – and those that stand by them.”³⁵ Another cleric, Dr. Muhammed Ibrahim Madi, declared

³¹ Marcus Itamar, “Arafat Tells Young Children to be *Shahids*,” *Palestinian Media Watch Bulletin*, August 21, 2002.

³² “PA Mufti of Jerusalem and Palestine Discuss the *Intifada*,” Middle East Media Research Institute, November 8, 2000, <http://www.memri.org/>.

³³ George Will, “The Downfall of Israel?” *Jerusalem Post*, October 8, 2000.

³⁴ “The Palestinians in Their Own Words,” Information Regarding Israel’s Security (IRIS), October 16, 2000, <http://www.iris.org.il/quotes/quote50.htm>.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

on PA-controlled television, “Shame upon he who does not educate his children in the education of *jihad*. Blessings upon he who dons a vest of explosives... on himself or on his children and goes into the midst of the Jews.” Sheikh Abd al-Razak, also on PA Television asserted, “Allah has planted within our youth the love of *jihad*, the love of martyrdom. Our youth have turned into bombs, they blow themselves up among them [Israelis] day and night.”³⁶ While the sermons are broadcast live from mosques on television and radio, it should be noted that they are also heard directly by those praying in the mosques, an audience that often includes children.

Similar to the case of the Palestinians, child incitement is being propagated in Pakistan by its governing authorities. While the Pakistani Government arguably denies assistance through the provision of arms, training and monetary aid to militant organizations, top Government officials admit to assisting these militants across the Pakistani border into Indian controlled Kashmir – in many cases killing any Indian Army personnel who stand in the way.³⁷

The aftermath of September 11, 2001, created a wave of international pressure calling on the Pakistani Government to eliminate the growth of religious extremism within its borders. This includes the indoctrination of children for the purpose of *jihad*. Similar to the Palestinian Authority, the Pakistani Government has perfunctorily humoured the international community, but taken no concrete action in inhibiting terrorist activity and complying with this international goal.³⁸ In one case, the then Pakistani Interior Minister, Moinuddin Haider, had stated that “the brand of Islam that they are teaching is not good for Pakistan, some in the garb of religious training, are busy poisoning peoples [including children’s] minds.”³⁹ Ironically, Pakistan’s failure to act has created a situation in which Islamic fundamentalism has begun to threaten even President Musharraf.

³⁶ Nadav Shragai, *Ha’aretz*, January 8, 2003.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Jessica Stern, “Pakistan’s Jihad Culture”, *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2000.

In June of 2000, Haider “announced a reform plan that would require all *Madrassas*”⁴⁰ – schools run by religious organisations – “to register with the government, expand their curricula, disclose their financial resources, seek permission for admitting foreign students and stop sending students to militant training camps.”⁴¹ According to Harvard Professor Jessica Stern, an expert in the study of religious extremism, the Pakistani Government has taken little or no proactive steps to eliminate this problem.⁴² Stern reported that “only 4,350 of the estimated 40,000 to 50,000 *Madrassas* have registered with the Government.”⁴³ The majority of *Madrassas* have made it clear that they are unwilling to revise their curricula, and consistently ignore the rights of their students by sending them to training camps “despite parents’ instructions not to do so.”⁴⁴

Madrassas are the primary source of child incitement within Pakistan.⁴⁵ According to World Bank estimates, only 40 percent of Pakistanis are literate due to a lack of public schools in rural areas.⁴⁶ The combination of poverty and lack of schools has enabled the *Madrassas* to become a powerful tool of incitement. In addition to providing a free education, these institutions gain support by feeding, clothing, and housing their students. In some cases, they have reportedly paid parents to enrol their children. According to Stern, 7,500 *Madrassas* in Pakistan preach *jihād*.⁴⁷

In another study by Stern, principals of *Madrassas* were interviewed. At one school, the *Jamia Manzoor ul Islamiya* – with an enrolment of about 550 students – the principal was asked if he had a favourite book. His response was the “Koran.” When asked about a popular Sufi singer – Nusrat Fatah Ali Khan – his response was “I don’t need music. Music

⁴⁰ *Madrassas* are schools and religious seminaries run by religious organisations. Many of them are tied to Islamist extremist ideologies (in Pakistan many have links to the Taliban), which only teach *jihād*.

⁴¹ Stern, “Pakistan’s Jihad Culture.”

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Jessica Stern, “Meeting with the Muj,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, vol. 57, no. 1, January/February 201.

is for those who have an addiction within them.” Questioned about Albert Einstein, the principal remarked “that he saw no need for science.”⁴⁸ Stern met two children who wanted to become doctors. Embarrassed, the principal remarked “by the time I’ve worked on them for a year, they will want to be *Mujahideen* too.”⁴⁹

After being indoctrinated at a *Madrassa*, many students go on to further their fundamentalist education at militant training camps. A typical day at these camps begins at 4:00 am, with prayers and a small breakfast consisting of bread and tea. This is followed by a full day of rigorous drills teaching the manufacturing of bombs, and the use of sniper rifles, rocket launchers, and communications equipment. This daily process is interrupted for only a single meal – consisting of rice – and daily prayers. Sports, music, and literature are forbidden, and only pre-screened newspapers are allowed to be read. The final exam for this programme consists of a three-day hike through rugged mountainous terrain with no food or sleep. The best of these graduates are selected for ‘martyrdom’.⁵⁰

The implications of this systematic indoctrination are vast and dangerous. As stated by one *Mujahid*, “A person addicted to heroin can get off it if he really tries, but a *Mujahid* cannot leave the *jihad*. I am spiritually addicted to the *jihad*.”⁵¹ Another *Mujahid* stated that “we won’t stop – even if India gave us Kashmir... we’ll also bring *jihad* here. There is already a movement here to make Pakistan a pure Islamic state. Many preach Islam, but most of them don’t know what it means. We want to see a Taliban-style regime here.”⁵²

Educating the ‘Martyrs of Tomorrow’

Even in the PA’s public schools, whose textbooks are financed by the European Union, incitement against Israel and the

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ghulam Hasnain, “Pakistan’s Jihad in Kashmir,” *Time*, vol. 157 no. 5, February 5, 2001.

⁵¹ Stern, “Pakistan’s Jihad Culture.”

⁵² Ibid.

glorification of martyrdom are prominent themes, embedded in nationalistic aspirations. Needless to say, interest in reconciliation with Israel is notably absent. Elementary school teachers and principals commend their young students for wanting to “tear their [Zionists’] bodies into little pieces and cause them more pain than they will ever know.” Posters in university classrooms proudly remind the world that the Palestinian cause is armed with ‘human bombs’. Sheik Hassan Yosef, a leading Hamas member, summarized this process of incitement in his own words: “We like to grow them from kindergarten through college.” Palestinian Brigadier General, Mahmoud Abu Marzoug, reminded a group of tenth grade girls in Gaza City, “as a *Shahid*, you will be alive in Heaven.” After the address, a group of these girls lined up to assure a *Washington Post* reporter that they would be happy to carry out suicide bombings or other actions ending in their deaths.⁵³

When the PA assumed responsibility for education in the West Bank and Gaza in 1994, it adopted textbooks from Jordan and Egypt. These schoolbooks contained egregious anti-Semitic and anti-Israel rhetoric, including overt calls for Israel’s destruction. After much international criticism, a curriculum review project was initiated by the PA, which resulted in the publishing of new textbooks for grades one and six, for the school year 2000–2001. While much of the explicit incitement against Israel and Jews that existed in the old schoolbooks is gone, there is still considerable de-legitimization of Israel and denial of any Jewish historical connection to the land. Israel is omitted on all maps of the area, and all cities and natural and historic landmarks in Israel are taught as being ‘Palestinian.’

In the new sixth grade textbook entitled “Reading the Koran”, Palestinian children read about Allah’s warning to the Jews that Allah will kill them because of their evil. Elsewhere, they are taught that Jews are like donkeys and that they will be expelled from their homes by Allah. In the assessment of the *Palestinian Media Watch*, this religion-based anti-Semitism is the most dangerous, as children are taught that hating Jews is God’s

⁵³ Richard Leiby, “Where Rage Resides: For the Ordinary People Of Gaza City, Death Is a Way of Life,” *Washington Post*, April 24, 2002.

choice and command. Moreover, although Islam also has positive traditions regarding Jews, the PA educators chose to incorporate only hateful religious traditions. Israel is portrayed as foreign to the Middle East and is described as a colonialist conqueror. There is a strongly implied message that all such conquered Arab land must be “liberated.”⁵⁴ This message is pervasive in all subjects, sometimes subtly, almost subliminally, as in the first grade science book in a chapter on ‘sight’. The young student is instructed to look at little things using a magnifying glass. An illustration demonstrates what would be seen when looking through a magnifying glass at a piece of paper with writing that is barely visible without the magnifier. The part under the magnifying glass can be read clearly: “Palestine is Arab.” In all contexts of the education system, “Palestine” includes all of Israel.⁵⁵ Note that these are the ‘new and improved’ textbooks.

Other grades are still using the Jordanian and Egyptian imports, which glorify hatred of Israel and Jews, and glorify death in *jihad*. For example, in an eighth grade book for “Islamic Education” we find, “The Muslim sacrifices himself for his belief, and wages *jihad* for Allah. He is not swayed, for he knows that the date of his death as a *Shahid* on the field of battle is preferable to death in his bed.” A tenth grade reading text claims, “Martyred *jihad* fighters are the most honoured people, after the Prophet.”⁵⁶

Violent death is sanctified throughout the Palestinian areas. The streets are plastered with posters glorifying the exploits of individual suicide bombers. Children trade ‘martyr cards’, purchased at their local shops, instead of cricket cards. Necklaces with pictures of martyrs are also very popular.⁵⁷ One favourite wall slogan reads: “beware of death by natural causes.”⁵⁸ Suicide bombing is considered a source of neighbourhood pride, as streets are named after the

⁵⁴ Itamar Marcus, “The New Palestinian Authority School Textbooks for Grades One and Six,” *Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace*, November 2000, pp. 1, 19, www.edume.org; Itamar Marcus, “Planting the Seeds of the Next War: The Truth About Palestinian Schoolbooks,” *Jerusalem Post*, June 29, 2003.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 6.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 20.

⁵⁷ Sandro Contenta, *Toronto Star*, June 17, 2002.

⁵⁸ Amos Harel, *Ha'aretz*, July 15, 2002.

perpetrators of these atrocities. There is even a musical group named ‘The Martyrs’, whose lyrics espouse the virtues of “sacrificing yourself for Allah.” Under these cultural influences, many children readily admit that they want to become suicide bombers. Some draw pictures and fantasize about the day when they will achieve their goal. Boys are taught that, as suicide bombers, they will ascend to a paradise of luxury staffed by 72 virgins waiting to gratify the martyrs as they arrive. An American psychiatrist with 22 years of experience studying and treating suicidal patients stresses that suicide bombers – both children and adults – are “tools used by terrorist leaders” with “a whole culture encouraging [them] to die.”⁵⁹

Pakistani Government-controlled schools and private schools teaching the Government-prescribed curriculum may teach conventional disciplines, but hardly provide a more rational education than provided at *Madrassas* and training camps. The educational agenda of these schools is to instill the “ideology of Pakistan” into the minds of students, and/or the belief that Islam is superior to all other religions and that Pakistan is the Muslim homeland. Dr. Yvette Clair Rosser’s study for the *Observer Research Foundation* revealed the prejudices found in Pakistani textbooks. In one seventh grade textbook, the section explaining different political systems on democracy, theocracy, and military rule was replaced with chapters titled “*What it Means to be a Good Pakistani*” and “*Standing in Queue*.”⁶⁰ As stated by one student: “we have covered the same material year after year... we don’t have to study for the tests, because the ideology of Pakistan has been instilled into us.”⁶¹

On an ethnic level, textbooks embody supremacist phrases condemning outside religions. In Pakistani textbooks, Hindus are referred to as “diabolical and conspiring against Pakistan.”⁶² Further, Hindus are described as “backward, superstitious, wife burners, and that they are inherently cruel and if given the chance

⁵⁹ Diane Carman, *Denver Post*, April 25, 2002.

⁶⁰ Yvette Claire Rosser, *Islamisation of Pakistani Social Studies Textbooks*, Delhi: Observer Research Foundation, 2003, p. 59.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 5.

⁶² *Ibid*, p. 29.

would assert their power over the weak, especially Muslims, by depriving them of education and pouring molten lead into their ears.”⁶³ This supremacist rhetoric continues on a global level and other countries are vilified in a similarly negative light. Textbooks portray Pakistan’s existence as being threatened by a “Machiavellian conspiracy.”⁶⁴ As stated in Mohammed Sarwers’ Pakistan Studies⁶⁵ book, “at present particular segments in the guise of modernisation and progressive activities have taken the unholy task of damaging our cultures heritage and thereby damaging our nation’s integration.”⁶⁶

Pakistani state-run education is not substantially different from what is preached by Islamist fundamentalists at *Madrassas*. The latter proclaim the need to perform *jihād* against India and on the West, which they believe is run by Jews. They also proclaim the goal of “planting Islamic flags in Delhi, Tel Aviv and Washington.”⁶⁷ One of the Lashkar-e-Toiba’s Websites had a list of Jews that it claimed were working for the ‘Clinton Administration’. Included in this list were presidential officials Robert Nash (an African American from the United States) and CIA director George Tenet (a Greek American).⁶⁸ The group went so far as to accuse Israel of assisting India in Kashmir, making the claim that “Hitler was right in that he understood that the Jews and peace are incompatible.”⁶⁹

A Family’s Badge of Pride

For many Palestinian children, incitement begins at home. The parents’ role in encouraging their own offspring to become *Shahids* is difficult to understand. They believe that the death of their child for the sake of holy *jihād* and Islam will guarantee him or her everlasting life and bliss in the hereafter. This type of

⁶³ Ibid, p. 43.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ ‘Pakistan Studies’ is a mandatory Government regulated course taught in Pakistani public schools. The intent of the programme is to instil the ‘ideology of Pakistan’ into the minds of Pakistani students.

⁶⁶ Rosser, *Islamisation of Pakistani Textbooks*, p. 46.

⁶⁷ Stern, “Pakistan’s Jihad Culture.”

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

sacrifice is held in such high esteem in certain segments of Palestinian society that it has become a badge of pride. Parents of toddlers proudly recount their little children saying they want to become martyrs. The father of a 13 year-old says, "I pray that God will choose him" to become a *Shahid*.⁷⁰ One mother of a 13 year-old who perished as a result of his participation in the *Intifada*, told a journalist from the *Times* (London): "I am happy that he has been martyred. I will sacrifice all my sons and daughters (12 in all) to Al-Aqsa and Jerusalem."⁷¹ Another mother boasted that she bore her son precisely for the purpose of participating in such a *Jihad*, while the child's father proudly claimed to have provided his son with the training.⁷² After 15 year-old Ahmat Omar Abu Selmia was killed on his way to attack the Israeli community of Dugit, his father celebrated his 'martyrdom' at a street festival attended by about 200 men.

A photograph in the *Jerusalem Post* on February 26, 2002, showed Palestinian fathers teaching a group of toddlers and young children to properly hold assault rifles while trampling on American and Israeli flags. The most shocking evidence of the extent of such brainwashing was found in the family photo album of a wanted Hamas militant. This album contained a photograph of a baby dressed as a suicide bomber, complete with a harness of mock explosives and the traditional *Shahid's* red headband.⁷³

Another reason that Palestinian parents allow and even encourage their children to get involved is the financial incentive offered to families of 'martyrs'. Thus, the PA furnishes a cash payment of \$2,000 (USD) per child killed and \$300 per child wounded. Saudi Arabia announced that it had pledged \$250 million as its first contribution to a billion-dollar fund aimed at supporting the families of Palestinian martyrs. In addition, from the beginning to the current *Intifada* until the capture of Baghdad by allied forces in April 2003, the Arab Liberation Front, a Palestinian group loyal to former Iraqi

⁷⁰ Chris Hedges, "The Glamour of Martyrdom," *New York Times*, October 29, 2001.

⁷¹ Sam Kelly, "A Deadly Game," *The Times*, London, October 19, 2000.

⁷² Gerald Steinberg, "Child Sacrifice is Palestinian Paganism," *Jerusalem Post*, October 27, 2000.

⁷³ Ramit Plushnick-Masti, "Palestinian Baby Picture Stirs Anger," *Jerusalem Post*, June 30, 2002.

President Saddam Hussein, paid generous bounties to the injured, and the families of the Palestinian dead, according to the following sliding scale: \$500 for a wound; \$1,000 for disability; \$10,000 to the family of each martyr; and \$25,000 to the family of every suicide bomber. These are lavish sums, particularly given the chronic unemployment and poverty of the Palestinians who reside in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.⁷⁴

It is important to note, however, that many Palestinian parents have attempted to restrain their children, and have resisted those who would place them in harm's way.

One public opinion poll of Palestinians living in the West Bank revealed that 74.1 per cent oppose the participation of children under the age of eighteen in the *Intifada*.⁷⁵ Unfortunately this still leaves a substantial percentage that supports the participation of children, corresponding to hundreds of thousands of parents. Could their reluctance to exercise routine parental authority, by discouraging their children from participating in the violence, be attributable to the threats by armed PA officials?

Some in the PA leadership are apparently uncomfortable with the international and local criticism their use of children has engendered and are beginning to acknowledge the inherent risks of mixing child protesters with Palestinian gunmen. However, their reactions to the use of children in the *Intifada* are far from uniform or consistent. Mixed signals still emanate from various factions of the PA leadership.

For example, in January, 2003, marches and rallies were being planned by Fatah, the largest faction of the PLO, to celebrate the 38th anniversary of the founding of the movement. The then PA Minister of Interior, Hani al-Hassan, warned the Fatah activists against any display of weapons or the wearing of masks (to hide their faces) during the demonstrations. Hassan's directive was completely ignored, however, and witnesses said that the marchers "carried almost every kind of weapon, turning the celebration into a military parade." Shots were fired into the

⁷⁴ Hassan Fattah, "Saddam Rewards Palestinian Martyrs," *Jerusalem Post*, March 14, 2003; Khaled Abu Toameh, "Checks and Balances," *Jerusalem Post*, March 21, 2003.

⁷⁵ Lamia Lahoud, "Bir Zeit Shows Rising Support for Armed Attacks," *Jerusalem Post*, November 14, 2000.

air from rifles and pistols. “The shooting continued all day,” said one Palestinian. “It was like being in a battlefield. People were terrified, and it’s only a miracle that no one was killed or injured.” Many Palestinian bystanders were especially disturbed by the participation of several hundred children brandishing Kalashnikov rifles during the demonstrations. Some of the children were dressed in white uniforms, and wrapped in explosive belts to emulate Palestinian suicide bombers.⁷⁶ Pictures of the children appeared in both local and foreign newspapers, much to the annoyance of the Palestinian Journalists’ Association. The Association has banned journalists from taking pictures of armed children and threatened sanctions against any journalist, local or foreign, who disregards the ban. Association members are concerned that such pictures will further damage the image of the Palestinians in the eyes of the world.⁷⁷

The same ideology of martyrdom of their children is shared by many Pakistani parents. Stern found that “mothers claimed that they would donate sons, because it will help them in the next life – the real life.”⁷⁸ One father stated “whoever gives his life to Allah lives forever and earns a spot in heaven for 70 members of the family chosen by him.” Whenever there is a martyr in the village it encourages more children to join *Jihad*.⁷⁹

As in the Palestinian *jihad*, organizations have been set up in Pakistan to help the families of martyrs. These organizations help to pay debts, improve the families’ living conditions and help start businesses.⁸⁰ One such organisation, the Shuhda-e-Islam Foundation, founded in 1995 by the Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI), claims to provide financial support to over 364 families and to have paid out over three million Pakistani rupees.⁸¹ When interviewed, one mother whose son lost his life to *jihad* claimed, “God is helping us a lot,” pointing to the new additions to her house. She stated

⁷⁶ Khaled Abu Toameh, “Palestinians Condemn Use of Children at Fatah ‘Military Parade,’” *Jerusalem Post*, January 2, 2003.

⁷⁷ Associated Press, “Palestinian Press Organization Bans Journalists from Taking Pictures of Armed Children,” *Jerusalem Post*, August 27, 2000.

⁷⁸ Jessica Stern, “Pakistan’s Jihad Culture,” *Foreign Affairs*, November-December 2000.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

that she wanted to martyr her youngest son, who was ten years of age. When questioned what he wanted after he grew up, he claimed “respect and *jihad*.”

The Relevance of International Law

We live in an era in which the rights of children are widely considered paramount, as superseding other considerations, particularly political causes. “The best interest of the child” is the standard that is routinely used in controversies concerning parental custody, child labour, child abuse, and juvenile criminal procedures.⁸²

The international community has increasingly condemned the utilization of children in armed conflicts. Many non-governmental organizations have been trying to combat this form of child abuse. A coalition of American paediatricians, ‘Doctors Opposed to Child Sacrifice’, has called on the PA to stop broadcasting advertisements and all other programmes that call on children to participate in violent acts, glorifying martyrdom.⁸³ Amnesty International condemned the recent use of children in suicide attacks, calling it “an abomination” and urging the Palestinian leadership “to publicly denounce these practices.”⁸⁴

International law broadly attempts to protect children from the horrors of armed conflict. For example, the use of children as human shields to impede the adversary’s military operations is prohibited by Article 28 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which strictly forbids the use of civilians (of any age) as shields. The cynical use of groups of children as human shields by Palestinian gunmen in confrontations with Israeli soldiers during the early months of the present *Intifada* was described earlier in this article. To further encourage youth to participate in such confrontations, the PA declared school holidays for that purpose and drove

⁸² Philip Alston, “The Best Interests of the Child: Reconciling Culture and Human Rights,” UNICEF, New York, 1984.

⁸³ Melissa Radler, “PA Ads Encouraging Child Violence Slammed,” *Jerusalem Post*, May 11, 2001.

⁸⁴ “Israel/Occupied Territories: Children Must Not Be Used By Armed Groups,” Amnesty International, March 24, 2004
<http://news.amnesty.org/mav/index/ENGMDE150302004>.

busloads of children to hot spots.⁸⁵ Such activity is in clear violation of Article 28. More generally, with intent to protect civilians, the Geneva Convention proscribes the placing of fighting forces in the midst of civilian populations. The Palestinian practice of setting up bomb and missile factories and centres of operational planning for armed conflict in the middle of densely populated civilian areas, including refugee camps, puts all non-combatants in the vicinity, including children, at great risk.⁸⁶ This, again, is a clear violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) condemns the recruitment and involvement of children less than fifteen years of age in hostilities and armed conflicts. This standard appears to conform to Islamic law, which prohibits children under fifteen from participating in *jihad*. Current treaty law not only forbids children from participating in combat, but also proscribes a wide range of other indirect activities.

Furthermore, a number of states have raised the minimum age for children to participate in armed conflicts from fifteen to eighteen.⁸⁷ However, neither international law nor Islamic law has curtailed the exploitation of children in the current *Intifada*.

The Cult of Martyrdom: Consequences for the Next Generation and the Possibility of Peace

What is the relevance of the widespread concern for ‘the best interest of the child,’ to the Palestinian leadership and parents? Do parents who encourage their children to become martyrs ‘for Jerusalem and Islam’ have the best interests of their children in mind?

The eager participation of Palestinian youth in acts of violence against Israelis is certainly fuelled, to some extent, by

⁸⁵ Justus Reid Weiner, “The Use of Palestinian Children in the Al-Aqsa *Intifada*: A Legal and Political Analysis,” *Temple International and Comparative Law Journal*, vol.16 no.1, Spring 2002.

⁸⁶ Muhammad Daraghme, “Disarming the *Intifada*,” *The Jerusalem Times*, April 17, 2003. This article reports that armed fighters or “militias” often rent houses in residential areas which they then use as their headquarters on a daily basis.

⁸⁷ United Nations General Assembly Resolution 54/263, “Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on Involvement of Children in Armed Conflicts,” February 2002.

feelings of anger and frustration at seeing enemy soldiers in their neighbourhoods, by a desire for revenge for the killing of a family member or friend, or even by a desire to demonstrate their courage and audacity.

A passionate desire for martyrdom and death does not come about as a natural consequence of anger or frustration. Children and their parents are indoctrinated through PA-controlled television, religious sermons, school textbooks, and other media sources, to believe that martyrdom is a religious and patriotic obligation, and is rewarded by an afterlife of eternal bliss. They live surrounded in an environment that glorifies the *shahid*. Martyrs' pictures hang on walls in homes, mosques and schools, and appear, like those of celebrities, on television.

The generation of Palestinian children that has been raised in a popular culture that celebrates hate, killing and death will have a difficult time accepting any plan for peace with Israel. Even more troubling is the spread of the cult of martyrdom, and with it, the export of highly developed Palestinian techniques of suicide bombing to other countries in the Middle East and to other parts of the world.⁸⁸

Pakistani and Kashmiri *Madrassas* continually preach *jihād* against India and the West, nurturing legions of future Al Qaeda and LeT and other Islamist extremist terrorists. Despite assurances by Pakistani President General Pervez Musharraf that he is working to reform these *Madrassas* and the public school curriculum, indoctrination of Muslim children, as well as the forced recruitment of children into armed conflict, is on the rise.⁸⁹ If this problem is not addressed urgently and effectively, perhaps assisted by Israeli intelligence and security services (beneficiaries of ample experience in these unfortunate matters), India may very well find itself in a situation similar to Israel's. Suicide attacks like those of 17 year-old Ahmed Shah's, cited at the outset of this article, will become all too common.

⁸⁸ In mid-April 2003 U.S. troops found a cache of leather suicide vests in a schoolroom in Iraq. They were fully armed with explosives, metal shards and ball bearings intended to enhance the pain of any victim who was not killed instantly. Carol Rosenberg, "Chaos Still Reigns in Baghdad," *Miami Herald*, April 14, 2003.

⁸⁹ Michael Hirsh, Zahid Hussain, Ron Moreau and Sami Yousafzai, "Holy War 101," *Newsweek*, December 1, 2003.

Over the course of the current *Intifada*, the Israeli public has come to realize that, ironically, the generation that was to have matured under the influence of the anti-incitement provisions of the Oslo peace agreements will have to be re-educated to value life more than death. The culture of martyrdom and its pervasiveness in the lives of Palestinian children must be understood and urgently addressed. Islamic leaders should emphasize those Islamic values that respect other religions, historical accounts, and traditions. Only then can the true best interests of the Palestinian children, and Muslim children everywhere, including those in the subcontinent, be advanced.