

# Dying to Live: The “Love to Death” Narrative Driving the Taliban’s Suicide Bombings

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## Abstract

*Embracing the tactic of suicide bombings first in 2003, the Taliban in Afghanistan quickly emerged as the leading terrorist group in the world that has claimed responsibility for such bombings. Over a period of more than 10 years, the group has indiscriminately carried out hundreds of suicide bombings across the country. How have the Taliban managed to operationalize one of the most notorious bombing tactics against all the existing social and cultural odds of Afghan society? To answer this question, this study, by applying qualitative thematic analysis, examined the contents of the Taliban’s written and audio-visual materials on suicide bombings. Two dominant narratives, namely “Istish-haadi” [seeking martyrdom] and “love to death,” that are at the core of the Taliban’s produced literature on suicide bombings, have supplied the group with dispensable human bombs. These bombers, the study concludes, are “dying to live”.*

**Keywords:** Afghanistan, human bombs, martyrdom, political violence, suicide bombings, Taliban bombers, Taliban terrorism.

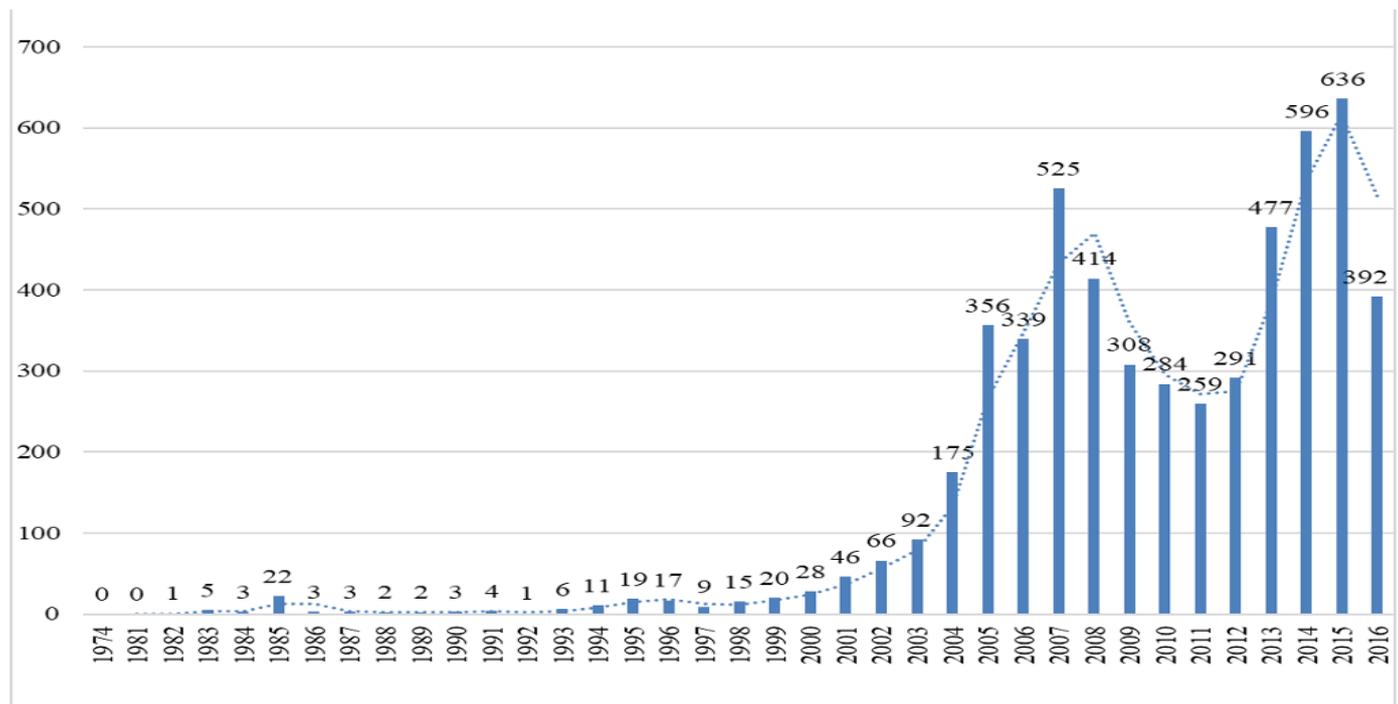
## Introduction

Although the history of suicide missions can be traced back to ancient times, suicide bombings are a modern form of political violence.[1, 2] These bombings were pioneered in Lebanon in the early 1980s.[3] They soon spread to other armed conflicts around the world, including Sri Lanka, Turkey, and Chechnya.[4] However, it was only in the post-9/11 world that the incidence of suicide bombings increased exponentially, making suicide bombings the outstanding characteristic of contemporary global terrorism (See Figure 1).

With the initiation of the War on Terror, suicide bombings have systematically transformed from a unique form of political violence to a full-blown warfare tactic for terrorist groups. These groups, which include the Taliban in Afghanistan, have embraced these bombing tactics to advance their agendas by inflicting unexpected violence and thereby affecting the political climate.[5]

While terrorist groups easily find and marshal hundreds of individuals to willingly walk or drive toward an enemy risking death, the phenomenon of suicide bombings has remained an enigma. To unwrap this enigma, scholars have studied different terrorist groups that resorted to the use of this tactic. An overwhelming majority of these studies are focused on suicide bombings in the Middle East, mainly in Palestine, Lebanon, and Iraq.[6] However, one group that, somehow, did not attract that much attention, is the Taliban with their suicide bombings in Afghanistan.

Only a limited number of studies have looked at the Taliban’s human bombs. Semple studied the case of the Taliban’s suicide bombings from the perspective of the group’s ideological orientation and organizational structure.[7] Williams provides a general commentary on different aspects of the Taliban suicide bombings.[8] The United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA) describes Taliban’s suicide bombings mainly through the lens of civilian casualties.[9] By utilizing different quantitative approaches, Rome argues that the Taliban’s suicide bombers are incompetent and for that reason do not constitute the group’s main strength.[10] Edwards’ ethnographic approach to suicide bombings in Afghanistan asserts that these bombings have a sacrificial orientation.[11]

**Figure 1:** Frequency Distribution of Suicide Bombings Per Year (1974-2016)\*

\***Source:** The graph is based on numbers provided by the Suicide Attack Database of the Chicago Project on Security and Terrorism (CPOST) ([Dataset]; accessed 26 April 2016)

The present study explores the motivations that lead Taliban bombers to blow themselves up to kill and destroy. The study examines whether Taliban suicide bombers are “dying to win,” “dying to kill,” “dying to expiate,” or, paradoxically, “dying to live.”[12]

The article proceeds in four sections. Initially, it briefly describes the methodology used for this study. Subsequently, the article explores the particularities of the Taliban’s suicide bombings. Within this section, the author sheds light on how the Taliban’s suicide bombings differ from suicide bombings in the Middle East. In the third section, the author explores the narratives that are at the core of the Taliban’s suicide bombings. Lastly, before ending with a concluding note, the article briefly discusses its findings in the light of the relevant literature.

## Methodology

The Taliban [from the Arabic ‘Talib’ = ‘student’, used by adding ‘-an’ as plural in Pashtu] have published and disseminated materials to justify and promote their suicide bombings. This qualitative explorative study aims to analyze the contents of the group’s specific materials on its suicide bombers which are scarce. This is unlike the situation in Palestine or in Iraq with the ubiquity of suicide bombers’ farewell letters or their detailed biographies.[13, 14] To cope with such scarcity, this study mined any type of relevant materials that the Taliban have published, including written (manifestos, books, articles, and poems), verbal (sermons/preaching, ballads) and visual (preoperational proclamation and warfare promotional clips) sources.

### Data Mining and Cleaning

Government and Internet media counter-terrorism measures have made Jihadi electronic prints notoriously unstable.[15] To overcome this challenge in the data mining process, the study conducted a web-based search of the Taliban’s official and affiliated websites as well as a general web search. In total, 19 of the Taliban’s official and affiliated websites (See Table III) and tens of non-affiliated websites were explored. In addition, this study also used YouTube and Facebook, primarily to mine relevant audio-visual materials of the group.

Given the ephemeral and migratory nature of the Taliban's electronic print, it took this study three years (from March 2016 to April 2019) to periodically explore, identify, and scrap the Taliban's official and affiliated websites and social media accounts. In addition, the instability of the group's media outlets made it difficult to identify a specific coverage time period for the search. To overcome this problem, the author of this article decided to arrange the search and scraping processes periodically/in waves. Over the course of three years, a total of six waves of websites identification, searching, and scraping episodes were conducted. In total, most scraped materials were published or republished between 2012 and 2019 by different outlets.

The searches were conducted in Pashtu, Dari (Farsi), Urdu, Arabic, and English. Key search words and phrases were translated from one language to another during the data mining process. Subsequently, for redundancy, the key terms and words were conjugated with other terms and phrases that have recursive usage for suicide bombings in mainstream and social media outlets.

In total, thousands of pieces of materials containing the key search words and phrases were mined. Most of these materials were reproduced and republished in multiple sources. For that reason, the first step of data cleaning was to address multiplicity by identifying and discarding duplicate materials. The second phase of data cleaning focused on identifying materials that were produced by the Taliban and their affiliated sources. For that purpose, 'medium of dissemination' was used as the key identification marker. Only materials that were published and disseminated by the Taliban's official and affiliated websites were included in the corpus. The organization's logo was used as the identification marker for visual materials.

### *The Corpus*

In total, 50 items, including 2 books, 16 articles/commentaries, 2 of the Taliban's codes of conduct, 21 suicide bombers' proclamation clips, and 9 audio sermon/preaching clips were identified as the corpus of this study. [16]

In the last 10 years, at least, much has been written in Pashtu, Dari/Farsi, Arabic, and even Urdu languages about the suicide bombings of the Taliban. However, this body of literature is not or cannot be directly related to the group. This study rigorously collected, carefully screened, and robustly processed a portion of the literature that can be verifiably related to the Taliban. As a result, this study considers the corpus as the universe of the Taliban's publications on their suicide bombings. This corpus represents the period between 2012 and 2019.

A reporting bias relevant to the contents of the corpus must be acknowledged. This study assumes that the Taliban may have more recorded preoperational proclamation clips of their suicide bombers than those that the group has released. During data processing, it became evident that the group is highly selective in releasing clips, using only those suicide bombers who have targeted military installations or personnel. Most bombers who have targeted populated and urban areas remained unreported. Such a reporting bias resulted in the inclusion of a limited number of preoperational clips in the corpus, which may have quantitative effects on the analyses of the study. However, given the thematic similarities among the preoperational clips in the corpus, this study assumes that the qualitative impacts of the reporting bias on the analyses of this study are minimal, if any at all.

Subsequently, the study classified the contents of the corpus into two folders. First, the "Taliban Official" folder included materials reflecting the Taliban's official standing on suicide bombings, including the books, articles/commentaries, preaching clips, and military operational promos. Second, the "Suicide Bombers" folder contained materials related to the suicide bombers—the preoperational proclamation videos.

### *Analyzing the Data*

By applying a qualitative thematic analysis method, this study seeks to comprehend the motives behind the bounded system of the Taliban's suicide bombings. Operationally, thematic analysis identifies patterns and trends within a set of qualitative data.[17] As such, the method is intended to explore the underlying themes and narratives in the Taliban's suicide bombings literature. Practically, pertaining to the contents of extremist

media, thematic analysis gives more significance to the language used in the construction of the given ideas and narratives.[18] This distinctive ability of the method allows the study to analyze the use and types of language that the Taliban and their suicide bombers use in their written and spoken materials. This specific method has been used by Macnair & Frank (2017), Khosravi et al. (2016), and Goerzig & Al-Hashimi (2015) to study the contents of extremist/Jihadi media.[19–21]

Initially, the audio and video clips were transcribed. To avoid losing meaning, none of the pieces in the corpus were translated. Subsequently, four categories, namely Justification, Occupation/Invasion, Criticism, and Miscellaneous, were identified in the transcripts of the “Taliban Official” folder. Similarly, four categories, namely Life, Occupation/Invasion, Afterlife, and Miscellaneous, were identified in the transcripts of the “Suicide Bombers” folder. After identifying the categories with colour schemes, coding was applied to each coloured text. Subsequently, each section of the coded text was extracted from the documents and compiled in a new document named after the specific category. Four new documents, namely Justification, Invasion, Criticizing, and Miscellaneous with a suffix of “Taliban Official,” were created from the transcript in the “Taliban Official” folder. The same number of documents, namely Life, Invasion, Afterlife, and Miscellaneous with a suffix of “Taliban Bomber,” were created from the transcripts in the “Suicide Bombers” folder. By size, the heaviest (worded) document within the “Taliban Official” folder was “Justification,” followed by “Criticizing,” “Miscellaneous,” and “Invasion.” Similarly, in the “Taliban Bomber” folder, the heavy-worded document was “Afterlife,” followed by “Life,” “Miscellaneous,” and “Invasion.”

In the next stage, different themes were identified within each of the Category Documents. The “Miscellaneous” and “Invasion” categories did not show any specific themes and the contents were widely scattered around different issues and topics, including but not limited to the “hardship the Prophet suffered,” “the suffering of Muslims,” “message to family,” “the movement of Taliban,” and the “sacrifice of Taliban.”

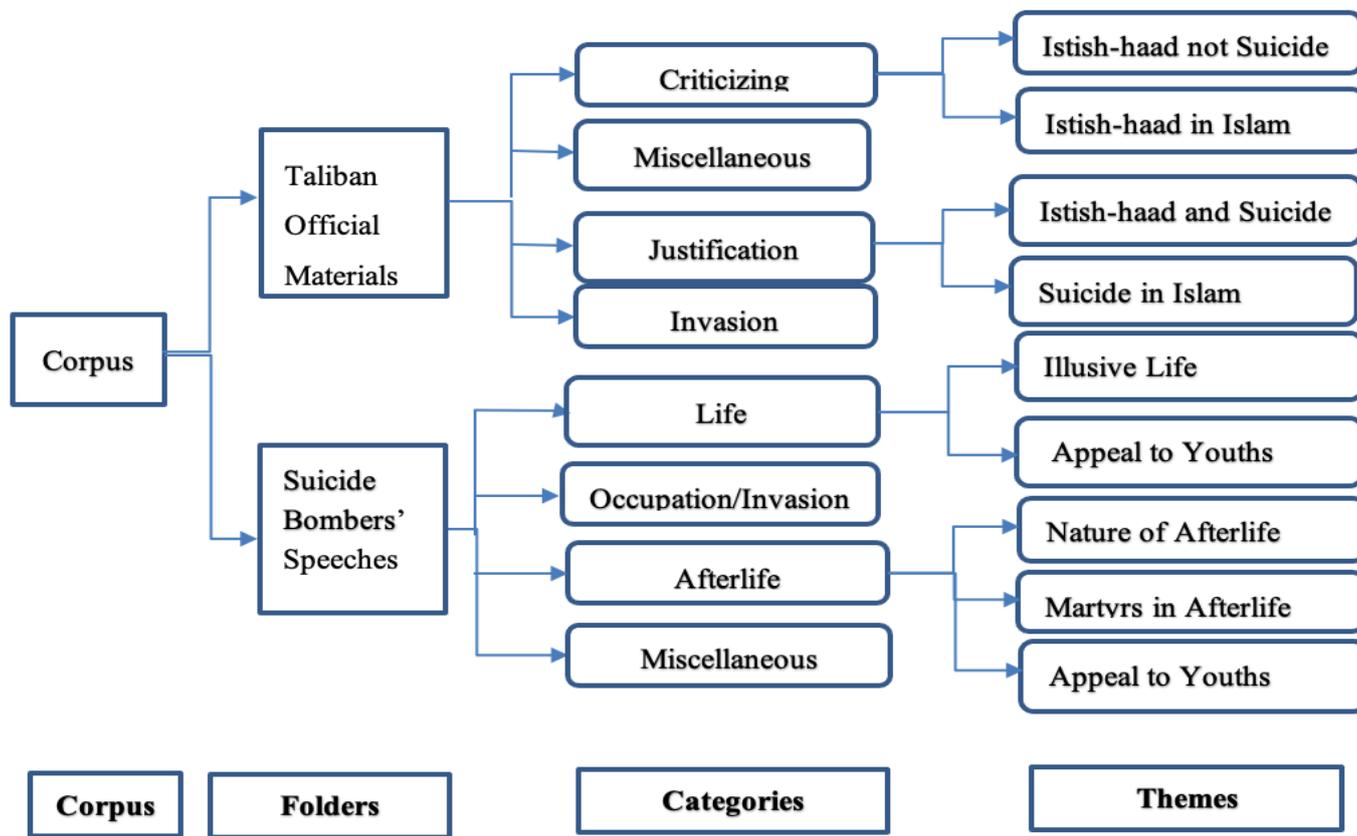
In the last phase of the analysis, the author examined each thematic area for the existence of underlying reasoning and narratives. The study focused on identifying the type, nature, and ubiquity of the reasons used in the identified themes. In each theme, a given reasoning or narrative was identified and highlighted. At the end, authoritative/religious reasoning exclusively based on sacred scripts (the Quran and Hadith) and stories, largely imaginative, emerged as the two main underlying reasons used in the different thematic areas.

### ***Characteristics of the Taliban’s Suicide Bombings***

The birth of the Taliban’s post-9/11 insurgency is in parallel with their embrace of suicide bombings.[22] In 2003, the group introduced this tactic in Afghanistan by carrying out its first attack in the capital Kabul.[23, 24] Before this, no evidence exists to suggest the use of this tactic by any domestic actor at any time in the prolonged warfare history of the country. Similarly, this study did not trace any evidence indicative of the Taliban resorting to suicide bombings prior to 2003. In addition to consulting other sources, the present study systematically reviewed the online repository of the Taliban Source Project (TSP) but found no evidence suggesting that the group has mentioned, discussed, or even promoted suicide bombings, in an array of terminology, between the period of 1994 and 2003.[25]

Subsequently, the group quickly created an infrastructure to train suicide bombers; plan and execute attacks and generate high-quality propaganda materials.[26] Based on the Robert Pape’s CPOST data that was accessed in April of 2016, in more than a dozen years (2003–2015), the Taliban emerged as the leading terrorist organization in the world that has claimed responsibility for the most suicide bombings.[27] Out of the total 5,430 suicide bombings that 104 terrorist groups have carried out across the globe since 1981, the Taliban claimed 774 (14.25% of the total) of them; only second to the 2,520 unclaimed bombings (See Table 1 in the Annex). [28] Similarly, analysis of the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) data (1970–2018) reveals that second to Iraq, Afghanistan has the highest number of suicide bombings, with 1,339 or 19.1% of the total 7,011 carried out since 1970 (See Table 2a in the Annex).[29] This positioned Afghanistan as having the second-highest number among the 49 countries where the most suicide attacks were carried out.[30]

Figure 2: Categorizing and Thematic Analysis



From a strategic perspective, the introduction and the rapid expansion of suicide bombings within the Afghan theatre of operation is critical. Some scholars considered this transfer from the Middle East an alarming and dramatic strategic shift in global terrorism.[31, 32] However, paradoxical to this strategic significance, the case of the Taliban’s suicide bombings has not attracted the required scholarly attention. This case has largely remained in the shadow of the most-studied cases of suicide bombings in the Middle East.

At both policy and strategic levels, any comprehension of the Taliban’s suicide bombings based on over-generalized conclusions of suicide bombings in the Middle East is problematical and in the end misleading. Such an approach may have helped in a preliminary exploration of the Taliban’s “human bombs,” but it cannot amount to an in-depth and robust understanding of this rapidly expanding case of extreme political violence.

The dynamics of the two cases—suicide bombings in the Middle East and those in Afghanistan—are different and so are nature and circumstances surrounding suicide terrorism in these two distinctive theatres of operation. The cultural, historical, and strategic attributes and contexts of the two geographic regions need to be taken into consideration. These distinctive characteristics indicate a stark contrast between the dynamics of these two cases.

***Differentiating the Taliban’s Suicide Bombings from Those in the Middle East***

First and foremost, the existence of a customary value system in Afghanistan facilitates a social and cultural context that is different from that in the Middle East. The Pashtunwali code of conduct, in addition to other aspects of life, has shaped the warfare conduct and ethos of Afghans. (For more on Pashtunwali, see: Barfield 2010 [33] and Habibi 1962.[34])

Unlike in the Middle East, where strategic implications of suicide terrorism overshadowed its normative and legal aspects, in Afghanistan these bombings are scrutinized based on the traditional code. The Taliban, inspired by their fundamentalist religious orientation, disregard the traditional warfare ethos. As a result, they

have based their conduct of warfare on extremist religious thoughts and interpretations. This fundamentalism, including the use of suicide bombings, is largely imported from the Middle East.[35–37]

For example, one of the warfare norms of Pashtunwali that defies the conduct of committing suicide in warfare is “Tura”, Literally meaning ‘sword,’ this notion in warfare demands bravery by fighting face-to-face, not even under the cover of the night.[38] Inflicting indiscriminate violence by trickery tactics in the battlefield [the two defining characteristics of suicide bombings] is considered as cowardice.[39] More specifically, in Pashtunwali, bravery is not defined by dying in war. Metaphorically, it is the nature and place of the wound—the one that indicates face-to-face engagement—that defines a warrior’s bravery.[40, 41]

Secondly, dying in warfare or for any given cause, per se, is not a virtue of warriorship in Pashtunwali. In the Middle East, this may have been a value within some cultural groups (see Ergil 2000[42]). Here is where a fine, yet critical distinction, between simply dying for a cause and fighting for a cause to the extent of death must be made. In dying for a cause, the virtue is in dying. In fighting to death for a cause, however, the virtue is the cause that needs to be defended to the extreme limit. Pashtunwali promotes defending specific causes and values including, but not limited to, individual and collective dignity and honor to the extent of death. This distinction has made the practice of embracing death without a fight—characteristic of suicide bombings—unpopular within Afghan traditional warfare ethos. Traditional Afghans will indeed fight to the death, perceiving this as an honorable deed; however, their warrior ethos does not normally include killing themselves deliberately.[43]

These cultural values have facilitated a critical and hostile public mindset toward suicide bombings. On the other hand, in the Middle East, at least in some theatres of operation such as Palestine and Iraq, the existence of public support toward suicide bombings is well documented (See [44–50]). The overall social aversion against suicide bombings in Afghanistan can be illustrated by the fact that when the Taliban first resorted to suicide tactics, many Afghans refused to accept that the performers of these attacks were Afghans.[51]

This shows that the Taliban has operationalized their suicide bombings in a strategic milieu with strong social and cultural aversions toward killing oneself in war. For these reasons, the Afghan resistance groups fighting against the Soviets in the 1980s avoided the use of suicide bombings. Although thousands of Arab fighters from the Middle East and North Africa with Salafi Jihadist ideology and familiar with suicide terrorism joined the Afghan Mujahideen to fight against the Soviets, these foreign fighters were not allowed to diverge from the local cultural/traditional warfare ethos. However, post 9/11, the Taliban’s new warfare ethos based on a fundamentalist interpretation of Islamic law, put into question some traditional values and conducts.[52] In order to operationalize their suicide bombings in a social and cultural context that is hostile to using suicide missions in warfare, the Taliban had to rely on more psychological and ideological interventions and arrangements.

Based on the mentioned differences, inferring comprehensions about the Taliban’s suicide bombings from the conclusions drawn from suicide bombings in the Middle East is not conclusive, but rather based on overstretched and stylized facts. To understand the Taliban’s suicide bombings, the phenomenon must be studied and treated as an independent case, surrounded by distinctive social and cultural circumstances including the Afghan cultural resentment to suicide bombings.

### ***Taliban’s Written and Spoken Materials on Suicide Bombings***

The Taliban’s approach to cope with the social resentment toward suicide bombings is systematic. In addition to disseminating materials, they have included relevant guidelines on suicide bombings in their official code of conduct—the Layeha (For the translated Layeha, see; Clark 2011[53]). In general, the group has disseminated written, verbal, and visual materials.

The written texts are mostly conceptual contents, including three books that are rich in religious script and are intended to provide moral-legal legitimacy.[54–56] The conceptual materials heavily rely on complex religious reasoning, which suggest that they are not likely intended for public consumption, but rather for religiously informed debates. The Taliban’s initial written work on suicide bombings originated from Arab Jihadi sources. In 2004, soon after adopting suicide bombings as one of the insurgency’s main warfare tactics, the Taliban

translated and disseminated Yusuf Al-ayeri's book on martyrdom-seeking operations. In this booklet, Al-ayeri, the founder of Al-Qaeda in the Arab Peninsula, inferred the claimed legitimacy of suicide bombings from Islamic sources. In addition to other sources, his work is dependent on the writings of Ibn Taymiyyah. This medieval-era controversial Islamic theologian wrote extensively on the legal and moral aspects of Jihad-related issues, including its obligatory rather than optional status, killing oneself, civilian casualties, and executing traitors (see; Ibn Taymiyyah (1995).[57]).

Contrary to the written materials, the audio recordings of sermons of the group's ideologues, preachers, and sympathizers are simple in language and are emotionally enhanced and value-laden. These speeches use both religious and mundane/strategic reasoning and are largely intended for public consumption. The visual contents that include the group's operational promos and the suicide bombers' preoperational proclamations are the only sources that directly depict suicide bombers talking about these operations.

Comparing to the frequency of their suicide bombings, the Taliban seldom releases the proclamation clips of their suicide bombers. In addition, the group does not practice writing farewell letters or producing detailed biographies of the bombers. This is different in Palestine, where writing farewell letters among the suicide bombers is common.[58] This may have two reasons. First, to avoid public scrutiny. Tactically, the group does not take ownership and claim responsibility of suicide bombings that target public places with massive civilian casualties. Secondly, due to the strong social and cultural hostility/aversion toward suicide bombings, the group safeguards the bombers' relatives and family from possible social resentment by not releasing most of their suicide bombers' proclamations.

### ***The Underlining Narratives***

This study has uncovered the existence of two dominating narratives that the Taliban have used to promote their suicide bombings. The first is an explicit narrative of "Istish-haadi";[59] while the second is an implicit "love to death" narrative.

#### **1. *The Istish-haadi [Seeking Martyrdom] Narrative***

Since its establishment as a religious militant group in 1994, the *raison d'être* of the Taliban's political ideology has been to establish the rule of the divine. It is practically and theoretically not feasible to distinguish what is political for the group and what is religious. They have consistently justified their ideology/political thoughts and warfare ethos and conducts based on the interpretations and narratives they derive from scripture—the Quran and the Hadiths. This also goes for the Taliban's arguments with regard to suicide bombings—these are exclusively based on religious doctrines.

To assert the moral-legal legitimacy of suicide bombings, the Taliban has exclusively based its reasoning on the notion of martyrdom/Shahada in Islam. From the notion of Shahada, they inferred the narrative of martyrdom-seeking or Istish-haad. This narrative is frequent in their materials. In fact, the group officially named their suicide bombings as "Istish-haadi" [martyrdom-seeking] attacks. At the core of this narrative is the debate on Intehar and Istish-haad.

#### *The Intehar (انتحار) and Istish-haad (استشهاد) Debate*

The Taliban's written literature on suicide bombings revolves around the two notions of "Intehar" and "Istish-haad." Intehar (انتحار) is an Arabic term that is widely used for "suicide." It also is a well-known and broadly used term in Pashtu and Dari (Farsi); the two main languages in Afghanistan. On the other hand, Istish-haad (استشهاد), also an Arabic word, means "seeking martyrdom." This is not a commonly used term but is widely known among religious scholars.

The teaching on suicide in mainstream Islamic jurisprudence is clear: there is a broad-based consensus within all branches and sects of Islamic jurisprudence regarding the legal status of committing suicide, it is forbidden.

[60] In their writings, the Taliban do not contest this. Quite the reverse, the group explicitly denounces suicide as a sinful conduct that is religiously outlawed and prohibited.[61] However, the debate does not end there. To provide a full explanation on the issue, the Taliban explored: What constitutes suicide (Intehar)? and, Are suicide bombings suicide?

To answer these questions and to differentiate between “Intehar” and “Istish-haad,” the Taliban apply a hermeneutic approach by deriving different meanings from religious texts, differentiating their suicide bombings from killing oneself.

The group argues that the fundamental reason for the prohibition of suicide in Islam is not the act of killing oneself per se, but the cause(s) behind the killing. The debate revolves around the mundane and the sacred. If killing oneself is a result of existential problems, including material or emotional attachments or despair, then the act is considered “Intehar,” which is a vice.[62] They argue that as humans owe their life/existence to the divine, individual human beings do not own it and thereby, they do not have any right to either end or waste it for materialistic and mundane reasons.[63] Materialistic association with life is considered a deviation and killing oneself is forbidden because it indicates a materialistic and emotional association to life.[64]

For the Taliban, it is not the inherent value of life that led to the prohibition of suicide, but rather the deviation from the celestial purpose of life. However, if the reasons for killing oneself relate to nonexistential and divine circumstances—engaging in jihad—then giving up on life is considered Istish-haad.[65] Based on such reasoning, the Taliban oppose referring to their suicide bombings as “suicide attacks” and instead call them Istish-haadi [martyrdom-seeking] attacks.

Citing global Jihadist sources, the Taliban argue that giving up on life for religious purposes constitutes a deep-rooted tradition in Islam, and that the legitimacy of Istish-haad is attested by the sacred texts. They denounce mainstream Islamic authorities and scholars who have condemned and edicted suicide bombings as religiously outlawed.[66–68] The Taliban claims that as the legitimacy of Istish-haad is explicitly proven in sacred texts, its legal status is therefore beyond opinion, consensus, and reasoning.[69–72]

### *Sources of Legitimacy*

The Taliban resort to two sources to claim the legitimacy of their suicide bombings. First, by authoritative reasoning based on the [interpretations of] scripture. Secondly, by applying a circular reasoning that revolves around Jihad, Martyrdom, and Istish-haad.

*Authoritative Reasoning:* The Taliban’s standing on the moral and legal legitimacy of suicide bombings is assertive. They claim that such legitimacy is well-grounded in the sacred texts, therefore there is no room for further reasoning. They frequently cite the following Hadith with a decontextualized interpretation as a source of legality. The Hadith reads (translation):

The Prophet said, “By Him in Whose Hands my life is! Were it not for some men amongst the believers who dislike to be left behind me and whom I cannot provide with means of conveyance, I would certainly never remain behind any Sariya’ (army-unit) setting out in Allah’s cause. By Him in Whose Hands my life is! I would love to be martyred in Allah’s Cause and then get resurrected and then get martyred, and then get resurrected again and then get martyred and then get resurrected again and then get martyred (Sahih al-Bukhari Book 56, Hadith 15).

In addition, the Taliban also cite the following very similar Hadith to support the claim that seeking martyrdom is religiously recommended as an ultimate goal. It reads (in translation):

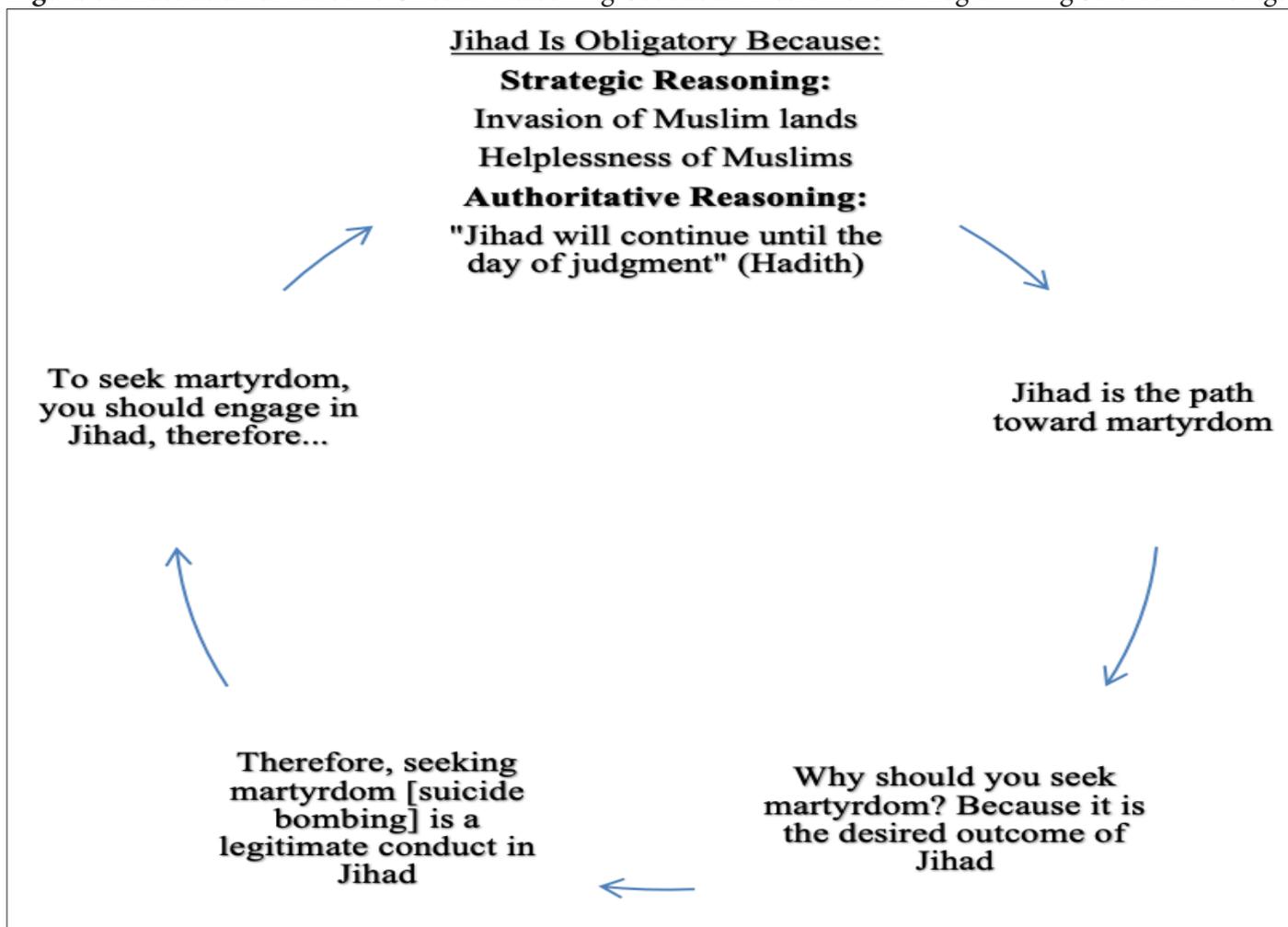
Allah’s Messenger said, “By Him in Whose Hand my life is, I would love to fight in Allah’s cause and then get martyred and then resurrected (come to life) and then get martyred and then resurrected (come to life) and then get martyred, and then resurrected (come to life) and then get martyred and then resurrected (come to life).” Abu Huraira used to repeat those words three times and I testify

to it with Allah's Oath (*Sahih al-Bukhari* (Book 94, Hadith 1)).

The Taliban has borrowed numerous similar Hadiths from global Jihadists and Salafi sources that claim legitimacy of suicide bombings based on holy scripture. Unlike mainstream Islamic jurisprudence that provides highly contextualized interpretations and meanings of the sacred texts, the Jihadist sources, and for that reason, the Taliban, take recourse to literal and decontextualized meanings.

*Circular Reasoning:* The group also infers the legitimacy of suicide bombings by applying a circular reasoning, which links jihad, martyrdom, and suicide bombings in a complicated and confusion-inducing logic. The fallacy includes justifying the effectiveness of suicide bombings in terms of inflicting violence on the adversaries. [73] Subsequently, they construct the jihad-martyrdom-suicide bombing nexus (See Figure 3).

**Figure 3:** Illustration of Taliban's Circular Reasoning Used as an Instrument for Legitimizing Suicide Bombings



The argument starts with insisting the necessity and obligation of Jihad due to the helpless circumstance of Muslims in different parts of the world. The argument continues by promoting martyrdom as the desired and divinely recommended outcome of Jihad and a divinely recommended conduct.[74] Subsequently, the argument focuses on proving suicide bombings to be the only conduct with certain and unescapable probability of inducing martyrdom.[75] By referring to the uncertainty of becoming martyred during conventional warfare engagements, Taliban preachers encourage their fighters to adopt suicide tactics as the most practical path for realizing the sense of urgency of martyrdom.

Only the martyred are the ones who succeeded. Survival in the battle is a vice.... We don't know if we will die cursed or blessed. Only embracing the Istish-haad is the salvation...and you all should promote [it] among your families and offspring.[76]

*Istish-haad Is Not Sacrifice*

The Taliban's interpretation of suicide bombings goes beyond the notion of sacrifice. Two factors, the ownership of life and the source of the decision of giving up on life, differentiate their conceptualization of suicide bombings from that of sacrificial conduct. The Istish-haadi narrative is based on the ontological assertion that the soul and body of human beings, and for that reason of suicide bombers, is owned by the divine.[77] Thus, suicide bombers do not own their lives nor souls. This invalidates the notion of sacrifice, as ownership of the sacrificial gift is principally and practically the prerequisite in offering the sacrifice. As life does not belong to the bombers, they cannot sacrifice what is not theirs.

The second element that differentiates the Taliban's suicide bombings from sacrifice is the decision to carry out the act. While sacrifice is often voluntary, the Taliban asserts that choosing the subject for a suicide bombing is not the decision of the bomber, but of the divine. Therefore, the decision can neither be contested nor denied as the attack is not the killing of oneself, but rather the obligation to carry out a decision made otherworldly.

This argument constructs a special and chosen identity for the bomber. The Taliban argues that to be chosen for giving up life for the rule of the divine is a privilege that not everyone is entitled to, but only those who are chosen.[78] To support this claim, the Taliban's sources narrate a verse from the Quran, which reads that God makes martyrs among you (Cf. chapter 3, verse 140 in the Quran).[79]

Consequently, the Taliban infers that carrying out suicide bombings is a practice of trading off the earthly life for the one hereafter. However, humans do not have the will to make this choice. It is the exclusive right of the divine to choose subjects for such a transaction. This divine selection, in addition to shaping a chosen identity for the bombers, constructs a sense of inevitable obligation. The suicide bombers, who are already overwhelmed by their chosen status, become indebted to follow up with the decision. The status that is promised to suicide bombers in response to the trade-off is not immortality, but satisfied eternity. Within Islamic teaching, the immortality in the hereafter is universal for everyone. However, trading off life by committing suicide leads to a state of satisfied eternity.[80–82]

## 2. *The 'Love to Death' Narrative*

Analyzing the Taliban's material on suicide bombings also reveals the existence of a "love to death" narrative. An extreme version of this narrative is characterized by a disdain for life and a love for death. Messages that discourage the love of life and glorify death are plentiful and explicit in the Taliban's materials, especially in their preoperational proclamations. In the following excerpt from a clip, the bombers fervently speak of their experience as a journey toward the ultimate reality—from the illusive life to a satisfied eternity. While discouraging any attachment with the earthly being, the bombers passionately talk about the hereafter:

“... to my [family], when you hear about my martyrdom do not express sorrow but jubilation, as I am returning [the life] back without wasting and investing it in this vice [world]...”[83]

They explicitly appeal to giving up on loving life through embracing death, as any attraction toward, or attachment with, earthly life is a divergence and deviation from the ultimate reality:

“How can serving yourself, country, home, kids... justify your [earthly] existence in hereafter? ... it is not late; come on! Follow this path [suicide]...”[84]

In addition, the willingness to detach from life and embrace death is promoted as the exclusive strength of Muslims' youth's force:

“The true lovers are those who celebrate the message of their death as good news, their pride, and their triumph... They [suicide bombers] know what to love...” [85]

However, the Taliban does not consider the “love to death,” narrative as nihilistic, but rather portrays it as a

path toward the ultimate reality. Their bombers predominantly and ardently talk about an alternative realm that is beyond the dimensions of time and space. They preach that the worldly existence is not real but rather an illusion and a wearisome ordeal; and that embracing death is the journey toward the true existence. They sound convinced that what they are chosen for—suicide bombing—will end such an ordeal:

“...so, be careful! Shall not be deceived by the colours of the life; shall not be shackled by the love of materials, offspring, and loved ones. All these are contemptuous. Hence! Move towards the battle fields and run towards those paradises that are as expanded as skies and...”[86]

These bombers seem ecstatic. They speak of an alternative state, induced by the fact that they will soon transition to an ultimate reality, one that will allow them not to feel the pain and hardship of existence.[87] Such an alternative understanding of life and existence is a recurring theme in the clips of suicide bombers:

“My brothers! There won't be any worries, all the pains and problems of this life will go forgotten... my appeal to all believers! Who want to get satisfaction and peace, come and join us, you will get the eternal peace.”[88]

In their proclamations, Taliban suicide bombers convey their message with a pleasant and satisfied demeanour. In addition, the visual effects used to enhance the clips made the images of the bombers more radiant. The explicit speech and the clear outlook of the bombers implicitly exudes a state of satisfaction and peace. The bombers express satisfaction in being the chosen one for trading off the illusive state of existence on earth with the real, satisfied, and eternal one. The intention is to convey the message that the opportunity of *Istish-haad* that is bestowed upon these bombers induces such satisfaction and peace.

## ***Discussion***

The Taliban's conceptual work on suicide bombings is not original. On the contrary, they recycle the radical Islamists and Salafi literature of the Middle East. These sources have inferred the claimed moral and legal legitimacy of suicide bombings from controversial Islamic literature whose history goes as far back as the medieval times, in particular the controversial 13<sup>th</sup>-century Islamic theologian Taqi-u-Din Ibn Taymiyyah, who has remained a major point of reference within the global Jihadist literature, and for that reason, also in the Taliban's writings on suicide bombings. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Ibn Abdul Wahab of the Najd, the founder of the Salafi/Wahabi school of thought, has built upon the work of Ibn Taymiyyah.[89, 90] This challenges Edwards' assertion that Abdullah Azam, the ideologue of the Arab fighters during the Afghan Jihad in the 1980s, was the one who provided a scriptural basis for the promotion of martyrdom and killing oneself and civilians in Jihad.[91] Azam simply tried to contextualize the existing controversial literature to the realities of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Although Arab fighters have promoted and encouraged martyrdom operations, the question that remains unanswered is why suicide bombings could not hold their ground during the Afghan Jihad against the Soviets in the 1980s. While the Jihadist and Islamists were using suicide bombings in Lebanon and later in Palestine in the 1980s, their peers in Afghanistan simply did not. Why? Edwards could not provide an explicit answer to this question. However, the differences in the ideological and cultural orientations of the Arab fighters and the Afghan Mujahideen should have prevented the former in operationalizing their tactic of suicide bombings on the Afghan front.

Ideologically, the disconnect between the Arab fighters and the Afghan Mujahideen was obvious.[92] Largely being followers of Hanafi jurisprudence, the Afghan Mujahideen, including their mainstream Sunni scholars of the original Deobandi school of thought, were not accommodating the radical doctrines of Ibn Taymiyyah and Abdul Wahab that Azam was preaching. In addition to the doctrinal disconnect, culturally, the warfare ethos of the Afghans stood in stark contrast with that of the Arab fighters. This may have caused the absence of suicide tactics during the Jihad era. Johnson argues that the absence of suicide missions in Afghanistan before the Taliban was due to the cultural aversion of Afghans to suicide.[93]

However, with the radicalization and proliferation of Pakistani Madrasas, the ideological orientation of the Deobandi school of thought in Pakistan has shifted. The process that was initiated in the late 1970s by the Pakistani dictator General Zia with financial support from the Saudis and the United States was aimed at broader strategic goals.[94] This ultimately caused the emergence of a new generation of Pakistani and Afghan Deobandi Ulema (religious scholars), including the Taliban, whose ideological orientation is guided by radical Islamist doctrines.

The contents of the Taliban's literature on suicide bombings, including the constructed narratives—'love to death' and *Istish-haadi*—and their underlying reasoning, confirm the group's radical ideological shift. Gopal and van Linschoten (2017) argue that over the past two decades, the Taliban's ideology has transformed from 'traditionalist' Islam to a form of political Islam espoused in the Arab world.[95] Similarly, Giustozzi (2007) asserts that the neo-Taliban's post-2002 ideological orientation transformed from their original rigid ultra-orthodox Deobandi way of thinking toward a more internationalist Islamist ideology.[96] More specifically, Brahimi (2010) argues that the adoption of suicide bombings by the Taliban is a radical ideological evolution from conservative Deobandi Islam toward fundamentalism/Islamism.[97]

While the Taliban has recently publicly rejected any affiliation with the global and regional Jihadist groups such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS, the group's decision to resort to suicide violence and its underlying logic is inspired by the theological reasoning promoted by the extremist Jihadi groups with a global outlook. The group's reasoning, logic, and epistemological orientation has converged with the reasoning advanced and promoted by groups ranging from the Muslim Brotherhood to Al-Qaeda.[98] Particular to suicide bombings, the group not only has become more radicalized in promoting indiscriminate violence, but also resorted to promote irrationality among its potential suicide bombers.

A deeper scrutiny of the group's suicide bombings' corpus points to the existence of an irrational and dystopian understanding of reality and existence. This narrative promotes "love to death" and is prominent in the Taliban's suicide bombers' speeches. However, it is not an individual orientation. The foundation is provided by the group's "*Istish-haadi*" narrative, which is drawn from a decontextualized and reinterpreted comprehension of the notion of martyrdom in Islam.

The group has constructed these narratives to serve two strategic purposes. First, to morally and legally legitimize the violence of suicide bombings. For their individual recruits, these narratives provide a moral cover for the violence they inflict.[99] This is a rational tactic for tackling the strong cultural aversion of Afghan society to suicide bombings, which is largely shaped by the traditional warfare ethos of the Pashtunwali code of conduct. The social resentment to suicide bombings was so strong that initially the Taliban had to rely on non-Afghan human bombs (usually Arabs or Pakistanis).[100, 101] As such, there was a need for the Taliban to dilute this aversion and operationalize suicide bombings by constructing appropriate authoritative/religious reasoning. Thus, they adopted a scriptural *Istish-haadi* narrative that links suicide terrorism with the notion of martyrdom.

Secondly, against the backdrop of the strong local cultural ethos, it was not practical for the Taliban to operationalize their suicide campaigns solely relying on the notion of martyrdom. Therefore, to sustain and perpetuate their campaigns, they constructed an irrational narrative of "love to death." While both of these objectives are part of a rational strategy, the group has resorted to promote an irrational and dystopian way of thinking among its potential suicide bombers.

Taliban's "love to death" is suicidal and irrational. In their preoperational speeches, the bombers reveal both suicidal tendencies and an irrational and twisted explanation of life. They hold earthly existence to be illusive and the hereafter to be real. Hence for them, embracing death is the journey from an illusive status toward an ultimate reality. The bombers' denial of the reality of the material world defies Edwards' assertion of suicide offerings (sacrifice) as a means to materialize the sacred and mundane worlds.[102] In this regard, the main discrepancy between Edwards' sacrificial assertion and the Taliban's narratives lies in the conceptualization of the ends and the means.

For Edwards, the logic of suicide as a sacrificial act is to establish and materialize pathways between the sacred and the profane worlds through the mediation and destruction of the victim [the bomber and those killed]. [103] However, for the suicide bombers and the Taliban, martyrdom-seeking is an instrument that facilitates the journey from the illusive material world toward a real, sacred existence. By studying the case of the Pakistani Taliban, Sheikh argues that through suicide bombings, the actor is prioritizing an otherworldly mission over worldly goods.[104] Hence, while Edwards' ethnographic scrutiny of the Taliban's suicide bombings is based on the overarching assumption of rationality, the Taliban's materials point to a dystopian and irrational understanding of existence.

Both narratives mentioned here are heavily shaped by specific interpretations of religious texts. Semple argues that the religious case presented in the profiles of the Taliban's suicide bombers is unsophisticated and largely non-textual. He rightly observed that all Taliban suicide bombers invoke religion, but not in a sophisticated manner.[105] This is true when it comes to the speeches of the bombers. The Taliban's ideologues and preachers, however, heavily rely on, and cite, sacred text. Some of the proclamation clips were edited with audio effects that narrate verses from the Quran. In addition, the group's written materials are highly sacred text-based and contain complex religious reasoning.

In general, religious text is an inseparable aspect of the Taliban's narratives on suicide bombings. This is unlike some of the generalized secular and grievance-based assertions for suicide bombings, including those of Pape 2003 [106], Talal 2007 [107], and Egril 2000.[108] On the contrary, the Taliban's use of religion is similar to Bloom's argument. Bloom identified similarities between contemporary suicide terrorism with the medieval Shi'a Muslim Assassins in terms of indoctrinating their followers to the level of irrationality and the use of religious rhetoric to justify the infliction of violence.[109] Both the irrational orientation of the bombers and the use of religious rhetoric explicitly exists in the Taliban's narratives on suicide bombings.

To eliminate any possible doubt about the religious legitimacy of suicide bombings, the Taliban avoids resorting to secular reasoning. For example, they do not refer to their Istish-haadi attacks as heroic martyrdom, which may reflect an earthly/secular goal. This is unlike what Hafez found about Iraqi jihadist suicide bombers. Hafez argues that in order to avoid overwhelming their audience by complicated ideological and political discourses, Iraqi jihadists use simplistic narratives of glory and heroic martyrdom.[110] The Taliban does the complete opposite. In addition to the use of complex authoritative/religious reasoning, they resort to logical fallacy and circular reasoning to induce confusion among their listeners/followers. Given the fact that the Taliban has continuously faced strong societal resistance, this may have played a role in the Taliban resorting to the use of complicated authoritative reasoning and logical fallacy. Since the traditional Pashtoonwali code of warfare does not include references to support the newly adopted warfare tactic of suicide bombings, this may have led the Taliban to resort to circular logic and complex religious reasoning.

Culturally, the traditional Afghan warfare ethos does not promote embracing death as a value. This both shapes and defines the existence of a deeply rooted social mindset on heroism in warfare; that is to fight face-to-face until the end. This is another reason that the Taliban avoids using the notion of 'heroism' in their narratives. Rather, the Taliban exclusively based their argumentation on fundamentalist interpretations of religious texts. This interpretation consists of a dystopian understanding of life and reality and has shaped the Taliban's 'love to death' narrative.

The fluidity and highly contextualized nature of religious texts can easily be misinterpreted for constructing erroneous authoritative narratives. Soufan argues that by using scripture, lore, and codes of conduct, organizations like Al-Qaeda often develop their own countercultures which are usually going beyond accepted social and religious norms.[111] This is certainly true for the Taliban's suicide bombings. Taking advantage of the multiple ways of scriptural interpretation, they have constructed narratives that promote an irrational socialization and a misleading understanding of life and reality. Such alternative understandings/countercultures have generally been overlooked by those scholars who largely dissect suicide bombings under the overarching presumption of rationality. For example, Talal claims that killing oneself is not uncommon in peace and preparing to die is not uncommon in war.[112]

This assertion confuses two completely opposing orientations to life: the glorification of death, and the love of life. Killing oneself in peace is not the same as willing to die in war by carrying out suicide attacks. Killing oneself in peace due to despair and overwhelming existential problems/pains does not constitute the 'love to death' orientation of the performer of the act. Quite the reverse, it conveys the message of hopelessness and an inability to celebrate life. It is the extreme form of rejection of not having a life without despair or pains. Here, the end is not dying, but rather ending the pains and despair that overburden life and living. Similarly, altruistic missions and the willingness to kill or be killed on the battlefield is aimed at the ultimate envisioned goal of life and freedom, for oneself and/or for other group members. Here once again, the end is not dying but rather standing up for life and its given associated values to the end.

The Taliban's narratives on suicide bombings neither suggest heroic martyrdom nor altruistic missions, as conceptualized by Durkheim and Johnson.[113–115] The Taliban's narratives express a strong bond and love, not with life, but with death. Life and existence for the Taliban's aspiring suicide bombers is illusive, deceptive, and leading to vice. Conversely, embracing death is understood as transcending from this illusive life into a real, eternal, and highly satisfactory state of being.

Such orientations may be viewed as what Strenski, Semple, and Fierke refer to as martyrdom.[116–119] However, the Taliban's understanding of martyrdom induced by suicide is different. They place a distinction between martyrdom induced during regular warfare engagements and the "martyrdom-seeking" operations (suicide bombings). While the notion of martyrdom has a highly contextualized interpretation within mainstream Islamic jurisprudence, the "Istish-haadi" conceptualization is its most radical and fundamentalist interpretation. The Taliban differentiate Istish-haadi attacks with martyrdom in regular warfare engagements by constructing a chosen identity of the suicide bombers. They argue that suicide bombers, unlike regular fighters, are divinely chosen. The purpose of this distinction goes far beyond seeking any political or moral justifications. Rather, it serves as an instrument of recognition and obligation. The bombers, in addition to their special identity/recognition, also have the inevitable obligation to carry out the divine-given mission. Strategically, this closes any potential avenues of retreat by the bombers.

In the case of Iraq, Hafez revealed the elevation of the Iraqi suicide bombers' identity to that of an extraordinary moral being as a result of their ultimate sacrifice.[120] Similarly, the Taliban acknowledge the bombers' special identity, but the reason for this is not due to sacrifice. It is due to the divine selection of the bombers. As such, the bombers are willing to accept the divine decision by embracing death. Hence, contrary to what has been asserted by scholars like Hafez [121] and Msellemu [122], the motivation to embrace death is not merely seeking otherworldly reward systems of eternity, promises of paradise, or immortality in highly pleasurable circumstances. On the contrary, a complex system of divine recognition, worldly obligation, and otherworldly satisfaction is driving the Taliban's bombers to embrace death.

## **Conclusions**

The Taliban in Afghanistan have embraced suicide bombings since 2003. Within a short period of time, the group developed an infamous industry of manufacturing "human bombs." They soon became the leading terrorist organization in the world, claiming responsibility for the greatest number of suicide bombings. Two narratives assist the Taliban in supplying their bombing campaigns with large numbers of bombers. First, an Istish-haadi narrative, which is based on authoritative reasoning derived from sacred texts. In addition, the group has resorted to logical fallacy/circular reasoning in producing the desired narrative. This narrative serves as the conceptual foundation for providing moral-legal legitimacy to suicide bombings. However, legitimization does not mean the practicality of these terminal missions, especially in a social and cultural milieu that is dismissive of suicide killing in warfare.

To overcome this challenge, the group constructed yet another narrative; "love to death." It is based on an irrational and dystopian interpretation of the mundane existence. It promotes an alternative comprehension of reality that is beyond the premises of time and space, one which does not bear any relation to rationality.

Two aspects of these narratives are prominent. First, martyrdom is the central tenet of the Taliban's suicide bombing industry. However, their understanding of martyrdom induced by suicide bombings is different. The decision to choose subjects for these bombings does not reside with the bombers, but rather is bestowed upon them by the divine. This renders the decision to embrace death indisputable and binding for the bombers. In addition, such selection renders their actions as solely following through with divine orders rather than committing suicide.

The second noteworthy aspect of the Taliban's narratives is their specific conceptualization of life. They consider death by suicide bombing as a transformation from an illusive and transient earthly existence toward a real and satisfied eternity. This is a crucial element as it promotes the idea of 'love to death' whereby death is regarded not as demise, but a passage toward a satisfied eternity. The Taliban resorted to the construction and use of these narratives as a strategic lifeline for their insurgency. Without "human bombs" at their disposal, the insurgency might well have faded away. Resorting to suicide bombings for the Taliban became a rational tactic in order to ensure the continuation and longevity of their insurgency. However, they pay a high price for this as the meaning of life and reality that the Taliban has constructed in their narratives is irrational, dystopian, and suicidal.

For the Taliban's bombers, the decision to embrace the certainty of death with little or no hesitation is beyond any logical and rational justification. These bombers are seeking life by willingly and joyfully embracing death. Scholars have advanced different theses regarding the motives of suicide bombers, including a desire to win, to kill, to expiate, and as a reaction to injustice. However, the message that the Taliban's suicide bombers explicitly send out regarding their willingness to embrace death is outside the realm of rationality. The absurd message is that they are dying to live.

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## Notes

[1] This study conceptualizes "suicide mission" as a general term that refers to any type of suicide tactic that requires the death of the perpetrator for the success of the mission. The article, however, refers suicide bombings exclusively to those suicide missions that use explosives attached to either human body or the vehicle to carry out the attack.

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[3] Pape, Robert. *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*. New York: Random House, 2005, p. 14.

[4] Crenshaw, Martha. 'Explaining Suicide Terrorism: A Review Essay.' *Security Studies* 16, no. 1 (2007): 133–62. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636410701304580>.

[5] Horgan, John. *The Psychology of Terrorism*. London: Routledge, 2005.

[6] For studies that are focused on suicide bombings in Middle East, see: Shakiki [44], Bloom [123], Pape [3], Moghadam [124], Moghadam [30], Hafez [14], Pedahzur, Perliger & Weinberg [2], Asad [107], Cohen [13], Merari [125], Brynen [126], Crenshaw [127], Schbley [128], Krueger and Maleckova [129], Post et al [130], Schweitzer [131], and Hicks & et al [132].

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- [11] Edwards, David. *Caravan of Martyrs: Sacrifice and Suicide Bombing in Afghanistan*. California: University of California Press, 2017.
- [12] These are several political theses on suicide bombings developed by various scholars. “Dying to live” is the thesis advanced by the author of the present study.
- [13] Cohen, Shuki. ‘Mapping the Minds of Suicide Bombers using Linguistic Methods: The Corpus of Palestinian Suicide Bombers’ Farewell Letters (CoPSBFL).’ *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 39, no. 7–8 (2016): 749–780. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2016.1141005>.
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- [15] Shuki, Cohen, 2016, op. cit.
- [16] For transparency and possible replication purposes of the study, the researcher has committed himself to make the corpus available upon request to bonafide researchers for these purposes. However, due to the nature of the content and its potential of unintentionally spreading and promoting violence, the corpus will not be made available on a public domain.
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- [19] Ibid., 18.
- [20] Khosravi, Shadi, Peter Kwantes, Natalia Derbentseva, & Laura Huey. ‘Quantifying Salient Concepts Discussed in Social Media Content: An Analysis of Tweets Posted by ISIS Fangirls.’ *Journal of Terrorism Research* 7, no. 2 (2016): 79–90. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.15664/jtr.1241>.
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- [23] *The New York Times*. ‘Threats and Responses: Afghanistan; Kabul Bombing Killed 4 German Soldiers and Injured 29.’ July 08, 2003. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/06/08/world/threats-responses-afghanistan-kabul-bombing-kills-4-german-soldiers-wounds-29.html>.
- [24] It should be noted, however, that the first ever documented suicide bombing in the country was carried out by two Arab al-Qaeda operatives on September 9, 2001. The perpetrators, disguised as foreign journalists, assassinated the leader of the Northern Alliance, Ahmad Shah Masood, by detonating a bomb implanted inside a recording camera. Masood was resisting the Taliban’s geographic expansion toward the northern parts of the country.
- [25] The repository is compiled and launched by the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI), in cooperation with the University of Oslo. URL: <https://www.hf.uio.no/ikos/english/research/taliban-sources-repository/>.
- [26] Semple, Michael, 2014, op. cit.
- [27] At this point, the CPOST database has become inaccessible for a number of years. As communicated to the author of this article by one of the project administrators, this is due to database renovation.
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- [59] Istish-haad [استشهاد] in the Arabic language is not a hyphenated term. The hyphen placed between the two parts of the term in the main text of this article is solely for pronunciation purposes.
- [60] It should be noted that the term used in the Quran for suicide is not "Intehar," but the phrase (قتل النفسه) [killing oneself]. "Intehar" is a term from modern Arabic language.
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[69] Baryali, Ahmad Zeya, 2013a, op. cit.

[70] Afghan, 2018, op. cit.

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## Annex

Table I: Top 20 Terrorist Organizations that carried out the highest number of Suicide Bombings (1974–2016)\*

#	Name of the Organization	Total Number of Claimed Attacks	Total Number of Deaths	Total Number of Wounded	Lethality per Attack
1	Unknown Groups	2746	24960	58745	9.1
2	Taliban (IEA)**	681	3015	7453	4.4
3	Islamic State	255	3600	7047	14.1
4	Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan	144	2241	5339	15.6
5	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria	125	1175	2823	9.4
6	Al-Qaeda in Iraq	121	1544	3263	12.8
7	Islamic State of Iraq	113	1631	4842	14.4
8	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam	83	981	1404	11.8
9	Hamas	78	511	3274	6.6
10	Al-Shabaab	72	787	937	10.9
11	Jabhat an-Nuá'Érah li-Ahl ash-Sham	56	777	1912	13.9
12	Palestinian Islamic Jihad	50	225	1412	4.5
13	Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade	40	107	995	2.7
14	Ansar al-Sunna	28	319	1390	11.4
15	Jama'at Al-Tawhid Wa'al-Jihad	28	357	1110	12.8
16	Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula	26	394	474	15.2
17	Boko Haram	23	212	709	9.2
18	Al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb	22	236	1064	10.7
19	Al-Qaeda Central	20	3408	13053	170.4
20	Lashkar-e Jhangvi Al-almi	20	541	1301	27.1

\*Source: Analysis is based on Suicide Attack Database of the Chicago Project on Security and Terrorism (CPOST) ([Dataset]; accessed April 26, 2016)

\*\*Islamic Emirates of Afghanistan

Table II: Countries where the highest number of Suicide Bombings were carried out (1970–2018)\*

#	Country	# of attacks	% (out of the total)	#	Country	# of attacks	% (out of the total)
1	Iraq	2668	38.1	17	India	62	0.9
2	Afghanistan	1339	19.1	18	Mali	39	0.6
3	Pakistan	536	7.6	19	Algeria	33	0.5
4	Nigeria	449	6.4	20	Saudi Arabia	25	0.4
5	Syria	364	5.2	21	Indonesia	23	0.3
6	Yemen	225	3.2	22	China	17	0.2
7	Somalia	218	3.1	23	Chad	15	0.2
8	Israel	125	1.8	24	United States	15	0.2
9	Libya	121	1.7	25	Bangladesh	13	0.2
10	Sri Lanka	114	1.6	26	Niger	13	0.2
11	Cameroon	99	1.4	27	Iran	12	0.2
12	Russia	90	1.3	28	Morocco	11	0.2
13	Turkey	76	1.1	29	Tunisia	11	0.2
14	WB and Gaza	71	1	30	Philippines	10	0.1
15	Egypt	68	1	31	All Others	84	2.09
16	Lebanon	65	0.9		Total	7011	100

\*Source: Analysis is based on the numbers of the Global Terrorism Database (1970–2018).

**Table III:** Name, address, affiliation, and other characteristics of websites used for retrieving Taliban's official materials on their suicide bombings

#	Name (Local)	Name (English)	Address (web)***	Claimed Affiliation	Link with Taliban	Language	Mandate
1	نن اسيا	Nunn Asia	<a href="http://nunn.asia">nunn.asia</a>	IEA	De facto Website	Pashtu	News, Current Events
2	کابل کام	Kabul Com	<a href="http://kabull.com">kabull.com</a>	IEA	De facto Website	Pashtu	News, Current Events
3	شہامت	Shahamat	<a href="http://shahamat1.com">shahamat1.com</a>	IEA*	Official DNS	Pashtu	DNS
4	الهدایہ	Al-Hedayat	<a href="http://alhedayat.com">alhedayat.com</a>	Al-Hedayat Publications	Unknown	Pashtu, Dari, Arabic, Urdu, and English	Publication and disseminating
5	الامارہ اصدار	Al-Emarah Videos	<a href="http://alemarah.org">alemarah.org</a>	IEA	CCA**	Pashtu, Dari, Urdu, Arabic, Uzbek, and English	Disseminating visual materials
6	الامارہ	Al-Emarah	<a href="http://alemaral.org">alemaral.org</a>	IEA	Official Webpage	Pashtu, Dari, Urdu, Arabic, English	News, Current Events
7	الامارہ اردو	Al-Emarah Urdu	<a href="http://alemarahurdu.net">alemarahurdu.net</a>	IEA	CCA	Urdu	News, Current Events
8	تورہ بورہ	Toora Bora	<a href="http://toraboranews.com">toraboranews.com</a>	IEA	Toora Bora Jihadi Front	Pashtu	Jihadi- and war-related news and events
9	الامارہ اسلام	Al-Emarah Islam	<a href="http://alemarahislam.com">alemarahislam.com</a>	IEA	CCA	Pashtu	Promotion of virtue and prevention of vice
10	مجلہ	Mujali [Magazines]	<a href="http://www.mujali.net">www.mujali.net</a>	IEA	CCA	Pashtu, Dari, and Arabic languages	Disseminating only print materials and magazines
12	الامارہ دری	Al-Emarah Dari	<a href="http://alemarahdari.com">alemarahdari.com</a>	IEA	CCA	Dari (Farsi)	News, Current Events
13	الامارہ اردو	Al-Emarah Urdu	<a href="http://alemarahurdu.net">alemarahurdu.net</a>	IEA	CCA	Urdu	News, Current Events
14	الامارہ انگلش	Al-Emarah English	<a href="http://alemarahenglish.com">alemarahenglish.com</a>	IEA	CCA	English	News, Current Events
15	الامارہ عربی	Al-Emarah Arabic	<a href="http://alemaraharabi.com">alemaraharabi.com</a>	IEA	CCA	Arabic	News, Current Events
16	سپین صبا	Speen Sabah	<a href="http://spin-saba.com">spin-saba.com</a>	IEA	Supreme Council	Pashtu and Dari	News, Current Events
17	الامارہ	Al-Emarah	<a href="http://alemaral.org">alemaral.org</a>	IEA	CCA	Pashtu	News, Current Events
18	شہامت	Shahamat	<a href="http://shahamat.info">shahamat.info</a>	IEA	Official Website	Pashtu and Dari	News, Current Events
19	د شریعت غیر	The Voice of Sharia	<a href="http://allfida.org">allfida.org</a>	IEA	Istish-haadi Front	Pashtu, Dari, Urdu, Arabic, and English	Jihadi and Suicide news

\* (after IEA): Islamic Emirates of Afghanistan

\*\* (after CCA): [Taliban] Commission of Cultural Affairs

\*\*\* During the data mining process (March 2016 to April 2019), the author visited these webpages at different times. As discussed in the text, these Jihadi and terrorist webpages are highly unstable. They either migrate and emerge with different URL or simply disappear.