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## The Why's In Suicide Bombings

**February 1, 2008** ·

The BBC is [reporting](#) that the twin suicide bombings that took place in local Baghdadi markets today was carried out by two mentally disabled female suicide bombers.

This is not the first female suicide attack we've seen in Iraq, but I think it may be the deadliest. I'm not sure, we'll have to wait and see till all the numbers are in.

Just the fact that female suicide bombers exist prompts a closer look at militant ideologies, and certainly the militant ideologies in Iraq are sufficiently different from that of Palestinian militants or that of Al-Qaeda.

I'm a little skeptical of the "mentally disabled" claim. It may very well be true, but I think the label might be used very liberally because those on the ground can't understand why any woman in any rational mental capacity would carry out something like this. And yes, I did attribute rationality to suicide attacks. Many studies of suicide bombers (including many failed) have been done and show that these individuals are operating under a very rational mind set, believing that they have more to gain from blowing themselves up rather than resorting to more conventional or less violent methods. They're wrong of course, but the point is they're not actually "lunatics". The payments to their families or hopes of 72 virgins in Paradise also aren't very good explanatory factors, rather its that these individuals honestly believe that what they are doing is helping their cause. This understanding is critical to any discussion of how to fight militants and terrorists.

Two of the big studies I relied on last semester when I wrote a paper on the links between poverty and terrorism, which also provide alternative links, are from Efraim Benmelech and Claude Berrebi and Alan B. Krueger and Jitka Maleckova. You can type those pairs of names into any academic search engine, and should be able to find their work. I just can't find a good link to them.

So, in the meantime, let's just wait and see if the information on these women will become public.

**Categories:** [War on Terror](#)

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