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## **Terrorists Are Made, Not Born**

*By James Legee, September 11, 2012*

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Israel has long lived with their own version of the horror the United States experienced in the September 11 attacks. Operating well outside of the political process, radicals are willing to execute scores of civilians to pursue their own ideological agenda, suicide-attacking nightclubs, public transit, and firing rockets indiscriminately. Where do these radicals come from? How do otherwise ordinary individuals decide to take up the gun or sacrifice their own lives in a suicide attack come to such fringe positions?

The most common—and politically correct—answer is that they're poor ... or uneducated ... or they lack economic opportunity. Some even claim that they're sexually deprived, with no prospect for marriage or a family. Such an outlook fails to account for the poor and uneducated from around the world who do not radicalize. Social scientists, including Claude Berrebi of Rand, Marc Sageman of the Foreign Policy Research Institute, and Alan Krueger of Princeton have found that, to the contrary, the majority of suicide bombers come from middle class backgrounds

and are educated. This does not rule out poverty as a motivating factor, but it is clear that terrorists do not act out of desperation.

What makes people kill innocent civilians? Why are people with prospects willing to kill themselves and others? Simply put, they are exposed to—and adopt—a worldview that places them on the side of the angels: they are defenders of the poor and marginalized or defenders of the faith. This sometimes occurs in school at a young age. It uses a religion or an ideology that justifies attacking civilians to accomplish a goal. Individuals may have their own motivations for seeking out such an ideology: a sense of humiliation, a desire to belong, the wish to correct a perceived wrong. They may not even seek it out, but grow up in a hate-filled environment. But this does not alter the fact that they have taken a worldview that rules out the idea of a peaceful discussion.

What's more is that there is an economic reason for terrorist organizations to recruit the educated and intelligent: they are less likely to fail through incompetence. These are not brainwashed drones, but individuals that believe so firmly in their worldview that they will stop at nothing to see it achieved. This is what makes achieving peace in the Middle East so difficult. Terrorist organizations like Hamas and Hezbollah are impossible to reach precisely because their worldviews proscribe coexistence. A terrorist often sees himself as engaged in an existential struggle with his target. This raises the frightening possibility that so long as Western values like freedom of religion, speech, and equality before the law are rejected the Middle East will see no peace.



About the author

## James Legee

James is a recent graduate of Villanova University's Master of Political Science program, where he split his energies between studying American political thought and politics and international relations. Professionally, he is a freelance writer/blogger and has worked for the last four years in civic education, trying to convey the importance of good citizenship to students from around the United States. James views the existence of a strong Israel as wholly necessary to the stability and spread of liberal democracy in the Middle East; he holds a special affinity for Israel because of the values shared between her and America. When not studying politics, writing, or teaching, he enjoys backpacking, cooking, and bad action films.

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