

Bali bombed, 26 dead, two fugitives suspected

BEERSHEBA, Israel — A bomb strapped to his abdomen, Rafat Moqadi walked into a Tel Aviv restaurant and saw a woman dining with her two little girls.

"Seeing that, I decided not to carry out the operation. I couldn't do it," he said.

Yet, Moqadi said he longed for what he believes awaits a suicide bomber in the hereafter — God's reward and a special place in heaven for martyrs.

"He has a life in paradise," he said. "He doesn't die."

A rare jailhouse interview with the would-be suicide bomber revealed a common thread running through the rising worldwide phenomenon — most attackers are driven not by poverty or ignorance, but by a lethal mix of nationalism, zealotry and humiliation.

As the pace of attacks increases in the Middle East and beyond, a surprising profile is emerging of those willing to take their own lives; many are young, middle class and educated.

Nearly four-fifths of all suicide attacks over the past 35 years have occurred since the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist strikes, according to the RAND Center for Terrorism Risk Management. And 80 percent of those have been carried out by radical Islamic groups, said the center's director, Bruce Hoffman.

But religion is only part of the picture. Moqadi said that wasn't his motivation.

"The main reason was to resist the (Israeli) occupation, to create a balance of power with the Israeli army," he said.

"At the moment they put the (explosives) belt on me there were a few seconds of doubt," he said. "But after that I felt strength. I felt stronger than the whole state of Israel. It was a good feeling."

Moqadi, who is serving a 14-year sentence in the southern Israeli city of Beersheba, said he graduated high school and worked with his brothers laying tile before joining the Hamas militant group in 2002. The soft-spoken 26-year-old with neatly cropped hair said he did so in response to massive gun battles between Israeli forces and Palestinians in Jenin.

Now, Moqadi spends most of his time in jail learning to speak, read and write Hebrew, the language of the Jewish state. Islam, he said, teaches that it's important to "know your enemy."

Moqadi is not alone in having doubts before pressing the button, said Ariel Merari, an Israeli psychologist who has interviewed numerous would-be bombers.

"A person who volunteers usually hesitates. He has second thoughts," Merari said.

Often what makes the person carry out the mission is commitment to a group, making it difficult to back out without losing face, experts say. Many of today's suicide bombers, especially in Iraq and the Palestinian territories, come from societies where many people condone the action, making it easier to execute.

"Usually there are rites and rituals just before launching that constitute the last nail in the coffin," Merari said.

For Palestinian attackers, the last ritual is usually the making of a videotape in which the bomber proclaims commitment to national liberation. In Sri Lanka, when suicide bombings were prevalent, it was often a final dinner with rebel leader Velupillai Prabhakaran.

Since the early 1980s, three countries have accounted for the vast majority of suicide bombings: Iraq, Israel and Sri Lanka. Iraq has become the global leader in suicide attacks, with an average of two per day dur-

ing the past six months, attracting jihadists from all over the world, said Merari, who studies the issue at Tel Aviv University.

The conflicts in Israel and Iraq provide a fertile battlefield for suicide bombers, just as the conflict in Lebanon did during the 1980s and the one in Sri Lanka did from 1987 to 2002.

Hoffman attributes the sharp upturn in suicide bombings to their success in achieving the attackers' goal. His studies reveal that suicide strikes around the world kill four times as many people as other kinds of terrorism.

On Thursday alone, three exploding suicide car bombs nearly killed at least 60 people simultaneously in a city north of Baghdad.

In Afghanistan, another post-Sept. 11 war front, a man launched a rare suicide attack in that country Wednesday outside a military training center in Kabul, killing nine people and breaking 10 days of relative calm after landmark parliamentary elections. The bombing, the worst to hit Kabul in a year, added to fears insurgents could copy tactics used in Iraq.

Recent studies have debunked some common misperceptions about suicide bombers that most are poor, that they're in it for personal revenge or that they're crazy and uneducated.

"He wasn't short of money," said Bilal Ardo, whose 16-year-old son Hussam was arrested in March 2004 at a West Bank checkpoint with an explosives belt strapped to his body. "I have a supermarket, and his pockets were never empty."

Many suicide bombers have come from middle class families and have attended a university. But most were "relatively unimportant people, not leader types but follower types," Merari said.

Most have been men, but in places like Sri Lanka and Chechnya, up to

40 percent have been women, he said. Most were in their late teens or early 20s but some, including many of the 9/11 bombers, were older. Almost all have been single and childless.

Some bombers do seek revenge, such as Hanadi Jaradat, 27, who blew up herself and 19 others at a restaurant in northern Israel in 2003 after seeing her brother die at the hands of Israeli troops. But most thwarted bombers say their motivation was nationalist, not personal.

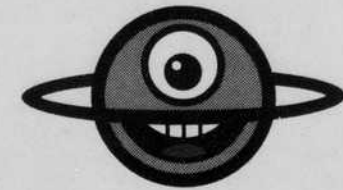
A letter appearing this week in the journal *Nature* noted that many of today's Islamic radicals — especially those operating in London or Madrid — have no clear political goals but in-

stead act "to oppose a perceived global evil." The letter, by researchers Scott Atran and Jessica Stern, said many potential suicide bombers in the West feel marginalized from society, and "small groups bond as they surf jihadi websites to find direction and purpose."

Abdel Haleem Izzedin, an Islamic Jihad leader in the West Bank town of Jenin, said Palestinian candidates for suicide bombings are "normal people" who "believe that Israel is occupying and confiscating their land and want to fight back."

Bombers in places like Madrid and London, he said, were "unusual" and "extreme."

—The Associated Press



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Officials suspect two fugitives with ties to the al-Qaida-linked Jemaah Islamiyah terror group in Saturday's Bali bombings that killed 26 people.

Major terror attacks in Indonesia

Recent attacks the Jemaah Islamiyah terror group are accused of

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| Aug. 1, 2000 A bomb killed two people and seriously injured the Philippine ambassador to Indonesia. | Sept. 13 A car bomb exploded inside the Jakarta Stock Exchange garage, killing 10 people. | Oct. 12, 2002 Two near simultaneous bombs exploded in a nightclub district of Bali, killing 202 people. | Aug. 5, 2003 A car bomb in front of the J.W. Marriott Hotel in Jakarta killed 12 people. | May 28, 2005 Two bombs exploded in a market in Tentena, killing 22 people. |
| Dec. 25 Bombs exploded at 11 churches on Christmas Eve, killing 19 people. | Dec. 5 A bomb exploded outside a McDonald's restaurant on Sulawesi Island, killing three people. | Sept. 9, 2004 A suicide car bomb exploded outside the Australian Embassy in Jakarta, killing 11 people. | Oct. 1 Bombs ripped through three resort restaurants in Bali, killing 26 people. | |

SOURCE: AP research

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