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Monday, Mar 10, 2003

# Nation

Posted on Thu, Mar. 06, 2003

## Researchers study suicide attacks

By MATT KELLEY  
Associated Press

**WASHINGTON** - Suicide terrorists may be lured by ideology, religion and promises of help for their families, but the groups that recruit, equip and direct them get the most benefit from their actions, a University of Michigan researcher says.

Stopping suicide attacks "may require finding the right mix of pressure and inducements to get the communities themselves to abandon support for institutions that recruit suicide attackers," researcher Scott Atran writes in Friday's edition of the journal Science.

Other experts who reviewed Atran's analysis said his view is well accepted among terrorism researchers, even if it goes against the conventional wisdom that attackers like the Sept. 11 hijackers are zealots.

Most of the Sept. 11 attackers were well-educated men from relatively prosperous families, and the same can be said of many of the Palestinian suicide bombers in Israel and Tamil suicide attackers in Sri Lanka, said terrorism expert Bruce Hoffman.

"Suicide bombing is an instrument of warfare. That's how to understand it," said Hoffman, an analyst with the independent RAND Corp. think tank.

"It's a strategy that's effective because it conveys the image of a crazy, irrational adversary - if I'm up against an irrational, fanatical adversary, what can I do?"

Leaders of terrorist groups deliberately manipulate their followers' religious beliefs and feelings of being politically powerless, oppressed or humiliated, Atran writes, just as fast-food companies manipulate people's cravings for fatty foods.

"For the sponsoring organization, suicide bombers are expendable assets whose losses generate more assets by expanding public support and pools of potential recruits," Atran writes in a review of articles published on the issue.

Targeting those terrorist groups is the most effective short-term tactic against suicide attacks, said Gideon Rose, a terrorism expert with the Council on Foreign Relations.

"The real target of your efforts is not the individual people who could be turned into suicide bombers, but the agents who run the suicide bombers and choose to deploy these guided missiles, as it were," said Rose, a former staffer on former President Clinton's National Security Council.

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