



The Myth of Martyrdom: What Really Drives Suicide Bombers, Rampage Shooters, and Other Self-Destructive Killers

By Adam Lankford

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For decades, experts have told us that suicide bombers are the psychological equivalent of America's Navy SEALs--men and women so fully committed to their cause or faith that they cease to fear death. In *The Myth of Martyrdom*, Adam Lankford corrects this misconception, arguing that terrorists are driven to suicide for the same reasons any civilian might be: depression, anxiety, marital strife, or professional failure. He takes readers on a journey through the minds of suicide bombers, airplane hijackers, 'lone wolf' terrorists, and rampage shooters, via their suicide notes, love letters, diary entries, and martyrdom videos. The result is an astonishing account of rage and shame that will transform the way we think of terrorism forever. Lankford convincingly demonstrates that only by understanding the psychological crises that precipitate these acts can we ever hope to stop them.

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Editorial Review

Review

"A lively, insightful, and evidence-based analysis of the most disruptive phenomenon in world affairs today. Adam Lankford challenges the conventional wisdom about suicide terrorism in a way that respects the facts, resolves the paradox (with profound implications for many other issues), and not least, de-romanticizes this loathsome practice." --**Steven Pinker, Harvard College Professor of Psychology, Harvard University, and author of *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined***

"A coherent, must read for all who would claim to be experts in terrorism--or just curious. Dr. Lankford's analytic rigor and willingness to examine assumptions make this a textbook example of how to do research and analysis...As Keynes once wrote: 'When someone persuades me I am wrong, I change my mind.' What will you do?" --**Jim Simon, former Asst. Director of Central Intelligence for Administration, Office of the Director of Central Intelligence, and Chair, Homeland Security Intelligence Council**

"At last an insightful book about martyrdom and suicide bombers. Too many so-called experts have dominated the stage without ever examining the life of a suicide bomber. Lankford, in a thorough and in-depth study, has identified the trauma, chronic depression and suicidal behavior that characterize their lives. This is a fascinating book with profound implications." --**David Lester, former president of the International Association for Suicide Prevention**

"Lankford demonstrates that suicide-murderers who call themselves martyrs are actually suicidal. Like many important ideas, this one seems utterly obvious once someone presents the overwhelming evidence and makes the compelling argument. As Lankford shows, terrorists are motivated by a lot more than the ideologies they espouse...A critically important contribution to the literature and, one hopes, to our counter-terrorism." --**Jessica Stern, former Director of Russian Affairs, National Security Council, and author of *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill***

"More than a decade after the 9/11 attack, scholars and commentators are still offering alternative explanations as to why the plotters were willing to commit suicide...In a must-read book for those interested in these issues...[Lankford] provides a benchmark that others will have to consider as they seek to reach their own conclusions." --**Donald Daniel, security studies professor, Georgetown University, and former Special Adviser to the Chairman, National Intelligence Council**

"Are suicide bombers psychologically normal? Many psychologists, including experts 'diagnosing' the hijackers responsible for the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks, view them as just that, albeit exercised by a powerful sense of justice. Adam Lankford begs to differ. Self-destructive killers, he says, are already primed for suicide — so depressed, addicted or brutalized that it is relatively easy to tip them over the edge. A criminal-justice specialist, Lankford presents compelling, well-synthesized evidence for his case."--*Nature*

"Lankford builds an impressive case ... If the courage assumed of suicide terrorism is its most powerful weapon, we can disarm this threat by denying its practitioners the myth of martyrdom."—*Scientific American*

"A fierce attack on the view that suicide terrorists are true martyrs to a cause, worthy of respect or honor because of their commitment."--*Kirkus Reviews*

About the Author

Adam Lankford is a criminal justice professor at The University of Alabama. He has written for *The New York Times*, *Foreign Policy*, *Wired*, *The Daily Beast*, *The Huffington Post*, and numerous peer-reviewed journals. His research has been featured by CNN, MSNBC, NPR, BBC World Radio, CBS Radio, *The Boston Globe*, and many other national and international outlets. From 2003 to 2008, Lankford helped coordinate anti-terrorism efforts in conjunction with the U.S. State Department's Anti-Terrorism Assistance program. He lives in Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

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