

DEAD CENTRE

Not Every Suicide Bomber is Religious!

By

Owen Jones

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By Owen Jones

Published by Megan Publishing Services
at XinXii

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ISBN-13: 9783957032928

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DEDICATION

This edition is dedicated to my wife, Pranom Jones, for making my
life as easy as she can - she does a great job of it.
Karma will repay everyone in just kind.

INSPIRATIONAL QUOTES

Believe not in anything simply because you have heard it,
Believe not in anything simply because it was spoken and
rumoured by many,
Believe not in anything simply because it was found written in
your religious texts,
Believe not in anything merely on the authority of teachers

and elders,

Believe not in traditions because they have been handed down for generations,

But after observation and analysis, if anything agrees with reason and is conducive to the good and benefit of one and all, accept it and live up to it.

Gautama Buddha

Great Spirit, whose voice is on the wind, hear me. Let me grow in strength and knowledge.

Make me ever behold the red and purple sunset. May my hands respect the things you have given me.

Teach me the secrets hidden under every leaf and stone, as you have taught people for ages past.

Let me use my strength, not to be greater than my brother, but to fight my greatest enemy – myself.

Let me always come before you with clean hands and an open heart, that as my Earthly span fades like the sunset, my Spirit shall return to you without shame.

(Based on a traditional Sioux prayer)

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to express my thanks to my brother, Rhys Jones, for his helpful advice and suggestions and my author friend, Lord David Prosser for his thoughts on the cover and encouragement.

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1 SCHEHERAZADE'S BAGHDAD

Tony was terrified, but he knew that it was his only option. He also knew that in a few minutes' time, there would be hundreds far more terrified than he was right now.

He had his schedule and it was memorised to the second. He could even see the big clock on the wall that he had to work to. He watched the seconds tick down and took deep breaths to calm himself, it was not a particularly hot day, but he was perspiring profusely, so he took his handkerchief from his inside jacket pocket and stopped at a mirror to dab at his face.

He was beginning to calm down, the Valium was working. He had not thought that it would be this easy. He had a hundred metres further to walk and fifteen minutes to do it in. He dawdled, looking at the clothes along the way, and wondered, none of it would matter soon, and he wondered whether it ever should have. Shirts, trousers, suits, men's perfumery. He touched some of them, as you might a flower. Up the escalator to ladies' wear and along the aisles heading for the jewellery department. He knew the way, he had walked the route dozens of times.

Two minutes to go and he felt his heart pick up speed. Wait a few more seconds, don't get too close to the display cabinets, he had been told. In fact, he had been given a line not to cross, and lo and behold, there it was a metre before him. He stood on his mark, the point where two sections of the aisle carpet joined, and pretended to be reading an advertisement

Fifteen seconds to go. He looked around himself, a deep sadness in his eyes.

Ten seconds, he caught a sales assistant's eye and she started to walk towards him, he tried to will her away.

Five seconds, she was speaking to him, but he was not listening.

Four, three, two, one...

Zero.

Boom.

She never heard him say sorry, but then neither she nor Tony existed in this world any longer.

After the deafening explosion, there was complete silence for

several seconds and then the screaming started. People were screaming, crying and running for their lives, those who were still able to anyway. There were people and bits of people lying all around and smoke from several fires.

Smoke and cries of agony and smells of fear and Semtex and spatters of Tony and the nice female sales assistant all over the ceiling and clothes and shoppers. The department store's alarm started and so did the sprinkler system seconds later.

Men in black raced in from the emergency staircase, but they were there to help themselves, not the wounded, and they carried machine guns, not medical bags, not that there was any resistance.

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The next day, the newspapers reported that at least thirty people had been killed and one hundred and fifty injured in the suicide bombing of a large department store in the centre of Baghdad.

Nothing more was to be read in the papers or to be seen on television, but the insurance world was abuzz about the jewellery heist from the store and so were the world's main intelligence agencies.

Ten and a half million dollars worth of goods had been stolen in the confusion and there were no clues as to the perpetrators. They had Tony on CCTV, but he was also dead. They saw that happen too, but then the camera stopped working. They put the losses down to 'looters, who probably included the security staff and the clean-up personnel' and left it at that.

It was not unheard of for security and clean-up staff to steal items of value that they found while in the process of carrying out their grizzly work. It was a perk and nobody really minded if the wealthy Western insurance companies were defrauded anyway, and if there was a clause against acts of war and terrorism, then some other rich people would foot the bill and that didn't matter to a bobby on the beat either.

Sympathy was reserved wholly for the dead, the maimed and their relatives, not the store owners.

The two most noticeable things about the suicide bombing of

Scheherazade's department store were the misery that it caused to mostly local people and the overtime it gave them cleaning the place up, making it safe again and reopening it.

The damage it had caused to the shoppers and staff had been horrific, but the actual damage to the building itself had been negligible, because the walls around the jewellery department had recently been clad with slabs of marble and they had stood up well to the blast from the bomb, which had been designed to kill and to maim, but not to cause structural damage.

The six-millimetre-diameter shot that had surrounded the explosives had been heavy enough to wreck people and display cabinets of toughened glass, but not bring down walls or ceilings. However, not many people were aware of that, and neither had Tony been.

The inquiry into the blast began immediately that afternoon when the store's security staff handed their cameras' recordings to the police so that they could start trying to track down those responsible.

The surveillance cameras were mounted on very obvious 'glitter globes', six on each, hanging from the ceilings at such points around the store, that every aspect was covered by a camera. Not all of the cameras were recording all of the time, but each one came 'on' for ten seconds before focus was switched to the next camera lens. The globes had been installed and the switching so set up, that almost every location in the store was under observation all of the time, albeit from different angles and from different focal points.

The Federal Police officers ran the recording sequence back from the detonation, so that they had an image of the bomber and then searched for his entry into the store. When they had found him entering the store, it was easy enough to track his movements. Every officer agreed that, in hindsight, it was easy to see that he had something to hide by his demeanour, if not by his clothing. He certainly had not looked 'padded out'.

Six officers watched the footage on both a large screen and a smaller one, because the large screen produced a pixellated image, although individual frames could be corrected to a large extent by software made for the purpose.

They watched Tony, although they did not know his name, for the almost twenty minutes he was in the department store at normal

speed and then they watched the footage in slow motion.

Several times.

They watched, and spent all night watching, the film, over and over again, while scenes of crime forensic experts and other police and army officers inspected the gruesome aftermath.

At daybreak, fourteen hours later, they had to stop, and reluctantly went home for some rest. The night shift took over, but on overtime until the day shift could get back in five hours later. They watched the footage over and over again and made notes, which they could share with their colleagues.

One point that everyone on both shifts agreed on, was that it was obvious that the bomber was nervous and the chief officer of the night shift wrote a memorandum to include parts of the film in a training video for store security staff on how to spot people acting suspiciously. However, for the rest they were stumped.

When the day shift took over again, they sat with a coffee and played the film again in slow motion.

“Sir, stop it there! Rewind it a few seconds, please, now, one frame at a time and get ready to freeze it when I say so,” said a young female Federal Police officer. “I think I saw something... See there? The perp just mopped his brow, and look! There is brown on his handkerchief! It was either very dusty yesterday, or... I think our man is wearing make-up, stage make-up. We, or I at least, have assumed that he is from the Middle East, but now I am not sure. Look, his forehead is a little whiter now... patchy. Go back and play that sequence again, sir, if you please. See what I mean?”

“Could he be European?”

They ran and re-ran that part of the footage over and over again.

“Suzette, you might just have something there,” said the commanding officer, Federal Police Captain Ali Allawi, what do you guys think?”

Most agreed, some reluctantly.

“So, our bomber might not be Arab or even from these parts at all. I did notice that he did not shout ‘Allahu Akbar!’ at detonation.”

“Can you give us a clear close-up of his face?”

The female IT expert twiddled some knobs and moved a few virtual sliders in order to enhance the image until it was the best she could produce.

“Sir.”

“Throw it up on both screens and print off a dozen hi-res copies, please.”

The officers inspected the screens and the print-outs in minute detail.

“Can you manipulate this image, Lieutenant? Try removing those heavy eyebrows... and the moustache, and lighten his skin, especially around the eyes. That’s it, a bit paler, north European. Yes...”

“Good. Now give him brown hair instead of black, yes, that’s it. He could be European or of European descent, but it’s only a long shot... a very long shot... Has Scenes of Crime found any bits of him that we could use for ID?”

“No, sir, not yet. Not that I am aware of. The blast took out the nearest pod of cameras and the flash from the explosion over-exposed images from other cameras near-by, so we don’t know where any of him flew off to, sir.”

“OK, give someone at forensics a call and check.”

“Sir! Will do right away, sir! When I called fifteen minutes ago they said that there is massive carnage and anything could belong to anyone within twenty metres of the bomber. They said that it is hard to impossible to check for any DNA matches on the walls and the ceiling because of smoke damage. Pollution, sir.”

“All right, lieutenant. Keep in touch with them and let me know the minute anything happens – day or night, on shift or not, understand?”

“Yes, sir.”

“OK, guys, for the rest of this shift, we will work on the assumption that the bomber was a white European or American. I will put that in our shift log, but for the time being, it is only speculation, all right? It does not, and I repeat most strongly, it definitely does not, rule out the possibility that he was an Arab terrorist, who committed this atrocity for political or religious motives.

“Who knows what is running through the mind of someone who is on the verge of meeting Allah and taking innocent people with him? Perhaps he just forgot to say ‘Allahu Akbar’. Perhaps he hadn’t seen the need to wash his face that morning, in the circumstances... Do not allow your minds to close off any possibility. I am only saying that for the rest of this shift, we will run with Suzette’s idea that he might be European, or American, let’s say Caucasian, and see where it

takes us. There is absolutely no historical evidence relating to Caucasian suicide bombers.

“White people bomb things, yes, and blow other people up, yes, but they don’t normally kill themselves in the process, at least, not on purpose.

“Our man here is on a mission and he is going to die. If he is Caucasian, then we are dealing with a new breed of suicide bomber, a type no-one has ever met before.

“Question. How many Caucasians were at the scene of the crime at the time of the blast? Someone find out.

“Let’s see how many unclaimed teeth we can find, and bits of bone. Get them all off for DNA testing. Let’s see whether we have any unattributable body parts of Caucasian origin.”

“Forensics are not going to be happy about that, sir. It’ll take them weeks, if not months.”

“Who cares what they think. It can’t be helped, we could be on the brink of something new here. A new terrorist organisation or a new splinter group, although I must say that if that is true, why would a Caucasian blow himself up in an Iraqi department store?

“It doesn’t make sense! Christians just don’t do that sort of thing simply to prove a point.

“Has any group claimed responsibility yet?”

“No, sir. Nothing at all from any of the usual sources.”

“Have you phoned our sources and asked them?”

“That is being done as we speak, sir, and individual officers are asking their snouts too, but nothing whatsoever... leastwise, not yet.”

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The men in black ransacked the jewellery display cabinets, most of which had been damaged in the blast and would not resist even a kick, others were machine gunned. The eight combatants took everything they could find in the eight minutes that they had allowed themselves.

A guard on the stairs landing dropped flash grenades down the stairwell at irregular intervals to deter people from coming up or down and the lifts and escalators were disabled.

They had not had to hurt any more people, but they were prepared to do so, if it were necessary. Since they were only on the second floor, it was not a problem to shoot out one of the large windows and abseil down into the two large open-topped, high-sided trucks that were waiting in the alley below.

The trucks left in opposing directions, so that there was less chance of them both being apprehended. However, they were heavily armed and there were rocket launchers waiting in each vehicle. They got away safely without incident and transferred to non-descript commercial vans with souped-up engines shortly after leaving Scheherazade's.

All of the attackers, except Tony, were safely in their hide-out – their boss' villa – within an hour of the atrocity.

“So, Mustapha, everything went according to plan?”

“Yes, sir. We have the merchandise and without conflict of any kind or loss of life on our part.

“Your plan worked totally effectively, sir.”

“Yes, it was foolproof because it was simple. I watched everything up to the point of the explosion from the subject's camera on that monitor and then I watched your operation from the footage relayed by your helmet camera too. I saw the whole thing. More than you did. The footage from your camera was a bit patchy though, perhaps because of the speed you were operating at, I suppose.”

Mustapha did not want to contradict his powerful boss, so just let it ride.

“Probably, sir,” he said, thinking that that was the least likely cause of the interference, but not knowing for certain what it could have been, unless it was due to the electrical shorting of the overhead surveillance cameras, as he suspected.

“You and your team have done well, Mustapha and I shall not forget it. Please convey my pleasure to your squad and be assured that I have given orders for the usual celebrations after a successful mission. You have all deserved it.”

“Thank you, sir, I shall tell the men.”

“That is all for now, Mustapha, get some rest and then enjoy life.”

“Yes, sir.” Mustapha saluted his boss and left the room.

When he had left, ‘The Boss’ picked up his cell phone and typed in a series of numbers.

“Our team won! Let's hope that they win the league as well.”

“Good, that is my desire also. When is the next game?”

“I am not certain of the fixture yet, but I think in a few weeks, but it will be an away game. Perhaps in your vicinity. Will you be able to put us up if we go?”

“Yes, I think I can arrange that. Just send me the details of when and how many will arrive and it will be taken care of.”

“Good. Then I can assume that you will pass on the good news to our friends?”

“Oh, certainly! Everyone likes to be the bearer of good tidings. I hope to see you soon.”

“You will, I am sure and I hope the same. Goodbye for now.”

∞

“Hello, yes. Are you happy with the results, sir?”

“Yes, everything went perfectly, according to plan. I am most happy with your service.”

“Good, I am happy to hear it. So, I can expect you to fulfil your obligation soon?”

“Yes, it has already been arranged. Your company should receive delivery from mine within thirty minutes. If it does not, please do not hesitate to contact me within the hour and I will sort it out immediately.

“Will the service be available again?”

“Yes, of course.”

“At the same notice?”

“I cannot guarantee anything without more details from you and completion of this contract, naturally.”

“Yes, of course, I understand. Well, I am more that satisfied with your services. Everything has been arranged, so please expect another order from us soon.”

“As you say, so shall it be done. I am glad that you have had satisfaction from our company.”

Then the line went dead and he got onto his secretary immediately to ensure that the payment from Switzerland was indeed being made.

He did not want any cock-ups with this supplier.

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A Swiss bank silently moved \$1,500,000 one way and \$500,000 in another.

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“That was another successful operation, Bob.”

“Yes, sir, so it seems.”

“There is no need to still call me ‘sir’, Bob, those days are long gone and I have asked you to call me Gareg numerous times.”

“Yes, sir, you have. Sorry, but old habits die hard. Sorry, sir, Gareg.”

“Jesus, Bob, ‘Sir Gareg’ is even worse!” he said jokingly.

“Yes, er, Gareg, I’ll get used to it one day, I suppose.”

“I hope so. Try to relax a bit more, we’re not in the army any longer and haven’t been for ages. Five for you and ten for me, I think, or not?”

“Yes, s... er, Gareg. I left four years ago and will always be grateful that you looked me up and took me on. I was so worried that I’d end up on the scrapheap, like so many old soldiers.”

“Yes, well, I wasn’t going to let that happen, after all we’ve been through together, was I?”

“Well, sir, I mean, er, Gareg, you have turned my life around and there is no mistake about that. Me and the missus were worried about what I would do when I retired from the forces, but here I am earning three times more with you than before, and I’ve still got my pension. I just wish that poor old Jenny was here to see the benefit. Still, I am indebted to you and always will be.”

“Enough of all that now, let’s open a bottle of scotch to another mission well done or would you rather go into town and sink a few pints?”

“Up to you, sir, either way suits me.”

“OK, let’s have a change and go into town. See who’s about. We

can always come back if it's quiet.”

“Right you are, I'll bring the car around. The Merc or the Bentley?”

“Oh, I think the Bentley tonight. If we drink too much, you know how much it impresses the police. We may even get lucky, you never know.”

As they left the farm in high spirits, a doctor from Birmingham, Alabama, was trying to get through, but they were on a mission again and didn't care.

They never did. In their line of business there was no competition and customers always got back to them, because the rate of return on investment was as high as people's ideas.

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The money that had changed hands filtered down as did the compensation for the victims of the blast and the overtime money for the police, builders and hospital staff.

Although there were a lot of people grieving, there was also a large injection of capital into the micro-economies of several local communities both in the Scheherazade department store area and other places around the world.

There were no really poor people killed in the blast, although a lot of the sales assistants were related to poor families, and all the wealthy shoppers, and the workers were insured, as was the owner.

Many people made a lot of money from the atrocity, and insurance premiums were flagged to rise the following year to compensate, but that was never made public either.

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