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Trends. Husbands, Wives, and Terrorism: The Validity of Beliefs and the Threat of Interpretive Strategies

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Abstract: This article discusses threat assessment via linguistic analysis.

People as personnel with power within organizations may harbor beliefs about what supports personnel security or what constitutes an external person threat to the organization that may have little if any foundation beyond the fact that the beliefs are believed. Beliefs as believed are believed to have an obvious and intrinsic validity and may be notoriously resistant to change even from significantly disconfirming information. And even if these beliefs retained appropriate validity, there is a multitude of interpretive strategies that would always threaten it.

A case in point involves the causal attributions and related social cognitions of the wife of an Egyptian immigrant-the latter having murdered two people on July 4, 2002 at Los Angeles International Airport and being fatally shot in the process that has been typed by many as at least a partial example of politically motivated violence. (This and the following quotes taken from MacFarquhar, 2002).

"There is no motive that would make him do such a thing." Perhaps this statement is just the protective response of a wife for a husband. On the other hand, the statement also subverts the notion of motivation by suggesting that an individual would kill for no reason-a state of affairs that might subvert the whole notion of personnel security.

"He is a quiet person who lived his life in peace." This statement suggests that a pacific behavioral style may be an indicator of continued pacific style. The statement also seems to be founded on the notions that still waters do not run deep and that past behavior is the best indicator of present and future behavior irrespective of intrapsychic and external-e.g., social, historical, economic, phenomena.

"He carried no hatred for anyone, and he was never aggressive nor violent, never." Again, we may have the protective response of the wife. However, hatred may have little to do with violence in that hatred can instill resistance to a target's violent demise so that the latter can continue to suffer exquisite existential anguish that would be ended through death.

"The day of [the shootings], he talked to us, his voice was quiet as usual. He asked about the kids and said please make them study so that they do not forget their English when they return. He had plans for the future so how could he do such a thing." Although there is some face validity to the notion that an individual intent on committing a suicidal act will not be concerned with the future, there is much to counter this validity. The self-report of individuals who have sincerely attempted to commit suicide but have failed suggests that the future is a salient topic including the fate of loved ones and associates, as well as how the violent act will be interpreted.

This example is but one of many that illustrates the seemingly hopeless task of validating indicators that necessarily are related to so many interpretive strategies on the part of the person as a potential threat; the person's family, colleagues, and associates; and personnel security and security authorities. (See

International Bulletin of Political Psychology

Larsen, R.C. (1998). Inappropriate workplace aggression: Case examples. *Psychiatric Annals*, 28, 253-258; MacFarquhar, N. (July 9, 2002). Wife can't explain fatal shootings at airport. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Richards, R.N. (1997). Nonviolent factors: Variables associated with ethnic violence, and factors which are associated with nonviolent response to grievances toward members of other ethnic groups; Webster, C.D., Harris, G.T., Rice, M.E., Cormier, C., & Quinsey, V.L. (1994). The violence prediction scheme: Assessing dangerousness in high-risk men. University of Toronto Centre of Criminology.) (Keywords: Linguistic Analysis, Security, Threat Interpretation.)