

3-14-2003

# Trends. A Casualty of War: Suicide as a Response to an American-Led Invasion of Iraq

Editor

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## Recommended Citation

Editor (2003) "Trends. A Casualty of War: Suicide as a Response to an American-Led Invasion of Iraq," *International Bulletin of Political Psychology*: Vol. 14 : Iss. 8 , Article 1.

Available at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol14/iss8/1>

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## International Bulletin of Political Psychology

Title: Trends. A Casualty of War: Suicide as a Response to an American-Led Invasion of Iraq

Author: Editor

Volume: 14

Issue: 8

Date: 2003-03-14

Keywords: Iraq, Suicide, War

Abstract: This Trends article discusses the political psychology of suicide as protest.

A 19 year-old secondary-school student killed himself in Prague, Czechoslovakia on March 6, 2003. His suicide note details a number of rationales including opposition to an "American attack [on] Iraq." Beyond the obvious point that his death will not affect a go/no-go decision to attack Iraq, an analysis of the suicide note yields a number of often-posed hypotheses concerning politically motivated suicide.

First, there is often a vicarious conditioning element. Here, the student cited others--especially others of similar social status and age--who have committed suicide in what he deemed to be political contexts.

Second, there often are other political rationales beyond any one rationale cited as primary. In the suicide note, issues such as the consequences of the Velvet Revolution, the environment and ecology, the military-industrial complex, social problems such as drug addiction, and the power of money were cited by the student.

Third, a utopia lost or never gained is a common theme. Here, the student cited a desire for "the imposition of total democracy" and the political involvement of all citizens and even all humankind as opposed to moneyed interests. As well, computer programming was cited as a vehicle to approach Utopia. Often utopian themes are either ambiguously or painstakingly but unrealistically explicated as is the case in the suicide note. And thus the note supports common denotations of the utopia construct--viz., realities that do not exist, cannot exist, are too good to exist, or are the God but may or may not exist.

Fourth, there usually is some precipitating factor that by itself might not have the robustness to induce suicidal behavior. Initial journalistic analyses of the student's suicide (cf. Zdenek, undated) suggest that he seems to have fallen into association with political radicals and engaged in behaviors that he might not otherwise have engaged in if he could have applied cool and dispassionate contemplation. The upshot constituted police investigation, surveillance, and threat as precipitating nexus.

Fifth, regardless of the political rationales, there are psychological conflicts that are expressed, are acted out, or are serving to impel political mentation and action. Journalistic analyses and comments in the suicide note that a very sheltered upbringing, discomfort and inadequacy in social interaction, and adolescent rage at the world's injustices might have fueled such conflict.

Causing one's own death instead of waiting to die may have legitimate and illegitimate rationales and often may be an object of others' admiration, aversion, or despair. Sadly, the death in question brings us only to the abyss. (See Fernquist, R.M. (2001). Attitudes toward the unification of Western Europe and cross-national suicide rates: Eight European countries, 1973-1990. *Suicide & Life-Threatening Behavior*, 31, 333-341; Pietikainen, P. (2002). Utopianism in psychology: The case of Wilhelm Reich. *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 38, 157-175; Stack, S. (2000). Media impacts on suicide: A quantitative review of 293 findings. *Social Science Quarterly*, 81, 957-971; Zdenek Adamec' suicide note.

**International Bulletin of Political Psychology**

(Undated.). (Trans. M. Hofmeisterova.) The Prague Pill, 27.

<http://prague.tv/pill/article.php?name=adamec.> (Keywords: Iraq, Suicide, War.)