

## ABOUT



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# et Power

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## Terrorist Productivity

I teach Principles of Microeconomics. I've told my students that they will have generally been exposed to most of the stuff that we call "economic thought" by the time they finish the course: people do things because the perceived benefits outweigh the perceived costs. We use this basic idea to analyze any number of situations.

The standard neoclassical treatment consumer theory that one would find in an Intermediate Micro course (indifference curve and budget constraint analysis) looks much the same as the treatment of the theory of the firm choosing how much of two resources to use in production (isoquants and isocost curves). The objectives (maximize net benefits) and logic are similar. Aliens, first exposed to the models, might not be able to tell them apart.

So it is with [terrorism](#) and human capital theory:

In their new study, "Attack Assignments in Terror Organizations and the Productivity of Suicide Bombers," two economists, Efraim Benmelech of [Harvard University](#) and Claude Berrebi of the RAND Corporation, set out to analyze the productivity of terrorists in the same way

## RECOMMENDED READING



[The Invisible Heart](#)  
Russell Roberts  
Best Price \$12.45  
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- EconLog
- Econbrowser
- Greg Mankiw's Blog
- Heavy Lifting
- Houston's Clear Thinkers
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- Kudlow's Money Politic\$
- Macroblog
- Marginal Revolution
- Mish's Global Economic Trend Analysis
- New Economist
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- The Becker-Posner Blog
- The Club For Growth - News & Commentary

they might analyze the auto industry. But they defined the “success” of terrorists by their ability to kill.

They gathered data on Palestinian suicide bombers in Israel from 2000 to 2005 and found that for terrorists, just like for regular workers, experience and education improve productivity. Suicide bombers who are older — in their late 20’s and early 30’s — and better educated are less likely to be caught on their missions and are more likely to kill large numbers of people at bigger, more difficult targets than younger and more poorly educated bombers.

What I'd like to know:

1. What is their major course of study?
2. What are useful "kill skills"?
3. Is it general education (and not skill-specific education) that matters?
4. Does Spence's signalling model apply here?

HT to [Greg Mankiw](#).

Posted by Phil Miller on September 14, 2006 at 10:14 AM in [Economics](#) | [Permalink](#)

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### ECON 416 (SPORTS ECON) LINKS

- Pro sports stadiums don't bolster local economies, scholars say (Interview with Brad Humphreys - 2004)
  - Coates and Humphreys (2004) - Caught Stealing: Debunking the Economic Case for D.C. Baseball
  - Carlson and Carlino (2004) - Should Cities be Ready for Some Football?
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