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## Newsblog

The latest local news from the Union-Tribune's newsroom

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**May 05, 2007**

### UCSD Terrorism Conference

More than 30 experts on terrorism gathered at the University of California San Diego on Friday and Saturday for a conference entitled "Terrorist Organizations: Social Science Research on Terrorism." It was held by the Institute on [Global Conflict and Cooperation](#).

Presenting two papers was French-Israeli scholar Claude Berrebi, who decided to branch into terrorism analysis after the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks while he was working toward a degree in economics at Princeton University.

He and fellow Israeli Efraim Benmelech, an economist at Harvard University, presented a study that concluded "that more educated and older suicide bombers are less likely to fail in their mission, and are more likely to cause increased casualties when they attack."

Berrebi presented a second study with Esteban Klor of Hebrew University in Jerusalem. That study found that a terror attack within three months of an election caused Israeli voters to be more likely to vote for hard-line politicians.

Berrebi, who received his doctorate in 2005, now is at the RAND Corp. think tank.

One of the experts at the conference, UCSD sociologist Gershon Shafir, discussed why terrorism "has acquired the considerable legitimacy that it possesses" in some Islamic societies.

He said a major debate is taking place about the legitimacy of terrorism between Muslim intellectuals advocating holy war and traditional Muslim intellectuals.

Stanford political scientist David Laitin combined with Eli Berman, a UCSD economist who is research director for international security studies at the UC Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation, to present a paper, "Hard Targets: Theory and Evidence on Suicide Attacks."

Laitin said their research found that the more hardened terrorists' targets become, the more likely it is that suicide attacks will occur. He said suicide attacks were more likely to cause major damage than more conventional terror attacks.

That prompted UCSD political scientist David Lake to say that suicide

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**attacks could be called  
"the poor man's smart bomb."**

Posted by David Gaddis Smith May 5, 2007 10:12 AM | [TrackBack](#)

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