



## A Fact Sheet from the Worldwide Incidents Team

National Counterterrorism Center

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### Did you know the first suicide bombing may have occurred in 1881?

On 13 March 1881 (NS)<sup>1</sup>, near the Winter Palace, St. Petersburg, Russia, an assailant threw an improvised explosive device (IED) under the armored carriage of the Tsar where it exploded, killing one bodyguard, injuring the driver, and several civilian bystanders, and damaging the carriage. The assailant was arrested immediately by other guards. While Tsar Alexander II inspected the site of the explosion, a suicide bomber approached and threw another IED at the Tsar's feet where it exploded, fatally wounding the Tsar and critically injuring 20 others. On the same day at 3:30 PM, the Tsar died from his wounds. Members of the People's Will, a Russian revolutionary organization, were arrested, tried and executed for the assassination.



**Tsar Alexander II of Russia and his assassin, Ignacy Hryniewiecki.**

The second bomb severed one of Alexander's legs and shattered the other.<sup>2</sup> He was taken to the nearby Winter Palace where he bled to death. He was alive long enough to receive communion, and for family to be with him in his last moments.<sup>3</sup> At his side were Alexander III and Nicholas II who would become future Tsars. Scarred by what they had witnessed, it is believed they suppressed civil liberties to prevent befalling the same fate. It was later learned that a third assailant was waiting within the crowd and prepared to detonate a bomb had the first two bombings failed.<sup>4</sup>

Some credit this attack as the first recorded suicide bombing in history. There is no definitive evidence, however, that the assassin intended to give up his own life to kill the Tsar.<sup>5</sup> Others point to the book of Judges (16:30) for the first recorded suicide attack on non-combatants, in which Samson intentionally dies with his victims in the collapse of a Philistine temple.

According to MIPT<sup>6</sup>, the first suicide bombing was on 15 December 1981, in Beirut, Lebanon, at the Iraqi Embassy which claimed the life of the Iraq Ambassador to Lebanon. There was a claim by the Army for the Liberation of Kurdistan; and by the Iraqi Liberation Army – General Command; and also by the al Dawa (“The Call”), a Muslim fundamentalist group. However, the 1927 Bath, Michigan suicide bombing is likely to be the first definitive suicide bomber, although depending on the definition used some might argue it was not “terrorism”.

The first female suicide bomber may have been Sana’a Mehadli of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP) who detonated her car bomb on 9 April 1985, in Lebanon, killing two Israeli soldiers and injuring two others. It must be pointed out, however, that her targets were likely considered combatants, which makes her attack insurgency rather than terrorism.

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<sup>1</sup> NS refers to the current dating style we use today, vice the old style dating which would make the date 1 March 1881.

<sup>2</sup> Graham, Stephen. “Tsar of Freedom: The Life and Reign of Alexander II,” Yale University Press, New Haven. 1935.

<sup>3</sup> Radzinsky, Edvard. “Alexander II: The Last Great Tsar,” Freepress 2005, p. 413

<sup>4</sup> “Alexander II of Russia”, Wikipedia.com, 12 Dec. 2007

<sup>5</sup> Hoffman, Bruce. “Inside Terrorism” Columbia University Press, New York. 1998, pp 17-19.

<sup>6</sup> The Oklahoma City National Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism (MIPT), [www.mipt.org](http://www.mipt.org)