

Suicide bombers of Sri Lanka

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Abstract

The phenomena of suicide bombers in Sri Lanka share some similarities with but also have some marked differences with what is seen in other parts of world today. Increasing discrimination, state humiliation and violence against the minority Tamils brought out a militancy and the phenomena of suicide bombers. The underlying socio-political and economical factors in the North and East of Sri Lanka that caused the militancy at the onset are examined. Some of these factors that were the cause of or consequent to the conflict include: extrajudicial killing of one or both parents or relations by the state; separations, destruction of home and belongings during the war; displacement; lack of adequate or nutritious food; ill health; economic difficulties; lack of access to education; not seeing any avenues for future employment and advancement; social and political oppression; and facing harassment, detention and death. At the same time, the Tamil militants have used various psychological methods to entice youth, children and women to join and become suicide bombers. Public displays of war paraphernalia, posters of fallen heroes, speeches and video, particularly in schools and community gatherings, heroic songs and stories, public funeral rites and annual remembrance ceremonies draw out feelings of patriotism and create a martyr cult. The religio-cultural context of the Tamils has provided meaning and symbols for the creation and maintenance of this cult, while the LTTE has provided the organisational capacity to train and indoctrinate a special elite as suicide bombers. Whether the crushing of the LTTE militarily by the state brings to an end the phenomena of suicide bombers or whether it will re-emerge in other forms if underlying grievances are not resolved remains to be seen.

Author keywords

Altruistic suicide; Ethnic conflict; Insurgency; Sacrifice; Sri Lanka; Suicide bombers

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