

# Attitudes Toward Political Violence: Suicide Bombing

Now I want to talk about suicide bombing. Now, suicide bombing has been used in modern times by a number of folks. The Tamil Tigers, actually, are the primary group that suicide bombing used to be associated with. They were fighting against overwhelming forces, and they embraced suicide bombing. And they're a good example of how religion can come in handy. The Tamil Tigers were basically Marxist. Some people would say Trotskyites. They weren't particularly believers, but, Hindu background, you want to mobilize Tamils who are Hindu, so then you appeal in your rhetoric to religion.

Then we see suicide bombing occurring in Palestine and Israel. Now, in the fight between Israeli military and, let's say, the PLO as well as Hamas, in general, that struggle followed what we might call ordinary rules of the game. But at a certain point, the Palestinians, in particular Hamas, began to use suicide bombing. Using it and legitimating it as a weapon of last resort. What they meant by this was that faced with the overwhelming power of the Israeli military, and not having the same kind of weapons to resist-- remember there were all kinds of embargoes on the Palestinians. Not only embargoes imposed by Israel, but also by Western powers, so that they could not get weapons to fight and resist. That, therefore, suicide bombing became a weapon of last resort. And what that really meant was the belief that suicide bombers were turning themselves into an effective weapon.

Now, remember with suicide bombing the point is not how many people do you take out. That's not the effectiveness that one is looking for. Because terrorism is about terrorizing. Terrorists want to terrorize a population so that that population feels threatened and will then put pressure on its government to back off. To leave and not occupy, to change its policies. So that was the purpose of the suicide bombing. So it wasn't how many Israelis can we kill in overwhelming numbers. It was to what extent can you terrorize the population. And therefore you're not only going to be using them against the military, but you're going to be using them in the heart of the city so that one doesn't know when that bombing will occur. And it's a way of showing just how vulnerable you are.

Watch Afghanistan today and how often the Taliban are not only engaging troops in outlying areas, but they will engage in acts of terrorism in the very heart of Kabul, the capital. Basically saying that all that US military, and with the Afghan military, we can come in at any time, and we can hit any target we want to hit.

When we actually look at the relationship of Islam to suicide bombing, it gets pretty complex. On the one hand, Islam, like Christianity, traditionally teaches that suicide for whatever reason is forbidden. And indeed, the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, in looking at the phenomenon of suicide bombing, basically said suicide bombing is suicide, and suicide is forbidden. And also the killing

of civilians for any reason, non-combatants, is forbidden.

On the other hand, a number of religious leaders, in Palestine, for example, basically legitimated suicide bombing, regarding it not as your traditional notion of suicide, but that in fact these fighters were sacrificing their life for a greater cause. They were seeking to overcome an occupation. They were seeking to liberate significant portions of the population in the area. That is, of Palestinians, who were occupied and under siege from their point of view. The Grand Mufti of Egypt basically was against the suicide bombing, but made an exception when it came to Palestine and Israel. But clearly stated that civilians could not be targeted.

However, a very prominent Muslim leader, Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, for him, although he criticized and indeed condemned the 9/11 attacks, when it comes to Palestine and Israel, he believes that suicide bombing is legitimate because of the magnitude of the occupation. Because of the lack of Palestinians to be able to resist on a level playing field. And he sees it as an act of self-sacrifice. But he adds another wrinkle. For him, the killing of civilians is the equivalent of collateral damage. It's a fair target. The reason he says that, or his rationale is, that the majority of healthy Israeli males, and also women, do fight in the military, are part of the reserve. And so he doesn't see, therefore, the population as that civilian. It's interesting to note that that was the only area in which he had legitimated this kind of resistance. However, in recent years, he also legitimated it with regard to the US occupation of Iraq and Iraqis resisting that occupation.