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Suicide Terrorism in Sri Lanka

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R Ramasubramanian

Suicide Terrorism in Sri Lanka

*It would elicit little debate that since the non-violence protest movements of Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King J., and Nelson Mandela, the acts of suicide bombings, more than any other single form of political protest, have left their greatest imprint on global politics during the past two decades.*¹

Reports of suicide bombings have filled the news recently. The continuing spate of attacks in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Israel and Sri Lanka has made suicide terrorism seem like a flourishing sunrise industry. This augments the fact that suicide bombings have been a favorite and effective mode for terrorists to successfully penetrate a target and create injuries and chaos. Suicide bombings have emerged as 'deadly weapons' in the arsenal of terrorism.² Terrorist organizations are increasingly relying on suicide attacks to achieve major political objectives.³ For example, spectacular suicide terrorist attacks have recently been employed by Iraqi hardliner groups in attempts to force US and allied forces to abandon the mainland Iraq, by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam to compel the Sri Lankan government to accept an independent Tamil homeland, by Palestinian groups in attempts to force Israel to

abandon West Bank and Gaza, and by Al Qaeda to pressurize the United States to withdraw from the Saudi Arabian Peninsula.⁴ Before the early 1980s, suicide terrorism was rare but not unknown. However, since the attack on the U.S. embassy in Beirut in April 1983, there have been at least 300 separate suicide terrorist attacks worldwide, in Iraq, Lebanon, Israel, Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, Turkey, Russia and the United States,⁵ the most recent being the Uzbekistan suicide bombing in July 31 2004. Thus the numbers have increased from 31 in the 1980s to 104 in the 1990s to 153 in 2000– August 2004, increasing both in tempo and location.

This study is not about suicide terrorism *per se*, but is concerned with the perpetrators of this kind of terrorism. An attempt has been made to synthesize their psychological and sociological motives and provide a general assessment of suicide terrorism in Sri Lanka. It is hoped that an examination of the extensive body of behaviorist literature on political, nationalistic and religious terrorism will provide some answers to questions such as: Who are suicide terrorists? How do individuals become suicide bombers? How are they recruited? Is there a terrorist mindset or are terrorist groups too diverse to have a single mindset or common psychological traits? Are there instead different terrorist mindsets? Is politics more

¹ Kusum Mundra, "Suicide bombing as a strategic instrument of protest: an empirical investigation", Seminar Paper presented in Department of Economics in San Diego University during Fall 2003. http://www.economics.ucr.edu/seminars/10-01-03_Kusum_Mundra_Intro.pdf

² Scott Atran, "Genesis of Suicide Terrorism", *Science*, March 7, 2003, p. 21. <http://search.epnet.com/direct.asp?an=9355002&db=aph>

³ Josie Gladiusz, "The Surprises of Suicide Terrorism", *Discover*, October 2003, p. 17. <http://search.epnet.com/direct.asp?an=10841171&db=aph>

⁴ Robert Pape, "The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism", *American Political Science Review* Vol. 97, No. 3, August 2003, p.1.

⁵ Yoram Schweitzer, "Suicide Terrorism: Development and main characteristics," in *Countering Suicide Terrorism: An International Conference* (Herzliya, Israel: The International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism, 2001), pp. 75-76.

important than a human life? Is suicide terrorism ever successful? Can suicide terrorism be justified? Why is suicide terrorism an attractive choice for terror groups? What can be some positive goals of terrorist activity? What strategies can be used to stem the tide of suicide attacks?

To gain a better understanding, the study is categorized into four parts. The first part overviews the emerging suicide terrorist – threat scenario and purpose behind such attacks. The second part deals with suicide terrorism in Sri Lanka, focusing on attacks carried out by the LTTE. The third part focuses on the Black Tigers, their motivations and the role of women. The fourth part analyses the psychological and nationalistic framework of suicide terrorism.

I Emerging Suicide Terrorist-Threat Scenarios

*Terrorist organisations are increasingly relying on suicide attacks to achieve major political objectives... The rise of suicide terrorism is especially remarkable. – Robert A. Pape.*⁶

The emerging trend in terrorism over the past three decades has contradicted the conventional thinking that terrorists are averse to using deadly weapons or WMDs.⁷ When the conventional terrorist groups of the early 1970s are compared with terrorists in the early 1990s, a trend can be seen i.e., a transition towards nationalistic feeling and religious fervor.⁸ The increased threat level, in the form of terrorist actions aimed at achieving a larger scale of destruction through the choice of their targets, which are often symbolic or representative in the

⁶ Robert Pape, “The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism”, *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 97, No. 3, August 2003, p.1.

⁷ Rohan Gunaratna, “Suicide Terrorism: A Global Threat”, *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, 20 October 2000; accessed at [http://www.janes.com] on 22 June 2004.

⁸ Ehud Sprinzak, “Rational Fanatics”, *Foreign Policy*, September/October 2000, pp. 66-73.

targeted nation was dramatically demonstrated with the suicide bombing of the WTC, or the 9/11 attack.

According to Robert Pape, ‘the total number of terrorist incidents of all kinds had been falling - from a peak of 666 in 1987 to a low of 274 in 1998. But, in contrast, suicide attacks are proliferating’⁹. There were 98 suicide attacks in the past four years, as compared to 212 attacks during 1983 – 2000¹⁰. This sharp increase can be attributed to the change in terrorist mindset in engaging their opponents; however, the employment of suicide attacks as a terrorist technique is not a new phenomenon. ‘With the invention of dynamite in the late 19th century, the use of bombs in terrorist attacks became a generally favored method, and this applies to suicide attacks also’¹¹. But with the development of better explosives and means of detonating them, suicide attacks became less common. Later, ‘due to the increase in counter terrorism measures, the terrorist organisations began to reintroduce suicide attacks’¹².

The terrorist organisations arrange suicide attacks to coerce the state into conceding its demands and to punish members of the targeted state for any harm done to their community or religion. Thus they use suicide attacks not only ‘as a weapon of protest, but also as a weapon of intimidation and weapon of reprisal’¹³. Subsequently, terrorist organisations venerate these individual acts of suicide terrorism to create

⁹ Robert Pape, “The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism”, p.1.

¹⁰ Michael Kurton, “Why Human Bombs?”, *Journal of Defence Strategy*, Vol. 42, No. 4, July 2001, p. 56.

¹¹ Audrey Kurth Cronin, “Terrorists and Suicide Attacks”, *CRS Report for Congress*, August 28, 2003, p. 4.

¹² *ibid.*,

¹³ B. Raman, “Suicide and Suicidal Terrorism”, Paper 947, South Asia Analysis Group. <http://www.saag.org/papers10/paper947.html>

a desire among the fellow members to follow suit.

DELINEATING SUICIDE TERRORISM

Suicide terrorism must be differentiated from other form of terrorisms. Pape has defined the different forms of terrorism as demonstrative, destructive, and suicide terrorism¹⁴. However this differentiation is not clear cut. Suicide terrorism cannot be compared with demonstrative and destructive terrorism. It can be argued that the suicide terrorism is merely an instrument or *modus operandi*, compared to demonstrative or destructive terrorism which are mostly objectives. Suicide terrorism as an instrument, seeks both objectives to some extent, often aiming at enemy targets and, in some cases, mobilizing support for the terrorists' cause. This is explicit in the 9/11 suicide attack; though the attack inflicted civilian casualties, its main objective was to demonstrate that the US is vulnerable to terrorists.

However, suicide terrorism can be differentiated from suicidal terrorism. In suicidal terrorism, 'a terrorist undertakes a high risk operation, in which though he does not consciously kill himself in order to kill others, the chances of his surviving the operation and returning alive are very low.'¹⁵

¹⁴ Demonstrative terrorism is mainly directed at gaining publicity, for any or all of three reasons, such as, to recruit more activists, to draw attention to grievances from soft-liners on the other side, and to gain attention from third parties who might exert pressure on the other side. In these cases, terrorists often avoid doing serious harm so as not to undermine sympathy for their political cause. Destructive terrorism seeks to inflict real harm on members of the target audience at the risk of losing sympathy for their cause. Exactly how groups strike the balance between harm and sympathy depends on the nature of the political goal.

¹⁵ B. Raman, "Suicide and Suicidal Terrorism", Paper 947, South Asia Analysis Group. <http://www.saag.org/papers10/paper947.html>

But in the case of suicide terrorism, a terrorist kills others by killing himself. Here the terrorist knows fully well that the attack will not be executed if he is not killed in the process. (Refer Table I)

Suicide terrorism can be broadly defined as "the readiness to sacrifice one's life in the process of destroying or attempting to destroy a target to advance a political goal. The aim of the psychologically and physically war-trained terrorist is to die while destroying the enemy target".¹⁶ Schweitzer defines suicide terrorism as a *politically motivated violent attack perpetrated by a self-aware individual (or individuals) who actively and purposely causes his own death through blowing himself up along with his chosen target. The perpetrator's ensured death is a precondition for the success of his mission.*¹⁷ Suicide terrorism is an act that 'reintroduces an irreducible singularity in a generalized exchange system. It aims to radicalize the world through sacrifice, while the system aims to realize world through force'.¹⁸ The acts of suicide terrorism particularly where the actor accepts his/her demise as certainty assault our notion of human rationality to the core.

SUICIDE TERROR ORGANIZATIONS

Suicide terrorism has confounded governments since it made its modern debut on 23 October 1983, when two explosions destroyed the barracks of the US and French contingents of the multinational

¹⁶ Rohan Gunaratna, "Suicide Terrorism: A Global Threat", Jane's Intelligence Review, 20 October 2000, http://www.janes.com/security/international_security/news/usscole/jir001020_1_n.shtml

¹⁷ Yoram Schweitzer, "Suicide Terrorism: Development and Characteristics", A lecture delivered in the International Conference on Countering Suicide Terrorism at International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT), Herzeliya, Israel, 21 Feb 2000.

¹⁸ Bruce Hoffman, "The Logic of Suicide Terrorism", *The Atlantic Monthly*, June 2003. p.5

peacekeeping force in Beirut, Lebanon¹⁹. Two centuries of experience had suggested that terrorists, 'though ready to risk their lives, wished to live after the terrorist act in order to benefit from its accomplishments'²⁰. Suicide terrorism denies that belief. Despite the complexity of suicide terrorism operations, it remains an 'attractive choice for terror groups due to five main reasons - tactical advantage and success, cost-effective operations, personal rewards for perpetrator, the utility of women and the psychological victory'²¹.

For states, 'air power and economic sanctions are often the preferred coercive tools'²² to engage the enemy. For terrorist groups, suicide attacks are becoming the coercive instrument of choice, to retaliate against the defending government. Many argue that for most of the organizations that have used these tactics, 'the common denominator is their success in causing large scale casualties and negatively influencing public morale'²³, while entirely failing to change regimes or force their governments to surrender to their strategic demands. The common feature of all suicide terrorist campaigns is that 'they inflict punishment on the opposing society, either directly by killing civilians or indirectly by killing military personnel in circumstances that

cannot lead to meaningful battlefield victory'²⁴.

On the basis of their deployment, there are three levels of organisations that use suicide attacks. 'At the simplest level, there are groups such as Egyptian Islamic Group, the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, the Kuwaiti Dawa, and the Algerian Armed Islamic Group that neither practice suicide terrorism on a regular basis nor approve of its use as a tactic'²⁵. Local members or affiliates of such organizations may initiate it on their own for a variety of reasons, such as imitating the glorious acts of others, responding to perceptions of enormous humiliation and distress, avenging the murder of comrades and relatives, or being presented with a special opportunity to strike.

At the higher level, 'there are groups like the Hizbullah and Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) that formally adopt suicide terrorism as a temporary tactic'²⁶. Their leaders obtain ideological or theological legitimization for its use from an authority, recruit and train volunteers, and then send them into action with a specific objective in mind.

At the highest level, there are groups like the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and Hamas that adopt suicide terrorism 'as a legitimate and permanent strategy'²⁷. Currently, suicide battalions of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) - or Black Tigers - are the leaders of this phenomenon. The Black Tigers launched their first attack in July 1987, and since then suicide bombings have become an enduring feature of the LTTE's struggle. The Black Tigers offer significant proof that suicide terrorism is not merely a religious phenomenon and that, 'under certain extreme political and psychological

¹⁹ Suba Chandran, "Suicide Terrorism", *The Hindu*, 06 October 2001.

²⁰ Rex Hudson, "The Sociology and Psychology of Terrorism: Who Becomes a Terrorist and Why?", a report prepared by the Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, September 1999.

²¹ Daniel Tan Kuan Wei, "The Fatal Attraction of Suicide Terrorism", *Journal of the Singapore Armed Forces*, Vol 24, No 9 Oct-Dec 2003. http://www.mindef.gov.sg/safti/pointer/back/Journals/2003/Vol29_4/7.htm

²² David Johnston and James Risen, "New Signs of Terror Not Evident," *The New York Times*, 6 April 2003.

²³ Gorel Mithyne, "Suicide Terrorism", *The Nation*, 24 September 2000.

²⁴ Ibid.,

²⁵ Ehud Sprinzak, "Outsmarting suicide terrorists", *The Christian Science Monitor*. <http://csmonitor.com/cgi-bin/durableRedirect.pl?durable/2000/10/24/fp9s1-csm.shtml>

²⁶ Ibid.,

²⁷ Ibid.,

circumstances, secular volunteers are fully capable of martyrdom'²⁸.

While it is difficult to make generalizations about why and at what stage some terrorist organizations, but not others, decide to use suicide attacks, it is necessary to dispel some misconceptions about such operations. For example, it is often claimed that suicide attacks are a product of strategic desperation, 'carried out only when all military and other means have been exhausted'²⁹. It is true that groups like Chechen fighters have conducted suicide operations to overcome their entrenched military inferiority. Indeed, for a terrorist group, 'the practical attractions of suicide attacks are manifold'³⁰. The 'weapon' is mobile and, 'given sufficient guidance, increases targeting possibilities beyond the normal range, as the proximity guaranteed by a suicide attacker greatly heightens the probability of successes'³¹. In the West Bank and Gaza Strip, this advantage has proven useful against tight Israeli security checks. Similarly, 'the value of an accurate human guidance system has been evident in the assassination attacks of the LTTE or the September 2001 al-Qaeda killing of Afghan Northern Alliance leader Ahmad Shah Massoud'³².

All the suicide terrorist groups have support infrastructures in Europe and in North America. Suicide-capable groups differ in

form, size, orientation, goal and support³³. 'In terms of military and economic power, Hizbullah and the LTTE lead the list of suicide operations. In terms of numbers, the LTTE has conducted the largest volume of suicide attacks, followed by Hamas and the PKK'³⁴ (Refer Table II). In terms of range, only some of the groups have operated beyond their territories. The LTTE has conducted one suicide operation in India. It is the only group to have killed two world leaders - the former prime minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi, and the President of Sri Lanka, Ranasinghe Premadasa.³⁵

SUICIDE BOMBERS

The vast spread of suicide terrorism over the last two decades suggests that there may not be a single profile of a suicide bomber, although the study of the personal characteristics of suicide attackers may help identify individuals whom the terrorist organizations are likely to recruit for this purpose.³⁶ Until recently, the leading experts in psychological profiling of suicide terrorists characterized them as uneducated, unemployed, socially isolated, single men in their late teens and early 20s. According to a US Congressional Research Service Report published in August 2003, suicide bombers have belonged to all major religions - including Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism - as also secular terrorist streams³⁷. Now, it is recognized that suicide

²⁸ Louise Richardson, "Global Rebels: Terrorist Organizations as Trans-National Actors," *Harvard International Review*, (Fall 1998)

²⁹ Shefali Rekhi, "What Makes a Suicide Bomber Tick?", *The Straits Times*, 24 August 2003.

³⁰ David Ucko and Christopher Langton, "Suicide Attacks - A Tactical Weapon System", International Institute for Strategic Studies, 24 April 2002. <http://www.iiss.org/news-more.php?itemID=26>

³¹ *Ibid.*,

³² Russell D. Howard, "Understanding Al Qaeda's Application of the New Terrorism-The Key to Victory in the Current Campaign," *Terrorism Today*, vol 3 no 4, 2003, p.32.

³³ Rohan Gunaratna, 'Suicide terrorism: a global threat'. http://www.janes.com/security/international_security/news/usscole/jir001020_1_n.shtml

³⁴ *Ibid.*,

³⁵ Paul R. Pillar, from "The Dimensions of Terrorism and Counterterrorism", *Terrorism and U.S. Foreign Policy*, (Brookings Institution Press: Washington, 2001), p.112.

³⁶ Ehud Sprinzak, "Rational Fanatics," *Foreign Policy*, Issue 120, September/October 2000, pp. 66-74.

³⁷ Audrey Kurth Cronin, "Terrorists and Suicide Attacks", *CRS Report for Congress*, August 28, 2003. p. 5.

terrorists can be college educated or uneducated, married or single, men or women, socially isolated or integrated, from ages 13 to 47. In other words, although only a tiny number of people become suicide terrorists, they come from a broad cross section and lifestyles, and it would be impossible to pick them out in advance.³⁸ Even if many suicide attackers are irrational or fanatical, the leadership groups that recruit and direct them are not.³⁹

A suicide bomber carries minimal security risks for the organization sponsoring them. Should the attacker be captured prior to detonation, it is quite common for him/ her to detonate the explosives regardless, simply to destroy evidence. In Sri Lanka, 'the LTTE's 'Black Tigers are equipped with cyanide pills in the name of security'⁴⁰. Similarly, ' Hamas suicide attackers often remove their fingerprints by burning or scraping away skin tissue, so as to prevent tracing and thus protect the attack's ultimate organizers'⁴¹. In most cases, however, the attacker is deliberately uninvolved in planning and has little information to give even if captured alive. Viewed from the perspective of the terrorist organization, suicide attacks are designed to achieve specific political purposes: to coerce a target government to change policy, to mobilize additional recruits and financial support, or both. This is true in the case of LTTE in Sri Lanka.

³⁸ Linda Butler, "Suicide Bombers: Dignity, Despair and the Need for Hope - An Interview with Eyad el Sarraj", *Journal of Palestinian Studies*, No. 4, 2002, p. 42.

³⁹ David Johnston and James Risen, "New Signs of Terror Not Evident," *The New York Times*, 6 April 2003.

⁴⁰ Jerrold Post, "The Mind of the Terrorist: Individual and Group Psychology of Terrorist Behavior," testimony prepared for the Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities, Senate Armed Service Committee, 15 November 2001.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*,

II Suicide attacks by LTTE

The members do what the leadership says. Theirs is not to ask why, theirs is to do and die. Matters little what the directive from the leadership is; the leader is always right, he is god, he alone knows what is good for the Tamil community. If the leader orders to kill, it will be carried out – without any question. - R.Narayana Swamy.⁴²

In South Asia, three countries have been the principal victims of suicide terrorism: Sri Lanka, India – in Jammu and Kashmir and Pakistan.⁴³ The terrorist organisations such as the LTTE, JeM, and LeT have been responsible for a relatively high number of suicide attacks and resultant casualties in South Asia. Some attacks by the terrorist groups, such as the 15 October 1997 bombing of the Colombo World Trade Center in Sri Lanka by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam which killed 18 and injured more than 100 persons, are as shocking as they are destructive. Out of 118 suicide attacks in South Asia between 1990 – 2000, Sri Lanka alone suffered 88 attacks⁴⁴. The island country is vulnerable to such attacks since 1987. The recent suicide attack on Kollupitiya Police station in Colombo on 7 July 2004, the first attack after two years, suggests that the LTTE is back in action.

The LTTE leads the global list of groups that have carried out suicide attacks such as the Palestine Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and the Hamas in Palestine, the Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Turkey, the Groupe Islamique Armee (GIA or the Armed Islamic Group)

⁴² MR Narayana Swamy, "Inside an Elusive Mind", (Konark Publishers: New Delhi), 2003. p xv.

⁴³ Suba Chandran, "Suicide Terrorism in South Asia: From Promised Land to Presumed Land", *Peace & Conflict*, vol. 6, no. 5, 2003. p.8

⁴⁴ Rohan Gunaratna, "Suicide attacks", in Michael Green (Edt) 'Global Rebels: Terrorist Organizations as Trans-National Actors', *Harvard International Review*, (Fall 2001), p 64

of Algeria and the Islamic Group of Egypt⁴⁵. The LTTE is the deadliest group that has successfully infused the suicide bomb syndrome into Sri Lanka. It is the only group to have assassinated two world leaders, both assassinations being carried out using the suicide body-suit. The Sri Lankan experience provides valuable lessons because no other country has lost so many leaders in such a short time as Sri Lanka.⁴⁶ No one knows for sure how many suicide bombings the LTTE has ordered its self-effacing machines since 1987 to inflict maximum damage on the Sri Lankan government.

On 5 July 1987, the first suicide attack was launched by Captain Miller, by ramming a truck packed with explosives into a military camp in northern Sri Lanka, which marked the beginning of this dreadful retaliation. The suicide killings formed a 'deadly weapon for which Sri Lanka had no anti'⁴⁷. Other than the loss of leaders, the country's national, political, economic and cultural infrastructure has been severely damaged by suicide attacks.⁴⁸ The LTTE deployed suicide bombers with deadly accuracy to destroy the Joint Operations Command, the nerve-centre of the Sri Lankan security forces; the Central Bank; the World Trade Centre; the Temple of the Tooth Relic, the most hallowed Buddhist shrine; and the oil

storage installations in Kolonnawa⁴⁹. The LTTE used suicide bombers to kill a number of service personnel, apart from political leaders and outstanding intellectuals such as Neelan Thiruchelvam⁵⁰. The Sri Lankan Navy chief Admiral Clancy Fernando was killed by a suicide bomber on a motor cycle soon after he returned from India after discussing Indo-Sri Lankan naval cooperation⁵¹. The LTTE singled out and targeted individuals who were at the forefront of counter-insurgency operations to paralyze the security apparatus.⁵² It is interesting to note that unlike other terrorist organisations that target the civilians, the LTTE has mostly targeted the governmental machines. A brief review of the suicide threat from the LTTE to targets in Sri Lanka is therefore in order. (Refer Table III)

LEADERSHIP AND STRUCTURE OF LTTE

The founders of the military youth movement, Tamil New Tigers, formed the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam on May 5, 1976. Also known as the Tamil Tigers, the LTTE is a by-product of Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict between the majority Sinhalese people and the minority ethnic Tamils.⁵³ It aims to carve a Tamil homeland out of the north and east of Sri Lanka, and it has waged a brutal war toward this end for

⁴⁵ Boaz Ganor, "Suicide Terrorism: An Overview", International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT), 15 February 2000 at <http://www.ict.org.il/articles/articledet.cfm?articleid=128>.

⁴⁶ Rohan Gunaratna, "The LTTE and Suicide Terrorism", *Frontline*, Vol 17 - Issue 03, 05 February 2000, p.42.

⁴⁷ Amantha Perera, "Suicide bombers feared and revered", *Asia Times*, 17 July 2003. http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/E_G17Df03.html

⁴⁸ Rohan Gunaratna, "A strategic failure", *Frontline*, Vol 17 - Issue 10, 13 May 2000, p.43

⁴⁹ K. Ratnayake, "Suicide bomb blast in Sri Lanka threatens ceasefire", *World Socialist Website*, 9 July 2004.

⁵⁰ "Ten-member suicide squad stalks Colombo", *The Island*, 1st August 1999.

⁵¹ K T Rajasingham, "The Kilaly Massacre" in 'Sri Lanka : Untold Story', *Asia Times*, 17 August 2002. http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia

⁵² Rohan Gunaratna, "The LTTE and Suicide Terrorism", *Frontline*, Vol 17 - Issue 03, 05 Feb., 2000, p.42

⁵³ Karen Parker, "Why the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam is not a Terrorist Organisation?", Proceedings of International Conference on Tamil Nationhood and Search for Peace in Sri Lanka, Ottawa, Canada 1999.

nearly 18 years.⁵⁴ As a result of government actions that violated the rights of the Tamils in Sri Lanka in the 1948-77 period, a large pool of educated and unemployed young people rose against the government in 1972, under the leadership of Velupillai Prabhakaran. Nationalism has remained the driving force behind the Tiger Movement.⁵⁵

The LTTE leadership has two wings - a military wing and a subordinate political wing, governed by a central governing committee, headed by the LTTE chief, Velupillai Prabhakaran. The Military wing has four major units viz., *the Sea Tigers*, *the Black Tigers*, *an elite fighting wing* known as the Charles Anthony Regiment and a *highly secretive intelligence group*⁵⁶. The political wing is headed by Thamilselvam and Anton Balasingham. The Tigers established offices and cells throughout the world, building a network unsurpassed by any other terrorist group. The LTTE's overt organizations support Tamil separatism by lobbying foreign governments and the United Nations.⁵⁷ During 1987 the LTTE had emerged as the strongest militant group in Sri Lanka. More than two generations of Tamil youth have now been indoctrinated by separatism.⁵⁸

By 1980 the majority of LTTE combatants were reportedly between 18 and 25 years of

age.⁵⁹ In 1990 approximately 75 percent of the second generation LTTE memberships were below 30 years of age, with about 50 percent between the ages of 15 and 21 and about 25 percent between the ages of 25 and 29. The majority of the rank and file membership belongs to the lower middle class.⁶⁰ In 1993 the LTTE reportedly had about 10,000 men in its fighting cadres, all Tamils and Hindus. According to Prof. Oberst of Nebraska Wesleyan University, many are university educated, English-speaking professionals with close cultural and personal ties to the West. However, several of the important Tiger groups are led by Tamils who are relatively uneducated and non professional, from a middle-status caste.⁶¹ It is said that LTTE had implemented compulsory military training for all people over the age of 15 in areas under LTTE control in the Vanni region. It had also established a Leopard Brigade (Sirasu Puli), made up of children. By early 1984, the nucleus of the LTTE Baby Brigade was formed.⁶² The feature that attracts young minds to the LTTE was the glamour and the perceived respect it was paid by society. These Baby brigades were used as 'body guards' and not for suicide missions. In 1998 Sri Lanka's Directorate of Military Intelligence estimated that 60 percent of LTTE fighters were below the age of 18 and that a third of all LTTE recruits were women.

The LTTE has also set up a parallel civil administration within its territory by establishing structures such as a police force,

⁵⁴ VS Sambandan, "Living through the bombs", *Frontline*, Vol 17 - Issue 09, 29 Apr - 12 May, 2000, p.13.

⁵⁵ Rajkumar Sivapatham, "Lessons to be learnt from LTTE by Tamils", *Tamil Canadian*, 28 January 2004.

⁵⁶ Peter Chalk, "LTTE's international organization and operations - a preliminary analysis" *The Island*, 2 May 2000. <http://www.is.lk/is/clips/sp0443/clip5.html>

⁵⁷ Amy Waldman, "Masters of Suicide Bombing: Tamil Guerrillas of Sri Lanka" *New York Times*, 14 January 2003.

⁵⁸ Rohan Gunaratna, "International and Regional Implications of the Sri Lankan Tamil Insurgency", *ICT Website*, <http://www.ict.org.il/articles/articleid?articleid=57>.

⁵⁹ Rohan Gunaratna, "The LTTE and Suicide Terrorism", *Frontline*, Vol 17 - Issue 03, 05 February 2000, p.42

⁶⁰ Oberst, 'Sri Lanka story', *The Island*, 23 June 2002.

⁶¹ Rohan Gunaratna, "The LTTE and Suicide Terrorism", *Frontline*, Vol 17 - Issue 03, Feb. 05 - 08, 2000, p. 42

⁶² Dr. Ely Karmon, "The Role of Intelligence in Counter-Terrorism", *ICT Website* <http://www.ict.org.il/articles/articleid?articleid=152>

law courts, postal services, banks, administrative offices, television and radio broadcasting station, etc. The most prominent in the LTTE 'state structure' is the 'Tamil Eelam Judiciary' and the 'Tamil Eelam Police'. The 'Tamil Eelam Police', with its headquarters in Kilinochchi, was formed in 1993, and reportedly has several wings, including traffic, crime prevention, crime detection, information bureau, administration and a special force. LTTE cadres collect taxes, its courts administer their version of justice and the entire law and order machinery is LTTE-controlled. According to an Indian authority, LTTE cadres are known for their high sense of discipline, dedication, strong determination, a high degree of motivation and innovation.

LTTE has inculcated the nationalist spirit amongst its cadres, who are carefully indoctrinated into the authorized position that they are fighting for a separate Tamil Eelam. The cadres must banish all fear of death from their minds and be prepared to lay down their lives fighting the Government forces, or consume the cyanide pill carried around their necks when capture is imminent. Unlike religious indoctrination, the LTTE has been successful in infusing ethno-nationalism in the minds of its members. This has led to the formation of LTTE's elite commando unit known as the Black Tigers, which is trained for suicidal missions.⁶³

III Devotion of Black Tigers

With perseverance and sacrifice, Tamil Eelam can be achieved in 100 years, but if we conduct Black Tiger Operations, we can shorten the suffering of the people and achieve Tamil Eelam in a shorter period of time. This is an era of Black Tigers. No force on

⁶³ N Manoharan, "Suicide Terrorism: An Historical Account", *Peace & Conflict*, vol. 6, no. 6, 2003. p 1.

earth today can suppress the fierce uprising of the Tamils who seek freedom - V.Prabhakaran⁶⁴

Black Tigers, also known as Karumpuligal, form the elite section of the LTTE. These are the most feared suicide bombers, a band of diehard that LTTE is explicitly enamored of. However, the world outside South Asia has not fully discovered the story of Black Tigers in its gory details. One of obvious reasons has been the geographical focus of their campaign for a separate Tamil state. Since its birth in the 1980s, the resistance has been generally confined to Sri Lanka and occasionally ventured into its powerful northern neighbor, India. The most brutal example was in 1991 when a young Black Tiger Woman suicide bomber blew up India's former Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, at an election rally, using a tactic no one could have even remotely conjectured. What makes the Black Tigers unique? How is it that the LTTE has succeeded in continuously sustaining its suicide wing? What makes the cadres of the LTTE opt for becoming Black Tigers? Who are the Black Sea Tigers? These are some of the questions to be looked into.

The Black Tigers lead most of the military operations of the LTTE, especially its attack on Sri Lankan army camps.⁶⁵ The Black Tigers, armed with explosives, drive directly into the army camp, catching the Sri Lankan Army totally by surprise, and causing maximum damage. Before the Army recovers from its initial shock, the regular cadres of the LTTE attack, making maximum use of the sacrifice by the Black Tigers. The Black Tigers, being the "Leading Force" of any military operation, has an added attraction for the cadres. Their ability

⁶⁴ The LTTE leader, Mr. Vellupillai Pirabhakaran delivered a speech in Tamil on 13 May 1998, the first anniversary of the launch of the Sri Lanka Army (SLA) Operation, 'Jaya Sikerui' ('Victory Assured' in Sinhala).

⁶⁵ Joseph Lelyveld, "All suicide bombers are not alike", *New York Times*, 28 October 2001.

to penetrate the tough security, not only in Colombo, but in other places makes the Black Tigers invincible in their mission.⁶⁶

A Black Tiger is a most potent weapon that cannot be very easily detected, says government military spokesman, Brig Sanath Karunaratne. "It is a one-way soldier and there is very little stopping. Once you get someone into that mentality, there can be no limit," he said.⁶⁷ For instance, Babu, the LTTE cadre who killed President Ranasinghe Premadasa in 1993, had infiltrated the President's staff as a household staffer and remained inactive for almost two years before carrying out his suicide attack.

The Black Tigers use six types of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) for their suicide missions⁶⁸. These are: the human-borne suicide IED, also known as the suicide bodysuit; the vehicle-borne suicide IED; the motorcycle-borne suicide IED; naval craft-borne suicide IED; scuba diver-borne suicide IED; and aerial-(microlight, glider, mini-helicopter) borne suicide IED. However the suicide body suit is the most common device.

Black Tigers readily give up his or her life for the Leader and for the cause of Eelam.⁶⁹ Determination has been the Black Tigers' most effective mindset in their struggle against the Sri Lankan government. This provides them elite status inside the LTTE and makes other cadres aspire for that status. Unlike suicide terrorists in the Middle East, where religious indoctrination is carried out, these cadres understand the

need for a separate Eelam and are infused with a sense of victimhood and martyrdom that inspires them to take up suicide missions. Another interesting fact is that, there is a separate suicide squad in LTTE, and the leaders don't *hire* persons for such purposes.⁷⁰ Unlike the Middle East suicide terrorists, the Black Tigers are not recruited due to poverty or unemployment, but because of their nationalist spirits. The LTTE has sensed the pulse of those people and successfully inducted them in their lifework.

Upon selection, the selected Tiger will undergo six months arduous training at a place called 'Red Garden', which is located deeply in the Mullaitivu forest.⁷¹ At the end of the camp the Tiger, he/she, will swear an oath of personal loyalty to the Tiger's leader, Prabhakaran and place an amulet containing a cyanide capsule around his/her neck.⁷² For suicide missions, the LTTE leader himself selects the members from the Black Tigers and the Birds of Freedom, the women's suicide wing. Women and young boys are often preferred to men for the simple reason that they are not subject to the same movement restrictions and body searches. Moreover, the layers of a woman's clothing can more easily disguise the bulky suicide belt, which is more conspicuous under a man's shirt and trousers.⁷³

From the time a cadre is singled out to be a Black Tiger, he or she acquires a mythical admiration. The Black Tiger is separated from the ordinary cadres and severs all contact with family and friends. Before embarking on a suicide mission, he or she will partake in a special meal with

⁶⁶ Suba Chandran, "Born to die: The Black Tigers of the LTTE", *Peace and Conflict*, vol. 6, No.6, 2003, p.5.

⁶⁷ "Declawing the Tigers", The Editorial, *National Post*, 23 February 2002.

⁶⁸ Rohan Gunaratna, "Suicide Terrorism: A Global Threat", Jane's *Intelligence Review*, 20 October 2000; <http://www.janes.com>.

⁶⁹ "The legitimacy of the armed struggle of the Tamil people" <http://eelam.com/introduction/legitimacy.html>

⁷⁰ Joseph Lelyveld, "All suicide bombers are not alike", *New York Times*, 28 October 2001.

⁷¹ Ambalavanar Sivarajah, "The rise of militancy in Tamil politics" in Mahindra Werake and PVJ Jayasekara, ' *Security dilemma of a small state*' (South Asian Publishers: New Delhi,1995)

⁷² MR Narayan Swamy, "Tigers of Lanka", (Konark Publishers: New Delhi, 2002) p. 65.

⁷³ Radhika Coomaraswamy, "LTTE Women : Is this Liberation?", *Sunday Times*, 05 January 1997.

Prabhakaran. Upon their death, Black Tigers are venerated.⁷⁴ In LTTE cemeteries, suicide cadres have pride of place with granite tombstones over graves that hold no bodies. Shrines built in their memory dot Sri Lanka's northeast. At the location of the first suicide attack in Nelliady, the Tigers erected a statue of Miller during 2001. At least 243 Tigers have since followed in Miller's footsteps, including 53 women.

This glorification of the Black Tigers by the LTTE makes it a prestigious unit. Every year July 5 is celebrated by the LTTE as the day of the Black Tigers.⁷⁵ On this particular day, an eternal lamp is lighted in front of the tombstone of every Black Tiger, who had lost his or her life. The LTTE flag is hoisted and the parents of the Black Tigers, who had sacrificed their lives, are honored. The LTTE radio broadcasts the brave deeds of the Black Tigers with their operational details. When Jaffna was under the LTTE's control, the *Maveerar Thuyilum Illam* (Resting Home of the Brave) was cleaned and lit and the day celebrated in such an emotional manner that it made other cadres aspire to become Black Tigers.⁷⁶ The Tiger rebels also look after the suicide cadres' families after their demise.

WOMEN SUICIDE BOMBERS

History is not short of examples of women terrorists. One of the better-known is Leila Khaled, who, on behalf of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, hijacked a plane in 1969. In the LTTE, the presence of women cadres in the Black

Tigers is a distinct phenomenon. Nearly one-third of the Black Tigers are composed of women. The presence of women in the suicide squad asserts the gender equality that the LTTE preaches.⁷⁷ (Refer Table IV)

The *Vituthalai Pulikal Makalir Munani* (Women's Front of the Liberation Tigers) was formed in 1983, which had begun as a support group and was later absorbed into the fighting formations. The first group of Women Tigers had their training in Tamil Nadu camps by 1985, and had their first taste of combat in July 1986. In October 1987, Prabhakaran set up a training camp exclusively for women in Jaffna for the second and successive batches. By 1989, this unit secured its own leadership structure. In the same year they were recruited for the Sea Tigers, which was then in an embryonic stage. The female cadres were restricted in numbers till about the early-1990s, at which point there was an expansion brought about by the nature of military engagements and the needs of the LTTE. The women's squad operates from six divisions – Jaffna, Wannai, Mannar, Mullaitivu, Vavunia and Batticaloa. Some criticism has been leveled against the LTTE for using women only as implementers and not the initiators of policy; in other words, they were only used in suicide bombing and to carry out specific military tasks and nothing more. However, of the LTTE's central committee of 12, five are women, but it is not known how much influence they carry on decision-making and determining policy.

As in the case of selecting males for Black tiger operations, the LTTE central military command selects, rather accepts, volunteer women for suicidal missions.⁷⁸ The women reportedly undergo the same tough training as men, and like them, are broken up into

⁷⁴ Edward Desmond, "Inside the Tiger Mind", *Time*, 16 September 1991. p.14.

⁷⁵ It was on July 5, 1987, that the first suicide attack was perpetrated by the LTTE, when its 'Captain' Millr drove a truck full of explosives into a Sri Lankan Army camp, killing nearly forty soldiers.

⁷⁶ Suba Chandran, "Born to die: The Black Tigers of the LTTE", *Peace and Conflict*, vol. 6, No.6, 2003, p. 5.

⁷⁷ Ibid.,

⁷⁸ Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, Institute of Conflict Management, <http://www.satp.org/satporg/countries/shrilanka/terroristoutfits/Ltte.htm>

fighting, intelligence gathering, political and administrative units. The Tigers' conduct political classes and the aspects of female liberation and feminist ideology are taught along with nationalist politics. Tasks are assigned that break taboos such as riding bicycles, driving motor vehicles, swimming and sea faring that have given women a sense of empowerment that could stand them in good stead even outside their military roles.⁷⁹ In her book *Women Fighters of Liberation Tigers* (1989), Adele Ann, the Australian-born wife of Anton Balasingham, LTTE theoretician, described the decision by a Tamil woman to join the organisation as a message to society "that they are not satisfied with the social status quo; it means they are young women capable of defying authority; it means they are women with independent thoughts; young women prepared to lift up their heads."

Death, not life, is celebrated. The greatest feat for a woman is to die a martyr. This celebration of heroic death is an aspect of most nationalist movements, but in the LTTE it is a major factor which determines and conditions the life of women who have dedicated themselves to the cause.⁸⁰ According to Paikiasothy Saravanmuttu, an analyst at the Center for Policy Alternatives, Colombo, 'the Woman tigers welcome death as a kind of devotional sacrifice'. A report in *The Hindu* said on March 10, 2002, that nearly 4,000 women LTTE cadres have been killed since they began taking part in combat from 1985, joining the LTTE pantheon of over 17,000 "heroes" in the nearly two decade-old conflict. Over 100 of the women killed belonged to the dreaded Black Tiger suicide squad.

⁷⁹ Miranda Alison, "Female combatants of the LTTE and IRA: A comparative study" *Northeastern Monthly* - July 1, 2004. <http://www.tamilcanadian.com/pageview.php?ID=2430&SID=456>

⁸⁰ Radhika Coomaraswamy, 'LTTE Women : Is this Liberation?', delivered at the Rajani Thiraganama Memorial Lecture, Colombo, *Sunday Times*, 05 January 1997.

LTTE chief Prabhakaran, in an address to women cadres on International Women's Day on March 8, 1996, described the liberation of the Tamil woman as "the fervent child" that was born out of the Tamil "national liberation movement." Women in the LTTE are allegedly forced to suppress their femininity and sexuality, which is regarded as a crime and an evil force that could sap their strength.⁸¹ Marriage is not allowed for women cadres up to the age of 25 and for men up to the age of 28.

BLACK SEA TIGERS

Sea Tigers are the naval wing of LTTE. They are exclusively designated to carry out attacks on the Sri Lankan Naval forces. The Sea Tigers deploy squadrons of heavily armed gunboats and speedboats. *Jane's International Defence Review*, in a report on Sri Lanka, published a few years ago, pointed out that the Sea Tigers "have taken on the Sri Lankan navy with unprecedented success." Sri Lankan and foreign intelligence agencies estimate the strength of the Sea Tigers at 2,000 to 3,000 cadres. According to V.Suryanarayanan, the Sea Tigers have acquired the latest equipment from several countries in Asia and Europe to enhance their fighting capabilities. Mullaitivu is the headquarters of the Sea Tigers; from there they are able to dominate the eastern coast extending from Jaffna to Trincomalee⁸².

The newest addition to the Sea Tigers is the Black Sea Tigers. The Black Sea Tigers, the suicide squad of the naval wing comprising highly motivated young men and women, was formed in 1990. 'Mr. Prabhakaran wanted to challenge the supremacy of the Sri Lankan Navy and for this effectively used the dedication of the Sea Tigers. The Black Sea Tigers made use of small boats,

⁸¹ Tim Mc Girk, 'Running away from the Tigers', *Time*, 17 November 1997.

⁸² V.Suryanarayanan, "Sea Tigers – Threat to Indian Security", *The Hindu*, 28 July 2004.

packed with large quantities of explosives, and generally under cover of darkness hit their target, triggering off explosions. In the process, they naturally sacrificed their lives. In the first Black Sea Tiger attack off Valvettiturai on July 10, 1990, the guerrillas badly damaged a Sri Lankan naval ship *Edithara*. On May 4, 1991, they sank the Sri Lankan command ship, *Abitha*⁸³.

Till now there have been 22 such suicide attacks that have led to large scale destruction of ships, naval vessels and containers of the government.⁸⁴ At least 88 persons have been killed, that includes naval forces and security personnel. These Black Sea Tigers go as a squad and attack the enemy forces. Boats laden with explosives and ferries laden with explosives were used. These Black Sea Tigers have specialised in scuba diving by which they penetrate enemy targets. Footage of such attacks has shown them speeding toward Sri Lankan Navy crafts in explosive-ridden crafts, waving and acknowledging the cheers of cadres on other boats. The Triconamalee and Kankesanthurai coastal commands get affected. This explains why suicide terrorists, once launched on a mission, go like a homing pigeon towards their targets and do not develop any fears or second thoughts on the way to their objective or abandon their mission. Their decision to undertake suicide missions is not an impulsive action, but carefully-thought out.

IV Psychology and Nationalism

While nothing is easier than to denounce the evildoer, nothing is more difficult than to understand him - Mikhailovich Dostovsky

⁸³ V.Suryanarayanan, "Sea Tigers – Threat to Indian Security", *The Hindu*, 28 July 2004.

⁸⁴ Edward Desmond, "Inside the Tiger Mind", *Time*, 16 September 1991.

In contrast with political scientists and sociologists, who are interested in the political and social contexts of suicide terrorist groups, 'the relatively few psychologists who study suicide terrorism are primarily interested in the micro-level of the individual suicide terrorist or terrorist group'⁸⁵. The psychological approach is concerned with the study of suicide terrorists *per se*, their involvement and induction into terrorist groups, their personalities, beliefs, attitudes, motivations, and careers as terrorists. To understand the psychological framework of the perpetrator, it is necessary to answer the questions: Why do some individuals decide to break with society and embark on a mission like suicide terrorism? What are the factors that contribute to such self-motivation? Do suicide terrorists share common traits or characteristics? Is there a suicide terrorist personality or profile? Can a suicide terrorist profile be developed that could reliably help security personnel to identify potential suicide terrorists, whether they are would-be airplane hijackers, assassins, or suicide bombers? Do suicide terrorists have a psychotic personality?

Conventional teaching on suicide indicates that the vast majority of those who deliberately kill themselves are suffering from some form of mental disorder, mostly 'depressive illness, schizophrenia, substance misuse or, in some cases, personality disorder or adjustment reactions'⁸⁶. However, mental disorder in itself is not a sufficient basis for suicide, and some who

⁸⁵ Rex Hudson, "The Sociology and Psychology of Terrorism: Who Becomes a Terrorist and Why?", a report prepared by the Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, September 1999.

⁸⁶ Jerrold Post, "The Mind of the Terrorist: Individual and Group Psychology of Terrorist Behavior," testimony prepared for the Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities, Senate Armed Service Committee, 15 November 2001.

kill themselves may not be mentally disordered at all. This is true in the case of LTTE Black Tigers. Although suicide terrorism is often described in terms of pure psychological emotionalism or “fanaticism,” its instrumental or strategic dimensions should not be overlooked. Because suicide terrorism is a multi-causal phenomenon, it would be simplistic and erroneous to explain such acts by a single cause, such as the ‘psychological need of the suicide terrorist to perpetrate an act of violence’⁸⁷. Today, experts agree that the acts of suicide bombers are attributable to organizational masterminds than to personal psychopathology⁸⁸. Hence, a dispassionate reading of the struggle and the struggling people in Sri Lanka - their aspirations, convictions, motivations and mindset of the people who are struggling as victims and as self-giving (that-kodai) martyrs is attempted below.

SUICIDE PHENOMENON

According to Emile Durkheim, a French sociologist, there are four types of suicides – ‘egoistic, anomic, altruistic, and fatalistic’.⁸⁹ Individuals who comprise the category of *altruistic suicides* exist in a community wherein

the social rules dictate that the person’s life is sacrificial. The assimilation of the individual into society, especially in a conflict environment, assists the birth of suicide bombers.⁹⁰ Individuals who compose the category of *fatalistic suicides* believe that the circumstances surrounding their lives have simply become unbearable and that death is the only way to get relieved. ‘The reduced levels of serotonin in the brain are associated with poor impulse control and with the tendency to engage in violent and aggressive behavior’⁹¹. ‘Low levels of serotonin are also associated with depressive disorders, and thus is one of the possible explanations of the strong link between suicide and depression’.⁹² In the case of suicide terrorists, the altruistic tendency might be the root cause for this phenomenon⁹³.

In 1969, Zurich born American Medical doctor Elizabeth Kubler-Ross published a trend setting book, *On Death and Dying*. In this book, she presented her novel idea of five stages of grief, which occurs in persons who await death,⁹⁴ denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance are the stages that precede the death of a person⁹⁵. When

⁸⁷ Rex Hudson, “The Sociology and Psychology of Terrorism: Who Becomes a Terrorist and Why?” report prepared by the Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, September 1999.

⁸⁸ Harvey Gordon, “The ‘suicide’ bomber: is it a psychiatric phenomenon?” *Psychiatric Bulletin* No. 28 , 2002, pp. 285-287

⁸⁹ *Egoistic suicides*, following a pattern of diminished integration, are individuals who have become detached from society and come to believe that their existence is meaningless. Most of the individuals in this group suffer from mental disorders or are recently divorced, and usually exhibit signs of depression and apathy. *Anomic suicides*, with a pattern of diminished regulation, usually result from sudden disruptions in the social hierarchy or norms, such as economic or political crises, or disruptions in the individual’s normal life. The typical feelings associated with this group of individuals are anger, disappointment, and exasperation.

⁹⁰ Suba Chandran, ‘An inquiry into suicide terrorism: sociological perspectives’, *Peace and Conflict*, Vol 6, No 6, 2003. p. 5

⁹¹ Harvey Gordon, “The ‘suicide’ bomber: is it a psychiatric phenomenon?” *Psychiatric Bulletin* No. 28 , 2002, pp. 285-287

⁹² Henry Orlin, “The phenomenon of suicide”, *Psychology*, no 4, fall 2002, p. 12.

⁹³ Suba Chandran, ‘An inquiry into suicide terrorism: sociological perspectives’, *Peace and Conflict*, Vol 6, No 6, 2003. p. 5

⁹⁴ Satchi Sri Kantha, ‘Paradigm Shift in Eelam’ in Prabhakaran Phenomenon – Part 11’.

⁹⁵ According to the Kubler-Ross formulation of five stages, *Stage 1: Denial* - the person denies the forthcoming loss of life, and reacts by withdrawing from routine and social contacts. *Stage 2 Anger* - the grieving person becomes furious at the person who inflicted the hurt or at care-givers. *Stage 3: Bargaining* - the person then makes a bargain with God, pleading ‘If I repent for my sins, will you allow me to live a little longer?’. *Stage 4: Depression* - During this stage,

states are in a moribund condition, the citizens of these states also pass through a Kubler-Ross formulation of these five stages of grief and try to invite death upon themselves. Though this argument can be applied in the case of suicide terrorism in Middle-Eastern countries, it cannot be extended to the case in Sri Lanka.

According to Davidson, the power of the mind to influence bodily functions, especially connections between the nervous, immune and endocrine systems is an interesting phenomenon. A person's emotional makeup reflects the relative strength, or asymmetry, of activity between two sides of the prefrontal cortex -- the left side, which is associated with positive emotion, and the right side, where heightened activity has been associated with anxiety, depression and other mood disorders⁹⁶. 'Though in the case of suicides, the right side gets activated; in case of suicide terrorism it is the activation of the left side of the prefrontal cortex' that is noticeable.

Ernest Becker (1973), whose theories on the human notion of death is strongly psychoanalytical, views the fear of death as a universal phenomenon, a fear which is repressed in the unconscious and of which people are largely unaware.⁹⁷ The fear of death, nevertheless, can move individuals toward heroism. They live in the hope that leaders will be born even with divine power to fight for them against the triumph of evil. It is with this view that the LTTE invites all

the person gives up hope of survival, though undercurrents of anger and sadness still persist. *Stage 5: Acceptance* - The final stage of grief, during which anger and sadness prevailing in stage 4 tapers off, and the person learns to accept the impending reality of death.

⁹⁶ Davidson, "Emotional imbalance and suicides", *Psychology concepts*, vol 4, 2000. pp 234-236

⁹⁷ Ernest Becker, 'Notion of Death', *British Medical Journal*, vol 321, 2004. pp. 1141-1143.

Tamils to two focal commemorations – Victimhood and another on Martyrdom.

GRIEF STAGES OF THE SRI LANKAN STATE

The prolonged conditions of chronic ethnic conflict and bloodshed in Sri Lanka have endowed suicide bombing with a sinister logic. Death seems pervasive and unavoidable for the Black Tigers of the LTTE who value its survival above their own. They became willing, even eager, to sacrifice their lives for the greater cause of Tamil Eelam.⁹⁸ This willingness to court death requires a psycho-cultural explanation. There are several reasons for it,

- Atrocities by the Sri Lankan security forces with their own relatives and close friends being victims;
- Extreme instances of violation of human rights by the security forces;
- Repeated Tamil pleas not to drop bombs on the civilian population under the pretext of targeting terrorists went unheard for years.
- Air attacks were carried out even on refugee camps, churches, temples, schools and hospitals.
- Anger against their adversaries.
- Strong belief in their cause for Tamil Eelam.

On the 23rd of July 1983, thousands of innocent Tamils, including 53 Tamil prisoners in the state prison at Welikade, were literally butchered all over the island. This holocaust is commemorated annually as Black July. And the night of the 26th November is observed as the Heroes Night (*Mahaveerar Thinam*), honoring thousands of heroic Tamil youth who gave their lives in fighting for the liberation of their people. These two events, commemorating victimhood and martyrdom, have helped

⁹⁸ 'The legitimacy of the armed struggle of the Tamil people' <http://eelam.com/introduction/legitimacy.html>

foster the powerful growth of Tamil nationalism and an increasing desire for Tamil liberation.

NATIONALISM AND MARTYRDOM

Suicide is generally associated with hopelessness and depression.⁹⁹ The desire to end intense and unbearable psychological pain motivates the actor to commit this act. Others who care for the actor typically view suicide as an undesirable outcome. *By contrast, people typically associate martyrdom with feelings of heroic sacrifice.* The family and loved ones typically support this behavior, and, if the event occurs, the family is honored¹⁰⁰. The martyr self-consciously creates a model for future emulation and inspiration. He expects to impress an audience and to be remembered. The act also flatters all those who follow, since they are identified with the heroism and glory of the act of self-sacrifice. The individual, whose identity might otherwise fade into obscurity, will be established as a legend for all time.

According to Prof. Michael Roberts,' the cult of filial piety and devotion to God among Tamils apparent in Sangam literature are the reasons for the acts of self-immolation in Tamil Nadu and suicide bombings in Sri Lanka. There is cultural bedrock on which such total commitment can be based¹⁰¹.

The ideal self consciousness of LTTE men and women about their struggle for *cutantiram*, (independence) can be found in the projected language nation-state called

Tamililam.¹⁰² For LTTE, *to fight* implies the option to kill and the possibility to get killed in an armed struggle. For *independence*, the individual life is sacrificed. To quote Prabhakaran, 'I have groomed my weak brethren into a strong weapon called Black Tigers....the Black Tigers have cast aside fear from its very roots. Death has surrendered to them. They keep eagerly waiting for the day they would die. They just don't bother about death'¹⁰³.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) advocate Tamil nationalism that is expressed by its leaders referring to the cult of martyrs. There are six main ideological expressions of the LTTE that rationalize the armed struggle, ending in "martyrdom", for independence.¹⁰⁴

- *arppanippu*¹⁰⁵, "sacrifice",
- *pali*¹⁰⁶, "sacrifice",

¹⁰² Peter Schalk, 'The veneration of martyrs by the LTTE' in 'The Revival of Martyr Cults' *Temenos* 33, 1997, p. 152

¹⁰³ The LTTE leader, Mr. Vellupillai Pirabhakaran delivered a speech in Tamil on 13 May 1998, the first anniversary of the launch of the Sri Lanka Army (SLA) Operation, 'Jaya Sikerui' ('Victory Assured' in Sinhala).

¹⁰⁴ Peter Schalk, 'The concept of martyrdom of the LTTE' 'The Revival of Martyr Cults' *Temenos* 33, 1997, p. 154

¹⁰⁵ The word *arppanippu* (alternatively *arppanam* or *arppanam*)¹⁰⁵ comes from the Sanskrit *arpana*. We have translated it as "sacrifice". It can also mean "dedication", equating it to the sacrifice that is dedicated to a god. We have the word *tevarppanam*, "offering that is acceptable to gods". *Arppi*, "to offer", could include the totality of a human as expressed in the Tamil composition '*ivvutampai unakkarpanam akkinen*, "I have sacrificed this body to you". In the context of the LTTE this sacrifice becomes a sacrifice for the realization of *Tamililam*. The closest parallel in the West to '*arppanippu*' would be the devotion practiced by dedicated fighters on the battlefield of the Romans.

¹⁰⁶ The word *pali* (Sanskrit *balī*) refers to a sacrifice to the gods and the Tamil verb *palikotu* means "to sacrifice a victim", "to present offerings (to a deity)" and "to kill". A *pali* is that which has been "killed" or taken as a sacrifice. In the LTTE lexicon, the *pali* is, of course, not

⁹⁹ Prabhan, 'Historization of the Martial Ideology of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)', *Journal of South Asian Studies* 20:1-38.

¹⁰⁰ Kodikara, "The Separatist Eelam Movement in Sri Lanka: An Overview." *India Quarterly*, April 1981, pp. 194-212.

¹⁰¹ Michael Roberts, "Collective Identities, Nationalism and Protests in Modern Sri Lanka", (Marga Institute: Colombo, 1979), p. 64.

- *virar*, “hero”, *viram*, ‘heroism’,
- *maravar*, ‘warrior’,
- *maram*¹⁰⁷, ‘valour’,
- *tiyaki*, “one who abandons”,
- *tiyakam*, “abandonment”,

The *maravar* in the Sangam literature can be described as an aristocratic libertine with access to worldly pleasures. Up to the end of the first millennium the word *maravar* referred to a function, the warrior’s function, which could be taken up by mercenaries in different armies. The self - image of the *maravars* of having a glorious history, and their political ideology classified as Subhasism (ideology of Subhash Chandra Bose) strongly influenced the mind of Veluppillai Prabhakaran.¹⁰⁸

When the LTTE speaks about “martyrdom”, it often translates the word *tiyakam*.¹⁰⁹ It does not lexically mean “martyrdom”. It means “abandonment”. Implied in this concept is the meaning of voluntary abandonment of life, the conscious choice of possible death to reach an aim that is declared holy. The very

an animal or vegetable. The *pali* is the fighter himself¹⁰⁶ who has been killed and who is at the same time the sacrificer and the sacrifice. He gets killed in the very act of killing that intends to make the holy aim come true.

¹⁰⁷ The word *maram* is connected with “*valour*” “*bravery*”, “*anger*”, “*wrath*”, “*enmity*”, “*hatred*”, “*strength*”, “*power*”, “*victory*”, “*war*”, “*killing*” and “*murder*”. Not only can a warrior have *maram*, but also a whole army and a horse. This can be made evident by the two *turai*, “*themes*” of heroic Sangam poetry, *tanaimaram*, “*valour of the army*” and *kutiraimaram*, “*valour of the horse*”.

¹⁰⁸ The *maravars* were declared a criminal caste in 1911 by the then Government of India. Their political ambition after 1911 was to get rid of this bad reputation that discriminated against them in public life. This succeeded only in 1947.

¹⁰⁹ Peter Schalk, *Devotion, the ideal act of the tiyaki of the LTTE* in “*The Revival of Martyr Cults*” *Temenos* 33, 1997, p. 157

specific meaning assigned by the LTTE to *tiyakam* is the voluntary abandonment of life in the very act of taking life, in the act of killing. The getting killed whilst killing (in rage), having been confronted with the death of a comrade, is *tiyakam*. It is a specific type of aggressive mourning behaviour in the martial culture of the LTTE. A killed male and female LTTE fighter is regarded as a *tiyaki*.

The *Heroes Day (Maaveerar Naazh)* is held to remember the freedom fighters who sacrificed their lives to liberate an independent homeland for the Tamils - Tamil Eelam. Lt. Shankar, was the first LTTE fighter who sacrificed his life on 27 November 1982 after being fatally wounded in a Sri Lankan army round-up. LTTE marks the occasion with activities such as prayer, cultural events and community service in memory of their martyred heroes. ‘The widespread observance of this occasion denotes Tamil peoples’ proud consciousness of their own national identity and dedication to the liberation of their people from Sinhala rule’¹¹⁰. Thus it can be said that nationalism is the driving force and an enlightened notion for attaining a distinct nation-state, even at the cost of one’s life.

V Culminating suicide bombings in Sri Lanka

Death and sorrow will be the companions of our journey; hardship our garment; constancy and valor our only shield. We must be united, we must be undaunted, and we must be inflexible – Winston Churchill

It is learnt that the Sri Lankan Tamils are nurtured and trained to regard themselves as

¹¹⁰ Amantha Perera, “*Suicide bombers feared and revered*”, *Asia Times*, 17 July 2003 http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/E_G17Df03.html

'uyirautham' that is to make their *life into a weapon*. Whenever he commits to a suicide attack, it is regarded as '*that-kodai*' or *self gift*, rather than '*that-kolai*' or self killing. It also records that the mother of 'martyrs', are proud on hearing how their sons had met such an honourable death. One can well imagine that these smiling mothers were heart-broken inside, and cried a lot when no one was watching. Society rewards sacrifice. It does this for its own good. We benefit from the sacrifices of others, so are we encouraging each other to be self-sacrificing for the sake of society at large? Was this the force at work, making individuals commit suicide?

The self motivated Black Tigers die voluntarily, because the idea of Tamil Eelam is larger than their self. But they fail to understand that the self is the biggest of all ideas, without it, there are no ideas. There are crucial distinctions between 'true' martyrs and others. A true martyr does not abandon his previously held moral values. His goal is not to kill innocents. His goal is to accomplish a mission. Killing may be necessary, but it is not sought out as a primary goal. Another distinction is that a true martyr may accept the risk of his death, he may even accept or choose it, but only if it is inevitable. True martyrs would be altruistic. On the contrary, does the suicide terrorists. More information is required to understand whether the LTTE's cause inspires martyrdom or mere terrorism.

Suicide terrorism can be successful. Can it be justified and does it have positive goals – even if it involves violence, suffering and death? It is therefore necessary to stop the two decades of debilitating war that is sapping the vitality and civility of an otherwise beautiful island. Counter Terrorism measures cannot check or eliminate suicide bombers, nor can it prevent suicide bombings. No modern surveillance system or hardware can check suicide attacks. But there are a few oblique ways to end this form of terrorism in Sri

Lanka, though this may sound 'idealistic' in content.

The *first* line of defense against suicide terrorism is to understand its aim, history and people behind it. 'To Understand' is a soft but powerful phrase. It is not achieved by mere spying or military intelligence but by cultivating peace culture among those at logger heads. 'The Philosophy of Inclusivity, a search for a "third way" solution that does not support either party to the current struggle, may be attempted'¹¹¹. The goal is to permanently break the cycles of victim-villain-violence.

The *second* line of defence is to articulate the "third way" position against terrorism itself and not against either of the parties to the conflict¹¹². Each side justifies its actions while vilifying the actions of the other. Because of anger, history and psychological filters, the two sides cannot see or hear each other. Each seems unreasonable, "evil", to the other. The Sri Lankan government always refers to the LTTE as "terrorists", and stresses their unprovoked attacks on unarmed civilian populations, Sinhalese, Muslim and Tamil, as well as their use of suicide attackers and child soldiers. The Tigers refer to the government as oppressors, and stress the military's well-documented record of "disappearances", and other violations of human rights. Therefore, it is necessary to help both sides understand that their actions are part of the problem, and that all sides, including "the enemy", is part of the solution.

Third, each side feels justified in fighting the war, since they see themselves as "defending" the unprovoked aggression of the other. The Sri Lankan government states that the LTTE started and sustains the war, and that the government is only defending the Sri Lankan people. The LTTE says that the Sinhalese majority and the government

¹¹¹ Michael Ponnambalam, "Common way solutions", *The Nation*, 22 August 2002.

¹¹² Ibid.,

started the attacks on the Tamil people, and the LTTE is only defending against those attacks. Therefore it is necessary to help all parties to understand that it simply does not matter who “started” the conflict. No one who holds a gun can claim to have ‘clean hands’.

Fourth, because the wars are asymmetric, the standards of “winning” are different. The fighting goes on for decades, with both sides claiming victories. The Sri Lankan government sees itself fighting a war against a handful of terrorists who are trying to destroy the government. The Tigers see themselves as leading a movement for national liberation against a Sinhalese government that wants to exterminate the Tamil ethnic group. Both sides see themselves as the victims and the other as the perpetrators of violence. Therefore it is necessary to formulate and articulate a “third way” position (beyond government and insurgent positions.) This must look at reality from the point of view of the people, not the advocates of violence.

Fifth, both parties are locked in a cycle of mutual terrorism and retribution. Both sides have made honest attempts at peace, but have had them ignored or dismissed by the other. Both parties call for “peace talks”, but those calls are rejected by the other as not serious. Both parties are locked in a cycle of mistrust and violence. The only question is how long it will take them to learn the appropriate lessons. The recent suicide bombing of a police station at Colombo is a good example of this mistrust. Therefore the goal must be to shorten the learning curve, from generations to decades to years to now.

Sixth, all wars and conflicts have ethnic and cultural causes at their roots. The whole phenomenon of having young men who are ready to sacrifice their lives in suicide attacks should be frontally addressed and researched. The possible preventive

methods and solutions in the framework of a peace culture should also be explored, and constructive results applied.

Seventh, the solution to the phenomenon of suicide bombers probably lies in getting to the minds of the suicide volunteers with a powerful and influential culture of peace, before their minds are influenced. Research can help in exploring ways how to reach the roots of their identity, understand what their grievances are, to examine and suggest directions how these grievances can be addressed. The results should be presented in convincing ways that could influence volunteers for suicide bombings to change their decisions and behavior.

Eight, after almost 20 years of war, both sides still maintain that victory is right around the corner¹³. The Sri Lanka government maintains that their war on terrorism will end through military dominance: by deploying their latest weapons systems. The LTTE maintains that they will win through strategic attacks: in the latest ground offensive or by suicide bombing. Both are wrong. It is necessary to continually advocate a shift in their consciousness that can end war.

Finally, leadership plays an important role in an organisation. The violence continues because of the leadership, both in the government and in LTTE. The suicide terrorism in Sri Lanka is due to a powerful leadership in LTTE. Though the suicide bombers are self-motivated; the support and command is provided by the leadership. This is also true in the case of government. There must be a leader who can understand the problem and deliver the goods. The Sri Lankan government tries to effect the leadership change in LTTE by supporting the ‘traitors’ of LTTE. Therefore, without a change in the leadership, the suicide bombings in Sri Lanka will continue.

¹³ Michael Ponnambalam, “Common way solutions”, *The Nation*, 22 August 2002

An International award winning Tamil film *The Terrorist*, directed by Santosh Sivan, clearly mirrors the psychology of a suicide bomber. The story revolves around a woman suicide bomber, Malli, volunteering to assassinate a dignitary by the detonation of a concealed explosives belt during a public appearance. She is trained to follow a script in which she will garland the leader, bow down for a blessing, and then push a button that will set off explosives on a hidden belt. Malli, of course, will also die in the explosion, and her assassination and martyrdom would advance the cause for which she has dedicated her life. When the

time comes to push the button, Malli demurs. For the first time in her life, she decides to make her own decision and opts not to explode the bomb. Thus ends the film.

To sum up, suicide terrorism is a complex phenomena rooted in its own time and place. History will not give us all the answers. But it can provide useful lessons and even the promise of success, despite its rise as a new global threat. Unless there is a change in the mindset of the perpetrator, nothing can stop suicide bombings.

Table 1
Suicide Terrorism as differentiated from Suicidal Terrorism

| | Suicidal Terrorism | Suicide Terrorism |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|
| Aggressive Form | More aggressive form of terrorism | Most aggressive form of terrorism |
| Objective for promoting the cause | Coerce opponents, mobilize support for the cause. | Coerce opponents, create fear psychosis. |
| Intention | Acts of suicidal terrorism are generally directed against hard targets. | Acts of suicide terrorism are directed against hard (well-protected) as well as soft (ill-protected) targets. |
| Mode of Attack | Fidayeen attacks | Driving a car bomb, wearing a suicide vest, ramming an airplane into a building. |
| Chances of Survival | The attacker expects to survive a mission. | The attacker does not expect to survive a mission and often employs a method of attack that requires the attacker's death to succeed |
| Groups Involved | Pakistani jihadi organisations such as the Lashkar-e-Toiba (LET) and the Jaish-e-Mohammad (JEM) in Jammu and Kashmir | PIJ, LTTE, Hamas, PKK |

Table 2
Comparison Profile of LTTE with other groups (Top 3 activities of each group)

| Activities | LTTE | Hamas | ETA | PIJ | IRA | PKK | Shining Path | |
|------------------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|---------------------|-------------|
| <i>Bombing</i> | 20.7 | 6.1 | 37.3 | 9.3 | 25.0 | 27.6 | 5.0 | |
| <i>Car bomb</i> | 10.3 | 4.3 | | 35.3 | 18.5 | 37.5 | 0 | 45.0 |
| <i>Knife attack</i> | 3.4 | 7.8 | 0 | 1.9 | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| <i>Shooting</i> | 10.3 | | 37.4 | 23.5 | 27.8 | 31.5 | 13.8 | 35.0 |
| <i>Suicide Bombing</i> | 41.4 | | 34.8 | 0 | 35.2 | 0 | 13.8 | 35.0 |

| | | | | | | | |
|-------------------|-----|-----|---|-----|---|-------------|------|
| <i>Kidnapping</i> | 6.9 | 5.2 | 0 | 1.9 | 0 | 20.7 | 10.0 |
|-------------------|-----|-----|---|-----|---|-------------|------|

Source: www.ict.org.il

ETA - Basque Homeland and Freedom; PIJ - Palestinian Islamic Jihad; IRA - Irish Republic Army ; PKK - Kurdistan Worker's Party, Shining Path - Sendero Lumanaso , LTTE – Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam

Table 3
Suicide Attacks by LTTE in Sri Lanka

| Date / Day | Target Zone | Victims | Mode of Operation | Suicide bomber |
|----------------------------|--|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| 5 July 1987, Sunday | Nellyyadi Maha Vidyalayam, in Vadamradchchi in the Jaffna peninsula. | 40 security persons killed | Truck laden with explosives | Captain Miller |
| 12 July 1990, Thursday | Naval Vessel , Triconamalee | 6 security persons killed | Boat laden with explosives | 4 Male suicide bombers (Sea Tigers) |
| 23 November 1990, Friday | Manakulam Army camp | 3 Army men killed | Car laden with explosives | 2 Male suicide bombers |
| 02 March 1991, Saturday | Havelock Road, Election rally in Colombo | Defence Minister Ranjan Wijeratne killed | Car laden with explosives | Male suicide bomber |
| 19 March 1991, Tuesday | Army camp, Silavathurai | 5 Army men killed | Truck laden with explosives | _____ |
| 05 May 1991, Sunday | Naval vessel in Triconamalee | 5 security personnel killed | Boat laden with explosives | 2 Male suicide bombers (Sea Tigers) |
| 11 May 1991, Saturday | Kankesanthurai | 3 Naval personnel killed | Boat laden with explosives | 3 Male suicide bombers (Sea Tigers) |
| 21 June 1991, Friday | Outside the Joint Operations Command Office, Colombo | 21 persons killed, 200 people wounded | Truck laden with 70 kg of explosives | Two male suicide bombers |
| 16 November 1992, Monday | Outside the Naval Command office, Colombo | Clancy Fernando, Vice Admiral of Navy and 5 others killed | Motorcycle laden with explosives rammed into his car | Two male suicide bombers |
| 01 May 1993, Saturday | Armour Street Junction, UNP's May Day rally at Central Colombo | Mr.Ranasinghe Premadasa, the Sri Lankan President and 23 others killed | 6cm wide and 40 cm long – abdominal belt bomb | Babu, a male suicide bomber |
| 11 November 1993, Thursday | Naval base, Jaffna lagoon | 2 Navy boats got damaged | Boat laden with explosives | Sea Tigers |

| | | | | |
|----------------------------|--|--|---|-------------------------------------|
| 02 August 1994, Tuesday | Palali Air base | Air force helicopter damaged | Body suit | Male suicide bomber |
| 23 October 1994, Sunday | Thotalaga (Grandpass) Junction, Election meeting in Colombo | Gamini Dissanayake, Opposition leader (UNP) and 56 others killed | Abdominal Belt bomb | Male suicide bomber |
| 07 August 1995, Monday | In front of the Western Province CM's office at Independence Square, Colombo | 22 persons killed | Hand cart laden with explosives | Male suicide bomber |
| 10 September 1995, Sunday | Kankesanthurai | A Naval vessel damaged | Plastic bomb by Scuba diving | Male suicide bomber (Sea Tigers) |
| 02 October 1995, Monday | Kankesanthurai | A Naval vessel damaged | Plastic bomb by Scuba diving | Male suicide bomber(Sea Tigers) |
| 17 October 1995, Tuesday | Triconamalee | 9 Naval personnel killed and a Naval vessel damaged | Plastic bomb by Scuba diving | Male suicide bomber(Sea Tigers) |
| 11 November 1995, Saturday | Opposite Slave Island Railway Station and near the Army headquarters. | 23 Army men killed | Abdominal belt bomb | Two women Suicide bombers. |
| 05 December 1995, Tuesday | Police Camp, Batticaloa | 23 police killed | Truck laden with explosives | 3 Male suicide bombers |
| 31 January 1996, Wednesday | Central Bank at Janadipathi Mawatha, Colombo | 91 killed and 1,400 wounded | Truck laden with 124 kg of explosives | 3 member suicide squad |
| 01 April 1996, Monday | Vettilaikerni | 10 security persons killed | Boat laden with bomb | 2 male suicide bombers (Sea Tigers) |
| 03 July 1996, Wednesday | Government Motorcade, Jaffna | 37 persons Killed | Abdominal belt bomb | Woman Suicide bomber |
| 25 October 1996, Friday | Triconamalee | 12 Naval personnel killed | Boat laden with explosives | 2 Male suicide bombers (Sea Tigers) |
| 17 December 1996, Tuesday | Ampara, Police unit | A Deputy Police commander killed. | Motorcycle laden with explosives | Male suicide bomber |
| 15 October 1997, Wednesday | World Trade Centre building, near President's Secretariat | 118 killed and 40 wounded | Truck laden with 300-400 kg of explosives | 2 Male suicide bombers |
| 19 October 1997, Sunday | Naval gun boat, North Eastern coast | 7 Naval personnel killed | Boat laden with explosives | 2 Male suicide bombers (Sea Tigers) |

| | | | | |
|---------------------------|--|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| 28 December 1997, Sunday | South Srilanka | Naval Chief Cecil Tissera wounded | Truck laden with explosives | Male suicide bomber |
| 25 January 1998, Sunday | Sri Dalada Maligawa in Kandy, the temple which houses the Sacred Tooth Relic of the Lord Buddha | 11 killed and 25 wounded | Truck laden with 300-400 kg of explosives | Three Male suicide bombers |
| 06 February 1998, Friday | Near the Rio Cinema at Slave Island - Air Force Head quarters, Colombo | 8 Air Force men killed | Abdominal belt bomb | Woman Suicide bomber |
| 23 February 1998, Monday | Point Pedro | 47 Naval personnel killed | 2 Boats laden with explosives | 4 Male suicide bombers (Sea Tigers) |
| 14 May 1998, Friday | Jaffna Peninsula | Army Brigadier killed | Abdominal belt bomb | Woman suicide bomber |
| 11 September 1998, Friday | Municipal Council building, Northern Jaffna | Mayor of Jaffna and 17 others killed | Bomb strapped to the bomber's body (Body suit) | Male suicide bomber |
| 18 March 1999, Thursday | Near a police station in Colombo. Target was the head of the police terrorism investigation unit | Chief Inspector Mohammed Nilabdeen and 2 others killed | Bomb strapped to the bomber's body (Body Suit) | Woman Suicide bomber |
| 29 May 1999, Saturday | Batticalao | Tamil Rival leader Mr.M.Ganesha Kumar (EPRLF) killed | Abdominal belt bomb | Woman Suicide bomber |
| 25 July 1999, Sunday | Triconamalee | 1 Naval personnel killed | Abdominal belt bomb | Woman Suicide bomber |
| 29 July 1999, Thursday | Kynsly Road - Rosmead Place Junction in Borella, Colombo | Neelan Thiruchelvam, TULF vice president killed | Bomb strapped to the bomber's body (Body suit) | Male suicide bomber |
| 04 August 1999, Wednesday | Town of Vavuniya northern Sri Lanka | Nine police commandos and one civilian killed | Belt bomb. A bicycle was used for the mission. | Male suicide bomber |
| 09 August 1999, Wednesday | Vakarai | Military commander killed | Abdominal belt bomb | Male suicide bomber |
| 02 September 1999, Monday | Vavuniya | K.Manikkadasan, Deputy Leader of PLOTE and 2 others killed | Abdominal belt bomb | Male suicide bomber |

| | | | | |
|----------------------------|---|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| 18 December 1999, Thursday | Election rally Town Hall premises in the heart of Colombo | 21 people killed and 110 others wounded. Chandrika Kumaratunga, President, survived the attack but shrapnel wounds the eye | Bomb strapped to the bomber's body (Body suit) | Woman suicide bomber |
| 18 December 1999, Thursday | Presidential Election meeting at Ja-Ela, Colombo | Former Army Major General Lucky Algama and 8 others killed and 70 wounded | Bomb strapped to the bomber's body (Body suit) | Male suicide bomber |
| 05 January 2000, Saturday | In front of the Prime Minister's Office, Flower Road, Colombo | 11 persons killed and 24 wounded | Bomb strapped to the bomber's body (Body suit) | Woman suicide bomber |
| 02 March 2000, Thursday | Rajagiriya, opposite to an Ayurveda Hospital | 25 persons killed | Weapons & claymore mines | 3 member suicide cadre |
| 02 March 2000, Thursday | Inner Harbour Road, Trincomalee | Col.DP De Z Abeyasekera (221 Brigade Commander) and 2 others killed | Belt bomb | Woman suicide bomber |
| 10 March 2000, Friday | Top floor of the Serpentine Flat "C", Wanathamulla | Three policemen and at least 20 others killed | Van laden with explosives | 5 Male suicide bombers |
| 05 June 2000, Monday | Sinks gunboat of the Sri Lankan Navy, off Vadamarachchi coast, Jaffna peninsula | 34 Naval personnel killed | Boat laden with explosives | 2 Male suicide bombers - Sea Tigers |
| 07 June 2000, Wednesday | Golumadama Junction, Ratmalana | C. V. Goonaratne, Industries Development Minister killed | Bomb strapped to the bomber's body (Body suit) | Woman Suicide bomber |
| 14 June 2000, Wednesday | Gemunu Palace Cinema Junction in Wattala | 2 Air Force personnel killed | Push Bicycle fitted with an explosive device | Male suicide bomber |
| 25 June 2000, Sunday | Merchant vessel in the high seas off Point Pedro | 16 Naval personnel killed | Boat laden with explosives | Sea Tiger squad |
| 16 August 2000, Wednesday | Vavuniya | 1 Army person killed | Abdominal belt bomb | Woman suicide bomber |
| 15 September 2000, Friday | Eye Hospital, Deans Road in Colombo | 7 persons were killed and 30 wounded | Bomb strapped to the bomber's body (Body suit) | Male suicide bomber |

| | | | | |
|----------------------------|--|--|--------------------------------------|---|
| 02 October 2000, Monday | Triconamalee | SLMC leader and 22 others killed | Abdominal belt bomb | Woman suicide bomber |
| 19 October 2000, Thursday | Near Town Hall. Just before Sri Lanka's President installed her new cabinet in Colombo | 5 people killed and 23 wounded. | Abdominal belt bomb | Male suicide bomber |
| 24 July 2001, Tuesday | International airport in Sri Lanka | 12 people killed | Truck laden with explosives | 14 Male suicide bombers |
| 29 October 2001, Monday | Chitra Lane, Narahenpita | 6 others killed. Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickremanayake escapes assassination | _____ | Male suicide bomber |
| 30 October 2001, Tuesday | Mt. Silk Pride was attacked at 12 nautical miles north of Point Pedro | 7 security personnel killed | Boat laden with explosives | Sea Tiger squad |
| 15 November 2001, Thursday | Batticaloa town | Three soldiers killed (who had formerly been members of PLOTE) and nine others seriously wounded | Abdominal belt bomb | Male suicide bomber |
| 07 July 2004, Wednesday | Kollupitiya police station, Colombo. | Four police officials killed and nine seriously injured | Bomb strapped to the bomber's chest. | Thiagaraja Jeyarani, a Woman suicide bomber |

Table 4
Involvement of Men and Women in Black Tiger Operations

| Black Tigers | Tigers Claw (Men) | Birds of Freedom (Women) |
|---------------------|--|---|
| Total Strength | 312 | 92 |
| Black Sea Tigers | 152 | 22 |
| Successful Missions | 58 | 27 |
| Training camp | Red Garden, Mullaitivu forest | Red Garden, Mullaitivu forest |
| Mode of operation | Truck laden with bomb, Bicycles, Abdominal belt bomb, Scuba diving | Abdominal belt, Body suit, Brassiere bomb |

About the Author

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