

The Sydney Morning Herald

Suicide bombings are effective - so expect more

Tom Allard, National Security Editor

15 August 2007

© 2007 Copyright John Fairfax Holdings Limited.

SUICIDE bombings are becoming more frequent around the world and remain a highly lethal and effective terrorist tactic, according to a study funded by the Federal Government.

The survey of suicide attacks over the past 25 years by a Flinders University academic, Raiz Hassan, finds the popularity of the technique can be easily explained.

"It works," said Professor Hassan. "Suicide bombing is the precision weapon of the militarily challenged."

From Hezbollah's success in pushing the US and France out of Lebanon in the early 1980s to the advances of the Tamil Tigers in the north of Sri Lanka and the Hamas campaign in Gaza, Professor Hassan said there was no shortage of examples where suicide attacks had achieved political and territorial concessions.

"They are much more lethal compared to non-suicide attacks," Professor Hassan said. "They cause more deaths, they provide psychological impacts, impacts that are further enhanced by the media coverage."

Professor Hassan's research found suicide attacks were 12 times more lethal than non-suicide terrorist operations. On average, each suicide attack kills 13 and injures 30 people.

While suicide attacks accounted for just 3.5 per cent of all terrorist attacks between 1981 and 2006, they accounted for 30 per cent of all deaths, an extraordinary 13,195 fatalities.

Professor Hassan noted that, before the invasion of Iraq in 2003, there had been 315 suicide attacks in the preceding 20 years. But from 2003 to 2006 there have been almost 1100 suicide attacks, 56 per cent of them in Iraq.

Professor Hassan said the tactic was also on the rise in countries like Pakistan and Afghanistan.

"What we are seeing may be the tip of the iceberg and that is a very depressing prospect."

Professor Hassan had originally intended to interview terrorist groups members - including leaders - for his research but was told that he would breach the Government's anti-terrorism laws. The project, which received more than \$800,000 from the Government, had to be recast.

However, the Adelaide academic still delved into the controversial area of what motivates people to take the extraordinary step to take their own life and kill innocent civilians in pursuit of a military or political objectives.