



Självmondsbombares motiv

OUTLOOK - **In Sweden, a suicide bombing** is a big deal as long as it takes place in Sweden. International suicide bombings, however, pass without attracting much attention. Last Wednesday 38 people lost their life in Chababar in southeastern Iran, and on Sunday 17 people were killed in Ramadi in Iraq. On both occasions a suicide bomber was behind it - but they are joining a long list that has now become so long that one no longer keeps track.



Bomber in Stockholm was himself his only victim.

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SVD / SCANPIX

Where does this widespread readiness to blow oneself up in the air come from? A common interpretation is that there is the issue of religious extremism.

A suicide bombing is justified, in this view, by a combination of irrational hatred and the promise of heavenly delights – and the often spoken about 72 virgins that are rewarded to the successful bomber.

But not everyone who studies the phenomenon agrees with this ideological interpretation. The phenomenon is - they say - not so extreme, and less exotic. Adam Lankford, who is professor of criminal justice at the University of Alabama, argues that these are ordinary people whose quite common causes are suicidal: the money has run out, conditions that have cracked or health failed.

The way out of the hopeless situation is suicide bombing, which, unlike an ordinary suicide can be portrayed as a heroic martyrdom.

To the question of how this performance arises and cultivated, the other answer is the religious extremist. Also, terrorists are people with social ties and obligations; terrorists are also influenced by group dynamics forces. "The big threat in the western world," writes the American anthropologist Scott Atran, "is not from any athletic organization, but from an al Qaeda-inspired virus-like social movement that uses religion in the name of defending Muslims, and is particularly contagious among young adults in various transitional phases: migrants, students, those looking for friends, partners, or work." In this typical modern state of uncertainty and identity confusion of a particular form of community with an unusually strong tendency to radicalization.

That the motives and mechanisms can be quite mundane does not mean that there are no religious or political components. Rather it is the combination of different driving forces that create suicide bombers and terrorists in general. "When the perceived injustices linked to thwarted personal ambitions," writes Atran, "it generates moral outrage which provides support for violent conduct."

The risk of ignoring the mundane reasons is that the entire phenomenon is misunderstood as more exotic than it actually is. It may indeed be adequate to locate all the problems on other continents and cultures, but the consequence is that the battles are fought against enemies that do not exist - to a hierarchically organized global terrorist organization that controls and brainwashes its members, for example - while real threats and challenges are neglected.

Jerusalem

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