

## Film Reviews

### *Human Weapon*

Directed by Ilan Ziv

First Run/Icarus Films, 2003

*Human Weapon* is a truly disturbing documentary focusing on the contemporary phenomenon of suicide bombing. By combining interviews with bombers, victims and their families with newsreel footage and recruitment videos made by terrorist organizations the film explores the reasons why people become suicide bombers and how these bombers are used by terrorist organizations as part of their larger military goals. I do have to warn potential viewers of this film, much of the newsreel footage is incredibly graphic and includes pictures of severed limbs and mangled bodies that are usually left out on the evening news. I know that there are some scenes that will stay with me for years.

The film debunks many of the stereotypes about suicide bombers. For the most part the suicide bombers we see in the film are not alienated, untrained teenagers who are acting on their own or as a part of a small loosely organized terrorist organization. Often they are highly trained military personnel with wives and children who are an important part of the military organizations in which they serve. Indeed the Tamil Tigers, Hamas and Hizbollah all have specific squadrons of suicide bombers who are treated as a branch of military service that are as vital to their military as the army or the navy are to the United States' military forces.

The film begins with the 1983 bombings of the American Embassy and the U. S. Army barracks in Lebanon that led to the withdrawal of American forces a few weeks later. This withdrawal points out what a powerful weapon suicide bombing is. Two truck bombs convinced the U. S. to withdraw its troops when the constant fighting between the various armies occupying southern Lebanon could not.

Suicide troops were used on a much wider by the scale by Iranians in the Iran-Iraq war. Facing the technical superiority of the Iraqi military, the Iranians responded with the basaji who were huge squadrons of

young, generally unarmed boys who participated in human wave attacks. The boys were often sent ahead of regular, Iranian troops to clear minefields and generally distract or exhaust the Iraqis. Participation in basaji raids was so popular that, as one former basaji reports, on one mission a commander asked for a thousand volunteers and three thousand boys volunteered. The boys were so eager to participate that the officers had to hold a foot race to determine which boys would go.

The Lebanese Shi'ite organization Hizbollah was the first to successfully use suicide bombers to drive both the Israeli and American armies out of southern Lebanon. Hizbollah also used its television station to create a cult of martyrdom by glorifying the exploits of suicide bombers through television specials and videos that are included in the film. Their success inspired Hamas to use similar tactics against the Israeli military in the West Bank and against Israeli civilians in Israel. Hamas has also created a cult of martyrdom by glorifying the exploits of its suicide bombers in videos.

While bombings in the Middle East are international news, in the United States we rarely hear about the suicide bombings in Sri Lanka, that are carried out by a division of the Tamil Tigers known as the Black Tigers who are responsible for the death of Rajiv Gandhi and nearly killed the Sri Lankan Prime Minister. These bombings are so common that they are only reported in the newspaper if they kill ten or more people. The Sri Lankan suicide bombers are even better organized and more highly trained than their middle eastern counterparts and unlike the male dominated squads of Hamas and Hizbollah, most Black Tiger bombers are women. Their goal is to cause as much chaos as possible within Sri Lankan society, so they do not target only military operations, but they attack politicians and commercial sites. The film shows a special unit of Black Tigers who ram speedboats full of explosives into Sri Lankan vessels and a unit of bombers who temporarily grounded the entire fleet of Air Sri Lanka. This section of the film shows some particularly graphic footage from the assassination attempt on the Sri Lankan Prime Minister.

In an interview, an unsuccessful bomber explains that he became a suicide bomber because he has no hope in this life. His only hope lies in the possibility of sacrificing himself for his cause and going to a paradise after his death. It is this loss of hope that drives many of these suicide bombers and the various organizations that they serve.