

P A R A I E W

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SPREAD OF TRANSIT BOMBINGS ACROSS EUROPE EXPECTED BY COPYCAT EFFECT RESEARCHER

An international expert in behavioral contagion, Loren Coleman, author of *THE COPYCAT EFFECT* said even before the latest London bombings that floodgates would open to copycat acts of suicide bombers targeting mass transit systems and public gathering locations, such as malls in Europe and North America. Incidents as the 7/7 London, 3/11 Madrid, and 9/11 terror attacks serve as “celebrity events” that become models copied by vulnerable Islamic extremists. The shift from flying airplanes into buildings, to soft targets in the mass transit sphere, now appears complete, says Coleman who expects we will see more copycat bombings in the coming months.

The news that the deadly London subway and bus bombings were caused by suicide bombers already has an immediate impact on the ranks of potential suicide bombers, as last Thursday repeat-bombings show.

Coleman, who foresaw last summer that beheadings would be copied due to the mass media attention, says that while the media is not to blame, per se, it serves the objectives of the suicide bombers. Al-Qaeda and Hamas suicide bombers’ acts serve as models of acceptable behavior among their peers, spreading their membership via the copycat effect. In his groundbreaking book, he documents how suicidal-homicidal behavior requires a strong sense of purpose, which is in itself contagious, and leads to “volunteers” of this kind.

Coleman points out, that we did not always live in a world of suicide bombers. There is mounting evidence that suicide bombings, because of the media attention they receive, the fear they create, the terrorism and copycats they produce, achieve the goals of their suicidal-homicidal acts. The media--and how they can be used--has certainly become a part of the process. Today’s terrorists will use mass transit suicide bombings as publicity to recruit more activists, to gain attention to their grievances from softliners, and to “win” their war, from their point of view. Suicide bombers employ the media as horror-driven entertainment, to broaden their message.

Coleman notes that research shows potential terrorists become aroused by media presentations of terrorism, accept the violence as justified, and become tomorrow’s suicide bombers. Contagion terrorism, unfortunately, makes compelling sense when we understand the simple but deadly psychology of the copycat effect. The global attention and blanket media coverage given the recent London terrorist attacks will actually help create tomorrow’s suicide bombers who will feel fully legitimized in their future murder-suicides. It all is a sad irony, notes Coleman.

About LOREN COLEMAN

Loren Coleman, M.S.W., of Portland, Maine, has written and lectured extensively on the impact of media on violence in the U.S. His career spans the mental-health field, as a researcher and adjunct associate professor at the University of Southern Maine, and the author, coauthor, or editor of more than 20 books, including the acclaimed *Suicide Clusters* (Faber and Faber, 1987). He has investigated epidemics in suicide, arson, substance abuse, child maltreatment, sexual crime, and other behaviors. His work has been covered in the national press, including *The New York Times*, *Sports Illustrated*, ESPN, *The Larry King Show*, *All Things Considered*, *Inside Edition*, and other media forums, where he is featured as an authority on suicide clusters, Heaven's Gate, Waco, and Columbine. Since the mid 1980s, Coleman has been consulting and speaking in the U.S. and Canada on suicide clusters, school violence, and the media.

About THE COPYCAT EFFECT

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