

**Underestimating Threats:
Women Terrorists**

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Abstract

The wrongful depiction of women as incapable of violent acts embedded in our society and fueled by mass media, leads governments to underestimate the role of women in terrorist organizations. This biased perception represents a threat to international security. As history and recent statistics prove, women do play active roles and are even more effective than men as perpetrators of violence. The objective of this paper is to offer policy makers an insight of women's role in terrorist organizations when implementing counter terrorism measures. This analysis of women can be a window to a terrorist organization's tactics, strengths, and ideology. The assessment will take into consideration the cultural biases and threats of women terrorist's today and offer five case studies of terrorist organizations in which women have played active roles.

Introduction

"I have learned that a woman can be a fighter, a freedom fighter, a political activist, and that she can fall in love, and be loved, she can be married, have children, be a mother... You see, at the beginning we were only interested in the revolution. We were not mature enough politically. The question of women is a part of our struggle but not the only part. Revolution must mean life also; every aspect of life" (Viner, K., 2001, para.15-16; Khaled, 1973). These words were spoken by Leila Khaled, one of the most renown women fighters in the world, who became an icon to whom songs and films were dedicated.

Born in Haifa, Israel in 1944, four years later Leila fled to Lebanon with her family. At age 15, Leila was already registered with the Arab Nationalist Movement. At age 25, she became a part of the group that hijacked the flight TWA 840 that took off from Rome bound for Cairo. No one died during that operation, but Khaled recounts that she had held a grenade for six hours

after she had inadvertently activated the trigger. Leila Khaled is not the first, nor is she the only woman in the world to use violence for political purposes. However, despite the actions in which Leila engaged, she always rejected the definition of terrorist for herself.

Merely talking about women and terrorism can create uneasiness. In society, we are used to associating women with characteristics such as motherhood, cooperation, care and peace, as Laura Sjobergs, professor of Political Science at the University of Florida explains (Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007). However, these stereotypical assumptions and beliefs fall and shatter when we witness the cruelty of terrorist actions taken by women. The purpose of this research paper is to explore women's roles within terroristic organizations, analyze how their roles are underestimated, and provide insight into how to combat terrorism from a different perspective.

A Wrongful Perception

The world in which individuals operate within today is largely influenced by mass media. Mass media plays a crucial role in the common misconception that women are not capable of terrorist acts. When it comes to the coverage of political violence, the gender of the perpetrator of a terrorist act is highlighted more than the act itself (Nacos, 2005). As a result, the common perception regarding the relationship between gender and terrorism becomes exceptional, and an integral part of terrorist strategy. It is important to understand that mass media, especially in democratic countries with extensive press freedom, is used by terrorist as a tool of propaganda. When a terrorist act makes the front page, terrorists consider it a success because of the large audience it reaches, glorifying the act, the perpetrator, and the terrorist organization (Richardson, 2006). In the media, the personal depiction of a woman perpetrator is always different than a man's. A man's actions within a terrorist group is usually associated with a political goal, while women terrorist are often portrayed as "wives", "sex slaves" forced to join the group, "religious

fanatics”, or even “mentally ill”. Most women are not members of terrorist groups for those reasons, such as the case of the Yazidis under ISIS’s control, where women are forced into sexual slavery and deprived of all human rights (Subin, 2018). However, it is important to know most women join terrorist groups voluntarily.

Mass media typically does not hold women accountable for their actions as terrorists. The media plays a large role in shaping the public’s opinion about women terrorists. The embedded cultural bias within the media influences opinions on the measures that should be taken by governments regarding the issues of gender and terrorism. Most countries have laws that treat women and children differently from male terrorists. For example, women returning from Middle Eastern countries like Syria have the right to come back and live in European Countries. Despite laws that exist within many countries that treat women/children and men terrorist differently, some countries have changed their laws. The United States and France have both enacted laws that treat women and men equally as a way to reduce national threats by returnees from radicalizing conflicts (Hamza, 2018). Unfortunately, as a United Nations (UN) report shows, stricter laws regarding gender and terrorism could interfere with international human rights (UNSC, 2018). Within France some enacted laws and security procedures have been criticized for threatening human rights (McKernan, 2017).

Regardless of the globally spread misogynist view within society, the international community has always taken a stand against gender discrimination and violence against women. Even in the context of counter-terrorism, since 2008 the UN has reported and strongly spoken against the use of sexual violence as a tactic of terrorism and the impact of counter-terrorism measures on women’s rights. (UN Security Council, 2017). In recent years the General Assembly has begun to change their attitude towards women in the context of terrorism and

counter-terrorism strategies. In 2016 the UN General Assembly urged its member states to investigate the causes of radicalization of women for the first time. In Resolution 2396 (2017), the UN Security Council encouraged countries to develop tailored prosecutions, rehabilitation, and reintegration strategies when dealing with women “associated with foreign terrorist fighters returning or relocating may have served in different roles, including as supporters, facilitators or perpetrators of terrorist acts” (United Nations Security Council: Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, 2019, pg. 4). Despite the UN’s efforts, a Europol report on terrorism trends confirmed that the presence of radicalized women and their involvement in extremist violence was underestimated, and the idea that violent extremism and terrorism is an almost exclusively male phenomenon continued to be advanced (Europol, 2017).

Increasing Numbers

The Europol report indicates that women have historically been active in various violent political organizations in different parts of the world. Women in these terrorist groups not only have supporting roles, but also act as leaders within these organizations. These roles within the organizations range from recruitment and fund-raising to exercising direct operational actions. The active role of women in terrorist organizations has been growing since the 1980’s, and rose exponentially in the 2000’s as women began acting as suicide bombers. A total of 257 suicide attacks have occurred between 1985 and 2010 in which women from various terrorist organizations were involved, accounting for a quarter of the total of the attacks (Bloom, 2011). According to a study conducted by Tel Aviv University’s Institute for National Security Studies, even though the total number of suicide attacks has decreased since 2013, the attacks involving women have increased. Of the 348 attacks carried out by a total of 623 terrorists in 2017, 137 were carried out by women and girls. This is the highest number of attacks by women since

women began taking part in suicide attacks (Mendelboim & Schweitzer, 2018). The internet has also facilitated the participation of women in radical organizations that are now virtually accessible and in an anonymous manner. According to analysts like Katherine Brown of King's College London, women's presence in terrorist groups has increased over the years along with the violence of which they are stained (Moss, 2017).

Women Terrorists in History

History reflects the opposite of what public perception of women as terrorists is today. In fact, women's involvement in terrorist organizations are not as sporadic as mass media portrays. Nor is their involvement a recent phenomenon. Considering that the most prominent and effective armed groups used terrorist tactics to achieve their political goals, we find that women's participation within terrorist organizations have been constant across time, geography, and culture, along with a change in role.

Table 1

Terrorist Organization	Country	Year	Ideology	Women's Role
AL-QAEDA	Afghanistan	1988-present	Sunni- Islamist Anti-imperialist	Logistics Recruitment
JAPANESE RED ARMY	Japan	1971-2001	Marxist-Leninist	Political Leadership
BAADER-MEINHOF	Germany	1970-1998	Marxist-Leninist	Logistics Political Leadership

BRIGATE ROSSE	Italy	1970-1988	Marxist-Leninist	Logistics Political Leadership Assassinations
ETA (EUSKADITTA ASKATASUNA)	Basque (Spain and France)	1959 – May 2018	Separatist-Nationalist	Logistics Guerrilla Political Leadership
FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia People's Army)	Colombia	1964-2017*	Left-wing Nationalist Marxist-Leninist	Logistics Recruitment Guerrilla
FRENTE SANDINISTA (Terrorist Group)	Nicaragua	1961-	Anti-imperialist	Logistics Guerrilla Political Leadership
Armed Islamic Group	Algeria	1993–2004	Salafi-Jihadist Wahhabis	Logistics
HAMAS	Palestine	1987	Nationalist Sunni-Islamist Anti-Zionist	Logics Martyrdom Political Leadership

HEZBOLLAH	Lebanon	1985	Islamist Nationalist Anti-imperialist	Logistics Political Leadership
ISIS (Islamic State of Syria and Sham)	Iraq-Syria	1999	Salafist	Logistics Recruitment Martyrdom*
JEMAAH ISLAMIAH	Indonesia Malaysia Philippine Singapore	1993	Salafist Wahhabis	Logistics
ISLAMIST JIHAD MOVEMENT	Palestine (Gaza strip)	1987–present	Palestinian- Nationalist Islamist	Logistics Martyrdom
PKK (PARTIYA KARKAREN KURDISTAN)	Kurdistan	1978-present	Nationalist	Logistics Martyrdom Guerrilla Political Leadership
PIRA (Provisional Irish Republican Army)	Ireland	1969-1988	Separatist Nationalist	Logistics Recruitment Political Leadership

SENDERO LUMINOSO	Peru	1969- present	Maoist Marxist Gonzalo- thought	Logistics Guerrilla Recruitment Political Leadership
CHECHEN SEPARATISTS (BLACK WIDOWS)	Chechnya	200-present	Separatist Islamist	Logistics Recruitment Martyrdom
Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)	Sri Lanka	1976-2009	Separatist Nationalist	Logistics Recruitment Political Leadership Guerrilla Martyrdom
Weather Underground Organization	United States	1969-1977	Communist Black Power Anti-imperialist	Logistics Recruitment Political Leadership

* Data presented in Table 1 has been gathered from the book *Terrorism: A History* (Law, 2016).

* ISIS use of women in martyrdom is unprecedented before 2017 and still under scrutiny.

Observations

Interesting patterns are found when evaluating the relationship between the ideology of each organization and the specific role of women within the organization: suicide bombing. In general, there may be a connection between female participation in suicide attacks and the ideological orientation of armed groups sponsoring this form of violence. With the exception of

Chechen rebels, female participation is very low in Salafist organizations such as al-Qaida, and in nationalist-Islamist-inspired organizations such as Hamas, Islamic Jihad in the Palestinian Territories, and Hezbollah in Lebanon. Female participations is high or very high in secular nationalist organizations like Fatah, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (FPLP) in the Palestinian Territories, the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka, the Lebanese lay groups, and the Kurdish PKK (Table 1).

It appears that the ideological appeal to Islamic fundamentalism has the effect of reducing female participation in suicide attacks. In terms of the symbolic function of violence (relating to the representation and communication of messages), female "martyrdom" usually has a wider resonance. Moreover, it appeals to the feelings of fear and disorientation that are more intense in the community affected by violence because of the cultural bias discussed above. The sacrifice of female "martyrs" can have the effect of motivation and mobilization because it encourages male comrades not to be less than women. Women normally are less subject to control by the authorities. They can reach places and targets inaccessible to men because of the advantages they have as a woman. For instance, women can more easily hide an explosive charge under their clothes by pretending to be pregnant or, more simply, because nobody expects them to explode. According to some scholars, suicide attacks by women would cause more deaths and injuries than those made by male counterparts (O'Rourke, 2009).

The operational and tactical advantages of women are recognized by many terrorist organizations as so beneficial that they will bypass or circumvent the ideological prohibition on the active participation of women in fighting. This is typical of many traditionalist and patriarchal societies in which these acts of violence are organized. Even major Islamist and Jihadist armed groups who typically are very conservative on gender equality have, over time,

accepted the possibility that women may take part in Jihad and sacrifice their lives in "martyrdom operations". Examples of this can be seen in organizations such as the Hamas, The Black Widows, and ISIS.

Case Studies

To gain insight of the roles of women in terrorist organizations, a comparative analysis will be conducted on five study cases: the Italian Red Brigades, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Sendero Luminoso, the Black Widows, and the Islamic State of Syria and Sham (ISIS). The five terrorist groups were selected based on three specific criteria: location, ideology, and political context. The purpose of the analysis is to determine if there is a relationship between location, ideology, political context, and the role of women within these organizations. The criteria of location, refers to the country or region in which the group operates. The location of an organization is an essential component for a group's operations since proximity to other terrorist organizations might influence ideology, tactics or even an alliance, making a comparison between the groups a vain endeavor. The terrorist organization's location is also important because it impacts the group's accessibility to sources or territory, and sets the environment either in favor of, or against, the group. For this reason, the case studies are taken from five different countries or areas of operation: Italy, Sri Lanka, Peru, Chechnya (Caucasus area), Syria, and Iraq.

The criteria of ideology refers to the beliefs that drive the terrorist organizations under which they conduct their activities against the government, army, or civilian population. The ideology of a group impacts the choice of targets, as well as the choice of recruitment of group members. Although overlapping of some aspects of ideology, such as equality through socialism or religious fanaticism, is frequent in a number of terrorist groups, classifying these groups by

their core ideology in the specific environment in which the group operates is a useful profiling tool. The five case studies include the following ideologies: Marxism, Ethno-Nationalism, Maoism, Nationalism and Islamism, and Islamic Fundamentalism.

The third criteria, political context, refers to the political environment in which the terrorist group was created, operates, and combats. An organization's political context includes the type of government that exists within its territory, the level of economic and social equality within the country, and international influence within the country. Each case study has a unique political context that can be compared and contrasted. The Red Brigades operated in a post-World War II environment characterized by rapid industrialization, where a centrist “democratic Christian” government was welcoming US influence through multinational companies. The LTTE was fighting ethnic discrimination by the Sri Lanka Government, which used the caste system and practiced systematic gender discrimination. Sendero Luminoso operated in a weak democracy in which economic and the ethno-social division was deep since Spanish colonization, especially in rural areas. The Black Widows were a section of the separatist Chechen group which tried to gain independence from an authoritative Russian government. The government forces and the separatists went to war twice, and the small areas controlled by the separatists were lawless and became a place of human right violations on both sides. ISIS developed in the context of the US invasion of Iraq, even though it can also be traced back to Al-Qaeda’s Jihad in the Afghan War. The democratic plan of the US in the nation building process of a sectarian Iraq, and later the territorial divide of the Syrian Civil War, became terrorist havens for Islamic extremists who exploited the cracks in the society of Iraq and the power vacuum in Syria. The three criteria used to choose the case studies serve as a comparison measurement in the conclusion.

Italian Red Brigades (EUROPE-Marxist)

The Italian Red Brigades is categorized under the European revolutionary groups of leftist ideology. It was a domestic terrorist group with international ties that operated in Italy between the 1970's and 1980's. This movement, like the German Red Brigades, was populated mainly by students and professors. The organization formed as a reaction to the former fascist generation that was in power as a legacy of WWII. The Red Brigades was Marxist in ideology and fought against the capitalist state and, by extension, the United States. After years of inactivity, the "Red Brigades" organization was active once more in 1999, revendicating new bloody attacks in the period between 1999 -2003 (Law, 2016).

Between 1970 and 1984, it is estimated that 451 of the 2,512 individuals arrested by the Italian government, or about 18%, were female (Weinberg & Eubank, 1987). Women had both a political and operational role in the Italian Red Brigades terrorist group. In addition to roles such as intelligence gathering, spying within the organization to look for potential moles, and recruiting, women were also involved in arm conflict with the Carabinieri such as robberies, kidnappings, and assassinations (Bianconi, 2003). They were also political voices within the organization, and took just as much initiative and risks as men.

Among the founders, was Mara Cagol, also known as "Compagna Mara," the daughter of a bourgeois family who learned about the leftist student movement at the University of Trento. Mara Cagol was married to the leader of the Red Brigades, Renato Curcio. In 1969, she and her husband formed the Italian Red Brigades terrorist organization. Cagol has gone undercover and participated in all the actions of the Red Brigades, including the kidnapping of Judge Mario Sossi. In 1975, Cagol managed to accomplish the spectacular escape of Curcio from prison (Atkins, 2004). In the Red Brigades, there are no differences between man and woman. For the

Brigatista Doctrine, the female participation has no specificity compared to that of the male (Moretti,1994).

Susanna Ronconi, is another woman who was a part of the Red Brigades. Her father was an army official who later became a manager of an American oil company. At age twenty-three she went undercover when she started her career in the Red Brigades with a bank robbery. On June 17, 1974, in Padua, Ronconi took part in the commando raid of the headquarters of the MSI (Italian Social Movement), where she killed two exponents of the party.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) (SRI-LANKA- Separatist/ethnonational)

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was a separatist movement in Sri Lanka, who sought secession and independence from the government. It was created in 1976 by Velupillai Prabhakaran, with the goal of forming a sovereign socialist state in the North and East of the country, a region known as Tamil Eelam. The violence perpetrated by LTTE, the impeccable organization, and the appeal it had on the local population turned the series of terrorist attacks into an actual civil war from 1983 to 2009. On May 17, 2009, the LTTE finally surrendered, publishing a statement on their website accusing the Sri Lankan government of committing a massacre against their population. The terrorist group was successful in assassinating two heads of state, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi of India in 1991, and Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa in May 1993.

In January 1996, a kamikaze attack on the central bank of the capital city of Colombo caused 100 deaths. LTTE was particularly involved in suicide attacks, and created a specific body of suicide bombers called Black Tigers within the organization (Law, 2016). Suicide bombings and attacks mainly targeted politicians, military personnel, and businessmen. Although civilians were not their first target, LTTE's suicide bombings have killed a massive number of

innocent people. The actual number of deaths has been argued by many (Richardson, p 109). The criteria for suicide selection and recruitment within LTTE were that one had to be young, usually between the age fourteen and sixteen. The leaders also had a preference for girls and women to be suicide bombers. Females made up two-thirds of the suicide squad.

The Tamil Tigers also had a female brigade called the Birds of Freedom. This female brigade was initially created for the purpose of propaganda and recruitment, typical roles of women that we see in many other terrorist groups (refer to Table 1). The Birds of Freedom exploited the atrocities inflicted by the Sri Lanka's government and military on women as propaganda material, and leveraged nationalistic sentiment to recruit more women. Eventually, the female recruitment unit turned into a guerrilla unit, often using suicide bombing. Before entering the Birds of Freedom, women underwent loyalty and indoctrination tests. It is estimated that, of the total 15,000 members of the group, 30%-60% were women. This approximately compared to the amount of participation by women in the Black Tigers. (Cunningham, 2003) Women's roles within the terrorist organization mainly involved active combat. They were provided with extensive training in mining, explosives, weapons technology, electronics, intelligence work, and combat (Ann, 1993; Bouta, 2005).

Sendero Luminoso or Shining Path (PERU- Maoist)

Sendero Luminoso, the official full name of the Communist Party of Peru on the luminous path of Mariátegui, is a Maoist-inspired Peruvian guerrilla organization with ideological connections remanded to the guerrillas of the Chinese Red Army created by Mao Tse Tung in 1934. The organization was founded sometime between 1969 and 1970 by Abimael Guzmán following a split from the Partido Comunista del Perú - Bandera Roja (PCP-BR). The terrorist group's goals are to subvert the Peruvian political system and establish an agrarian

communist state through armed struggle. The group was created by students and professors who used universities for recruitment, and propaganda programs throughout the country.

Although the organization was led by westernized intellectuals, the Shining Path appealed to Inca mythology and anti-white rhetoric in order to gain the uneducated and impoverished indigenous community. The Peruvian government's absence in the Andean highlands, allowed the group to build a centralized organization there in the 1970's. Funding for the Maoist terrorists' campaign came from cooperation and deals with drug lords. This gave the terrorist group the label of narco terrorists. The Shining Path is considered defeated by the Peruvian authorities, even though events of political violence still happen. The current political leader of the narco terrorist group, Víctor Quispe Palomino, also known as Comrade José, stated in a recent interview that both Guzmán and Durand were not able to lead the people's war. Comrade Jose emphasized that Sendero Luminoso now has a revolutionary force of its own, and an independent leadership that is not associated with the previous incarnation led by Guzmán. The terrorist group Shining Path is particularly infamous for its brutality, usually against peasants, trade union organizers, elected officials, and the general civilian population (Law, 2016).

As in other terrorist organizations, women have played an instrumental role in the Shining Path as well, making up one-third of the total members in the organization. Initially, women were involved in education, spreading Maoist ideas, and recruiting in universities. Most of the women received their education in the Shining Path-controlled San Cristóbal of Huamanga University (UHSC) Education Department, where they became teachers, spreading the organization's ideology and recruiting students. Over time, women acquired leadership roles as well. Augusta de la Torre, Guzman's wife, was the leader of the Popular Women's movement,

creating a bridge between the feminist movement and the Shining Path by recruiting women into the terrorist organization. Augusta died in hiding with her husband in 1991. She was a martyr for the group and inspiration for other women (Heilman, 2010). Edith Lagos, a well-educated Sandinista from a wealthy family, was another woman dedicated to the terrorist organizations cause to the point of death. Besides approaching indigenous women with appealing feminist rhetoric, she was a military-commander, and one of the masterminds of the Ayacucho prison break. She was described as “the most famous Shining Path member after Guzman (Kirk, 1997, pg. 80).” Female roles took on a more aggressive component when they started to become heads of armed guerrillas that fought on the field with men and became martyrs. Shining Path’s women were famously ruthless as they were known for giving the last shot over the head of the executed.

Black Widows (CHECHNYA- Nationalist/Islamist)

Chechnya is a region on the Northern Caucasus controlled by the Russian government. The republic, with its Islamic majority, that proclaimed its own independence in 1991 was never recognized by the Moscow as a separate entity. After two atrocious phases of war between the separatists and the regular troops that occurred in 1994 to 1996 and in 1999, Putin's government managed to take control of the capital Grozny (Law, 2016). The so-called Black Widows have become a significant instrument for Chechen separatist groups seeking independence from Russia since 2002. Their participation in war operations represents an unprecedented fact in the Muslim world, that it, allowing a female the opportunity to play an active role in a purely male environment, such as the military one. Yet this phenomenon has also appeared in Iraq, Palestine, Afghanistan, and the rest of the Middle East (refer to Table 1).

The apparent controversy over the religious ideology and teachings of the organization is a result of the modernization of Islam. Muslims have witnessed an ever-increasing number of

young people joining the Wahhabi ideology. The Wahhabi ideology promotes the sacrifice of life in the name of the religious or a national cause. Francesco Vietti wrote, "for how much regards the specific case of Chechnya, we must not forget that traditional culture in the Caucasus has always reserved women an active role in the war, not only as a support, but also as the actual author of acts of military heroism (Vietti, 2005)." The first and most famous episode in which women played a central role was the seizure of the Dubrovka theater in Moscow in 2002. The images of dead terrorists wrapped in their black chador with explosive belts still wrapped around their waist became the symbol of this new form of terrorism perpetrated exclusively by women. In December 2003, two terrorists exploded in the center of the Russian capital, in front of the Duma. In July 2004, Moscow was hit again, by two other Chechens during a rock concert, causing the death of 14 people.

The attacks continued, and became more frequent over time, until the attack of the school of Beslan. There are videos that show images of women veiled in black and padded with explosives. These women terrorists in Russia are called "shakhidki." It is a Russian word that means, "sacred warriors who sacrifice their lives" in Arabic (Orsini, 2015, para. 3). The term Black Widows, has been coined by the media to refer to these Chechen women who are ready to kill themselves to redeem the loss of their husbands, brothers, or children because of the Russian army. The adjective "black" is included in the name to represent their custom of being entirely dressed in black, with a single slot to leave the eyes uncovered. The color black is also a symbolic meaning of mourning. This female commando known as the Black Widows was created by the Chechen independence leader and founder of the Chechen separatist group in 2000.

As reported by Anne Speckhard and Khapta Ahkmedova, the Chechen television has claimed that women are the biggest danger to the nation because they have started to carry out very risky operations. In fact, 43% of Chechen suicide terrorists are women. Without the help and presence of men, these female martyrs have made 55% of the suicide attacks attributed to Chechnya, while men have only performed 18% of the suicide attacks (Speckhard and Ahkmedova, 475). In terms of the symbolic function of violence, relating to the representation and communication of a message, female "martyrdom" usually has a wider resonance. Moreover, it appeals to the feelings of fear and disorientation more intensely in the community affected by violence due to the cultural bias previously discussed. The sacrifice of the "martyrs" can have an effect of motivation and mobilization because it motivates male comrades not to be less than women. From perspective of violence relating to the material damage inflicted, women are normally less subject to control by the authorities.

ISIS (Syria and Iraq and Europe-Islamist)

Formed in the Middle East, ISIS is a military and terrorist organization that supports Islamic fundamentalism. ISIS is the English acronym of "Islamic State of Iraq and Sham." Sham refers to a set of territories including Syria, Palestine, Lebanon and Jordan. The primitive purpose of ISIS originated from the political situation in Iraq between 2003 and 2004. The years 2003 and 2004, are the years of the Second Gulf War, which was undertaken by the United States and Great Britain. Essentially, ISIS finds its foundation in the extreme application of Shari'a Law (Islamic Law) in every human sphere. The source of Islamic Law is not only the Koran, but the Sunna, or the stories of the Prophet. In fact, both are a direct expression of divine will, and therefore, a pragmatic guide to life and the daily social order. In order for Shari'a Law to be applied without restriction, ISIS promotes the offensive Jihad, or Holy War, with the

purpose of the expansion of Islam in the world by enforcing conversion through force (Warrick, 2016).

ISIS is the most influential and successful terrorist group today. Many other Islamist groups in the Middle East and Africa have pledged allegiance, expanding the terrorist network significantly and making it harder to monitor for the international intelligence communities. European cities such as Paris, Brussels, Nice, Berlin, Istanbul, London, Stockholm, Manchester, and Barcelona have been attacked since 2016. In addition, African cities in Tunisia, Egypt, Mali, and Nigeria have also been under attack of the ISIS-affiliated organization Boko Haram (Lister, 2018). Islamist terrorists specifically target civilians, including Muslims. Because of the atrocities committed by ISIS and their recording of them for propaganda, ISIS has been rejected by a number of groups, including Al-Qaeda. This rejection is primarily due to their harsh violence and targeting of Muslims. Even if the caliphate no longer exists, ISIS continues to be frightening, especially since those who have escaped after the capitulation between Syria and Iraq are returning to Europe and their countries of origin (Warrick, 2015). They are the so-called "foreign fighters." Among them are women.

Due to ISIS' misogynist view of society, the terrorist group initially used women for domestic purposes. They were prohibited from joining military operations. Until 2014 women played secondary roles of support such as wives for Jihadists and mothers for future militants. In 2014, ISIS announced the creation of two female brigades, "al-Khansa" and "Umm al-Rayan." These groups were active in Raqqa, Syria, and in the province of al-Anbar in Iraq (Gowrinathan, 2014). These brigades were used as *hisba* forces in charge of the enforcement of Sharia Law on other women. In the 2017 issue of Al-Naba, ISIS endorses women in combat operations and military roles. In February 2018, an ISIS propaganda footage portraying women fighting on the

battlefield alongside men was released on the internet. (<https://jihadology.net/2018/02/07/new-video-message-from-the-islamic-state-inside-the-caliphate-7/>).

Very little information about the actual combat of women is available to assess the roles women take within the organization. However, ISIS' release of videos showing women involved in military actions indicates its desire to recruit women for these roles. This recruitment of women by ISIS into more militant roles is most likely due to a lack of personnel and loss of territory by the organization this year. More reliable evidence of ISIS' use of women comes from the Iraqi security officials. A 2017 New York Times article explained how ISIS tried to use 20 women suicide bombers as one of its last attempts to hold off Iraqi forces in Mosul (Trew & Shamary, 2017). What is becoming a matter of international security, especially in Europe and the United States, is the influx of women foreign fighters that are coming back from the territories of war in Iraq and Syria. The number of American women who fled to fight alongside ISIS made up 11 percent of all American foreign fighters. However, 43 percent of the 690 French foreign fighters are women. Other European countries, such as Germany, count 20 percent of their foreign fighters to be women. Since 2013, it is estimated that a total of 500 women have joined ISIS (McCarthy & Richter, 2018).

Counter-Terrorism Measures

Today, the international community concerns are about women foreign fighters. With the end of the caliphate in Syria and Iraq, governments are expecting several foreign fighter returnees. European governments have begun to strengthen laws to deal with repatriated women, even though they did not take a homogenous approach. The policies regarding foreign fighter returnees are still dealt with on a case-by-case basis. In Belgium, France, and the Netherlands, prosecution and imprisonment is almost certain for men and women who joined the caliphate and

return home. The Belgian government, after initially allowing women and children to return to their old neighborhoods, is now conducting legal proceedings for 29 women demanding repatriation from Iraq or Syria. The perception of women involved with terrorist organizations as victims vanished after the March 2016 attack in Brussels, and more recent cases in which the children of returned families tried to radicalize classmates (Mekhennet & Warrick, 2017).

The concern of European security experts is that some returnees will retain their radical ideas, even after spending time in prison. This concern is not only legitimate, but well- founded, based on the personal history of many radicalized jihadists like Al-Zarqawi and Al-Baghdadi. These radicalized jihadists hold political Islamist beliefs that have turned into fanaticism and a thirst for violence in prison. The fears of European security experts are also supported by years of research demonstrating the difficulty of reversing the effects of extremist indoctrination. These studies confirm that mothers have a greater influence when it comes to instilling radical points of view in children. "Given that the returnees are mostly young women, there is the possibility of having more children in the coming years, and a real possibility that these women can raise their children in a very radical version of Islam (Mekhennet, S., & Warrick, J., 2017, para. 30)".

Findings and Conclusion

Based on the case studies in this paper, women are used for marginal roles of logistics and recruitment in all terrorist organizations. Female political leadership is prominent in leftist groups such as the Red Brigades and Shining Path. Terrorist groups with female political leadership tend to have women that are involved in more active and aggressive roles, such as assassinations and guerrilla warfare. This trend could be explained by the egalitarian philosophy that is characteristic of leftist ideologies. Lastly, the phenomenon of martyrdom – suicide

attacks- is directly proportional to the percentage of female participation as discussed earlier.

Both groups with high female participation developed a special branch devoted to suicide attacks led and operated entirely by women (Black Tigers for the LTTE and the Black Widows for the Chechen separatists). Although, both are ethno-nationalist, the Black Widows are also Islamist, while the LTTE is considered a secular organization.

In general, Islamist groups prohibit women from political leadership roles or field tasks, such as suicide bombing (Table 1). Exceptions are the Black Widows and Hamas, which are mainly ethno-nationalist groups as well. To clarify this incongruence between the ideology of Islamism and the female role of martyrdom, it is useful to look at the recent example of ISIS, which began using women only after its loss of territory in Syria and Iraq. This unorthodox shift suggests that terrorist organizations are willing to compromise their strict ideology for the sake of accomplishing their political goals. The gap in women's participation in political leadership and guerrilla operations in Islamist groups along with their use as martyrs, makes it a win-win tactic for misogynist Islamic leaders. These terrorist leaders exploit women for the cheap and effective tool of suicide bombing, while not having to give these women the equal rights that they might demand if they survived their fighting for the cause. Finally, data suggests that ISIS propaganda has successfully increased the number of female suicide bombers and foreign fighters in recent years. This phenomenon represents a threat to the international community, who is not legally equipped to handle a future wave of women terrorists returning to their home countries, often with children, while conflicts unravel in the Middle East.

In conclusion, mass media influences the public's perception of women's roles within the context of terrorist organizations by emphasizing the sex of the perpetrator more than the act itself when reporting terrorist activities. This misleads the audience by portraying women's

participation in terrorist organizations as exceptional and a recent phenomenon. This perception is observed on a national and international level, with a delay in awareness and response on by the UN on the matter. Substantial historical evidence refutes this misconception, indicating that women are a constant variable in terrorist organizations with roles that vary from marginal and supportive, to leading and violent. The case studies, based on location, ideology, and political context, show a relationship between the three criteria and the percentage of participation of women in the terrorist organization. Terrorist organizations with an ethno-nationalist ideology, who revendicate the independence of their land over an oppressive government, tend to have a higher participation of women than any other terrorist organization. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and Chechen have higher female participation, with 30%-60% and 43% respectively.

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