

The Rising Importance of Women in Terrorism and the Need to Reform Counterterrorism Strategy

A Monograph

by

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Abstract

THE RISING IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN IN TERRORISM AND THE NEED TO CHANGE COUNTERTERRORISM STRATEGY by MAJ Marne L. Suttan, U.S. Army, 53 pages.

It is evident that women are increasingly playing a role in terrorism. The war on terror has restricted freedom of action within the security environment for terrorist organizations, making it more advantageous for terrorist organizations to use women to support or execute terrorist activities. In countries where terrorism originates and extremist organizations find safe haven and freedom of movement, the social environment also can play a significant role in leading women towards supporting terrorism. Discriminatory religious and social customs in these same countries leave women as a largely untapped resource in supporting the ideological causes of terrorist organizations. Female terrorist acts can also generate much greater media attention than those conducted by males, further encouraging terrorist organizations to expanding recruiting of women. Counterterrorism strategies tend to ignore gender as a relevant factor, and in doing so exclusively focus on male imposed threats. Although women taking part in terrorist and extremist acts is not new and dates many years, their presence in terrorist organizations as both leaders and executors is increasing around the globe. It is important that the U.S. and regional combatant commands integrate gender into national and military counterterrorism strategy to address this alarming trend. The purpose of this monograph is to examine the role of the female gender in terrorism and in terrorist organizations, and to determine if U.S. counterterrorism strategy should specifically address women. The main hypothesis is that approaching counterterrorism strategy with a perspective on the female gender as well as the male gender will have a positive impact on the ability of the U.S. to combat terrorism in the long war. The monograph concludes with several recommendations for national policy and counterterrorism strategy that address the role of women in terrorism. It is important that extensive cultural analysis be conducted in a specific regions or countries where female involvement exists in order to fully understand the context of the situation so policy and strategy can be tailored to that area. Recommendations include a variety of means that can be used by the U.S. to influence the social, political, and economic environment of an area to discourage women from supporting or participating in terrorist activities.

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Section I: Introduction

It is evident that women are increasingly involved in terrorism. Despite this obvious involvement, counterterrorism strategies tend to ignore gender as a relevant factor. The omission of gender leads to an incomplete counterterrorism strategy with unacceptable results. The war on terror has restricted freedom of action within the security environment for terrorist organizations. Consequently, it has become more advantageous for terrorist organizations to use women to support or execute terrorist activities. In countries where terrorism originates and extremist organizations find safe haven and freedom of movement, the social environment also can play a significant role in leading women towards supporting terrorism. Discriminatory religious and social customs in these same countries leave women as a largely untapped resource in supporting the ideological causes of terrorist organizations. Female terrorist acts can also generate much greater media attention than those conducted by males, further encouraging terrorist organizations to expand the recruiting of women. Although women taking part in terrorist and extremist acts is not new and dates back more than a century, their presence in terrorist organizations as both leaders and executors is increasing around the globe. It is important that the U.S. and regional combatant commands integrate gender into counterterrorism strategy to address this alarming increase.

Between 1985 and 2006, over 220 female suicide attacks occurred which constitutes roughly 15% of the total suicide attacks worldwide.¹ After six years of U.S. involvement in the war in Iraq, women are now playing a significant role in terrorist attacks carried out by the insurgents. Iraq has a population of over 13 million women from which terrorist organizations can recruit. Over the past two years the insurgent force has increasingly turned to this pool to maintain strength. For example, in 2007 there were eight instances of a female suicide bombing in Iraq. As of August 2008, 27 female suicide bombers gave their lives in support of the insurgency.² This represents a significant increase that is expected to continue and must be addressed in strategy. In order to get ahead of this trend, it is important that lines of effort for counterinsurgency operations, as well as strategy for counterterrorism, address the role played by women. In Iraq, women involved in terrorist activity are not only an asset for the enemy, but can be influenced to renounce terrorist acts and turn their fathers, husbands, and sons away from extremist activities. Addressing gender in military counterterrorism strategy will greatly enhance our ability to reduce terrorism by eliminating them as an asset for terrorist organizations, both in Iraq as well as other regions around the world.

Hypothesis and Methodology

The purpose of this monograph is to examine the role of the female gender in terrorism and in terrorist organizations, and to determine if U.S. counterterrorism strategy should

¹ Mia Bloom, *Women as Victims and Victimiziers*, (April 11, 2008), <http://www.america.gov/st/peacesec-english/2008/April/20080522172353SrenoD0.6383936.html> (accessed April 13, 2009).

² Steve Niva, "Behind the Surge in Iraqi Women Suicide Bombers," *Foreign Policy in Focus*, (August 11, 2008), <http://www.fpif.org/fpiftxt/5455> (accessed August 14, 2008).

specifically address women. The main hypothesis is that approaching counterterrorism strategy with a perspective on the female gender, as well as the male gender, will have a positive impact on the ability of the U.S. to combat terrorism in the long war. Gender issues that must be analyzed and addressed in counterterrorism strategy include the motivations and roles of women who support extremist organizations and the techniques used by terrorist organizations to recruit women. Other areas of research will focus on these gender-related issues and will include an analysis of what motivates women to participate in terrorism, an historical review of the roles women have played in terrorist activities, and an examination of the recruitment strategies used by extremist organizations use to recruit women. Finally, this monograph will review the current open-source U.S. counterterrorism strategy to determine whether the female gender is adequately addressed, and make general recommendations for inclusion in U.S. policy.

To begin the monograph, a review of the historical involvement of women in terrorism will be conducted, followed by a discussion of how the role of women is becoming increasingly important in the contemporary security environment. Historical examples include the role women played in the People's Will and the assassination of Tsar Alexander II, suicide bombers in the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and Syrian Social Nationalist Party, the Black Widows of Chechnya, and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Current examples of female involvement in terrorist activities include the role of suicide bombers in Iraq, Afghanistan, and in other domestic attacks against Western countries. Next, an examination will be conducted on what motivates females to join or support terrorist organizations. Motivations that will be discussed include grief or revenge, ideology, financial hardship, personal or family shame, and protection of self and family. Several of these reasons are byproducts of the environment or culture that women are currently living in and are difficult to affect or change. Other motivations are caused by harmful acts perpetrated against females by males and the terrorist organization with which they are affiliated. Often, several motivations combine to precipitate women becoming involved with extremist organizations. The roles women fill in

extremist organizations will then be reviewed and analyzed. Historically women have been involved in all types of terrorist activities and at all levels of terrorist organizations, and their roles include acting as sympathizers, spies, warriors, and dominant forces.³ Next, the monograph will outline the methods used by terrorist organizations to recruit women. Recruiting techniques that will be reviewed include a call based on ideology, leveraging personal relationships, coercion through both physical and emotional distress, and internet campaigns.

After gaining a better understanding of the role of gender in terrorism, a review of the unclassified national counterterrorism strategies will determine if current methods for combating terrorism specifically address the role of gender. These documents outline the United States Government and the Department of Defense viewpoint on the ways to combat terrorism, and provide guidance to various organizations to execute counterterrorism activities. Finally, this monograph will make general policy recommendations about how to modify counterterrorism strategy to account for the role of gender in terrorism.

Terrorism Defined

Terrorism is a reality in the contemporary security environment that domestic and international organizations struggle to agree upon a common definition, including the United Nations. While the definition of terrorism remains a contentious issue between and among nations, the definition throughout this monograph will be the same as the one used by U.S. security organizations such as the National Security Division of the Justice Department, the Counterterrorism Threat Assessment and Warning Unit, the Terrorist Research and Analytical Center, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. For these organizations, international terrorism is “the unlawful use of force or violence committed by a group or individual, who has some

³ Sue Mahan and Pamela L. Griset, *Terrorism in Perspective*, (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2008), 15.

connection to a foreign power or whose activities transcend or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives.”⁴ More simply put, terrorism is the use of violent acts to create fear in an attempt to cause a political or social change. A topic that will be discussed in a later section is the debate over whether women are motivated to participate in international terrorism as opposed to domestic terrorism within the borders of their own states. To facilitate this discussion, a definition is required that can be applied on a global scale and includes terrorist organizations that operate exclusively within the borders of a foreign nation attempting to further a political or social objective exclusively within that state. The definition used by U.S. agencies to define domestic terrorism is an act that “involves groups or individuals who are based and operate entirely within the U.S. and Puerto Rico without foreign direction and whose acts are directed at elements of U.S. government or population.”⁵ This definition will be expanded for this monograph to include acts that involve groups or individuals who are based and operate entirely within the borders of a nation whose acts are directed at elements of the government or population of that nation.

⁴ Margaret Gonzalez-Perez, *Women and Terrorism: Female Activity in Domestic and International Terror*, (New York: Routledge, 2008), 5.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

Section II: Historical Review of Female Involvement in Terrorism

“It is woman who teaches you today a lesson in heroism, who teaches you the meaning of Jihad, and the way to die a martyr’s death ... It is a woman who has shocked the enemy, with her thin, meager, and weak body ... It is a woman who blew herself up, and with her exploded all the myths about women’s weakness, submissiveness, and enslavement.”

Al-Sha’ab Editorial, February 2002⁶

In the excerpt from an editorial in the Egyptian newspaper Al-Sha’ab, the perception that female involvement is a recent phenomenon is evident. The truth is that throughout history, women have played extensive roles in the planning and executing of terrorist activities. These women come from diverse geographical, social, political, and economic backgrounds and are motivated to participate for a variety of reasons. Within the past ten years, women have been directly involved in over 38 international or domestic conflicts.⁷ Countries that have experienced women in terrorist or militant organizations include Afghanistan, Angola, Burundi, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Guatemala, Iraq, Lebanon, Liberia, Macedonia, Nepal, Peru, Philippines, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Zimbabwe, and many others.⁸ Within these conflicts, the percentage of female fighting forces varies extensively depending on the region, but most estimates vary between 10% - 30% of the combatants as females.⁹ It is evident that in the contemporary operating environment women play significant

⁶ The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, *Female Suicide Terrorism - Consequences for Counter-Terrorism*, Background Paper, Warsaw: Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, (2005), 2.

⁷ Kim Jordan and Myriam Denov, "Birds of Freedom? Perspectives on Female Emancipation and Sri Lanka's Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 9, no. 1 (November 2007): 42.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 42.

roles in conflict. The foundation for these roles dates back to at least the end of the 19th century, with the involvement of women in the insurgency against the Russian government.

The People's Will

One of the first well-documented cases of women involved in terrorism was the assassination of Tsar Alexander II of Russia in 1881. On the 13th of March of that year, Tsar Alexander II was traveling from the Michaelovsky Palace to his Winter Palace in St. Petersburg when his carriage was attacked by multiple bombs. Sophia Perovskaya initiated the attack by signaling fellow members of the radical revolutionary group known as Narodnaya Volya, or the People's Will.¹⁰ Sophia Perovskaya was a member of the executive committee of the organization, which consisted of revolutionary professionals that supported social and democratic reforms for Russia. Ten of the original twenty-nine members of the executive committee were females, and eleven terrorist attacks were conducted by women from 1905 -1908.¹¹ Two of the eight conspirators directly involved with the attack on the Tsar were women, including Perovskaya and Gesya Gelfman. Gelfman died in prison after being sent to Siberia for her involvement in the assassination plot. Perovskaya was hanged for her involvement and was the first woman executed in Russia for political crimes.¹² Women involved with the People's Will were devoted to violence and extremist behavior and saw "terror and their own heroic self-sacrifice as an end in itself" and believed the "ultimate test of their commitment and devotion to the revolution was their willingness to die."¹³ This fanatical dedication to a cause encouraged

¹⁰ NationMaster.com, *Sophia Lvovna Perovskaya*, <http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/Sophia-Lvovna-Perovskaya> (accessed December 14, 2008).

¹¹ Amy Knight, "Female Terrorists in the Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party," *Russian Review* 38 (1979): 139.

¹² NationMaster.com, *Sophia Lvovna Perovskaya*, (accessed December 14, 2008).

¹³ Knight, "Female Terrorists in the Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party," 149.

women to take increasingly dangerous and important leadership roles in the People's Will. Perovskaya and Gelfman both participated as dominant forces within the organization, and set the foundation for women to hold leadership positions within terrorist organizations.

Black September

Black September was a terrorist organization whose members supported the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). PFLP terrorists hijacked four airliners in September 1970 and demanded the release of several members of a Palestinian Liberation unit that were being held in Israel.¹⁴ The standoff ended with two aircraft landing in a deserted airfield in Jordan, and one landing in Cairo. The aircraft in Cairo was blown up after the crew and passengers were released to gain media attention. In the final aircraft that departed from Amsterdam, passengers foiled the attempted hijacking by overpowering the hijackers and diverting the plane to the Heathrow airport. Leila Khaled, a Palestinian woman, was in charge of the fourth hijacking and was arrested when the plane landed in London.¹⁵ One week later, the PFLP hijacked another aircraft and demanded the release of Khaled. The British government faced a difficult decision over whether to negotiate with the terrorists or risk losing the lives of 300 hostages, to include 65 British citizens.¹⁶ The British Cabinet was concerned that a decision to negotiate with terrorists would encourage terrorism and they would "lose all credibility in international civil aviation circles."¹⁷ In the end, the negotiation and release of Khaled was coerced after the PFLP blew up the three remaining hijacked aircraft and demanded the exchange

¹⁴ Paige Whaley Eager, *From Freedom Fighters to Terrorists: Women and Political Violence*, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Group, 2008), 186.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 186.

¹⁶ U.K. Confidential, "Black September: Tough Negotiations," *BBC News*, (January 1, 2001), http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/in_depth/uk/2000/uk_confidential/1089694.stm (accessed December 14, 2008).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

of Khaled for the passengers. Khaled later stated that it was an important step to know that the PFLP could impose demands and Western nations would negotiate, and that the success “gave us the courage and the confidence to go ahead with our struggle.”¹⁸ The Palestinian cause was broadcast around the globe and Khaled became a “sex symbol for her cause and revolutionaries worldwide.”¹⁹ The dominant force role that she fulfilled in the PFLP persuaded other women to join the Palestinian cause.²⁰

Despite this early example of a female filling a dominant role in Palestinian militant organizations, female suicide bombers are a relatively new phenomenon across the region. The first recorded incident was in 1985 when Khyadali Sana killed two soldiers of the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) in Lebanon.²¹ Sana was seventeen years old and a member of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party when she drove a car bomb into an IDF convoy.²² Known as the “Bride of the South,” the success of the attack carried out by Sana influenced more women to become terrorists.²³ Since then, women have increasingly become involved in terrorist organizations and have carried out a variety of terrorist attacks ranging from missions using vehicles loaded with explosives, belts or vest bombs, and bombs carried in bags. In Palestinian terrorist organizations, women generally do not fill the leadership roles. They “may volunteer” or “be coerced to conduct

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Eager, *From Freedom Fighters to Terrorists: Women and Political Violence*, 185.

²⁰ Ibid., 186.

²¹ Debra D. Zedalis, "Beyond the Bombings: Analyzing Female Suicide Bombers," in *Female Terrorism and Militancy: Agency, Utility and Organization*, by Cindy D. Ness, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008), 49.

²² Debra D. Zedalis, *Female Suicide Bombers*, Monograph, (Carlise, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2004), 2.

²³ Yoram Schweitzer, *Female Suicide Bombers for God*. Tel Aviv Notes 88, (Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, October 9, 2003), 3.

a murderous strike” but the role they play is “ultimately dictated by the patriarchal hierarchy that rules Palestinian society and its terrorist groups.”²⁴

The Black Widows

The Black Widows are a female terrorist organization that provided support in the struggle for Chechen independence. The organization developed their own unique uniform to distinguish themselves from regular Chechen rebel units that includes being completely dressed in black with a ‘martyr’s belt’ filled with explosives as a unique accessory.²⁵ It is widely believed that the term ‘Black Widows’ comes from the fact that many of the women are widows or family members of individuals killed by the Russian military in Chechnya.²⁶ On June 7, 2000, Khava Barayeva and Luisa Magomadova became known as the first “Black Widows” after they drove a truck into the headquarters of a Russian Special Forces detachment in the village of Alkhan Yurt in Chechnya.²⁷ They were not only female suicide bombers, but they were the first suicide bombers used during the Chechen conflict. The Chechen rebels have used females in terrorist roles to a great extent throughout the struggle against Russia, and it is estimated that “42 percent of Chechen suicide bombers have been women.”²⁸

The organization gained widespread international attention after being significantly involved in the two largest hostage incidents associated with suicide terrorism. These two incidents were the takeover of the Dubrovka Theater in Moscow and the Beslan School in North

²⁴ Bloom, *Women as Victims and Victimiziers*, (accessed April 13, 2009).

²⁵ Ryan Chilcote, "Russia's 'Black Widows' Wreak Terror," CNN, (September 3, 2004), <http://edition.cnn.com/2004/WORLD/europe/09/01/russia.widows/index.html> (accessed April 13, 2009).

²⁶ Jane's Intelligence Digest, *Deadlier Than the Male?* Briefings, (Surrey, U.K.: Jane's Information Group, 2003), 1.

²⁷ Anne Speckhard and Khapta Akhmedova, "Black Widows and Beyond," in *Female Terrorism and Militancy: Agency, Utility and Organization*, by Cindy D. Ness, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008), 100.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 100.

Ossetia. There were 40 terrorists involved in the Moscow Dubrovka Theater incident including 19 women. Approximately 800 individuals were taken hostage during the event. In the end, 129 hostages were killed and another 644 victims were injured when Russian forces stormed the theater after pumping an unknown chemical into the ventilation system.²⁹ The brother of Fatima and Khadzhad Ganiyeva, two sisters involved in the siege, was later found to have been paid a bounty in return for their participation in the incident. It was reported that bounty was paid by Chechen warlord Shamil Basayev, and amounted to \$1,500 per sister.³⁰ In September 2004, two females took part in the hostage taking of the Beslan School in North Ossetia along with thirty male terrorists. The incident occurred on the first day of school for first graders and involved taking 1,120 hostages. Russian security forces stormed the school and the chaos that ensued caused the death of 330 hostages and injured another 470 individuals.³¹ Both female terrorists were killed during the operation as they filled the role of warriors for the Chechen rebels. A final example is the incident where Zulikhan Elikhadzhiyeva and another woman detonated bombs at a rock concert in Moscow on July 5, 2003. Her family claims that she was kidnapped by her half brother and forced to complete the terrorist attacks.³²

The foundation for the motives of the Black Widows is difficult to determine since many of the women were coerced, drugged, or intimidated into following orders from Chechen rebels. According to Maria Zhikova, a reporter for a Russian newspaper, women are undergoing “zombification” to include drugging them or enslavement. She states that “rape is a big issue; if a woman is raped and it is filmed, she can be blackmailed into doing anything because it is

²⁹ Ibid., 100.

³⁰ Viv Groskop, "Chechnya's Deadly 'Black Widows'," *Newstatesman*, (September 6, 2004), <http://www.newstatesman.com/print/200409060023> (accessed December 14, 2008).

³¹ Speckhard, "Black Widows and Beyond," 104.

³² Groskop, "Chechnya's Deadly 'Black Widows,'" (accessed December 14, 2008).

regarded as a dishonor to her entire family and they are as much victims as the people they set out to kill.”³³ Motives in these cases often include the desire for revenge against the Russian authority that killed a loved one or coercion from male members of the Chechen rebels. A study conducted about female terrorists in Chechnya determined that women were similar to their male counterparts in the areas of demographics and motivations. Female suicide bombers were on average 25 years old and many were married with children. All women were “indoctrinated into militant jihadist ideology prior to the bombings and they were at least minimally trained and equipped by the organization.”³⁴ Their primary motivations included the desire for revenge, a personal trauma, and a nationalist or ideological viewpoint.³⁵ The mission of Chechen terrorists is to “force the withdrawal of all Russian military and security forces from Chechnya, to end armed conflict there, and to gain national independence.”³⁶

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) is another terrorist organization that uses women to perform terrorist acts to further their objectives. The LTTE objectives include establishing a separate Tamil state on the island of Sri Lanka, ensuring an end to human rights violations, and equality for the Tamil people. The 1978 constitution of Sri Lanka was written and implemented without input of the Tamil people which led to many of the discrimination issues that are still present today. Human rights abuses perpetrated by the Sri Lankan government, to include disappearances, murders, rapes, and torture to encourage men and women to take a stand

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Speckhard, "Black Widows and Beyond," 106.

³⁵ Ibid., 110.

³⁶ Mahan, *Terrorism in Perspective*, 249.

against violence directed at the state.³⁷ The Tamil people held their own elections in 2000 and elected the LTTE as their governmental representation.³⁸ The role of woman in the LTTE was solidified in 1983 with the establishment of an entire division of women called the Women's Front of the Liberation Tigers. Female leadership took over the Women's Front in 1989.³⁹ Females in the Tamil Tigers are trained in military tactics and martial arts and serve in all units, including the army, the naval forces (Sea Tigers) and the elite suicide squad (Black Tigers).⁴⁰

It has been reported that the LTTE has "orchestrated more suicide attacks with women than any other terrorist organization worldwide."⁴¹ Jane's Intelligence Review states that "from 1980 to 2000, the LTTE performed 168 suicide attacks, about 30 percent used women cadres."⁴² Female terrorists in the LTTE have killed and wounded thousands and cost the Government of Sri Lanka and private businesses millions of dollars in damages.⁴³ The most significant suicide bombing performed by a woman in the LTTE was the assassination of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1991.⁴⁴ Dhanu blew herself up while standing next to Gandhi in the southern state of Tamil Nadu.⁴⁵ Females in the Tamil Tigers participate at all levels within the terrorist organization, and have the ability to fill the same roles as males.

³⁷ Ibid., 249.

³⁸ Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, Official website of the Peace Secretariat of the LTTE, (2003), www.ltteps.org (accessed December 8, 2008).

³⁹ Jordan, "Birds of Freedom? Perspectives on Female Emancipation and Sri Lanka's Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam," 46.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 46.

⁴¹ Siddharth Srivastava, "Women Terrorists on the Rise in India," *New America Media*, (October 22, 2003), http://news.pacificnews.org/news/view_article.html?article_id=3eeea82ae0d4741ec00d163d7d259bda (accessed August 5, 2008).

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Mahan, *Terrorism in Perspective*, 249.

⁴⁴ Eager, *From Freedom Fighters to Terrorists: Women and Political Violence*, 140.

⁴⁵ Srivastava, "Women Terrorists on the Rise in India," (accessed August 5, 2008).

Contemporary Examples of Female Terrorism

Female terrorism is in the spotlight again with the increasing numbers of suicide bombers in Iraq and evidence that Al-Qaeda is actively recruiting them into their ranks. There were eight female suicide bombers in 2007 with an increase the following year to 27 by the middle of August.⁴⁶ Women are even banding together to commit double or triple suicide attacks to increase their lethality. In 2008, a double suicide bomb was conducted by two women in a pet market in Baghdad, and a triple suicide attack was executed against Shi'a -pilgrims in Baghdad that killed 25 people.⁴⁷ Al-Qaeda has used females to carry out several suicide attacks, to include utilizing a Western European named Muriel Degauque. Degauque was a fair skinned woman from Belgium that was married to another Belgian of Moroccan descent. She was accompanied by her husband when she blew herself up near a U.S. Army patrol in Mosul. Her husband was shot by the Americans after Muriel detonated the bomb.⁴⁸ These female suicide bombings demonstrate that women are actively participating in terrorism in Iraq, and that Al-Qaeda will continue to rely on them as assets to their organization.

Globally, female suicide bombers are increasing and involve nearly the same methods of operation as those conducted by males within the same organizations. Debra Zedalis, a leading expert on counterterrorism, makes six predictions for the future use of females in suicide bombings. First, terrorists will continue to use Islamic converts who have the advantage of blending in with Westerners. Second, future bombings will include multiple targets and will include sequential and simultaneous bombings. Third, female suicide bombers will continue to focus on high value targets. Fourth, the internet will continue to be a prime resource for

⁴⁶ Niva, "Behind the Surge in Iraqi Women Suicide Bombers," (accessed August 14, 2008).

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Christopher Dickey, "Terror: Women of Al Qaeda," *Newsweek International Edition*, (December 12, 2005): 27.

recruitment of women. Fifth, women will increasingly fill strategic-level positions in terrorist organizations. Finally, terrorist organizations will begin to use young women and women who are pregnant to commit terrorist acts.⁴⁹ Along with the historical examples from female involvement in Palestinian, Chechnyan and Sri Lankan terrorist organizations, the recent increase in contemporary conflicts is a trend that is expected to continue.

⁴⁹ Zedalis, "Beyond the Bombings: Analyzing Female Suicide Bombers," 59.

Section III: The Rising Importance of Women in Terrorism

“But are suicide bombings committed by women different than those committed by their fathers, husbands, sons, and brothers? No, they are not different because women despair as much as men and want to fight for the freedom of their people just as their male counterparts do. Yes, they are different because women often stand as boundary stones at the dawn of a new escalation in a conflict.”

Claudia Brunner, 2005⁵⁰

Claudia Brunner argues that the act of a female undertaking suicide bombing missions is no different than that of a man, but realizes the increasing number of women taking part in terrorism is an alarming trend for the future security environment. In the contemporary operating environment, it is becoming more advantageous and more acceptable for terrorist organizations to turn to females to enhance their ability to accomplish political or ideological objectives. Terrorist organizations actively recruit females for a variety of reasons, which include increasing the number of combatants, gaining a tactical advantage, generating media attention, and eliciting a distinctive psychological impact on an external audience.⁵¹ Females can provide advantages to extremist organizations that are in serious need of a resurgence of resources or publicity to further or even continue their cause. Many organizations see the female gender as an untapped resource and are increasingly willing to make concessions in their ideology to include women in their ranks. Increasing female involvement is also a good recruiting technique for influencing males to join, since in many cultures women are a dominant influence in family life but are not allowed to be involved in the larger society. The Islamic religion also believes that women should not be involved in extremist activities and as a result males are shamed into participating, rather than

⁵⁰ Claudia Brunner, "Female Suicide Bombers-Male Suicide Bombers? Looking for Gender in Reporting the Suicide Bombings of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict," *Global Society* 19, no. 1 (2005): 44.

⁵¹ Zedalis, "Beyond the Bombings: Analyzing Female Suicide Bombers," 50.

allowing women to perform the cultural or religious responsibility of men.⁵² Islamists have used the Arab media as an outlet to appeal to the Islamic pride of men to learn from the actions of Palestinian female terrorists and join in the fight to liberate occupied Islamic countries.

The increasing role of women in terrorist organizations in many cases can be attributed to meet a need or a shortage within the organization. Terrorist organizations are struggling with a shortage of available personnel with so many males being captured, killed, or unwilling to support the cause.⁵³ International cooperation in the global war on terror (GWOT) has made it difficult for organizations to continue to fight without access to the appropriate human and financial resources. Increasingly, organizations recruit both males and females during childhood to train and manipulate them at an early age to support the cause. Mass indoctrination of Palestinian children “by a multi-modal methodology emanating from media, schools, and pulpit, and street have been eminently successful in helping to generate an abundance of suicide bombers for future generations.”⁵⁴ In the insurgency against the government of Uganda, the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) continues to conduct terrorist attacks and reports indicate that the insurgent force consisted of 80% children abducted from Northern Uganda and Southern Sudan, and approximately 25% of the child rebel forces were females.⁵⁵ Females received extensive military tactics and weapons training, held command positions, and fought in front line combat units alongside males.⁵⁶ Developing terrorists from an early age allows organizations to accustom

⁵² Dickey, "Terror: Women of Al Qaeda," 29.

⁵³ Alisa Stack-O’Conner, “Picked Last: Women in Terrorism,” *Joint Forces Quarterly* 44, 1st Quarter (2008), 98.

⁵⁴ Daphne Burdman, "Education, Indoctrination, and Incitement: Palestinian Children on their way to Martyrdom," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 15, no. 1 (2005): 97.

⁵⁵ Susan McKay, "Girls as ‘weapons of terror’ in Northern Uganda and Sierra Leonean Armed Groups," in *Female Terrorism and Militancy: Agency, Utility and Organization*, by Cindy D. Ness, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008), 173.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 173.

children to committing various atrocities including torture, abduction, suicide bombing, and killing of parents, siblings, and neighbors.⁵⁷

Use of female terrorists also produces a tactical advantage, since they generally do not receive the same scrutiny by security forces on patrol or at gates or check points. Women have “become a tactical innovation because they deviate from the established counterterrorist profiles and stereotypes.”⁵⁸ According to Dr. Meir Litvak from the Tel Aviv University, “women can evade security checks more easily than men, since they arouse fewer suspicions.”⁵⁹ Women are able to hide suicide vests or belts under traditional clothing, making detection of a bomb or weapon difficult. Many cultures and religions do not allow a male to search a female due to the implications it has on the reputation of the woman, making it difficult to conduct a thorough search. Security forces often lack a female member to conduct the search properly. The Daughters of Iraq are filling this void along with the Sunni movement to quell the presence of al-Qaeda by conducting searches on female visitors at schools, hospitals, banks, and government offices.⁶⁰ As of August 2008, over 500 women have joined the 90,000 members of the Sons of Iraq to provide additional security at checkpoints and to ensure that women receive thorough searches.⁶¹

Female terrorists also provide additional international media attention for a terrorist organization, since news of a woman killing or threatening to kill innocent civilians is socially a more remarkable event than one conducted by a man. The media cannot resist reporting on a female terrorist act because of the shock value that it provides the audience. A Hezbollah

⁵⁷ Ibid., 167.

⁵⁸ Bloom, *Women as Victims and Victimiziers*, (accessed April 13, 2009).

⁵⁹ Giles Foden, "Death and the Maidens," *The Guardian*, (July 18, 2003): 3.

⁶⁰ Alexandra Zavis, "Daughters of Iraq: Women Take on a Security Role," *The Los Angeles Times*, (June 4, 2008), <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-daughters4-2008jun04,0,7497772.story> (accessed April 13, 2009).

⁶¹ Ibid.

spokesperson has explicitly stated that the media is an important part of the fight and has claimed that CNN is a bigger asset than an airplane.⁶² The general populace can be morbidly fascinated with the role that females play in terrorism and their coverage increases media ratings and alerts others to the ideological cause of the terrorists. Sinikka Tarvainen, a reporter for the Deutsche Presse Agentur, states that female terrorists have “long fascinated the popular imagination with their frequent combination of feminine charms and ability to kill in cold blood.”⁶³ The media coverage serves as free advertisement for an organization and may improve the ability of the organization to recruit additional men and women to support a cause.⁶⁴

Psychologically, a female terrorist invokes a passionate response from the public. Michael Tierney states, “previously, the suicide bomber fitted a stereotype: male, unmarried, immature, undereducated, aged between 17-23, and fanatically religious” and that “today, the martyr has evolved: he has become a she.”⁶⁵ The general populace has a hard time believing that wives, sisters, daughters or mothers can be cold-blooded killers or take their own life along with the lives of civilians for a cause. Females who have participated in terrorist acts have filled all of these roles. One gender specific role that has not been exploited in an act of terrorism to date is the use of a pregnant woman to commit an attack. In April 2006, a Sri Lanka suicide bomber disguised herself as being pregnant to gain entrance into a hospital.⁶⁶ This woman, Anoja Kugenthirasah, committed the suicide attack and was able to kill eight people and wound 26 others, including LTG Sarath Fonseka, the commander of the Sri Lankan Army, who escaped

⁶² Scott Atran, "Mishandling Suicide Terrorism," *The Washington Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (2004): 76.

⁶³ Sinikka Tarvainen, "The Life of Female Terrorists: Guns, Reluctant Sex, and Longing," *Deutsche Presse Agentur*, November 2, 1997.

⁶⁴ Zedalis, "Beyond the Bombings: Analyzing Female Suicide Bombers," 50.

⁶⁵ Foden, "Death and the Maidens," 2.

⁶⁶ Zedalis, "Beyond the Bombings: Analyzing Female Suicide Bombers," 62.

with serious injuries.⁶⁷ She was reported to be a member of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam elite Black Tigers suicide squad.⁶⁸ Some reports conclude that Kugenthirasah was actually pregnant, but this has not been confirmed.⁶⁹

The fascination with female terrorism can be “explained by the fact that female violence had not previously been accurately portrayed and that society’s conception of war, violence, and death is based upon our gender stereotypes.”⁷⁰ The psychological impact of a female terrorist can draw global support or attention to the cause of a terrorist organization, and the current increase of women involved in terrorism is expected to continue. This trend results from terrorist organizations using women as a necessity to counteract the impacts of the global war on terror, as well as benefiting from several strategic and tactical advantages that women can provide.

⁶⁷ British Broadcasting Company, "Bomb Targets Sri Lanka Army Chief," *BBC News*, (April 25, 2006), http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/4941744.stm (accessed March 8, 2009).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ The Associated Press, "Sri Lankan Bomber was Pregnant After All," *USA Today*, (April 28, 2006), http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2006-04-28-sri-lanka-bomber_x.htm (accessed March 8, 2009).

⁷⁰ Jessica West, "Innovations: A Journal of Politics," University of Calgary, 2004-2005, <http://www.ucalgary.ca/innovations/files/innovations/Inv2005spr-2.pdf> (accessed March 05, 2009).

Section IV: Motivations of Women to Support Terrorism

“A woman is often perceived as a victim of violence or of society, as widows or mothers, or as passive supporters – part of a support network. She symbolizes the guardian of tradition, a symbol of motherhood and life. How can she then, seemingly contradictory to this, give her life to valance and death?”

Report on Female Suicide Terrorism, 2005⁷¹

As clearly stated above, it is difficult for most to comprehend a woman carrying out a terrorist attack. However, the motivations for female involvement result from a variety of societal pressures. It is important to realize that each individual is motivated for a different reason, and therefore it is difficult to determine the motivation of any one individual. According to psychologist Joseph Margolin, “terrorist behavior is a response to the frustration of various political, economic, and personal needs or objectives.”⁷² A multitude of reasons may also combine to influence women to take action in an extreme manner. Society is quick to judge these women as irrational actors or individuals that are trying to gain equality with their male counterparts. This scenario is not always the case. One extreme view is that terrorist acts are carried out by “woman on the fringe of society who pursued their suicide mission as a way to restore their honor or that of their family.”⁷³ The other extreme sees “the female terrorist/militant as a ‘liberated’ feminist actor embracing violence as a way to achieve respect in a sexist society.”⁷⁴ Both of these extremes have been found to be true in certain instances, but it is naive to think that these are the only motivations for females to participate in terrorist activities. The

⁷¹ The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, *Female Suicide Terrorism - Consequences for Counter-Terrorism*, 4.

⁷² Bloom, *Women as Victims and Victimiziers*, (accessed April 13, 2009).

⁷³ Cindy D. Ness, *Female Terrorism and Militancy: Agency, Utility and Organization*, (New York: Routledge, 2008), 3.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

reality is that women join terrorist organizations for a variety of reasons, including grief or revenge for loss, ideology, financial hardship, personal or familial shame, and the need for protection of self and family. Many of these reasons are similar to those of their male counterparts, but differ from the standpoint that women have much more to gain or lose. When discussing the roles females play in terrorism, they are generally categorized as passive victims or feminist warriors. Similar to the narrow descriptions of the motivations for why women join terrorist organizations, these two characterizations do not adequately capture the entire array of responsibilities women carry in terrorism.

Grief or Revenge for Loss

Grief is a significant motivation that draws wives, mothers, or daughters into extremist organizations. The loss of a dominant male figure in their lives has a tremendous emotional, physical and financial impact. In most cases, the loss of the loved one was a perceived injustice at the hands of a Western occupying nation in a country such as Afghanistan or Iraq. A predator strike into a remote village in Afghanistan or casualty from a U.S. operation in Iraq is difficult for a mother to understand, and extreme grief will often turn to the desire for revenge. Although personal tragedy or revenge is one of the most prevalent motivations for women to conduct or support terrorist activities, one must also allow that at least some women are motivated by belief or ideology.

Commitment to an Ideological Cause

Women have the same dedication as their male counterparts to a cause such as freedom for the oppressed or equality for the underprivileged. It has been shown through previous research that even if women had a significant grievance or other emotional motivation, the “bottom line

was their belief in the 'cause' they were fighting for and willingness to die so that political attention would be put on their people's suffering."⁷⁵ Although the societies they live in may not allow them to fill the same roles as men, they are no less a part of that society and can believe just as strongly in the social and cultural beliefs and values of the society. Religious and ethnic beliefs are often a touchstone for the motivation and commitment of females involved in terrorism.⁷⁶ An overwhelming desire to make significant changes to the current environment or ultimately achieve martyrdom led women to take drastic measures. Martyrdom is voluntarily accepting death to demonstrate the truth to nonbelievers and help facilitate proselytizing efforts.⁷⁷ Many women are drawn to terrorism to contribute to a cause that they believe in and this leads to females accepting martyrdom. Wafa al-Bas, an attempted suicide bomber, states, "I love Allah, I love the land of Palestine and I am a member of Al-Aksa Brigades...my dream was to be a martyr. I believe in death...Since I was a little girl I wanted to carry out an attack."⁷⁸ Since a young age, Wafa al-BasIn believed that becoming a suicide bomber would help her religion and country and that she would become a martyr for her sacrifice. In many cases, women are more dedicated to the cause than men because the female gender as a whole has more to gain from significant social changes that may occur from the terrorist movement.

⁷⁵ The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, *Female Suicide Terrorism - Consequences for Counter-Terrorism*, 11.

⁷⁶ Zedalis, *Female Suicide Bombers*, 42.

⁷⁷ Mahan, *Terrorism in Perspective*, 53.

⁷⁸ Media Critiques, "Three Lessons from a Women Terrorist," Honest Reporting, (June 21, 2005), http://www.honestreporting.com/articles/45884734/critiques/Three_Lessons_from_a_Woman_Terrorist.asp (accessed April 1, 2009).

Desire to Improve Social Status

Female terrorists are often afforded an increase in their social status due to the position they hold within a terrorist organization.⁷⁹ Gaining equality with their male counterparts is a strong motivation to participate in terrorist activities. Many female terrorists view their cause and the subsequent violent acts as utopian and as a means to create a new society, not to restore a traditional way of life.⁸⁰ These liberal ideologies and the desire to elevate the status of females in society or to obtain opportunities for their children also provide the impetus to participate. Female terrorists are often motivated by violence, displacement, hunger, and lack of opportunities.⁸¹ Simple advancements in the rights of women that can be influenced in this manner include the ability for women or their children to attend school, receive medical attention, and maintain a job to feed a family. Analysts say that women terrorists in particular have often “lived on the receiving end of a system designed to trample their rights and crush every hope of a brighter future.”⁸² Terrorist organizations will use these personal frustrations and grievances to recruit women and ultimately meet their own political goals.⁸³

Financial Hardship

In addition to fueling grievances, the death of a husband, father or son can lead to a loss of economic support for an entire family. Women are often involved in terrorist activities to make up for this loss and support their families financially to provide basic subsistence requirements, including food and water. Women and children are the most impoverished demographic group in

⁷⁹ Cindy D. Ness, "In the Name of the Cause." In *Female Terrorism and Militancy: Agency, Utility and Organization*, by Cindy D. Ness, (New York: Routledge, 2008), 17.

⁸⁰ Mahan, *Terrorism in Perspective*, 255.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 249.

⁸² Srivastava, "Women Terrorists on the Rise in India," (accessed August 5, 2008).

⁸³ Foden, "Death and the Maidens," 3.

the world, leaving them as easy targets for terrorist organizations to recruit.⁸⁴ Often husbands are killed due to the instability in the security environment and women are left to struggle to provide for their children. Dire circumstances can force a mother to participate in dangerous or suicide missions to ensure they are able to provide for the welfare of their children. Mothers and daughters have been known to sacrifice themselves as suicide bombers to enable the rest of the family to survive. After death, the families of suicide bombers usually receive a generous amount of money, improved social status, enhanced reputation, and are “showered with honor and receive substantial financial rewards.”⁸⁵ Suicide bombers receive the fame and recognition associated with martyrdom after they successfully complete the terrorist act.

Personal or Family Shame

Females will often join terrorist organizations as a way to reinvent themselves or to become pure again after an alleged sexual misconduct or a real sexual assault.⁸⁶ This category also includes examples of women who are married and are forcibly raped by acquaintances of their husbands to make them unfit as wives.⁸⁷ This shame is not only focused on the individual, but also directed at the entire family. Often women will seek to become suicide bombers to cleanse the indiscretions that they have been accused of regardless of who is to blame. In many cultures, the inability to conceive children is viewed as the fault of the women, and in most cases

⁸⁴ Miemie Winn Byrd and Gretchen Decker, "Why the U.S. Should Gender It's Counterterrorism Strategy," *Military Review* 88, no. 4 (2008): 97.

⁸⁵ Zedalis, *Female Suicide Bombers*, 9.

⁸⁶ Sitralega Maunaguru, "Gendering Tamil Nationalism: The Construction of 'Women' in Projects of Protest and Control," In *Unmaking the Nation: The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka*, by Pradeep Jeganathan and Qadri Ismail, (Colombo: Social Scientists Association of Sri Lanka, 1995), 171.

⁸⁷ Asian News International, "Al Qaeda Now Recruiting, Deploying Female Militants Across Europe," (accessed April 13, 2009).

she will become divorced and considered useless in the eyes of society.⁸⁸ Terrorist organizations provide a means for women to redeem themselves in the eyes of their family or society. Suicide bombers are considered martyrs and discretions in their past are forgiven and their family honor are restored when they give their life for an ideological cause.⁸⁹

Protection of Self or Family

Members of a population have many reasons to shelter terrorist organizations within their homes and villages. One motivation is that terrorist organizations often provide the basic security mechanism for local towns and villages. They often become the “godfather” or “patriarch” of a community, and will provide services and protection for supporters as long as they are loyal to the cause.⁹⁰ The local police or military are also challenged to provide protection from extremist organizations in many ungoverned or remote locations. Families turn to support terrorists because they either receive protection from criminals or other rogue elements or are afraid of possible retaliation if they do not provide support. The protection provided by terrorist organizations can be more destructive to the local populace since security or military forces see this support as disloyal to the government, and will crack down on supporters. This creates a destructive cycle.

Women are motivated for many reasons to join or support terrorism. Reasons can result from personal motivations, from a desire to serve a larger social or ideological cause, or are simply a result of fear or a need to survive. Often, several motivations combine within a region or country to result in an increased likelihood of female involvement in terrorism.

⁸⁸ Robert A. Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*, (New York: Random House, 2005), 228.

⁸⁹ Bloom, *Women as Victims and Victimiziers*, (accessed April 13, 2009).

⁹⁰ Gabriela Rendon, “How to Change the Culture of Terrorism,” Citizens Against Terror, February 8, 2007, <http://citizensagainstterror.net/page/index/206> (accessed April 29, 2009).

Section V: Role of Females in Terrorism

“If we are to comprehend more fully the role of women as terrorists, we must recognize that women comprise a self-conscious, dynamic sector of our society which often perceives itself to be an oppressed majority – a majority oppressed not only because of race, religion, ethnicity, or national origin but also because of sex.”

Daniel E. Georges-Abeyie, 1983⁹¹

Women willingly and unwillingly fill a variety of roles within terrorist organizations. These roles include providing moral and logistics support, spying, executing terrorist attacks, and providing leadership. Socially women also are integral in the “vertical transmission” of family values and morals.⁹² Women are normally the primary care giver or teacher in the household. This role allows women to pass on the family traditions and “continuously reshape, repackage, and reuse cultural traits.”⁹³ Often viewed as the keepers of the family values and morals, women impart this knowledge to the younger generation. Hate or radical values are difficult emotions to reverse when children have been indoctrinated by an influential figure such as a mother since birth. Umm Osama bin Laden, an alias used to demonstrate her affection for Osama bin Laden, depicts the more active responsibilities females have in terrorism, stating they are “currently tasked with reconnaissance and gathering intelligence, providing logistical support and conveying messages between mujahedeen leaders, they have received training on explosives and suicide operations which will be carried out in the future.”⁹⁴ Despite the increasing variety of female roles in terrorism, they are sometimes dictated by the conditions that surround them. An

⁹¹ Daniel E. Georges-Abeyie, "Women as Terrorists," In *Perspectives on Terrorism*, by Lawrence Zelic Freedman and Yonah Alexander, 71-84, (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1983), 84.

⁹² Byrd and Decker, "Why the U.S. Should Gender It's Counterterrorism Strategy," 99.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁹⁴ Abdul Hameed Bakier, "Jihadis Provide Internet Training for Female Mujahideen," *Terrorism Focus*, 2006: 1.

environment characterized by long-term conflict might have women fill more significant roles as a result of a shortage of males from casualties or attrition. Norms for the roles women play in society are often ignored during long-term conflicts or contentions situations. For example, in Chechnya interviews with women involved in radical organizations or who are family members of female activists indicate an “expressed willingness, sympathy and legitimization for female participation, not only as supporters but also as actors in the most violent acts.”⁹⁵

Sympathizers, Spies, Warriors and Dominant Forces

Sue Mahan and Pamela Griset have conducted extensive research on gender and terrorism, and place the role of women into the four major categories. These categories include sympathizers, spies, warriors, and dominant forces.⁹⁶ A brief description of each category is included in the table below:

<p style="text-align: center;">Sympathizers</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Basic logistics support Money Time Food Safe haven Sex with males terrorist</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Spies</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Running messages Gathering intelligence Serving as decoys</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Warriors</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Execute terrorist acts Weapons Bomb making Execute terrorist events</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Dominant Forces</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Play a prominent role Leadership Establish policy</p>

⁹⁵ The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, *Female Suicide Terrorism - Consequences for Counter-Terrorism*, 5.

⁹⁶ Mahan, *Terrorism in Perspective*, 15.

Sympathizers provide basic logistics support to terrorist organizations, including money, time, sewing, food, supplies, safe haven, and sex to males in the organization. Spies play a more active role, and undertake missions such as running messages, gathering intelligence, or serving as decoys for the terrorist organization. These roles are critical to the ability of a terrorist organization to function and further their political agenda. The reality for sympathizers and spies is that if the terrorist organization is able to implement change, these women are unlikely to see their role change in society or receive benefits. Often females with family members in the terrorist organization fill these roles when their father, husband, brother, or son joins a terrorist group. Female warriors and dominant forces operate in a significantly more active and even leadership role. Warriors are trained to use weapons, make bombs, and to execute terrorist events. They “fight alongside their male counterparts, but they are not allowed to become leaders and have little, if any, input in policy formation.”⁹⁷ Examples of warriors include the suicide bombers from the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, suicide bombers in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the female Chechens known as the “Black Widows,” who took hostages in Moscow Theater in 2002.⁹⁸

Dominant forces do more than simply execute a particular task for a terrorist organization, but rather play a prominent role in leading and establishing policy for a terrorist organization. These women are also involved in development of the strategy and ideology that guides an extremist group. Although more rare than the sympathizers, spies and warriors, dominant forces receive the same benefits as their male counterparts from improvement or changes implemented by the terrorist organization. They are often considered equal to their male counterparts and are critical assets to the organization. Leila Khaled of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) is a prominent example of a female dominant force. She was in

⁹⁷ Gonzalez-Perez, *Women and Terrorism: Female Activity in Domestic and International Terror*, 16.

⁹⁸ Chilcote, "Russia's 'Black Widows' Wreak Terror," (accessed April 13, 2009).

charge of a failed terrorist operation to hijack an aircraft that resulted in her arrest by the London Police forces. In response, the PFLP hijacked another aircraft and demanded her release from British authorities. The importance of Khaled to the organization along with international media attention surrounding the incident made a second hijacking advantageous to the PFLP, allowing them to successfully negotiate for her release.⁹⁹ Other examples of dominant forces are found in an analysis of the female leaders within the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and leaders such as Sophia Perovskaya of the People's Will. The role and influence of women in terrorist organizations and activities are becoming more diverse, largely based on the changing environment and conditions within which terrorists operate.¹⁰⁰

Women in Domestic and International Terrorist Organizations

The involvement of women in terrorism in both domestic and international terrorist organizations has been well documented. Margaret Gonzalez-Perez argues that women are more likely to become involved in domestic as opposed to international terrorist organizations. She states that, "women are more active and participate at much higher levels in terrorist groups that espouse domestic objectives and act against the state government, than women in terrorist organizations with an international agenda that targets globalization, imperialism, or foreign influence."¹⁰¹ Females have very little to gain from participating in international terrorism since, "regardless of the outcome, women will still be relegated to their status quo."¹⁰² Two case studies

⁹⁹ Eager, *From Freedom Fighters to Terrorists: Women and Political Violence*, 186.

¹⁰⁰ Mahan, *Terrorism in Perspective*, 247.

¹⁰¹ Gonzalez-Perez, *Women and Terrorism: Female Activity in Domestic and International Terror*, 1.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, Preface.

that contradict this viewpoint are the role of Ulrike Meinhof of the Red Army Faction (RAF) in Germany and of Augusta La Torre Guzman of the Sendero Luminoso (SL) in Peru.¹⁰³

Ulrike Meinhof was a well known senior leader in the left-wing militant group, the RAF, who forcefully asserted her opinion of the rights of women.¹⁰⁴ The RAF was a leftist organization allied with the Palestinians that bombed department stores throughout Germany, and attacked U.S. installations as well as German military targets.¹⁰⁵ Meinhof held a significant and dominant influence on the activity of the organization prior to her arrest in 1972. In Peru, the SL was a post-Maoist movement whose main objective was to redistribute wealth equitably with the ultimate objective of remaking the entire global world order.¹⁰⁶ Although the SL was unable to significantly project terrorism outside of Peru, Guzman and her partner terrorists were “responsible for the economic and social devastation of one state in Peru and for wreaking havoc with the way of life of the entire nation.”¹⁰⁷ These two examples demonstrate that women have been actively involved and held positions of high esteem and influence in terrorist organizations with international objectives.

In contrast with fundamental Islamic principles, the involvement of females in al-Qaeda is on the rise. Male terrorists are increasingly seeing advantages to having women involved, and are forced to find ways to reconcile their ideology with the use of females. Umm Osama bin Laden states that the “female section of al-Qaeda is multinational and reports to Mullah Saif al-Din who, in turn, reports directly to the Taliban and Osama bin Laden.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ Mahan, *Terrorism in Perspective*, 253.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 253.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 253.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 253.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 253.

¹⁰⁸ Bakier, "Jihadis Provide Internet Training for Female Mujahideen," 1.

Section VI: Methods Used to Recruit Women into Terrorism

“Are there no men, so that we have to recruit women? Isn’t it a shame for the sons of my own nation that our sisters ask to conduct martyrdom operations while men are preoccupied with life?”

Abu Musab al Zaraqawi¹⁰⁹

With this quote, Zaraqawi taunts his male Muslim brothers and recognizes the problems al-Qaeda is having with recruitment. With a shortage of males as a result of the massive resources applied to the global war on terror, al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations are increasingly expanding efforts to recruit women. Increased attention from international media on attacks carried out by women and the need to increase personnel strength are two primary reasons women are being recruited into terrorism. Several methods are used to recruit women, to include an appeal to ideology, coercion using physical and emotional distress, leveraging family relationships, causing dishonor or shame, and conducting internet campaigns. Terrorists understand the motivations and reasons why women turn to extremist actions, and look for every opportunity to exploit these motivations to their advantage. Terrorists understand that they can leverage the innocence, enthusiasm, personal distress, and thirst for revenge of a female and channel it into terrorist activities that gain international media attention.

Appeal to Ideology

A call to action against a perceived injustice has the same draw to women as it does on men. Some claim women are often more interested in causing change since they have the most to gain from sweeping reforms to the political or ideological environment. Women are “easily enlisted by a terrorist group that pretends to know what must be changed, that want to change it

¹⁰⁹ Dickey, "Terror: Women of Al Qaeda," 27.

here and now, and that on the way to change allows women to manifest precisely those maternal-sacrificial qualities that for centuries constituted recognition of her identity.”¹¹⁰

In an Islamic extremist organization, justifying the female role in terrorist activities or the global Jihad is a hurdle that must be faced. Most terrorist groups have patriarchal organizations that relegate women to a second class citizen status. Robert S. Leiken, Director of the Immigration and National Security Program at the Nixon Centre in Washington, D.C., notes the significance of “al-Qaeda and more generally, the Global Salafist Jihad’s heightened interest in recruiting female operatives.”¹¹¹ This interest is in complete conflict with many of the Islamic values that the organization is based upon, but the reality remains that many leaders are softening their stance based on necessity and the massive amount of media attention that female involvement brings to the cause. For example, al-Qaeda has softened their stance on the involvement of women in suicide missions, and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was a great supporter of females involved in terrorist activities.¹¹² Additionally, Sheikh Yassin, the former spiritual leader of Hamas, “has not excluded a direct role for women and has even provided an appropriate *a priori* legal justification.”¹¹³ There are also a growing number of individuals that support the belief that Jihad is an obligation for women as much as it is for men. Umm Badr (Mother of Badr) states that “when jihad becomes a personal obligation, then the woman is summoned like a man and need ask permission neither from her husband nor from her guardian, because she is

¹¹⁰ Luisella De Cataldo Neuberger, Tiziana Valentini, and Jo Campling, *Women and Terrorism*, (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1996), 85.

¹¹¹ Jeffrey Cozzens, "Terrorism & Insurgency-Islamist Groups Develop New Recruiting Strategies," *Jane's Intelligence Review* 17, no. 2 (2005): 5.

¹¹² Ness, *Female Terrorism and Militancy: Agency, Utility and Organization*, 6.

¹¹³ Schweitzer, *Female Suicide Bombers for God*, 3.

obligated and none need ask permission in order to carry out a commandment that everyone must carry out.”¹¹⁴

The justification behind the softening stance on female involvement is often supported by historical precedence outlined in published documents. Examples of female involvement include women fighting in Jihad, becoming martyrs, and providing medical care. Aliyya Mustafa Mubarak assembled a list of 67 women who according to her “fought in the wars of Prophet Muhammad or immediately afterword in the great Islamic conquests.”¹¹⁵ Most of these women were involved in supporting roles on the battlefield, but it demonstrates examples of females involved in Jihad. Another example that can be used by leaders to justify female involvement is from a highly regarded Islamic moralist figure in the treatise entitled *The Merits of the Women Companions of Prophet Muhammad*.¹¹⁶ The author cites several examples of female fighters that carried arms and provided other support to the Prophet Muhammad. One example includes women taking up arms and fighting alongside men during the Battle of Uhud, which is considered the major defeat of Muhammad during the wars of his time. Safiya, the aunt of the Prophet Muhammad, is also cited as taking up arms to protect a stronghold during the Battle of the Khandaq.¹¹⁷ These examples are tangible incidents that religious leaders can leverage to justify the use of females in terrorist activities.

The growth of “Islamic Feminism” has drawn more attention to this delicate issue and modern literature routinely addresses the role of women in Jihad. Muhammad Khayr Haykal wrote a three volume book which covers everything pertaining to Jihad and includes a section in

¹¹⁴ Jane’s Intelligence Digest, *Female Suicide Bombers in Iraq*, 3.

¹¹⁵ David Cook, “Women Fighting in Jihad?” In *Female Terrorism and Militancy: Agency, Utility and Organization*, by Cindy D. Ness, 37-49, (New York: Routledge, 2008), 38.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

the second volume on the role of women. Haykal concludes that it is “incumbent upon the Islamic state to prepare training centers for women so that they can learn the use of arms and methods of fighting in them. This is because as long as it is possible that Jihad could become *fard ‘ayn* [individual duty] upon the women, it is incumbent to train her for this eventuality so that she will be prepared to fulfill this obligation.”¹¹⁸

Nawaf al-Takruri, a Syrian writer, focuses on the legal issues associated with suicide attacks and the role that women are allowed to play. He cites six fatwas that allow women to execute suicide missions. These include fatwas issues by “Yusaf al-Qaradawi (the famous TV and radio personality), three faculty at al-Azhar University in Egypt, Fasal al-mawlawi of the European Council for Research and Legal Opinion (based in Dublin), and Nizar ‘Abd al-Qadir Riyyan of the Islamic University of Gaza (Palestine).”¹¹⁹ These fatwas provides another basis for leaders of radical Islam to justify the role of women in suicide attacks.

A final example of a current writer that supports the role of women in the extremist activities is Yusaf al-‘Ayyiri. Al-‘Ayyiri was one of the ideological leaders of al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia prior to his death.¹²⁰ He uses examples of eight women fighters appearing throughout the history of Islam including several in medieval times. In the final part of his paper, al-‘Ayyiri dismisses two of the foundations that critics use to block the involvement of women in Jihad. The first aspect is obtaining permission of the parents to be involved in Jihad and the second is that Jihad for women is the performance of the hajj ritual. He dispels these beliefs by stating “that because Jihad at this present time is *fard ‘ayn* [individual duty] it is incumbent on women as well as men, without regard to parental permission.”¹²¹ He continues by listing prayer, Jihad, and

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 42.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 43.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 45.

¹²¹ Ibid., 45.

respect to parents as the important activities that women should conduct.¹²² Al-‘Ayyiri is still a very influential individual even after his death, and his interpretation of the roles women should play opens the door for women to participate in a multitude of terrorist activities. In addition to the influence of the beliefs of ideological leaders, the role of females in terrorist activities is evolving as leaders realize what tremendous assets women are in supporting the cause. Multiple spiritual and community leaders are providing historical precedence that opens the door for an increased female role in terrorist activities.

Targeting of Personal Relationships

Women are often recruited into extremist organizations as a result of their relationship with a father, husband, brother, or son. These women usually come from a highly patriarchal society which expects them to obey men and never question their judgment. This oppressive control makes it very easy for females to be recruited into terrorist organizations since they must follow the decisions made by male family members. Females also may choose to follow a friend, boyfriend or lover into a terrorist organization, and this devotion to another person is often the only reason for their involvement.¹²³ This occurs quite frequently, and according to Mia Bloom, “one of the most reliable predictors of a women’s involvement in a particular movement is her relationship to a former or current terrorist in that movement.”¹²⁴ Family and social ties plays a significant role in the growth of terrorist organizations, and al-Qaeda relies on this method heavily. In Iraq, the leaders of al-Qaeda known as emirs “managed to recruit entire clans to their cause by marrying into the families there.”¹²⁵

¹²² Ibid., 46.

¹²³ Bloom, *Women as Victims and Victimiziers*, (accessed April 13, 2009).

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Zavis, "Daughters of Iraq: Women Take on a Security Role," (accessed April 13, 2009).

Emotional Coercion

Causing shame is another prevalent technique used by terrorist organizations to coerce women to support their cause. In many cultures, Islam has a very strict view on what is acceptable behavior for women. Women that are considered soiled or damaged goods are easy targets for terrorist organizations to recruit since they are shunned from society. There are cases of militants marrying women and allowing other militants to rape them.¹²⁶ The dishonor and rejection experienced by women makes them susceptible to recruitment or even forcible coercion by a terrorist organization to be used as suicide bombers.¹²⁷ Saja Quadouri, a member of a Security Council on an Iraqi Provincial Council states “they will get married to more than one man and get pregnant without knowing who the father is, and eventually, due to despair, hopelessness and fear, they get exploited to commit such crimes, as they become unwanted by society.”¹²⁸

Internet Campaigns

The internet is a growing resource for terrorist organizations to recruit females to extremist activities. Websites educate women about how they can become more involved in ideological causes and provide support to those already involved in terrorism. These websites provide women specific instructions on providing medical care to wounded mujahideen in twelve specific areas including resuscitation, applying a tourniquet, and treating gunshot wounds.¹²⁹ There are also pictures and interviews with females involved in shooting weapons and conducting suicide attacks. A female trainee is quoted as saying “we consider this hard and dangerous

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Asian News International, "Al Qaeda Now Recruiting, Deploying Female Militants Across Europe," (accessed April 13, 2009).

¹²⁸ Zavis, "Daughters of Iraq: Women Take on a Security Role," (accessed April 13, 2009).

¹²⁹ Bakier, "Jihadis Provide Internet Training for Female Mujahideen," 1.

training as worship to God and by implementing this training, we will achieve one of two merits, victory or martyrdom.”¹³⁰ Bakier states that, “observers of jihadi cyber activities have noticed an increase in the number of websites dedicated to mujahidat (female mujahedeen), linked either directly or ideologically to al-Qaeda.”¹³¹ Al-Qaeda has also established an online magazine called al Khansa that encourages Muslim women to support al-Qaeda.

According to a Jane’s Intelligence briefing released in 2005, there is an Arabic language internet magazine that recruits women for suicide attacks and provides fitness tips for aspiring mujaheda, including “breathing gymnastics to conquer the passions.”¹³² Websites also offer advice about how to raise children to fight the infidel. The intelligence brief cites a recent editorial that states “Muslim women have set our lines next to our men to support them...raise their children and be prepared and may God elevate us to martyrs.” The editorial continues by stating that the goal of all Muslim women should be “martyrdom for the sake of Allah” and “the pleasure of Allah and His Paradise.”¹³³ These are influential words that have proven effective in recruiting females to the extremist ideology of al-Qaeda. Jane’s Intelligence also cites other propaganda on the internet, including an article that “contends that the belief that jihad is solely the preserve and duty of men is flawed and due to a defective understanding of Jihad.”¹³⁴ The author argues that women should be allowed to fight jihad with or without the approval of fathers or husbands.¹³⁵ These views are a relatively new way of thinking, and reveal how dangerous female involvement in al-Qaeda could be for Western and moderate Muslim countries.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 2.

¹³¹ Ibid., 1.

¹³² Jane’s Intelligence Digest, *Female Suicide Bombers in Iraq*, 2.

¹³³ Ibid., 2-3.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 3.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 3.

Terrorist organizations will continue to use every means at their disposal to recruit women to provide support to their cause. The variety of methods terrorist organizations are using to recruit females and the increased willingness to use them in more important roles are expanding the number of recruits. Strategies to counter this trend must be incorporated into national policy and military strategy.

Section VII: Current Counterterrorism Strategies

Several counterterrorism strategies have been developed by various organizations within the United States Government. These include the National Strategy for Combating Terrorism, The National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism, and the Field Manual on Counterinsurgency. All of these publications are open-source documents and are available to the general public. Due to the nature of this monograph, classified counterterrorism documents were not included in the research.

National Strategy for Combating Terrorism

The National Strategy for Combating Terrorism was published in 2003. The document outlines four specific goals and objectives for the administration of President George W. Bush. These goals include defeating terrorists and their organizations, denying sponsorship, support, and sanctuary to terrorists, diminishing the underlying conditions that terrorists seek to exploit, and defending U.S. citizens and interests at home and abroad.¹³⁶ Gender is pertinent to all of these goals and objectives, but the strategy itself does not specifically address this important detail. For example, the strategy discusses the responsibility of the intelligence community to identify terrorist personnel, organizations, networks and command and control structures, and financial and material support structures. Women are involved in all of these areas, but gender is never mentioned in the document. Realistically, gender may not need to be addressed in detail at the national strategy level since this level of strategy is very general. However, since females are playing a much more significant role in terrorism the trend is expected to continue, the role of gender should be addressed in general terms at this level.

¹³⁶ United States Government, *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*, National Security Strategy, (Washington, D.C.: Executive Office of the President, 2003), iii.

National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism

The National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism (NMSP-WOT) of 2006 was written as the comprehensive military plan to execute the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT). NMSP-WOT states that it, “guides the planning and action of the Combatant Commands, the Military Departments, Combat Support Agencies, and Field Support Activities of the United States to protect and defend the homeland, attack terrorists and their capacity to operate effectively at home and abroad, and support mainstream efforts to reject violent extremism.”¹³⁷ This plan is more detailed and outlines six strategic objectives. These objectives include denying terrorists what they need to operate and survive; enabling partner nations to counterterrorism; denying WMD/E proliferation, recovering and eliminating uncontrolled materials, and increasing capacity for consequence management; defeating terrorists and their organizations; countering state and non-state support for terrorism in coordination with other U.S. Government agencies and partner nations; and contributing to the establishment of conditions that counter ideological support for terrorism.¹³⁸ Gender is not addressed in any form or manner in this publication. The NMSP-WOT is more detailed and would benefit from the integration of gender as an aspect of the military counterterrorism strategy.

Field Manual 3-24 Counterinsurgency

The Army does not currently have a publication that governs terrorism or outlines counterterrorism strategy. The most relevant publication is the new Army field manual published in December 2006, *FM 3-24 Counterinsurgency*, that was developed in conjunction with the Marine Corps. FM 3-24 briefly discusses the role of gender in counterinsurgency operations. A

¹³⁷ Department of Defense, *National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism*, National Military Strategy, (Washington, D.C.: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2006), 3.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

small paragraph located in Annex A, *A Guide for Action*, called “Engage the Women; Be Cautious around the Children” discusses the role of women in social networks that support insurgents and their organizations. It recommends using female counterinsurgents to engage neutral or friendly women to undermine insurgents.¹³⁹ This is an important suggestion that is useful in both counterinsurgency and counterterrorism, but fails to address the more active roles that women play in insurgent operations as fighters or in leadership positions. Failure to address gender ignores the power and resources that females provide to an insurgency. An effective strategy should deal with the contributions of and roles held by women in insurgent organizations, and ignoring these factors may result in an ineffective strategy.

¹³⁹ Department of the Army, *FM 3-24, Counterinsurgency*, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, December 2006), A-6.

Section VIII: Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

“No one who understands the feminist movement, or who knows the soul of a real woman would make the mistake of supposing that the modern woman is fighting because she wants to be a man. That idea is the invention of masculine intelligence. Woman is fighting today, as she has all the way through the ages, for the freedom to be a woman.”

Anne B. Hamman¹⁴⁰

Women are increasingly involved with terrorist organizations that have and will continue to target the United States and the Western way of life. Female involvement has distorted the prevailing profile used by the U.S. and other countries of the typical terrorist. The U.S. government, the general public, and especially the military must adjust their perceptions of the demographics of terrorism. Failure to include gender in the development of counterterrorism strategy leads to an incomplete plan that could result in disastrous consequences. Female participation in terrorist organizations exponentially raises the threat due to an increase in the number of combatants, an asymmetrical tactical advantage, added international media attention, and a distinctive psychological impact on an external audience.¹⁴¹ Women will continue to participate at all levels of extremist organizations and the U.S. government must not ignore the role of females in counterterrorism strategy. Failure to implement significant changes could lead to more females joining extremist organizations and an increase in the exploitation of women by terrorist groups. A variety of means can be used by the U.S. to influence the extent that women are involved in terrorism, to include changes to the social, political, and economic environment of an area or region. Programs that improve the social environment, educate women, stop violence against women, encourage gender equality, and provide financial support will discourage women

¹⁴⁰ Neuberger, et. al., *Women and Terrorism*, 92.

¹⁴¹ Zedalis, "Beyond the Bombings: Analyzing Female Suicide Bombers," 50.

from supporting or participating in terrorist activities.¹⁴² Although many of these solutions, such as promoting political and economic equality, involve a Western-centric approach to the problem, there are indications that these programs do enhance quality of life for women. For any solution to be effective, it must be appropriate to the social norms of the society within which it is being implemented.

Regions and countries where terrorism exists and continues to grow must be identified, and extensive cultural analysis should be conducted to accurately determine the role females fill in society. Each country has a variety of influences that affect the status of women in that particular culture. These influences include religion, tradition, type of society or government, and tribal association. For example, in Afghanistan tribal culture is the most significant influence on the position of women in the society, while in Sri Lanka tradition dominates the role of women. A locally specific assessment allows the U.S. to determine a general hierarchy of needs for females in the country, and regional strategy can be tailored to address these needs. Needs include, but are not limited to, education, food or water, social status, legal equality, employment opportunities, participation in the political process, and protection from violence or human rights violations. The U.S. can target the most critical needs to ensure women gain the most benefit from humanitarian or financial programs and are less likely to participate in terrorist activities.

U.S. Law requires that the Department of State release a Country Report on Terrorism by the end of April every year.¹⁴³ The report should be expanded to include a cultural analysis about the status of women in different countries and the current roles they play in terrorist activities. Additionally, the Department of Defense has initiated a program known as the Human Terrain

¹⁴² Amy Caiazza, "Why Gender Matters in Understanding September 11: Women, Militarism, and Violence," Institute for Women's Policy Research, November 2001, <http://www.iwpr.org/pdf/terrorism.pdf> (accessed April 13, 2009), 4.

¹⁴³ U.S. Department of State, *Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism*, 01 10 2009, <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/> (accessed 01 10, 2009).

System (HTS), which employs anthropologists to assist military units in understanding cultural issues. Although the focus of the HTS is to embed social scientists with operational and tactical units, an element is also designed to conduct cultural analysis at the combatant command level. Information collected and analyzed by this asset is critical to developing counterterrorism strategy on a regional level. Information from the Country Reports and the HTS should be utilized to develop a more comprehensive counterterrorism strategy that addresses the entire population.

The role women play within a terrorist organization should dictate the actions taken to deter her participation. This will ensure that the most effective means are implemented and resources are not wasted. For example, it is more effective to target sympathizers with humanitarian aid programs than women in the dominant force role. Sympathizers fill a passive support role in an organization and are often recruited by coercion. Targeting sympathizers might also entail establishing a secure environment so women are not intimidated into providing supplies or refuge for terrorists. Spies and warriors engage in a more active role to accomplish tasks directed by a terrorist organization. These individuals will be more difficult to target and might require employment opportunities or financial aid programs. The most difficult females to influence will be the dominant forces in the leadership of a terrorist organization. Dominant forces are actively involved in the development of the strategy and ideology of the terrorist organization, and usually are dedicated to the cause. These individuals may have to be killed or captured to prevent their active participation in the organization.

Improving the social environment is a vitally important means for deterring participation in terrorist activities. Improving education opportunities, medical support, and social programs for women and their children will give them an alternative to the benefits provided by terrorist organizations. The World Bank states that educating women “increases their productivity on the farm and in the factory but also results in greater labor force participation, later marriage, lower

fertility, and greatly improved child health and nutrition.”¹⁴⁴ Improvements provide additional advantages since, “illiteracy and lack of schooling directly disadvantages their young children” and “low schooling translates into poor quality of care for children and then higher infant and child mortality and malnutrition.”¹⁴⁵ Providing support to grassroots organizations dedicated to improving the rights of women is one way to generate change at the local level. Organizations such as these are well established in communities and understand the needs of the local women. Social improvements not only benefit women, but also the community and nation. Another method to effect social change is to support programs that work with religious and local leaders to develop programs that build female self-esteem and discourage women from becoming involved in terrorist activities. It is critically important that women understand “that they can play a positive role in their societies and make a greater and more meaningful contribution in life than death.”¹⁴⁶ Support from local leaders gives legitimacy to a program that outside organizations will never attain. However, the difficulties involved with generating social change within fundamentalist societies must be acknowledged as a significant challenge.

Strategy should support international aid programs that focus on stopping violence against women and encourage gender equality in the political process. Repression and violence against women undermines stability and encourages the growth of terrorism.¹⁴⁷ The U.S. should support the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) and other international organizations attempting to reduce human rights violations against women. U.S. counterterrorism

¹⁴⁴ Michael P. Todaro and Stephen C. Smith, *Economic Development*, (Boston, MA: Addison-Wesley, 2008), 377.

¹⁴⁵ Elizabeth M. King and Andrew D. Mason, *Engendering Development: Through Gender Equality in Rights, Resources, and Voice : Summary*, World Bank Policy Research Report, (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2001), 8.

¹⁴⁶ Bloom, *Women as Victims and Victimiziers*, (accessed April 13, 2009).

¹⁴⁷ Caiazza, "Why Gender Matters in Understanding September 11: Women, Militarism, and Violence," 4.

strategy should unequivocally oppose violence against women and should target countries that condone this unacceptable behavior.¹⁴⁸ Failure to adequately address this issue allows violence to continue while women become desperate for change and turn to terrorism. The U.S. can use political and economic pressure to stop sexual violence and the human trafficking of U.S. policy should focus on providing women with the tools and resources to stop the violence and ultimately achieve individual autonomy. Legislation and policies similar to the Afghan Women and Children Act of 2001 enacted by Congress provide assistance to women through nongovernmental organizations (NGO) and local institutions.¹⁴⁹ These programs are focused on empowerment of women, and may also encourage stability.

Inability to participate fully in the political process leads many women to become frustrated and to take drastic measures to facilitate change.¹⁵⁰ Women should be treated as equals in the political process, although this is in direct conflict with the religious and traditional role of women in many parts of the world. Political equality includes the ability to hold office, vote, and develop policy. This will ensure the voices of women are heard and that programs will be developed to meet their specific needs. Political equality will not happen overnight, but small steps should be taken to facilitate women becoming more active in the political process.

Economic support to programs developed for women is another way that the U.S. can positively affect and discourage women from becoming involved in extremist organizations. Financial aid under U.S. foreign policies should target economic support for education programs, medical facilities, peace movements, and reconstruction efforts. These programs will not only

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 4.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 4.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 3.

encourage economic development, but “are among the most likely to increase levels of security among men and women and address the conditions that encourage terrorism.”¹⁵¹

Micro-financing programs can target women and make a lasting impact on local economies. Dr. Mohammad Yunus, Nobel Peace Prize winner in 2006, founded the Bangladesh Grameen Bank that lends primarily to women. He demonstrated that women pay back loans more often than men and that “women tend to help the whole community when they have access to micro loans.”¹⁵² Financially empowering women contributes to positive results for the individual as well as for all women in the local area. The community will begin to view women as important and capable of handling the same responsibilities as men. In addition, economic development leads to increased stability and a decreased need for individuals to support terrorism.¹⁵³

Integrating a perspective on gender into national and military strategies for counterterrorism is critical to national security in the contemporary and future operating environment. A review of history shows that women have played a significant role in terrorism. Since terrorist organizations benefit greatly from the support and involvement of females, it is expected that the role of women will continue. Failure to address gender in counterterrorism strategy bears unacceptable consequences.

¹⁵¹ Caiazza, "Why Gender Matters in Understanding September 11: Women, Militarism, and Violence," 5.

¹⁵² Byrd and Decker, "Why the U.S. Should Gender It's Counterterrorism Strategy," 99.

¹⁵³ Caiazza, "Why Gender Matters in Understanding September 11: Women, Militarism, and Violence," 5.

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