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## A JUSTIFICATION FOR CONFLICT – THE USE OF THE “GENTLER SEX” IN A POST 9/11 CONTEXT

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**JCSP 43 DL**

***Exercise Solo Flight***

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CANADIAN FORCES COLLEGE – COLLÈGE DES FORCES CANADIENNES  
JCSP 43 DL – PCEMI 43 AD  
2017 – 2018

EXERCISE *SOLO FLIGHT* – EXERCICE *SOLO FLIGHT*

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**A JUSTIFICATION FOR CONFLICT –  
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*“Observe your duty to Allah in respect to the women and treat them well.”<sup>1</sup>*

*Koran*

*“It is heartbreaking to see the way these terrorists treat ... women. In their eyes, a woman is an object that they can control. They are scared that when these girls get an education, they will become aware of their rights as women and as a human being.”<sup>2</sup>*

*Razia Jan (principal of Zabuli education centre for girls and CNN Hero 2012)*

Women have always played a role in war; however, their history is rarely documented because it is assumed that their role is primarily one of ‘victim’ to its atrocities. Although it is a fact that women are disproportionately affected by violence, women have also contributed to past war efforts as soldiers, special agents, nurses, surgeons, doctors, laundry women and prostitutes.<sup>3</sup> The interest in the study of the relationship between gender and security and women’s roles in conflict has increased significantly since 9/11 and in the conflicts of Afghanistan and Iraq.<sup>4</sup> One could assume that this is likely due to the increasing influence of women in the realms of diplomacy, politics and defence; however, the liberal values of Western gender expectations may not be the sole reason for this rise in the study of the gender/security nexus. Gender, and more specifically, the role of women in society, illustrates the cultural differences between Western democracies and Terrorist Organizations in Afghanistan including the Taliban, Al Qaeda and

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<sup>1</sup> The Islamic Quotes, <https://www.theislamicquotes.com/islamic-quotes-on-women/> Last accessed 23 May 18.

<sup>2</sup> Allie Torgan, “CNN Heroes,” 17 March 18. <https://www.cnn.com/2012/08/02/world/meast/cnnheroes-jan-afghan-school/index.html> Last accessed 23 May 18.

<sup>3</sup> Caroline Kennedy “Gender and Security.” Cotemporary Security Studies, edited by Alan Collins. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. 118.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

ISIS. The following proposes that much of the recent gender rhetoric espoused by Western democracies has been used to justify their military actions in Afghanistan. Moreover, it is suggested that the enemy, in this case a multitude of terrorist organizations (TO) including but not limited to Al Qaeda, Taliban and ISIS, also uses its “vision” of a women’s role in society as a motivation to fight. This paper will also expose gaps and contradictions in the narrative of both sides.

### **“Moral Justification”**

The attacks of 9/11 were a pivotal moment in U.S. history. Not since Pearl Harbour had America been attacked on its own soil leaving thousands dead. Most Americans, up to 90%, agreed with President Bush’s course of action including the invasion of Afghanistan less than a month after the attacks.<sup>5</sup> In his address to the nation on October 7, 2001, President Bush announced that Operation ENDURING FREEDOM had been launched and its main goals were to destroy Al Qaeda terrorist training camps, the military installations and capability of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.<sup>6</sup> Bush had support both domestically and from international partners for his justifiable actions; however, the mere destruction of Taliban installations and of Al Qaeda’s destruction would not meet his secretary of state’s Colin Powell “Pottery Barn” approach to international affairs of “you break it, you own it.”<sup>7</sup> Consequently, rebuilding efforts were also required and although Bush warned Americans that patience was required, “...in the

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<sup>5</sup> Jeffrey M. Jones “Sept. 11 Effects, Though Largely Faded, Persist.” Sept 2003.  
<http://news.gallup.com/poll/9208/sept-effects-though-largely-faded-persist.aspx>. Last accessed 19 May 2018.

<sup>6</sup> George W. Bush, Address to the Nation, 7 Oct 2001.  
<https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2001/10/mil-011007-usia01.htm> Last accessed 19 May 2018.

<sup>7</sup> Kathy Gilsinan. “The Pottery Barn Rule,” The Atlantic.  
<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/09/the-pottery-barn-rule-syria-edition/408193/>  
Last accessed 19 May 18.

months ahead,”<sup>8</sup> months turned into years and, as of 2017 more than 3,500 US soldiers were killed in Afghanistan.<sup>9</sup>

A sustained conflict with thousands of casualties like the one seen in Afghanistan cannot be supported by a nation’s citizens unless there is moral justification for these efforts. Ergo, the Bush administration introduced other reasons why the US and 43 other Coalition partners ought to stay in Afghanistan. Coalition partners were also facing similar situations in their respective nations – the humanitarian and peacekeeping/stabilization part of the “Three Block war” metaphor needed to be obvious to their populations.<sup>10</sup> One of the reasons that was used to justify this sustained operation in Afghanistan was the concept of improving the lives of Afghan women and girls.

### **Women’s Rights as Justification - The West**

Although the practice of gender equality within Western Liberal democracies is still a work in progress, there exists a basic theoretical assumption that women are entitled to the same rights as men. This concept cannot be extended to Afghan women, regardless of the ruling regime. According to author Ayann Hirsi Ali, the situation for women is dire in countries where Shariah law and Islamic law are applied which is the case for Afghan women.<sup>11</sup> She provides examples of inequity including the fact that women cannot leave their homes without a guardian,

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Statista, “The Statistics Portal.” <https://www.statista.com/statistics/262894/western-coalition-soldiers-killed-in-afghanistan/> Last accessed 19 May 2018.

<sup>10</sup> Doctor A. Walter Dorn and Michael Varey, “The Rise and the Demise of the Three Block War,” <http://www.journal.forces.gc.ca/vol10/no1/07-dornvarey-eng.asp>. Last accessed 23 May 18.

<sup>11</sup> Gay Acorn, “Ayann Hirsi Ali: fighter for freedom or just a help for Hanson.” *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/03/ayaan-hirsi-ali-fighter-for-freedom-or-just-a-help-for-hanson> Last accessed 19 May 18.

a women's testimony is worth only half of a man's testimony in a court of law; child marriage is permitted; and which is likely the most visual to Western sensibilities, is the fact that Afghan women must wear a burka in public. Moreover, the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan, a group that promotes women's right and a secular democracy for Afghan women, continues its activism from Pakistan because Afghanistan is too dangerous.<sup>12</sup> This tenuous situation for women (and girls) in Afghanistan is further exacerbated by the fact that they are at risk of being subjected to "conflict-related sexual violence" which includes rape, sexual slavery, forced pregnancy, and forced marriage.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, Al Qaeda is known to systematically rape women (and men) as a means of shaming them, due to the, "...intense social stigma associated with the crime, into redemption as suicide bombers."<sup>14</sup> Notwithstanding the additional risk faced by Afghan women due to the conflict, the inequities faced by Afghan women are difficult for those from Western liberal democracies to comprehend. Consequently, when the Bush Administration set out to rebuild Afghanistan, a significant focus was placed on improving the plight of Afghan women especially in the domains of education and health. Although the initial invasion of Afghanistan had little to do with improving women's rights for Afghan women (who had already been suffering throughout the 1990s under Taliban rule), it was going to help justify the US and coalition forces continue their involvement in the region.

For instance, Al-Gharbia indicates how within the first weeks of the Afghan campaign, a bi-partisan effort where Hillary Clinton and Laura Bush were joined by the then British Prime Minister's wife, Cherie Blair, to spearhead a "highly-effective propaganda effort" to convince

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<sup>12</sup> RAWA, "About RAWA," <http://www.rawa.org>. Last accessed 27 May 18.

<sup>13</sup> Caroline Kennedy "Gender and Security." 120.

<sup>14</sup> Arwa Damon, "Raped by Al-Qaeda," CNN <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xQ98ip4I4ic>. Last accessed 19 May 18.

the public that the U.S. and the U.K. were engaged in a moral war.”<sup>15</sup> This war was eventually “pitched” about human (women’s) rights in addition to a tactical effort to dislodge the Taliban, Al Qaeda and capture Osama Bin Laden.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, throughout her time as first lady, Mrs. Bush collaborated with non-governmental organizations focused on educating Afghan girls and advocated for the improvement of Afghan women’s lives. She also penned an opinion in the Washington Post in 2013 warning that the gains made by women in Afghanistan were fragile and could easily be reversed.<sup>17</sup> President Bush often referred to the “stories of hope” about young girls in the country going to school for the first time.”<sup>18</sup>

This reasoning was repeated by the political and military leadership of troop contributing nations. In Canada, Prime Minister Harper and his high-ranking ministers routinely highlighted the ‘importance of rescuing Afghanistan’s women and girls’ and directly referenced this purpose in relation to Canada’s military and diplomatic involvement in the region.<sup>19</sup> In a May 2007 address to Canadian troops in Kandahar province, Harper underlined the connection between Canada’s military role in Afghanistan and the plight of Afghan women by stating that, “Because of you [Canadian men and women in uniform] the people of Afghanistan have seen the

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<sup>15</sup> Musa Al-Gharbi, “How America Failed Afghan Women,” *The American Conservative*. <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/how-america-failed-afghan-women/>. Last accessed 17 May 2018.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Laura Bush, “Afghan women’s gains are at risk,” *The Washington Post*. 14 Nov 2013. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/laura-bush-afghan-womens-gains-are-at-risk/2013/11/14/0c105688-4bed-11e3-9890-a1e0997fb0c0\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.28d75bb14959](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/laura-bush-afghan-womens-gains-are-at-risk/2013/11/14/0c105688-4bed-11e3-9890-a1e0997fb0c0_story.html?utm_term=.28d75bb14959). Last accessed 19 May 18.

<sup>18</sup> Marc Oliver, “Bush make first visit to Afghanistan,” *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/mar/01/usa.india1>. Last accessed 19 May 18.

<sup>19</sup> Sarah Tuckey. “Instrumentalization of Gender in Kandahar, Obligations and Omissions: Canada’s Ambiguous Actions on Gender Equality.” McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2017. <https://books.google.ca/books?id=sm4kDwAAQBAJ&pg=PA190&lpg=PA190&dq=harper+girls+going+to+school+in+afghanistan&source=bl&ots=7qSEgdUVj4&sig=QnPY1gLF8MceHvV8yaQ29fO2yGw&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj039b0iZfbAhVKw4MKHekGCPUQ6AEwDXoFCAEQkgE#v=onepage&q=harper%20girls%20going%20to%20school%20in%20afghanistan&f=false>. 202. Last accessed 21 May

institution of democratic elections, the stirring of human rights and freedoms for women, the construction of schools, healthcare facilities and the basic infrastructure of a functional economy.”<sup>20</sup> Despite this focus, the Manley report in 2008 clearly outlines that the whole of government’s main effort in Afghanistan from a resourcing perspective favoured military intervention, since, as Harper explained, “...without security, development workers cannot provide reconstruction or humanitarian assistance, police cannot ensure peace and justice and diplomats cannot help build democracy and enhance human rights.”<sup>21</sup> Canadian troops, including the Chief of Defence Staff at the onset of the mission in Kandahar, General Rick Hillier, re-iterated this theme about their involvement in Afghanistan and how they felt they were playing an important role in ensuring that Afghan girls were going to school, helping others and the spreading of democracy.<sup>22</sup> Their personal sacrifices, including the 158 soldiers who made the ultimate sacrifice, had to be meaningful and reports regarding breakthroughs in women’s rights in Afghanistan were key to morale for both troops involved in the conflict and the citizens of the democracies supporting them.

One of the weightiest tragedy-to-triumph story to emerge during this period came from next door Pakistan where Malala Yousafzai was shot by a Taliban gunman because of her activism related to girls’ access to education. She survived the assassination attempt and became a glimmer of hope and reflection of Western values where she was awarded the Nobel Peace

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 205.

<sup>22</sup> Kate Fillion, “Gen Rick Hillier on this biggest strategic error, the Taliban, and Canada’s Future in Afghanistan,” Maclean’s 2009.



Prize in 2014 and honorary Canadian citizenship.<sup>23</sup> The Malala effect spread across Western democracies as an example of positive outcomes. From the United Nations to American daytime television shows such as *Ellen*, the message implied that efforts in the region of Afghanistan were justified as she represented one of millions of girls who had the right to an education.

Despite this positive narrative propagated by Western governments, NGOs, and the media, critics of the West's involvement in Afghanistan suggests that this promotion of women's rights was opportunistic. Turenne-Sjolanger and Trevenen explain that of the narrative from the coalition forces' political leadership referred to the 'saving' of Afghanistan where this nation was perceived as the 'victim' who needed rescuing from terrorists and the regime of the Taliban.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, they argue that Canada actually placed itself in a "paternalistic and patriarchal relationship" with Afghanistan and that the Harper government portrayed Afghan women and children as having "no agency" and were constructed, "...as backward and subjugated, in need of rescue from Canadian (Western) men."<sup>25</sup> Albeit a severe assessment, there remain significant gender inequities in Western cultures suggesting some conflicting gender messaging when claiming to fight for the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan. Domestically, the gender pay gap in the United States remains unchanged since 2005 where

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<sup>23</sup> Liam Stack, "Malala Yousafzai, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, Starts at Oxford," *The New York Times*.

[https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/10/world/europe/malala-yousafzai-oxford.html?rref=collection%2Ftimestopic%2FYousafzai%2C%20Malala&action=click&contentCollection=timestopics&region=stream&module=stream\\_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=7&pgtype=collection](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/10/world/europe/malala-yousafzai-oxford.html?rref=collection%2Ftimestopic%2FYousafzai%2C%20Malala&action=click&contentCollection=timestopics&region=stream&module=stream_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=7&pgtype=collection). Last accessed 23 May 18.

<sup>24</sup> Sarah Tucker, "Instrumentalization of Gender in Kandahar," 197.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

women earn 80% of what men earn.<sup>26</sup> Women in Canada live at a greater risk than men of domestic violence, sexual assault, sex-trafficking and, where on average, “...one woman is killed by her intimate partner every six days.”<sup>27</sup> Ironically, up until 2013<sup>28</sup>, the U.S. government did not permit women to serve in the combat arms, despite examples from Norway (1985), Israel (1985), Denmark (1988), Canada (1989) and Germany (2001).<sup>29</sup> This dual messaging, on one hand justifying Coalition Forces in Afghanistan to help the plight of women and girls while on the other, still having significant work to do regarding gender issues domestically does create skepticism as to the genuineness of the message.

### **Women’s roles within Terrorist Organizations**

Terrorist organizations, including Al Qaeda and ISIS, use women’s place in society as justification for violence and extremism. TOs are based on a strong patriarchal society who preach that “progressive and egalitarian rights have undermined once-moral societies,” and aim to keep their women “pure for a pure society.”<sup>30</sup> Moreover, women are perceived as “badges of difference” between the “faithful” and “unbelievers” and their bodies are offered as a reward for piety and braveness.<sup>31</sup> Many, including the women’s group Musawah, has called the Koran’s

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<sup>26</sup> Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequity. 2011. <https://inequality.stanford.edu/publications/20-facts-about-us-inequality-everyone-should-know>. Last accessed 23 May 18.

<sup>27</sup> Canadian women’s foundation, Facts page. <https://www.canadianwomen.org/the-facts/gender-based-violence/>. Last accessed 23 May 18.

<sup>28</sup> Women In International Security, “Women in Ground Combat: Facts and Figures,” Feb 2017. <https://www.servicewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Women-in-Ground-Combat-Arms-Fact-Sheet-2-1-17.pdf>. Last accessed 23 May 18.

<sup>29</sup> Anna Mulrine, 8 other Nations That Send Women to Combat.’ 25 January 2013. National Geographic News. <https://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2013/13/130125-women-combat-world-australia-israel-canada-norway/>. Last accessed 23 May 18.

<sup>30</sup> Belquis Ahmadi and Sadaf Lakhani, “Afghan Women and Violent Extremism- Colluding, Perpetrating or Preventing.” United States Institute of Peace. Special Report. 4. <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR396-Afghan-Women-and-Violent-Extremism.pdf>. Last accessed 23 May 18.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

scripture 4:34 as the “DNA of patriarchy” for the Islamic legal tradition, where “Allah expresses men’s superiority and authority over women, an authority that can be backed up by force.”<sup>32</sup>

This is further amplified by TOs as a core belief worthy of war.<sup>33</sup>

Interestingly, the role of women in “violent extremism is not as binary as one would expect and is often conflicting.”<sup>34</sup> Harald Weilnboeck explains that the, “conflicting gender issues not only coincide with violent extremist behavior and group hatred, but are key psychological driving forces behind them.”<sup>35</sup> The most common role women in the movement of Al Qaeda is one of the female Jihad who is, “pure” and is responsible with carrying out political acts supported by their male relatives, educating her children in the ideology and facilitating terrorist operations.<sup>36</sup> Although this was the accurate depiction of the initial female jihad, her role began to evolve as one of recruiter, mobilizer, informer, and, occasionally, perpetrator.<sup>37</sup> Despite being in direct contradiction with traditional cultural norms, the more ‘participative’ woman Jihadi provided an interesting opportunity for TOs since women in Afghanistan and Iraq represented a lower threat to Coalition Forces and faced more relaxed security procedures. There appears to have been an ideological shift within some TOs throughout the 2000s inciting women to Jihad.<sup>38</sup> Even Al-Qaeda leader in Iraq, Abu Musab Al-

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<sup>32</sup> Carla Power, *If the Oceans were like Ink*, (Henry Holt and Company, London, 2015) <http://s.telegraph.co.uk/graphics/projects/koran-carla-power/index.html> Last accessed 23 May 18.

<sup>33</sup> Counterextremism Project, “ISIS persecution of women.” <https://www.counterextremism.com/content/isiss-persecution-women>. Last accessed 23 May 18.

<sup>34</sup> Belquis Ahmadi and Sadaf Lakhani, “Afghan Women and Violent Extremism- Colluding, Perpetrating or Preventing.” 3.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>36</sup> Katharian Von Knop, “The Female Jihad: Al-Qaeda’s Women,” in <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10576100701258585?src=recsys&journalCode=uter20>. Last accessed 23 May 18.

<sup>37</sup> Belquis Ahmadi and Sadaf Lakhani, “Afghan Women and Violent Extremism-Colluding, Perpetrating or Preventing.” 5.

<sup>38</sup> Murad Batal Al-Shishani, “Is the role of women in al-Qaeda increasing?” BBC Arabic <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-11484672>. Last accessed 23 May 18.

Zarqawi who originally opposed the role of female suicide bombers changed his mind on the matter following the attack of Belgian national, Muriel Degauque, the first female suicide bomber in 2005.<sup>39</sup> Others followed including Sajida al-Rishawi, in Jordan in 2005, Aafia Siddiqui in Afghanistan in 2009, and American born Colleen LaRose, self-proclaimed “Jihad Jane,” who was arrested for terror-related activities.<sup>40</sup> Although these documented events could be perceived as isolated events, analyst of Islamic groups, Mr. Abu Haniya, states that up to 500 attacks in Iraq were perpetrated by woman jihads.<sup>41</sup> This by no means suggests that TOs are becoming more progressive regarding women’s roles in their organizations but it is a sign that they will exploit tactical opportunities even if it means violating fundamental beliefs.

## **Conclusion**

During this clash of cultures, the focus turned on one of the more visual and measurable means of clearly delineating the “us” (Western liberal democracies) versus “them” (Terrorist Organizations): the role of women in each of their respective cultures. Both patriarchal societies double-downed on their version of the appropriate gender-roles for women. Once the images of the twin towers collapsing had left their mark, the West was inundated with images of Afghan women wearing Burkas and reports that the Taliban and Al Qaeda had subjugated women and denied girls’ access to education. This was offensive to Western values of liberty and equality, and, once the initial invasion of Afghanistan was complete, Coalition Nations helped justify their elongated stay based on improving the plight of Afghan women and girls in addition to other Western liberal based ideals. Concurrently, Al Qaeda also defined women’s roles within its

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

community as, “symbolic bearers of cultural purity and tribal identity, the producers of future generations and signs of piety.”<sup>42</sup> They also presented the West’s ideals of gender equality as an immoral. As both sides of the conflict polarized on women’s roles in society, they also presented in practice conflicting gender narratives. The West, despite its theoretical fight for women’s rights in Afghanistan, continued to experience domestic gender inequities, including domestic violence and gender-based wage gaps. Meanwhile, TOs, despite their routine subjugation and abuse of women, shifted their ideology to begin accepting the concept of the women jihad in a ‘fighter’ role at a time when American women could not fight in combat trades. Sixteen years after the invasion of Afghanistan, it is estimated that two thirds of Afghan girls are still not attending school begging the question, who won the gender influence war?<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Belquis Ahmadi and Sadaf Lakhani, “Afghan Women and Violent Extremism-Colluding, Perpetrating or Preventing.” 3.

<sup>43</sup> Human Rights Watch, Oct 2017. <http://www.rawa.org/temp/runews/2017/10/17/hrw-two-thirds-of-afghan-girls-do-not-attend-school.html#ixzz5Fyd6ea8I>.

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