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FEMALE SUICIDE BOMBERS: WHEN PAWNS AND PLAYERS BECOME PREDATORS

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**FEMALE SUICIDE BOMBERS:
WHEN PAWNS AND PLAYERS BECOME PREDATORS**

By LCol Y.N. Thomson

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Abstract

This paper is about adversarial intent and will focus on the female adversary, specifically, the female suicide bomber. These women pose a real threat to the societies upon which they perpetrate their terrorism despite the fact that instances of female suicide bombers are far less than their male counterparts. It suggests that a woman is either a pawn or a player before she becomes a predator. Factors influencing her development as a predator are discussed. An historical perspective of female suicide terrorism is presented along with thoughts regarding the impact that media has on the employment of female suicide bombers. The issue of gender equality surfaces however gender equality as established by Western standards is not the experience of these women. Two case groups with histories of employing female suicide bombers are examined. These groups are the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam as well as a group of Islamic organizations including various arms of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, the Black Widows of Chechnya and al Qaeda. The work suggests some potential considerations that may help address the requirement to counter the threat of female suicide terrorism. It offers that the role of mothers is potentially pivotal in combating female suicide terrorism. There are indications that al Qaeda and its affiliates have been training females for suicide missions in Afghanistan. Consequently, this paper reminds the Canadian Forces of the requirement to be mindful of the potential threat of female suicide bombers while they conduct operations in Afghanistan. It recommends that efforts to develop an understanding for why women become pawns or players are critical to preventing even one more predator from accomplishing her mission.

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Preface

On beginning -

Having been raised in the Western world, more to the point, having been raised in North America, I fully acknowledge any ingrained biases I may have concerning different cultures throughout the world which place different values on various aspects of life, indeed, human life. Grateful to have been raised in a safe and secure environment, like most of my contemporaries, it is challenging to truly appreciate the strife and daily struggles that many in the world suffer due to persecution of any nature. This work is written mindful of my Western bias.

Lieutenant-Colonel Y.N. Thomson
March 2008

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FEMALE SUICIDE BOMBERS: WHEN PAWNS AND PLAYERS BECOME PREDATORS

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

What is the difference when the perpetrator of a horrific event is a woman rather than a man? Do you answer the question by wondering who was she? Or, are you curious about what influenced her to commit that terrible act? Consider the female suicide bomber. Do you wonder why a woman would pose as being pregnant, waiting at a bus stop, and then blow herself up, killing fifteen other people in the process? Take a moment to contemplate a possible answer.

Now, consider a man. Consider a man at a similar bus stop. He is carrying backpack, similar to what many students carry. He detonates his suicide bomb, killing himself and fifteen other people. What do you wonder about him? Take a moment to similarly contemplate a possible answer.

In most cases, a Western bias would likely produce quite different answers to these two questions. For some it is likely that the question concerning the woman is answered with empathy, perhaps even sympathy. In the case of the man however, for some the likely response is to question his mental health. Suicide is complicated. The act of suicide bombing is, arguably, even more complicated. In her book *Deadly Embrace* Jacqueline Rose notes that, “For years, Israeli secret service analysts and social scientists have been trying to build up a typical profile of the suicide ‘assassin’, only to conclude that there isn’t one.”¹ In researching this work, it was similarly discovered that

suicide terrorists are difficult to stereotype. In military speak, suicide terrorists are another weapons platform. Given the relative newness of the evolution of this particular weapons platform, insufficient research has been conducted to date that can conclusively provide an accurate, all encompassing profile of a suicide terrorist, male or female. If anything, current stereotyping is limited to a male-orientated terrorist. Following 9/11, the United States for example, began to monitor more closely males between the ages of 16 and 45 entering that country. This identified group is more likely to be scrutinized than other male age groups or women in general.² Simply stated, a hard and fast profile of a stereotypical suicide terrorist suspect does not exist, but limited profiles are used.

This paper is about adversarial intent and will focus on the female adversary. More specifically, it will focus on the female adversary that is a suicide bomber. As recently as 17 March 2008, a female suicide terrorist claimed the lives of 43 people in Iraq. Since the outbreak of the war in Iraq in 2003, female suicide bombers have successfully perpetrated at least 20 attacks in that country.³ Female suicide terrorism actions are also increasing. For example, in Iraq from 1980 until 2003 there were no reports of suicide attacks committed by women in Iraq.⁴ As mentioned above, since then, 20 women have completed suicide attacks. Research on this subject indicates that in some

¹Jacqueline Rose, "Deadly Embrace" *London Review of Books*, Vol 26, No. 21 (November 2004); [journal on-line]; available from http://www.lrb.co.uk/v26/n21/print/rose01_.html ; Internet; accessed 15 March 2008.

²Jessica Stern, "When Bombers are Female," available from http://www.dodgeglobe.com/stories/122003/opi_1220030073.shtml ; Internet; accessed 25 March 2008.

³CTV.ca News Article, "Bomb kills dozens in Iraqi city of Kabala," 17 March 2008; available from http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/print/CTVNews/20080317/iraq_karbala_080317/20080317?hub=World; Internet; accessed 17 March 2008

⁴Robert A. Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005), 208.

circles female suicide bombers are considered a phenomenon,⁵ as suggested by Rosemarie Skaine in *Female Suicide Bombers*. Skaine also offers that the criticality in studying this group of terrorists is paramount to enhancing a nation's own security. While a suicide terrorist act attributed to a female bomber has yet to be perpetrated in North America, one has to ask why not? I offer that it may simply be a matter of time.

Female suicide bombers pose a real threat to the societies upon which they prey. While occurrences of female suicide bombers are far less than their male counterparts, these women represent a viable, deadly and effective weapon being used by terrorist-identified organizations. This paper considers various research which identifies a variety of influences that may affect the fate of a woman in becoming a female suicide bomber - the predator. I suggest that a woman is either a pawn or a player before becoming that predator. Is she a pawn in that she carries out suicide terrorism having been coerced into doing so, or does she willingly carry out suicide terrorism fully aware of the path she is following? The paper advocates that regardless if the instance presents a pawn or player, further developing an appreciation for the factors which influence a woman to become a suicide terrorist can only serve to help develop strategies to counter their potential terrorist leanings and possibly diminish the chances of her becoming a predator.

In order to appreciate the potential threat that female suicide bombers present, time will be spent discussing the appearance of suicide terrorism in history, followed by discussions regarding the concept and logic of suicide bombings. Robert Pape's work in *Dying to Win* will figure prominently, along with that of Bruce Hoffman's

⁵Rosemarie Skaine, *Female Suicide Bombers*. (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2006), 23.

Inside Terrorism. Both authors present theories regarding the social acceptability and support of suicide terrorism which, in essence, give the bombers permission to commit these violent actions.⁶ Next, the paper will examine the importance of studying female suicide terrorism in particular. This will be followed with a section contemplating the influence that media has on the employment of female suicide terrorists. It will then consider suicide terrorism and its current employment by various terrorist organizations. Also included in this section will be discussions regarding what attracts potential suicide bombers to their respective organizations, specifically, what is it that attracts female prospective terrorists. Intertwined in this discussion will be observations concerning recruitment tactics and the motivational drive of prospective female suicide terrorists. Issues regarding gender equality appear throughout the various sections of this work which are unavoidable on a subject matter of this nature. This is not because this paper is about gender equality, but rather in the traditional, ultraconservative societies where organizations have chosen to employ suicide terrorism as a weapon, the issue is not one of gender equality but it is suggested it is one of gender inequality. In societies which support the employment of suicide terrorism, equality of the sexes is yet to be established to a standard that is recognizable from a Western perspective. Consequently, regardless of whether a female suicide terrorist is a pawn or a player, her gender in some cases is a likely factor in her becoming a suicide terrorist.

In order to better develop an appreciation for the complexity that is female suicide terrorism, the paper will examine two groups that have a known history of employing female suicide bombers. The first is the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri

⁶ Robert A. Pape, *Dying to Win*, 81.

Lanka. The second grouping will include various arms of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) of the West Bank and Gaza, the Black Widows of Chechnya and al Qaeda. These organizations were selected specifically for two primary reasons. Firstly, all employ female suicide bombers and secondly, there is a striking difference between the groups in that the LTTE claims to be secular⁷ and unmotivated by religion. Conversely, the second grouping - the Black Widows, al Qaeda and the PLO, in particular the extremist arm of al-Aqsa Martyr's Brigade readily and outwardly incorporates religion in its employment of suicide terrorism by way of declaring that the bombings are carried out in the name of Allah.⁸ The examination of the various organizations' employment of female suicide terrorists will reflect on their respective historical use of suicide bombers in general, their employment of female bombers, and the typical recruitment methods used by the organizations to force generate female suicide bombers. Of significant importance in the examinations will be the discussion concerning the motivation of the female bombers. The issue of gender inequality will figure in these discussions. Included in these case examinations are findings as a result of forensic investigations in the case of successful bombers coupled with insight gained from interviews conducted by a number of academics and journalists with captured would-be female suicide terrorist.

Following these case examinations, the work will then conclude by focusing attention on some potential considerations that may help address the requirement to

⁷Arjana Gunawardena, "Female Black Tigers: A Different Breed of Cat?" in *Female Suicide Bombers: Dying for Equality*, ed. Yoram Schweitzer, Memorandum No. 84 (August 2006), available from <http://www.tau.ac.il/jcss/memoranda/memo84.pdf>; Internet; accessed 18 Feb 2008. 81.

⁸Barbara Victor, *Army of Roses: Inside the World of Palestinian Women Suicide Bombers* (United States: Rodale Inc., 2003), 8.

counter the threat of female suicide terrorism. It will suggest that the role of mothers is potentially pivotal in combating female suicide bombers in the societies that employ them. It will remind the Canadian Forces of the requirement to be mindful of the potential threat of female suicide bombers as it conducts its operations in Afghanistan since there are alleged reports that al Qaeda has begun training female suicide bombers for operations in Afghanistan. It will ultimately conclude that the female suicide bomber is a viable weapon for the organizations that employ her. Her significance must be acknowledged as she is a worthy adversary. Regardless if she unwittingly becomes embroiled in the act of suicide terror as a pawn, or knowingly pursues this violent act as a player, she ultimately becomes a predator.

CHAPTER TWO

DEVELOPING AN UNDERSTANDING OF SUICIDE TERRORISM

Defining Suicide Terrorism

The term suicide bomber is a relatively familiar one in today's lexicon. It implies that in committing a violent act, specifically exploding a bomb, the perpetrator was killed, or had the intention of being killed. More recently, the term suicide terrorist has become in vogue. This term has been used in reference to 9/11 for example. The use of the word terrorist or terrorism however can be perplexing since the definition of terrorism varies as suggested by Hoffman. In his opinion the *Compact Oxford English Dictionary* offering of terrorist is more appropriate than most commercial dictionaries as it actually indicates that an act has been committed in that a terrorist is "any one who attempts to further his views by a system of coercive intimidation."⁹ Hoffman dedicates the entire first chapter of his book *Inside Terrorism* to defining terrorism. Ultimately, he offers

We may now attempt to define terrorism as the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence in the pursuit of political change. All terrorist acts involve violence or the threat of violence. Terrorism is specifically designed to have far-reaching psychological effects beyond the immediate victim(s) or object of the terrorist attack. It is meant to instill fear within, and thereby intimidate, a wider "target audience" that might include a rival ethnic or religious group, an entire country, a national government of political party, or public opinion in general.¹⁰

Pape's work compliments the discussion at hand with his interpretation of suicide terrorism. For Pape, "terrorism involves the use of violence by an organization other than

⁹Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism: Revised and Expanded Edition*. 2nd ed.(New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 2.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 40.

a national government to intimidate or frighten a target audience.”¹¹ Suicide terrorism is violence of the extreme kind: it has the ability to threaten whole societies, physically, psychologically, politically and culturally. Its very randomness is a powerful menace.

History of Suicide Terrorism and the Appearance of Female Suicide Terrorists

The concept of a non-ruling group committing violence against a governing or stronger, dominant target audience was the genesis for the appearance of some of the first suicide attacks recorded in history. During the Jewish war of A.D. 66, in efforts to liberate Judea from Roman occupation, the Zealots and Sicarri - militant revolutionary groups - would murder Roman authorities and Jewish collaborators in public, surely knowing their fates would be doomed.¹² Comparatively, some thousand years later a radical group of Shi'ites, that History would later dub the original *assassins*,¹³ would wreak havoc on a far superior Sunni enemy. The *assassins* would target and murder all manner of Sunni authorities, “...never attempting to flee. Instead, having carried out a murder, they allowed their target’s bodyguards to stab them to death.”¹⁴ Racing forward another thousand years, Skaine offers that difference between the *assassins* and today’s suicide bombers is that today’s targets include random targets whereas the *assassins* had specific targets.¹⁵ Research specifically on the earliest history of suicide bombing failed

¹¹Robert A. Pape, *Dying to Win*, 9. Of note, no specific mention of state-sponsored terrorism drawn from Pape’s work. This concept is not discussed in this work.

¹²*Ibid.*, 11.

¹³Christoph Reuter, *My Life as Weapon* [Mein Leben ist eine Waffe] . Translated by Helena Ragg-Kirkby. 2nd ed. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2004), 24.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁵Rosemarie Skaine, *Female Suicide Bombers*, 8.

to produce any information that indicated that women participated as suicide fighters, regardless of how infrequently, during the Jewish wars of A.D. 66 or the period of the *assassins*. While history is rife with accounts of women having participated as fighters in wars throughout the ages, it is only in very recent history that we see the emergence of the females participating in terrorist activities. Women are recorded as having participated in terrorist activities “during the Battle of Algiers in the late 1950s and early 1960: the terror campaigns of the Baader-Meinhof gang in Germany and the Italian Red Brigades in Italy in the 1970s into the mid-1980s”¹⁶ to name a few. Of particular noteworthy mention is the terrorist action of a female Palestinian fighter, Leila Khaled. In 1969 Khaled, a member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLD) participated in the successful hijacking of an Israeli airliner. On the success of the mission, Eileen MacDonald in *Shoot the Women First* accounts:

Leila Khaled achieved in a few hours what the lives and deaths of hundreds of other Palestinian fighters failed to do either before or since: she grabbed the attention of the world’s media and held it enthralled. The way in which she did it – hijacking an aircraft, evacuating the passengers, then blowing it up – made her both a supremely dangerous woman, but also paradoxically, romantic and brave at the same time. ...she shattered a million and one taboos overnight: and she revolutionized the thinking of hundreds of other angry young women around the world.¹⁷

As will be discussed later in the paper, an important significance of Khaled’s success as a terrorist was the media sensation that she caused. It is offered that this sensationalism

¹⁶Yoram Scwheitzer, “Female Suicide Bombers: Dying for Equality?” (Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University. Memorandum No. 84, August 2006); available from <http://www.tau.ac.il/jcss/memoranda/memo84.pdf>; Internet; accessed 18 Feb 2008. 7.

¹⁷MacDonald, Eileen. *Shoot the Women First* (New York: Random House, 1991) 91.

was surely noted by terrorist organizations and would be further leveraged in the years to come.

Returning specifically to the subject of suicide terrorism, attention is directed to Lebanon in the early 1980's and the emergence of modern suicide terrorism. During this period the world saw the events of October 1983 when a suicide bombing claimed an unprecedented 241 US Marines in a single suicide terror event followed soon thereafter by a similar suicide terror event that claimed the lives of 58 French soldiers. These initial modern suicide attacks were carried out by male suicide bombers. Hezbollah claimed responsibility for the attacks. In the months and immediate years to follow, Hamas and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam would also adopt suicide terrorism tactics.

On the matter of the employment of the first female suicide terrorist in modern times, accounts turn to Syria in the mid 1980's. It is reported that in April 1985, Sana Khyadali, a 16-year old Lebanese Christian, and member of the Syrian Socialist National Party, blew herself up in a car packed with explosives, killing five Israeli soldiers, because she stated that she had a desire to avenge her enemy oppressors.¹⁸ Khyadali's actions were thereafter mirrored in the suicide terror acts of five other Lebanese women, three of them within that same year.¹⁹ Following the initial attacks by these women, "[the following] decades witnessed the spread of female suicide bombers to other areas around the globe."²⁰

¹⁸Knight, W. Andy and Tanya Narozhna. "Social Contagion and the Female Face of Terror: New Trends in the Culture of Political Violence," *Canadian Foreign Policy* 12, no. 1 (Spring, 2005): 146.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 147.

²⁰Yoram Schweitzer, "Female Suicide Bombers: Dying to Equality," 7.

Since 1985, estimates indicate female suicide terror acts account for approximately 15 percent of all suicide attacks that were accomplished or attempted and interrupted: some 220 female suicide terror acts of an estimated 1460 combined male and female suicide terror acts.²¹ The following table, Table 2.1, further indicates the geographical area where these 220 female suicide terrorist conducted, or attempted, their respective act.

Sri Lanka	75
Israel and Palestinian Territories	67
Russia and Chechnya	47
Turkey	15
Lebanon	6
Uzbekistan	4
Iraq	4
Morocco	2
Pakistan	2
India	1
Tajikistan	1
Jordan	1

Table 2.1: Female Suicide Bombers, Targeted Areas, 1985-2006.
Source: Database compiled by Yoram Schweitzer²²

Comparatively, as recently as April 18, 2008, Washingtonpost.com published an article which indicates a dramatic increase in suicide terrorism in particular over the course of the past seven years. Figure 2.1 below reflects this increase. Although the figure does not distinguish the attacks performed by male or female attackers, it is reasonable to assume that the overall dramatic increase includes an associated increase in

²¹Yoram Schweitzer, "Female Suicide Bombers: Dying to Equality," 8.

²²*Ibid.*, 7.

the employment of female suicide bombers. Iraq, as indicated earlier, clearly identifies such an increase.

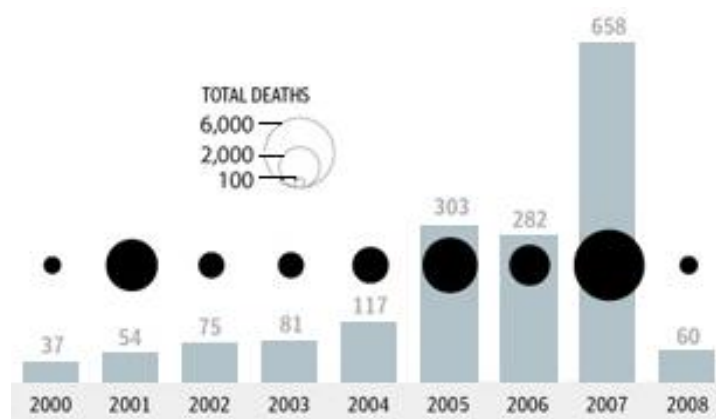


Figure 2.1: Global Suicide Attacks (Male and Female attackers) 2000 – April 2008
 Source: Robin Wright, “Since 2001, a Dramatic Increase in Suicide Bombing,”
 Washingtonpost.com²³

Accordingly, the number of women participating in various terrorist organizations recognized by their respective national states as security threats is also on the rise.²⁴ In studying these women, and if by incorporating gender studies in this complicated environment is another means to develop potential counter terrorist strategies, societies should embrace such studies. Knight and Narozhna echo this sentiment in that they further indicate that in attempting to identify the environment that fosters the creation of female suicide terrorists, some recommendations regarding counter terror strategies can

²³Robin Wright, “Since 2001, a Dramatic Increase in Suicide Bombings” *Washingtonpost.com* (April 19 2008); [Journal on-line]; available from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/story/2008/04/18/ST2008041800913.html> ; Internet; accessed 18 April 2008.

²⁴Karla Cunningham. "Countering Female Terrorism." *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 30, no. 2 (02, 2007). 113.

be made.²⁵ Given the appearance of female suicide bombers has only been more identifiable in the last twenty-five years, current research is far from being extensive.²⁶ It is challenging to draw any significant conclusions regarding the specific profile of a would-be female suicide bomber as documented cases of suicide attacks carried out by women are limited. This is due to (a) the relative 'newness' of this particular act of terror as well as (b) quite simply in stating the obvious, unless the perpetrator was apprehended in the act of committing the suicide bombing, there is no perpetrator left behind with whom to discuss her motivations in committing the act. Furthermore, on the matter of gender considerations, the evidence available today, while slowly increasing, does not provide a significant database²⁷ upon which to conclude with certainty that the manner in which these women are treated by their respective terrorist organizations is responsible for their decision to participate in a suicide terror act.²⁸ This said, gender exploitation of women is a likely influential factor. It is highly surmised that gender is playing a more significant role in the force generation of suicide bombers of late. This will be discussed in the forthcoming examinations of various terrorist organizations' fostering of female suicide terrorism.

²⁵Knight, W. Andy and Tanya Narozhna. "Social Contagion and the Female Face of Terror: New Trends in the Culture of Political Violence." 145.

²⁶Modern male suicide bombers whose appearance was discussed earlier in the paper appear only a few years prior to female bombers however, more research has been conducted on them since males account for 85 percent of all attempted and completed attacks, also discussed earlier in the paper.

²⁷While writing this paper, it was discovered that the University of Maryland is in the process of populating a database which will include statistical information regarding female suicide bombers. It is anticipated that this database will be operational by summer 2008. Access to the Global Terrorism Database is available at <http://www.start.umd.edu/data/gtd/>.

²⁸Clara Beyler, "Female Suicide Bombers," International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism, April 2005, available from <http://www.ict.org.il/index.php?sid=119&lang=en&act=page&id=10728&str=beyler>, Internet; accessed 25 February 2008, 4.

Establishing Authority to Commit Suicide Terror

Earlier in the paper, reference was made to suicide terrorists establishing legitimacy from their respective societies in order to perpetrate their chosen act of terror. This is but one component that is established in the development of a suicide bomber, regardless of gender. Pape, in *Dying to Win*, suggests that in trying to understand suicide terrorism, whether perpetrated by a male or female, three questions can be considered: (1) What is the strategic logic of suicide terrorism? (2) What is the social logic of suicide terrorism? and (3) What is the individual logic of suicide terrorism?²⁹ In essence, these three questions address the political, social and individual components of suicide terror, and again, are gender neutral.

On the political level, the act of suicide terrorism addresses the exploitation aspect that terrorists mean to obtain in carrying out such an act. Recall from Hoffman's definition, terrorism is a deliberate attempt to strike fear in the target audience. The randomness of the act has psychological effects on that target audience.³⁰ One only needs to look back at the events of 9/11 to appreciate the psychological effect of suicide terror. While 9/11 is an example of suicide terror in the most extreme case, it is reasonable to accept the premise that not only was the primary target audience, the United States, affected at its core by that horrific terror event, but the world was too. In a single suicide terror act, al Qaeda was able to imprint on the world that through the use of human-guided-aircraft bombs, it was capable of reaching out and randomly striking what it has

²⁹Robert A. Pape, *Dying to Win*, 21.

³⁰Bruce Hoffman, *Inside terrorism*, 2.

identified as its oppressor and occupier.³¹ Strategically, for al Qaeda, the single act of 9/11 lends considerable credit to Pape's and Hoffman's offerings that in reaching a target audience, in leveraging significant violence against it, the United States was shaken to its very core.

On the societal level for terror organizations that employ suicide bombing there is "broad social support within the national communities from which they recruit because they are seen as pursuing legitimate nationalist goals, especially liberation from foreign occupation."³² The employment of suicide bombers by the Palestinian organizations, in particular the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, is openly supported within the Palestinian society. This is not to say that all Palestinians advocate the use of suicide terrorist as a means to achieve independent statehood. The act of suicide bombing against Israeli targets however, does receive significant support from many sectors of Palestinian society. Sons, and now daughters, who carry out the act of a suicide bombing against Israel obtain hero status. Community support both prior to and after the commission of the act is significant. Posters of successful suicide bombers appear throughout the Palestinian territory.³³ Parents, and in many cases, mothers in particular, praise the ultimate sacrifice her child made in supporting the community. This community support and approval for suicide terror is resident elsewhere. "In many societies – such as the

³¹Osama Bin Laden, "American Imperialism Motivates Suicide Bombers." in *What Motivates Suicide Bombers?* Friedman, Lauri S., ed. (San Diego: Thomson Gale) 2005. 41.

³²Robert A Pape, *Dying to Win*, 22.

³³Anne Speckhard, "Understanding Suicide terrorism: Countering Human Bombs and Their Senders." Available from http://www.annespeckhard.com/publications/Suicide_Terrorism_Countering_Human_Bombs.pdf ; 2005. Internet accessed 18 March 2008. 8.

Kurdish, Palestinian or the Tamils - there is glorification of and reverence for suicide attacks.”³⁴

On the matter of the individual logic regarding the commission of suicide terror, Pape indicates that most suicide bombers commit these acts for altruistic purposes, as in they do this in support of furthering their respective society’s goals. In the majority of cases where suicide terrorism has become a weapon of choice, there are significant issues for the organization concerning their nationhood and desired home territory. As previously discussed, political gains are a common goal of many terrorist organization in that they are fighting to establish, or reestablish their home land, as in the case of the Tamil Tigers or the PLO. Clara Beyler in “Messengers of Death,” surmises that, “Modern suicide terrorism is best understood as an extreme strategy for the national liberation against democracies with troops that pose an imminent threat to control the territory the terrorist view as their homeland.”³⁵ An individual committed to the cause of his or her organization is, on some level, compelled to make a direct and personal contribution towards achieving the goal of the organization. This consideration of suicide terrorism - altruistic suicide - will appear later in this work during discussions concerning the various motivations of female suicide terrorist.

Pape offers that the logic of suicide terrorism is a means for the oppressed to attempt to expel the oppressor from the desired homeland through a complex game of psychological terror. Moving away from the psychological explanation of suicide

³⁴Clara Beyler, “Messengers of Death: Female Suicide Bombers,” International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism (February 2003), available from <http://www.ict.org.il/index.php?sid=119&lang=en&act=page&id=10728&str=beyler> , Internet; accessed 25 February 2008.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 23.

terrorism, as critical an element of this phenomenon as it is, consider now that there is also a more tangible, physical and economic aspect to suicide terrorism. Affording this author some license, there are in fact physical arguments supporting the employment of suicide terrorism. Historically, the oppressed have been physically weaker than the oppressor. In the case of the Tamil Tigers for example, the Singhalese majority population base exceeds that of the Tamil minority three times over.³⁶ In other cases, it may not be the case of a numerically superior oppressor, rather it may be a case of a technologically and/or economically more superior oppressor. Such is the case using the example of the Israeli economic and technological superiority in these aspects over Hamas. A similar situation exists between Russia and its superiority over Chechnya. Faced with these physical, tangible considerations, the oppressed organizations have resorted to suicide terrorism as a weapon which achieves the most economy of effort on their behalf. Suicide terrorism is a low cost endeavour, both in terms of manpower and fiscal resources: one man or woman commits the event and no resources are required in order to extract or recover them. And, there is no danger of being interrogated after a successful explosion. It is estimated that on average a suicide bombing event costs approximately \$150.00 to commit.³⁷ Another advantage to suicide terrorism is that the targeting process is extremely precise in that the bomber determines the moment and location the event is to occur: in doing so, he or she can attempt to take maximum advantage of the situation, causing as much devastation and loss of life as possible. Conversely, the bomber can also decide if the event is to be thwarted should

³⁶Christopher Reuter, *My Life as a Weapon*, 158.

³⁷Nasra Hassan, "letters from Gaza: An Arsenal of Believers," *New Yorker* (New York: November 19, 2001): 39, quoted in Bruce Hoffaman, *Inside Terrorism*, 133.

circumstances dictate. This, from a practical perspective, is a means to ensure the resources are not wasted. For the organization, as mentioned earlier, there is typically no requirement to have to plan an escape route for the suicide terrorist nor is there a concern for having to worry about the terrorist divulging information about the organization should they be apprehended.³⁸ Again, in stating the obvious - that typically there is little left to apprehend – the organization remains protected. A further and very significant benefit of committing suicide terror is the media attention which it draws. A discussion concerning the impact of media coverage on suicide terrorism will follow next.

Media and Female Suicide Terrorism

Media coverage of suicide terrorism is significant. Not surprisingly, given the state of world affairs, there seems to be more than enough events for the media to cover. In the short period from January 2008 until March 2008 four suicide terror incidents occurred in Sri Lanka and Iraq: the common threat in each of these four incidents was that these events were perpetrated by women.³⁹ This number is a result of the author informally noting when a suicide terror event was perpetrated by a woman: during this time frame the events were limited to two events in Sri Lanka and two events in Iraq. Not reflected in this number is an event which took place in Baghdad on 2 February 2008 where two mentally handicapped women, carrying remote-controlled explosives,

³⁸Debra Zedalis, “Female Suicide Bombers,” The Strategic Studies Institute of the US Army War College, (June 2004), available from <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/PUB408.pdf> ; Internet; accessed 18 Feb 2008.7.

³⁹Steven R. Hurst, “Bombers had down syndrome, Iraqi military says,” available at http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/Page/document/v5/content/subscribe?user_URL=http://www.theglobeandmail.com%2Fservlet%2Fstory%2FRTGAM.20080202.w-bombers0102%2FBNStory%2FInternational%2F&ord=125963279&brand=theglobeandmail&force_login=true ; Internet; accessed 5 February 2008.

detonated and subsequently killed 91 people. The author is of the opinion that this particular event falls in a category of suicide terrorism which not specifically about female suicide bombers but presents a scenario involving mentally handicapped terrorists that is beyond the scope of this paper to examine. Regardless, the point here is that there has been and seemingly continues to be, female suicide terror events for the media to report upon.

Media and suicide terrorism in general is, in a most colloquial sense, almost like a perfect marriage: the violence associated with suicide terrorism makes for a perfect bedfellow for the media in that it is relatively easy to sensationalize. Bad news sells. One is hard pressed to identify worse news than a random terror attack that kills indiscriminately. Organizations that employ suicide terrorism know this and consequently rely upon the media to assist in circulating their message. Interesting, while the message itself is key, the manner in which terror organization have been able to leverage media, on their own behalf as well as through public media source, has also become an extremely useful tool. This section will consider not only the messaging the media transmits about female suicide terrorism, but also the important revolution in the media tools available to terror organization to transmit this information.

Relaying the Message

For terror organizations today, while the message remains critical, the means by which that message is relayed is equally critical. Technology advances have permitted these organizations to “bypass traditional media outlets [and has] empowered them to

relay their messages in their own way.”⁴⁰ The traditional means of self-relaying their messages included clandestine radio broadcasts, underground newspapers, leaflets and conventional state-owned mass media outlets, such as television stations.⁴¹ The advent of the internet however has revolutionized, not surprisingly, how instantly and broadly the terror organizations can relay their messaging. Female suicide bombers, and the growing use of them, is one message that is receiving play on this new means. In effect, this is another mechanism whereby terror organizations can further recruit prospective members, including potential male and female suicide terrorists. Through the internet, terror organizations, like any political organization can mobilize support, regionally, and internationally.⁴² Groups like the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, Hezbollah, Hamas and al Qaeda manage and maintain numerous World Wide Web pages respectively. The Tamil Tigers for example, manage a considerable number of Web sights, readily available to the 450,000-member Tamil diaspora.⁴³ In addition to the internet, recent additions to the list of media tools available to terror organization includes the ability to mass produce and distribute video and DVD recordings as well as in certain organizations, they have access to private, terrorist-owned television stations.⁴⁴ Video and DVD recordings can be used for training purposes, including the instruction on how to manufacture explosive devices. It is not hard to conclude that the advances in technology have provided organizations that endorse terrorism a venue to further exploit

⁴⁰Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 198.

⁴¹Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 199.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 201.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 205.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 201.

potential members. This popular means of mass communication also provides an excellent medium to continue to harass target audiences, further leveraging the fear factor especially when the messaging includes threats of suicide bombings.

It is submitted outright that the media tools available to terror organizations are not specific to recruiting or reaching just potential female suicide bombers. This said, what is it that traditional media does to the phenomenon of female suicide bombers and how does a terror organization leverage this more traditional media coverage? Consider next, what's in a message.

What's the message?

Regarding Western media coverage of a suicide terror event, especially coverage of a female suicide terrorist event, it is quite simple: Western media affords terror organizations essentially free publicity. Earlier in the paper reference was made to the terror attack, not a suicide attack but terror attack perpetrated by Leila Khaled in hijacking an Israeli airliner. The press coverage of that event was unprecedented. It was suggested that at the time terror organizations realized the coverage that a female terrorist received. Regrettably, when the event is a suicide terror event perpetrated by a women the event is sensationalized even more. Mia Bloom in "Female Suicide Bombers" indicates that "[suicide] attacks by women receive eight times the media coverage as attacks by men."⁴⁵ The media seems fascinated by events involving female suicide terrorists. This is most likely because for women to commit such acts is so against what most cultures in the world perceive of women. Regardless of religious affiliation, of

⁴⁵Mia Bloom. "Female Suicide Bombers: A Global Trend." *Daedalus* 136, no. 1 (Winter, 2007), 100.

secular or non-secular nature, traditional, conservative or liberal society, women historically are providers of life, not takers. It is not surprising that the media, typical Western media, plays up on the anomaly that female suicide terrorist present to all these societies. The shock or “CNN Factor”⁴⁶ plays well and garners the organization significant coverage. Western media coverage provides mechanisms which for the organization that orchestrated the suicide terror event can further leverage accordingly: (a) a means to spread the organizations doctrine around the globe; (b) a means to enhance the threat that suicide terrorism is real and is a threat in the region in which the terror event occurred as well as enforce the premise that the terror organization can reach far beyond its regional geography and can potentially perpetrate suicide events anywhere in the world; and (c) the media coverage of female suicide events is a means to recruit potential female suicide bombers not just from with the organization’s home territory but from international communities where sympathy for the organization runs deep. Consider the story of 38 year old Muriel Degauque, a Catholic who converted to Islam, originally from Belgium. After converting, she and her Muslim husband spent three years in Morocco. On November 9, 2005 in Baquba, Iraq, Degauque became the first known Western woman to carry out a suicide attack.⁴⁷ While the media cannot be readily identified as the single mechanism responsible for Degauque’s recruitment, it is reasonable to assume that media can influence a potential recruit’s curiosities and sympathy about and for terrorist organizations.

⁴⁶Farhana Ali. “Muslim Female Fighters: Am Emerging Trend”, *Terrorism Monitor*, Vol 3, No. 21, (November 2005) ; available from <http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2369824>; Internet; accessed 14 January 2008.

⁴⁷Rosemarie Skaine, *Female Suicide Bombers*, 55.

The manner in which the media covers a story concerning a female suicide terrorist is considerably different than the coverage a story provides for male suicide terrorist. Firstly, the coverage of a female suicide bomber in Arab media focuses on the empowerment aspect of, in the case of a Palestinian female suicide bomber, her being an equal, a full partner⁴⁸ in the Palestinian fight for its nationhood. The messaging, while still sensationalizing the female suicide terrorist and her actions, does not focus on the same aspects of the event which the Western media will focus on. Western media wants to know who she was, provides her first name and often, continues to refer to the bomber by her first name throughout the news article or in subsequent journal articles and books.⁴⁹ It is common for Western media to relay information about the woman's home circumstances and her family situation, and what she was wearing. There is a desire to find out who she is and what may have caused her to commit such a diabolic act. The following describes the typical information which an Israeli media report would provide regarding a female suicide terrorist and highlights the lack of information sought to learn about the male suicide terrorist:

“A male terrorist will not receive the same empathy and interest as a female suicide terrorist, about whom the question always arises whether she had a romantic affair, divorce, personal distress stemming from rape, for example or, needless to say, problems in having children, which pushed her to commit a terror attack.”⁵⁰

⁴⁸Avi, Issacharoff, “The Palestinian and Israeli Media on Female Suicide Terrorists” in *Female Suicide Bombers: Dying for Equality*, Yoram Schweitzer, ed. Memorandum No. 84 (August 2006); available from <http://www.tau.ac.il/jcss/memoranda/memo84.pdf>; Internet; accessed 18 Feb 2008. 43.

⁴⁹A reflection of the phenomenon was noted in most of the journal articles used while researching this work. In particular, Skaine's *Female Suicide Bombers*, Victor's *Army of Roses*, and Goodwin in “When the suicide bomber is a woman” continually refer to female suicide bombers and would-be bombers by their first name. A certain empathy is developed in doing so. Conversely, male suicide bombers are rarely referred to by their first names, as is the case in Pape's *Dying to Win*.

⁵⁰Avi, Issacharoff, “The Palestinian and Israeli Media on Female Suicide Terrorists”, 43.

It is reasonable to state that the Israeli media coverage reflects that of the Western media. Terrorist organizations know the value of having the events of a female suicide terrorist reported upon. In raw terms, Miglena Sternadori in "Sexy, Tough or Inept?" indicates that there are five stereotypes which Western media usually reflects in its reporting or recording of female suicide terrorists: "(1) the technically unskilled suicide bomber; (2) the 'attack bitch' seeking revenge; (3) the failed (potential) mother, (4) the victim, brainwashed by a male; and (5) the sexy babe with personal issues."⁵¹ Regardless of how the female bomber is portrayed, the empathy and potential sympathy that can be leveraged from reporting of this nature amounts to essentially free publicity to the international audiences which are genuinely sympathetic to the organization's goals. It is a means to continue to mobilize support for the organization's cause as well as potentially expand on that support. Conversely, one would be remiss not to indicate that while reports on male suicide attackers may lack the personal details which are likely to be included in reports reflecting female suicide terrorism, that reporting too garners some support in a similar vein for the perpetrating organization. Recruitment for the organization benefits from this reporting, male or female. Keep in mind however, the sensationalism factor of reporting on women who so violently go against what the world essentially sees as one of their primary purposes, to nurture and raise children, provides terror organizations with a perverse but free, effective media tool.

⁵¹Miglena Mantcheva Sternadori. "Sexy, Tough Or Inept? Depictions of Women Terrorists in the News." *Media Report to Women* 35, no. 4, Fall, 2007, available from <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=1386145471&sid=3&Fmt=3&clientId=1711&RQT=309&VName=PQD> ; Internet; accessed 13 January 2008.

CHAPTER THREE

PAWNS AND PLAYERS

The Value of Female Suicide Terrorists

Having considered in general terms the reasons for employing suicide terrorist, consider now why an organization would consider employing a female suicide bomber in particular. In some instances, there is likely no reason for employing a male over a female bomber. Both present their respective organization with an effective weapon, a human bomb, capable of accomplishing the desired act. However, of the limited research that has been committed to date on the subject of the employment of female suicide bombers, some explanations are emerging. Debra Zedalis suggests that female suicide terrorist provide an outright tactical advantage to the organization which employs her. Zedalis, along with others who have affected research in this field, contends that women offer the tactical advantage of being able to commit stealthier attacks than their male counterparts.⁵² In the societies and cultures where suicide bombings are a more common occurrence, women are far less likely to be subject to physical searches. In the traditional and conservative Muslim and Hindu faiths, physical contact with women by men is prohibited on religious grounds. This consequently provides or implies that women for example may not be subjected to physical searches at military checkpoints or border crossings, as is the case at crossing points between the Palestinian Territories and Israel. In some instances however female border guards may conduct searches if they are on sight.

⁵²Debra Zedalis, *Female Suicide Bombers*, 7.

For the organizations that employ female suicide bombers, women also offer the organization a means of increasing their resource base. Women represent another source from which to force generate. It could be argued that these organizations would be well served to leverage this readily available source of fighters and prospective suicide terrorists. Manpower, regardless of gender, is manpower. Finally, consider once again the media appeal that the opportunity of employing a female suicide bomber represents to the organization. She is almost certainly ‘free publicity’ which achieves two important goals for the organization: (a) there is no doubt that the media will play up and sensationalize the success of a female suicide bomber, thereby generating greater publicity for the organization; and (b) in turn, this greater publicity may impact positively on recruitment for the organization.⁵³

Zedalis is successful in portraying the tactical advantages of employing female suicide bombers. Furthermore, it is submitted that the use of female suicide bombers, at this stage in recent history, has a psychological impact that the employment of male bombers does not. This impact is on both the oppressed and oppressor’s respective society. Consider that utilizing female suicide bombers sends a message that in traditional cultures, organizations are having to send a woman to do a man’s job. Such a statement is admittedly smug and cliché. However, in the societies and organizations that have used suicide terrorism to date, women’s roles are customarily distinguished from men’s: their customary fighting roles have been subordinate in nature and clearly distinct from that of their male counterparts.⁵⁴ Women are historically viewed as caregivers, supporters and

⁵³Debra Zedalis, *Female Suicide Bombers*, 7.

nurturers. In taking on a traditionally male role it could be argued one of the most traditional male roles - that of a fighter and warrior - female suicide bombers are anteing-up and are even being used as a shame tactic by some groups in attempts to increase male suicide bomber recruitment.⁵⁵ Regarding the psychological impact of female suicide bombers on the oppressor, it has been recorded that “The use of female suicide bombers by Palestinian militant groups is designed to embarrass the Israeli regime and show that things are so desperate that women are fighting instead of men.”⁵⁶ Statements such as this evoke sympathy for the cause that the organization is fighting. The employment of women as suicide bombers does impact on society, arguably on both the oppressor and oppressed, as well as the larger world community. It is offered that the employment of female suicide bombers is in fact a very effective weapon specifically in the tool box of psychological operations (PSYOPS). Her employment is relatively new, in the course of history, and can be further complicated if we consider one of the premise of this paper which is to explore the female suicide bomber as a pawn or player.

Pawns

We are more used to mad, bad, ruthless, male terrorists, though their actions as suicide bombers defy our understanding: on the other hand, women exploding themselves totally destroy their traditional gender roles of nurturing caregivers.⁵⁷

⁵⁴Lucy Fraser, “Abandon Weeping for Weapons: Palestinian Female Suicide Bombers,” (August 2002), available from <http://www.nyu.edu/classes/keefe/joe/frazier.html> ; Internet; accessed 15 March 2008. 2.

⁵⁵Mia Bloom, *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror*, (New York: Columbia University Press), 2005, 144.

⁵⁶Debra Zedalis, “Female Suicide Bombers,” 8.

⁵⁷Maria Alvanou, “Criminological Perspectives on Female Suicide Terrorism.” in *Female Suicide Bombers: Dying for Equality*, Yoram Schweitzer, ed. Memorandum No. 84 (August 2006), available from <http://www.tau.ac.il/jcss/memoranda/memo84.pdf>; Internet; accessed 18 Feb 2008. 95.

The statement above is a fairly accurate representation for most Western thinking people. It is likely that similar thoughts were conjured at the beginning of this paper when the reader was asked to think about the two scenarios offered up concerning the actions of a female and then a male suicide terrorist. It seems that culturally, both in Western and more traditional cultures, there remains a preponderance that females continue to be viewed as caregivers and nurturers. This in itself is not a negative statement. In more traditional cultures however, unlike women in more established and modern cultures, females in traditional cultures remain inextricably dependent on financial support from the male sector of their respective population.⁵⁸ Furthermore, and arguably more critical to their lack of standing in their respective society, the women in societies that are heavily traditionalist and conservative do not benefit from the basic equal rights as their male counterparts.⁵⁹ There is a strong possibility therefore, that for some women in such traditional cultures when faced with an economically uncertain future, they may well turn to the appeal offered by a terrorist organization. At the very least, in joining that group, as has been documented in the case of the LTTE and PKK⁶⁰, there is the prospect that such women will be provided with the basic life staples. A support network of some kind will be made available to them, as is the case in the military training camps of the Tamil Tigers. It appears that this kind of recruitment tactic is more prevalent in groups which are ethno-separatist in nature, like the LTTE, PKK and

⁵⁸Maria Alvanou, "Criminological Perspectives on Female Suicide Terrorism." in *Female Suicide Bombers: Dying for Equality*, Yoram Schweitzer, ed. Memorandum No. 84 (August 2006), available from <http://www.tau.ac.il/jcss/memoranda/memo84.pdf>; Internet; accessed 18 Feb 2008. 95.

⁵⁹Yoram Schweitzer, "Female Suicide Bombers: Dying for Equality", 10.

⁶⁰Cindy Ness, "The Rise in Female Violence." *Daedalus* 136, no. 1 (Winter, 2007), 2.

the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia (FARC). It is reasonable to conclude that this appeal is a recruitment tactic of the organizations. Practically speaking however it is also reasonable to conclude that this tactic is not a tactic designed specifically to recruit only women. Although research could not confirm it, this tactic is most certainly used to entice male recruits into the group as well. Regardless of which sex is recruited, using a tactic of this nature is likely to enhance the loyalty and obligation that the 'rescued' recruit may feel towards the organization. It is suggested that under similar circumstances, this is the moment that the 'pawn' begins to form. How obliged and to what extent will that new recruit feel compelled to return or compensate the organization for providing her with the basics of life? As will be seen in the examination of the Tamil Tigers, it is this 'rescue' that is often the first step in the indoctrination process of creating a suicide terrorist. It is this indoctrination process that in some instances has resulted in the process of turning a pawn into a predator.

Looking again at traditional and conservative cultures of ultra Muslim or Hindu societies, unwed girls and women who are victims of rape are often considered no longer suitable to be married. In cases such as this as well as in cases where women are divorced or widowed, becoming a suicide terrorist affords these women the opportunity to do something right with their lives, and in some cases they are easy targets for recruiters.⁶¹ Recall from earlier in the paper the discussion concerning the stereotypes which media tends to classify female suicide bombers. The stereotypes of the 'failed mother' and 'the brainwashed victim' fall within the notion of a woman who is a pawn in the loathsome

⁶¹Mira Tzoreff, "The Palestinian Shahida: National Patriotism, Islamic Fundamentalism, or Social Crisis." in *Female Suicide Bombers: Dying for Equality*, Yoram Schweitzer, ed. Memorandum No. 84 (August 2006), available from <http://www.tau.ac.il/jcss/memoranda/memo84.pdf>; Internet; accessed 18 Feb 2008. 20.

recruitment efforts of a terror organization. Reem al-Reyashi is reported as having been shamed into committing a suicide bombing attack on behalf of Hamas as this 22 year old mother of two had committed adultery. As a 'failed mother',⁶² al-Reyashi was able to restore her family's honour by committing the suicide terror attack. Admittedly, there seems no logic to actions of this nature however, in an ultraconservative culture, social and religious pressures can figure prominently in the recruitment of potential female suicide terrorists. It is not difficult to comprehend that the desperate plight of women in similar situations to al-Reyashi could cause them to take the drastic action of becoming a suicide bomber. Add to this the premise that their actions would not only redeem any wrongs befallen on their family as a result of their personal indiscretions, but perhaps more importantly in the case of a prospective fundamental Islamic female suicide bomber, the prospect of becoming a martyr, in making the ultimate atonement, it is possible to see how this act of self sacrifice would be compelling to disenfranchised women.

Players

Players are similar to pawns in that they too are subject to being conditioned and influenced by their respective societies. In the case of a player, the author suggests that she is a woman who knowingly believes in and supports the nationalistic goals and efforts of the organization with which she is associated. Emancipation and issues of equality for women may figure prominently in this proposed category of potential female

⁶²Miglena Mantcheva Sternadori. "Sexy, Tough Or Inept? Depictions of Women Terrorists in the News." *Media Report to Women* 35, no. 4, Fall, 2007;[jounrel on-line]; available from <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=1386145471&sid=3&Fmt=3&clientId=1711&RQT=309&VName=PQD> ; Internet; accessed 13 January 2008. 36.

suicide bomber. Turning to the PLO and the situation that women in the territories faced a year into the first Intifada, roughly 1988-1989, women who had previously become actively involved with demonstrating and participating in outward displays of support for Hamas, were forbidden by Islamic clerics from continuing to actively participate in public or street demonstrations. “Women were ordered to resume their traditional roles as wives, mothers and homemakers...”⁶³

For some Palestinian women this was a significant setback in their struggle to be seen as an equal with their male counterparts. However, for other women, the issue of equality became secondary to the issue of nationalism.⁶⁴ Included with the edict of no longer participating in outward demonstration, women were strongly encouraged to return to wearing more traditional dress, including *hijab* and *jilbab* (long sleeve blouses and long skirts). This traditional dress while objectionable by some women initially, was soon employed by other women as a means to hide and smuggle weapons across border checkpoints. Initially, in a few instances, this smuggling degraded into something worse. Some Palestinian women “began committing violent acts against Israeli soldiers and civilians that some analysts believe were a harbinger of things to come.”⁶⁵ This demonstration of nationalism, this belief in supporting the organization’s cause provides some insight into the type of potential female suicide bombers who knowingly pursue a desire to carry out the ultimate act in support of the ‘cause’. She is a player.

⁶³Barbara Victor, *Army of Roses*, 11.

⁶⁴Barbara Victor, *Army of Roses*, 12.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 13.

Referring back to the earlier discussion concerning media and stereotyping female suicide terrorists, players would likely be cast as ‘the attack bitch seeking revenge’. Granted this is a very shallow and biased stereotype, however it portrays the image of a woman who is determined and focused, and acting of her own volition. Consequently, while a very colloquial descriptor, it does relay a feasible image.

The following chapter focuses on the employment of female suicide terrorist by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. There is a concerted effort to fully indoctrinate its members, male and female, on the nationalist struggle and goals of that organization. For many female members of the Tamil Tigers, they are completely supportive of the Tigers’ claims that women are treated equally and that the Tigers’ are solely responsible for the fair and just treatment extended to women in the Tamil community. These female fighters are players. They believe and uphold the principles and goals of the organization. It is some of these women who have and potentially will become members of the Black Tigresses. They are the potential players who willingly become predators.

CHAPTER FOUR
THE LIBERATION TIGERS OF TAMIL EELAM
AND FEMALE SUICIDE TERRORISTS

History and Founding

Formerly Ceylon, Sri Lanka is the location of the Liberation of Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). This militant organization is portrayed as brutal and unforgiving. Early pioneers of suicide bombing, including female suicide bombers, suicide terrorism has become a mainstay weapon in its arsenal, primarily because it is a force multiplier for this small but unrelenting group.⁶⁶ The use of female suicide bombers by the LTTE is a relatively common practice. This chapter will provide a brief history of the LTTE and it will introduce its leader. It will consider the recruitment of LTTE cadres, specifically women, and will present some of the factors which may well motivate these women to commit suicide terrorism. Perhaps unique to the LTTE over similar organizations which employ suicide terrorism to advance their cause is the outright claim by the LTTE that men and women are treated equally amongst its ranks. Some within the LTTE advocate that its movement, and more particularly that of its female arm, is responsible for the emancipation of Tamil women.⁶⁷ It will be shown that there are opposing views on this aspect of the LTTE. The use of fear tactics are rampant within the LTTE and consequently, the legitimacy of claims that it has promoted the equality of women

⁶⁶Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 145.

⁶⁷Arjuna Gunawardena, "Female Black tigers: A Different Breed of Cat?", 83.

amongst its ranks, more important to this paper –women as suicide bombers - will be examined. But first, some more useful background will be provided.

Ceylon, gained its independence from being a British colony in 1948. Its population base comprised of about 75 percent Sinhalese and the remaining population was represented by a Tamil minority, which was reputed as having been favoured by Britain during the colonial period.⁶⁸ In 1948 when Britain granted independence to Ceylon, the Sinhalese majority seized control and severely curtailed the rights of the Tamil minority in retaliation for the perceived favouritism.⁶⁹ Through the course of the next twenty years, conditions for the Tamil population would continue to deteriorate; discrimination regarding employment policies, higher education opportunities, etc... were found to consistently be in favour of the Sinhalese. Tamil discontent with their long standing disenfranchisement came to a peak in 1972 with the institutionalization of the Republican Constitution and the renaming of Ceylon to Sri Lanka: a total of 36 different Tamil separatist groups emerged to fight for Tamil rights.⁷⁰ What initially began as a number of student-lead college organizations shortly morphed into an extreme, nationalistic Tamil movement. The Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), which emerged as the leading group, advocated an ethnically separate Tamil nation state in the northern and northeastern areas of Sri Lanka.⁷¹ TULF's mandate and ethos at its infancy envisioned that

⁶⁸Christoph Reuter, *My Life as Weapon*, 158.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*

⁷⁰Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 138.

⁷¹*Ibid.*

...TULF was preparing for war. Unwilling to put its trust in a political system that had long demonstrated its bias against basic Tamil civil rights, the TULF sought to hedge its bets by establishing a parallel, clandestine organization to recruit radical young Tamils who believed that the only solution to their political problems would be found at the point of a gun.⁷²

Velupillai Prabhakaran, founder and leader of present day LTTE, was recruited by the TULF under these conditions. In 1974 he became a member of the Tamil New Tigers (TNT) which was the precursor of the LTTE. The TNT, bent on silencing anyone who would undermine the Tamil separatist mandate and activities, soon found Prabhakaran at its helm. During the later half of the 70's and into the early 1980's, Prabhakaran continued developing the LTTE so as to ultimately win back Tamil Eelam, the Tamil homeland. Opportunistic, his drive for power and ruthlessness soon saw the LTTE as the controlling Tamil separatist organization in Northern Sri Lanka: "any Tamil who stood in their way was massacred as mercilessly as the hated Sinhalese enemy."⁷³ While it is presumptive to say that this militant and charismatic leader had the issue of women's rights at the fore, he did not exclude women from becoming members of the LTTE. Rigid controls were employed so as to ensure men and women had their own respective units, as well as male and female cadres living and training in separate camps.

By the mid 1980's, Prabhakaran had launched the LTTE into a deadly battle against Sri Lankan government forces. Concurrently, he had established his elite fighter unit, the Black Tigers, which had both male and female soldiers. This unit was to become the arm of the LTTE that would exclusively generate the future male and female suicide bombers for the LTTE. Prabhakaran was fascinated by the terrific suicide assault which

⁷²Bruce Hoffman, *"Inside Terrorist."* 138.

⁷³Christoph Reuter, *My Life as Weapon*, 159.

had taken place against an American military barrack in Beirut, in which over 240 US servicemen perished followed by the US withdrawing its military forces from Lebanon. Understanding full well the economy of effort a suicide terror act could bring to the LTTE, Prabhakaran orchestrated a replica of the Beirut bombing. The first Black Tiger suicide attack against a government military camp was carried out in 1987, killing the lone bomber and forty government soldiers.⁷⁴ From the LTTE's perspective, this new weapon addressed the requirement for achieving mission success as well as doing so while employing minimal resources: a truck, some explosives and one man. Hereafter, the Black Tigers would incorporate suicide bombing as a primary weapon in its inventory. It is timely to recall the discussion from earlier in the paper which considers Pape's premise concerning an organization's employment of suicide terrorism in order to rid itself of its occupying force. In line with this premise was and is the fact that the LTTE desired the establishment of its own homeland, Tamil Eelam. This ethno separatist struggle is at the heart of the Prabhakaran's pre-occupation with suicide terrorism.

Recruitment and Motivation of the Black Tigresses

Arjuna Gunawardena, in "Female Black Tigers: A Different Breed of Cats", states that the recruitment of women to the LTTE combat units was a result of pure military requirements rather than the organization's official party line of providing women with opportunities for empowerment.⁷⁵ In the early 1990's Prabhakaran would up the ante regarding the perceived empowerment of women within the LTTE by authorizing the

⁷⁴Christoph Reuter, *My Life as Weapon*, 156.

⁷⁵Arjuna Gunawardena, "Female Black tigers", 83.

employment of the first female suicide bomber in LTTE history. Known as Dhanu within the Black Tigers, Thenmuli Rajaratnam would assassinate India Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi in May 1991 while Gandhi was campaigning in the Indian southern state of Tamil Nadu.⁷⁶ Having offered the Prime Minister a flower garland and stumbling, she detonated her explosive belt as Gandhi bent to help her up.

How is it that a woman from a culture which expects that she be submissive, nurturing, and that traditionally binds her to a life filled with cultural constraints,⁷⁷ be capable of carrying out such an overt act of terrorism? While not the first female suicide terrorist in recent memory, Dhanu, given her target, is amongst one of the most notorious. Her indoctrination to the LTTE, more specifically the Black Tigers, does not appear to be dissimilar to other women in the group. Dhanu was an apparent rape victim and consequently reputed to be a downcast within Tamil Hindu society. Considered damaged goods, she was not eligible to marry or have a family.⁷⁸ The opportunity to become a suicide bomber offered her the chance to make a worthy contribution to the LTTE cause. Amy Waldman reports that the Tigers refer to this kind of sacrifice as “thatkodai” which means to give yourself, vice the term “thatkolai” which means to simply kill yourself.⁷⁹ In Dhanu’s case, it is speculated that becoming a suicide bomber was a means to find

⁷⁶Andy W. Knight and Tanya Narozhna. "Social Contagion and the Female Face of Terror," 147.

⁷⁷Dilshika Jayamaha. “Partners in Arms: LTTE Women and the Changing Face of the Sri Lankan Civil War”(Oct 2005), 11; available from <http://www.jjay.cuny.edu/terrorism/womencombatants.pdf> ; Internet; accessed 24 Feb 2008.

⁷⁸Andy W. Knight and Tanya Narozhna. "Social Contagion and the Female Face of Terror", 147.

⁷⁹Amy Waldman, “Masters of Suicide Bombing: Tamil Guerrillas of Sri Lanka,”

some use in her life, a means of redeeming herself.⁸⁰ By dying for the cause, she was able to restore herself to a useful position in life. It is offered that in submitting to “thatkodai”, Dhanu transformed from a pawn, knowingly, into a predator. Dhanu is but one of 75 women who have become predators on behalf of the LTTE. While it may be considered myopic to review her particular case, given her particular notoriety, she brings to the fore an example of many women who are pawns within the LTTE.

There are some examples from with the womens’ cadre of the LTTE where women have been, it appears, genuinely motivated by the separatist appeal of the Tamil homeland. There are some other examples of women who have been kidnapped, coerced and even sold off to the LTTE. Of these examples, it seems that through the extensive training and doctrinal inculcation, most ultimately believe in the cause of the LTTE. Interviewees who seemingly are not under any apparent pressure during the respective interviews are devoted to Tamil Eelam. Common amongst them is the high regard and esteem lauded to the women who have committed ‘thatkadai’. These women suicide terrorists are truly revered as martyrs for the LTTE and are considered players.

Research indicates that for as many voices that advocate that the LTTE has in fact been responsible for the emancipation of Tamil women, there are as many advocating the women have been simply used as an alternate source of force generation. Male counterparts are not as plentiful as Prabhakaran would like. However, it is still reported that regardless of whether emancipation is the true underpinning for having such high numbers of women amongst its ranks, the LTTE had provided women with equal training

⁸⁰Ana Cutter, “Tamil Tigress, Hindu Martyrs,” available from <http://web.archive.org/web/20000425000746/http://www.columbia.edu/cu/sipa/PUBS/SLANT/SPRING98/article5.html> ; Internet; accessed 14 March 2008. 3.

and opportunities to fight alongside its male members. It is difficult to pin point the exact size of the LTTE. The group does not easily divulge this information. It is thought however that their numbers range from 10,000 to 18,000 fighters, depending on the source, and about half of them are female.⁸¹

This philosophy of equality is carried through into the elite ranks of the LTTE. Reports on the Black Tigers typically do not reflect a number attributed to its manning level. Most often reports only indicate how many suicide terror acts are claimed by the group. Statistics are questionable at best as the Tigers often do not acknowledge attacks on civilian targets but only political and military targets.⁸² Concerning its female composition, statistics published indicated the female suicide terrorists are responsible for approximately 40 percent of the Black Tigers suicide terror actions; 75 females have been identified as having carried out a suicide attack in support of the LTTE movement from 1991 until 2006.⁸³ Most recently, on February 3, 2008, a female suicide terrorist struck at a main railway station in Colombo, Sri Lanka killing twelve and wounding 92 others.⁸⁴

On the matter of motivation for women of the Black Tigers there are similarities and differences with women belonging to other organizations that sanction suicide terrorism. One of the most striking differences between the Tamil and Palestinian

⁸¹Clara Beyler, "Female Suicide Bombers," 7.

⁸²Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 144.

⁸³Jan Goodwin, "When the Suicide Bomber Is a Woman." *Marie Claire*, (August 2007), available from <http://www.marieclaire.com/print-this/world/articles/female-suicide-bomber> ; Internet: accessed 18 Feb 2008. 3.

⁸⁴Krishan Francis, "Suicide bomb at railway station in Sri Lanka kills 11, wounds dozens," *Globe and Mail*, 3 February 2008; available from <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20080203.srilanla0203> ; Internet; accessed 5 February 2008. 1.

organization for instance is the lack of religious influence amongst the LTTE, the Black Tigers in particular. Where jihad and fatwa play prominent roles in the construct, one would even say the national psyche of the Palestinian population, the Tamil, prominently Hindu population, is far less inclined to have religion influence the actions of the LTTE. It must be noted that the influence of religion for women in the LTTE is the same as for men in the LTTE. Prabhakaran's Tamil Eelam is focused on a national struggle not a religious one: while not outright banned, practicing one's religion is discouraged.⁸⁵ Furthermore, while interviewing a significant number of LTTE female cadres, Dilshika Jaymaha concluded that

...none of the women fighters and ex-fighters interviewed showed any desire to follow conventional religion beyond superficial practice. But they shared an almost religious faith in the LTTE and themselves. Nila...said it was more important for her to follow her conscience than religion. Thamilvili...asserted that she believed more in herself than even in God.⁸⁶

While the specific women interviewed above were not at that particular time members of the elite Black Tigers, they represent the mindset of the LTTE regarding religion and its diminished place in LTTE society versus religion in an Islamic organization.

As for the premise of martyrdom being achieved through the commission of a suicide attack, the Black Tigers do aspire for martyrdom, much like their Islamic counterparts. Again, the difference is inconsequential between men and women within the group. The difference in martyrdom for the Black Tigers versus an Islamic interpretation of martyrdom is that for the Tigers it represents a secular appeal vice a

⁸⁵Dilshika Jaymaha, "Partners in Arms: LTTE Women and the Changing Face of the Sri Lankan Civil War"(Oct 2005); available from <http://www.jjay.cuny.edu/terrorism/womencombatants.pdf> ; Internet; accessed 24 Feb 2008. 9.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 10.

religious one. Black Tigers, male or female, die for the Tamil nation for the here and now – their act is singular and finite in its action. There is no promise of a glorious afterlife. That their names will be revered and their sacrifice recognized amongst the LTTE and Tamil community is considered a reward in itself. This is perhaps the most appropriate point in this paper to make reference to ‘thatkodai’. LTTE martyrs are honoured on their death anniversaries and it is their devotion and sacrifice that is celebrated.⁸⁷

The specific indoctrination of a female suicide terrorist within the LTTE is significantly different from that of her sister compatriot within the Chechen Black Widows or PLO. The LTTE draws its female suicide cadres from within its ranks, and those amongst the ranks have been fully indoctrinated. Women who are eventually recruited into the Black Tigers endure the standard basic training experienced by all members of the LTTE. The basic training consists of three months of physical exercises, endurance requirements and small arms training.⁸⁸ Following some time of further inculcation into the organization, women, like their male counterparts, may receive specialist training. This may include heavier weapons training, intelligence gathering skills or mine laying skills⁸⁹ to name some of the more advanced military training skills which are taught. Throughout this training process, and throughout their respective career with the LTTE, or Black Tigers, cadres are exposed to LTTE doctrine and propaganda which “are important components and include an effort to teach Tamil history and to instill a tangible sense of mission and purpose.”⁹⁰

⁸⁷Dilshika Jayamaha, “Partners in Arms”, 9.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 6.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*

To become a member of the elite Black Tiger unit is viewed as an honour. The Tigers selection process is rigorous and quite secretive. Membership is closely guarded and typically, only on their death, are the identities of Black Tigers and Tigresses released.⁹¹ Members of the LTTE will most often make application or volunteer to become a Black Tiger rather than being outright selected by the organization. Women are not exempt from this application process. As mentioned above, the selection process itself is rigorous and thorough. This application process enhances the concept that perhaps more often than not women with the LTTE are in fact players more frequently than pawns in the deadly game of suicide terrorism. On the application process,

Although every LTTE guerrilla is given the option to join these groups [suicide squads], many more are rejected than accepted. At any given point, of the 10,000 or so cadres, there are probably 150 – 200 who are Black Tigresses and Tigers. The main selection criterion is a high level of motivation to complete the mission, a criterion that puts a premium on mental stability over tactical military competence.⁹²

Consider now the specific case of Menake, a captured Black Tigress who in the spring of 2007, was a prisoner within the Sri Lankan correctional system. Menake made application to become a Black Tigress and waited well over a year before she was summoned for an interview in order to determine if she was worthy of becoming a Tigress.⁹³ Her story is apparently typical in so far as it concerns the application process to

⁹⁰Dilshika Jayamaha, “Partners in Arms”, 9.

⁹¹Michael Roberts, “Tamil Tiger”Martyrs”: Regenerating Divine Potency?” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol 28, No.3, 2005. 497.

⁹²Robert Pape, *Dying to Win*, 229.

⁹³Jan Goodwin, “When the Suicide Bomber Is a Woman,” 4.

the Black Tigers. However, while women are said to be equal to men within the LTTE, and while the LTTE leader, Prabhakaran advocates the full emancipation of women, it is offered that Menake's history with the organization suggests that perhaps there is more at play with her particular selection to the Black Tigers as well as the selection of other women like her. More specifically, what is it about the women selected to join this elite group that makes them more eligible candidates over other applicants, male or female? Consideration of Menake's case may help provide some insight.

It is highly unusual that a Black Tigress should be apprehended alive. Each member of the LTTE, male and female, is issued a small vile containing cyanide which is reverently worn around their neck. The vile, a *kuppi*,⁹⁴ is a means for the fighter to commit suicide should they be captured. By bighting down on the tiny glass vile, the cyanide quickly enters the system through resulting cuts in the mouth. In committing personal suicide, the captured fighter cannot suffer the humiliation of torture. Consequently, and likely more importantly to the LTTE, the plans and secret activities of the organization are not divulged to the enemy. For women, the *kuppi* is regarded 'as a friend'⁹⁵ as it assists in attaining a quick death. In Menake's case, she was sent to kill the Sri Lankan prime minister. In the course of conducting her reconnoiter to carry out the attack, authorities stopped her and became suspect with her cover story. Police were quick to recognize the *kuppi* around her neck and beat her unconscious.⁹⁶ Now a prisoner

⁹⁴Michael Roberts, "Tamil Tiger "Martyrs": Regenerating Divine Potency?" 496.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*

⁹⁶Jan Goodwin, "When the Suicide Bomber Is a Woman," 2.

of the Sri Lanka state, she offers a rare insight to the training and life of a Black Tigress has been obtained.

Menake, a rape victim at a very young age, was eventually raised by extended family. Hard pressed economically, and considering Menake a financial burden, her aunt and uncle essentially gave Menake to LTTE as a means of addressing a human tax levied on the Tamil population by the LTTE in 2000 when the organization was faced with a shortage of fighters.⁹⁷ In an interview conducted by journalist Jan Goodwin, Menake indicated that her training was in line with the process described earlier in this work. She endured some four years of basic guerrilla training and the military work associated with that of belonging to the LTTE. Suffering from chronic back pain and depression, Menake

says...she made the leap from fighter to would-be martyr. “I had nerve damage to my spine after falling from an LTTE tractor. The doctor said I might become paralyzed when I got older. I thought, Why continue to live? A lot of girls were volunteering to be suicide bombers so I thought I would, too.”⁹⁸

The significance of Menake’s story is that she represents many women typical of the Black Tigresses – someone who had lost members of their immediate family and/or has suffered some kind of personal physical and or mental trauma – being a rape victim for example.⁹⁹ While not intending to provoke sympathy for the women of the Black Tigers, those who have been and are capable of indiscriminately taking the lives of many others, have often been encouraged by Tamil culture to join the LTTE.¹⁰⁰ According to

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 3.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, 4.

⁹⁹Clara Beyler, “Female Suicide Bombers,” 11.

¹⁰⁰Clara Beyler, “Female Suicide Bombers,” 11.

Ana Cutter, former editor of Columbia University's *Journal of International Affairs*, the commitment to the LTTE is more than simply finding something to do with your life.

Tamil culture traditionally sees women in a nurturing role and fully accepting their destiny to be a mother. If however, a woman is raped, she is no longer considered marriable. And so history and the vicious cycle persist. The pawn has severely limited potential to survive and be accepted within the Tamil society. However, by becoming a member of the LTTE, more specifically a member of the Black Tigers and consequently a player, she has the potential ability to contribute constructively to the Tamil society. According to Cutter, by becoming a suicide bomber, a socially downcast Tamil woman "Acting as a human bomb...[for] a Tamil woman... is an understood and accepted offering for a woman who will never be a mother."¹⁰¹ So, for Menake, and women like her including the infamous Dhanu, becoming a Black Tigress is a manner in which they can become a contributing member of their society.

In the perceived positive contribution these pawns and players are making to their society, we see the support for Pape's theory that a society's permission must be obtained in order to achieve acceptance for suicide terrorism. The social logic in the commission of suicide bombing affords not only some personal satisfaction in this act, knowing that one is positively impacting on her society, but the martyrdom associated with the commission of a suicide bombing offer by that society also affords appeal. This aspect, the appeal of martyrdom, cannot however be solely attributed to the female suicide bombers of the Black Tigers. The resulting martyrdom bestowed on suicide bombers

¹⁰¹Ana Cutter, "Tamil Tigress, Hindu Martrys" 2

must surely appeal to male members of the Black Tigers to the same degree as female bombers.

Prabhakaran's tight grip on the LTTE and its elite group of suicide bombers is unquestioned. It is suggested that through careful, intended manipulation and a mastery of charismatic leadership, he has very successfully managed to generate a devout following bent on securing a homeland for the Tamil nation, using whatever means necessary to do so, including crossing traditional and unconventional Tamil societal lines of fully employing women in all aspects of the LTTE. While other extremist organizations may employ suicide bombing as a regular weapon in their arsenal, one is hard pressed to find another group that uses this means so prolifically and successfully to advance their cause. The level of devotion from LTTE members appears unparalleled. Regarding claims of emancipation of women into the LTTE, it is hard to dispute the cross employment of women through the ranks and occupation of the group, including that of the infamous Black Tigers. That women receive equitable recognition in death is not disputed. That women are completely employable and in fact, due to their virtual unrestricted travel ability within Sri Lanka, most travel without being questioned or suspected. This freedom of movement can allow for women to be more employable as a suicide bomber than their male counterparts. That Tamil female suicide bombers have begun camouflaging their suicide bombs as pregnancies¹⁰² further adds to their being less suspect. It is for these very reasons, the complete employability of women, that the author offers Prabhakaran employs them. Female suicide bombers are effective weapons. At this point in time, with their *kuppi* concealed from Sri Lankan authorities, women can operate

¹⁰²Mia Bloom, "Female Suicide Bombers: A Global Trend." *Daedalus* 136, no. 1 (Winter, 2007): 94.

with an extremely high degree of stealthiness. Prabhakaran is a pragmatist who knows how to best exploit the means available to him. The employment of female suicide bombers within the Black Tigers is simply a practical means of securing a force generation mechanism that is easy to target, cheap to recruit and relatively plentiful.

According to Prabhakaran,

With perseverance and sacrifice, Tamil Eelam can be achieved in 100 years. But, if we conduct Black Tiger operations, we can shorten the suffering of the people and achieve Tamil Eelam in a shorter period of time. ¹⁰³

The LTTE, including the Black Tigers and Tigresses, are a strictly controlled and highly structured military group that regularly uses suicide terrorism to achieve its political aims. There is no dispute that for the LTTE, the struggle is about establishing a homeland for Tamils. Tamil Eelam is a homeland that most certainly includes women, if only because they are pawns and players that can be leveraged as force generators and in extreme but a significant number of cases, predators. Black Tigresses are a viable, deadly weapon in the psychological tool bag of the LTTE.

¹⁰³Rohan Gunaratna, "The LTTE and suicide terrorism." *Frontline*, (February 2000); available from <http://www.flonnet.com/fl1703/17031060.htm> ; Internet; accessed 23 Feb 2008. 3.

CHAPTER FIVE

ISLAM AND FEMALE SUICIDE TERRORISM

Female suicide bombers have been and continue to be employed by a number of Islamic extremist groups. A number of organizations in the Palestinian Territories, including al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade and Hamas to name but two, have used them. Female suicide terrorists, in particular the group known as the Black Widows, have been employed in Chechnya and Russia. The most recent spate of female suicide bombers has occurred in Iraq where over the course of 2004 until 2008, twenty suicide bombings have been attributed to women.¹⁰⁴ The news report highlighting this event was discussed earlier in the paper. In the same news report, American military officials in Iraq indicated that the use of female suicide terrorists is proving more lucrative for insurgents because these women tend to be able to move unsuspected through checkpoints. The concept of using women as fighters, and in this very extreme case of suicide terrorists, is shocking to the majority of the Muslim world. Traditional and ultraconservative Muslim societies are very patriarchal. It is seemingly, then, very extraordinary that some of these women become involved in what is traditionally considered a man's world or terrorism. Conversely, these societies are also extremely matriarchal in the constant praise for women in their role as revered mothers and child bearers. This contradiction in itself warrants further reflections and will be addressed herein. To do so, this chapter will be devoted to examining the employment of female suicide bombers by Palestinian organizations, by the Chechen terrorist organizations and finally, it will examine briefly al Qaeda and its recent engagement of women as suicide terrorists.

¹⁰⁴CTV.ca News Article, "Bomb kills dozens in Iraqi city of Kabala; 1.

Palestinian Female Suicide Bombers

Palestinian women content with a very patriarchal society. Palestinian society for women generally speaking is highly structured. Like many Arab societies,

...is hierarchical and fixed: individuals must adhere to the directions given by those with higher standing on the social scale, commonly determined by sex and age...males occupy the highest stratum of the social hierarchy. Women and children are placed at the base of the scale. Young women not only obey older women and males, but also males younger than themselves.¹⁰⁵

Couple this premise of hierarchy with the consideration that during the first intifada of the early 1990s, Palestinian women were urged to serve their nation by becoming ‘mothers of the nation’ and were expected quite literally to produce fighters, male fighters.¹⁰⁶ Research indicates that while initially some Palestinian women did in fact participate in physical violent protests during the early months of the first intifada, 1987/1988, religious leaders soon stymied these activities. Reference to this effect was mentioned earlier in the paper. Consequently, at the edicts of Islamic clerics, most Palestinian women who had been mobilized to actively participate in outwardly supporting protests and violence against Israeli reverted to invisibly supporting the Palestinian causes. They fell back into their traditional and highly regarded roles of being mothers, nurturers and providers of life.

Over the course of the next ten to twelve years, and in particular during the period of 1996 to 2000, Palestinian authorities struggled to secure a semblance of national unity. Yasser Arafat’s Fatah leadership of Palestinians sagged over a stumbling peace process

¹⁰⁵Sharabi (1975) quoted in Anat Berko and Edna Erez, “Gender, Palestinian Women, and Terrorism: Women’s Liberation or Oppression?”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 30,(June 2007); 496.

¹⁰⁶Mira Tzoreff, “The Palestinian Shahida”; 13.

and questions of corruption within his organization.¹⁰⁷ With the advent of the second intifada in 2000 - the al Aqsa Intifada - the West Bank and Gaza Borders were subject to closure by the Israelis. The resulting economic crisis in the Palestinian Territories caused a further demise in the Territories. Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and the al Aqsa Brigade, the military arm of Fatah, had begun proliferating violent protests, attacks and suicide bombings against Israel, including Israeli citizens. For many Palestinians, violence was seen as the only remaining means to retrieve Palestinian rule of Territories from Israel.¹⁰⁸ Historically, in the late 1990s over 70 percent of Palestinians were unsupportive of suicide terrorism, including martyrdom operations, and only 20 percent of popular support was thrown behind Hamas. By the early 2000, following a rash of Hamas sponsored suicide attacks, popular support for the group had skyrocketed to over 70 percent alongside public support for martyrdom operations.¹⁰⁹ As the al Aqsa Intifada progressed, suicide terror attacks continued and increased. Figure 6.2 indicates the number of Palestinian attacks, both successful and unsuccessful, against Israeli targets.

Figure 6.2: Increasing Number of Suicide Attacks by Decade
Source: From Mia Bloom, *Dying to Win*.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷Mia Bloom, *Dying to Kill*, 25.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, 26.

This figure reflects information which represents a significant shift in the modus operandi of various organizations in their conduct of suicide terrorism. Had this graph been constructed on the philosophy regarding women's participation during the first intifada, it would have reflected the efforts of male attackers only. Figure 6.2 includes the suicide terror actions of both men and women. The al Aqsa Intifada introduced a new weapons platform to the conflict in the Territories: the female suicide bomber.

To say that this new inclusion for Palestinian women was a stride towards equality with their male counterparts is rather harsh. Again, consider the pawn and player analogy raised earlier in the paper. In January 2002, in contrast to the first intifada proclamations that disallowed women from participating in public displays and violent actions, Yasser Arafat spoke at a rally and encouraged Palestinian women to participate in the al Aqsa Intifada. He is purported to have said "Women and men are equal" followed by "You are my army of roses that will crush Israeli tanks."¹¹¹ Subsequently, records indicated that between January 2002 and May 2006, sixty-seven Palestinian women attempted suicide attacks: eight completed their mission.¹¹² The remaining women were interrupted while attempting their attack and arrested. Others were arrested earlier during the planning stages of their respective operation.

The motivation of these women varied. Arguably the most infamous of the successful Palestinian female suicide bombers is Wafa Idris who is identified as being the first female Palestinian suicide bomber. Idris, a Red Crescent paramedic, was catapulted into martyrdom on January 27, 2002. She became the first *shahida*, the first female

¹¹⁰Mia Bloom, *Dying to Kill*, 200.

¹¹¹Barbara Victor, *Army of Roses*, 19.

¹¹²Yoram Schweiter, "Female Suicide Bombers: Reality vs Myth", 25.

martyr. The Arab media proclaimed “It’s a woman!” in much the same tone that a birth announcement would proclaim “It’s a boy!”¹¹³ It is this type of reporting that benefits the organization that affected the attack. In this case, the al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade claimed responsibility for the attack, an attack that occurred in a busy shopping district in Jerusalem, killing one and injuring a reported 140 people. Idris was 26, had delivered a still born child, was divorced and returned home to live with her parents.¹¹⁴ As a paramedic, she had been exposed to many violently killed and injured Palestinians. There are reports of Idris having suffered from deep depression following her divorce and being faced with the prospect of having to return home to her parents, where she was viewed as an economic burden.¹¹⁵ In an odd twist of fate Idris brother, Khalil, was reportedly the intended *shahides* (male martyr) on January 27, 2002. Wafa had begged¹¹⁶ to participate and offered to be a *shahidas* but instead was recruited to assist her brother in his mission. While transporting the explosives in preparation for his mission, she caused them to detonate. Regardless of al Aqsa not initially intending for her to be a *shahidas* on that day, she instantly became one and al Aqsa profited from the popularity of the attack. For purposes of this paper, Idris is counted as a player. She is reported to have asked to be a suicide bomber. Her involvement with this particular suicide event was apparently a short one. Research on her case did not locate information indicating that she had been sought out by al Aqsa. On the contrary, it indicates she came forward, through her brother,

¹¹³Rivka Yadlin, “Female Martyrdom: The Ultimate Embodiment of Islamic Existence?” in *Female Suicide Bombers: Dying for Equality*, Yoram Schweitzer, ed. Memorandum No. 84 (August 2006); available from <http://www.tau.ac.il/jcss/memoranda/memo84.pdf>; Internet; accessed 18 Feb 2008.

¹¹⁴Rosemaire Skaine, *Female Suicide Bombers*, 126.

¹¹⁵Barbara Victor, *Army of Roses*, 47.

¹¹⁶*Ibid.*, 24.

readily volunteering to participate in a suicide mission. The al Aqsa Martyr's Brigade, realizing the popularity of her martyrdom, capitalized on it almost immediately: weeks after her death, the group established a woman's suicide unit in Idris' honour.¹¹⁷ At this time, a former Hamas spiritual leader, Sheikh Ahman Yassin upheld his influential premise that a woman's role in the fight for Palestinian nationality was not that of a suicide bomber but was that of a supporter of men whose role included that of potential suicide bombing. Later in the spring of 2002, Yassin bowed to public pressure and "found religious justification to allow women's involvement in suicide operations."¹¹⁸ Recall from earlier in this work the considerations put forth by Pape regarding the social logic of suicide terrorism: only with society's support will suicide terrorist be accepted. Yassin's endorsement of employing females to conduct suicide terrorism clearly solidified that support. In playing the suicide terrorist card, Idris established herself as a *shahidas* and entrenched the utility of female suicide bombers for organizations of the Palestinian Territories.

Reem Reyashi became a *shahidas* in January 2004. Unique to her participation was that she was that this twenty-seven year old was the married mother of two young children. Reports indicated that Reyashi had become involved in an extramarital affair¹¹⁹. Restoring Reyashi's family honour was a key motivator in this case. Unofficial sources indicated that spiritual leader, Sheik Yassin, "would sanction suicide actions of women who had stained their family honour. Indeed...Reyashi had requested Yassin's

¹¹⁷Barbara Victor, *Army of Roses*, 31.

¹¹⁸Mia Bloom, *Dying to Kill*, 150.

¹¹⁹Mia Tzoreff, "The Palestinian Shahida.", 21.

sanction...”¹²⁰ On receiving this approval, this young mother would kill herself and four others while wounding 10 others at the Erez Crossing between the Gaza Strip and Israel. For purposes of this paper, Reyashi is considered to be a pawn who, under the immense pressures of an ultraconservative Islamic, hierarchical society, transformed herself into a weapons platform and became a *shahidas* in order to restore her family honour.

The examples here were chosen for two reasons. On one hand, consideration was given to the story of a woman who was unable to bear children, and on the other hand, consideration was given to the story of a woman who was a mother but was considered to be an inappropriate or unfit one. It is the author’s understanding that based on the information gleaned while researching this paper, married Islamic women who reside in the conservative societies like the ones discussed in the paper, and who disgrace their family honour, by way of committing an extramarital affair, or by conducting herself inappropriately in public, (for example being seen in public with another male who is not a family member), are subject to being deemed inappropriate and risk being cast as unfit mothers, incapable of raising their children appropriately. The social hierarchy coupled with religious conviction of these traditional societies provides the thermometer by which these women are judged for their indiscretions. Conversely, it is this same thermometer that judges women for not being marriable or for not being able to produce children.

Berko and Erez in “Gender, Palestinian Women and Terrorism” state that

For mothers, whose own happiness is determined by their children’s happiness, growth, and achievement, their success or failure in personal behaviour and life choices, in marriage and child rearing, is considered as the failure or success of the family...Her role as a mother becomes a “master status,” overshadowing every other aspect of her life.¹²¹

¹²⁰Mia Tzoreff, “The Palestinian Shahida.”, 21.

The reverence placed on being a good mother within Palestinian society is at the core of its existence. Should anything impede that or should a woman reject the prospect of being a good mother, she is subject to being scorned and rejected. She is however, in some cases as demonstrated herein, provided with the opportunity to make amends for her inefficiencies: player or pawn, she can opt to die in the name of Allah and restore her family honour.

The Black Widows

Chechnya has been defying Russian rule for well over two hundred years. Russian Imperialism through to Soviet dominance prevented Chechnya independence. The demise of the former Soviet Union in 1991 was the genesis for the present day conflict between Chechnya and Russia was. At that time, a number of former Soviet block states immersed as independent states; however, Chechnya's claim for independence was not accepted by Russia. Rich in mineral and energy resources, Chechnya offers significant economic advantages to those who control it. Since making an initial attempt to become an independent nation, Chechnya and Russia have engaged in two wars. The second conflict began in 1999 and lasted until 2002, however significant flare-ups continue.¹²² Over a hundred-thousand Russian troops have been sent into Chechnya, primarily concentrating in the Grozny area, resulting in over some 250,000 refugees.¹²³ The significant amount of fighting over the past decades has touched the majority of all Chechens. The majority of the male Chechen population has participated in the fighting,

¹²¹Arat Berko, Edna Erez, "Gender, Palestinian Women, and Terrorism," 496.

¹²²Rosemaire Skaine, *Female Suicide Bombers*, 98.

¹²³Rosemaire Skaine, *Female Suicide Bombers*, 98.

and has been killed or incapacitated by the Russian military¹²⁴ – women have become a source of force generation, many performing in roles never imagined for Chechen women. Historically, women in Chechnya who contributed to war efforts performed supporting roles which women writ large have carried out through the centuries: nursing, feeding, providing non-combat support. In June 2000, this changed significantly with the advent of the first Chechen female suicide bomber. Khava Barayeva, 20 years old, recorded her last words “I know what I am doing, paradise has a price, and I hope this will be the price for Paradise” just prior to driving an explosives laden truck into a Russian Special Forces detachment, killing herself, another occupant of the vehicle, 27 Russian soldiers, and wounding five others.¹²⁵ Not only did this mark the first acknowledged suicide terror event committed by a Chechen woman, but it also marked the advent of the Black Widows, Chechnya’s infamous league of female suicide bombers. Speckhard and Akhmedova report in their 2006 findings in “Black Widows: The Chechen Female Suicide Terrorists” that from June 2000 through to May 2005, 81 percent of all successful Chechen rebel attributed suicide attacks have been perpetrated by women (twenty-two of twenty-seven suicide attacks).¹²⁶ Table 6.2 indicates the overall attempted suicide attacks perpetrated by both Chechen men and women.

¹²⁴Knight and Narozhna, “Social Contagion and the Femals Face of Terror,” 160.

¹²⁵Rosemaire Skaine, *Female Suicide Bombers*, 101.

¹²⁶Speckhard and Akhmedova, “Black Widows,” 64.

	Date	Place	Total terrorists	Female terrorists	Male terrorists	Fatalities	Injured victims	Hostages	Terrorists' outcome
1	June 7, 2000	Chechnya, Alkhan-Yurt military base (Khava Barayeva, Luiza Magomadova)	2	2	0	2	5	0	Dead
2	June, 2000	Chechnya, military checkpoint	1	0	1	?	?	0	Dead
3	July 2, 2000	Chechnya, military base (Movladi)	1	0	1	33	81	0	Dead
4	Dec. 2000	Chechnya, MVD building (Mareta Duduyeva)	1	1	0	?	?	0	Wounded, later dead
5	Nov. 29, 2001	Chechnya, Urus-Martan, Military office (Elza Gazueva)	1	1	0	1	3	0	Dead
6	Feb. 5, 2002	Chechnya, Grozny, Zavodskoy ROVD (Zarema Inarkaeva)	1	1	0	23	17	0	Wounded
7	Oct. 23-26, 2002	Moscow, Dubrovka Theater	40	19	21	129	644	<800	Dead
8	Dec. 27, 2002	Chechnya, Grozny, governmental complex (Tumrievs family)	3	1	2	83	<200	0	Dead
9	May 12, 2003	Chechnya, Znamenskaya, governmental complex	3	1	2	59	111	0	Dead
10	May 14, 2003	Chechnya, Iliskhan-Yurt, religion festival (<i>Shahidat</i> Shahbulatova, Zulay Abdurzakova)	2	2	0	18	145	0	Dead
11	June 5, 2003	North Osetia, Mozdok military base (Lida Khildehoroeva)	1	1	0	17	16	0	Dead
12	June 20, 2003	Chechnya, Grozny, governmental complex (Zakir Abdulazimov)	2	1	1	6	38	0	Dead
13	July 5, 2003	Moscow, rock festival (Zulikhhan Elihadjieva, Mariam Sharapova)	2	2	0	14	60	0	Dead
14	July 11, 2003	Moscow, Tverskaya Street (Zarema Mujikhoeva)	1	1	0	1	0	0	Survived
15	July 27, 2003	Chechnya, Grozny, military building (Mariam Tashukhadjieva)	1	1	0	?	?	0	Dead
16	Aug. 1, 2003	North Osetia, military hospital	1	0	1	35	300	0	Dead
17	Dec. 5, 2003	Southern Russian near Yessentuki, train (Khadijat Mangerieva)	4	3	1	41	<150	0	Dead
18	Sept. 15, 2003	Ingushetia, FSB office	2	1	1	2	31	0	Dead
19	Dec. 9, 2003	Moscow, National Hotel near Duma	1	1	0	6	14	0	Dead
20	Feb. 6, 2004	Moscow subway station Avtozavodskaya	1	0	1	41	<130	0	Dead
21	April 6, 2004	Ingushetia, president's car	1	0	1	2	25	0	Dead
22	Aug. 25, 2004	Airplane TU-134 Moscow-Volgograd (Sazita Jebirhanova)	1	1	0	43	0	0	Dead
23	Aug. 25, 2004	Airplane TU-154 Moscow-Sochi (Aminat Nogaeva)	1	1	0	42	0	0	Dead
24	Aug. 31, 2004	Moscow, subway station Rijskaya	1	1	0	10	33	0	Dead
25	Sept.1-3, 2004	North Osetia, Beslan school (Roza Nogaeva, Mariam Tuburova)	32	2	30	330	470	1120	Dead
26	May, 2005	Chechnya, Grozny	1	1	0	0	0	0	Dead
27	May, 2005	Chechnya, Assinovskaya	2	2	0	0	0	0	Dead
	Total		110	47	63	938	2473	1920	
	Percent		100%	43%	57%				

Table 6.2 : Summary of Suicide Terror Attacks Attributed to Chechens June 2000 – June 2006.
Source: Speckhard and Akhmedova “Black Widows: The Chechen Female Suicide Terrorist”, 64.

These numbers strongly indicate that female suicide bombers are strategically effective in Chechnya for the organization that employs this mode of terror. While researching this paper, an interesting difference was noted between studies conducted on female suicide bombers in Chechnya, and the studies conducted on female suicide bombers in other societies, mainly Palestinian and Sri Lankan. There was general agreement in most of the research consulted on Palestinian and Tamil female suicide bombers regarding motivation and methods of recruitment for example, studies on Chechen female suicide bombers offer varying conclusions. For instance, research on this use of suicide bombers in Chechnya in general presents a situation which is contrary to Pape's premise regarding the social logic for suicide bombers: community support for suicide bombers is low in Chechnya and most Chechens "still believe in civil society and hope for peace. They do not expect good results from terrorism and condemn terror groups and bombers."¹²⁷ As discussed earlier in this paper, there is substantial community support for suicide terrorism within Palestinian and Tamil societies.

The manner in which women are recruited to become suicide bombers in Chechnya presents another example of research coming to different conclusions about these women. Speckherd and Akhmedova advocate that the majority of women who become a Black Widow do so because they have experienced a significant personal trauma. Committing the act of suicide bombing offers these women a means to seek revenge or to positively contribute to a situation which they had until that time, been unable to contribute to. Some women had lost husbands, brothers and fathers to the war fighting. Others had "lost close family members to air raids, bombings, landmines, so

¹²⁷Speckhard and Akhmedova, "Black Widows," 74.

called *cleansing* operations... Many personally witnessed the death, beating, or other mistreatment of a family member at the hands of the Russians.”¹²⁸ This research indicates that the post-traumatic stress disorder and dissociative phenomena was evident in all cases that were reviewed. A predominantly Muslim society, the research also indicated that in most cases, developing Chechen suicide bombers, male and female, “sought a connection to Wahhabist groups soon after the trauma and in direct reaction to it...”¹²⁹ Speckherd and Akhmedova did not report a significant number of instances where they found that Chechen women had been outwardly coerced into participating in suicide terror. For instance, they did not report that women were being raped and blackmailed into becoming a suicide bomber. Bloom and Knight & Narozhna’s respective research makes reference to some Chechen women being coerced into becoming suicide bombers but they do not indicate this is a significant recruitment tool.

There is concurrence amongst the researchers that Wahhabism is at the fore amongst Chechen groups who employ suicide terrorism. While not the case in the Gulf States where Wahhabism is also practiced, in Chechnya, Russia and the Caucasus, “Wahhabism is linked to militant religious groups that promote jihad and terrorism.”¹³⁰ Religion is a factor in most cases where women have been employed as suicide bombers in Chechnya. Religion is often a mechanism whereby one who is suffering from a significant trauma can find comfort and relief.¹³¹ In the extreme case when participation and dedication to the faith becomes so fundamental, the concept of martyrdom is

¹²⁸Speckherd and Akhmedova, “Black Widows,” 67.

¹²⁹*Ibid.*

¹³⁰*Ibid.*, 77.

¹³¹*Ibid.*, 69.

sometimes embraced. Martyrdom in Chechnya, for those groups that espouse a radical and extreme form of Islam, is regarded similarly to Palestinian groups that employ suicide terrorism and also promote martyrdom operations. Notwithstanding that popular support for female suicide terrorism and martyrdom low in Chechnya, some Chechen women bombers have been promised the right of becoming a *shahidas* in carrying out their respective attack.¹³² In a similar vein, some comparisons have been made between the conflict in Chechnya and the conflict in the Palestinian Territories in that the use of suicide terrorism in general is postponing any real chance for a political solution. Knight and Narozhna purport that this Palestinian comparison may be a little premature because of the lack of public support for suicide terrorism. However, consideration should not be disregarded for the fact the initially, Palestinian public support for suicide terrorism, and in particular the use of women as this weapons platform was low during the first intifada too. Earlier, this work observed that popularity for suicide terrorism within Palestinian society increased when many in that society felt that this weapon was a last means to try to impact on their political situation. Perhaps then, pending the situation in Chechnya, time will see a similar increase in popular support for suicide terrorism, including female suicide terrorism, should a political solution continue to evade the Chechen population.

For the time being however, and despite this lack of public support, the facts are that the Black Widows have inflicted considerable death and casualties since June 2000. Figure 2 attests to these numbers. These women are being employed in relatively equal numbers to their male counter parts: of the suicide terror attacks attributed to Chechens between June 2000 and May 2005, women have committed 47 of 110 attacks – 43

¹³²Clara Beyler, “Messengers of Death,” 9.

percent. In the context of reflecting equality amongst the sexes, does this number reflect an equal opportunity society? Chechnya, unlike recent Palestinian history, was impacted by the Soviet mentality and consequently, it is reasonable to consider that “prior to the war [Chechen women] already enjoyed a Soviet-type of feminism in terms of equality in education and opportunity to work in many professions.”¹³³ This being the case, it is logical that Chechen society in general would not exclude women from participating in fighting roles, including that of a suicide bomber. In fact, it appears that Chechen women have been readily incorporated into Chechen terror organizations. However, couple the fact that support for suicide bombing in Chechnya is low with the fact that it is also predominantly Muslim, it is logical to come to the conclusion that female participation in this type of terrorism is frowned upon by Chechens in general. Women, like those in Sri Lanka and Palestine are still considered to be mothers and wives first, and are to raise children encouraging them to be strong in character so that “the [children] will become warriors for the Islamic faith (*mujahideen*) when they grow up”.¹³⁴ This vein of traditional thinking regarding the expected role of Chechen women was further visible during the tragic events of the Dubrovka theatre siege.¹³⁵ Nineteen of the forty two terrorists who participated in the seize were women. Ironically, the women who were wearing bomb belts

¹³³Spechard and Akhmedova, “Black Widows,” 75.

¹³⁴Mia Bloom, “Female Suicide Bombers,” 5.

¹³⁵On October 23, 2002 a group of Chechen terrorist seized control of the Dubrovka Theatre House in Moscow claiming that theirs was a suicide mission and demanded that Russian forces redeployed from Chechnya immediately or all in the theatre would perish. 19 Female and 21 male terrorists held 800 people hostage in the theatre. The three day seize ended when Russian forces eventually overtook the theatre, killing all the terrorists as well as a staggering 129 of the hostages during the rescue effort.

“...distributed medical supplies, blankets, water, chewing gum, and chocolate. Though the women allegedly toyed threateningly with their two-kilo bomb belts, they did not control the detonators – the men retained control of the remotes.¹³⁶

That the male terrorist maintained apparent control of the suicide belts speaks to the more traditional society in which women are not on equal terms with their male counterparts. Worthy of consideration in this example is the concept that some Chechen women who participate in suicide terrorist may be both pawns and players. Players in that these nineteen women seemingly chose to participate in this Dubrovka seize but yet they were pawns in that they did not completely control their own destinies since they could not independently activate their respective explosives.

Significant personal trauma, seeking revenge through the ultimate personal sacrifice, to a lesser degree – leveraging women as force generators, and to an even lesser degree – committing suicide terrorism in order to become a *shahidas*, are thought by researchers to be some of the more influential factors in motivating Chechen women to become suicide bombers. Some of the works referenced in the construct of this paper made a comparison between Chechnya and Palestine in regards to Chechnya displaying a similar pattern to the situation in Palestine in the evolution of the employment of suicide bombers, specifically female suicide bombers. As in Palestine where the employment of female suicide bombers was initially unsupported, their employment eventually gained significant support, both in the religious community and consequently within Palestinian society writ large. Bloom, Knight and Narozhna offer that Chechnya may be headed in the same direction. While support for female suicide bombers in Chechnya may be relatively low presently, “when faced with an overwhelmingly powerful oppressor, [the

¹³⁶Mia Bloom, “Female Suicide Bombers,” 4.

oppressed] have discovered that suicide bombers are an effective asymmetric weapon.”¹³⁷ The Black Widows have been successful in their respective attacks. They garner media attention and arguably, draw attention to the nationhood struggles of Chechnya. Pawns or players, Chechen female suicide bombers have proven themselves an extremely effective weapon in reeking revenge on primarily Russian targets. Employed almost on equal footing with male suicide bombers in the region, it may only be a matter of time before their efforts become more prolific. If researchers are correct, and if Chechnya does in fact emulate the Palestinian experience, an increase in the employment of female suicide bombers in Chechnya is likely.

al Qaeda and Female Suicide Bombers

Pre 9/11 women were not openly encouraged to participate in and support al Qaeda’s jihad efforts. Since 9/11 however, this has changed. Between 2003 and 2007, six fatawa have been issued by al Qaeda which allow women to participate in martyrdom operations.¹³⁸ In 2003 the FBI acknowledged that it had concerns with al Qaeda’s activities regarding the recruitment and training of women, specifically training which would prepare women to engage in terrorism.¹³⁹ The overarching concern is that al Qaeda would be employing a new surprising tactic, one that would see unsuspected female terrorists perpetrating suicide attacks.

¹³⁷Knight and Narozhna, “Social Contagion and the Female Face of Terror,” 160.

¹³⁸Katharina VonKnop, “The Female Jihad: Al Qaeda’s Women,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 30, no. 2 (02, 2007): 405.

¹³⁹*Ibid.*, 404.

Al Qaeda and a number of its affiliates are extremely active in Iraq¹⁴⁰. The coalition forces operating in Iraq have been plagued by suicide attacks all too frequently. As reported earlier, these attacks have also included attacks carried out by female suicide bombers. Al Qaeda's use of women in this role was established shortly after the US war with Iraq began. Unfortunately, empirical data on al Qaeda's employment of female suicide bombers is limited to date. Pape reports that prior to 2003, no women were employed as suicide bombers in Iraq.¹⁴¹ Schwietzer reports that in by 2006, four attacks had been committed by women in Iraq. News reports referred to earlier indicate that between 2005 and as recently as March 2008, 20 suicide attacks have been perpetrated by women in Iraq. This is a startling increase.

Reports indicate that al Qaeda's women, the women who are interested in participating in the jihad are mobilizing not just within traditional regions of Southeast Asia and the Middle East but being recruited from other international locations. Muriel Degauque, the Belgium woman whose suicide attack took place in Baqubah in November 2005, is one European whose conversion to Islam and dedication to al Qaeda was complete. Converts like Degauque present a rather sinister threat to the West in that a woman holding a European passport is unlikely to raise any suspicion should they travel randomly through Europe or North America.¹⁴² Al Qaeda no doubt is well aware of the freedom of movement recruits such as Degauque afford them. It is ironic consequently,

¹⁴⁰Rosemaire Skaine, *Female Suicide Bombers*, 23.

¹⁴¹Robert Pape, *Dying to Win*, 209.

¹⁴²Christopher Dickey, "Women of Al Qaeda" *Newsweek*, Vol 146, Iss 24, (December 12); [Journal on-line]; available from <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=938727041&Fmt=7&clientId=65345&RQT=309&VName=PQD> ; Internet; accessed 13 January 2008. 2.

that Degauque should actually have committed her suicide attack in Iraq. Complimenting al Qaeda's suicide recruiting outside Southeastern Asia and the Middle East is the al Qaeda 'Sisterhoods'¹⁴³ that are being established in Europe, with the UK and Germany being particularly active areas. The sisterhood, comprised of women who advocate Islamic extremist views, are not necessarily groups of women who are poised to committee suicide terrorism however are deemed for purposes of this paper to be players. They are organized groups who "function as operational facilitators, supporting their male relatives, and as ideological educators of their children."¹⁴⁴ Reference to the impact these women have on raising future generations is noteworthy. This theme has been apparent in each of the case studies examined and represents a significant commonality between each of the examined organizations.

The Internet is providing a venue from which al Qaeda and its various affiliates are able to reach and recruit women interested in participating in its jihad. Those who monitor jihad cyber activities note a surge in websites dedicated to *mujahidat* (female mujahideen).¹⁴⁵ Perhaps more concerning than the available internet training for al Qaeda's prospective female mujahideen is the reported establishment of secret training camps in Afghanistan where women sympathetic to al Qaeda's goals are being trained to fight. A spokeswoman reportedly in charge of training women in Afghanistan, who referred to herself as Umm Osama (mother of Osama¹⁴⁶) indicated that

¹⁴³Katharina Van Knop, "The Female Jihadd," 405.

¹⁴⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵Abdul Hameed Bakier, "Jihad Provide Internet Training for Female Mujahideen," *Terrorism Focus* Vol III, Issue 40 (October 17, 2006), [journal on-line]; available from <http://www.aina.org/news/20061018182137.htm> ; Internet; accessed 19 April 2008. 4.

although females are currently tasked with reconnaissance and gathering intelligence, providing logistical support and conveying messages between mujahideen leaders, they have received training on explosives and suicide operations which will be carried out in the future.¹⁴⁷

Further reports indicate that there is another group of women poised to act on behalf of al Qaeda and who are currently dispersed along the Pakistani/Afghan border.¹⁴⁸ These are women whose family ties with al Qaeda placed them on the run in late 2001 and early 2002 following the arrival of American forces in Afghanistan. Forced to learn to defend themselves and their families, these women have reportedly defended themselves against Afghan warlords and some Pakistani forces. They have maintained their family ties with jihadist organizations and are now apparently very well versed in the art of killing.¹⁴⁹ Reports of groups such as this, and that of Umm Osama, are particularly disconcerting for the Canadian Forces given its participation in military actions in Afghanistan even though to date, there have been no reports of al Qaeda or its affiliates employing female suicide bombers in Afghanistan. Notwithstanding, given the recent increase in the use of female suicide bombers in Iraq against US Forces, it is reasonable to suspect that similar attacks against US and coalition forces in Afghanistan by female terrorists may simply be a matter of time.

The three groups discussed in this chapter - the Palestinians, the Chechens and al Qaeda - have a proven track record in their respective employment of female suicide terrorists. While martyrdom is an important incentive presented to would-be female suicide bombers, it remains challenging to define a specific profile of these women.

¹⁴⁶Katharina Von Knop, "The Female Jihad," 404.

¹⁴⁷Abdul Hameed Bakier, "Jihad Provide Internet Training for Female Mujahideen," 5.

¹⁴⁸Christopher Dickey, "Women of al Qaeda," 5.

¹⁴⁹*Ibid.*

Some women appear to be players in that the messages they leave behind indicate they committed the act to further the cause of their respective organization, and that in committing the suicide act they achieve equality with their male counterparts. They enthusiastically become a predator. Others evoke pity in that it seems obvious that due to circumstances beyond their control, they succumb to committing the suicide mission so as to save their family honour. This last group of women are pawns who are sadly coerced into becoming predators in some cases by an ultraconservative, extreme religious society whose patriarchal structure manages to keep gender equality at bay.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS

Female suicide bombers are effective weapons platforms for the organizations that employ them. This paper has discussed that tactically, they represent a reliable source of force generation and whether a pawn or a player, these women will, and want, to participate in suicide terror. They are less likely to evoke suspicion and consequently are less likely to be viewed as a threat. Research has indicated that no one single profile exists regarding which women are more inclined to become predators. For as many women that have participated in this kind of terror attacks, there are as many individual stories behind them. What research has indicated however is that there are some common factors and influences that do play on the potential to become a female suicide bomber. Typically, the likely candidate is from an ultra conservative and traditional society. This was evidenced in the cases studies presented on both the women of the Tamil Eelam and those from extremist Islamic societies. On the matter of personal circumstances, some reports indicated that some women are coerced into becoming a suicide terrorist because they have shamed their families in some way, or for reasons such as rape or divorce, are considered unmarriageable. Consequently, their respective society has rendered them unable to perform the ultimate, most important womanly duty of becoming a mother, again, according to that society. These women represent the pawns of this paper. In other cases, women have taken up the cause of their respective organization. They have been completely inculcated in it, as depicted by most women of the Black Tigers. These women it seems willingly volunteer to perform suicide

terrorism. Palestinian women who actively seek out the opportunity to become suicide terrorists appear to do so with steely drive and determination. Common among the Black Tigress and some of the Palestinian women, is the determination that they are considered equals with their male counterparts: fighting and dying along side these men. This particular vein does not readily appeal amongst the motivational factors for the Black Widows of Chechnya nor the women jihad of al Qaeda. Research on these two groups is somewhat more limited than on the other two groups and as such, no conclusion of this nature was evident. With the exception of Chechnya where public support for suicide terrorism, let alone female suicide terrorism, is referred to as low, each of the other groups appears to receive active support from their respective societies for female suicide terrorism. Without this support, as Pape underlines, female suicide bombers would not likely exist.

As mentioned above, while research has not determined the definitive profile of a female suicide bomber, it strikes this author that there is a significant common thread that runs between the women in the groups that employ female suicide terrorism. That thread is the reverence for and value of becoming a mother. To be a good mother, responsible to raise, educate and produce fighters, is assessed constantly within these societies. If this is indeed that case, it stands to reason that mothers have significant influence over their children. If the women in these societies then can be influenced to turn the attention of the children away from the fighting and violence that is advocated by their societies, this may be an avenue to try to stem the future development of would be suicide bombers, male or female.

In order to further diminish the use of female suicide bombers, consideration must be given to improving the economic and social support networks available to some women who, perhaps as pawns, turn to the various terrorist organizations as a last resort. If governments and authority networks can positively impact on the availability of social support networks and offer some of these women an alternative to becoming involved with a terror organization, perhaps fewer would-be female suicide bombers would result.

Female suicide terrorism however is unlikely to disappear anytime soon given the considerable support that terror groups are able to sustain in the world's current climate. The media only serves to fuel this support in extremist circles where support to terror organizations is strongest. Empathy it seems, and even sympathy, is evoked for the women who perpetrate suicide bombing. Women in most of the world are considered givers of life not takers of it and so, the messaging that women are dying in support of the cause of their organization perpetuates public support since in using women as a 'last resort' organizers are able to indicate how dire their circumstances might be.

More specific to the Canadian Forces is the very real threat of female suicide bombers in Afghanistan. Indications are that al Qaeda and its affiliates have been training females for suicide missions in Afghanistan. This threat must be dealt with accordingly. Culturally and tactically, the Canadian Forces must be prepared to invoke, if not already doing so, measures that will heighten the awareness amongst its troops of the potential threat of female suicide bombers. Measures, such as being culturally sensitive so as to be able to provide female representatives who could conduct searches of local Afghan women, if necessary, is just one example of the tactical measures required in today's environment in Afghanistan.

Research regarding female suicide terrorism must continue. While women have committed only an estimated 15 percent of all modern suicide terror attack, they are committing them. Recent numbers in Iraq suggest that the employment of female suicide bombers by al Qaeda and its affiliates have risen dramatically in the past two years. Indications are that these numbers are likely to increase unless methods to deter them are discovered. Female suicide bombers must be studied. Efforts to develop an understanding for why women become pawns or players are critical to preventing even one more predator from accomplishing her mission.

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