The Terrorists Secret and Hidden Weapon

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Abstract

Since the immersion of female suicide bombers is still in its infancy, there are many questions asked about this new role played by women. Terrorists for decades have been men; even today when one hears the word terrorism, one presumes the person who launched the attack was a male. While many individuals can justify acts of aggression by men due to their innate nature and testosterone driven violence, individuals struggle with understanding why women become suicide bombers. The question mulled around in one's head is "how can women who are seen as the nurturing, compassionate, emotional sex, engage in acts of violence?" That question is the premise for this paper.

Introduction

Female suicide bombers have become a new-fangled phenomenon because of their covertness and defiance against the preconceived "role" of women. Moreover, their ability to hide bombs under the folds of their burqa and still enter public places without being identified as a threat makes them a "desired weapon" for male terrorist groups. This paper will challenge the domestic ideology of a woman with the depiction of females as suicide bombers. Additionally, this paper will also determine if female bombers are threatening the patriarchy as they step into a "masculine" role, or if they are the victims of foul-play.

Thesis: This research paper will aspire to answer the following question in hopes of finding new ways to counter terrorism: Are Muslim women and girls recruited to become suicide bombers against their own wills or do they enlist on their own terms?

As a Criminal Justice student, I have taken a few classes in terrorism. One of my classes, had a mandatory hour video that briefly examined the oppression of Muslim women. This video showed Muslim women being beaten on the streets or arrested if their jilbaab was too short. Women's dress code in Muslim countries is determined by the male leaders; women must follow this dress-code or risk punishment and possible imprisonment. When I learned about women becoming suicide bombers, I began questioning whether they were forced into this role by the males in their community or did they volunteer because of their own resolve. Does oppression play a part in female radicalization? Over the past seven weeks I have been battling with this question and decided to devote my research paper to answering it.

Definitions

Image of a Woman: "symbolic nurturer, healer, and spiritual mother of the nation." 1

Oppression: "prolonged cruel or unjust treatment or control." Many women in patriarchal families are subjected to oppression, ultimately limiting their freedom.

Patriarchy: "social organization marked by the supremacy of the father in the clan or family, the legal dependence of wives and children, and the reckoning of descent and inheritance in the male line" (Merriam Webster, 2022).

Terrorism: "a deliberate instrument employed for political goals by intentional actors." 3

Suicide bomber: "a person who commits suicide by exploding a bomb in order to kill other people." One of the peer-reviewed journals went on to say that in suicide bombing "A subject declares 'my life is not worth living, but in my death, I will produce a myth that is worth dying for."

¹ Dorit Naaman, "Brides of Palestine/Angles of Death: Media, Gender, and Performance in the Case of the Palestinian Female Suicide Bombers." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. (2007): 936. https://web-s-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=0&sid=5eb9a46f-6fc7-467a-9bb2-00dd221d1dd5%40redis

² Merriam Webster, (2022). https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/patriarchy

³ John Sawicki, "A Tragic End: Why Terrorists Use Female and Child Suicide Bombers." ProQuest. (2016): 38 https://www.proquest.com/docview/1804471237?accountid=12085&parentSessionId=DuGbU7GFfBQVxfdhmDkRyfm2Ch%2Fx%2B27tRVZRsx9Afcs%3D

⁴ Merriam Webster, (2022). https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/patriarchy

⁵ Dorit Naaman, "Brides of Palestine/Angles of Death: Media, Gender, and Performance in the Case of the Palestinian Female Suicide Bombers." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society.* (2007): 936. https://web-s-palestinian Female Suicide Bombers." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society.* (2007): 936. https://web-s-palestinian Female Suicide Bombers." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society.* (2007): 936. https://web-s-palestinian Female Suicide Bombers."

Literature Review

The purpose of this paper is to ascertain why females become suicide bombers. In her book, *The* Smart Bomb: Women and Children as Suicide Bombers, Anat Berko (2016) evaluates the various environmental factors that contribute to female radicalization. Additionally, Berko's book questions whether "a woman who carried out a suicide bombing attack [is] a smart bomb or a stupid bomb?"⁶ While Berko focuses on the ideology that female suicide bombers were victimized before they decided or were forced to become a bomber, other authors take an opposing view. For example, in John Sawicki's article (2016), A Tragic Trend: Why Terrorists Use Female and Child Suicide Bombers, he presents the ideology that women become suicide bombers to protect their village/country, to aid their family financially, for fame, etc.... Rather than being coerced to offer their body as a weapon, Sawicki introduces the theory that that women readily detonate bombs and "blow up" their own bodies for the "cause" of the terrorist group they are affiliated with. Additionally, Sawicki demonstrates that radical female jihadists take part in recruiting females to become suicide bombers. The methods by which they recruit these females are heinous and disturbing. These women recruiters defy the characteristics of a stereotypical woman (nurturing, compassionate, sympathetic, etc....) and rather seem to take pleasure in harming fellow members of their sex.

Data

Previous Roles of Women

For centuries, women have been viewed as "fragile, vulnerable, and in need of male defense." Additionally, women have been "confined to family and domestic chores" and in Islamic nations are expected to stay home and take care of their husbands while also "raising the next generation of jihadi militants." Although some women have been involved in militant activity, they only played a support role away from the battle field.

Female Suicide Bombers

One of the first female suicide bombers was Sana'a Mehaydali who "blew herself up" in 1985 in the vicinity of an Israeli convoy. Her death popularized the use of female suicide bombers and within

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⁶ Anat Berko, "The Smarter Bomb: Women and Children as Suicide Bombers." *ProQuest*. (2016): ix https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/reader.action?docID=4717574&ppg=43

⁷ Dorit Naaman, "Brides of Palestine/Angles of Death: Media, Gender, and Performance in the Case of the Palestinian Female Suicide Bombers." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. (2007): 934. https://web-s-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=0&sid=5eb9a46f-6fc7-467a-9bb2-00dd221d1dd5%40redis

⁸ The Economic Times, ISIS Using Women as Suicide Bombers is 'Drastic' U-Turn: Report. (2016): 2 https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/isis-using-women-as-suicide-bombers-in-drastic-u-turn-report/articleshow/55411503.cms

⁹ Mia Bloom, "Female Suicide Bomber: A Global Trend." American Academy of Arts and Science. (2007) https://www.amacad.org/publication/female-suicide-bombers-global-trend

the next twenty years over 220 women suicide bombers were employed in terrorist attacks. ¹⁰ Additionally, other countries began adopting the use of female bombers. Al-Qaeda, al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and HAMA – these are the four terrorist groups that have weaponized women in the Middle East. ¹¹

Why are Females an Asset to Terrorism?

Unlike their male counterparts, females wired with explosives are "able to approach a target more easily, evade scrutiny, and in general, catch the target with their guard down." Moreover, females "blend in" with their surroundings because of the stereotype that women are fragile and in need of protection. Additionally, females pass through security checks with ease and arouse very little suspicion. Furthermore, it is considered improper to search females; therefore, they can easily hide weapons under their loose fit clothing i.e., burka, jilbaab, abaya, chador, etc...... Female suicide bombers who do not hide bombs underneath traditional dress, will conceal bombs in the "intimate parts of [their] body" which could potentially increase the possibility of bombs making it through a checkpoint. To

While females are an asset to terrorists because of their covertness, they also increase terrorists' media coverage and infringe on counter-terrorism measures. For example, the deployment of female bombers "poses a challenge for security organizations which already have difficulty penetrating extremist networks and identifying potential attackers." As security forces become paranoid, they may wrongfully shoot an innocent female, suspecting them of carrying a bomb. Terrorists play the media (with this story) and make the government look like it is intentionally killing "unarmed women". Moreover, female bombers make it harder for security forces to stop/kill them. With every female suicide bomber comes utter "shock" from the public; terrorist organizations thrive on this shock value.

¹⁰ Ibid, (2007)

¹¹ Tosin Osasona, "Victims or Vanguards of Terror: Use of Girls as Suicide Bombers by Boko Haram. *Taylor & Francis Online*. (2022) https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23311886.2022.2028956

¹² John Sawicki, "A Tragic End: Why Terrorists Use Female and Child Suicide Bombers." ProQuest. (2016): 38 https://www.proquest.com/docview/1804471237?accountid=12085&parentSessionId=DuGbU7GFfBQVxfdhmDkRyfm2Ch%2Fx%2B27tRVZRsx9Afcs%3D

¹³ Anat Berko, "The Smarter Bomb: Women and Children as Suicide Bombers." *ProQuest.* (2016): ix https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/reader.action?docID=4717574&ppg=43

¹⁴ Tosin Osasona, "Victims or Vanguards of Terror: Use of Girls as Suicide Bombers by Boko Haram. *Taylor & Francis Online*. (2022) https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23311886.2022.2028956

¹⁵ Mia Bloom, "Female Suicide Bomber: A Global Trend." American Academy of Arts and Science. (2007) https://www.amacad.org/publication/female-suicide-bombers-global-trend

¹⁶ The Economic Times, ISIS Using Women as Suicide Bombers is 'Drastic' U-Turn: Report. (2016): 1 https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/isis-using-women-as-suicide-bombers-in-drastic-u-turn-report/articleshow/55411503.cms

¹⁷ John Sawicki, "A Tragic End: Why Terrorists Use Female and Child Suicide Bombers." ProQuest. (2016): 38 https://www.proquest.com/docview/1804471237?accountid=12085&parentSessionId=DuGbU7GFfBQVxfdhmDkRyfm2Ch%2Fx%2B27tRVZRsx9Afcs%3D

¹⁸ Ibid, (2016), 40

¹⁹ Ibid, (2016)

²⁰ Ibid, (2016)

Willingly or Un-Willingly

Females suicide bombers who volunteer "their bodies as human detonators for the explosive material strapped around their waists" usually enlist for the following four reasons: (1.) to protect their village/country, (2.) as an emblem of their dedication to a cause, (3.) to provide monetarily and societally for their families, and (4.) in some cases for fame. Although some female bombers do volunteer to kill themselves, many females are forced into this role. Violence, abduction, rape, exploitation, hypnosis, and drugging – these are several methods used to conscript female bombers.

Shockingly, it has been determined that female suicide bombers have carried out suicide bombings past their first trimester of pregnancy.²⁴ Several of these women's bombings were unsuccessful and their babies were saved and carried to full-term.²⁵ Female suicide bombers, whose bombings were unsuccessful, have been interviewed in prison; some of these women seem depressed and grieved that they were unable to blow themselves into oblivion while others are thankful their bombings were unsuccessful.²⁶ Yet, the pregnant mothers who attempted suicide bombing seem to have little remorse about almost claiming the life of their baby.²⁷ One thing several of these women have in common is their gratefulness for being imprisoned.²⁸ A sentence in prison is a span of time where these women will be protected from violence, rape, and oppression.²⁹ Many female security prisoners will rebel against the customs of their family (while in prison) and go without a hijab, wear make-up, and wear clothes that would be considered immodest by their families, i.e., jeans, crop-tops, etc....³⁰

The promises of Paradise (Muslims' life after death) compel suicide bombers to end their life, so that they can fast-track into a better life.³¹ While male suicide bombers are promised seventy-two virgins, female suicide bombers are not promised seventy-two males.³² So, what promise does Paradise offer for women? According to the Islamic faith, women will be virgins again and get to choose the man of their "dreams" to marry.³³ Muslim women are grateful that they do not have to remain married to their same husbands from earth (especially if their earthly husbands were violent).³⁴ Martyrs will enter Paradise faster than other Muslims which is their incentive.³⁵

²¹ Mia Bloom, "Female Suicide Bomber: A Global Trend." American Academy of Arts and Science. (2007): para, 3 https://www.amacad.org/publication/female-suicide-bombers-global-trend

²² John Sawicki, "A Tragic End: Why Terrorists Use Female and Child Suicide Bombers." ProQuest. (2016): 38 https://www.proquest.com/docview/1804471237?accountid=12085&parentSessionId=DuGbU7GFfBQVxfdhmDkR vfm2Ch%2Fx%2B27tRVZRsx9Afcs%3D

²³ Ibid, (2016)

²⁴ Anat Berko, "The Smarter Bomb: Women and Children as Suicide Bombers." *ProQuest.* (2016): ix https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/reader.action?docID=4717574&ppg=43

²⁵ Ibid, (2016)

²⁶ Ibid, (2016)

²⁷ Ibid, (2016)

²⁸ Ibid. (2016)

²⁹ Ibid, (2016)

³⁰ Ibid, (2016)

³¹ Ibid, (2016)

³² Ibid, (2016)

³³ Ibid, (2016)

³⁴ Ibid, (2016)

³⁵ Ibid, (2016)

Analysis

Oppression till Submission

Rape

Rape is one of the most disturbing methods used to recruit females as suicide bombers.³⁶ Since rape is psychologically and socially damaging, terrorists employ this torture to compel females that "deaths in so-called martyrdom operations are the only way to re-establish their honor."³⁷ While one may presume that men are responsible for coordinating the rapes of these woman, it has been proven that jihadist women have been contributors to these acts of violence. For example, jihadist women have been known to coordinate rapes, so that the victim will be forced to become a suicide bomber in order to restore honor to their family.³⁸ In 2009, Samira Ahmed Jassim was arrested for coordinating 80 rapes and sending "28 women to their deaths" (as suicide bombers).³⁹ Another jihadist woman, about fifty-five years old, "recruited eighty female suicide bombers, some of whom had been raped to ensure they carried out their attacks. The recruitment process was carried out in the woman's own house from among the friends who came to visit her daughters."⁴⁰

Abduction

Additionally, abduction is also used to force females to become human bombs. In the spring of 2014, 250 female students were abducted from their school by a terrorist group (Boko Haram) for "operational" purposes. While some females are abducted, others are donated by their parents "as a form of support for the group." Those who do not comply with their captors' orders have been drugged and hypnotized into submission 43

Woman or Girl

When one thinks of female suicide bombers, they wrongly presume that the bomber was an adult clad in traditional dress. While female bombers have been adults, that is not always the case. Terrorists have been known to employ pre-adolescent girls as human bombs.⁴⁴ Some of these girls have been as young as seven.⁴⁵ Security officers are often un-prepared for these bombings as young girls do not arouse suspicion and are not deemed as a threat. Many officers present at pre-adolescent suicide bombings "thought [the little girl] was looking for her mother."⁴⁶ Promises of an "afterlife" with no poverty have been one of the methods used to recruit children as bombers.⁴⁷ In addition to promises that the "afterlife" will be better than the life the girls live in, abduction,

³⁶ John Sawicki, "A Tragic End: Why Terrorists Use Female and Child Suicide Bombers." ProQuest. (2016): 38 https://www.proquest.com/docview/1804471237?accountid=12085&parentSessionId=DuGbU7GFfBQVxfdhmDkRyfm2Ch%2Fx%2B27tRVZRsx9Afcs%3D

³⁷ Ibid, (2016), 41

³⁸ Ibid, (2016)

³⁹ Ibid, (2016), 41

⁴⁰ Anat Berko, "The Smarter Bomb: Women and Children as Suicide Bombers." *ProQuest.* (2016): 41 https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/reader.action?docID=4717574&ppg=43

⁴¹Tosin Osasona, "Victims or Vanguards of Terror: Use of Girls as Suicide Bombers by Boko Haram. *Taylor & Francis Online*. (2022): 12 https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23311886.2022.2028956

⁴² Ibid, (2022), 12

⁴³ Ibid, (2022)

⁴⁴ Ibid, (2022)

⁴⁵ Ibid, (2022)

⁴⁶ Ibid, (2022), 13

⁴⁷ Ibid, (2022)

exploitation, and violence are also used to recruit and force young girls into terrorist activity.⁴⁸ Similar to women, young girls are able to access their target more easily than men without arousing suspicion and threatening the operation (Sawicki, 2016).

Escape by Death

Reasons Behind Volunteering

Oppression, family violence, death of a spouse, divorce, and shame – these are contributors to Muslim females voluntarily becoming a human bomb. For example, women who are divorced by their husbands are shamed and carry stigma and "dishonor" to their family. Muslim women at times are divorced by their husbands because they did not make the right sounds during sex and in turn displeased their husbands. Women in patriarchal societies are controlled down to the intimacy of marriage – how they must sound and perform during sex. Men must feel at all times that they are superior and alluring. One female who had an un-successful suicide bombing, went on to say it is "better for a woman to die doing what she thought was right, even in a suicide bombing attack, than to live a life of oppression and humiliation." It is important to note that in Palestinian Arab society, "free will and free choice" are concepts unfamiliar to these women. 55

Are They Really That Tough?

Female suicide bombers who volunteer for the job have been known to have a tougher facade and more of a "macho – tough guy" personality than those who were forced into the job. These women rarely talk about children and family because this topic aggravates them. This aggravation appears to stem from guilt. When Muslim women, "whose biological clocks are ticking, kill women and children, they seem to feel that if they can't have children, then no one else should, either." Confusingly, female suicide bombers have been known to say, "The parents of those who die aren't in pain. They are in great pain!" Rather than sounding remorseful, the female bomber who said this, seemed to take consolation and draw strength from knowing that she inflicted great pain. Do female suicide bombers feel empowered by inflicting pain on others? Does pent up anger released in the form of bombings coupled with watching others being victimized act as a salve to a bombers own "inward" wounds? These questions need to be answered, so that one can gain a deeper understanding of the mindset behind suicide bombers, construct a clearer picture, and formulate plans on how to counter their attacks.

⁴⁸ John Sawicki, "A Tragic End: Why Terrorists Use Female and Child Suicide Bombers." *ProQuest.* (2016): 38 https://www.proquest.com/docview/1804471237?accountid=12085&parentSessionId=DuGbU7GFfBQVxfdhmDkR yfm2Ch%2Fx%2B27tRVZRsx9Afcs%3D

⁴⁹ Anat Berko, "The Smarter Bomb: Women and Children as Suicide Bombers." *ProQuest.* (2016): 41 https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/reader.action?docID=4717574&ppg=43

⁵⁰ Ibid, (2016)

⁵¹ Ibid, (2016)

⁵² Ibid, (2016)

⁵³ Ibid, (2016)

⁵⁴ Ibid, (2016), 26

⁵⁵ Ibid, (2016), 26

⁵⁶ Ibid, (2016)

⁵⁷ Ibid, (2016), 22

⁵⁸ Ibid, (2016), 22

Countering Female Suicide Bombers

Knowing what causes females to become suicide bombers is vital to countering terrorism. Since violence and oppression have been known to recruit and radicalize Muslim women, counterterrorism methods need to be focused on educating these women, preventing them from being harmed, and enabling them with the tools necessary to stand up against their recruiters. Because Muslim women have limited religious knowledge, "clerics should be involved in providing counter narratives to rebut the propaganda that helps to recruit women as suicide bombers." In addition to providing these women with religious teachings (to rebuttal terrorist recruitment propaganda), new security methods need to be implemented. For example, more females at security checkpoints would enable a more thorough examination of Muslims dressed in burqas and other religious dress. While an increase in female officers at checkpoints is encouraged, there have been requests to ban loose fitted Muslim dress in "public places". Private screening rooms for Muslim women in burqas could also be employed and searches could be conducted by female officers. Moreover, high-tech metal detectors (similar to the ones at airports) could be used at checkpoints.

Findings

Females who were seen for centuries as domestic and fragile are domestic no longer. They have moved away from the sidelines of the battlefield to the forefront. These females have started strapping on bombs with detonator in hand, ready to blow themselves up when given the "go ahead." Why do they agree to become human bombs? Some of these women are trying to forge a better life for their families, escape oppression, or retaliate against those who wronged them, while others are raped, abducted, and drugged until they agree to become a human bomb. More research needs to be done before one can determine which is more prevalent in recruiting females to become suicide bombers – violence or personal conviction. Since female suicide bombing is still in its infancy, data remains inconclusive and will remain that way until there are statistics and numerical data. However, one thing is clear, female suicide bombers realize that blowing themselves up will release them from the brutality of this world and provide them with an expedient journey to "Paradise."

I would like to end my paper with this profound quote by Mia Bloom (2007), "The advent of women suicide bombers has thus transformed the revolutionary womb into an exploding one." 63

⁵⁹ Saba, Noor, "Women suicide bombers: An emerging security challenge for Pakistan." *JSTOR* (2011): 4 https://www.jstor.org/stable/26351018?seq=3#metadata_info_tab_contents

⁶⁰ Ibid, (2011)

⁶¹ Ibid, (2011)

 ⁶² Tosin Osasona, "Victims or Vanguards of Terror: Use of Girls as Suicide Bombers by Boko Haram. *Taylor & Francis Online*. (2022): 15 https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23311886.2022.2028956
⁶³ Mia Bloom, "Female Suicide Bomber: A Global Trend." American Academy of Arts and Science. (2007): para, 4 https://www.amacad.org/publication/female-suicide-bombers-global-trend

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