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“We are proud that our women, young and old, [fight] side by side with men... Women who are capable of fighting take military training, which is a major prerequisite for the defense of Islam and the Islamic state... They have bravely discarded the superstitions created by enemies of Islam and by the inadequate knowledge of friends of Islamic tenets.”<sup>1</sup>

Ayatollah Khomeini

## Introduction

Conflict regions must be uniquely viewed through independent prisms of circumstance. The last twenty years have marked an extreme escalation in the use of women as fighters and martyrs in an expanding global Jihadist movement. With few common denominators beyond religious affiliation, women in Afghanistan, Chechnya, Palestine, Iraq and recently Jordan have joined terrorist organizations in armed struggle, including as operatives of suicide bombings. While the first paper in this series focused strictly on a practical evaluation of suicide bomb techniques and tactics with a preliminary discussion of female suicide bombers, paper two expands the discussion into the following areas:

- Practical and Theological Themes
- Historical and Ideological Framework
- Training Programs
- Tactical Implementations
- Regional Analysis
- Critical Analysis

While the information in this document constitutes a comprehensive review, it is not intended to be a complete framework of data on the subject and should be used in coordination with current, region specific intelligence and trend reports to gauge a sensible threat assessment.

## Islamic Female Warriors – The Inauguration

On April 9, 1985 17 year old Sana Mahaydali, a member of the Syrian Socialist National Party (SSNP) detonated an explosive laden vehicle next to an Israeli patrol in her native Lebanon killing two soldiers and wounding two more.<sup>ii</sup> The age of the female suicide bomber had begun.<sup>iii</sup>

From 1985 through 2006, 225 women ended their own lives in suicide and martyrdom operations on behalf of a wide range of terrorist organizations in support of spiritual, tribal and political causes.<sup>iv</sup>

In the beginning female suicide attacks were a staple of secular terrorist institutions. From the SSNP<sup>1</sup> the tactic was spread to the Kurdish Workers Party and then to the Tamil Tigers. The leap into avowedly Islamic groups took nearly 20 years.<sup>v</sup>

Sana Mahaydali; The first female suicide bomber



Suicide Bomber Wafa Idris



On January 27, 2002, Wafa Idris, a 27 year old<sup>2</sup>, divorced Red Crescent paramedic from the al-Amari Refugee Camp near Ramallah detonated a 22 pound<sup>vi</sup> bomb hidden in her back pack<sup>vii</sup>, killing an 81 year old Israeli man and wounding 150 in central Jerusalem.<sup>viii</sup> This action lifted the veil covering Jihadist women and their participation in martyrdom operations. After her death, dozens of women rushed to sign up for military operations and terrorist acts. Until this point women had been relegated to roles of support and planning but now were given the opportunity to become the equals of men in Jihad. This critical turning point provided Islamic terrorist groups with a deadly new weapon while providing Islamic women with a rare taste of gender equality within this Jihadist military campaign.<sup>ix</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Syrian Socialist National Party (*Parti Populaire Syrien*) is a nationalist political party in Syria and Lebanon advocating the establishment of a Greater Syrian national state to include present Syria, Lebanon, the Hatay Province of Turkey, Israel, the Palestinian territories, the Sinai Peninsula of Egypt, Cyprus, Jordan, Iraq, and Kuwait.

<sup>2</sup> Some reports list Wafa Idris' age as 28.



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## **Motivations**

The traditional role of women, Islamic and otherwise, has been that of nurturer, educator and protector. Being a fighter runs counter to the entire model of femininity and motherhood. In general terms, the roles of women in Jihad have included the following duties:

- Supporting male fighters in the battlefield;
- Providing food and water to the Mujahideen;
- Providing weapons and ammunition;
- Guard duty and protection
- Raising Mujahid children.<sup>x</sup>

## Historical Model

Women have played a powerful role in Jihad since the founding days of Islam. The Prophet's wife Ayesha led the Battle of the Camel in opposition to the Caliphate of Ali, and Muhammed's granddaughter Zaynab fought in the Battle of Karbala which defined the moment the Sunni tradition grounded itself in control of the Islamic movement over the Shia.

Islamic scholar Katharina Von Knop explains, "The involvement of the early Arab women in Jihad is celebrated today throughout the Muslim world and they serve as icons and a precedent for the contemporary Muslim women who choose suicide operations, who have lost a family member in Jihad, or who support the ideology."<sup>xi</sup>

## Practical Motivations

An interesting catch-22 exists in the Jihadist world. Women are expected to encourage their husband to fight and die in the name of Allah, as there is no higher or more glorious display of dedication to the faith than by becoming a Shahid.<sup>3</sup> Beyond this encouragement, Jihadi women are required to foster the same qualities in their children, so they will make the right decisions and follow the path towards their own martyrdom. However, once the husband has followed his faith into the afterlife, the woman becomes dependant on the community and more specifically his family. In traditional

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<sup>3</sup> Shahid refers to a martyr and has even been adopted by some Muslims in the title of their names to bring attention to their sacrifice.

communities a woman without a husband becomes a drain on society without a source of financial support. Since men obviously make up the majority of casualties from counter terrorism operations, failed missions and successful suicide attacks, a pervading sense of loss and desire for vengeance is a strong motivating factor in women taking up arms or explosive belts. The Islamic and Jihadist culture is tailor made for the recruitment of female volunteers, like the Black Widows in Chechnya who fight to avenge the death of loved ones. Additionally, as men are captured and killed and intelligence operations focus on male members of an organization, Jihadist movements may require an infusion of manpower to continue operations. Women now actively answer this call to duty. While women often make the decision to become martyrs independently, other times they may be pawns following the instructions of dominant and radical male figures.

#### The “Bonds” of Marriage



Failed suicide bomber Sajida  
Mubarak Atrous al-Rishawi

On November 9, 2005 a team of suicide bombers including Sajida Mubarak Atrous al-Rishawi attacked three hotels in Amman, Jordan killing 57 people. Unlike her husband, Sajida survived the attack as her belt, packed with 15 pounds of RDX and loaded with ball bearings failed to detonate.<sup>xii</sup> She was arrested 4 days later and subsequently interviewed on Jordanian TV. While acknowledging her participations in the bombings, her testimony clearly demonstrates a lack complicity in planning the attacks and she was simply following the orders of her husband.

*"On November 5, I accompanied my husband to Jordan with a forged Iraqi passport, under the name of Ali Hussein Ali and Sajida Abdel Qader Latif. We waited and a white car arrived with a driver and a passenger. We rode with them and entered Jordan (from Iraq). My husband arranged our trip from there, I don't know.*

*In Jordan, we rented an apartment. He had two explosive belts. He put one on me and wore the other. He taught me how to use it, how to pull the [primer cord] and operate it.*

*He said it was to attack hotels in Jordan. We rented a car and entered the hotel on November 9. My husband and I went inside the hotel, he went to one corner and I went to another.*



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*"There was a wedding with children, women and men inside. My husband detonated [his bomb], I tried to explode [my belt] but it wouldn't. People fled and I ran with them." <sup>xiii</sup>*

Because there has been no direct access granted by the international media or advocacy groups, no additional information is available on her personal motivations for the involvement in these bombings.

### Cultural Outcasts

Woman unable to bear children such as Wafa Idris<sup>xiv</sup> and women accused of having relationships<sup>4</sup> outside of marriage are considered untouchable in many Islamic communities. The Islamic world is governed by a strict set of religious and cultural standards. A breach of these rules easily results in shame of one's family and potential ostracization by the community if not violent repercussions. Consequently, 'marked' women represent a prominent potential for recruitment in an effort to redeem their name within the community, especially if they have (male) children who need to be cared for in the future.

While not Islamic, the social and cultural norms among the Tamils draw interesting parallels.

*"In Sri Lanka, terrorism is often seen as a viable option for Tamil women who are survivors of sexual violence. Following a rape, Tamil women are considered 'damaged goods' and social customs prevent them from getting married or bearing children. The shame brought on by sexual violation is thus magnified by the humiliation of not being able to fulfil [sic] childbearing duties. Their participation compensates for their inability to give birth to future generations, and restores their personal and familial dignity."<sup>xv</sup>*

While the western security community and academia tend to categorize the motivation of female suicide bombers through justifications of abuse and cultural coercion, a new trend is emerging from within the Feminist voice of the Jihadi community; the pursuit towards equality.

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<sup>4</sup> These 'relationships' also include rape. The woman is still responsible for accepting the shame of this act even if her family believes her account of the attack.



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## Equality

In the male dominated Muslim world, the acceptable role of women in society has been clearly defined. Despite a history of being relegated to positions of servitude within the family and community, women are developing a new voice by participating in martyrdom operations. Feminism is growing throughout the Muslim world and while it represents a positive intention to influence the role of women in Islamic society and their treatment within the 'realized' role of Islam, this movement also represents a dangerous undercurrent to support violent engagements.

The first International Congress on Islamic Feminism in 2005 fuelled a new identity for this movement, "Gender Jihad." The use of 'Jihad' refers to "a struggle that taps Islamic theology, thinking and history to reclaim rights granted to women by Islam at its birth but erased by manmade rules and tribal traditions masquerading as divine law."<sup>xvi</sup> Muslim women are rejecting chauvinistic interpretations of Islamic teachings but this movement is not only reflective on the movements towards equality. This movement does not preclude women from choosing to be involved in Jihadist activities. In fact, it could underpin an independent tradition of Jihadi women's groups making them susceptible to recruitment and independent action. This discussion will be expanded and linked in more depth within the critical analysis.

## **Western Women in Jihad**

Western women who convert to Islam and subsequently radicalized are being incorporated as part of the Jihadist arsenal of human martyrs. These women turn to radical Islam for a number of reasons. Some are disillusioned by western society while others have issues with mental illness. Some simply convert looking for answers and are taken advantage of by the dominant male community. Many convert for love in order to marry Muslim men and then face radical indoctrination by their husbands. Regardless of the underlying reason, radicalized women from Western countries represent a substantial paradigm shift in tactical demographics and require unique profiling.

French antiterrorism officials have been monitoring this scenario for years and have declared on numerous occasions that female converts represent a small but increasingly important part of the terrorist threat in Europe.<sup>xvii</sup> “European women who marry Muslim men are now the largest source of religious conversions in Europe.”<sup>xviii</sup>

Belgian National Muriel Degaque



On the same day as the Amman Hotel Bombings (November 9, 2005) Muriel Degaque was killed and one American soldier was wounded after she detonated an explosive vest in Baghdad, becoming the first Western female suicide bomber.<sup>xix</sup> Originally from the Belgian town of Charleroi, Muriel was raised Roman Catholic and converted to Islam.<sup>xx</sup> Her Moroccan husband was known by Belgian authorities to be a radical Islamist. While it is unclear whether her actions reflect abuse, undiagnosed mental disorder(s) or simply a personal transformation into a Jihadist ideologue, she traveled with her husband to Morocco where she learned Arabic and studied Koran before joining the Jihad in Iraq.<sup>xxi</sup> This specific case is also

clouded by the deficiency of available prime facie evidence documenting her transition into the Islamic world and her involvement in the bombing in Iraq.

Nevertheless, use of western women by insurgent elements represents the potential escalation of diversified tactics. Providence may be the only reason Degaque sacrificed herself in Baghdad opposed to London, Paris or New York. A white female with Jihadist intentions carrying an EU passport represents a multi-tiered security threat; mobility and access to any European country while representing an almost non-existent demographic in profiles utilized at airports or border crossing.<sup>xxii</sup>

With this cultural and ideological framework, the focus will now shift to a practical analysis of the Jihadi training of women.

### **Tactical Training**

Women are trained to become martyrs in a combination of military and paramilitary training camps in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan and the Palestinian territories. These camps are supported by various, Jihadi web sites, corroborating training manuals and ideological literature. It appears training can be tracked into two different routes; first geared towards female militants and second by those identified to be martyrs from the onset of



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their involvement with a terrorist group. While women destined to become martyrs through a suicide operation are instructed in detonation methods and how to escape detection by security forces, female militants are sent through fairly rigorous training camps as an investment into their longer term utility by the group. In Pakistan, the Islamic terrorist group Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT) infamously utilizes female operatives.

Lashkar-e-Toiba operates a full-fledged training camp dedicated to female militants. Its' course "Daura-e-Sofa," patrons an exclusively women's brigade.<sup>xxiii</sup> The trainee militants, drawn from Madrassas in the PoK and Kashmir valley are housed together in a two storied building situated on the camp's premises 6 km from Muridke on GT Road between Lahore and Rawalpindi. Recruits are subjected to an intense 21-day training regime which includes guerilla warfare, arms and ammunition training, physical fitness activities and Jihadi discourse. Beyond the quantitative expansion of an enhanced corporeal fighting force, the Lashkar program institutionalizes new security paradigms for both multi-national security forces and the counter-intelligence community.<sup>xxiv</sup> Western (American and British) security protocols are far less likely to target women as threats. Consequently, terrorist groups are recruiting and training an expanded force to exploit these operational weaknesses founded on a lack of ideological and cultural understanding of new trends within the Islamic world. The physical insurgent force from the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003 is being empowered by its psychological training.

Jihadi psychological training serves to justify and praise the act of killing oneself and others so it can be conducted free of self-doubt as a true act of martyrdom. When recruited, a potential 'martyr' believes she has been awarded the greatest honor and privilege bestowed upon a devout Muslim. The critical factor in this specific design of psychological indoctrination is that these women may truly view themselves as defenders of the faith. As the products of Jihadist society, they believe this violent act is neither an act of suicide or homicide but one to protect cherished values by eliminating the 'evil' within their community.<sup>xxv</sup> "Islamic notions of 'martyrdom', 'Jihad', 'infidels', and heavenly compensation for all Muslims are important factors when an individual commits to denying life and killing military personnel or innocent civilians as has been the recent trend in the escalating number of suicide bombings in Iraq. In basic terms, the enemy is demonized and deprived of his human value."<sup>xxvi</sup> This true and in their interpretation, rational dedication to faith underpins the violent action. "The violent act itself then is removed from any negative meaning or connotation and becomes a righteous deed, purifying the soul."<sup>xxvii</sup>





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## Online Training

The security community is familiar with the Muslim Brotherhood, founded by Hassan al-Banna in Egypt in 1928 which eventually cultivated various terrorist organizations, including the PLO and Hamas. Likewise, women who share in the ideologies of a return to an extremist interpretation of Islam, the global Salafi Jihad and an Islamic state of Palestine organized into cooperative sisterhoods. These sisterhoods have become global and share similar beliefs intertwined with a global community of multiple nationalities. Members of sisterhoods gather locally and online in chat rooms and other platforms on the internet. These sites have become a meeting place for women to become involved in the global Jihad on a multitude of levels.

In the popular chat room hosted by the Turkish website ‘mucadele’ (<http://www.mucadele.com.tr/>) Sonja B. a German national was arrested after asking if her actions would be justified if she carried out an attack in Iraq with her baby. In this single chat room, local authorities documented 47 women expressing an interest in participating in terrorist plots. All of these women were European with two-thirds coming from Germany and the remaining from Denmark and Belgium. Muriel Degauque was also active in this chat room.<sup>xxviii</sup> This chat room is far from unique. Dozens of similar sites exist in Arabic, English, French, German and Pashto and the network is expanding.<sup>xxix</sup> In addition to chat rooms, numerous Islamic (extremist) websites have been created instructing women to participate in not just Jihad but also violent action in support of Jihad.

Even Al Qaeda has launched al-Khansa magazine, a Jihadist publication exclusively targeting women. Written from a female perspective, al-Khansa publishes articles with advice on how to bring up children in the path of Jihad, provide first aid to mujahideen, and models of physical training needed to prepare themselves for fighting. Al-Khansa also appears to be linked to, Sawt al-Jihad (Voice of Jihad), one of the most well-known Jihadist outlets on the internet.<sup>xxx</sup>

## **Tactical Advantages of Female Attackers**

Female suicide or martyrdom attacks have provided terrorist groups with a tactical advantage over traditional security forces in three ways. First, they constitute a ‘stealthier attack’ than male militants. Second, they provide a quantitative advantage by expanding the potential pool of attackers. Third, they create a media spectacle drawing international



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attention to the cause while delivering a psychological impact to security forces deployed in conflict regions such as Afghanistan and Iraq.<sup>xxxii</sup>

## **Tactics**

### Pregnancy

The goal of any suicide bomber is to get as close as possible to the target without being recognized as a threat. Consequently, Islamic women have utilized pregnancy to conceal suicide belts and vests beneath traditional hijab. They would appear to have a similar appearance to that of a near full-term pregnancy. Women are trained to play the part; seeming tired, uncomfortable or out of breath. This camouflage would be difficult if not impossible to detect from an external viewpoint, yet indicators do exist. First, the woman will appear to be carrying her pregnancy higher on the chest than a normal near term pregnancy. Second, security personnel should be critical of any attempt to be drawn closer to any Muslim woman, even if she is pregnant and requesting assistance. In traditional tribal regions, a local woman would never ask for assistance from an outsider, let alone a western male who is not a member of her immediate family. This however may not be the case in more urban and culturally integrated cities such as Baghdad but would still represent a clear danger if she was immediately requesting assistance in English drawing clear attention.

### Disguise as a Man

While pregnancy would be utilized to attract a sympathetic response, a strategic target may be a location where the presence of a woman would be noticed as unusual, such as a military installation or local police station requiring the appearance of a man. Women dressed as men may seem uncomfortable in baggy clothing and continue avoiding eye contact with men. A lack of eye contact in this scenario betrays a cultural norm of a woman's place amongst men, not so easily erased from a woman's psyche. Traditional signs of suicide bombers wearing unseasonably warm or baggy clothing continue to be part of a standard profiling protocol but may be undermined by the traditional and layered effects of clothing worn in a rural population.

## Regional Dissection

### Israel and Palestine

While the regional analysis of suicide bombings perpetrated in Israel may not be relevant to the majority of private security or military personnel, it represents a historical framework for the development and analysis of potential threats from female suicide bombers and Islamic feminist movements.



xxxii

- **27 January 2002:** Wafa' Idris became the first Palestinian female suicide bomber with her attack in central Jerusalem, killing one and wounding 150.  
xxxiii Divorced after nine years for failing to conceive, she returned to her parents house and became a financial burden before carrying out this attack.  
xxxiv
- **27 February 2002:** Dareen Abu Aisheh from the Northern West Bank town of Beit Wazan was sent to the Maccabim roadblock West of Jerusalem on behalf of Fatah's Tanzim. Two Israeli policemen were wounded in the explosive attack. Known to be a devout Muslim, and recently divorced, the 22-year-old woman approached Hamas to carry out an attack when her ex-husband and brother were killed in clashes with IDF troops. When rejected by Hamas, she approached Fatah, was accepted and successfully deployed.  
xxxv

- **29 March 2002:** Aayat al-Akhras, an 18-year-old high school student female from the Dehaishe refugee camp, was dispatched by the Fatah's Tanzim wing to commit a suicide bombing attack at a supermarket in the Kiryat Yovel neighborhood in Jerusalem. The resulting blast killed two Israeli civilians and wounded 22. Aayat al-Akhras was recruited by her fiancé, a Tanzim operative once it became known they were engaged in a pre-marital sexual relationship and probably became pregnant with his child.<sup>xxxvi</sup>
- **12 April 2002:** Andalib Suleiman al-Taqatiqah a 21-year-old operative of Fatah's Tanzim wing from Bethlehem, detonated herself at the Mahane Yehuda market in Jerusalem. This attack killed 6 civilians and wounded more than 60. It is believed that al-Taqatiqah conducted the martyrdom operation in an effort to redeem herself for her alleged extra-marital sexual relations with a Fatah operative. According to one version, she even became pregnant with his child.<sup>xxxvii</sup>
- **19 May 2003:** Hiba Azem Daraghmeh was sent by PIJ handlers to the Kanyon ha-Amakim, a shopping mall in Afula (a city southeast of Haifa). Her detonation killed 3 civilians and wounded 50. It is believed that Daraghmeh, a single religious student from Tubas, perpetrated the attack to avenge the death of her brother who had previously been arrested and incarcerated in Israel.<sup>xxxviii</sup>
- **4 October 2003:** Hanadi Jaradat, sent by the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) in Jenin exploded herself at the Maxim restaurant in Haifa killing 21 Israeli civilians and wounding 48. It is believed the 29 year old volunteered for this mission to avenge the death of her fiancé, a PIJ operative killed by IDF troops.<sup>xxxix</sup>
- **14 January 2004:** Reem Saleh al-Riyashi was dispatched by Hamas, to conduct a suicide bombing attack at the Erez workers terminal in the Gaza Strip, resulting in the death of four Israelis and wounding 10. At the time of her death Reem al-Riyashi was at odds with her husband and was intimately involved with another Hamas operative.<sup>xi</sup>
- **23 November 2006:** Fatma Omar an-Najar a 68-year-old widow and Hamas supporter exploded near Israeli troops in Northern Gaza wounding three soldiers.<sup>5</sup> According to her oldest daughter, the Israeli military had destroyed her house, killed her grandson and another grandson was wheelchair bound after having a leg amputated. She is the



68 year old suicide bomber Fatma Omar an-Najar

<sup>5</sup> Some reports list Fatima's age as 64.



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oldest Palestinian bomber to date.<sup>xli</sup>

Palestinian Jihadi organisations are at the forefront of a recent shift to incorporate woman into combat units. Hamas has devoted a wing to women.<sup>xlii</sup> The group is trained in using weaponry and ammunition, as part of their drive of 'Jihad and resistance'.<sup>xliii</sup>

*"They wear the long skirts and head coverings ... but their draped robes are camouflage khaki and their scarves the distinctive lime green colour of the Palestinian militant group, Hamas. Their shoulders bear the weight not of bags or babies carried by their more traditional peers, but rifles and rocket-propelled grenades."*<sup>xliv</sup>

Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade aligned with Fatah is expanding their recruitment of women. A spokeswoman of Al-Aqsa, Um al-Abed claims the group has recruited 100 women, who wish to execute suicide bombings and attack Israel and Hamas members.<sup>xlv</sup> As recently as 13 June 2007, two women were arrested attempting to carry out a suicide attack for Islamic Jihad. One of the women involved, Fatma Saz was nine months pregnant at the time and served as the Director of the Women's Labour Department in Gaza City.<sup>xlvi</sup> The womb itself has become 'nationalized' as a 'military womb' and "women's contribution to the Palestinian cause was measured by their degree of productivity, in its purest and most basic meaning of re-productivity."<sup>xlvii</sup>

*"The advent of women suicide bombers has thus transformed the revolutionary womb into an exploding one."*<sup>xlviii</sup>

The co-founder and spiritual leader of Hamas, Ahmed Yassin, stated in August 2001, "Palestinian women do not need a religious ruling in order to perpetrate a suicide attack" and claimed that under certain circumstances "Islam permits it." In addition, Abdel Aziz Rantisi, a senior Hamas activist also stated in 2001 in an interview with Abu Tibi Television, "There is no reason that the perpetration of suicide attacks should be monopolized by men."<sup>xlix</sup>

This combined shift in perpetrators and ideological support from within the male core of Palestinian terror groups represents a diversified dedication to the Jihadist cause. These demonstrations reflect the belief that suicide bombings are not an act of murder or suicide but martyrdom demonstrating a clear shift away from women being coerced physically, psychologically or by cultural constraints into these activities. Women are making an independent commitment to martyrdom operations through the birth of new soldiers and the sacrifice of the unborn.



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## Iraq

Iraq has seen a dramatic rise in female suicide operations over the past year. The following chronology of such attacks demonstrates the increased frequency and effectiveness of this specific delivery model.

- **3 April 2003:** A female suicide bomber killed three coalition soldiers at a checkpoint North-West of Baghdad. Her accomplice, a pregnant woman also killed in the attack exited the vehicle prior to the explosion and began screaming in fear. It is unclear because of the language barrier if she was attempting to flee or draw attention of coalition troops towards her vehicle.<sup>i</sup>
- **28 September 2005:** In the first female suicide bombing of the post Saddam era, a woman dressed as a man detonated her explosive belt outside a US military facility in Tal Afar, killing nine and wounding thirty. Responsibility was claimed by the Iraqi cell of al Qaeda.<sup>ii</sup>
- **9 November 2005:** A failed car bombing of US troops killed a female suicide bomber and injured one soldier. The bomber was later identified as Muriel Degauque from Belgium, discussed above.<sup>iii</sup>
- **25 February 2007:** A female suicide bomber wearing a vest packed with explosives and ball bearings blew herself up at a campus of Mustansiriyah University in Baghdad, killing 40.<sup>iiii</sup>
- **10 April 2007:** A female suicide bomber on foot killed 17 recruits and injured 32 outside a police station in the majority Sunni Muslim town of Muqdadia.<sup>lv</sup>
- **5 June 2007:** In Baghdad, a female suicide bomber prematurely detonated her device after security forces opened fire on her at an Interior Ministry police recruitment center in the Sadr al-Qanat neighborhood. Three police commandos were injured during the incident. It is unclear from Iraqi reports how they identified her as a potential threat.<sup>lv</sup>
- **23 July 2007:** Seven policemen were killed when a female suicide bomber detonated her explosives at a police checkpoint in Ramadi.<sup>lvi</sup>

In addition to the devastation and loss of human life caused by these attacks, these operations represent the willingness of terrorist groups operating specifically in Iraq to use women in operations. Women are rarely searched at checkpoints with the same thoroughness as men due to religious and social traditions granting special treatment including the use of female security staff and a private room<sup>lvii</sup>



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This network of potential bombers is enhanced by a devoted network of female militants who fight out of a loyalty to Saddam Husein. Arwa, a 23 year old Iraqi militant connected to PIJ's Jerusalem Brigade explains, "We love Saddam Hussein very much...He was kind. We were safe, even when there were wars. He gave opportunities to Iraqi women. Now every dream is broken."<sup>lviii</sup> Arwa, who has trained in the desert with revolvers and machine guns to kill invading Americans continues, "We don't want the American army walking in our streets. We prefer death...We must take them out of here, over our dead bodies."<sup>lix</sup>

### Afghanistan

Following the recent successes of female suicide bombers in Iraq, a similar trend has emerged in Afghanistan. On 11 July 2007 four insurgent fighters were arrested in Kabul carrying over 300kg of explosives. Two of the men in the group were allegedly dressed in burkhas when arrested, reflecting a reverse technique to avoid detection. A recent intelligence report comments;

"use of female dress as well as the numerous recent reports of children used as BBIEDs indicates a disregard for Islamic traditions; AGE [Anti-Government Elements] are clearly preying on a reluctance by ISAF to offend women or suspect children of being AGE. Continued use of children as bombers and women's dress will inevitably result in ISAF becoming increasingly suspicious of every local and will damage relations between ISAF and the local population."<sup>lx</sup>

### Pakistan

Militant Pakistani women are increasingly being used by Jihadist and extremist groups (including religious and political parties) to serve private interests and Jihadi causes. In addition, Jihadist women's groups have begun operating independently of their male counterparts. The women from the Jamia Hafsa madrassa have "violated the law by illegally encroaching on public land and threatening the Pakistani government with suicide attacks should the state refuse to comply with Islamic law."<sup>lxi</sup>

Additionally, the use of child soldiers in Pakistan and Afghanistan is particularly troubling. The International Herald Tribune has reported about Pakistani madrassas offering free or reduced cost education to the sons of poor families. Once enveloped in this private Jihadist world, children are shown videos of suicide attackers, taught to drive, given explosive vests and send to kill. In June 2007, "a 6-year-old boy in Ghazni province [Afghanistan] said Taliban militants forced him to put on a suicide vest and walk up to American soldiers — a potential attack foiled when the boy asked Afghan

soldiers for help.” While boys represent the largest pool of young minds to recruit from, female students are not exempt from the potential of recruitment, training and deployment.

### Chechnya

Black Widow fighter



<sup>lxii</sup> The Black Widows of Chechnya’s are an Islamic cadre of female suicide bombers fighting to avenge the deaths of loved ones at the hands of Russian troops and gain independence for an Islamic Chechan state. Responsible for the deaths of hundreds of Russian civilians in notable attacks including the 24 August 2004 dual bombing of Russian aircraft killing 90, the October 2002 hostage crisis in the Dubrovka Theater in Moscow where 129 hostages died <sup>6lxiii</sup> and the September 2004 Beslan school crisis which resulted in the deaths of 331 people including 186 children.<sup>lxiv</sup> While primarily motivated by the deaths of their husbands, brothers, fathers and sons at the hands of Russian troops in the Chechan war, others strive for paradise which they will never experience on Earth. Numerous reports also document many of these women are rape survivors and consequently permanently unfit for marriage or childbirth giving them additional motivation to become martyrs for the Chechan cause.<sup>lxv</sup> .

### **Critical Analysis**

#### A Flaw in the System

In a perfect Jihadist world, men do the fighting and women support the family ensuring another generation of Mujahideen prepared to sacrifice all for the sake of Allah and Islamic fundamentals. The use of women represents a breakdown of the Arab dominated cultural system in the following ways:

First, women are far more valuable as a mechanism to perpetuate the Jihadi movement than as a human delivery tool for explosives. The fact that not all female suicide bombers can be classified as ‘damaged goods’ is evidence Jihadist movements lack the recruits needed to carry out these operations. Previous opponents of using women in suicide operations have now shifted their support for this practice.

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<sup>6</sup> The deaths of all but two of the hostages were caused by Russian Special Forces spraying a lethal dose of Fentanyl (an opiate analgesic) gas into the theater.





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### Religious Position on Female Martyrdom Operations

An interesting phenomenon within the female Jihadist movement has been the scholarly discussion among Islamic legal authorities over the allowance of women to conduct suicide attacks. Currently, six fatwas allow women to participate in martyrdom operations. The first was issued by Sheikh Yusuf al Qaradawi, three by the faculty of al-Azhar University in Egypt, one by Faysal al Mawlawi of the Dublin based European Council for Research and Legal Opinion and one by Islamic University of Gaza's Nizar Abd al Qadir Riyvam. Terrorism scholar David Cook notes the significant absence of the more conservative Jordanian, Syrian, and Saudi religious leaders from this list. "One can see that the question of women participation in suicide attacks has become associated with the Egyptian-Palestinian and consequently more progressive side of the Muslim world."<sup>lxvi</sup>

An interesting by-product of female suicide bombers is an increase in male recruitment. The action of women doing men's work shames the traditional, male population and urges them to participate. On a website known to represent the online voice for Abu Mussab al-Zarqawi in Iraq posted a message attributed to him, "Are there no men, so that we have to recruit women?...Isn't it a shame for the sons of my own nation that our sisters ask to conduct martyrdom operations while men are preoccupied with life?"<sup>lxvii</sup>

While some would theorize the success of female suicide operations could result in a mass recruitment by insurgents eager to be involved in the worldwide Salafi-Jihad, Medea Group is designing a new layer to this multi-tiered analysis. Conversely, this trend of female suicide bombers indicates the birth of terrorist entities organized and run by women with pandemic support of an Islamic ideology and an established network of terror organizations. We justify their attacks with evaluations of abuse, coercion and their 'role' in support of men. The new 'Gender' Jihad may reflect anything but a weaker gender. .

For more information on the expanded series developed on female suicide bombers, please contact Medea Group directly: [info@medeagr.com](mailto:info@medeagr.com)

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