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### Women, Children, and Terrorism

According to Mia Bloom, “Terrorism is considered the ultimate “weapon of the weak.” Groups that could not possibly succeed using conventional tactics on the battlefield employ unconventional means to strike terror behind the battle lines” (Bloom, 2011). The target is physical and mental; what the eyes and ears witness, the body and mind respond to. Fear of the unknown can fracture the individual and the community. In retaliation, possible victims organize and seek to remove the threat. Rules and regulations are implemented, stricter oversight initiated, and perpetrator-profiling instigated. For this reason, many groups now utilize women and children to further their atrocities. Women terrorists have the element of surprise; the disbelief is evident in the loss of life caused by these unsuspected perpetrators. They have less difficulty in achieving access to victims because, in many cases, their threat is dismissed. The female terrorist garners more media attention as well, for the “gentler” of the species should be incapable of such heinous actions.

A time of maternal peace and stay-at-home motherhood is a memory, as women are becoming more involved in the fight going on around them. Some are drawn in to the cause by traumatic, life-changing events. Others are coerced and deceived by the men who control their daily lives. Still more resolve that death is preferred to unhappy marriages. “We can summarize women’s involvement in terrorism across a number of conflicts to be motivated by four R’s:

Revenge, Redemption, Relationship and Respect” (Bloom, 2011). Women are not offered the same rewards as men if they commit suicide bombings; they will not receive 72 virgins, but instead will earn a place by the Prophet’s side and 70 of her closest relatives will also go to heaven with her. Bloom does continue, “We can add one final “R” for Rape, since we are witnessing an increase in the sexual exploitation of women worldwide to coerce them into terrorism in places like Iraq and Chechnya” (Bloom, 2011). The deep, distressing incidents are used to generate new recruits, sometimes funneling the women into suicide bomber units.

An “R” not included in Bloom’s motivators is “Religion,” which plays a profound role in terrorism. “Widespread alarm about Islamist terrorism is forcing the world community to consider carefully the relation between Islam as a faith and the terrorist activity of Muslim extremists” (Duncan, 2015). Interpretation of the Qur’an is pivotal and fluid; outside forces have little influence as they have already been established as enemies of Islam. A specific misinterpretation of the Qur’an is the term “jihad” which roughly means “struggle.” This struggle, for mainstream Muslims, is the internal and external struggle for their faith. In contrast, the militant jihad advocates and rewards acts of violence, in the name of Islam. Even Islam itself is fractured, with a division between Sunnis and Shiites, with opposing succession beliefs. Women and children are pulled into this religious endeavor; sometimes using their bodies as weapons for the cause.

In theory, to treat these crimes as a “criminal activity” would provide a swifter response, thus a more immediate result from law enforcement. The term “criminal activity” does not convey that entrenched, violent, malevolent actions as well as their shocking results. In contrast, labeling this political violence as “terrorism,” prompting a “counterterrorism” response, prompts an immediate, societal outrage. This outrage could unite countries or states, working collectively

for a joint good. Each providing their respective resources to benefit each other. The resulting elimination of terrorism benefits the citizens of a united planet.

Terrorism, in all of its forms, is a vile endeavor. Countless lives are lost, families destroyed, and lands decimated for questionable and unjust causes. After centuries of terrorism being an adult male venture, women and children have been propelled into the fray. They are helping to elevate terrorism to ghastly heights and leaving carnage in their wake. The motivations of the perpetrators are varied in source and degree, but all must be taken seriously. Terrorism must be eradicated, the culprits disbanded. Peace-seeking individuals and nations must struggle and fight for the safety and freedom of a life without terrorism. It will be a formidable challenge, one that will require sacrifice and wit, but the result will be worth all that may be forfeited.

## Work Cited

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