

# **FEMALE MOTIVATION FOR TERRORIST ACTIVITY**

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Studies have shown that women have had an extensive history of participating in terrorist activities. It has been proven in modern terrorism that female involvement began in the nineteenth century with the Russian People's Will, with the onward appearance of Chechen Black Widows and the Tamil Tiger's Birds of Paradise, and other terrorist organizations. Today, we witness that more and more women join terrorist organizations, especially to the Islamic state, and that the role of women are altering and growing, which creates the need for a detailed examination of this phenomena.

In terrorist groups men are generally in charge, but women play a substantial role in terrorist activity. They participate in combat operations, and also have vital supporting roles. The question that undeniably arises is should there be vivid distinction of male and female members of terrorist organizations? An analysis of this question should start with detail examination of female motivation to participate in terrorism.

It is important to comprehend that each individual is motivated for a different reason, and that a multitude of reasons may also be combined to influence women to take action in an extreme manner. Society is quick to judge these women as irrational actors or individuals that are trying to be as, or even more, important than the already existing male roles in terrorist activities. This scenario is not always the case, so it is essential to recognize reasons that motivate women to support terrorism and carry out a terrorist attack. Reasons can result from personal

motivation, from a desire to serve a larger social or ideological cause, or are simply a result of fear or a need to survive. There is a list of potential motivation factors:

**1. Commitment to an Ideological Cause:** Political reasons, religious and ethnic beliefs are often a touchstone for the motivation and commitment of females involved in terrorism. They have a desire to make significant changes to the current environment and to contribute to a cause that they believe in.

**2. Grief or Revenge for Loss:** Grief is a significant motivation that draws wives, mothers, or daughters into extremist organizations. The loss of a dominant male figure in their lives has a tremendous emotional, physical and financial impact. Many female terrorists want to seek revenge on those who have humiliated them in the past; or for family members or on their male counterparts which have oppressed.

**3. Financial Problems:** The death of a husband, father or son for females that live inside conflict zones can lead to a loss of economic support for an entire family. Women are often involved in terrorist activities in order to support their families financially and to provide basic subsistence requirements.

**4. Desire to Improve Social Status:** There are many different reasons that can be classified under the desire to improve social status. When government institutions are able to provide gender equity and opportunities for women in economic, political, and social arenas, it would certainly reduce terrorist movements that appeal to women, and thus, diffusing the infrastructure of such movements. Human rights abuse, discrimination and lack of opportunities for women are factors that can generate discontent among women and provide potential mobilization for political violence against the state. Some woman choose to partake in acts of terrorism to bring respect to their status and with involvement in the terrorist group they bring pride to their family and children, and have found eternal paradise for themselves. Also, gaining equality with their male counterparts is a strong motivation to participate in terrorist activities.

**5. Personal or Family Shame:** Females will often join terrorist organizations as a way to reinvent themselves or to become pure again after a sexual assault or after been forcibly raped. This shame is not only focused on the individual, but also directed at the entire family. Often women will seek to become

suicide bombers to cleanse the indiscretions that they have been accused of, regardless of who is to blame. Suicide bombers are considered martyrs and indiscretions in their past are forgiven and their family honor is restored when they give their life for an ideological cause.

**6. Protection of Self or Family:** In conflict zones, terrorist organizations often provide the basic security mechanism for local towns and villages. Sometimes women turn to support terrorists because they either receive protection from criminals, or other rogue elements, or are afraid of possible retaliation if they do not provide support. The protection provided by terrorist organizations can be more destructive to the local populace since security or military forces see this support as disloyal to the government, and will crack down on supporters. This creates a destructive cycle.

**7. Adventure and romance:** Desires to experience adventure or romance are also factors that attract women to join terrorist organizations, especially women from non-conflict zones, in example, women from Western Europe. Faced with the unexciting and unchallenging environment at home, and seduced with the romance story between the female migrant and the jihadist, they may decide to experience this alluring different way of living. The sense of adventure in leaving home to travel to new places is influential particularly for the younger women. It is worth remembering that a large number of Western women joining ISIS are very young.

Counterterrorism strategies tend to ignore gender as a relevant factor, and in doing so exclusively focus on male imposed threats. Approaching counterterrorism strategy with a perspective on the female gender, as well as the male gender, will have a positive impact on the ability of combat terrorism. Motivation to participate in terrorism by woman is not only different from their male counterparts but also very complex. Generally, it occurs two or more factors simultaneously. To conclude, producing counterterrorism strategy and starting the process of de-radicalization should begin with an emphasis on women and with analysis of motivation factors that drag women into the war.