

Motivations of Jihad Janes

Introduction

The rise of Jihad Janes globally has become a new threat to the American home front. The rise of terrorism has encountered a new phenomenon with the recent rise of female involvement. These women's recent recruitment in terrorist organizations has resulted in a new recruitment process which has only led to an addition of motivations in engaging in terrorism. Women have become a new target in order to attract more men in jihad. Data has shown that a total of 10% of ISIS's population is made up of females and these numbers are only rising.¹ The integration of women in ISIS has led to other organizations to see the importance and benefits of integrating women into the field. The role of women in jihad can vary, however, this is not a job to take lightly and requires full dedication at all times.² The roles of women in jihad can range from teaching children about Allah or accepting the honorable task of offering her body as a suicide bomber.³ When studying women in terrorism it is important to attempt to identify the motivations behind their dedication to the cause. Motivations in women vary from motivations in men, just like age plays a factor as well. It is important to note that motivations vary from case by case situation and it is often a combination of motives that lead to full mobilization. Unfortunately, due to the majority of men being radicalized women are often overlooked as potential recruits. "The study of female terrorists is rarely acknowledged as a subject that can add to our understanding of terrorism"⁴ This ignored topic has potential to spark new counterterrorism initiatives and prevent the number of women becoming involved from rising. The new influence gender seems to have on mobilization is something that needs to be studied. In the past three years, women have been participating in a greater number of terrorist activities and missions.⁵ Some - but not all - of these missions have resulted in suicide bombers. Differing organizations seem to utilize women in different ways based on their views. Female participation in terrorism is now widely acknowledged as having increased "regionally, logistically and ideologically."⁶ With the growing phenomenon of women in terrorism - it's important to be able to identify key motives in order to counter this global spark.

Jihad Janes

The definition of jihad is simply a spiritual war. Jihad Jane was a term coined to a specific case of radicalization but in my opinion, all western women can be seen as Jihad Janes. These women can serve a different purpose than the traditional male role in jihad. For example, women do not necessarily engage in violent measures and become fighters as men do. A new role women commonly take on is the role of a fighter's wife, this job description generally entails taking care of the household while her husband is away and making sure he is pleased and satisfied when he returns. Women have also been described as mothers to the next generation of fighters so they are responsible for indoctrinating their children with the terrorist agenda. While some women may not engage in violent measures, some may

¹ Peresin, Anita, and Alberto Cervone. "The Western muhajirat of ISIS." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 38, no. 7 (2015): 495-509.

² Von Knop, Katharina. "The female jihad: Al Qaeda's women." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 30, no. 5 (2007): 397-414.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Cunningham, Karla J. "Countering female terrorism." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 30, no. 2 (2007): 113-129.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Jacques, Karen, and Paul J. Taylor. "Female terrorism: A review." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 21, no. 3 (2009): 499-515.

be allowed to engage in combat or serve as a bomber. Although rare in the muslim community - women of the west have been instructed to carry out attacks when unable to go to live with the organization in which they are apart of. As mentioned earlier, women have a variety of ways they can live out the jihadi lifestyle. Through the use of technology, particularly social media, women have been used to recruit other women and portray a happy and satisfying lifestyle which in turn is used as a tactic to recruit as well. In addition to this, organizations have a tendency to target educated women who can serve as doctors, teachers, and nurses in the community which is again another form of participating in jihad. One of the most honorable roles a female jihad can have is the ability to serve her fighter husband. She is in charge of making sure he is satisfied, supported, and providing him with children.

This new trend of women being used in terror has many factors. There are various strategic benefits in using women in jihad. For one, they are less suspicious resulting in the element of surprise. In addition to this, due to the rarity of western women turning to a life of jihad, the media tends to devote more attention to this topic. Because of the media coverage, this can lead to more recruits through the free propaganda. This new trend also serves as a key component in recruiting more male fighters. The fighters want women who want to engage in the jihadi lifestyle which is why western women are valued to them. Women serve as a motivating factor while the idea of marriage acts as an incentive for men to join an organization.

Types of Motivations

While there is typically more than one motivating factor that leads a woman to mobilization, it is important to identify common trends in motivations. Four common categories that most motivations for women fall under include; ideology, rationality, emotional, and identity. Understanding of the geopolitical climate and understanding how organizations target western women's motivations is crucial in tackling this growing epidemic. It is important to address that there are more than just these four types of motivations and these driving factors often vary on a situational basis. The first motivation this analysis will cover is ideology.

Ideological transformations serve as an important component of motivation. Many women find themselves in a vulnerable state and religion can serve to add meaning to ones life. However, women are motivated to participate for political and personal reasons in addition to religious ideologies.⁷ Political involvement allows these women to extend into the outside world and be apart of something larger. Particularly in the muslim community in the west, a life of jihad allows women to fulfill traditional male duties and having the chance of being honored by the society they are living in. Women may also engage in terrorism due to social oppression felt in the West for their own ideologies not aligning with the majority. This is a common theme the United States along with most of Europe has identified with second generation muslim teens. The transition from political activeness to political violence can be justified in the power of ideology and the want for political change. Women in the west tend to be more sympathetic to global pain and because of this are more vulnerable and receptive to partake in political change over seas.⁸ Typically women are said to have engaged in political violence for personal reasons.⁹ These motivations for women, typically in the west, entail the need of justice to come forth. Women also use the idea of a better life and spiritual transformation as an ideological motivation.¹⁰ Women in

⁷ Von Knop, Katharina. "The female jihad: Al Qaeda's women." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 30, no. 5 (2007): 397-414.

⁸ Cunningham, Karla J. "Cross-regional trends in female terrorism." *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 26, no. 3 (2003): 171-195.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Peresin, Anita, and Alberto Cervone. "The Western muhajirat of ISIS." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 38, no. 7 (2015): 495-509.

these organizations showcase their life and explain how great life is via various social media outlets which attracts women to want to find happiness in this seemingly attractive lifestyle.

The next form of motivation is rationality. This category views terrorism as a rational decision in which the recruit has outweighed the benefits with the costs in response to feelings of existential anxiety, search of ideology, a purpose.¹¹ When men outweigh the costs they often refer to the seventy virgins they are promised in the after life along with their family being taken care of. Women are not promised these types of rewards so why do women continuously engage in terror? Women gain honor and purpose out of being a fighter's wife. They also gain honor in carrying out suicide missions. In moving out of their western lifestyle they are given a clean slate and a new beginning. Perhaps the most common thread in rational motivations is the idea of romance through being a fighter's wife. This dangerous romance can provide a new life for women seeking to escape and find love. In relation to the justification for violence, this occurs through ideology in which the recruit once again assess costs and benefits. Spiritual awakening transforms rationale into justification for lifestyle choices.

The third category includes emotional motivations. As mentioned in balancing rationale, emotionally, women are attracted to the romanticized idea of martyrs and marrying holy warriors.¹² Another emotional motivation is the sense of thrill and adventure many young women seek in embarking on.¹³ While the thrill of a new adventure may attract women, the idea of rebelling is also a common trend among teens. As mentioned previously motivations should be looked at in a case by case basis but one factor in the emotional category that we will observe in our case study is personal and psychological problems.¹⁴

The last category motivations can fall under is the identity category. Women often seek acceptance and in some cases more than men. In this category, one will find motivations of attempting to find purpose, meaning, and direction. Anyone who feels some form of deprivation in their meaning in life is instantly vulnerable and naturally is desperate to seek purpose. The psychology of need is exhibited in this category due to the need to be needed. Within this category there are several different types of identity. The three main forms of identity can be found in cultural, social, and personal.¹⁵ The cultural identity has to do with loyalties one has toward a group while the social identity has to do with social acceptance. Personal identity can be defined as who you see yourself as. Often times, the personal identity can feel stress resulting in an existential crisis which in turn make women all the more vulnerable and receptive to mobilization.

Case Study: Identifying motivations in Colleen LaRose

In order to understand Colleen's motivations we need to first understand her past. Colleen was born into an unstable household with alcoholic parents who soon after her birth divorced. Her alcoholic father would constantly rape both her and her sister. Afraid for her life, LaRose ran away from home at the young age of 13 and made her living through prostitution.¹⁶ Deprived of love and attention as a child she sought male acceptance constantly through the form of prostitution. She hoped to find a husband

¹¹ McBride, Megan K. "The logic of terrorism: Existential anxiety, the search for meaning, and terrorist ideologies." *Terrorism and political violence* 23, no. 4 (2011): 560-581.

¹² Peresin, Anita, and Alberto Cervone. "The Western muhajirat of ISIS." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 38, no. 7 (2015): 495-509.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ "The Western muhajirat of ISIS." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 38, no. 7 (2015): 495-509.

¹⁵ Schwartz, Seth J., Curtis S. Dunkel, and Alan S. Waterman. "Terrorism: An identity theory perspective." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 32, no. 6 (2009): 537-559.

¹⁶ Peresin, Anita, and Alberto Cervone. "The Western muhajirat of ISIS." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 38, no. 7 (2015): 495-509.

through her profession and at the age of 16 she married.¹⁷ She had a tendency to throw herself into the next man who devoted time and attention to her. Through a series of unfortunate events Colleen was unable to bear children. This took an emotional toll on her and caused her to go into a deep state of depression. The depression she had been battling led her to almost committing suicide on multiple occasions. Her mental instability only made her crave stability and purpose all that much more. While on vacation with her boyfriend she encountered a muslim man whom she then later proceeded to have a one night stand with.¹⁸ She fell in love with him even though they only spent one night together. Although no records show she kept in contact with this man, this sparked a fascination with muslims and she soon signed up for multiple muslim dating sites. She then continued to explore Islam online and eventually converted via a chat room. She began using recruit chat rooms as dating sites in attempt to fill her void of her deep want for love and attention.

Through Colleen's past we can see that a key factor in mobilizing her was her emotional and identity motivations. Emotional motivations are seen in the events of her past leading to radicalization. Her constant emotional instability as a result of traumatic childhood experiences led her to long for stability and male attention. Through her encounter with a muslim man whom she claimed to have fallen in love with she was immediately attracted to that demographic. Colleen longed for that experience she had with him again. She was driven in hopes to experience male attention regularly. Her identity motivations stem from failure to every achieve social acceptance as well as her never really accepting herself as an individual as well. Colleen's childhood had a lot to do with her lack of social acceptance. Born to alcoholic parents and a father who would constantly rape her led to a runaway 13 year old who sought prostitution as a living is not exactly the American dream. Her mental disorders also led her to have a negative stigma attached to her identity. The truth of the matter is Colleen did not like who she was at all which led to various suicide attempts. In addition to this, Colleen's inability to have children caused her to sympathize and stirred anger in watching videos of young children dying because of their faith which is closely linked to not only emotional motivations but also a clash of ideology. Although there can be more motivations applied to this one case study, I think it is safe to say that her motivations were fueled by a combination of emotional, ideological, and identity needs.

Conclusion

Through this simple analysis, one can observe four key components of motivations that mobilize women of the west to partake in terrorist organizations. This framework of motivational categories can be applied to various other cases but can not be attributed as the only motivational factors that will be present. Motivations vary from case to case and it is important to keep an open mind as the different types of motivations are endless since each recruit comes from a different background and may be searching for different outcomes in life. This demographic deserves analysis and further research in order to prevent this issue from growing more than it already has. Motivations are just the beginning of understanding why western women are mobilized.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

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