WHY NOT USE WOMEN?: AN EXAMINATION OF THE CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH AN ISLAMIC TERRORIST ORGANIZATION WILL EMPLOY FEMALE SUICIDE TERRORISM

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
Of Georgetown University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts
In Security Studies

By

Krislyn P. Reuter, B.A.

Washington, D.C.
April 15, 2011
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Krislyn P. Reuter, B.A.

Thesis Advisor: Daniel Byman, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

Groups that use suicide terrorism have noticed a problem: counterterrorism efforts and security checkpoints have become so effective they have forced groups to innovate technologically, using women instead of men as suicide terrorists due to their ability to pass security screening. In so doing, however, many times groups must overcome significant cultural and ideological barriers, as well as risk alienating their host populations. The following paper tests a set of five hypotheses, involving the impact of sexism, Islamic ideology, resonance with a host population, target selection, and the presence of a military conflict, across four cases, to investigate which, if any, has a significant impact on groups’ decisions to use female suicide terrorism. Findings are that sexism and Islamic ideology both have an impact on the use of female suicide terrorists, but that resonance with the host population has limited impact. The conclusion is that the use of female suicide terrorists is best seen as a technological innovation, the strategic value of which must be higher than the barriers to entry for a terrorist group to adopt the new technology.
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Chapter I: Introduction

Context

In the years following September 11th, the American public, academic, and policy communities have become obsessed with the phenomenon of suicide terrorism. Americans want to know what kind of person would do something so terrible as martyring himself, want to know what kind of extremist group would cultivate and wield such a maniacal weapon, and, most of all, want to know what the United States government, as well as counterterrorism efforts around the world, can do about it. As one might expect, this has resulted in the publication of innumerable works on the topic of suicide terrorism (ST) that investigate issues from the psychology of individual bombers, to the strategic logic of their use, to looking at suicide terrorism from a criminal and law enforcement perspective rather than as an act of war.

One topic that has not been covered quite so extensively is the rising phenomenon of female suicide terrorism (FST). Using ST lends an attack an extra psychological factor—it implicitly tells one’s adversary that one is so serious about one’s cause one is willing to engage in a mission guaranteed to end in one’s own demise. Using a female suicide terrorist, then, becomes doubly traumatizing to an enemy. In this case, a woman, usually culturally revered as a giver and nurturer of life, is not only taking lives, but giving up her own. This topic will increase in importance as the incidence of FST use continues to rise.

1 See Bruce Bongar. *Psychology of Terrorism*. [Oxford [u.a.]: Oxford Univ. Press, 2007].
Findings

This paper analyzed five potential hypotheses in order to assess the impacts of sexism, Islamic ideology, resonance with a host population, target type, and the presence of a military campaign, on the decision to use FST. It finds that FST should be considered as a technological innovation naturally following ST adoption, but that the cultural aspects of sexism and ideology are often barriers to entry against which terrorist groups must weigh the potential relative gains that using FST could bring. Those groups who live in areas with higher degrees of sexism and religious intolerance for the use of women as militants will take longer to adopt female suicide terrorists than other groups.

Approach and Methodology

This paper set out to do a small-N study of groups that use FSTs in order to better refine the conclusions reached by University of Chicago doctoral candidate Lindsey O’Rourke in her 2009 large-N study. Specifically, it seeks to refine her findings that religious terrorist groups only use FST after secular groups in the same conflict use them first. Main sources included databases such as the University of Chicago’s Database of Suicide Terrorist Attacks, Jane’s Terrorism and Insurgency Database, relevant historical renditions, news articles, and blog entries.
Case Selection

Although many terrorist groups, both secular and religious, have used FST, due to space and time constraints, I have not been able to investigate all of them here. Cases were selected based on their abilities to prove or disprove hypotheses, as well as to control for instances in which FST has yet to be used. It was hoped that, collectively, the cases would be able to paint a picture of FST use that would show a different causality than that which might be found if one only investigated Palestinian or Iraqi groups. Specifically, the Chechen Separatists were selected because their infamous Black Widows have made them a textbook case of FST use. The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) was selected because it is a true outlier in almost all respects—the group had never used suicide terrorism at all, used it once with a mix of female and male attackers, and never used it again. The Taliban was selected because its culture and extreme religious conservatism seemed to preclude any possibility of FST use—yet within the last two years, it, too, has adopted the tactic. Finally, Hezbollah was selected as a control case so as to avoid selecting on the dependent variable. Through it launched the first modern suicide bombing campaign, and remains a prominent terrorist organization, it has yet to use FSTs.

Definitions

Religious Group

My definition of a religious group throughout this paper will not be one that aims to build any sort of Caliphate at the state or global level. Rather, it will be a group in which the ideology

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5 Excellent cases I would have liked to include are those of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, Hamas, Al Qaeda in Iraq, and the Iraqi insurgency. Not all of these are religious terrorist groups, but all are salient with regard to this topic.
and cultural tradition of the group’s religion has enough of a presence to impact group decisionmaking.  

**Muslim Ideology**

I have two points to make regarding Muslim ideology as I consider it in this paper. First, using females in jihad is problematic under Islam regardless of the particular sect of Islam from which a group draws its cultural background. David Cook, author of *Understanding Jihad*, states that female jihad can only be seen as a radical change in Islam that will be treated with suspicion by Muslim conservatives.

Traditionally, women have not been considered to have a role in the greater jihad. Cook points this out in an article in which he notes that, according to traditional interpretation, women are told that their “jihad” was the pilgrimage to Mecca, and that they were not permitted to engage in combat. One example of this comes from the Sunni tradition, in which the Prophet tells a woman that the reward given to men in jihad would be given to women if they obeyed their husbands and kept to their houses. Likewise, in the Shia tradition, tenth-century jurisprudent Ibn Babawayhi dictates that both men and women have a jihad, but that “the man’s jihad is to sacrifice his wealth and his blood...but the jihad of the woman is to endure suffering at the hands of her husband and his jealousy [of her].”

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6 Although this is counter to most definitions of religious terrorist groups, my reasons for defining it as such will be explained under the Islamic ideology definition.
7 It is usually possible to manipulate any religion in order to either condone or condemn violence, depending upon which way one interprets that religion’s scriptures.
9 Isma‘il al-Bukhari ‘Abdallah b. (d. 869), *[Sahih (Bbeirut: Dar al-Fakr, 1991), III, p. 264 (no. 2784)]*.
10 Cook, 39.
Methodological Notes and Explanation of Hypotheses

The findings of O’Rourke’s 2009 study is that a religious group will adopt FST use only after a secular group in the same conflict does so. I dispute this. My research will test the following hypotheses in an attempt to better understand O’Rourke’s observations and refine her findings.

Hypotheses

The first hypothesis is that terrorist groups do not use women because the men in charge of the organizations are sexist. Indicators for this are that women of the culture in question remain in their homes, group rhetoric saying women should not be suicide bombers based on their sex, that there are no women anywhere in the organization, that there is male dominance within the organization, and that there are lowered educational opportunities for women within the broader community. My null indicators are that women are founding members of the organization, female political activism, attempts at female recruitment, rhetoric regarding the respect and appreciation of women in the organization, and high educational opportunities and a high success rate for women within the broader community.

The second hypothesis is that Islamic ideology precludes terrorist organizations from using female militants. Indicators for this are a published group ideology that lays out the reason it does not use women, religious clerics who do not accept the validity of FST use, and the existence of a tradition that does not allow FST use (such as Qur’anic tradition). Null indicators are the converse of these.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{12} The second hypothesis is difficult to disprove because, to a certain extent, it should be valid across the entire umma, or Muslim community. It remains as a hypothesis because the extent to which Muslim communities adhere to Muslim tenants and traditions varies.
The third hypothesis is that FSTs are not used because host populations will not accept such tactics from the terrorist group. Indicators of this are negative media, a drop in public favor towards groups in polls, research indicating disfavor, and fewer recruits. Null indicators are the converse of these.

The fourth hypothesis is that FSTs are only used against civilian targets due to various culturally defined gender roles. ¹³

The fifth hypothesis is that FSTs are only used in military campaigns in which there is a concrete adversary.

The following chart serves as a quick reference regarding my hypotheses and how each case tested for them.

¹³ In each of the societies in which the organizations in question operate, there are targets against which females would be more effective than males (security checkpoints) and targets against which they would have been less effective (motorcycles, jet skis, or any location in which a woman would have called attention to herself rather than fading into a crowd). I have used this variable to see if groups were comfortable using women against both civilian and military targets, or if women were predominantly used against civilian targets. This hypothesis is difficult to test for, given that non-use against a certain type of target is not sufficient evidence to conclude that the group is doing this for a specific strategic reason.
The rest of my paper will be organized as follows: I will first explain O’Rourke’s findings and the precise manner in which I will contribute to them. I will then examine the cases of the Chechen Separatists, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, the Taliban, and Hezbollah, according to my hypotheses. Finally, I will analyze the data before offering policy recommendations based on my findings.

### Organization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>H1: Sexism</th>
<th>H2: Islamic Ideology</th>
<th>H3: Resonance with Host Population</th>
<th>H4: Target Type</th>
<th>H5: Military Conflict</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Chechen Separatists</td>
<td>N: The Separatists included women in the management of operations.</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N: Despite the population’s utter distaste for terrorism, the Separatists use STs of all types</td>
<td>N: FSTs were used against both civilian and military targets</td>
<td>Y: The Russians provide a concrete enemy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan</td>
<td>N: Women were used in first FST use</td>
<td>Y: Wahhabi strain of Islam may have made it difficult to use women</td>
<td>Y: The population did not respond positively to FST use. Or ST use. It was discontinued.</td>
<td>Not testable</td>
<td>N: There was no military conflict in Uzbekistan prior to the IMU’s rise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Taliban</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N: Risks alienating population</td>
<td>N: FSTs were used against both civilian and military targets</td>
<td>Y: The Americans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hezbollah</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y: Quest for political legitimacy</td>
<td>Not testable</td>
<td>Y: Israelis, Foreign Occupiers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**O’Rourke’s 2009 Study**

Up until two years ago, there was a major area within the topic of FST that had yet to be covered: a comprehensive, large-N study of not the terrorists as individuals, but the groups that used them, and their reasons for using them. This was important: the presence of a terrorist organization is important in mobilizing otherwise impotent would-be terrorists. Without a proper understanding of the drivers behind the groups causing the increase in FST, counterterrorism efforts would be less prepared to counter the threat.

Lindsey O’Rourke’s 2009 study titled “What’s Special About Female Suicide Terrorism?” was the first of its kind to cover the effectiveness and organizational dynamics of FST. O’Rourke makes her case by running regressions using data from the Chicago Project on Suicide Terrorism (CPOST) database of all ST attacks between 1981 and July 2008. She investigates the organizational dynamics of FST, analyzing secular terrorist organizations and religious ones separately. Her findings are that secular organizations are more likely to adopt FST, and are in many cases the first to use it, but that religious organizations have revised their ideologies in conflicts where secular organizations used them first, thereby competing for the support of the same population. 14 Ultimately, O’Rourke concludes that, in the world of ST, strategy trumps ideology. 15

In general, the evidence shows that O’Rourke is correct: strategy does trump ideology. Her analyses are, by and large, accurate, and her work makes great strides in furthering our knowledge of terrorist organizations and what makes them decide to use FST. More specifically, O’Rourke does an excellent job of proving the efficacy of FST and in viewing groups as rational actors working towards strategic aims—a point of view pioneered by her mentor, Robert Pape, in

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15 Ibid. 692.
the Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism. She is wise to split terrorist groups between secular and religious, and to note the distinctions between them.

Despite this, however, her findings regarding religious organizations and their decisions on whether or not to use FSTs are hasty, and overgeneralized. To support her argument, she seems primarily reliant on AAMB’s FST use, which inspired Hamas and PIJ, rather than doing a more in-depth trace of terrorist group learning. She also notes the upswing in the use of FST in the insurgency in Iraq, yet admits the difficulty in determining ascertaining what role religion played in this upsurge, and notes that the usage may have been a response to increased defensive measures rather than a tactic learned from a particular group. Additionally, she uses a statement from Hezbollah’s spiritual leader Mohammed Fadlallah to demonstrate increasing acceptance of FST, but does not question the implications of the fact that Hezbollah condones, but does not itself use, FST. Finally, she acknowledges FST use by three other, lesser-known groups: the Uzbek Islamic Jihad Union, Al Qaeda in Somalia (AQS), and the Kashmir insurgency—but the point she attempts to make with these examples is far from clear. 16

Overall, although O’Rourke makes the crucial observation that religious groups have the capacity to learn tactical innovations when under pressure from a rival group, in her quest to prove that strategy trumps ideology, she does not dig deeply enough into all possible causalities—strategic and otherwise—and how they may be interacting, and, in so doing, limits her findings.

In light of this, I plan to use the cases I have chosen to look more deeply into the specific factors that influence terrorist groups with Muslim ideological backgrounds to use FSTs. Through this, I hope to obtain a more accurate understanding of the causal mechanisms driving jihadist groups to use FST so as to be able to more accurately refine O’Rourke’s findings.

16 Ibid. 699.
Chapter II: Cases

Introduction to Cases

The following section will examine the cases of the Chechen Separatists, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, the Taliban, and Hezbollah, in an effort to discover what factors ultimately lead to group adoption of FST use. Following each case, I will explain how each tests according to my hypotheses.

The Chechen Separatists

The Chechens are an ethnic group with territory slightly to the South of Russia in the Northern Caucasus mountains. Although they were considered by the Russians to be part of the Russian Federation following the fall of the Soviet Union, they have considered themselves independent for centuries prior to the present. They declared independence from Russia in 1991, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and thereby incurred two conflicts with the Russians—the first, from 1994-1996, and the second, from 1999-2009. The Chechen Separatist movement, led by Shamil Basayev, employs guerilla warfare and terrorism in hopes of both winning a military victory, and garnering attention and support from the international community in order to retain independence.

Sexism

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17 Chechnya is selected as a jihadist group because its leader is jihadist and worked with Al Qaeda for necessary resources, which influenced his beliefs, and because Riyadus Salikhin used jihadist jargon in the Dubrovka hostage situation. Additionally, Chechnya is one of many groups that simply uses political Islam and invokes the principles of martyrdom and jihad to further its nationalist cause.
In Allah’s Angels, considered to be the first comprehensive portrait of the role of women in the recent wars in Chechnya, Paul Murphy underscores woman’s traditional role in society, but also demonstrates her growing independence and strength. “[Chechen women’s] identities are solidly grounded in centuries-old tradition; in Islam; in adherence to strict social, ethical, and moral codes that define right and wrong as well as how they must behave in any situation; a hierarchy of values; [and] strong Chechen family orientation….”

He describes Chechen women as being soft spoken, and strongly emphasizes the Chechen women’s struggle throughout the course of the last two wars. Yet Murphy also notes that in recent years Chechen women seem to have had greater opportunities to break out of traditional roles than have women in other traditional societies, an have started up small businesses and nonprofits. His ultimate take on the status of women in Chechen society is one that admires their resilience and sees them growing stronger into the future.

Islamic Ideology

Sufism was the first sect of Islam to take root in Chechen society. Its proclivity to absorb cultural practices made it well-suited to the Chechen society’s social system and cultural introversion. Like the other sects of Islam, Sufism also glorifies jihad as a defense against foreign occupation. The Wahhabi influence in Chechnya began in the early 1900s, when an indigenous Islamist elite, offering guidance and inspiration, emerged in the region. By the Spring of 1995, the Chechen elite forces were increasingly Islamist, and the message of an all-Caucasian jihad, as a distinct from a Chechen national liberation struggle, spread throughout the

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19 Ibid. 8.
Caucasus. Following the death of Chechen President Dudaev in 1996, the Wahhabis obtained their own newspaper and TV channel, and continued to gain strength.

*Observations*

I have two observations for Chechnya. First, Chechnya’s first FST use was on July 20, 2000, when two FSTs drove a VBIED into the temporary headquarters of an elite OMON (Russian Special Forces) detachment in the village of Alkhan Yurt in Chechnya. The FSTs had to force their way into the compound and did not reach their target, but instead detonated when a response forces arrived. Second, Chechnya’s second FST use was what would become known as the Dubrovka theater hostage crisis, or Nord-Ost Seige. On October 23, 2002, forty armed terrorists held just under 800 hostages for nearly three days at Moscow’s Dubrovka Theater. 19 of these terrorists were females—part of a special suicide unit named the “Riyadus-Salikhin Reconnaissance and Sabotage Battalion of Shakhids” that Besayev had established specifically for the attack—Besayev knew women would slip past the Moscow police more easily than men.

For purposes of this study, the most important part of the Dubrovka theater siege was actually not the siege itself, but the leadership that implemented it. Three women played key roles in organizing and recruiting the FSTs. One was known for making a career out of developing the women’s part of the war. Another was a loyal Basayev follower whose task for Dubrovka was to recruit women as suicide bombers and to act as head of female terrorists during the attack. A third woman recruited FSTs, was responsible for their safe passage to Moscow,

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22 Bodansky, 44.
23 Jaimoukha, 122.
24 Bodansky, 180.
25 Murphy, 157.
and cared for them once they arrived. She was also responsible for much of the preparation for the ultimate attack, and had to acquire target schematics and critical security information, as well as to coordinate the attack’s dress rehearsal.  

Hypotheses

The first hypothesis, which regards sexism, is false for this case. This is demonstrated by the fact that women were given responsibilities within the organization beyond the role of FST.

The second hypothesis, which regards Islamic ideology, is true for this case. The Wahhabi religious tradition precludes the use of women.

The third hypothesis, which regards resonance with the host population, is false for this case. Most authors writing on Chechnya emphatically emphasize the distaste the vast majority of the population holds for terrorism. This, however, did not prevent, and does not prevent, the Separatists from continuing in their use of FSTs. Additionally, there do not seem to be specific grievances about the use of women anywhere in the literature. Following a decade of being bombarded and undergoing atrocities at the hands of the Russians, conventional understanding is that most Chechens simply desire a more peaceful future.

The fourth hypothesis, which regards target choice, is true for this case. Although women were not overly effective against the military target in the first observation, they were nonetheless used.

The fifth hypothesis, which regards military conflict, is true for this case. The Chechens were explicitly fighting against the Russians.

\[^{26}\text{Ibid. 158.}\]
\[^{28}\text{Gilligan, 145.}\]
The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan

The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) formed during the mid-1990s and began steadily developing ties throughout Central Asia, to include the countries of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, the Uighur Separatists of China, and Afghanistan. Its original goal was a largely nationalistic one—to topple President Islam Karimov’s regime—but the group developed ties with Al Qaeda due to funding and resource needs, and soon began to adopt its international endeavors as well. Its new goal became to create enough turmoil throughout the Fergahana Valley and Central Asia in general to topple multiple governments, leading to a domino effect that would result in the establishment of a radical Islamic Caliphate.

Sexism

The state of women in Uzbekistan is a mixed bag. On the one hand, girls have strong attendance at school—roughly equivalent to their proportionality of the population. On the other hand, however, women’s careers are often hindered by government policy. The government calls on women to live according to traditional values, and refuses to remunerate their work, causing many to become victims of prostitution, the drug trade, and human trafficking. Additionally, an opinion poll conducted by the Education Ministry in 2006 showed that approximately 90% of

29 The case is not without problems. First, there is a controversy within the academic community regarding whether or not the IMU is a coherent, well coordinated terrorist organization, or simply a skilled group of bandits, drug-runners, and opportunists. Additionally, given its apparent integration into the Al Qaeda/Taliban hierarchy in Pakistan, it is debatable whether or not it could still have been considered an independent entity at the time of its FST use. There is a dearth of information on the terrorist group, and what most academics seem to base their analyses on is a conventional wisdom accepted by experts in the field such as Mia Bloom. It is on this basis I consider this case credible.

30 This valley spans Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.

mothers wanted to send their children to nurseries in order to pursue careers, but could not afford to.  

**Islamic Ideology**

The IMU’s brand of Salafi Islam tends more toward militancy than it does ideology. The early Ferghana Islamists were jihadists committed to violent struggle against their secular regime. Although some of the IMU fighters attended madrassas in Pakistan in the mid-1990s, their understanding of jihad was simplistic—a cross between jihad and Soviet guerilla-war handbooks. Meanwhile, the armed wing gradually came to dominate, and the “theoretical” or ideological wing of the movement was relegated to the background.  

**Observations**

The IMU had a hand in a series of suicide attacks that took place from March 28-30, 2004. Among the attackers were several women. The first FST never detonated—one attacker, the sex of whom is unknown, detonated near a market entrance where policemen usually gathered, and blew the torso off of an FST who was waiting to detonate. A second FST blew herself up at a bus stop, killing a small girl and wounding another policeman.  

Due to the dearth of information on the IMU, each attack incurs new conjecture regarding reasons for the attack, and which of its goals the IMU was trying to further by executing the

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32 "What Role Do Women Play in Uzbekistan?" April 28, 2010.  
34 Maksim Yusin notes in “Karimov znayet, gde ‘zombiruyut uzbekov’” (Karimov knows where Uzbeks are being turned into “zombies”), [Vremya novostey (Moscow) August 27, 2004], that although responsibility for the attacks was claimed by a little-known group named Islamic Jihad group in Uzbekistan, the Tashkent authorities, as well as the Israelis, suspected the complicity of Al Qaeda and the IMU.  
attack. In the aftermath of the IMU’s first FST use, Uzbek Foreign Minister Sadyk Safayev’s opinion was that, like the Madrid bombings, these attacks were aimed at breaking the anti-terror coalition. He believed the attacks had been “committed by the forces of international terror,” and “showed the hallmarks of acts [already] witnessed abroad.” In contrast, Aleksei Malashenko of the Carnegie Moscow Center believed the attacks to be more nationalistic in nature—that, “In addition to the goals set by al Qaeda and the other international Islamist organizations, there was another goal here—to show Karimov and the entire Uzbek establishment that they’re not the sole rulers of the country. Uzbek Islamist terrorists are trying to influence the domestic situation and pursuing their own goals.”36 Regardless of conjecture, what is clear is that the main target of the attack were the police, who are despised for their corruption and brutality throughout Uzbekistan. An interpretation of the attacks that combines both the group’s nationalistic and international aims is that the attacks were trying to harness popular understanding and support in order to spark an uprising that would grow throughout Central Asia. Unfortunately for the IMU, however, the public was disgusted by the use of ST, the attacks were repudiated, and the tactic was never used again. 37

Hypotheses

The first hypothesis, which regards sexism, is false for this case. The fact that the first use of ST included FST (usually there is lag time) suggests a complete lack of sexism in the decisionmaking process.

The second hypothesis, which regards Islamic ideology, is true for this case. The IMU’s ideology was influenced by, and strongly resembles, Al Qaeda’s, making it largely Wahhabi.

36 Bloom, 132.
37 Bloom, 132.
The third hypothesis, which regards host population resonance, is true for this case. FST usage failed because it was unable to achieve the IMU’s goal—to incite a popular uprising.

The fourth hypothesis, which regards target type, cannot be tested for this case because FST was never used against military targets.

The fifth hypothesis is false for this case—there was no direct conflict against a distinct enemy. Regardless, FST was used anyway.

The Taliban

In 1994, Afghanistan was a relatively lawless society still recovering from the anti-Soviet jihad. The Taliban emerged in an attempt to bring order to that society through the imposition of a strict Deobandi\(^{38}\) interpretation of *sharia* law. The organization has two objectives: First, to expel foreign forces from Afghanistan. Second, to restore the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan by overthrowing the current government. In January of 2011, Taliban strength was around 25,000.\(^{39}\)

*Sexism*

The Taliban indubitably has one of the worst track records for women’s rights in the entire world. It is the Taliban who forced the donning of the Burqa, who formed the Ministry of the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice, and who have become known for their public stoning of women for adultery. Many women in Afghanistan are not simply forced into

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\(^{38}\) Deobandi Islam teaches that Muslim societies have fallen behind Western ones because their followers have allowed themselves to be seduced by the materialism and immorality of the West, and have deviated from the true, pristine path of the original teachings of Islam.

traditional roles—they are virtual prisoners in their own homes, completely controlled by the men in their lives, forbidden to leave their homes without *mahrams*, and risk their lives just by going to school and seeking employment. So many women feel their condition is hopeless that self-immolation is on the rise. In fact, given the Taliban’s extreme oppression of women, NATO troops believed that the group was unlikely to ever use FST. There had been over 430 suicide attacks in Afghanistan since 2001, and not one of them had been perpetrated by a woman until 2010.

*Islamic Ideology*

The Taliban’s Islamic ideology emphasizes a specific type of jihad that is distinct from that which was used during the anti-Soviet jihad. Though this brand of martyrdom still uses rhetorical strategies to wrap economic, political, and social grievances around the idea of jihad, women have been removed from the concept—they are absent in resistance literature, oral narratives, and the movement in general. In contrast, during the anti-Soviet jihad, women were poets, espoused the heroics of their men, and defended their families’ honor. This demonstrates a shift backwards from a version of jihad in which women were present (if taking no part in the actual violence) to one in which women disappear altogether.

*Observations*

I have three observations. First, the Taliban has used men dressed in burqas to try to slip through security checkpoints since 2007. In response, NATO and Afghan counterinsurgency

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40 Male family members required to escort women in public at all times.
have adapted to be able to read gender-specific body language, and have prevented many men from completing their missions. Second, on June 20, 2010, a woman named Bibi Halima detonated a suicide vest in Kunar province, killing two US soldiers and wounding two Afghan children. Third, on December 24, 2010 in Bajaur, Pakistan, another unidentified Taliban FST killed 42 Pakistani civilians in an attack at a World Food Program ration distribution point.

**Hypotheses**

The first hypothesis, which regards sexism, is true for this case. The Taliban struggled with the decision to use female bombers because it has a sexist culture. This is evinced by the first observation, in which male bombers in female clothing were used rather than FSTs themselves. Despite the fact that FST utility had already been recognized, the Taliban was as yet unwilling to use it.

The second hypothesis, which regards Islamic ideology, is true for this case. Not only does the Taliban have the baseline Muslim ideology that would have made using FSTs controversial, it is known for Deobandi Islam, which in this case has removed all women from jihad.

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44 Bill Roggio. “Al Qaeda, Taliban Create Female Suicide Cells in Pakistan and Afghanistan”. The Long War Journal: A Project of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies. http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2010/12/al_qaeda_taliban_create_female_suicides_cell_in_pakistan_and_ afganistan.php. Also, corroborating evidence that these two attacks are not anomalies is the testimony of a 12 year old Pakistani girl named Meena Gul who attests to the presence of joint Taliban Al Qaeda suicide bombing cells in remote areas of northwestern Pakistan and northeastern Afghanistan.
The third hypothesis, which regards resonance with the host population, is false for this case. Although the host population is likely to look upon FST use disfavorably, the Taliban is popular enough that it will be able to continue to use women.\footnote{See the Small Wars journal. The host population wants peace, justice, and development. Unfortunately for NATO and Afghan forces, the Afghan government has not proven as adept at providing some of these things as the Taliban has. The group has supporters and sympathizers throughout the country. In many areas it is able to leverage discontent with government corruption and underdevelopment. Additionally, the Taliban’s legal structures, which are also able to deal with Afghan legal issues with greater efficiency than Afghan government courts, have also won them support. One thing is sure: The Taliban has taken a strategic risk by using FST. Not only will moderate Pashtuns be more likely to criticize FST operations—the Taliban has also opened itself up to possible infighting within its own ranks by those who see the inclusion of women in the insurgency as dishonorable and outside the realm of acceptable jihad. Moreover, the continual use of mass-casualty attacks and the large amounts of casualties they incur will always severely damage support.}

The fourth hypothesis, which regards target choice, is false for this case. Assaults have been against military targets in built up or urban areas.

The fifth hypothesis, which regards military conflict, is true for this case. The Taliban is in a military conflict against coalition forces.

Hezbollah

The fourth case is slightly more difficult than the previous three. Hezbollah has never used FSTs, and so absence rather than presence must be examined. The indicators used to test the previous two cases may not be sufficient to explain why FSTs were not used in this case. Instead, a series of questions will be asked in order to determine whether or not FSTs would have been strategically useful to Hezbollah at any point in time, as well as why Hezbollah has never used them.

Group Background

Hezbollah emerged in response to the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon during the Lebanese civil war. According to its 1985 manifesto, its four main goals are Israel’s destruction,
the expulsion of all imperialist powers from Lebanon, just rule, and giving the people the chance to choose the system of government they want (while still being committed to Islamic Rule). Although it started as only a small militia, present-day Hezbollah has strong support among Lebanese Shia, is capable of mobilizing hundreds of thousands, and holds 11 out of 30 cabinet seats in the national unity government. Hezbollah receives military training, weapons, and financial support from Iran, and political support from Syria. Its military strength has grown significantly since the end of the Israeli occupation of Lebanon in 2000. Despite having practically pioneered modern ST in April 1983 with a VBIED attack on the U.S. embassy in Beirut, Hezbollah has relatively few suicide bombings to its name. It has only used the tactic for which it is now world-renowned nine times.

Sexism

As with most family structures in the Arab world, Lebanese family structure is patriarchal. Even before Islam, the roles of women were traditionally restricted to those of mother and homemaker. Although during the 1970s, manpower shortages resulted in women throughout the Arab world playing a more active role in the work force, the 1980’s religious revival reasserted traditional cultural values. Lebanese women nonetheless enjoy equal civil rights and attend institutions of higher learning in numbers approaching their percentage of the population. Some women have their own organizations, (though most are subordinate branches of political parties). In Lebanon, living well is the goal of the whole society, and economic

46 Along with its allies.
pressures are often strong enough to push families to send their women to work. What holds Lebanese women back is not society, but rather the women’s own view that work is merely a means of financial support to be discarded once financial stability is ensured.\textsuperscript{48}

\textit{Islamic Ideology}

Hezbollah’s ideology is based on Shia Islam. According to its founding principles, it justifies its use of violence by saying “Each of us is a combat soldier when the call of jihad demands it, and each of us undertakes his task in the battle in accordance with his lawful assignment within the framework of action under the guardianship of the leaders jurisprudent.\textsuperscript{49} Additionally, during a 2002 interview, Muslim cleric Sheikh Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah said, “It is true that Islam has not asked women to carry out jihad, but it permits them to take part if the necessities dictate that women should carry out regular military operations or suicide operations.”\textsuperscript{50}

\textit{Questions}

My first question is why Hezbollah started using ST. Given that most terrorist organizations do not publish their strategic decisionmaking, this information is, at best, deducible. Like any strategic organization, however, Hezbollah likely weighed the potential drawbacks of the tactic against the potential benefits. Drawbacks were not insignificant. In the event that ST was not able to provide sufficient casualties, then it would provide little military advantage, and contribute to the erosion of an already small organization. Likewise, although

\textsuperscript{50} Sheikh Fadlallah, interview in “Lebanese Muslim Cleric OK’s Female Suicide Bombers,” \textit{Business Recorder}, 2 April 2002.
made slightly moot by the first point, if STs proved ineffective, it would be difficult to find people willing to volunteer. Additionally, Hezbollah likely felt that, if the tactic were used too often, the Israelis would adapt to it. On the other hand, the tactic would have two main benefits: it would help to maximize casualties, and it would reduce the potential damage that apprehended group members could cause the organization when questioned.  

Hezbollah must have felt the benefits worth the risks: it soon became known for ST.

My second question regards the effectiveness of Hezbollah’s STs. The first few were incredibly effective—the infamous attack against the U.S. and French Military barracks in Beirut killed just under 300 people. In November, a VBIED killed 63 people in an Israeli headquarters in Tyre. Following these large-scale attacks, however, Hezbollah’s effectiveness dropped considerably. An attack in September 1984 killed only 23 people. In 1989, an attack against an Israeli security convoy killed under 25. Other attacks, in 1988, 1995, 1996, and 1999, each killed less than 7 people. Hezbollah instead found that its deadliest weapon against the IDF to be the roadside bomb—a “claymore-style” directional bomb hidden beneath a makeshift rock. By the mid-1990s, IR was using cell phone technology to detonate. By the late 1990s, it had developed shaped charge bombs powerful enough to explode armored vehicles.

My final question is why Hezbollah has continued to avoid FST now that the tactic is becoming more permissible, more in vogue, and increasingly proving its effectiveness throughout the greater Middle East. First, Hezbollah’s technology has improved to the point at

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52 In this case, effectiveness is to be understood in terms of lethality.

53 CHICAGO PROJECT ON SECURITY AND TERRORISM (CPOST) SUICIDE ATTACK DATABASE. UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO. UPDATED SEPTEMBER 22, 2010. HTTP://CPOST.UCHICAGO.EDU/SEARCH.PHP [ACCESSED APRIL 10, 2011].

which ST use became actually a poor strategic decision. Suicide bombings are a tactic with a psychological edge, an extra intimidation factor, usually used by weak actors to try to coerce stronger actors. Given more power, or better technology, groups would not have to resort to such measures. In the case of Hezbollah, this was demonstrated in the aftermath of the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war, when Hezbollah’s military wing, Islamic Resistance (IR) was rearmed with unguided rockets by Iran and Syria. With these in its arsenal, Hezbollah had weapons systems at its disposal powerful enough for its defense needs, and did not need to consider the strategic value of ST.

Second, the IDF presence in the region changed. The IDF was not interacting with the population as much, and, as a result, there were fewer targets that would have been easily approachable by any sort of suicide bomber, female or no. Hezbollah’s technology needed to innovate to be able to hit a target at a distance, which suicide bombers cannot do. Hence, rockets became more appropriate.

Third, Hezbollah’s goals changed. It has changed its manifesto, taking out much of its jihadist rhetoric, and has begun to try to become a part of the legitimate political process. Further use of ST would likely result in a loss of popular support. As a result, Hezbollah has foregone them.

Analysis

Analysis of Hypotheses

The first hypothesis was that sexism prevented groups from using FSTs. My finding was that, despite the sub-par women’s rights records of most Muslim countries, the phenomenon of sexism was too multivariate and widespread to be the single variable that determined whether or not a terrorist group would use FSTs. It was, however, an issue that each group had to take into account when deciding whether or not it was more in its strategic interests to use FSTs than it was to maintain current gender stereotypes. My cases demonstrate this through the fact that the level of sexism varied from country to country and over time, such that while sexism was obviously a barrier, it was also shown to be something that could be overcome if necessary.

The second hypothesis was that Islamic ideology precluded the use of females as jihadists, and thereby precluded FST. Although in this paper, I defined Islamic ideology in a specific way, the fact is that Islamic ideology, like the ideology of most religions, can be contrived to serve many different political purposes. The literature shows that, when FST began, it was quite controversial throughout the Muslim world. Increasingly, however, incidences are not controversial so much as they are precedent-setting. To some extent, Islamic ideology does impact group decisionmaking, but more often, it seems to be a variable forced to bow to strategy—not the other way around. I must caveat this by admitting that this particular paper largely selected on the dependent variable—it is possible that, had I examined more cases in which FST was not used, I would have different findings.
The third hypothesis was that the need to find resonance with the host population would preclude terrorist groups from using FST. The analysis demonstrated that this mattered insofar as it began to disallow the accomplishment of strategic goals, which depended on a delicately balanced sliding scale of host population approval and how much of that approval was needed to achieve said strategic goals. In some cases, it did not matter. In Chechnya, for instance, the majority of the population abhorred the use of terrorism and condemned the use of violence, calling instead for peace after so many years of war. Riyadus-Salikhin nonetheless continued to exist because FSTs were still the best strategic weapon the Chechen Separatists had against the Russians.\footnote{Murphy, 216.} In other cases, however, the host population’s support was necessary enough, its disapproval, strong enough, to preclude further FST use. For the IMU, for instance, the group’s first FST use was also its last. The population rejected the use of ST, and Uzbekistan had to change and use another tactic. The IMU’s goal, to incite a popular uprising, could not be accomplished using FST (or ST), and was therefore discontinued.

My fourth hypothesis, that women would only be used against civilian targets, ultimately proved false. FSTs were used in whatever capacity they were most likely to gain groups a tactical advantage over their opponents. In most cases, women were selected because security forces naturally tended to overlook them and were likely to check them far less thoroughly than men if they did select them for further inspection at security checkpoints. Rather, in certain cultures, where it was possible to get women closer to military targets than men—for instance, in Chechnya, or, Afghanistan, then groups would find it strategically useful to use them in this capacity as well.

The fifth hypothesis was that a group would only use FSTs if it was in a military conflict with a concrete enemy. There proved to be no correlation. The Chechen Separatists and the
Taliban were both in military conflicts against concrete enemies when they used FSTs, but the IMU was not (although, in its eyes, there was a concrete enemy), and Hezbollah was occasionally in a military conflict, during which it used ST, but never used FST. It would be more accurate to say that a military conflict in which there is a concrete enemy creates conditions under which groups are more likely to consider FST to be their best strategic option.

**FST As Technological Innovation**

A useful paradigm through which to view FST is that of the diffusion and adoption of a technological innovation. Recently, there has been a body of research that has evaluated economic and social policy changes through a diffusion lens. In the case of FST, indirect diffusion—when one group learns about the actions of another group and models those actions—is at play. FST is an innovation to ST, a previous technology adoption. As noted in this paper, however, many groups that have adopted ST have not yet adopted FST. To understand the reasons behind this, one has to understand the barriers to entry that technological innovations face.

Barriers to entry are considered in broad categories such as the environment of the terrorist group, characteristics of group leadership and structure, availability of financial and human resources, and group longevity. Not all of these apply to FST, and those that do, do not necessarily apply in the way they would for actual technology. The forces of sexism and ideology nonetheless have a similar effect: the strategic/military utility of FST must be great

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58 Horowitz, 37.

enough to override the strength of cultural and ideological barriers within Muslim countries for them to be adopted.

This means that a group will use ST before it uses FST because the barriers to entry are lower for ST than they are for FST. The inherent tendency towards sexism present in most cultures will predispose most groups to consider using a male before considering using a female in a given position. This is played out across groups: with the exception of Uzbekistan, there has always been lag time between a group’s use of ST and a group’s use of FST as a group ascertains that ST use is strategically expedient, adopts it, and then realizes that FST would be even more strategically expedient. A textbook case of this at times hairline decision is exemplified by the Taliban: despite the group’s understanding of the strategic utility FSTs would bring, the sexist and ideological barriers in society demanded that they first try to use men disguised by burqas rather than simply using women. It was only once security measures improved to the point that this too became ineffective that they finally used FSTs.

By the same token, a group that is unable to achieve its strategic goals by using ST, is highly unlikely to overcome the barriers presented by sexism and Islam to begin using FST. The strategic costs of doing so are simply too high. A case for which FST was not able to meet strategic goals was Hezbollah. Hezbollah never used significant amounts of ST—only a few, sporadically, in the 1980s and 1990s. This is mainly because the group found other weapons—roadside bombs and rockets—to be more to its strategic advantage. This theory also suggests the possibility that, a group might not use FST because it does not have the resources to use ST. Unfortunately, none of my cases provides an adequate supporting example for this possibility.
Redefining O’Rourke

O’Rourke claims that religious organizations will only use FSTs if a secular group in the same conflict uses them first. My analysis proves this to not be entirely true. O’Rourke looks at a limited number of groups in her case studies (which are, in actuality, rather shallow examples rather than fleshed out cases), the majority of which are Palestinian, in order to prove her point. She cites Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade’s 2002, Hamas’ 2004, and PIJ’s 2004 FST attacks as the first FST usages by religious groups, having learned from secular groups in the same regional conflict. O’Rourke believes she sees a similar, though less-distinct phenomenon taking place in Iraq between the rival insurgent groups. In these particular cases, it absolutely does look as though innovation is limited to secular-religious tactical transfer within the same conflict. My broader investigation easily broadens her findings, however. Once FST was used in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, many other groups actually innovated specifically from them rather than from within the same conflict. The fight for the support of the host population was just one of many potential reasons for adoption. If ST is already being used, but is insufficient to obtain a group’s strategic goals, such that the need to innovate to FST is great enough to overcome barriers to entry, then FST will be used.

Policy Implications

Recommending appropriate policy options can be difficult—policy recommendations must be given in support of specific counterterrorism goals, and, paradoxically, in our complex world, different goals sometimes work against each other. A goal to prevent a terrorist organization from becoming more effective by using women could undermine a goal to

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60 O’Rourke 698.
61 O’Rourke 699.
completely wipe out an organization, and vice versa. For instance, if it had been true that sexism was the leading cause preventing groups from using more FST, then one’s first thought might actually be to turn a blind eye to the development of those societies in the hopes that, by staying backward, they might continue to use only men, and therefore not innovate operationally, thereby leading to the group’s demise. On the other hand, however, creating a society in which women are more empowered might help to temper extremism, though it could also have the negative effect of allowing women bombers in what terrorist groups did exist.

That said, the following three policy recommendations are intended to not just lower FST use, but to effectively undermine the terrorist organizations using them.

1. If a group is already using many STs, it would be to counterterrorism officials’ advantage to begin training female law enforcement officers in preparation for potential FST usage. My findings demonstrate that FSTs can be a next logical progression, particularly if counterterrorism efforts are succeeding.

2. In public relations campaigns against the Taliban, use the injustice of the FST battalion to the United States’ advantage. Call the Taliban to account, and ask them why, if women are oppressed in all other capacities, the Taliban chooses to use them as a weapon of war? The Taliban continues to prove the bankruptcy of its own ideology, and counterterrorism efforts should exploit this weakness wherever they can.

3. Do not train security officers to guard against potential FSTs in areas where women would look out of place. FST is used in instances where ST is no longer successful. If there was an instance in which FST would not be successful either, because it would not provide a strategic advantage (i.e., the men’s side of a mosque), then training counterterrorism officials for that potentiality would be counterproductive.
Conclusion

The fact that terrorists usually operate with limited resources often results in engaging counterterrorism efforts in a point and counterpoint of technological innovation in which it is not the most powerful, but the most innovative, who prevails. Understanding the rise of FST, particularly from a group perspective, is crucial to giving counterterrorism efforts the upper hand. It is not the would-be suicide terrorists themselves about which counterterrorism officials should be concerned, but rather the groups that realize their utility, recruit, and successfully wield them. This is the opponent the world must understand, for whom it must be prepared. Without recognizing the spread of technology from group to group, or understanding how group learning operates, counterterrorism efforts lose the upper hand, the death count grows, and the long war continues.
Acronym List

FST Female Suicide Terrorism
FSTs Female Suicide Terrorists
ST Suicide Terrorism
STs Suicide Terrorists
IMU Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan
AAMB Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade
PIJ Palestinian Islamic Jihad
AQS Al Qaeda in Somalia
VBIED Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Device
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