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Understanding Gender and Violent Extremism

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Abstract

The Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations/Low Intensity Conflict – Stability and Humanitarian Affairs (OASD (SO/LIC-SHA)) asked CNA to study the role of women and gender in both violent extremist organizations (VEOs) and US counterterrorism (CT) and counter violent extremism (CVE) operations (hereafter CT/CVE). Our research demonstrates that the dominant stereotypes about women’s roles in VEOs miss the vast majority of female activity in these groups and fundamentally fail to capture women’s lived experiences. Despite the passage of Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) legislation in the US, we found that internal DOD activities that are truly gender considered are severely limited, lack nuance, and are not institutionalized. External US CT/CVE efforts do not consider the roles men or women play from a nuanced perspective, and they are disproportionately influenced by a set of gender stereotypes that shape expectations of men and women’s roles. Much of the current DOD approach can be traced to misunderstanding gender as a concept. This report provides an analysis of the gaps, risks, and opportunities for the Department of Defense (DOD) on understanding women and gender in extremism, and integrating a gender-considered approach to CT/CVE.

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Approved by:

March 2021



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Executive Summary

The Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations/Low Intensity Conflict – Stability and Humanitarian Affairs (OASD (SO/LIC-SHA)) asked CNA to study the role of women and gender in both violent extremist organizations (VEOs) and US counterterrorism (CT) and counter violent extremism (CVE) operations (hereafter CT/CVE). This request emerged from the recognition that greater understanding of the role of gender and women in CT/CVE operations is necessary as mandated in section 1047 of the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) and in accordance with the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Act of 2017. This study addresses the following research questions:

1. What roles do women play in VEOs organizationally and operationally?
2. How have these roles shifted over time, and how might they evolve in the short and long terms?
3. What are the existing Department of Defense (DOD) and Special Operations Forces (SOF) approaches and policies regarding gender and CT/CVE?
4. What opportunities are presented to DOD, and SOF in particular, through increased consideration of gender in CT/CVE? What are the risks of failing to do so?
5. How should the US factor the role of gender into future CT/CVE operations, training, and education?

To carry this out, we developed a three-part approach:

1. **Identified the roles of women and gender in VEOs** through nine case studies: Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia–People’s Army, Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, Kurdistan Workers’ Party, Al-Shabaab, National Socialist Underground and National Action (two white supremacist groups in Europe), Boko Haram, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, Lord’s Resistance Army, and Abu Sayyaf Group.
2. **Assessed whether current US DOD CT/CVE strategy, policy, and activities incorporate gender considerations.**
3. **Identified gaps, risks, and opportunities** according to four thematic categories: strategy, policy and doctrine, internal activities,¹ external activities, and conceptual understanding.

¹ Internal CT/CVE activities are programs and activities directed at forces and individuals within DOD/SOF to train, educate, and prepare them to carry out CT/CVE activities abroad. This category does not refer to counter-radicalization efforts within US armed forces.

Our findings demonstrate that women play supporting, enabling, and operational roles in VEOs, and that there is no deliberate or coordinated effort to integrate these roles into CT/CVE strategy, policy, or activities. We provide an overview of select findings in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1. Select VEOs findings

VEOs Findings
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Women played supporting, enabling, and operational roles in the VEOs we examined. Women served in more types of roles than men. Within each group, women never served just one role. Women also never served every role.• Across categories, the most common roles women played were: household management/maintenance, smuggling or transporting weapons/materials, intelligence collection, psychological/emotional support to husband and/or male companion, and fundraising.• Within each category, the most common roles women played were as follows: <u>supporting</u>: household management/maintenance; <u>enabling</u>: smuggling or transporting weapons/materials; <u>operational</u>: fighters/combatants/attackers.• Women in religious groups were more likely to serve in supportive roles, women in secular groups were more likely to serve in operational roles.• All VEOs accepted women in enabling roles regardless of ideology.• No women held official senior leadership positions in VEOs formed after 1990.• Womanhood was propagandized differently across groups.• The evolution of women’s roles in the short and long terms will not be based on shifts in global gender norms, but on watershed shifts in VEO ideology across groups (liberal, conservative, etc.) and the emergence of exogenous factors (a critical need for fighters, etc.).• In every case study in which participation was voluntary, women cited multiple reasons for joining VEOs. The most frequently cited reasons for joining were: nationalist sentiment, a desire for respect new identity/social advancement, the promise of protection, a desire for revenge, and escape from “traditional” gender roles.• We found a correlation between groups that enforced strict rules to control women and women leaving those groups due to mistreatment by superiors. In other words, violent/strict rules for women may cause resentment.• We found that the treatment of women has also changed over time—both violence against women and the degree of control of women’s bodies increased. Within our case studies, the rise of violence against women correlated to a decline of leftist and feminist VEOs and a rise of conservative VEOs over time.• The status, existence, and recognition of women’s “membership” in terrorist groups can be an unresolved and contested issue.

Source: CNA.

Table 2. Select CT/CVE findings

US CT/CVE Findings
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No deliberate, consistent, or coordinated effort to integrate gender considerations exists at the US CT/CVE strategic or policy level. Strategic-level documents are largely, if not entirely, silent on the issue of gender.• We identified significant gaps, limited coordination, and inconsistent efforts in DOD CT/CVE internal and external activities related to gender.• Existing programs and activities related to CT/CVE and gender are currently limited and reflect an emphasis on internal efforts.• Based on historical and existing activities, gender considerations are more likely to be present if the nature of the DOD CT/CVE activity is population-centric as opposed to focused on direct action or targeting.• We did not identify any data to demonstrate that DOD operational and tactical unit-level activities have incorporated gender considerations since 2018.• Gender advisors (GENADs) appear to play a prominent role in many of the CT/CVE activities we identified, and their presence is a crucial step in socializing gender issues.• In many instances, the implementation of WPS requirements was used as the single or main indicator that gender considerations are being addressed in CT/CVE. There is therefore a risk that the implementation of WPS across DOD can be used to “tick the box” of gender-considered CT/CVE.

Source: CNA.

We identified four critical gaps in US CT/CVE strategy, policy, activities, and understanding related to gender and provide high-level recommendations to address these gaps.

Conclusion 1: Our research demonstrates that the dominant stereotypes about women’s roles in VEOs miss the vast majority of female activity in these groups and fundamentally fail to capture women’s lived experiences. Women play more roles than stereotypes suggest. They make contributions to VEOs that go unrecognized because they are unexpected, and they have such a wide range of experiences that it is not possible to discuss the “average” woman’s role in a VEO. We demonstrated that women play diverse supporting, enabling, and operational roles in a range of ideologically diverse and regionally disparate VEOs, both past and present. We found that women make substantial and essential contributions to VEO organization, operations, and maintenance. We also found that gender roles and norms affect women’s experiences, including their reasons for joining VEOs and their treatment while in VEOs.

Recommendations:

- 1.1** Remove dominant stereotypes about gender norms and women’s roles in VEOs from strategy, policy, programs, and activities in order to recognize the extent and significance of gender, gender roles, and women’s activities.
- 1.2** Identify the full spectrum of roles carried out by women—including operational, enabling, and supporting roles that may be currently unknown or unappreciated—and integrate those that align with DOD capabilities into DOD CT/CVE efforts.

- 1.3 Incorporate gender considerations across the DOD operational life-cycle. This includes but is not limited to providing regionally specific and gender-considered pre-deployment training at the tactical level and operational level, gathering intelligence and conducting analysis on women's and gender roles, and linking roles across categories (enabling, supporting, and operational) in operational planning in order to fully understand the threat environment.
- 1.4 Develop additional DOD activities and programs tailored to address the non-kinetic roles women play.

Conclusion 2: Despite significant growth in this space since the passage of WPS legislation, we found that internal DOD activities that are truly gender considered are severely limited, lack nuance, and are not institutionalized. The existence of gender-related conferences and events, research, and coordination by GENADs suggests modest progress. However, the distinction between WPS efforts and gender-considered CT/CVE efforts—each of which has very different goals, objectives, and language—is lost because the nuances of both initiatives are problematically flattened to a single point of overlapping concern: thinking about women. Of course, it is critical to think about women; however, in the context of CT/CVE, it is also critical to acknowledge that women might be combatants and to consider the differential effect that a CT/CVE initiative might have on male and female populations. This acknowledgment is just the start of a more robust engagement that needs to occur.

Recommendations:

- 2.1 Dedicate resources and personnel to formalize networks of gender experts across DOD. This should include but not be limited to GENADs. Experts are needed who are conversant on both the goals of WPS legislation and the need for gender considerations in CT/CVE, as well as the differences between the two. DOD entities should also distinguish between WPS legislative objectives and gender-considered CT/CVE efforts during internal trainings, events, research, and coordination in order to promote understanding that the efforts are not the same, nor are they singularly about women.
- 2.2 Sponsor regular evaluations to assess the integration of gender considerations across DOD. This should include formally linking CT/CVE operational imperatives to gender considerations through logical frameworks, and mandating the collection of sex- and (if possible) gender-disaggregated data as part of operational monitoring and reporting processes.

Conclusion 3: External DOD CT/CVE efforts do not consider the roles men or women play from a nuanced perspective, and they are disproportionately influenced by a set of gender stereotypes that shape expectations of men and women’s roles. Although DOD has some understanding of women’s roles in VEOs, gender roles of both men and women remain underexplored. **The limited nature of DOD’s gender-considered CT/CVE programs and activities suggests an ad hoc approach at the command level and a lack of senior-level understanding, guidance, and planning.** This has prevented gender-considered approaches from being institutionalized in external DOD CT/CVE efforts. Further, the majority of existing efforts focus on the roles that women have or might play as peacekeepers or combatants, reflecting an internal bias away from a robust understanding of gender as a social construct affecting all people, and a re-inscription of a long-standing tendency to see women as mothers or monsters.²

Recommendations:

- 3.1** Revise CT/CVE strategic and policy documents to incorporate gender-considered practices and approaches that are tied to an empirical understanding of gender norms and women’s roles in VEOs.
- 3.2** Integrate gender-specific considerations into engagements with CT/CVE partners—including exercises, conferences, events, and other assistance—and share gender-considered intelligence with CT/CVE partners.

Conclusion 4: Much of the current DOD approach can be traced to misunderstanding gender as a concept. This should be seen as a root cause for other gaps. Misunderstanding gender contributes not only to a lack of knowledge around women’s roles in VEOs, but also other operationally relevant knowledge gaps, such as the relationship between extremism and masculinity, the effect of gender norms on marriage as a driver for radicalization, and much more.

Recommendations:

- 4.1** Integrate gender-specific instruction on CT/CVE into Professional Military Education (PME) for senior leaders during Joint PME (JPME) I and II and at the military academies.
- 4.2** Define and promote an understanding of the difference between gender, gender roles, gender norms, gender identities, gender expression, and sex in DOD CT/CVE strategy and policy. Promote an understanding of gender as a reflection of socially constructed, context- and time-specific, and changeable attributes, opportunities, and relationships that affect women, men, boys, girls, and those who identify as transgender or non-binary.

² Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry, *Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Women's Violence in Global Politics*, 1st ed., London: Zed Books, 2007.

Understanding the roles and experiences of women in VEOs is an important but insufficient step in understanding the full effect of gender on VEOs and CT/CVE. Similarly, identifying gaps in CT/CVE strategy, policy, activities, and understanding without addressing those gaps risks the long-term effectiveness of DOD efforts to counter VEOs. We therefore submit this report as a contribution toward addressing these gaps in the hopes of helping DOD to better confront the full spectrum of women's roles and gender considerations in VEOs.

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Introduction

The Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations/Low Intensity Conflict – Stability and Humanitarian Affairs (OASD (SO/LIC-SHA)) asked CNA to study the role of women and gender in both violent extremist organizations (VEOs) and US counterterrorism (CT) and counter violent extremism (CVE) operations (hereafter CT/CVE). This request emerged from the recognition that greater understanding of the role of gender and women in CT/CVE operations is necessary as mandated in section 1047 of the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) and in accordance with the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Act of 2017. This study addresses the following research questions:

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4. What opportunities are presented to DOD, and SOF in particular, through increased consideration of gender in CT/CVE? What are the risks of failing to do so?
5. How should the US factor the role of gender into future CT/CVE operations, training, and education?

The issues addressed in this report come at a time of gender mainstreaming across the US government (USG) and reflect a rise in concern that insufficient engagement with and gaps in understanding about women and gender is undercutting our tactical and strategic objectives. Although this study is focused on the specific research questions outlined above, it has been informed by wider research, analysis, and discussions regarding the changing perception of the role of gender across the DOD, and specifically in CT/CVE operations.

Women, gender, and the USG

To place our analysis in the proper context, it is important to start with a nuanced understanding of terminology and concepts surrounding gender and gender mainstreaming, as well as the current state of high-level USG WPS legislation and associated implementation plans.

Understanding gender

Gender is a multifaceted concept.³ The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) defines *gender* in several parts:

- as the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female
- as relationships between women and men and girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men
- as a reflection of socially constructed, context/time-specific, and changeable attributes, opportunities, and relationships
- as a determining factor for what is expected, allowed, and valued in a women or a man in a given context
- as part of the broader sociocultural context that affects differences and inequalities between women and men in responsibilities, activities, and access to and control over resources⁴

Although useful in its articulation of the socially constructed and malleable nature of gender, this definition requires expansion to include **gender identity, expression, and perception**⁵ to be comprehensive according to modern understanding.⁶ A number of cultural and social norms and assumptions exist regarding the presumed relationship between sex and gender.

³ Gender is often confused with sex, a biological designation (e.g., male, female, intersex) usually given at birth that is based on the presence of sex organs. Sex characteristics are also determined by chromosomes and hormones. Gender identity and sex are linked by certain gender identities; for instance *cisgender* refers to people whose gender identity aligns with their sex assigned at birth, and *transgender* refers to people whose gender identity differs from their sex assigned at birth.

⁴ “OSAGI Gender Mainstreaming – Concepts and definitions,” United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.

⁵ **Gender identity** is one’s internal understanding of their own gender. Gender identity is not limited to those who identify with the male / female binary, but also includes non-binary and genderqueer identities. **Gender expression** is how an individual externally expresses their gender identity—for example, through appearance and behavior. **Gender perception** is how others perceive an individual’s gender, which may or may not align with that individual’s self-perception. **Sexual orientation**, a separate concept still, refers to a pattern of attraction to a specific sex and/or gender (includes heterosexual, homosexual, pansexual, asexual, etc.). See: The Trevor Project, *Guide to Being an Ally to Transgender and Nonbinary Youth*, <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Guide-to-Being-an-Ally-to-Transgender-and-Nonbinary-Youth.pdf>.

⁶ Anna Lindqvist, Marie Gustafsson Sendén, and Emma A. Renström, “What Is Gender, Anyway: A Review of the Options for Operationalising Gender,” *Psychology and Sexuality*, DOI: 10.1080/19419899.2020.1729844, Feb. 18, 2020.

These are referred to as *gender norms, roles, or stereotypes*. Although the link between sex and gender norms is a social construction, this link significantly affects people's lived experiences, behavior, relationships, and social expectations. These norms, roles, and stereotypes are the primary objects of analysis in this report.

Gender mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming, a strategy for promoting gender equality that has been promulgated through the UN since 1995, involves “ensuring that gender perspectives and attention to the goal of gender equality are central to all activities.”⁷ Gender mainstreaming is not the same as adding a “woman’s” perspective to existing activities, but rather “situates gender equality issues at the centre of policy decision.”⁸ Gender mainstreaming was reaffirmed by UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on WPS in 2000, which:

reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peace-building, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction and stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.⁹

USG WPS legislation and implementation plans

Since 2011, the USG has woven elements of gender mainstreaming and WPS into its foreign policy. In 2011, President Barack Obama issued Executive Order 13595.1 directing the implementation of an action plan on WPS.¹⁰ In 2017, the US passed the Women, Peace, and Security Act (Public Law 115-68).¹¹ This legislation led to several implementation plans,

⁷ “OSAGI Gender Mainstreaming – Concepts and Definitions,” United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.

⁸ “Gender Mainstreaming: Strategy for Promoting Gender Equality,” Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, Aug. 2001, <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/pdf/factsheet1.pdf>.

⁹ “Landmark Resolution on Women, Peace, and Security,” Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/>.

¹⁰ Valerie Jarrett, “Announcing the US National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security,” The White House, Dec. 19, 2011, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2011/12/19/announcing-us-national-action-plan-women-peace-and-security>.

¹¹ “Our Priorities: Women, Peace, and Security,” US Department of State, <https://www.state.gov/women-peace-and-security/>.

including the 2019 White House Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security¹² and the 2020 Women, Peace, and Security implementation plans from the DOD,¹³ State Department,¹⁴ and other agencies.

These implementation plans vary somewhat in language and form, but generally they include efforts around the topics of women's participation in conflict and peace, protecting women and girls in conflict, gender equality and women's empowerment, and the capabilities and practices of US partner nations (PNs) regarding women and girls in their armed forces. Although these efforts include some limited references to institutionalizing a gender-considered approach to conflict, their objectives are largely framed in terms of women and girls, as opposed to gender roles, norms, or identities.

The detailed lines of effort (LOEs) and objectives of the relevant legislation and strategic frameworks can be found in Table 3.

¹² "United States Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security," The President of the United States, June 2019, https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/WPS_Strategy_10_October2019.pdf.

¹³ "Women, Peace, and Security Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan," US Department of Defense, June 2020, https://media.defense.gov/2020/Jun/11/2002314428/-1/-1/1/WOMEN_PEACE_SECURITY_STRATEGIC_FRAMEWORK_IMPLEMENTATION_PLAN.PDF.

¹⁴ "The Department of State's Plan to Implement the US Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security 2020-2023," US Department of State, https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/20-01943-SGWI_v11_forWeb_Bookmarks508.pdf.

Table 3. WPS legislation and implementation plan LOEs

Title	Year	LOE or Objectives
US National Action Plan on WPS in accordance with 2011 Executive Order 13595.1	2011	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> National integration and institutionalization: Through interagency coordination, policy development, enhanced professional training and education, and evaluation, the United States government will institutionalize a gender-responsive approach to its diplomatic, development, and defense-related work in conflict-affected environments. Participation in peace processes and decision-making: The United States government will improve the prospects for inclusive, just, and sustainable peace by promoting and strengthening women’s rights and effective leadership and substantive participation in peace processes, conflict prevention, peacebuilding, transitional processes, and decision-making institutions in conflict-affected environments. Protection from violence: The United States government will strengthen its efforts to prevent—and protect women and children from—harm, exploitation, discrimination, and abuse, including sexual and gender-based violence and trafficking in persons, and to hold perpetrators accountable in conflict-affected environments. Conflict prevention: The United States government will promote women’s roles in conflict prevention, improve conflict early-warning and response systems through the integration of gender perspectives, and invest in women and girls’ health, education, and economic opportunity to create conditions for stable societies and lasting peace. Access to relief and recovery: The United States government will respond to the distinct needs of women and children in conflict-affected disasters and crises, including by providing safe, equitable access to humanitarian assistance.
Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017 Public Law 115-68	2017	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Integrate women’s interests: integrate the perspectives and interests of affected women into conflict-prevention activities and strategies; Participation: encourage partner governments to adopt plans to improve the meaningful participation of women in peace and security processes and decision-making institutions; Safety: promote the physical safety, economic security, and dignity of women and girls; Access: support the equal access of women to aid distribution mechanisms and services; Data: collect and analyze gender data for the purpose of developing and enhancing early warning systems of conflict and violence; Equality: adjust policies and programs to improve outcomes in gender equality and the empowerment of women; and AM&E: analyze, monitor, and evaluate the efforts related to each strategy submitted under section 5 and the effect of such efforts.

Title	Year	LOE or Objectives
DOD Requirements in WPS Act of 2017 (Public Law 115-68)	2017	<p>The Secretary of Defense shall ensure that relevant personnel receive training, as appropriate, in the following areas:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Training in conflict prevention, peace processes, mitigation, resolution, and security initiatives that specifically addresses the importance of meaningful participation by women. Participation: Gender considerations and meaningful participation by women, including training regarding (A) international human rights law and international humanitarian law, as relevant, and (B) protecting civilians from violence, exploitation, and trafficking in persons. Equality: Adjust US international programs to improve outcomes in equality for, and the empowerment of, women; Participation of PN women: Encourage partner governments to adopt policies, plans, and capacity to improve the meaningful participation of women in processes connected to peace and security and decision-making institutions.
United States Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security	2019	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Participation: Seek and support the preparation and meaningful participation of women around the world in decision-making processes related to conflict and crises. Protection: Promote the protection of women and girls' human rights; access to humanitarian assistance; and safety from violence, abuse, and exploitation around the world.
The Department of State's Plan to Implement the US Strategy on WPS	2020	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Internal capabilities: Adjust United States international programs to improve outcomes in equality for, and improvement of, women. Partnerships: Encourage partner governments to adopt policies, plans, and capacity to improve the meaningful participation of women in processes connected to peace and security and decision-making institutions. <p>Note: The US Strategy on WPS and the State Department's implementation plan share the same objectives.</p>
DOD WPS Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan	2020	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> DOD exemplification of women's meaningful participation: The DOD exemplifies a diverse organization that allows for women's meaningful participation across the development, management, and employment of the Joint Force. Participation of PN women: Women in partner nations meaningfully participate and serve at all ranks and in all occupations in defense and security sectors. Security of PN women and girls: Partner nation defense and security sectors ensure women and girls are safe and secure and that their human rights are protected, especially during conflict and crisis.

Source: CNA. Document citations can be found in references.

These documents are not CT/CVE-specific and shed limited light on women's roles in VEOs outside that of victim or CT partner. Although these documents are useful for providing blueprints for implementing WPS and gender mainstreaming objectives into the USG, they are insufficient for understanding whether the US is successfully incorporating gender issues and women's roles into its CT/CVE activities. The goals of this study, therefore, are to identify the roles that women play in VEOs, determine to what extent US CT/CVE approaches are addressing those roles, and recommend ways to do so in a more nuanced and comprehensive way going forward.

Organization

The remainder of this report is organized as follows. First, we present a detailed methodology for our data collection and analysis. Next, we identify the roles of women and gender in VEOs, and present our findings across the case studies. We then identify existing DOD and SOF approaches and policies on gender and CT/CVE. Next we present a gap analysis of DOD and SOF approaches and policies on gender and CT/CVE in the context of women and gender in VEOs. In this section we also identify risks and opportunities that flow from these gaps. Finally, we present our conclusions and recommendations to close the main body of the report. The appendices in this report contain our literature review on women and gender in VEOs, nine VEO case studies that informed our analysis, and details of our data collection process and methodology.

Methodology

Our methodology was based on the following logical flow. In order to understand the gaps in US CT/CVE gender-considered efforts, we had to first understand what these efforts are attempting to counter. That is, we needed to develop a full understanding of women and gender roles within VEOs. Once we had an understanding of these roles, we looked specifically at whether US DOD CT/CVE efforts are in place to counter these roles. Finally, we conducted a gap analysis in order to identify areas in which US DOD CT/CVE efforts are and are not countering these roles. To carry this out, we developed a three-part approach (Table 4):

1. **Identified the roles of women and gender in VEOs:** To identify the roles women play in VEOs, we first conducted a thorough review of the existing literature on the topic of female participation in violent extremist and terrorist movements. The results of this literature review can be found in Appendix A: Literature Reviews. This review then informed our selection of VEOs to analyze, and we ultimately conducted nine case studies. We standardized these case studies (detailed in Appendix B: FARC-EP to Appendix J: Abu Sayyaf) using a uniform data collection framework, and we supplemented these case studies with 21 semi-structured conversations with subject matter experts (SMEs) from academia and government. We then conducted a comparative analysis to identify key themes and trends regarding the roles of women and gender in VEOs across decades and continents. We identified a full list of the pathways into and out of the organization, roles played within the organizations, and treatment of women by the organizations. Analysts coded each variable according to a Likert scale (i.e., often, rarely, sometimes, never, no data/unknown) in order to determine the frequency of roles, behaviors, and women's treatment across groups.¹⁵ Finally, we leveraged the data to explore whether or not the roles of women in terrorist movements and VEOs have evolved over time.
2. **Assessed whether current DOD CT/CVE efforts incorporate gender considerations:** We focused on DOD strategy, policy, and activities from 2001 onwards (but focused specifically on 2018–2021 to ascertain presumably existing

¹⁵ This scale was imperfect given the complexity of the dataset. To begin, as a number of SMEs noted in our discussions, early research on women and VEOs was problematically flat-footed as analysts and academics did not ask nuanced questions about the roles that women played in these putatively male organizations. As a result, there is a troubling lack of granular data on women in VEOs before 2010. Additionally, the longevity of some groups complicated analyst attempts to clearly assert how frequently something had occurred. As one example, a data point might have occurred often in a VEO's early years, but occurred rarely in a VEO's later years. In recognition of this concern, analysts were instructed to conduct their analysis at the organizational level, assessing how frequently the data point had occurred over the course of the organization's entire history.

approaches and policies). We gathered data on all DOD entities, but paid specific attention to SOF given the dominant role these forces have played in DOD's CT/CVE efforts. Unless otherwise noted, all references to CT/CVE in this report refer to those efforts carried out by US DOD entities. Our data collection included classified and unclassified conversations with 25 USG personnel, including gender advisors (GENADs), curriculum developers, analysts, senior military advisors, policy assistants, program managers, and WPS implementers. We conducted an exhaustive classified and unclassified document review of strategic-, policy-, and operational-level documents.¹⁶ We then analyzed the data at two levels: the strategy and policy level and the activities level. At the strategy and policy level, we reviewed CT/CVE documents for gender-related terms and considerations, and we reviewed gender-related policy and strategy for CT/CVE-related terms and considerations. We also gathered strategic documents on two regional vignettes. At the programs and activities level, we identified and categorized a range of current and past DOD gender-related CT/CVE programs and activities by type of CT activity.¹⁷ We further categorized the activities by focus: internal¹⁸ vs. external. Finally, we identified key trends and patterns in the data.

3. **Identified gaps, risks, and opportunities:** We derived gaps by bringing together the major findings from the VEO case studies and DOD CT/CVE efforts. We identified CT/CVE gaps according to four thematic categories: strategy, policy and doctrine, internal activities, external activities, and conceptual understanding. We then looked at these gaps in terms of their risk to effective CT/CVE activities. Finally, we identified opportunities to address these gaps. We used these opportunities to derive recommendations.

¹⁶ We requested documents including, but not limited to, the following: descriptions of formal efforts/programs, after-action reports (AARs), campaign plans, planning documents, briefings, presentations, reports on or proposals for CT/CVE operations that involve women (or discuss gender roles), rules of engagement (ROEs), doctrine or policy on the role of women in CT/CVE operations, and details on training programs. The documents we received were primarily briefings, presentations, reports, policy, and doctrine. We received limited (if any) descriptions of formal efforts, AARs, ROEs, or details on training programs.

¹⁷ This framework, which outlines categories of CT/CVE activities, was amended from McQuaid et al., *Independent Assessment of US Government Efforts against Al-Qaeda*, CNA, Oct. 2017.

¹⁸ Internal CT/CVE activities are programs and activities directed at forces and individuals within DOD/SOF to train, educate, and prepare them to carry out CT/CVE activities abroad. This category does not refer to counter-radicalization efforts within US armed forces.

Table 4. Approach

VEOs	US CT/CVE	Gap Analysis
Actions taken		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reviewed literature - Developed nine case studies - Conducted comparative analysis - Developed findings - Developed case study standalone appendices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reviewed literature - Developed a baseline of DOD and SOF CT/CVE gender-related activities - Conducted an intra-blue gap analysis - Developed findings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identified gaps in gender considerations across strategic, operational, and tactical DOD effort - Determined gaps, risks, opportunities, and recommendations
Research questions addressed		
<p>What roles do women play in VEOs both organizationally and operationally?</p> <p>How have these roles shifted over time, and how might they evolve in the short and long terms?</p>	<p>What are the existing DOD and SOF approaches and policies regarding gender and CT/CVE?</p>	<p>What opportunities are presented to DOD, and SOF in particular, through increased consideration of gender in CT/CVE? What are the risks of failing to do so?</p> <p>How should the US factor in the role of gender for more effective future CT/CVE operations, training, and education?</p>
Data sources		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data collection discussions with 21 SMEs on women and gender, gender policy and strategy, preventing violent extremism, women in CVE, US CT efforts, and case study VEOs. • Data collection discussions with 25 USG personnel on US CT/CVE efforts including GENADs, curriculum developers, analysts, senior military advisors, policy assistants, program managers, WPS implementers, and subject matter experts. • Solicited and searched for documents including doctrine, campaign plans, planning documents, rules of engagement (ROEs), after-action reports (AARs), studies on women active in VEOs, briefings, presentations, reports on or proposals for CT/CVE operations that involve women or discuss gender roles, descriptions of formal efforts/programs, doctrine or policy on the role of women in CT/CVE operations, details on training programs, and studies on women, gender, and CT/CVE operations. 		

Source: CNA.

Scope

This study’s research questions focus primarily on women’s roles as supporters, enablers, or operators in VEOs, and how women are affected by (or considered in) DOD CT/CVE programming. Therefore, this paper does not fully cover the topics of how a gender-considered approach affects perceptions of men and masculinities, or issues of women’s rights or empowerment. We suggest that follow-on work be commissioned to improve understanding

in these areas. This scoping is not meant to perpetuate the misunderstanding that gender is relevant only as it pertains to women, but rather to emphasize that women's roles and gender roles (as well as men's roles and masculinities) are distinct but intersecting and mutually relevant factors for understanding gender in CT/CVE.

Data sources

We found great disparity in the available data between the VEO and DOD CT/CVE portions of this report. The data available on women and gender in VEOs were substantial and rich, enabling us to carry out a robust comparative analysis. Data were limited in some research areas, such as the pathways women take to leave VEOs, but these data gaps did not interfere with our ability to fully address the research questions. Data on DOD implementation of gender-considered approaches in CT/CVE were much sparser. Results in this area were difficult to measure because of the lack of sufficient data on program implementation related to gender (disaggregated data, etc.). Although we conducted an exhaustive search through interviews and classified and unclassified documents, it is unclear whether we have identified the full extent of USG/DOD programming in all areas. We are confident, however, that data on additional programming are unlikely to change the overall findings. We base this assertion on our rigorous review of available literature and extensive discussions with USG SMEs, which revealed a general paucity of DOD activity in this space.

Roles of Women and Gender in VEOs

In this section, we identify the roles women have played in VEOs organizationally and operationally, the factors that have influenced how these roles shifted over time, and how these roles may evolve in the short and long term. We also identify trends in women's lived experiences within and across VEOs over time, including the pathways through which women have joined and left VEOs, and how VEOs have treated and controlled women within and outside the group.

Case studies

To answer these questions, we conducted an extensive literature review (Appendix A: Literature Reviews) and examined nine case studies, each dedicated to a VEO group or movement (Appendix B: FARC-EP–Appendix J: Abu Sayyaf Group). Identifying a diverse selection of case studies was a critical step in ensuring that our analysis of women and gender in VEOs would be both robust and meaningful. To do so, we developed a set of criteria for choosing these organizations, including the following:

- Groups with a significant amount of or unique female participation or membership
- Groups with geographic diversity
- Groups analyzed in wide-ranging and credible academic and policy-oriented literature
- Groups of interest to DOD/SOLIC

Based on these criteria, we selected the following case studies for analysis:

- Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia–People's Army (FARC-EP) (Appendix B)
- Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) (Appendix C)
- Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) (Appendix D)
- Al-Shabaab (Appendix E)
- National Socialist Underground (NSU) and National Action (NA) (two white supremacist groups in Europe) (Appendix F)
- Boko Haram (Appendix G)
- Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) (Appendix H)
- Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) (Appendix I)
- Abu Sayyaf Group (Appendix J)

We developed a uniform case study data collection framework to identify guiding questions and gather data for the case studies. The sub-questions that guided our research within these three categories—recruitment (voluntary and involuntary), roles, and treatment—can be found in Table 5.

Table 5. Guiding questions for case studies

Category	Guiding Questions
Recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do women join and for what reasons? • What are women’s motivations for joining the group at the micro, meso, and macro level? • How have women left the group and for what reasons?
Roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What roles do women typically play in the group? • What roles have women played organizationally / Where do women sit in the organization? • What supporting, enabling, and operational roles have women played? • What are the typical gender roles in the group? / What stereotyping of men and women does the group use?
Treatment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the group have any rules or regulations for women who are members of the group or that determine gender roles? If yes, who enforces these? • Does the group have any rules or regulations regarding women or gender roles outside of the group? If yes, who enforces these? How have these changed over time? • Is there violence against women within the group? • Does the group perpetrate violence against women outside the group? If yes, what form does it take? • Who perpetuates the violence? • Does the violence occur incidentally or intentionally? • If applicable, what alleged transgressions precipitate this violence?

Source: CNA.

Research question findings

Having analyzed the nine case studies, we identified the following findings in relation to the research questions.

What roles do women play in VEOs both organizationally and operationally?

Women played supporting, enabling, and operational roles in VEOs, and these roles were more diverse and varied than most analysis suggests (Table 6).

- **Supporting roles** were those that assisted in maintaining the VEO environment. They included domestic responsibilities such as childrearing and household management,

psychological and emotional support to other militants, and both consensual and non-consensual sexual roles.

- **Enabling roles** were those that directly assisted the development of the VEO network and operations. They included outreach to promulgate messages, build and strengthen social networks, and identify and encourage potential recruits. They also included intelligence collection, fundraising, and transportation of weapons and materiel.
- **Operational roles** involved direct engagement in VEO combat, including direct roles as front-line soldiers and suicide bombers.

Table 6. Roles of women in VEOs

Supporting	Enabling	Operational
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • psychological/emotional support to husband and/or male companion • procreation/childrearing • household management/maintenance • sexual services/within “marriages” or “relationships” (e.g., conjugal slavery) • sexual services/outside marriage (e.g., sexual slavery) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • build social networks • teach • recruit • proselytize/propagandize • fundraising • administrative (to include finances) • collect intelligence • smuggling or transporting weapons/materials • camp management/maintenance¹⁹ • procuring weapons • logistical support • medical specialists • operational planning • communications specialists • community policing • monitoring other women 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • specialized training in weapons • fighters/combatants/attackers • senior leadership • leaders/commanders • suicide bombers • guards • assassins/snipers

Source: CNA.

Table 7 through Table 10 provide more granular views of these roles within each of the nine groups we examined in our case studies.²⁰

¹⁹ Camp management/maintenance refers to frontline encampments from which attacks are orchestrated and launched. This is not a reference to IDP camps or detention centers.

²⁰ The ordering of the rows and columns differs across these tables. We did this because the primary object of analysis was not the individual data points collected on each VEO; rather, it was the trends that characterize the experiences of women in VEOs more broadly. Thus, the order of the rows and columns was adjusted in each chart in order to ensure that the broader objective was clear. In most cases, this meant ordering the rows and columns to create a clustering of darker blue in the upper left quadrants and lighter blue in the lower right quadrants. This made it possible to speak about trends across the movements and made clear what variables (e.g., reasons for

Cumulatively across VEOs, women served in more types of roles than men. This is because women, unlike men, served in roles that are both traditionally male and female.

In addition to a large number of roles that were exclusive to women, our data demonstrate that women also served in *all* of the roles that are typically associated with men. For example, in some VEOs, women's roles included childrearing, household management, and the provision of psychological and emotional support to male companions, while in other VEOs women played traditionally male operational roles. In contrast, even in the most egalitarian VEOs (e.g., PKK or FARC), men were not engaged in all supporting roles, such as childrearing or household management.

joining, roles, etc.) were most prominent in the dataset. Note that this dataset, like all datasets, is by no means perfect. As mentioned above, data collection on women in VEOs has been, and continues to be, somewhat uneven. A number of cells in the tables are blank because data were incomplete or unreliable. In theory, this could skew our capacity to identify larger trends. However, these data collection gaps are sporadic, and no major trends (e.g., a lack of data on women serving in a certain subset of positions, a lack of data on women in certain types of groups) would disrupt the broad findings in the tables.

Table 7. Ranked roles of women in VEOs

Roles Within the Groups		FARC	PKK	AS	LTTE	ASG	ISIS	LRA	NSU	BH	NA
household management/maintenance	supporting	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
smuggling or transporting weapons/materials	enabling	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
collect intelligence	enabling	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
psychological/emotional support to husband and/or male companion	supporting	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
fundraising	enabling	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
fighters/combatants/attackers	operational	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue
administrative (to include finances)	enabling	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
procreation/childrearing	supporting	Light Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
proselytize/propagandize	enabling	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
camp management/maintenance	enabling	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue
recruit	enabling	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
sexual services/within 'marriages' or 'relationships' (e.g., conjugal slavery)	supporting	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
logistical support	enabling	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue
suicide bombers	operational	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue
build social networks	enabling	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
teach	enabling	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
specialized training in weapons	operational	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue
leaders/commanders	operational	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue
operational planning	enabling	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue
monitoring other women	enabling	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
sexual services/outside marriage (e.g., sexual slavery)	supporting	Light Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
senior leadership	operational	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue
medical specialists	enabling	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue
procuring weapons	enabling	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
assassins	operational	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue
guards	operational	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
communications specialists	enabling	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
community policing	enabling	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue

ASG: Abu Sayyaf Group
AS: Al-Shabaab
BH: Boko Haram
FARC: Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia–People’s Army
ISIS: Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
LRA: Lord’s Resistance Army
LTTE: Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
NA: National Action
NSU: National Socialist Underground
PKK: Kurdistan Workers’ Party

Frequency with which pathway was cited

 * Blank cells indicate incomplete or unreliable data

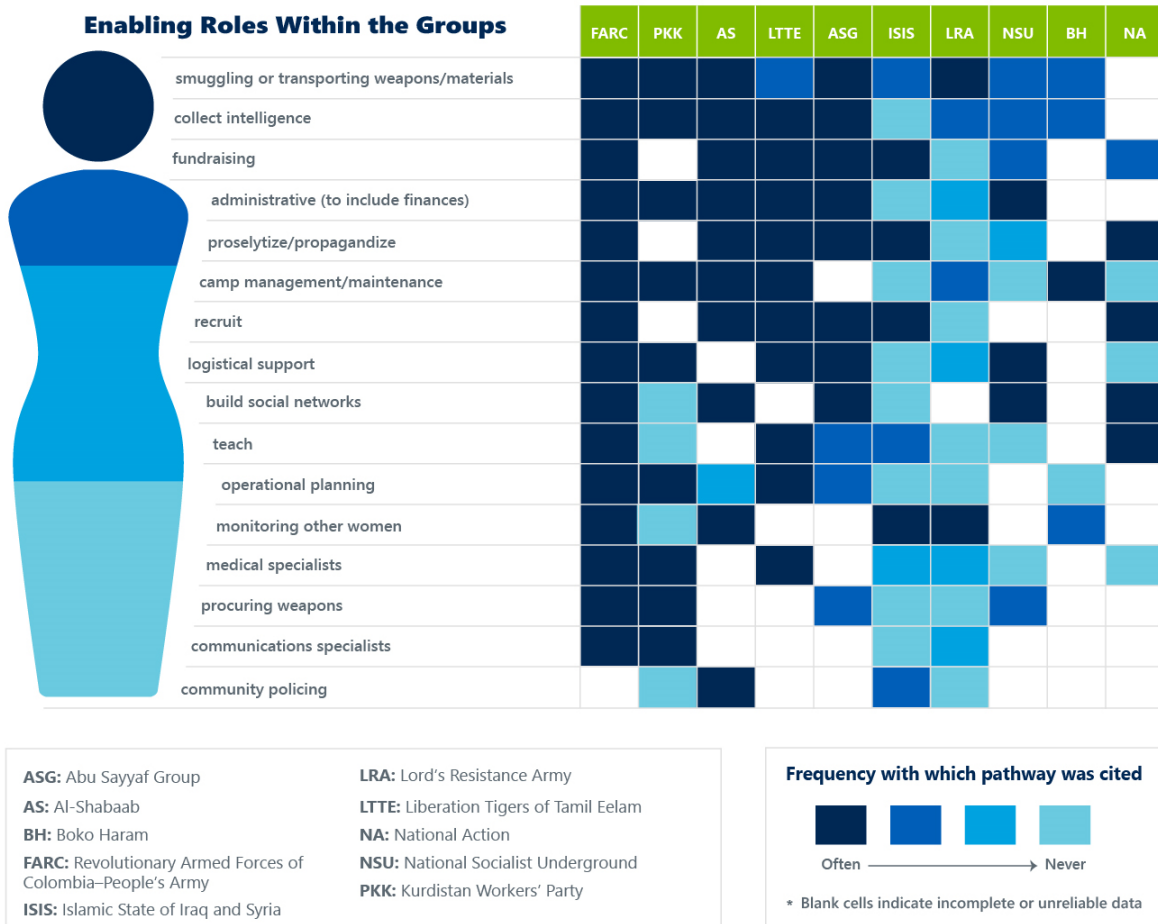
Source: CNA.

Table 8. Ranked *supporting* roles of women in VEOs



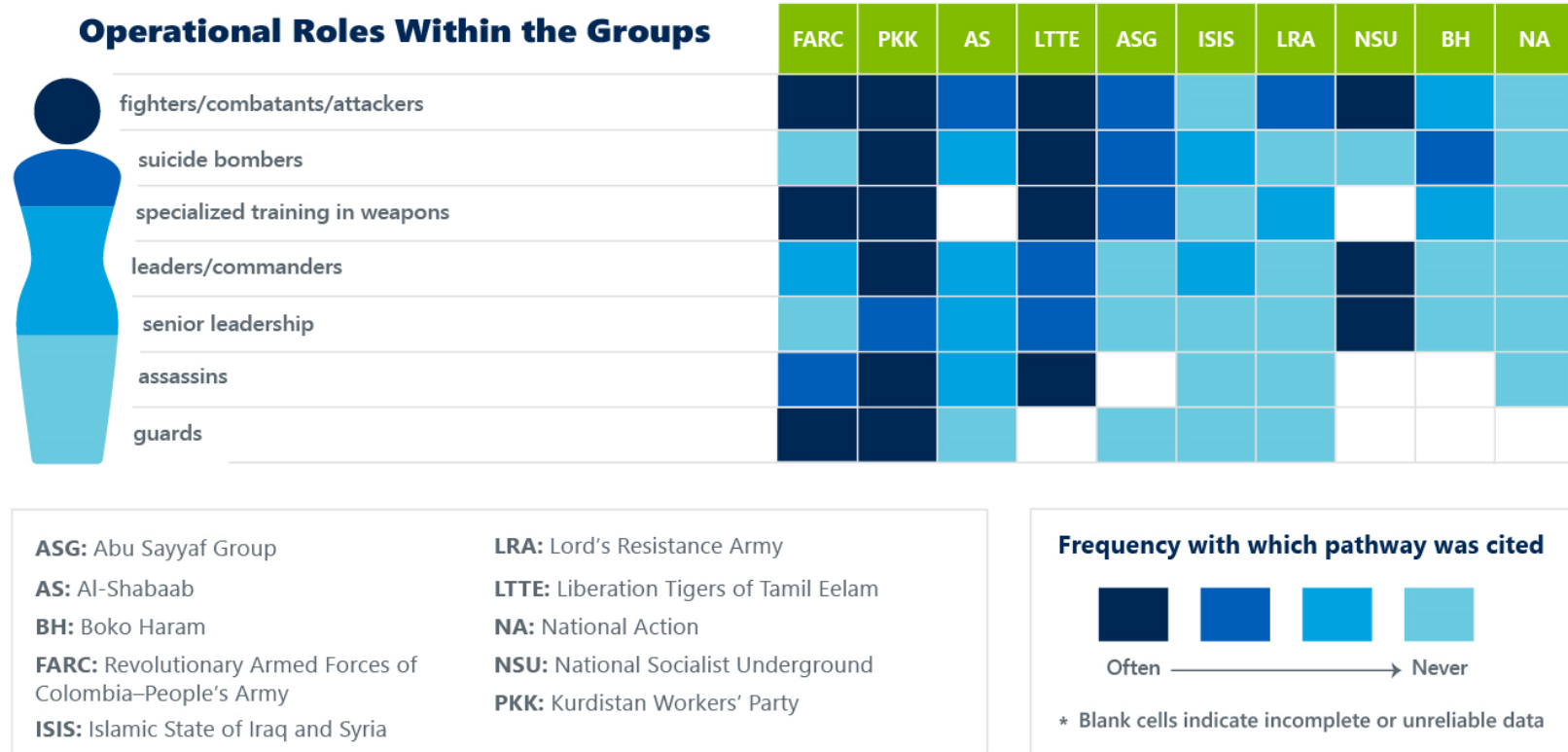
Source: CNA.

Table 9. Ranked *enabling* roles of women in VEOs



Source: CNA.

Table 10. Ranked *operational* roles of women in VEOs



Source: CNA.

Within each group, women never served just one role. Women also never served every role. No VEO limited women to one single role or to one single category of roles (e.g., there was no VEO in which women served in only supporting, only enabling, or only operational roles). Across supporting, enabling and operational categories, the most common roles women played were:

1. Household management/maintenance
2. Smuggling or transporting weapons/materials
3. Intelligence collection
4. Psychological/emotional support to husband and/or male companion
5. Fundraising

The least common roles women played were:

1. Community policing
2. Communications specialists
3. Guards
4. Assassins
5. Weapons procurement

Within each category, the most common roles women played were:

- **Supporting:** household management/maintenance
- **Enabling:** smuggling or transporting weapons/materials
- **Operational:** fighters/combatants/attackers

Women in religious groups were more likely to serve in supportive roles, women in secular groups were more likely to serve in operational roles, and women on the far-right appeared to serve in both supportive and operational roles.²¹ We have insufficient data to attribute causality, however, because the religious/secular divide could be obscuring a more meaningful conservative/liberal or pre- and post-1990 divide.

All VEOs accepted women in enabling roles regardless of ideology. There are many enabling roles (some far closer to operational roles from a conceptual point of view) that women across VEOs regularly carried out. For instance, nearly all groups utilized women

²¹ Data on the role that women played in the NSU was assessed based on the reported activities of Beate Zschäpe (one of a trio who constituted the group's primary operators) but Zschäpe denied taking part in the activities she was convicted of and is only one individual.

specifically for smuggling or transporting materiel. This suggests that dominant narratives—that women in VEOs are “mothers, monsters, or whores”—actually miss the vast majority of female activity in these groups.²²

In our case studies, supportive roles and operational roles were mutually exclusive. Groups in which women served supportive roles did not appear to have women serving operational roles and vice versa. One possible exception to this pattern might be the European far-right, but the fragmented nature of the dataset on this population complicates analysis. This trend in the data can be seen in Table 11, where the shaded regions in the upper-left and lower-right call attention to this mutual exclusivity.

No women held official senior leadership positions in VEOs established after 1990. The groups in which women held some leadership positions were LTTE, FARC, and PKK, but the extent of these roles was limited.²³ Several possible explanations exist for this, including the longevity and ideology of the groups. VEOs that had been in existence longer were more likely to include women in a wider variety of roles.²⁴ Additionally, the three groups formed before 1990 were all leftist in their orientation, while the six groups formed after 1990 were more culturally and politically conservative.

²² Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry, *Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Women's Violence in Global Politics*, 1st ed., London: Zed Books, 2007.

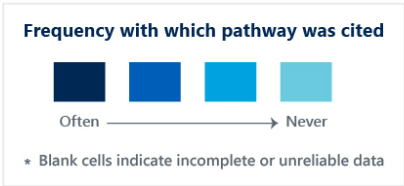
²³ As one example, the FARC was run by an exclusively male seven-member Secretariat, which oversaw key activities and operations. Although the FARC claimed that women had the same opportunities for command as men, women did not rise above mid-level positions of command.

²⁴ SME interview.

Table 11. Supporting and operational roles mutually exclusive

Roles Within the Groups		BH	ISIS	LRA	ASG	NA	NSU	FARC	LTTE	PKK
household management/maintenance	supporting	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue
psychological/emotional support to husband and/or male companion	supporting	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue
procreation/childrearing	supporting	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue
sexual services/within 'marriages' or 'relationships' (e.g., conjugal slavery)	supporting	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue
sexual services/outside marriage (e.g., sexual slavery)	supporting	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue
smuggling or transporting weapons/materials	enabling	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
collect intelligence	enabling	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
fundraising	enabling	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
administrative (to include finances)	enabling	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
proselytize/propagandize	enabling	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
camp management/maintenance	enabling	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
recruit	enabling	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
logistical support	enabling	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
build social networks	enabling	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
teach	enabling	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
operational planning	enabling	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
monitoring other women	enabling	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
medical specialists	enabling	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
procuring weapons	operational	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
communications specialists	operational	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
community policing	operational	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
fighters/combatants/attackers	operational	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
suicide bombers	operational	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
specialized training in weapons	operational	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
leaders/commanders	operational	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
senior leadership	operational	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
assassins	operational	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
guards	operational	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue

ASG: Abu Sayyaf Group
BH: Boko Haram
FARC: Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia–People’s Army
ISIS: Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
LRA: Lord’s Resistance Army
LTTE: Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
NA: National Action
NSU: National Socialist Underground
PKK: Kurdistan Workers’ Party



Source: CNA.

No clear correlation exists between the role of women in a VEO and the role women would typically play in the VEO's home culture. Although some VEOs mirrored or amplified existing norms around the roles of women, others rejected and upended existing norms around the roles of women.²⁵

Territorial control does not appear to have affected the types of roles women played in organizations. Groups that governed territory did not appear to expand the types of roles women played because of the administrative burdens required to govern.

No clear correlation exists between the roles offered to women and the reasons women cited for joining an organization. For example, women who joined avowedly egalitarian or feminist groups (e.g., FARC-EP) and women who joined groups that rejected Western conceptualizations of feminism (e.g., ISIS) both cited a desire to escape from traditional gender roles as a reason for joining. Similarly, data presented Table 12 show that ISIS and PKK offered women completely different roles, but women cited many of the same reasons for joining.

²⁵ For example, women's activity in the formal and informal economies that support of al-Shabaab reflect their status as primary earners in Somalia outside of al-Shabaab's presence, whereas Western women drawn to ISIS cited a desire to challenge Western gender norms as a pull factor for joining the movement.

Table 12. Supporting and operational roles mutually exclusive

Roles Within the Groups	ISIS	PKK
psychological/emotional support to husband and/or male companion	Dark Blue	Light Blue
procreation/childrearing	Dark Blue	Light Blue
household management/maintenance	Dark Blue	Light Blue
sexual services/within 'marriages' or 'relationships' (e.g., conjugal slavery)	Dark Blue	Light Blue
sexual services/outside marriage (e.g., sexual slavery)	Dark Blue	Light Blue
recruit	Dark Blue	Light Blue
fundraising	Dark Blue	Light Blue
teach	Dark Blue	Light Blue
community policing	Dark Blue	Light Blue
monitoring other women	Dark Blue	Light Blue
proselytize/propagandize	Dark Blue	Light Blue
smuggling or transporting weapons/materials	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
medical specialists	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
leaders/commanders	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
suicide bombers	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
administrative (to include finances)	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
camp management/maintenance	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
logistical support	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
procuring weapons	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
operational planning	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
communications specialists	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
guards	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
specialized training in weapons	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
fighters/combatants/attackers	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
assassins	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
collect intelligence	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
senior leadership	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
build social networks	Dark Blue	Dark Blue

Pathways Within the Groups	ISIS	PKK
escape from traditional gender roles (includes Westerners escaping Western norms)	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
appeal of group's gender norms	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
promise of protection	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
desire for respect/new identity/social advance	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
desire for revenge	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
desire to defend one's persecuted people	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
desire for friendship/comradeship	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
allure of building a utopian future	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
nationalist sentiment	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
facilitated by familial connections	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
a 'consensual' marriage into the group	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
promise of independence	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
desire to soften movement's image	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
kidnapping	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
desire to improve morale of male members	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
escape poverty	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
escape abuse	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
desire for a 'home' after rejection due to sexual violence	Dark Blue	Dark Blue

ISIS: Islamic State of Iraq and Syria PKK: Kurdistan Workers' Party

Frequency with which pathway was cited

Often → Never

* Blank cells indicate incomplete or unreliable data

Source: CNA.

Womanhood was propagandized differently across groups. Examples of this include portraying women as victims of violence to galvanize men to action (ISIS), recruiting attractive women and girls as part of a “marketing strategy” (FARC-EP), using women in messaging to signal a group’s inclusivity (NA’s use of a “Miss Hitler” beauty contest in an effort to recruit women), and externally framing women’s involvement as emancipatory (PKK).

How have these roles shifted over time, and how might they evolve in the short and long terms?

We found that the evolution of women’s roles *within a specific group* were driven by exogenous factors that created a need for women in a greater variety of roles. These shifts should not be interpreted as representative of the groups’ positions regarding the kinds of roles women “should” play, nor should they be taken to reflect a change in gender norms. Instead, they should be understood as a reflection of the necessity of having someone—male or female—serve in a particular capacity. These changes thus might be precedent-setting (and initiate long-term shifts that would be valuable to track), but they might also be temporary and situational.

Across groups, we found no meaningful changes in the roles that women played over time once all variables, including ideology, are taken into account. The data appears to indicate a shift toward supporting roles and away from operational roles over time. However, as the shaded areas of Table 13²⁶ demonstrate, this trend can be attributed to the fact that VEOs established pre-1990 were leftist and feminist (and thus more likely to have women in operational roles),²⁷ while VEOs established after 1990 are conservative and embrace traditional gender roles (and thus are less likely to have women in operational roles).²⁸ This additional variable limits the veracity of cross-group findings regarding shifting norms.

The simultaneous shifts in roles and ideology—from earlier, leftist groups in which women served in operational roles to contemporary, conservative groups in which women largely served in supportive roles—complicate any assertion that might link the roles women played to global or regional changes in gender norms over time. These shifts in roles are more easily explained as a result of the globally dominant VEO ideologies at the time (leftist in the middle of the 20th century, and conservative at the beginning of the 21st century), or exogenous factors that created a need for women in a greater variety of roles. In

²⁶ We did not include the two white supremacist movements in this table because there was not enough data to confirm women’s operational roles. However, like other post-1990 VEOs, these groups are conservative and embrace traditional gender roles that may influence the roles women play.

²⁷ Early groups were largely egalitarian with regard to gender, meaning that most roles (with the exception of senior leadership positions) have been occupied by women at some point in the last 40 years.

²⁸ The oldest VEOs in our case studies (LTTE, FARC-EP, and PKK), were avowedly leftist organizations that explicitly invoked gender equality issues as part of their ideologies. They differ considerably from the more contemporary VEOs analyzed that are avowedly conservative and explicitly reject modern articulations of Western feminism. Looking at our case studies, any shifts in women’s roles overall are obscured by the competing conceptions of feminine agency articulated by the selected VEOs. Moreover, with the exception of the PKK, there has been little change in the roles that women play within these two larger sub-categories—i.e., women in leftist organization and conservative organizations have played the same roles over time.

other words, the shift from operational to supportive roles may be secondary to the shift in ideologies or a recognition of need.²⁹

Given these factors, we find that the evolution of women's roles in the short and long terms will not be based on shifts in global gender norms,³⁰ but on watershed shifts in VEO ideology *across* groups (liberal, conservative, etc.) and the emergence of exogenous factors *within specific* groups (a critical need for fighters, etc.).

²⁹ Further complicating this, is the fact that early research on women and VEOs did not address the issue of women in a nuanced or thoughtful way. The organizations were assumed to be male, and the questions asked were about the experiences of men. As a result, the dataset is imbalanced (with far greater detail for more recent groups like ISIS).

³⁰ Moreover, VEOs are fundamentally revolutionary organizations designed to reject some aspect of the status quo. Thus while focus is often on ISIS's geopolitical agenda, the movement also has a clear cultural agenda that includes the explicit rejection of Western gender norms. Finally, it is possible to be revolutionary at both ends of the spectrum: thus in the same geographic region, ISIS can be revolutionary in its rejection of Western gender norms, and the PKK can be revolutionary in its embrace of Western gender norms.

Table 13. Potential evolution in roles women play in VEOs over time

Roles Within the Groups		Pre-1990/Secular			Post-1990/Religious				
		FARC	LTTE	PKK	LRA	ASG	AS	BH	ISIS
household management/maintenance	supporting	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
psychological/emotional support to husband and/or male companion	supporting	Dark Blue	Blank	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
procreation/childrearing	supporting	Light Blue	Blank	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
sexual services/within 'marriages' or 'relationships' (e.g., conjugal slavery)	supporting	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
sexual services/outside marriage (e.g., sexual slavery)	supporting	Light Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
smuggling or transporting weapons/materials	enabling	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
collect intelligence	enabling	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue
fundraising	enabling	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
administrative (to include finances)	enabling	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue
proselytize/propagandize	enabling	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
camp management/maintenance	enabling	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue
recruit	enabling	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
logistical support	enabling	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue
build social networks	enabling	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue
teach	enabling	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
operational planning	enabling	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue
monitoring other women	enabling	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
medical specialists	enabling	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue
procuring weapons	enabling	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue
communications specialists	enabling	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue
community policing	enabling	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
fighters/combatants/attackers	operational	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue
suicide bombers	operational	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue
specialized training in weapons	operational	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue
leaders/commanders	operational	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue
senior leadership	operational	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue
assassins	operational	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue
guards	operational	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Light Blue

ASG: Abu Sayyaf Group
AS: Al-Shabaab
BH: Boko Haram
FARC: Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia–People’s Army
ISIS: Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
LRA: Lord’s Resistance Army
LTTE: Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
PKK: Kurdistan Workers’ Party

Frequency with which pathway was cited

Dark Blue (Often) —————> Light Blue (Never)

* Blank cells indicate incomplete or unreliable data

Source: CNA.

What are the pathways through which women join and leave VEOs?

The pathways we identified into the groups included both push factors (those that encourage an individual to leave their current circumstance) and pull factors (those that draw an individual toward a new environment), as well as circumstances and variables that are involuntary. Table 14 includes a comprehensive list of the pathways into and out of VEOs that we found in the nine case studies.³¹

Table 14. Pathways for women into and out of VEOs

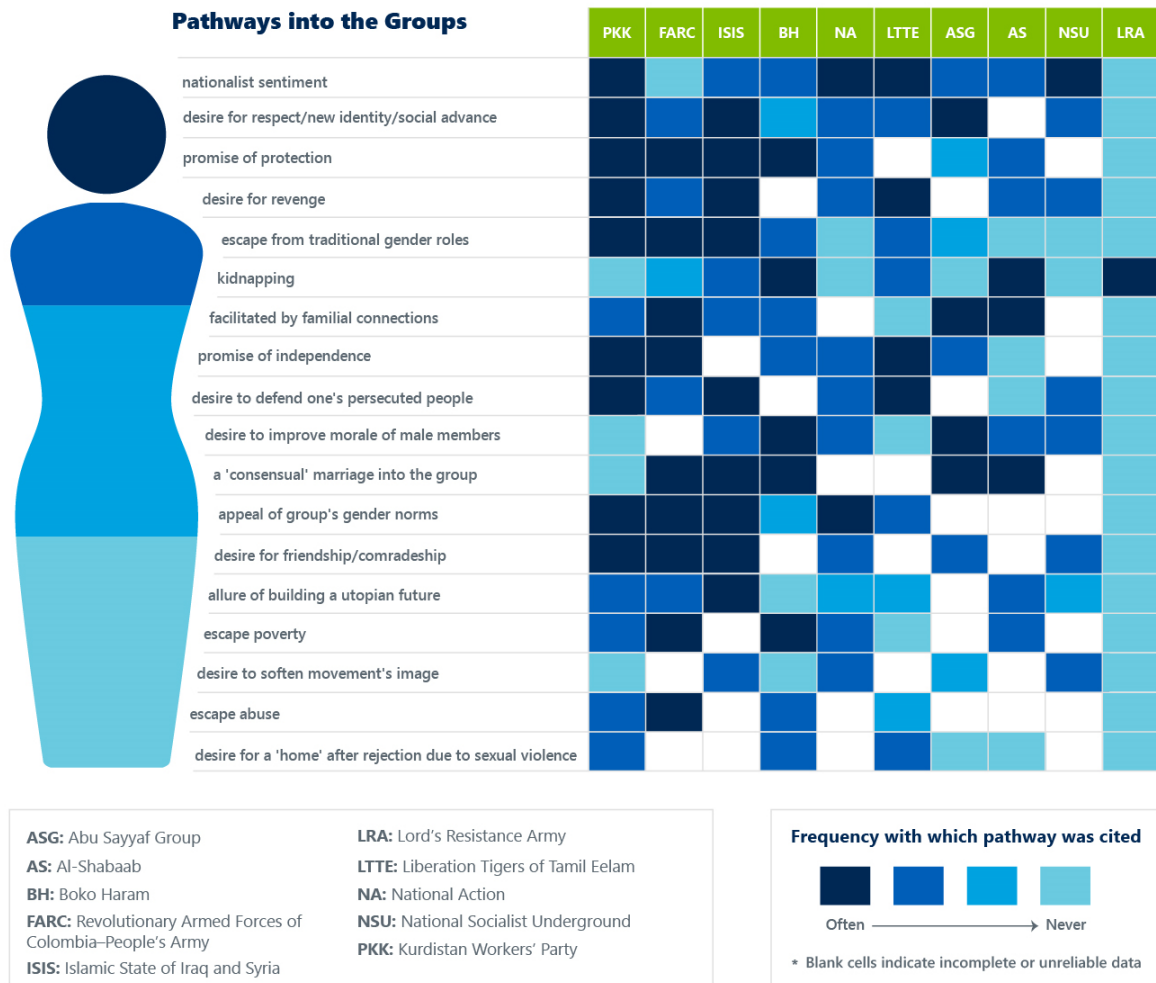
Pathways into the group	Pathways out of the group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • marriage into the group (consensual and non-consensual) • familial connection • promise of independence • promise of protection • desire for respect / new identity / social advancement • desire for revenge • desire to defend one's persecuted people • desire to improve morale of male members • desire to soften movement's image • desire for friendship/comradery • desire for a home after rejection due to sexual violence • allure of building a utopian future • nationalist sentiment • attempt to escape poverty • attempt to escape abuse • attempt to escape from traditional gender roles • kidnapping 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dissatisfaction (boredom, exhaustion, etc.) • external pressure to leave • mistreatment by superiors • issues with policies regarding families • escape • capture by other forces

Source: CNA.

³¹ Data on the pathways that women take into and out of VEOs is not comprehensive for each group as research on radicalization, recruitment, and defection / leaving is often done without reference to gender or focuses on a narrow and highly gendered issue (e.g., ISIS's effort to recruit jihadi brides). Our analysis attempts to capture both apparently universal motivations, and a set of less frequently mentioned motivations that appear to be unique to women.

Table 15 presents a more granular view of how these pathways occurred across the nine groups we examined.

Table 15. Ranked pathways into VEOs



Source: CNA.

We found that many of the reasons women join VEOs were the same as those that appear in the literature on men and VEOs or, more frequently, in non-gendered analyses that explore the issue without explicitly acknowledging that the population being analyzed is almost exclusively male.

Specifically, analysis of the data suggests that in every case study in which participation was voluntary, women cited multiple reasons for joining VEOs.³² The most frequently cited reasons for joining were:

1. Nationalist sentiment
2. A desire for respect new identity/social advancement
3. The promise of protection
4. A desire for revenge
5. Escape from “traditional” gender roles

The primary drivers of recruitment differed between Islamist and secular groups. Although consensual³³ marriages drove recruitment for all Islamist groups, the appeal of the group’s gender norms often drove recruitment for secular groups.

There is a correlation between groups that kidnapped women into their ranks and those that utilized women in support roles. VEOs that kidnapped women were not alone in placing women in support roles—women also served these roles in groups that they joined voluntarily. However, groups that kidnapped women were more likely to relegate them to these roles.

We identified the following reasons women cited for leaving VEOs (Table 16).³⁴ The most frequently cited reasons for leaving were:

1. Capture
2. Issues with policies regarding families
3. Dissatisfaction
4. Mistreatment by superiors
5. Escape³⁵
6. External pressure to leave

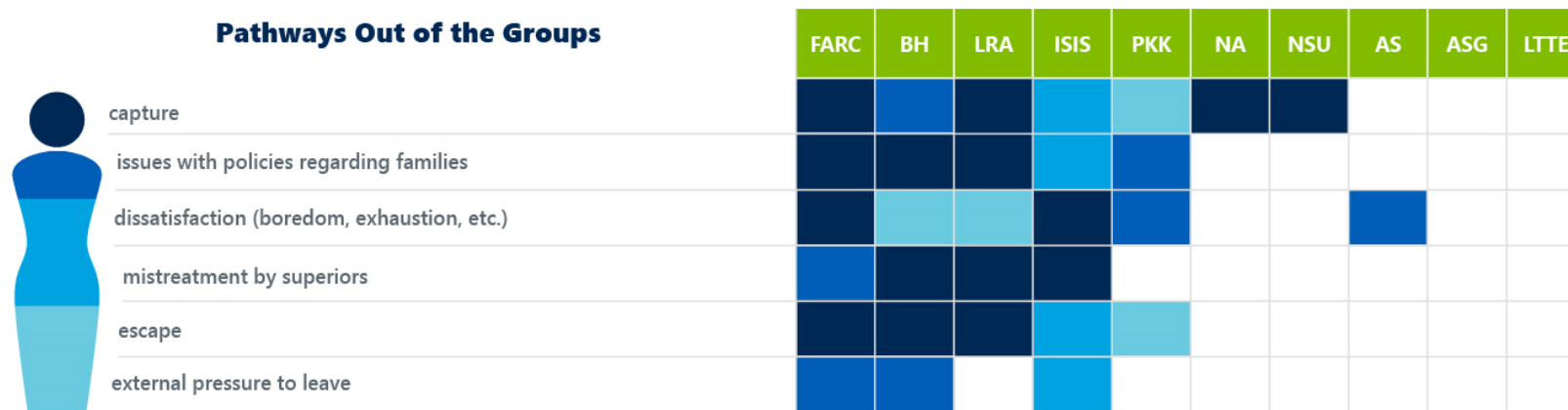
³² The outlier group is the LRA, which gains members through mass abductions and has no known voluntary female participants.

³³ The consensual/non-consensual binary for marriage is problematic in many cases. Women in our case studies often had limited alternative options. However, in order to enable distinctions in the data we considered marriages consensual if they were not explicitly forced, carried out under duress, or the outcome of being kidnapped.

³⁴ Overall, there is a paucity of data on why women left a group. Blank cells in this table indicate that there was little or no reliable data on women’s experiences leaving these VEOs.

³⁵ While the term “escape” explains *how* women left the VEOs, it also implies *why* they left the VEOs— they were being against their will. While women who escaped may also have been subject to mistreatment and dissatisfaction, these were not the primary drivers for leaving the VEO.

Table 16. Ranked pathways out of VEOs



ASG: Abu Sayyaf Group
AS: Al-Shabaab
BH: Boko Haram
FARC: Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia–People’s Army
ISIS: Islamic State of Iraq and Syria

LRA: Lord’s Resistance Army
LTTE: Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
NA: National Action
NSU: National Socialist Underground
PKK: Kurdistan Workers’ Party

Frequency with which pathway was cited



* Blank cells indicate incomplete or unreliable data

Source: CNA.

We found a correlation between groups that enforced strict rules to control women and women leaving those groups as a result of mistreatment by superiors. In other words, violent/strict rules for women may have caused resentment. This finding suggests that groups that attempted to control their women may have lost female support over time because of their violent and oppressive policies.

How have VEOs treated and controlled women within and outside the group?

We developed a list of categories to assess VEO treatment of women in the nine case studies (Table 17).³⁶

Table 17. Treatment of women by VEOs

Violence against women	Control of women
<p>Inside the group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> sexual psychological <p>Outside the group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> against ethnic/religious “others” against ethnic/religious “kin” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> existence of rules specifically for women (i.e., beyond general rules for everyone) norms were less permissive than the regional status quo enforcement was violent death penalty could be imposed reproductive control was maintained

Source: CNA.

A more granular view of how these categories apply to the nine groups we examined can be seen in Table 18.

³⁶ Assessing the treatment and control of women is complicated by the range of gender norms that characterize the regions under analysis and by the geopolitical realities of the regions where they operate. For example, one could assess ISIS’s attitudes towards women against Western norms or against Iraqi norms, and with or without the context of almost two decades of environmental conflict. Our analysis was designed to overcome these concerns by focusing on mechanisms of control that could be assessed objectively (e.g., the existence of rules specific to women) and contextually (e.g., comparing the VEO’s means of controlling women against the norms of the geographic and home culture). Finally, as our primary object of analysis is the *roles* played by women in VEOs, we chose not to disaggregate this issue into a comprehensive list of the rules, regulations, and punishments meted out to women inside and outside of VEOs. Instead, we took a broad categorical approach.

Table 18. Ranked mechanisms of controlling women inside and outside of VEOs



ASG: Abu Sayyaf Group

AS: Al-Shabaab

BH: Boko Haram

FARC: Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia–People’s Army

ISIS: Islamic State of Iraq and Syria

LRA: Lord’s Resistance Army

LTTE: Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam

NA: National Action

NSU: National Socialist Underground

PKK: Kurdistan Workers’ Party

Frequency with which pathway was cited

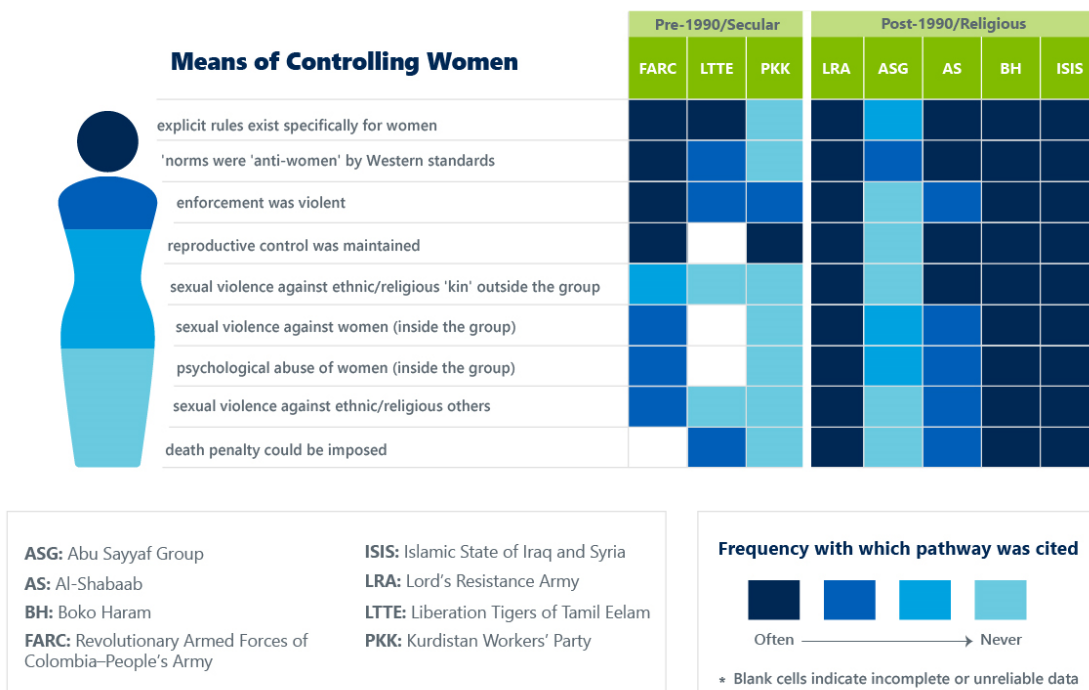


* Blank cells indicate incomplete or unreliable data

Source: CNA.

We found that the treatment of women also changed over time—both violence against women and the degree of control of women’s bodies increased. The rise of violence against women correlated to a decline of leftist and feminist VEOs and a rise of conservative VEOs over time. For the subset of groups examined in this study, the evidence presented in Table 19 and Table 20³⁷ suggest more frequent control of women and women’s bodies and more frequent use of violence against women both inside and outside of the groups. This may, however, be a product of case study selection as the earlier VEOs in our dataset were leftist and feminist.

Table 19. Potential evolution of the treatment of women in VEOs over time



Source: CNA.

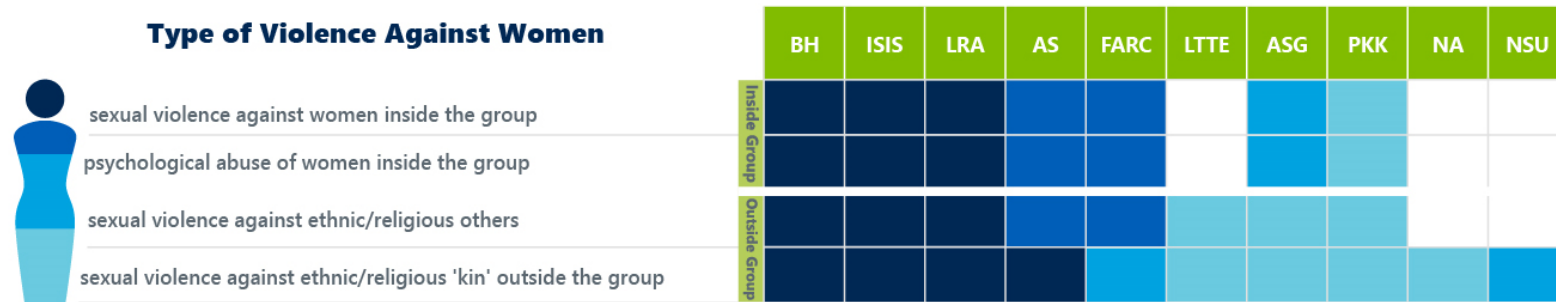
Violence against women transcends group boundaries. As is evident from the data presented in Table 20, VEOs that perpetuated violence against women inside the group were more likely to perpetuate violence against women outside the group. Similarly, VEOs that did

³⁷ We did not include the two white supremacist movements in this table because there was not enough data to confirm women’s operational roles.

not perpetuate violence against women inside the group were less likely to be violent toward women outside the group.

Religious groups exhibited greater control of women in their groups and were more likely than non-religious groups to engage in violence toward women both inside and outside the group. Religious groups tended to enforce greater and more severe rules governing the control of women in their ranks than secular groups. This included the death sentence for women found violating group rules.

Table 20. Violence against women inside and outside of VEOs



ASG: Abu Sayyaf Group
AS: Al-Shabaab
BH: Boko Haram
FARC: Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia–People’s Army
ISIS: Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
LRA: Lord’s Resistance Army
LTTE: Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
NA: National Action
NSU: National Socialist Underground
PKK: Kurdistan Workers’ Party

Frequency with which pathway was cited

Often —————> Never

* Blank cells indicate incomplete or unreliable data

Source: CNA.

Policy-level findings

The findings above—organized around the roles, recruitment, exiting VEOs, and treatment of women—are tied tightly to the data collected on these issues. In contrast, the following findings come from looking at the dataset as a whole and are meant to supplement operational- and tactical-level findings for consideration at the policy level.

“Women” in VEOs is not a homogenous group about which universal claims can be asserted. Although gender-specific issues and experiences are present in multiple VEOs (e.g., forced marriage), the diversity of the dataset highlights the need to ask: which group, which women, at what point in time, and in what context? Distinctions between women within groups include local versus diaspora women, different nationalities within the same group, and voluntary and involuntary participation.³⁸

The status, existence, and recognition of women’s “membership” in terrorist groups can be an unresolved and contested issue. Whether women were considered members of a group, and by whom, differed within and between groups. This affects how we view the actions (or roles) women carried out within groups.³⁹

In multiple instances, women carried out roles for VEOs both intentionally and as a byproduct of their daily activities or relationships, but they did not meet the criteria for formal membership. Examples included women who contributed to the economy in an area where a VEO controlled territory. This created a situation in which women were subjected to VEO control—and may have actively supported it—without having actually joined the group in any meaningful way. Another example was the wives of combatants who often maintained an ambiguous designation between affiliate and member depending on experience, perspective, recruitment story, and audience.

³⁸ In some groups, such as the FARC and LTTE, both men and women considered women to be members of the group. In others, women considered themselves members, but men did not. For example, there is evidence that women’s experiences in al-Shabaab camps differed based on their nationality. Kenyan women reported repeated sexual assault, including gang rape. Kenyan women alluded to the few Somali women in the camps as “legitimate” wives and implied that they were protected from sexual violence outside of their (possibly forced) marriages. In ISIS, women consist of both Western recruits and Yazidi slaves. In the LRA, there is evidence that Acholi women and girls were favored and received relatively less abusive treatment. According to some sources, Iteso and Langi girls were forced to conduct more manual labor than Acholi girls.

³⁹ For example, whether or not women are considered full members of al-Shabaab is a matter of disagreement within and outside the group. Although affiliated women often consider themselves full members of the group, male militants and the Somali and Kenyan governments countering these militants often do not.

The voluntary/involuntary binary to describe women's entry into VEOs and participation in VEO activities is inadequately nuanced. In many cases, women were subject to pressures that foreclosed alternative options and/or that coerced specific patterns of behavior. In these instances, their actions were neither entirely voluntary nor involuntary.⁴⁰

Women do not necessarily radicalize for one-dimensional gendered reasons. Many of the pathways to radicalization that apply to men also apply to women. Moreover, when women do radicalize, they do so for complex and layered reasons including a mixture of coercion, incentive, survival, and support for the movement's goals.⁴¹

Historically, there are almost no groups in which women constituted the majority of the members or the majority of fighters. In fact, this demographic imbalance is, as one analyst noted, "so obvious, it barely needs noting."⁴² Thus while the data in the section above demonstrates that women have played significant roles in VEOs and have performed nearly all of the tasks affiliated with a terrorist movement, men have nonetheless constituted both the majority of terrorist actors in these groups, and a significant majority of those in operational roles.

No clear evidence shows that norms about women's roles have evolved uniformly or globally within groups. Although shifting norms at the macro level correspond to different roles women play *within* groups—such as the shift from operational roles in the FARC to support roles in ISIS—the data suggest that a VEO's ideology (liberal, conservative, etc.) and exogenous factors (a critical need for fighters, etc.) are more likely to reflect a universal shift in gender norms *between* groups.

In the next section, we examine existing DOD and SOF approaches and policies on gender and CT/CVE.

⁴⁰ Even in instances when voluntary recruitment was substantial, such as women and girls entering the FARC, substantial evidence shows that coercion played a least some role, particularly with respect to minors.

⁴¹ M. Haner, F.T. Cullen, and M.L. Benson, "Women and the PKK: Ideology, Gender, and Terrorism," *International Criminal Justice Review* 30, no. 3 (2020): 279-301.

⁴² The question of why this pattern occurs has not been resolved, but research attempting to answer the question of why young men are violent has explored "neurobiological aspects, such as sex differences in the brain that predispose males to physical aggression and violence; gender role aspects, with regard to aggression and violence being basic components for demonstrating and reconstructing masculinity; demographic aspects of male youth bulges as potential breeding grounds for terrorism; aspects of group dynamics and identity fusion in the process of radicalization; and psychosocial characteristics of lone actor terrorists, which differ from group-related terrorists." See: Anne Maria Möller-Leimkühler, "Why is Terrorism a Man's Business?" *CNS Spectrums* 2 (2018): 119-128.

Existing DOD Approaches and Policies on Gender and CT/CVE

This section first identifies existing DOD approaches and policies on gender and CT/CVE at the strategy and policy level and at the programs and activities level. We then present our overall findings on the extent, integration, and coordination of these activities across DOD.

CT/CVE strategy and policy

Our review of strategy documents included looking both at WPS documents for references to CT-related terms⁴³ and CT/CVE documents for gender-related terms.⁴⁴ Our review of strategic-level WPS documents,⁴⁵ including the WPS Act of 2017 (Public Law 115-68), the *US Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security*, and DOD's "WPS Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan" for references to terrorism- and CT-related terms, revealed few connections of women to terrorism or violent extremism (Table 21). Although the overarching US WPS strategy mentions the importance of empowering women as partners in preventing and combatting terrorism, and the DOD implementation plan similarly acknowledges that women should play a role in countering VEOs, neither document mentions the roles women may play in VEOs.

Although the US strategy references that the administration will capitalize on opportunities to link the WPS strategic approach to the National Security Strategy (NSS) and other national strategic guidance, our review of CT/CVE documents, including the NSS, for gender-related terms found minimal mention of either men or women, let alone of their potential roles in violent extremism or approaches to counter them (Table 21). Several national policies and strategies at the presidential level make only brief comments about women. For example, the

⁴³ Search terms included *terror, terrorism, extremist, and extremism*.

⁴⁴ Search terms included *gender, sex, men, women, male, and female*. Of note, our review did not comprehensively cover non-DOD and non-WPS documents. For example, we did not include US State Department or USAID strategies, some of which contain references to women's roles in terrorist activities (e.g., *U.S. Strategy to Support Women and Girls at Risk from Violent Extremism and Conflict* submitted by the Office of Global Women's Issues in February 2019). These were not included because they were not directly connected to the implementation of WPS legislation or DOD activities.

⁴⁵ In October 2017, President Trump signed the WPS Act of 2017 (Public Law 115-68) into law. The WPS Act included a requirement to publish a government-wide strategy within one year of its enactment. Twenty months later, the Trump Administration released the *US Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security*, which required DOD and other government departments to develop a detailed, consolidated implementation plan within 120 days. One year later, DOD released its "WPS Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan."

NSS and a CT-focused Presidential Policy Directive (PPD) both mention the importance of empowering women to encourage peaceful societies, but do not mention their potential involvement in violent extremism. The National Strategy for Counterterrorism (NSCT) references women only in terms of being victims of terrorism, as opposed to potential perpetrators or enablers of violent extremism.

Table 21. Review of US policy and strategy for violent extremism and gender references

Title	Date of Most Recent Version	Level	Purpose	Revision Frequency	Reference
US Strategy on WPS	June 2019	USG/President	Provides a description of how the US intends to fulfill the policy objectives of the WPS Act of 2017	Four years ⁴⁶	Empower women to counter terrorism
NSS	December 2017	USG/President	Outlines overall US national security goals and objectives	Annual	Empower women (not specific to CT)
PPD-38, US CT Policy	February 2016	USG/President	Provides a policy architecture to tie together US CT efforts	As appropriate	Empower women to counter terrorism
NSCT	October 2018	USG/President	Outlines the USG approach to counter and prevent terrorist threats; directs the tools and approaches used for US CT efforts	As appropriate	Women as victims of terrorism
US Integrated Strategic Plan to Defeat ISIS	February 2018	USG/President	Information not releasable	Information not releasable	Reference to women, not in context of extremism
NDS	January 2018	DOD/SECDEF	Outlines DOD's goals within the most recent NSS	Four years, or as appropriate	None
Irregular Warfare (IW) Annex to the NDS	February 2019	DOD/SECDEF	Explains that DOD will embrace IW as an enduring and fundamental form of warfare	As appropriate	None

⁴⁶ The Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017 (Public Law 115-68-Oct. 6, 2017) requires, within one year of the enactment of the Act and again four years thereafter, the publication of a US strategy.

Title	Date of Most Recent Version	Level	Purpose	Revision Frequency	Reference
DOD WPS Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan	June 2020	DOD/SECDEF	Details DOD's roles and responsibilities for implementing the WPS Strategy and establishes WPS defense objectives to support WPS LOEs	As appropriate	Leverage tools to ensure women can participate in preventing, mediating, and countering terrorism/ VEOs

Source: CNA. Document citations can be found in references.

Strategic DOD documents at the Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) level make no mention of gender—male or female—and do not provide approaches to counter various gender roles (Table 22). Joint Force doctrine on countering terrorism remains similarly silent on gender considerations, aside from referencing that terrorists may exploit video footage of female casualties for propaganda purposes.

Table 22. Review of gender considerations in US counterterrorism policy and strategy

Title	Date of Most Recent Version	Level	Purpose	Revision Frequency	Gender Reference
NMS	November 2018	DOD/CJCS	Outlines how DOD will operationalize the NDS	Two years	None
CJCS Instruction 3310.01K, 2018 JSCP	March 2019	DOD/CJCS	Operationalizes the NMS and provides framework for implementing and augmenting strategic guidance as DOD's five year strategic-level campaign plan	Two years	None
CT Execute Order (EXORD)	September 2012	DOD/CJCS	Provides the baseline for DOD global CT authorities and operational guidance to execute DOD's contribution to the NSCT	As appropriate	None
JP 3-05, Special Operations	July 2014	DOD/CJCS	Provides overarching doctrine for special operations and the employment and support for SOF across the range of military operations	As appropriate	None

Title	Date of Most Recent Version	Level	Purpose	Revision Frequency	Gender Reference
JP 3-26, Joint Combating Terrorism	July 2020	DOD/CJCS	Provides fundamental principles and guidance to plan, execute, and assess military activities to combat terrorist threats to US forces, allied and partner nations, and foreign and domestic civilian populations	As appropriate	Women as victims used in propaganda
CP-GSO	October 2020	DOD/CCMD	Provides guidance on global employment of SOF	Five years, or as appropriate	None

Source: CNA. Document citations can be found in references.

A review of key documents specific to US Central Command (CENTCOM), which has responsibility for several of the regions in which today's predominate VEOs are located (i.e., the Middle East and South Asia), similarly identified no specific references to gender (Table 23).

Table 23. CENTCOM document review

Title	Date of Most Recent Version	Level	Purpose	Revision Frequency	Gender Reference
USCENTCOM Long-Term Middle East Strategy	July 2020	DOD/CCMD	Describes conditions and transition criteria	As appropriate	None
USCENTCOM CCP 2018	June 2018	DOD/CCMD	Outlines USCENTCOM's support to the USG activities and policy objectives, and implements and operationalizes the Commander, USCENTCOM's Theater Strategy	Five years	None
SOCCENT TCP	April 2019	DOD/TSOC	Provides strategic direction that forms the basis for SOCCENT plans, orders, and guidance	Three years	None

Title	Date of Most Recent Version	Level	Purpose	Revision Frequency	Gender Reference
Special Operations Regional SOF Plans, 2019–2022	April 2019	DOD/TSOC	Establishes the military strategic and operational framework for SOF actions in regional areas	As appropriate	None

Source: CNA. Document citations can be found in references.

A review of key documents specific to US Africa Command (AFRICOM) highlights one exception to this trend. AFRICOM, which has responsibility for the continent of Africa on which several notable VEOs operate, identified the importance of gender considerations in one key document along with an annex to that document specifically focused on WPS (Table 24).

Table 24. AFRICOM document review

Title	Date of Most Recent Version	Level	Purpose	Revision Frequency	Gender Reference
US Africa Strategy	December 2018	USG/President	Outlines USG interests and priorities in Africa	As appropriate	None
DOD Strategy for Africa	October 2018	DOD/SECDEF	Articulates DOD's overarching strategic guidance for Africa	As appropriate	None
USAFRICOM Theater Strategy 2018–2027	April 2018	DOD/CCMD	Describes USAFRICOM's approach in support of US interests	Five years	None
USAFRICOM CCP 2019	October 2018	DOD/CCMD	Implements USAFRICOM's Theater Strategy and informs resourcing	Five years	Importance of gender considerations
USAFRICOM CCP 2019 Annex on WPS	October 2018	DOD/CCMD	Provides guidance to USAFRICOM and subordinate commands for integrating a gender perspective into the execution of the CCP; links USAFRICOM operations, activities, and investments (OAs) to USG WPS policy and strategic guidance	Five years	Leverage SMEs to inform counter-VEO operations

Title	Date of Most Recent Version	Level	Purpose	Revision Frequency	Gender Reference
SOCAF SOF Supporting Base Plan	May 2018	DOD/TSOC	Outlines how SOCAF will achieve its mission in support of USAFRICOM	Five years	None

Source: CNA. Document citations can be found in references.

CT/CVE programs and activities

Internal and external DOD CT/CVE activities

At the program level, DOD CT/CVE activities fall into two categories: internally focused and externally focused. Internally focused programs and activities are directed at those forces and individuals within DOD/SOF to train, educate, and prepare them to carry out CT/CVE activities abroad. This category does not refer to counter-radicalization efforts within US armed forces. Externally focused programs and activities involve engagement outside the USG, primarily with people and entities within partner nations. In this section, we outline the gender-specific CT/CVE activities in each category.⁴⁷

Internal gender CT/CVE activities

We found evidence of gender-related CT efforts in the following types of activities:

- **Academic and research activities:** These are efforts within the DOD to sponsor or access existing research in the academic community in order to build knowledge and understanding on the topic of gender and CT within the department.
- **Conferences and events:** These are efforts within the DOD to organize and hold events with speakers or panels dedicated either entirely or partially to the topic of CT/CVE and gender. These are organized for other USG or DOD personnel, not for external participants.
- **Pre-deployment training:** This refers to traditional training that service members receive in preparation for a deployment. For this report, we are referring to pre-deployment training that include gender-relevant perspectives.

⁴⁷ The items in the Internal and External CT/CVE activities tables represent the programs and activities we found in our review of unclassified data. Owing to the sensitive nature of some USG activities, we acknowledge that this set may not be comprehensive.

- **Professional Military Education (PME):** This refers to the educational opportunities available to military personnel provided at a range of academic organizations, universities, and other learning centers. The topic of gender and CT/CVE is incorporated in class and program curricula at a number of institutions.
- **Coordination:** These efforts are related to different entities within DOD seeking to work with other entities within the DOD to coordinate activities to build knowledge and understanding on the topic of women and CT/CVE.
- **Integration:** This refers to DOD internal efforts to integrate gender perspectives into operations and intelligence processes. A variety of the activities listed support the goal of integration, but we also believe it should stand alone as a separate line of activity.

Table 25 provides examples of each type of activity identified.

Table 25. Internal gender-related CT/CVE activities

Category	Examples
Academic and research activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Research provided to the JS/J5/T2C2, JS/J7/Irregular Warfare and NIC-Transnational Threats on the topic of women terrorists. The work also addressed the role of women in ISIS.⁴⁸ <li>▪ United States Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) coordination with academic institutions to leverage research on CT/CVE-related topics in the area of responsibility (AOR) including work focused on women returning from ISIS to Indonesia.⁴⁹ <li>▪ Yale Capstone Project “The Role of Women in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism in the Indo-Pacific” supported USINDOPACOM’s efforts to leverage women’s experience and capacity to support CVE efforts in the AOR.⁵⁰ <li>▪ Researchers briefed the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) on the topic of women in extremist groups.⁵¹ <li>▪ NDU provided a WPS writing contest award in 2018 and 2019.⁵² <li>▪ WPS National Action Plan objectives and related materials have been incorporated into the Stability Operations Lessons Learned Information Management System.⁵³ <li>▪ The Council on Foreign Relations provided a briefing to OSD on women and terrorism.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ Department of Defense Annual Report on Implementation of Executive Order 13595 and US National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security, 2018.

⁴⁹ Interview with INDOPACOM, Oct. 21, 2020.

⁵⁰ Department of Defense Annual Report on Implementation of Executive Order 13595 and US National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security, 2018.

⁵¹ Department of Defense Annual Report on Implementation of Executive Order 13595 and US National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security, 2019.

⁵² Department of Defense Annual Report on Implementation of Executive Order 13595 and US National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security, 2018.

⁵³ Department of Defense FY19 Annual Report on Implementation of Executive Order 13595 and US National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security.

⁵⁴ Department of Defense FY19 Annual Report on Implementation of Executive Order 13595 and US National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security.

Category	Examples
Conferences and events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Gender Perspective Seminar is part of the Inter-American Defense College seminar series with partner organizations. Senior military and civilian leaders share ideas on creating and implementing policies that support gender integration.⁵⁵ ▪ The Law Enforcement Symposium (Philippines) works to empower local women law enforcers.⁵⁶ ▪ United States European Command (USEUCOM) representatives participated in a CVE research conference to better understand how to integrate WPS issues at the command in 2018.⁵⁷ ▪ A 2019 panel discussion at NDU on Inclusive Security covered issues related to gender and security.⁵⁸
Pre-deployment Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ US Army units, including the 10th Mountain Division, 18th Airborne Corps, and III Corps at Fort Hood were trained on how to include gender perspectives into their mission prior to deploying to CJTF-Operation Inherent Resolve.⁵⁹
Professional Military Education (PME)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ National Defense University centers include the topic of gender and CT/CVE as part of its research agenda for its students.⁶⁰ ▪ Operational Gender Advisor (GENAD) course implemented at USINDOPACOM in 2018.⁶¹

⁵⁵ “2019 Gender Perspective Seminar,” Inter-American Defense College, Mar. 2019, <http://iadc.edu/2019-gender-perspective-seminar/>.

⁵⁶ INDOPACOM interview.

⁵⁷ *Department of Defense Annual Report on Implementation of Executive Order 13595 and US National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security, FY 19.*

⁵⁸ *Department of Defense FY19 Annual Report on Implementation of Executive Order 13595 and US National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security.*

⁵⁹ *Department of Defense FY19 Annual Report on Implementation of Executive Order 13595 and US National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security, 2018, 2019.*

⁶⁰ Interview with Representative from NDU, Dec. 21, 2020.

⁶¹ “US Indo-Pacific Command Delivers First US Operational Gender Advisor Course,” Defense Visual Information Distribution Service, Jun. 2018, <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/279896/us-indo-pacific-command-delivers-first-us-operational-gender-advisor-course>.

Category	Examples
Coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ GENADs and Gender Focal Points at CCMDs ▪ There were a number of examples of this, including one office sending personnel to another office to attend a meeting or event, or staff assistant visits in which a staff member is sent to work with a GENAD to learn how to include gender into operations.⁶²
Integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There are several examples of intelligence entities working to integrate gender into the intelligence collection cycle. ▪ There are efforts to integrate the topic of gender into Army intelligence processes and at the CCMD level.⁶³ ▪ The Army Threat Integration Center is a key node for incorporating a gender perspective into Army operations, including through the incorporation of disaggregated data into its reports.⁶⁴ ▪ DOD released a video on WPS in 2020 that included comments from GENADs and the DOD Chief Management Officer.⁶⁵

Source: CNA.

⁶² Interviews; *Department of Defense Annual Report on Implementation of Executive Order 13595 and US National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security*.

⁶³ *Department of Defense Annual Report on Implementation of Executive Order 13595, FY18, and US National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security, FY19*.

⁶⁴ *Department of Defense FY19 Annual Report on Implementation of Executive Order 13595 and US National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security*.

⁶⁵ "Featured Videos: Women, Peace and Security," US Department of Defense, Dec. 2020, <https://www.defense.gov/Watch/Video/videoId/775738/dvpcc/false/?dvpTag=Featured+Videos#DVIDSVideoPlayer581>.

Based on the review described above, we made the following observations:

- Academic and research activities make up the majority of existing internal gender- and CT/CVE-related efforts. These activities primarily involve efforts to educate DOD staff on the topic of gender as it relates to CT/CVE.
- Conferences and events make up the next biggest category of internal gender-related activities.
- We identified two examples of gender-specific pre-deployment training.
- We found several concrete examples of PME institutions including the topic of gender in specific activities; within the institutions, lecturers and researchers appear to make an effort to build the topic into programming, but this effort is not comprehensive or consistent.
- We found that offices and entities conduct infrequent meetings and other activities in an attempt to coordinate efforts to incorporate gender into CT/CVE.
- We identified several activities that reflect the goal of better integrating gender into CT/CVE.

External gender CT/CVE activities

External gender and CT/CVE efforts exist in several areas of DOD CT/CVE activities. To categorize external programs, we binned external activities according to the following categories,⁶⁶ which capture the spectrum of DOD CT/CVE efforts:

- **Attack the network:** Carry out major combat operations in order to remove regimes that support VEOs, deny space for VEOs to operate, or provide a platform for direct action, security cooperation, and stabilization activities.
- **Messaging and counter messaging:** Provide, promote, and support (1) messaging that conveys US values, interests, intentions, and justifications to generate support for US counterterrorism activities, and (2) messaging that counters VEOs' ideology, intentions, and justifications in order to degrade support for VEOs' vision and operations.
- **Intelligence and information gathering and sharing:** Contribute to effective intelligence collection and promote the sharing of intelligence and information among

⁶⁶ This list is amended from McQuaid et al., *Independent Assessment of US Government Efforts against Al-Qaeda*, CNA, Oct. 2017.

US government agencies and with allies and partner countries to accelerate, improve, and better coordinate counterterrorism operations.

- **Building networks and partnerships:** Engage with and synchronize a wide array of partner organizations and countries as part of a coordinated, cooperative, or coalition approach to counterterrorism in order to enable the other elements of the US approach (e.g., by increasing resources, access, and reach) including through military diplomacy and Civil Affairs operations and the SOF network.
 - For the purpose of this analysis, we included training, events, and conferences in this category.

Table 26 lists all gender CT/CVE activities in these categories.

Table 26. External gender CT/CVE activities

External CT Category	Existing Programs/Activities Related to Gender - Status
Attack the Network ⁶⁷ Messaging and Counter Messaging	We did not identify any existing programs or activities (or operations) that involved gender considerations. We did not identify any existing programs or activities (or operations) that were explicitly intended for messaging and counter messaging that involved gender considerations. However, we note that training events, efforts to build partner capacity, and conferences and events often include a messaging component.
Intelligence and Information Gathering and Sharing	We identified some activities related to information sharing, primarily efforts aimed at building networks and sharing information within those networks. We also found instances in which intelligence analysis supports WPS issues indirectly by focusing on VEOs that target women and girls.
Building Networks and Partnerships	We identified the most programs/activities in this category, which include efforts to integrate the topic of gender into efforts to build networks with CT partners through partner capacity building, events, and training activities. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In recent years, SOCAFRICA has incorporated WPS into FLINTLOCK, its annual exercise with African partners. • The exercise Africa Endeavor in 2018 included a WPS working group focused on integrating a gender perspective into operations.⁶⁸ In 2019, that same exercise encouraged the participation of servicewomen from African nations. • USAFRICOM GENAD provided a brief on gender integration at the 2018 AFRICOM Senior Enlisted Leader Conference, which included attendees from 20 African partner nations, the US, and NATO. There were additional presentations on CVE as part of the event.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Typically data in this space are classified, this report includes only unclassified data.

⁶⁸ "AFRICOM, Ghana Armed Forces Commence Africa Endeavor 2019," Africanews, Sept. 2019, <https://www.africanews.com/2019/08/19/africom-ghana-armed-forces-commence-africa-endeavor-2019/>.

⁶⁹ *Department of Defense Annual Report on Implementation of Executive Order 13595 and US National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security.*

External CT Category	Existing Programs/Activities Related to Gender - Status
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Operations Command Pacific (SOCPAC) military information support operations (MISO) personnel train Indonesian police officers (male and female) on issues including gender equality and CVE, employing the female Indonesian founder of an organization promoting peace.⁷⁰ • SOCPAC conducted a counter radicalization and violent extremism conference in the Philippines and Southeast Asia in conjunction with counterparts from the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia. • The USINDOPACOM Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI) includes the topic of CVE in the context of UN Peacekeeping operations as part of its peacekeeping training courses. • USEUCOM offered training on gender in CVE for a USAID (US Agency for International Development) mission to Albania, a partnership that was funded through fiscal year (FY) 2020. USEUCOM humanitarian assistance to Albania supported efforts to counter violent extremism through marketing separately to men, women, girls, and boys.⁷¹

Source: CNA.

⁷⁰ Department of Defense Annual Report on Implementation of Executive Order 13595 and US National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security.

⁷¹ Department of Defense Annual Report on Implementation of Executive Order 13595 and US National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security.

Historical examples

Throughout the data collection process, we identified several historical CT/CVE activities related to gender. Though these activities are beyond the scope of the research questions because they are no longer occurring, they are significant enough to mention. Historical examples include Female Engagement Teams (FETs), Female Human Exploitation Teams (FHETs), Female Search Teams (FSTs), Cultural Support Teams (CSTs), and Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) operating in Iraq and Afghanistan. FETs operated with local women to provide services, build trust, and gather information (in a passive manner) during Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. FHETs, operating at the same time, were specifically designed to gather intelligence. FSTs assisted in security operations by searching female civilians.⁷² In 2011, SOCOM initiated a program to send out female CSTs with SOF to conduct operations in deescalating situations and protecting women and children. Team members also assisted in gathering information.⁷³ Female PRTs, which functioned in Iraq and Afghanistan, were comprised of DOD, the State Department, USAID, and other organizations with a mission to support reconstruction and stability efforts. As of 2019, the FETs and CSTs were no longer active.⁷⁴

These efforts primarily arose in environments where the US had consistent presence for long periods of time (months to years) and where the need to engage women more effectively was determined to be an operational necessity. Sometimes programs were in response to a vulnerability (e.g., the need to search women in case extremists were dressed as women to smuggle weapons through checkpoints), whereas at other points they were more proactive and acknowledging of the important role women play in societies where the US was operating.

Findings

Overall, our review of strategy and policy documents did not identify significant gender considerations specific to CT/CVE. Our review of program and activity documents identified

⁷² Maria Vedder, "Building Confidence with the Population Proposal for Military Females to Engage Afghan Females," Headquarters International Security Assistance Force, Mar. 2011, <https://berndpulch.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/isaf-femaleengagement.pdf>.

⁷³ Terri Moon Cronk, "Cultural Support Team Women Served with Distinction," DOD News, US Department of Defense, Apr. 2015, <https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/604540/>.

⁷⁴ Raymond T. Kareko, "Female Engagement Teams," Army University Press, Oct. 2019, <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/NCO-Journal/Archives/2019/October/Female-Engagement-Teams/>.

some aspects of gender considerations for CT/CVE, but these were not widespread and appeared to be largely bottom-up or localized efforts. Although there could be tactical-level CT/CVE activities being conducted (e.g., by SOF) that specifically address gender considerations that we were unable to identify in the course of this study, the likelihood of widespread activities is low given the dearth of gender considerations in the strategy and policy documents and the fragmented nature of gender considerations in programs and activities.

More details on this overall finding can be found below.

Strategy and policy

No deliberate, consistent, or coordinated effort to integrate gender considerations exists at the US CT/CVE strategic or policy level. Strategic-level documents are largely, if not entirely, silent on the issue of gender. With the exception of some AFRICOM strategy documents, a review of relevant strategic-level documents for gender-related terms found minimal mention of either men or women, let alone of their potential roles in violent extremism or approaches to counter them. Strategic-level documents that reference women do not do so from a nuanced gender perspective, but rather through a more simplistic understanding of women's roles as victims of terrorism or as objects of exploitation for propaganda.

Programs and activities

We identified significant gaps, limited coordination, and inconsistent efforts in DOD CT/CVE internal and external activities as they relate to gender. Although efforts exist to integrate some gender considerations into DOD CT/CVE activities, they tend to be either isolated results of top-down guidance or bottom-up manifestations of pragmatic decisions.

Existing programs and activities related to CT/CVE and gender are currently limited and reflect an emphasis on internal efforts. The activities we identified reflect a focus on research and education within DOD on this topic. Existing external efforts are very limited in number. Those that we identified focus on events to bring together US personnel with partner nation personnel to share perspectives on the topic of gender and CT, typically as part of broader efforts to maintain and strengthen partnerships.

Based on historical and existing activities, gender considerations are more likely to be present if the nature of the DOD CT/CVE activity is population-centric as opposed to direct action or kinetic targeting. For instance, operational areas that emphasize human terrain and culture are more likely to include gender considerations, often to meet an operational need for sustained engagement with the local population and/or access certain groups within a population.

We did not identify any data that demonstrated that DOD operational and tactical unit-level activities have incorporated gender considerations since 2018. Although we found several historical examples of gender-specific units prior to 2018, such as the FETs, these units no longer appear to be active. In addition, the mere existence of these units, though significant, does not necessarily indicate that gender considerations were fully integrated at that time.

Gender Advisors (GENADs) appear to play a prominent role in many of the CT/CVE activities we identified, and their presence is a crucial step in socializing gender issues. However, the extent to which GENADs focus on CT/CVE efforts, as opposed to the many other goals associated with WPS but outside the scope of CT/CVE, varies considerably. It is unclear also how much of their involvement in CT/CVE is a deliberate, coordinated effort versus a reflection of a specific command's objectives.

In many instances, the implementation of WPS requirements (as per WPS legislation) is used as the single or main indicator that gender considerations are being addressed in CT/CVE efforts. There is a risk that the narrow implementation of WPS legislation across DOD can be used to “tick the box” of gender-considered CT/CVE, when in reality a full gender-considered approach to CT/CVE includes elements that are not included in the WPS legislation.⁷⁵ Although the implementation of WPS legislation is an adjacent effort to developing a gender-considered approach to DOD CT/CVE efforts, and the efforts share some goals, they are not interchangeable. Even the full implementation of WPS legislation would not mean a fully gendered-considered approach to CT/CVE. Some gender-specific activities have a CT/CVE component (i.e., GENADs at COCOMs), and some CT/CVE activities have gender-specific considerations (i.e., FETs), but there is no comprehensive integration of CT/CVE and WPS legislative objectives.

In the next section, we compare the results of this section with the previous one in order to identify gaps between USG strategies, policies, programs, and activities and the roles that women have been playing in VEOs.

⁷⁵ We recognize that the portfolio and scope of work carried out by the WPS team in OASD (SO/LIC-SHA) is more expansive than the DOD requirements in the WPS Act of 2017 (e.g., the required actions under the Training, Participation, Equality and Participation of PN Women sections of the 2017 act), to include areas that are not explicitly mentioned by WPS legislation and implementation plans but still fall under their purview (e.g., understanding women and gender roles in VEOs and DOD CT/CVE). This finding is not meant to imply that these additional areas are or should be outside the scope of the OASD (SO/LIC-SHA) WPS team's portfolio. Rather, it is meant to highlight that the implementation of WPS legislation within DOD is too narrow to fully integrate a gender-considered approach to CT/CVE, because the WPS legislation does not address all elements of CT/CVE. Therefore, using WPS legislative requirements as a benchmark for the implementation of gender-considered CT/CVE in DOD is not a comprehensive way of measuring progress in this area.

Gaps, Risks, and Opportunities

In this section, we determine the impact of DOD CT/CVE not adequately considering gender through an assessment of risks and opportunities across multiple levels. We then provide a framework for how DOD could integrate women’s roles into its activities to factor gender more effectively into future CT/CVE efforts.

Deriving gaps, risks, and opportunities

In this section, we present the gaps we identified in US CT/CVE efforts by bringing together our observations from both the VEO and DOD sides of our analysis in Table 27 and Table 28.

Table 27. Select VEOs findings

VEOs Findings
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Women played supporting, enabling, and operational roles in the VEOs we examined. Women served in more types of roles than men. Within each group, women never served just one role. Women also never served every role.• Across categories, the most common roles women played were: household management/maintenance, smuggling or transporting weapons/materials, intelligence collection, psychological/emotional support to husband and/or male companion, and fundraising.• Within each category, the most common roles women played were as follows: <u>supporting</u>: household management/maintenance; <u>enabling</u>: smuggling or transporting weapons/materials; <u>operational</u>: fighters/combatants/attackers.• Women in religious groups were more likely to serve in supportive roles, women in secular groups were more likely to serve in operational roles.• All VEOs accepted women in enabling roles regardless of ideology.• No women held official senior leadership positions in VEOs formed after 1990.• Womanhood was propagandized differently across groups.• The evolution of women’s roles in the short and long terms will not be based on shifts in global gender norms, but on watershed shifts in VEO ideology across groups (liberal, conservative, etc.) and the emergence of exogenous factors (a critical need for fighters, etc.).• In every case study in which participation was voluntary, women cited multiple reasons for joining VEOs. The most frequently cited reasons for joining were: nationalist sentiment, a desire for respect new identity/social advancement, the promise of protection, a desire for revenge, and escape from “traditional” gender roles.• We found a correlation between groups that enforced strict rules to control women and women leaving those groups due to mistreatment by superiors. In other words, violent/strict rules for women may cause resentment.• We found that the treatment of women has also changed over time—both violence against women and the degree of control of women’s bodies increased. Within our case studies, the rise of violence against women correlated to a decline of leftist and feminist VEOs and a rise of conservative VEOs over time.

VEOs Findings

- The status, existence, and recognition of women’s “membership” in terrorist groups can be an unresolved and contested issue.

Source: CNA.

Table 28. Select CT/CVE findings

US CT/CVE Findings

- No deliberate, consistent, or coordinated effort to integrate gender considerations exists at the US CT/CVE strategic or policy level. Strategic-level documents are largely, if not entirely, silent on the issue of gender.
- We identified significant gaps, limited coordination, and inconsistent efforts in DOD CT/CVE internal and external activities related to gender.
- Existing programs and activities related to CT/CVE and gender are currently limited and reflect an emphasis on internal efforts.
- Based on historical and existing activities, gender considerations are more likely to be present if the nature of the DOD CT/CVE activity is population-centric as opposed to focused on direct action or targeting.
- We did not identify any data to demonstrate that DOD operational and tactical unit-level activities have incorporated gender considerations since 2018.
- Gender advisors (GENADs) appear to play a prominent role in many of the CT/CVE activities we identified, and their presence is a crucial step in socializing gender issues.
- In many instances, the implementation of WPS requirements was used as the single or main indicator that gender considerations are being addressed in CT/CVE. There is therefore a risk that the implementation of WPS across DOD can be used to “tick the box” of gender-considered CT/CVE.

Source: CNA.

Looking at both sets of findings, we identified gaps that fell into four thematic categories: CT/CVE strategy and policy, internal CT/CVE activities, external CT/CVE activities, and conceptual understanding. In the following tables, we consider how the gaps present risks to performing CT/CVE activities. We derived the risks in this section by considering the impact of gaps on current and future CT/CVE activities.⁷⁶ We then identify opportunities that emerge for

⁷⁶ Our discussion of risks in this section is the result of identifying the impact of gaps on current and future CT/CVE efforts. For example, once we identified a gap (e.g., “gender- and women-specific considerations are not integrated into CT/CVE strategy, policy, doctrine, or authorities”), we asked what would occur to CT/CVE efforts if this gap is not addressed (e.g., “absence of strategic guidance based on limited understanding negatively affects operational and tactical decision-making”). Each identified negative outcome of the gap was then articulated as a risk. Gaps and risks are not always aligned in one-to-one fashion. While each risk flowed from a gap, some gaps led to multiple risks, and sometimes multiple gaps contributed to the same risk. In addition, as this exercise was not an historical analysis, we did not systemically gather historical data on the impact of these gaps on past CT/CVE operations. However, we have several examples in the VEO case studies of unexpected and under-analyzed women’s roles that contributed to gaps in CT/CVE efforts. These include women affiliated with al-Shabaab

DOD to address these gaps and risks.⁷⁷ We use the opportunities to derive policy-level recommendations (shown in the next section).

Strategy and policy

Overall gaps: Of the documents we reviewed, we found that gender- and women-specific considerations are not integrated into CT/CVE strategy, policy, doctrine, or authorities, nor are such considerations consistently reflected in current DOD CT/CVE understanding of the varied effects of gender or of women's multifaceted roles in VEOs. While some documents mention women in various capacities, these references lack nuance on women's roles in extremism. The absence of such considerations from strategic guidance can negatively affect operational and tactical decision-making and reduce strategic effectiveness. The specific gaps, risks, and opportunities we identified are shown in Table 29.

organizing safe spaces in which militants can plan and organize operations, and women serving as couriers, intelligence collectors, recruiters, and as suicide bombers in Boko Haram.

⁷⁷ Although not all the opportunities presented may be suitable for immediate implementation, we identified them as being valuable for DOD consideration in each area.

Table 29. CT/CVE strategy and policy gaps, risks, and opportunities

CT/CVE Strategy and Policy		
Gap	Risk	Opportunity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gender- and women-specific considerations are not integrated into CT/CVE strategy, policy, doctrine, or authorities. Strategy, policy, and doctrine do not reflect the multifaceted roles women play in VEOs. Strategy, policy, and doctrine do not reflect understanding of the varied effects of gender or women’s roles in VEOs. Strategy, policy, and doctrine still cater to the misassumption that women are largely in victim roles. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Absence of strategic guidance based on limited understanding negatively affects operational and tactical decision-making. This gap reinforces the misperception that women’s roles in VEOs are limited. This gap contributes to gender illiteracy at all supporting levels because there is no compelling top-down influence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revise CT/CVE⁷⁸ strategic and policy documents to incorporate gender-considered practices and approaches, including a consideration of women’s roles in VEOs at the highest level. Incorporating gender considerations into these documents will link gender and women’s roles to strategic and operational mandates, and provide guidance that shapes commander’s engagement to reduce ad hoc or personality-driven approaches.⁷⁹ Require a gender annex that explicitly addresses women’s roles in CT in strategic documents. Require GCCs to integrate gender- and women-specific considerations in their CT/CVE efforts

Source: CNA.

⁷⁸ As our research questions focused on gender-approaches to CT/CVE efforts and not whether WPS implementation incorporates CT/CVE considerations, our recommendation are limited to CT/CVE documents. However, this is not to imply that WPS integration should remain silent on the role of women in terrorism, CT, and CVE. Many of these recommendations can be similarly applied to WPS strategies to incorporate a more nuanced approach to women and gender in conflict and conflict resolution.

⁷⁹ The following documents should be considered for revision (this is not a comprehensive list): the NSS to reflect gender consideration outside of existing references to women’s empowerment; the NDS, where there is no current reference to gender; the NDS annexes as they relate to CT/CVE, such as the IW Annex to the NDS; the NSCT, which currently only references women in terms of victimhood; specific CT strategies, such as the US Integrated Strategic Plan to Defeat ISIS; authorities, such as the CT EXORD; JP 3-26, which currently references women only as victims used in propaganda; JP 3-05, which currently has no gender considerations; SOF-specific employment guidance, such as the CP-GSO; mission support document, such as Special Operations Regional SOF Plans, 2019-2022, and SOCAF SOF Supporting Base Plan; command-level strategies, such as TCPs and regional plans; regional strategies, such as US Africa Strategy, DOD Strategy for Africa, and USCENTCOM Long-Term Middle East Strategy.

Internal CT/CVE activities

Overall gaps: We found that GENADs are often dual-hatted and lack the bandwidth, resources, or access to prioritize and implement gender- and women-related considerations in CT/CVE planning. Nor is there a top-down mandate on pre-deployment preparation or personnel designated to incorporate such considerations. The absence of, or limited attention toward, gender-specific data collection and analysis has contributed to the lack of demonstrable operational benefit for gender-considered approaches. This limits operational analysis and opportunities to improve strategic effectiveness (since data are unavailable and considered low priority), limits understanding of key actors in the CT/CVE landscape (who may be women), and reinforces a perception that gender-considered approaches are insignificant. Inconsistent buy-in from senior leadership also contributes to the ad hoc or commander personality-based nature of incorporating gender considerations into CT operational planning. We found no specific training or educational courses at military academies that focus primarily on understanding gender/women in VEOs or in CT/CVE. Finally, the lack of direct funding for these initiatives prevents these gaps from being addressed because of competing priorities for resources. The specific gaps, risks, and opportunities we identified are shown in Table 30.

Table 30. Internal CT/CVE activity gaps, risks, and opportunities

Internal CT/CVE Activities		
Gap	Risk	Opportunity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of permanently funded personnel focused on integrating gender and women considerations into CT/CVE planning • Significant gaps in gender-specific or gender-considered data collection and analysis, such as data disaggregated by sex and gender • Very limited or absence of training and education initiatives to better understand the CT landscape with a gender lens 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inability to carry out robust analyses of CT/CVE efforts due to paucity of data and metrics on key actors and issues (women and gender) • Further misunderstandings of the role of women and gender both in VEOs and in CT/CVE efforts • Inconsistent programming and education on gender and women in CT/CVE • Gender considerations as foundational knowledge and as an operational planning mechanism left out during early operative training • Low prioritization of gender issues in CT/CVE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mandate the collection of sex and gender disaggregated data as part of its reporting process. • Sponsor research in order to build knowledge and understanding on the topic of gender and CT/CVE. • Formally link CT/CVE operational imperatives to gender considerations through logical frameworks. • Sponsor regular evaluations to assess the integration of gender considerations across DOD. • Institutionalize GENADs as essential personnel carrying out mission-critical functions for CT/CVE.⁸⁰ • Fund permanent civilian support for gender mainstreaming efforts. • Formalize the official network of DOD GENADs through regular meetings and engagements. • Initiate regular interagency meetings with US CT/CVE strategy stakeholders (DOS, USAID, DHS) to encourage coordination and consistency for long-term CT/CVE strategy. • Integrate GENADs or external gender SMEs into CT/CVE training and education. • Require a comprehensive gender-specific element in CT education at military academies.

⁸⁰ This opportunity is not limited to specific GENAD title, and could be expanded to include a WPS gender advisor or gender focal point. In addition, someone who has recently taken gender-considered education or training could be qualified.

Internal CT/CVE Activities

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inconsistent funding for gender-considered CT/CVE efforts• Inconsistent buy-in from senior leadership | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reluctance to incorporate gender considerations into thinking and planning because it came “too late”• Slow socialization of gender mainstreaming within CT/CVE | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Require comprehensive gender-specific PME on CT/CVE for senior leaders during Joint Professional Military Education (JPME) I and II.• Require a gender-specific element in pre-deployment briefs.• Encourage senior leaders to model the importance of considering gender and women in CT/CVE efforts.• Require CT/CVE personnel to enroll in implicit bias trainings.• Integrate gender perspectives into operations and intelligence processes. |
|--|--|---|

Source: CNA.

External CT/CVE activities

Overall gaps: We found that gender is often not factored into DOD operational planning. Although some of the roles women play may be factored in, the full range of women's enabling, supporting, and operational roles and the differences between groups of women within these categories are not sufficiently factored into current CT/CVE activities. Current CT/CVE activities do not plan for the evolution of women's roles based on changing exogenous factors, nor do they show consideration for intersectionality and differences between gender, class, ethnic group, or religion in VEO analysis. Given very limited data, there is likely a large gap in integrating women's counter-radicalization and defection targeting into operational planning. Although ongoing building partner capacity (BPC) efforts have the potential to be fruitful for sharing knowledge and perspectives regarding gender and CT/CVE, misperceptions about gender as a concept among US military personnel can limit the effect of these efforts. Finally, to the extent that the DOD continues to use "by, with, and through" strategies for countering VEOs, all identified risks apply to PN gaps as well, including gaps in PN threat appraisals, intelligence, operations, and messaging. The specific gaps, risks, and opportunities we identified are shown in Table 31.

Table 31. External CT/CVE activity gaps, risks, and opportunities

External CT/CVE Activities		
Gap	Risk	Opportunity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gender is not factored into operational planning or is limited to the civilian “victim” context. Recognition of the value of a gender-considered approach in operational planning is lacking. Current CT/CVE activities do not sufficiently address or recognize the range of enabling and operational roles women in play in VEOs. Current CT/CVE activities do not show anticipatory planning for the evolution of women’s roles based on changing exogenous factors. Similarly, current CT/CVE activities do not show consideration for intersectionality and differences in gender, class, ethnic group, or religion across VEOs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduction of overall operational effectiveness Incorrect assessment of the CT/CVE landscape and battlespace Insufficient targeting of members, supporters, and enablers of VEOs Overlooking or excluding relevant population(s) for messaging and counter-messaging tactics/operations Missed intelligence-gathering opportunities Insensitive and misunderstood application of a comprehensive gender-considered approach to CT/CVE in training and education with PNs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrate GENADs into CT/CVE operational planning by requiring GENAD personnel. Incorporate external gender SMEs to help apply gender mainstreaming concepts to operational trainings, education modules, and briefings. Review operational mission guides and doctrine and revise areas lacking gender-considered language. Review operational exercises and joint PN capacity-building initiatives to better integrate gender-considered approaches. Consider applying gender considerations to CT/CVE operational planning from a population-centric standpoint in addition to a focus on direct action or targeting. Lead by example by having balanced gender representation at partner engagement meetings and trainings. Incorporate gender considerations into dismantling VEO networks by gathering intelligence and conducting analysis on including women’s roles and gender roles in these networks. Identify the supporting and enabling roles carried out by women that may be currently unknown or unappreciated, and integrate those that align with DOD capabilities into DOD CT operations.

External CT/CVE Activities

- The integration of women’s counter-radicalization and defection targeting into operational planning is lacking.
- Misunderstandings and biases towards gender/women considerations are still apparent among US military personnel.
- Gender mainstreaming in CT/CVE can be mistaken for educating partners on Western-centric conceptions of feminism as opposed to integrating gender considerations in a comprehensive way to meet operational objectives.

- Target messaging to specific female populations within VEOs by (1) differentiating between different female communities within VEOs and (2) formulating messaging that identify specific vulnerabilities and interests. Specific counter-messages can target regionally specific reasons women cite for joining a VEO, their experiences within the VEO, and the roles they carry out.
- Track women’s activities within VEOs, including identifying women’s contributions to typically “male” roles, and the women’s roles that have not previously been the focus of intelligence gathering.
- Track women’s activities in the environments in which VEOs operate, including women’s supporting, enabling, and operational roles outside of group membership.
- Conduct analysis to link roles across categories (enabling, supporting and operational) in order to fully understand the threat environment.
- Share gender-considered intelligence with CT/CVE partners. Provide advice and assistance on incorporating gender considerations to improve the capability and capacity of PNs to conduct CT/CVE operations. Review operational exercises and joint PN capacity building initiatives to better integrate gender-considered approaches.

Source: CNA.

Conceptual understanding

The previous three categories identified gaps at the strategy and policy level and the program and activity level in CT/CVE efforts. This category discusses the effect of gaps on the conceptual understanding of gender within DOD CT/CVE efforts. Limited conceptual understanding refers to both a lack of knowledge (such as the definition of gender) and a lack of willingness to learn and apply concepts of gender and women's roles to CT/CVE.⁸¹ Gaps in this area should be considered root causes that contribute to gaps in other areas.

Overall gaps: We found that understandings of gender and identity concepts are limited and varied, resulting in inconsistent DOD baseline knowledge of women and gender in VEOs, as well as a lack of understanding and recognition of the operational benefits of gender-considered approaches. "Gender" considerations often serve as a stand-in for "women" considerations, or vice versa, and the linkages and differences in the two definitions are inconsistently understood. There remains some resistance and hesitation within DOD towards embracing any "gender" or "women"-related concept/framework. Additionally, we found that there is limited understanding of the operational benefit of gender-considered approaches. For example, empowering women, which is often proposed as a gender-specific solution, does not account for women's multifaceted experiences, including the supporting, enabling, and operational roles women play in VEOs. The specific gaps, risks, and opportunities we identified are shown in Table 32.

⁸¹ The gaps articulated in this section are drawn from a variety of sources, including interviews, a comprehensive analysis of how strategic and operational documents articulate gender, and an analysis of the perceived implementation of gender mainstreaming within DOD CT/CVE efforts.

Table 32. Conceptual understanding gaps, risks, and opportunities

Conceptual Understanding		
Gap	Risk	Opportunity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited understanding of foundational gender and identity concepts Lack of recognition of or appreciation for the operational benefits of a gender-considered approach Lack of sophistication and nuance in understanding gender and identity in CT/CVE populations Limited understanding of the short-term and long-term ways that gender roles (masculine and feminine) can affect a population/battlespace Limited understanding of the multifaceted roles women play in VEOs and how they interlink with men/women in operational roles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Miscalculating the threat environment Mission deployments continuing to employ misperceptions and underestimate the varied roles of women in VEOs Disproportionately addressing “male” (combat) roles, ignoring important linkages between combat roles and supporting and enabling roles Insufficiently addressing the roles both women and men play Mistaking “women” considerations for “gender” considerations, and vice versa Limited understanding of the operational imperative for gender considerations Limiting or miscalculating the long-term effectiveness of a CT/CVE strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand understanding of gender/identity outside of women-only considerations through PME and training (top down and bottom up). Define and promote an understanding of the difference between gender, gender roles, gender identities, gender expression, and sex. Promote an understanding of gender as a reflection of socially constructed, context/ time-specific, and changeable attributes, opportunities and relationships that affect women, men, boys, girls, and those who identify as transgender, non-binary, or genderqueer. Understand the difference between the existence of varied gender expressions (feminine, masculine, androgynous) and the <i>norms</i> of gender expression in various locations, including areas of CT/CVE operations and PN societies Formally link operational imperatives to gender considerations through logical frameworks. Collect disaggregated data in order to provide operational benefit evidenced in incorporating gender considerations within CT/CVE operations. Encourage senior leaders to advocate for the operational value of gender-considered approaches.

Source: CNA.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This report was motivated by a recognition of the need to better understand the role of women and gender in CT/CVE, and the need to determine whether DOD CT/CVE approaches and policies effectively incorporate women and gender considerations. This report contributes to this understanding by providing a foundational document to help DOD understand the extent and limits of its engagement on this issue—women and gender in CT/CVE—via a full analysis of women’s roles in VEOs. In order to do this, this section concludes with four critical gaps in US CT/CVE strategy, policy, activities, and understanding on gender and provides high-level recommendations to address these gaps.⁸²

Conclusion 1: Our research demonstrates that the dominant stereotypes about women’s roles in VEOs miss the vast majority of female activity in these groups and fundamentally fail to capture women’s lived experiences. Women play more roles than stereotypes suggest. They make contributions to VEOs that go unrecognized because they are unexpected, and they have such a wide range of experiences that it is not possible to discuss the “average” woman’s role in a VEO. We demonstrated that women play diverse supporting, enabling, and operational roles in a range of ideologically diverse and regionally disparate VEOs, both past and present. We found that women make substantial and essential contributions to VEO organization, operations, and maintenance. We also found that gender roles and norms affect women’s experiences, including their reasons for joining VEOs and their treatment while in VEOs.

Recommendations:

- 1.1** Remove dominant stereotypes about gender norms and women’s roles in VEOs from strategy, policy, programs, and activities in order to recognize the extent and significance of gender, gender roles, and women’s activities.
- 1.2** Identify the full spectrum roles carried out by women—including operational, enabling, and supporting roles that may be currently unknown or unappreciated—and integrate those that align with DOD capabilities into DOD CT/CVE efforts.⁸³

⁸² Because the gaps are so significant across categories, our recommendations are focused on addressing these gaps at a macro-level. For more operational and tactical-level recommendations, please see the “opportunities” listed in the previous section, entitled Gaps, Risks and Opportunities. This section provides a roadmap for practical steps toward change at the operational and tactical-level.

⁸³ See Appendix K: Determining Which Women’s Roles to Counter for a three step process for identifying roles that align with DOD capabilities.

- 1.3 Incorporate gender considerations across the DOD operational life-cycle. This includes but is not limited to providing regionally specific gender-considered pre-deployment training at the tactical level and operational level, gathering intelligence and conducting analysis on women's and gender roles, and linking roles across categories (enabling, supporting, and operational) in operational planning in order to fully understand the threat environment.
- 1.4 Develop additional DOD activities and programs tailored to address the non-kinetic roles women play.

Conclusion 2: Despite significant growth in this space since the passage of WPS legislation, we found that internal DOD activities that are truly gender considered are severely limited, lack nuance, and are not institutionalized. The existence of gender-related conferences and events, research, and coordination by GENADs suggests modest progress. However, the distinction between WPS efforts and gender-considered CT/CVE efforts—each of which has very different goals, objectives, and language—is lost because the nuances of both initiatives are problematically flattened to a single point of overlapping concern: thinking about women. Of course, it is critical to think about women; however, in the context of CT/CVE, it is also critical to acknowledge that women might be combatants and to consider the differential effect that a CT/CVE initiative might have on male and female populations. However, this acknowledgment is just the start of a more robust engagement that needs to occur.⁸⁴

Recommendations:

- 2.1 Dedicate resources and personnel to formalize networks of gender experts across DOD. This should include but not be limited to GENADs. Experts are needed who are conversant on both the goals of WPS legislation and the need for gender considerations in CT/CVE, as well as the differences between the two. DOD entities should also distinguish between WPS legislative objectives and gender-considered CT/CVE efforts during internal trainings,

⁸⁴ We recognize and acknowledge the current limitations (i.e., legal, doctrinal, political) on targeting women through direct action during CT operations. We also recognize the current limits of CT laws as they pertain to prosecuting women as terrorists based on their supporting or enabling roles within VEOs. With regard to direct action, we note that even if certain roles women play in VEOs may in theory be targetable through direct action, these actions may be operationally counterproductive in practice. Our goal is not to suggest that direct action against female combatants is the only, or the most desirable, option. Rather, our goal is to ensure that any discussion of CT activities pertaining to women is carried out with a full awareness of women's roles and where those roles fit into VEO activities. If carrying out direct action is determined to be prohibitive, this decision should not be based on bias or stereotypes about women's roles, but on a complete understanding of options and risks. Finally, we offer that using direct action to target women in VEOs is only one option in the CT toolkit, and that DOD may consider indirect methods where direct action is possible but operationally counterproductive.

events, research, and coordination in order to promote understanding that the efforts are not the same, nor are they singularly about women.

2.2 Sponsor regular evaluations to assess the integration of gender considerations across DOD. This should include formally linking CT/CVE operational imperatives to gender considerations through logical frameworks⁸⁵ and mandating the collection of sex- and (if possible) gender-disaggregated data⁸⁶ as part of operational monitoring and reporting processes.

Conclusion 3: External DOD CT/CVE efforts do not consider the roles men or women play from a nuanced perspective, and they are disproportionately influenced by a set of gender stereotypes that shape expectations of men and women's roles. Although DOD has some understanding of women's roles in VEOs, the gender roles of both men and women remain underexplored. **The limited nature of DOD's gender-considered CT/CVE programs and activities suggests an ad hoc approach at the command level and a lack of senior level understanding, guidance, and planning.** This has prevented gender-considered approaches from being institutionalized in external DOD CT/CVE efforts. Further, the majority of existing efforts focus on the roles that women have or might play as peacekeepers or combatants, reflecting an internal bias away from a robust understanding of gender as a social construct affecting all people, and a re-inscription of a long-standing tendency to see women as mothers or monsters.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Logical frameworks are tools used to design, monitor, track, and evaluate the implementation of programs and strategies, and to link day-to-day activities to long-term strategic goals. Logical frameworks have been used extensively in the international development community, and are becoming increasingly common in the defense community. Logical frameworks are useful because they allow policymakers to theoretically link their tactical and operational activities to higher-level operational or strategic outcomes. By determining the assumed links between inputs, outputs, and outcomes, and comparing these to actual, monitored outcomes, implementers can make changes to activities to ensure their goals will be met. Applied to this report, logical frameworks can be used to track how gender considerations are being integrated into DOD CT/CVE efforts and to demonstrate how integrating gender considerations into CT/CVE contributes to long-term DOD CT/CVE objectives.

⁸⁶ We recognize the difficulty in collecting gender-disaggregated data due to the culturally-determined nature of gender and the diversity of gender identities that exist. Collecting sex-disaggregated data is a significant step toward understanding the implementation of some gender considerations. However, a comprehensive evaluation of gender-considered CT/CVE requires an understanding of gender identity diversity as well. Where possible, we recommend also collecting these data.

⁸⁷ Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry, *Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Women's Violence in Global Politics*, 1st ed., London: Zed Books, 2007.

Recommendations:

- 3.1** Revise CT/CVE strategic and policy documents to incorporate gender-considered practices and approaches that are tied to empirical understanding of gender norms and women's roles in VEOs.
- 3.2** Integrate gender-specific considerations into engagements with CT/CVE partners—including exercises, conferences, events, and other assistance—and share gender-considered intelligence with CT/CVE partners.

Conclusion 4: Much of the current DOD approach can be traced to misunderstanding gender as a concept. This should be seen as a root cause for other gaps. Misunderstanding gender contributes not only to a lack of knowledge around women's roles in VEOs, but also other operationally relevant knowledge, such as the relationship between extremism and masculinity, the effect of gender norms on marriage as a driver for radicalization, and much more.

Recommendations:

- 4.1** Integrate gender-specific instruction on CT/CVE into PME for senior leaders during JPME I and II and at the military academies.
- 4.2** Define and promote an understanding of the difference between gender, gender roles, gender norms, gender identities, gender expression, and sex in DOD CT/CVE strategy and policy. Promote an understanding of gender as a reflection of socially constructed, context- and time-specific, and changeable attributes, opportunities, and relationships that affect women, men, boys, girls, and those who identify as transgender or non-binary.

Understanding the roles and experiences of women in VEOs is an important but insufficient step in understanding the full effect of gender on VEOs and CT/CVE. Similarly, identifying gaps in CT/CVE strategy, policy, activities, and understanding without addressing those gaps risks the long-term effectiveness of DOD efforts to counter VEOs. We therefore submit this report as a contribution toward addressing these gaps in the hopes of helping DOD to better confront the full spectrum of women's roles and gender considerations in VEOs.

Appendix A: Literature Reviews

Women's participation in violent extremism

Until relatively recently, the involvement of women in violent extremist organizations (VEOs)—particularly strongly male-dominated, avowedly anti-feminist movements such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and neo-Nazi formations in Europe and North America—was widely regarded (particularly among the media) as curious and contradictory, if not outright bizarre and irrational.

Undergirding such perceptions are a variety of overlapping (and often unstated) gender stereotypes: women are by nature life-givers, healers, and nurturers and are therefore incapable of willing participation in armed groups; female participation represents a form of social deviancy; the involvement of women reflects a fundamental gullibility as well as a vulnerability to male manipulation and influence; and women are motivated by emotional and essentially irrational impulses and uncontrollable urges, unlike their supposedly self-interested male counterparts.⁸⁸

Some popular accounts, and even some academic and policy-oriented research, continue to reflect such gender stereotypes, with authors displaying a degree of astonishment, horror, and disgust when confronting female engagement in violent extremism.⁸⁹ Female terrorists often are depicted as “mothers, monsters, or whores.”⁹⁰

Within recent academic and policy-oriented literature, however, such gendered notions are largely anachronistic. Of course, perspectives, methods, and findings vary from author to author and discipline to discipline. But today, there is a broad consensus about the motivation, recruitment, mobilization, and other aspects of female engagement in terrorism, insurgency, and other forms of political violence.

This literature review offers an overview of the current state of knowledge by exploring studies by political scientists, sociologists, criminologists, terrorism specialists, and students of

⁸⁸ Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry, “It’s Complicated: Looking Closely at Women in Violent Extremism,” *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* XVII, no. II (Summer/Fall 2016), 23.

⁸⁹ Kayleigh Tervooren, “Representing Women and Terrorist Violence: A Feminist Interrogation of Female Agency in the Gendered Discourse of the Public,” M.A. thesis, Utrecht University, 2016, 18-20.

⁹⁰ Sjoberg, Laura, and Caron E. Gentry. *Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Women's Violence in Global Politics*, 1st ed. London: Zed Books, 2007.

gender. The relevant literature is vast, and as a consequence, we could review only a small selection, limiting the pool to research published during the 2015–2020 period. This review is not intended to be comprehensive; instead, it describes broad contours, important and recurring themes, and persistent gaps in the literature. Note that much of the recent scholarship has focused on engagement in violent Islamist activism and, in particular, participation in ISIS.⁹¹ To what degree theoretical and empirical insights from such research are relevant to understanding non-jihadist terrorist groups remains an open question.

This review begins with a discussion of three broad themes: the long-standing involvement of women in violent political activism, the importance of previously overlooked (or disputed) female agency, and the need to incorporate gender into the analysis of terrorism and political violence. The review then describes individual and other motivations for female (and male) engagement. Finally, this review maps the multiple roles of women as supporters, enablers, and operators in armed groups. Ultimately, this review is intended to help set the stage for subsequent phases of the project.

Themes

Female engagement in political violence is not a new phenomenon. Specialists generally agree that though terrorism and insurgency have been overwhelmingly dominated by males, women have played integral roles in political violence throughout history. Recent examples include substantial support and operational roles for women in movements and formations such as the Vietcong/National Liberation Front of South Vietnam (NLF), the Badaar-Meinhof Group/Red Army Faction (*Rote Armee Fraktion*, or RAF) in West Germany, the Weather Underground Organization (WUO) in the United States, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê*, or PKK) in the greater Middle East, and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia–People's Army (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia—Ejército del Pueblo*, or FARC-EP).⁹² As we will discuss

⁹¹ This emphasis on ISIS may be a byproduct of the high position of ISIS on government counterterrorism agendas. At the same time, it may also reflect the broader and sometimes unstated assumption among policymakers, journalists, and specialists that female participation in a group that is misogynistic by conventional Western standards is anomalous and uniquely curious if not bizarre.

⁹² Indeed, women made up an estimated 40 percent of the FARC-EP. Megan Alpert, "To Be a Guerrilla, and a Woman, in Colombia," *Atlantic*, Sept. 28, 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/09/farc-deal-female-fighters/501644/>.

For more on women in the organization, see Mia Kazman, "Women of the FARC," William J. Perry Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies, May 2019, https://www.williamjperrycenter.org/sites/default/files/publication_associated_files/Women%20of%20the%20FARC.pdf.

below, what *is* new is the increasing *visibility* of female supporters, enablers, operators, and combatants.

Female participants have greater agency than previously assumed. As mentioned above, many scholars and practitioners have previously argued that women in armed groups must have been duped, manipulated, or coerced into joining violent extremist organizations. In sum, they must have been denied agency.⁹³ Today, specialists almost universally agree that though coercion (including rape and other forms of violence as well as radical economic distress) sometimes plays a role, “brainwashing” and “grooming” are not the defining events in the trajectory that leads to participation.⁹⁴

Gender-sensitive analysis should play a larger role in the study of terrorism and political violence. Implicit in the two previous themes is the notion that gendered experiences can shape the nature and degree of the engagement of both women and men in violent extremism.⁹⁵ As will be discussed in more detail below, women and men engage in violent extremism for many of the same reasons; however, acknowledging and embracing a gendered perspective can provide a richer understanding of both female and male participation in armed political groups. Moreover, as many analysts have insisted, failing to move beyond gender stereotypes can hinder policies and programs intended to counter violent extremism.⁹⁶

Motivations

Many academic specialists and policy experts argue that no satisfactory monocausal explanations for female (or, for that matter, male) participation in terrorism exist. Gender is but one of many variables; moreover, as two leading scholars conclude, “Women experience gender relations and social structure worldwide; thus, motivations for terror will vary from woman to woman.”⁹⁷ Social scientists who study terrorism and social movements frequently

⁹³ Laura Sjoberg, “The Women of ISIS: Gender and Political Violence,” *Political Violence at a Glance*, Aug. 28, 2017, <https://politicalviolenceataglance.org/2017/08/28/the-women-of-isis-gender-and-political-violence/>.

⁹⁴ European Parliament, Committee on Women’s Rights & Gender Equality, “Radicalization and Violent Extremism – Focus on Women: How Women Become Radicalised, and How to Empower Them to Prevent Radicalization,” PE 596.838, Dec. 2017, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/596838/IPOL_STU\(2017\)596838_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/596838/IPOL_STU(2017)596838_EN.pdf).

⁹⁵ Alexandra Phelan, “Special Issue Introduction for Terrorism, Gender and Women: Toward an Integrated Research Agenda,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, published online Apr. 30, 2020, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1057610X.2020.1759252?scroll=top&needAccess=tru>.

⁹⁶ United Nations Security Council, Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, “Gender Dimensions of the Response to Returning Foreign Fighters: Research Perspectives,” Feb. 2019.

⁹⁷ C.D. Ortvals and L.M. Poloni-Staudinger, *Gender and Political Violence*:

employ one or more levels of analysis and the interactions among them.⁹⁸ These levels are described in simplified terms below:

- *Micro-level research* examines individual-level interactions, emotions, beliefs, and intentions, such as the desire for revenge, crises of personal identity, and the desire for opportunity.
- *Meso-level approaches* explore group dynamics and organizational behavior, such as ideological bonding and group identity and belonging.⁹⁹
- *Macro-level research* considers the broad social, political, and economic environments in which individuals and groups exist.¹⁰⁰

Women and men typically share many motivations for participation: a desire to escape boredom and pursue adventure, a deep commitment to a given group's ideological goals, and a wish to gain or reestablish a sense of personal autonomy or security.¹⁰¹ At the same time, motivations can be highly gendered and can vary from person to person. For example, research on violent extremism in the Middle East and North Africa suggests that the lure of violent action is a stronger motivating factor for men than it is for women.¹⁰² And the opportunity for at least

Women Changing the Politics of Terrorism (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 31.

⁹⁸ See, for example, Donatella Della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence, and the State: a Comparative Analysis of Italy and Germany* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), chap. 7; and Laia Balcells and Patricia Justino, "Bridging Micro and Macro Approaches on Civil War Wars and Political Violence: Issues, Challenges, and the Way Forward," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 58, no. 8 (2014), 1343-1359.

⁹⁹ That said, ideology by itself is unlikely to be a major initial motivation for women or men to join any given terrorist formation. In the case of Indonesian women in the Islamic State, for example, "factors that initially drive them closer to the radical group are not ideational per se, but emotional ones such as a feeling of acceptance, empowerment, and the development of new interpersonal bonds with members of the radical community." Nava Nuraniyah, "Not Just Brainwashed: Understanding the Radicalization of Indonesian Female Supporters of the Islamic State," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 30 (2018), No. 6, 891.

¹⁰⁰ Sebastian Jilke et al., "Analytic Frameworks for Micro-, Mezo-, and Macro-Level Public Administration," Maxwell School of Civic and Public Affairs, Syracuse University, undated, <https://www.maxwell.syr.edu/minnowbrook/about/analytic-frameworks-for-micro-meso-and-macro-level-public-administration/#:~:text=Micro%2Dlevel%20research%20examines%20individuals,teams%2C%20units%2C%20and%20organizations>.

¹⁰¹ Ortobals and Poloni-Staudinger, *Gender and Political Violence*, 33. Mia Bloom identifies four micro-level motivations for women: revenge, redemption, relationship, and respect. To what degree these motivations are applicable for male recruits remains an unanswered question. Mia Bloom, *Bombshell: Women and Terrorism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

¹⁰² Laura Sjoberg, "People Not Pawns: Women's Participation in Violent Extremism Across MENA," US Agency for International Development Research Brief, Sept. 2015, No. 1, https://2012-2017.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/CVE_RESEARCHBRIEF_PEOPLENOTPAWNS.pdf.

some measure of gender equality appears to have been a motivating factor for the many women who joined the FARC-EP, PKK, and Shining Path.¹⁰³

Some armed groups skillfully draw on a gendered approach in efforts to recruit new members. Hyper-masculinized jihadist and neo-Nazi groups use tropes such as defending the honor of women, the opportunity and obligation to shed the blood of non-believers and out-group members, and the chance to be part of a brotherhood of arms as “pull” factors to lure in males.¹⁰⁴

Hyper-masculinized armed groups make similar appeals to women, albeit with different framing devices. For example, ISIS has adeptly highlighted “gendered dissatisfactions” in their appeal to Muslim women and girls in the West and has promoted a persuasive, alternative narrative that offers a vision of men and women as separate but co-equal partners in reestablishing the Caliphate.¹⁰⁵ Such messaging, whether sincere or not, signals a welcoming environment for potential recruits—a potential advantage in environments in which violent extremist groups are in competition with one another.¹⁰⁶

Roles

What is the nature of female engagement with terrorist, insurgent, and other extremist groups? As mentioned above, such engagement is not new, although the role of women is more visible. In addition, some terrorist groups, such as ISIS, appear to have a growing number of women in their ranks, although male participation likely remains far greater. Moreover, women appear to be playing a greater part in group leadership, planning, and operations.¹⁰⁷

What are the roles that women have assumed and are continuing to play in violent extremist organizations? Terrorism is more than violence, as Aleksandra Gastold observes, “it is the

¹⁰³ Carol Andreas, “Women at War,” North American Congress on Latin America, Sept. 25, 20007, <https://nacla.org/article/women-war>.

¹⁰⁴ Jamille Bigio and Rachel Vogelstein, “Women and Terrorism: Hidden Threats, Forgotten Partners,” Council on Foreign Relations, May 2019, https://cdn.cfr.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/Discussion_Paper_Bigio_Vogelstein_Terrorism_OR.pdf. For more on push and pull factors, see Muhsin Hassan, “Understanding Violent Extremism: The Case of al-Shabab and Somali Youth,” *CTC Sentinel* 5, no. 8 (Aug. 2012), <https://ctc.usma.edu/understanding-drivers-of-violent-extremism-the-case-of-al-shabab-and-somali-youth/>

¹⁰⁵ Sjoberg and Gentry, “It’s Complicated,” 28.

¹⁰⁶ Jakana L. Thomas and Kanisha D. Bond, “Women’s Participation in Violent Political Organizations,” *American Political Science Review* 109, no. 3 (Aug. 2015), 490.

¹⁰⁷ Lydia Khalil, “Behind the Veil: Women in Jihad after the Caliphate,” Lowy Institute, June 25, 2019, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/behind-veil-women-jihad-after-caliphate>.

entirety of illegal activities undertaken by a terrorist organization and by their approving and supporting environment.”¹⁰⁸ As with many other aspects of political violence, generalizations are difficult, and roles vary by individual preference, group requirements, the nature of adversaries, and the broader environment, among other factors. Having said that, these roles can be assigned to three broad categories: (1) supporting, (2) enabling, and (3) operational. These are discussed in turn below.

- **Supporting**: Supporting roles include domestic responsibilities such as childrearing and household management; psychological and emotional support to other militants; and administrative roles, such as the supervision and monitoring of the actions of other women.¹⁰⁹ In addition, women can serve as important symbolic roles. Within what Kathleen Belew terms the “White Power” movement, women are valorized as childbearers and so-called “tradwives” (traditional wives) helping to secure the future of the purportedly embattled white race.¹¹⁰
- **Enabling**: Women are increasingly prominent as propagandists, particularly through the internet, where they articulate and promulgate messages, build and strengthen social networks, and identify and encourage potential recruits.¹¹¹ Women also serve as intelligence collectors, fundraisers, planners, transporters of weapons and materiel, and decoys.¹¹²
- **Operational**: Finally, women play direct roles as fighters. Groups such as the PKK engage women as front-line soldiers, and jihadist groups (as well as secular movements such as the LTTE and Boko Haram in West Africa) use women as suicide bombers.

¹⁰⁸ Aleksandra Gasztold, *Feminist Perspectives on Terrorism: Critical Approaches to Security Studies* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 85.

¹⁰⁹ Ortvals and Poloni-Staudinger, *Gender and Political Violence*, 25.

¹¹⁰ Kathleen Belew, *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2018), chap. 7.

¹¹¹ Julia Ebner and Jacob Davey, “How Women Advance the Internationalization of the Far-Right,” in Audrey Alexander (ed.), *Perspectives on the Future of Women, Gender, and Violent Extremism*, George Washington University Program on Extremism, Feb. 2019, <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Perspectives%20on%20the%20Future%20of%20Women%2C%20Gender%20and%20Violent%20Extremism.pdf>.

¹¹² Gasztold, *Feminist Perspectives on Terrorism*, 85.

Within ISIS, specialists anticipate that as male militants are taken off the battlefield, women will increasingly play greater operational roles.¹¹³

In addition, women can play roles as state-builders.¹¹⁴ Indeed, each of the previously described roles could be partly considered programs by armed groups to promote a state-in-being (in the form of a Caliphate), an ethnonationalist homeland, or a peasant revolutionary regime.

Finally, women can offer VEOs a number of important tactical, operational, and perhaps strategic advantages. At the simplest level, opening ranks to women increases the population of potential recruits—the most important material resource for any armed group. VEOs can be skillful at exploiting conventional gender stereotypes as they carve out space for female participation.

For example, in many parts of the world, women are considered less likely to be involved in subversive or illegal activities, and are therefore less likely than their male comrades to arouse suspicion among the public and security forces. In addition, the participation of women, should it be discovered, is likely to heighten public anxieties that terrorists and insurgents could be anywhere and that no one is safe—a key political-psychological objective for many armed groups.¹¹⁵

Women and gender in the prevention and countering of violent extremism

The nature of the terrorist threat has evolved considerably over the years in terms of tactics, ideologies, and objectives. In response, policy-makers have adjusted the strategies designed to prevent and counter terrorism and violent extremism. Missing from much of this history, though, has been recognition of the roles that women have played in terrorist movements, the involvement of women in this critical policy work, and a nuanced understanding of the ways that gender shapes both terrorist activities and the policies designed to stop them.

Importantly, the elision of women from these conversations—and the later integration of women—did not occur within a vacuum. The United States has never had a female President, Secretary of Defense, or Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and only in 2016 did the US

¹¹³ Jessica Davis, “The Future of the Islamic State’s Women: Assessing their Potential Threat,” International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, June 2020, <https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/The-future-of-the-Islamic-State%E2%80%99s-Women-assessing-their-potential-threat.pdf>.

¹¹⁴ European Parliament, “Radicalization and Violent Extremism.”

¹¹⁵ Kathy Laster and Edna Erez, “Sisters in Terrorism? Exploding Stereotypes,” *Women & Criminal Justice* 25 (2015), 89.

Department of Defense (DOD) open all combat roles to women and place a woman in charge of a combatant command. The absence of women from certain elements of the US military and government almost certainly affected the ability of these same elements to assess the importance of women in sustaining and countering VEOs. Moreover, the conceptually complicated and fraught nature of the very terms (*women, gender, etc.*) has been an additional impediment to fruitful engagement. For example, conversations about gender require engaging with “deeply complex societal questions around masculinities and femininities and how they do—or don’t—change because of governments’ action and inaction on terrorism.”¹¹⁶

In recent years, however, gender has become an increasingly prominent topic in discussions of terrorism, counterterrorism (CT), and the prevention and countering of violent extremism (P/CVE). As Fionnuala Ní Aoláin and Jayne Huckerby noted in May 2018: “After decades of marginalization, there has been a swift—meteoric, even—rise in governments recognizing the need to mainstream gender perspectives across efforts to fight terrorism.”¹¹⁷ In its best version, the contemporary integration of women into CT and P/CVE programming is a multifaceted effort that recognizes the degree to which stereotypes about women—and stereotypes about men and gender norms—have blinded policymakers to potential challenges and opportunities in these spaces. Broadly speaking, a more nuanced engagement with gender has resulted in the articulation of six tenets that have both theoretical and practical implications for CT/CVE policy-makers and practitioners:¹¹⁸

1. Women are perpetrators of terrorism.
2. Women are victims of terrorism.
3. Women are affected by CT and P/CVE programming.
4. Women are essential partners in successful CT and P/CVE programming.
5. Women’s rights are critical to successful CT and P/CVE programming.
6. A gender-sensitive approach to CT and P/CVE will challenge received knowledge about men and masculinities.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Fionnuala Ní Aoláin and Jayne Huckerby, “Gendering Counterterrorism: How to, and How Not to – Part I,” *Just Security* May 2018, <https://www.justsecurity.org/55522/gendering-counterterrorism-to/>.

¹¹⁷ Ní Aoláin and Huckerby, “Gendering Counterterrorism: How to, and How Not to – Part I.”

¹¹⁸ Ní Aoláin and Huckerby, “Gendering Counterterrorism: How to, and How Not to – Part I.”

¹¹⁹ These six tenets largely mirror what Joana Cook identified as seven categories where women were discussed in CT discourses: “(1) security practitioners; (2) conflict prevention, reconciliation and reconstruction; (3) female rights, empowerment and equality; (4) members of the public or community; (5) the private/domestic sphere; (6) victimhood; and (7) terrorist actors. See: Joana Cook, *A Woman’s Place: US Counterterrorism Since 9/11* (Oxford, 2020), 23.

Women are perpetrators of terrorism

The first of these tenets—that women are perpetrators of terrorism—is the most straightforward because it is predicated on an outright rejection of stereotypes regarding the roles that women do (and do not) play in perpetrating terrorist activity. This shift signals not only a better understanding of the roles that women play in terrorist movements but also an increased willingness to recognize the agency of women in choosing these roles (instead of framing women as the innocent, naïve, or manipulated victims of male predators).

This recognition is critical because it increases the likelihood not only that women participating in VEO activity will be recognized and arrested, but also that they will be convicted and sentenced for the crimes that they commit. A 2018 report by West Point's Combating Terrorism Center found that women are less frequently arrested for terrorism-related offenses, and that women convicted of terrorism-related offenses receive prison sentences that are shorter than average.¹²⁰ A US policy-making apparatus that recognizes women as self-directing agents will almost certainly reverse these patterns.

Obviously this shift does not represent an unconditional good for all women, which aligns with the reality that the integration of women and gender into CT and P/CVE efforts is not intended to benefit women but to improve US security. In fact, a subset of women (i.e., those who affiliate with VEOs) will experience this change as one that forecloses certain options. If US policy-makers believe that women are naïve and helpless victims of male predators, then the path to redemption for women will likely be easier, *regardless of whether or not they were indeed victims*. Women can simply emphasize their ignorance or victimhood (and obscure their own agency) to avoid harsh prison sentences or punishments. As stereotypes around female participation in VEOs are challenged and female agency increasingly recognized, prosecutors will almost certainly be less amenable to this type of explanation or excuse.

Women are victims of terrorism

The second tenet, in the context of the broader discussion, injects a degree of nuance into what might be an otherwise obvious claim. Namely, instead of merely stipulating that women are victims of terrorists, this assertion recognizes that women are vulnerable to unique threats as a result of war and conflict.

Sexual assault is perhaps the most obvious example of a risk that disproportionately affects women. As Joana Cook notes, this includes “AQI or Boko Haram kidnapping, raping and

¹²⁰ Audrey Alexander and Rebecca Turkington, “Treatment of Terrorists: How Does Gender Affect Justice?” CTC Sentinel, Sep. 2018, Vo.11, Issue 8, <https://ctc.usma.edu/treatment-terrorists-gender-affect-justice/>.

shaming women into becoming suicide bombers...ISIS abducting thousands of Yazidi women and holding them in human slavery, or targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex persons in territory they controlled.”¹²¹ In some cases, the issues of women and gender overlap, with women being targeted both physically (e.g., through sexual violence) and psychosocially (e.g., through the instrumentalization of gender norms that limit their options). In other cases, the issues of sex and gender overlap as norms about what constitutes gender-appropriate behavior (e.g., not marrying a same-sex partner) make entire populations vulnerable to persecution.

Women are also uniquely vulnerable to formal and informal efforts to limit freedom and basic human rights, including “non-discrimination and equality, liberty and security of person, right to health, right to education, and right to freedom of religion.”¹²² In fact, for some groups (e.g., Islamist), informal efforts to suppress the rights of women are among the first signs of radicalization and thus, by extension, a possible precursor of radicalized violence.¹²³ One study of “30 countries across the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia found that women were substantially more likely than men to be early victims of extremism.”¹²⁴

Although considerable progress has been made in this space, an emphasis on sexual violence is still common, with the result “that the multiple other harms women may experience have frequently faded into the background or been ignored entirely.”¹²⁵

Women are affected by CT and P/CVE programming

The third tenet—that women are affected by CT and P/CVE programming—is similar to the second in that it also injects a degree of nuance into the discussion, ideally prompting policymakers to consider how CT and P/CVE policies affect the male and female populations differently as a result of existing cultural norms around gender.

This tenet effectively has two core components. The first component is a call to recognize that CT and P/CVE policies can *inadvertently* have negative effects on women. This might occur materially when a specific policy introduces a hardship that disproportionately affects women,

¹²¹ Joana Cook, *A Woman's Place: US Counterterrorism Since 9/11*, 9.

¹²² Ní Aoláin and Huckerby, "Gendering Counterterrorism: How to, and How Not to – Part I."

¹²³ Jamille Bigio and Rebecca Turkington, "US Counterterrorism's Big Blindspot: Women," *The New Republic*, March 2019, <https://newrepublic.com/article/153402/us-counterterrorism-big-blindspot-women>.

¹²⁴ Jamille Bigio and Rachel Vogelstein, "Women Are Key to Counterterrorism," *US News*, Feb. 2017, <https://www.usnews.com/opinion/op-ed/articles/2017-02-08/women-are-critical-in-the-fight-against-terrorism-and-the-islamic-state>.

¹²⁵ Ní Aoláin and Huckerby, "Gendering Counterterrorism: How to, and How Not to – Part I."

or conceptually when the absence of women from a P/CVE policy unintentionally communicates the irrelevance of the role of women in the dynamic.

The second component is a call to recognize that CT and P/CVE policies can provide cover for the *purposeful targeting* of women as part of both legitimate and illegitimate national security efforts. As one article noted, this might take the form of:

women’s rights groups and defenders being labeled terrorists by their own repressive governments, counter-terrorism financing rules that cut off money to victims and women’s rights groups, unwarranted detentions of female family members as a form of collective punishment, [and] attacks on Muslim women and girls who often bear the brunt of Islamophobia that result from some governments’ counter-terrorism tactics.¹²⁶

In both cases, the core issue is the same: women are uniquely vulnerable to CT and P/CVE policies that are not, in most cases, designed with them in mind.

Women are essential partners in successful CT and P/CVE programming

The fourth tenet—women are essential partners in successful CT and P/CVE programming—has implications at both the strategic and tactical levels because it points to the importance of having women (a) in the room when policies are designed and (b) in the field when policies are implemented.

Although it may be tempting to read this claim as a politically correct call for the inclusion of women, strong empirical and anecdotal evidence supports the assertion that women play a crucial role in this space. As the United Nation (UN) Security Council’s Counter-Terrorism Committee has noted, “The inclusion of women in the delivery of security...often enhances the effectiveness of law enforcement efforts.” Moreover, “Women diversify the perspectives and expertise that inform policies and responses, can engage a broader range of stakeholders, and [can] enter spaces that may be restricted by cultural and religious sensitivities.”¹²⁷

Including women, especially at the tactical level, also prevents VEOs from exploiting a loophole that occurs when CT or P/CVE initiatives fail to accommodate local gender norms. VEOs and insurgencies have long exploited these loopholes to evade security apparatus. As one article noted:

¹²⁶ Ní Aoláin and Huckerby, "Gendering Counterterrorism: How to, and How Not to – Part I."

¹²⁷ "Gender," United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee, <https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/focus-areas/gender/>.

The dearth of female officers [a critical issue in a cultural environment that prohibits male officers from searching female bodies] has been readily exploited by female extremists throughout history, from Algeria in the 1950s, when female National Liberation Front fighters posed as young women out for a day of shopping to evade checkpoints and attack a strategic target, to a paramilitary member in Turkey who disguised a bomb as a late-term pregnancy in an attack on Turkish military officers in 1996.¹²⁸

Another example is the very rapid increase in Boko Haram's use of female suicide bombers who are less likely to be searched given the lack of female law enforcement agents.

Critically, the loophole can be closed in both a defensive sense (as outlined above) and in an offensive sense by, in some environments, increasing the percentage of the population that can be interviewed or that might be willing to come forward voluntarily with tips. In cultures with norms prohibiting non-familial gender integration, male-only teams will simply not have access to the observations, intelligence, and perspectives of half the population. A mixed team, though, does not operate with the same handicap. That said, this tenet comes with a critical caveat: it should not be read as a blanket statement positioning women as presumed peacemakers, while labeling men as "presumed combatant[s]."¹²⁹ Some women will support peace and work actively to achieve it, some will support peace but choose not to be involved, some will quietly sympathize with the VEOs, and some will actively support the VEOs. Rejecting gender-based generalizations requires rejecting not only those that are negative (e.g., all men are violent) but also those that may seem positive (e.g., all women are peaceful).

Women's rights are critical to successful CT and P/CVE programming

The fifth tenet—that women's rights are critical to successful CT and P/CVE programming—is slightly different in that it is a value assertion about the complicated relationship between VEOs and the efforts (CT and P/CVE) to stop them. This idea was articulated perhaps most prominently by Laura Bush, who said about the relationship between women's rights and terrorist movements that "the fight against terrorism is a fight for the rights and dignity of women." Bush made these comments just weeks after the 9/11 attacks as the country was actively fighting Islamist terrorist and extremist movements (i.e., AQ and the Taliban) that endorsed anti-feminist and anti-women policies, but her assertion has remained relevant, presumably because the US is still in conflict with these same VEOs (e.g., AQ) and because many

¹²⁸ Jamille Bigio and Rebecca Turkington, "US Counterterrorism's Big Blindspot: Women," *The New Republic*, Mar. 2019, <https://newrepublic.com/article/153402/us-counterterrorisms-big-blindspot-women>.

¹²⁹ Catherine Powell and Rebecca Turkington, "Gender, Masculinities, and Counterterrorism," Council on Foreign Relations, Jan. 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/gender-masculinities-and-counterterrorism>.

contemporary VEOs (e.g., ISIS) endorse gender norms similarly at odds with the contemporary US mainstream.

In fact, the authors of a 2016 report on women and conflict resolution noted that “restrictions on women’s rights have accompanied the rise of extremist groups—particularly those with fundamentalist religious ideologies—across the globe.”¹³⁰ Thus by this argument, efforts to counter VEOs are efforts to secure the rights of women.

Equally relevant is the argument that “societies for which gender equality indicators are higher are less vulnerable to violent extremism.”¹³¹ One extension of this line of thought, in this case articulated by the UN, is that efforts to “promote women’s participation, leadership and empowerment across society, including in governmental, security sector and civil society institutions” can be framed as P/CVE initiatives.¹³² As a result, in this argument, efforts to secure the rights of women are efforts to counter VEOs.

As numerous subject matter experts have noted, though, one potential downside to CT/CVE efforts predicated on securing the rights of women is that it introduces a degree of risk into this programming.¹³³ When CT/CVE programming is linked to this agenda it becomes vulnerable to the accusation that it may be trying to undermine existing gender norms (effectively politicizing what should be a non-controversial topic) and potentially puts future CT/CVE programming at risk. Additionally, linking the funds for programming designed to secure the rights of women to CT/CVE initiatives makes those funding streams contingent on DOD CT/CVE priorities.

A gender-sensitive approach to CT and P/CVE will challenge received knowledge about men and masculinities

And finally, the sixth tenet is a reminder that a gender-sensitive lens requires rejecting *all* gender-based stereotypes and reconsidering the ways in which all preconceived notions about gender and sex affect policy-making efforts. As Fionnuala Ní Aoláin noted at a January 2019 event, “*Gender* remains a short-form for women,” but its full definition is more inclusive.¹³⁴

¹³⁰ Bigio and Vogelstein, “Women Are Key to Counterterrorism.”

¹³¹ United Nations General Assembly. *Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism Report of the Secretary-General*. A/70/674, Dec. 24, 2015.

¹³² United Nations General Assembly, *Plan of Action*.

¹³³ SME Interview.

¹³⁴ Powell, “Gender, Masculinities, and Counterterrorism.”

Thus, as the UN Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Committee has noted, a "gender-sensitive" approach to P/CVE is also sensitive to "men and masculinities."¹³⁵ Read cynically, this language might appear to be reflexively reorienting (perhaps even re-center) the experience of men in conversations about VEOs, CT efforts, and P/CVE efforts. Read generously, though, this language can be seen as recognizing that stereotypes about sex and gender can hurt men as much as they hurt women. Thus, studying the "masculinities and the hegemonic masculinities that produce and sustain violence" is critical¹³⁶ Importantly, such an effort must be culturally contextualized because there is no single global masculine norm. A culturally specific engagement with these hegemonic masculinities, though, might prompt analysts to consider ways that terrorists radicalize vulnerable men by exploiting a constellation of male feelings including emasculation, inadequacy, entitlement, or humiliation while simultaneously exploiting gender norms that discourage this same population from acknowledging, discussing, or processing these complex emotions.

A more nuanced approach to gender, moreover, includes not only an engagement with the role of masculine norms in motivating behavior, but also addresses issues that are unique to male populations. As one example, researchers have analyzed the relationship between "inflationary brideprice" and "marriage market obstruction."¹³⁷ As the authors note, "In many cultures, marriage is much more than a social formality; it marks the transition to culturally defined manhood. When marriage includes brideprice, it is also an expensive economic transaction."¹³⁸ Thus when inflation increases brideprice, it poses an obstacle to both marriage and the transition to adulthood "producing grievances among young males that have been linked to violence and political instability."¹³⁹

Impressive progress has been made in recent years as governments have worked to adjust thinking on CT/CVE to account for the complicated constellation of issues related to both women and gender. This work, however, is by no means complete.

¹³⁵ United Nations Security Council. "Gender." <https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/focus-areas/gender/>.

¹³⁶ Powell, "Gender, Masculinities, and Counterterrorism."

¹³⁷ Hudson, Valerie M., and Hilary Matfess, "In plain sight: The neglected linkage between brideprice and violent conflict," *International Security* 42.1 (2017): 7-40.

¹³⁸ Hudson and Matfess, "In plain sight: The neglected linkage between brideprice and violent conflict."

¹³⁹ Hudson and Matfess, "In plain sight: The neglected linkage between brideprice and violent conflict."

Appendix B: FARC-EP

Overview

Following a decade of savage conflict known as *La Violencia* (1948–1958), members of the Colombian Communist Party (Partido Comunista Colombiana, or PCC) established self-defense communities in the countryside to defend impoverished rural populations and their land.¹⁴⁰ In 1964, after the Colombian government attempted to drive out the PCC militants and seize *campesino* land holdings, members of the PCC founded what was originally called the Southern Bloc, later renamed the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia–People’s Army (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia–Ejército del Pueblo, or FARC-EP), a Marxist-Leninist movement that would become the country’s most formidable armed group.¹⁴¹ Women played integral roles in the armed struggle from the movement’s earliest days—indeed, two women, Miryam Naváez, and Judith Grisález, were part of a group of 48 peasants who created the Southern Bloc.¹⁴²

Within two years of its founding, the FARC-EP transformed itself from a self-defense force to true insurgency that provided social services, recruited and trained guerrillas, and mounted attacks on government forces and other targets. In the 1990s, at the height of the FARC-EP’s power, it had a force of an estimated 18,000 (which included both combatants and civilian militants who made up group’s civilian support network) and held 42,000 square miles of territory under its control.¹⁴³ According to a declassified US Defense Intelligence Agency assessment prepared during this period, the FARC-EP had progressed from “hit-and-run

¹⁴⁰ For more on *La Violencia* and its consequences, see Richard Skretteberg, “Colombia’s bloody history,” Norwegian Refugee Council, Dec. 1, 2015, <https://www.nrc.no/perspectives/2015/nr-4/colombias-bloody-history/>.

¹⁴¹ Victoria Harrison, “An End to More than 50 Years of Civil War(s), in Colombia,” International Institute for Strategic Studies, July 10, 2017, <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2017/07/civil-war-colombia>. For reasons of style and simplicity, this case study will use the name FARC-EP throughout.

¹⁴² Karen Marón, “Mujeres Guerrilleras (Extractos),” International Committee of the Red Cross, Mar. 3, 2003, <https://www.icrc.org/es/doc/resources/documents/misc/5tecqs.htm>.

¹⁴³ Elizabeth Gonzalez and Pablo Medina Uribe, “Explainer: The FARC and Colombia’s 50-Year Conflict,” Americas Society, May 12, 2016, <https://www.as-coa.org/articles/explainer-farc-and-colombias-50-year-civil-conflict>. The number of FARC-EP members varied over time, as did official and unofficial estimates of the group’s strength. By 2016, according to the Colombian government, the FARC-EP had 6,000–7,000 fighters and 8,500 militant supporters. “Who are the Farc?” BBC News, Nov. 24, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-36605769>.

guerrilla-style attacks to sophisticated operations using intelligence, maneuver, indirect fire, and command-and-control of multiple units that mass on the target.”¹⁴⁴

Kidnappings of politicians and elites for ransom were an important initial source of the FARC-EP’s funding. But after initially rejecting any involvement in the drug trade as “counterrevolutionary” and corrupting, the FARC-EP found the lure of the highly lucrative coca economy irresistible.¹⁴⁵ The FARC-EP provided security for coca growing; taxed precursor chemicals and the use of landing strips; sold *pasta basica de cocaína* (cocaine paste), a highly addictive byproduct of cocaine production; taxed the use of landing strips; and engaged in cocaine trafficking in the region. According to the United Nations, illicit drug activities accounted for 25–50 percent of the FARC-EP’s income.¹⁴⁶

The FARC-EP’s goals were relatively straightforward: build a self-sustaining rural army, wage a protracted “people’s war,” and seize state power. Over time, and facing vastly more effective Colombian armed forces (organized, trained, and equipped by the United States¹⁴⁷), substantial battlefield losses, the death of key leaders, large numbers of defections, as well as widespread public opposition to the group and its violence, the FARC-EP pursued more-modest objectives. These included gaining legitimacy in the eyes of the Colombian people and the international community, and maintaining its strongholds and access to resources, particularly in the southern part of the country.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ Defense Intelligence Agency, “Colombia’s Insurgency: Military Implications from Las Delicias to Mitu,” Defense Intelligence Assessment, Jan. 1999, <https://www.dia.mil/FOIA/FOIA-Electronic-Reading-Room/FOIA-Reading-Room-Colombia/FileId/121076/>.

¹⁴⁵ John Otis, “The FARC and Colombia’s Illegal Drug Trade,” Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Nov. 2014, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/publication/Otis_FARCDrugTrade2014.pdf.

¹⁴⁶ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *The Drug Problem and Organized Crime, Illicit Financial Flows, Corruption, and Terrorism*, Part 5: *World Drug Report 2017*, May 2017, https://www.unodc.org/wdr2017/field/Booklet_5_NEXUS.pdf. This represented roughly \$500–\$600 million in annual revenue. United Nations Regional Information Center for Western Europe, “Guerrilla Groups in Colombia,” undated, <https://archive.unric.org/en/colombia/27013-the-guerrilla-groups-in-colombia>. FARC-EP leaders always rejected the charge that the group was engaged in drug trafficking—all of their activities, they claimed, were strictly in service to the “rebellion.” See for example the FARC-EP communiqué, “Somos Rebeldes, No Narcotraficantes,” Centro de Documentación de los Movimientos Armados (CEDEMA), Dec. 14, 2014, www.cedema.org/ver.php?id=6520.

¹⁴⁷ Daniel Mejía, “Plan Colombia: An Analysis of Effectiveness and Costs,” Brookings Institution, 2016, <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Mejia-Colombia-final-2.pdf>; and Natalio Cosoy, “Has Plan Colombia Really Worked?” BBC News, February 4, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-35491504>.

¹⁴⁸ Carlos Ospina, “Colombia and the FARC: From Military Victory to Ambivalent Political Integration?” Center for Complex Operations, National Defense University, May 24, 2016, <https://cco.ndu.edu/Publications/Publication-View/Article/780177/chapter-6-colombia-and-the-farc-from-military-victory-to-ambivalent-political-r/>.

At the apex of the FARC-EP sat the (exclusively male) seven-member Secretariat, which oversaw key activities and operations. The Secretariat was also responsible for appointing the commanders of the organization's seven blocs, each of which were composed of five or more "fronts" in specific zones that contained 50–200 fighters.¹⁴⁹

Notable FARC-EP military operations and terrorist "spectaculars" included the August 30, 1996 attack on the Las Delicias military base in southwestern Colombia that left 54 soldiers dead; the August 7, 2002 mortar attack near the presidential palace during President Alvaro Uribe's inauguration, which killed 14 people and wounded 40 others; and the June 22, 2015 bombings of an oil pipeline that released 410,000 barrels of oil into in the river system of Colombia's western Nariño department, an event described as the worst environmental disaster in the country's history.¹⁵⁰

Negotiations between the government of President Juan Manuel Santos and the FARC-EP during the 2013–2016 period led to a number accords, culminating in a subagreement reached in June 2016 that led to the demobilization and disarmament of the FARC-EP and a bilateral ceasefire, which effectively brought the 52-year insurgency to an end.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Mapping Militant Organizations, "Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia," Stanford University, last modified July 2019, <https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/revolutionary-armed-forces-colombia-farc>; and "Colombia: An Overview of the FARC's Military Structure," European Strategic Intelligence and Security Center, 2010, <http://www.esisc.org/publications/briefings/colombia-an-overview-of-the-farcs-military-structure>.

¹⁵⁰ Mapping Militant Organizations, "Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia"; and US Department of State, "Colombia 2015 Human Rights Report," <https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/253213.pdf>.

¹⁵¹ Congressional Research Service, *Colombia: Background and US Relations*, R43813, Nov. 29, 2019, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R43813.pdf>. According to the Colombian government, 13,104 ex-combatants had been accredited as demobilized as of March 2020. These were not exclusively members of the FARC, but included former members of other armed groups. Washington Office on Latin America, "Colombia Peace: Monitoring Progress in Peace Dialogues," May 13, 2020, <https://colombiapeace.org/numbers/>. For more on Colombia's demobilization campaign, see Maria Derks, Hans Rouw, and Ivan Briscoe, *A Community Dilemma: DDR and the Changing Face of Violence in Colombia*, Peace Security and Development Network No. 00030, July 2011, https://paxencolombia.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/a-community-dilemma-ddr-and-the-changing-face-of-violence-in-colombia_1.pdf. For a discussion of the criminal activities by ex-FARC members known as the "FARC Mafia," see Juan Diego Pasada, "FARC Dissidents Growing Faster than Colombia Can Count," *InSight Crime*, Dec. 20, 2018, <https://www.insightcrime.org/news/brief/farc-dissidents-growing-faster-colombia-can-count/>.

Figure 1. Map of Colombia



Source: Central Intelligence Agency, "Colombia," The World Factbook 2020, accessed Dec. 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/colombia/map>.

Role of women and gender

As mentioned above, the most senior leadership of the FARC-EP was exclusively male. The involvement of women during the movement's early years, when entire families joined, was confined strictly to childrearing, cooking, cleaning, and other household tasks. Over time, however, women became a considerable force inside the FARC-EP, with an estimated 40 percent of the group made up of women who served in a wide variety of combat and supporting roles.¹⁵² Female recruits (as well as males) were overwhelmingly young: more than 75 percent of the 129 demobilized women and girls interviewed in the course of one study were under the age of 19 when they joined the movement.¹⁵³ Child soldiers, both boys and girls, made up a considerable portion of the FARC-EP force.¹⁵⁴

Recruitment

Women and girls entered the FARC-EP largely through voluntary recruitment, although substantial evidence exists that coercion played a least some role, particularly with respect to minors.¹⁵⁵ Recruits, female and male alike, were overwhelmingly from impoverished rural areas. Scholars, analysts, and other specialists have identified a number of push and pull factors that contributed to FARC-EP recruitment. Some of these apply to men and women alike, while others have gender- or youth-specific components. And of course, there are rarely if ever single

¹⁵² "Colombia Case Study: Final Agreement to End the Armed Conflict and Build a Stable and Lasting Peace," Council on Foreign Relations, undated, <https://www.cfr.org/womens-participation-in-peace-processes/colombia>.

¹⁵³ Mia Kazman, *Women of the FARC*, Perry Center Occasional Paper, William J. Perry Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies, May 2019, https://www.williamjperrycenter.org/sites/default/files/publication_associated_files/Women%20of%20the%20FARC.pdf.

¹⁵⁴ P.W. Singer, "Child Soldiers: The New Face of War," Brookings Institution, undated, <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/singer20051215.pdf>. A child soldier is defined as "any person below 18 years of age who is, or who has been, recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, spies or for sexual purposes." Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, "Recruitment and Use of Children," undated, <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/six-grave-violations/child-soldiers/>.

¹⁵⁵ As Ingunn Bjørkhaug concludes, the entrance of children, girls and boys, into armed groups often involves "degrees of voluntarism and degrees of coercion." But at the same time, she notes, "even when they make choices under a certain degree of coercion and from a position of weakness, which is not uncommon in most societies, they are still able to make choices." Ingunn Bjørkhaug, *Child Soldiers in Colombia: The Recruitment of Children into Non-State Violent Armed Groups*, Microcon Research Working Paper 27, June 2010, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/6406917.pdf>. The same arguably holds true of adults.

motivations or triggering events that drive individuals into violent collective enterprises. Push factors include the following:

- Escape from sexual and other forms of abuse inside or outside the family
- Economic hardship and extreme poverty
- Search for identity
- Escape from the boredom of rural life and the desire for adventure
- Escape from traditional gender roles, *machismo*, and a sense of powerlessness
- Desire for respect
- Socialization into the cause through friends and family
- Desire for revenge.¹⁵⁶

Pull factors include the following:

- Need to “grow” the organization and expand territorially and demographically
- Requirement to replenish ranks
- A liberationist ideology promoting gender egalitarianism
- Desire to enhance the morale of male members
- Desire to soften the FARC-EP’s image as an army of marauding criminals
- Comradeship.¹⁵⁷

As in any large-scale civil war or armed conflict, combatants are inevitably killed or captured, and was certainly the case in Colombia. Others took themselves off the battlefield. In her analysis of interviews with 129 women who deserted the FARC-EP, Mia Kazman identified 11 (non-mutually exclusive) motivations for exiting the insurgency. The most important of these were dissatisfaction (including loss of morale, boredom, exhaustion, and general disillusionment

¹⁵⁶ Rahel Kunz and Ann-Kristin Sjöberg, “Empowered or Oppressed? The Case of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – FARC,” conference paper, International Studies Association, Nov. 15–18, 2009, <https://genderingworldpolitics.files.wordpress.com/2017/10/kunz-empowered-or-oppressed.pdf>; and Yvonne E. Keairns, “The Voices of Girl Child Soldiers,” Quaker United Nations Office, Jan. 2003, https://genderandsecurity.org/sites/default/files/Keairns_-_Girl_Ch_Sldrs_Colombia.pdf.

¹⁵⁷ James J. Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change in Colombia: The Origin and Direction of the FARC-EP* (New York: Pluto Press, 2010), 191; Jessica Trisko Darden, “Assessing the Significance of Women in Combat Roles,” *International Journal* 70, no. 3 (2015), 460; and Natalia Herrera and Douglas Porch, “Like Going to a Fiesta’: The Role of Female Fighters in Colombia’s FARC-EP,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 19, no. 4 (Dec. 2008), 614.

with life as a combatant); outside pressure (from family members and others, despite the FARC-EP's efforts to limit contact with outsiders); and mistreatment by commanders.¹⁵⁸ Other studies have identified the FARC-EP's policies and practices with respect to contraception and abortion as key factors contributing to the defection of women.¹⁵⁹

Roles within the organization

Beginning in the early 1980s, FARC-EP ideology enshrined gender equality as a key component of the revolutionary struggle and in 1985 formally declared that female and male fighters would serve on a completely equal footing.¹⁶⁰ This position meshed with the movement's decision to expand its combat operations vastly (an option fueled by the massive influx of rents from the Colombian drug trade). It was during this period that the leadership sought to become a true "people's army," as symbolized by the decision to add "Ejército del Pueblo" to the FARC's name. But building such a force would require a substantial demographic expansion—most notably, the large-scale recruitment of women and children. In short, ideological imperatives and operational demands aligned.¹⁶¹

The women of the FARC-EP performed a full spectrum of support, combat, and command roles, although there were some limits, as will be discussed below. These roles included the following:

- Serving in mixed-gender combat battalions and as battalion commanders
- Serving as guards and as bodyguards for commanders
- Performing camp duties, including cutting wood, cooking, and cleaning
- Serving as finance officers, communications specialists, and as interlocutors with local populations

¹⁵⁸ Kazman, *Women of the FARC*.

¹⁵⁹ Fiona Morrisson-Fleming, "Double Agency? The Role of LTTE and FARC Female Fighters in War and Peace," *E-International Relations*, November 1, 2020, <https://www.e-ir.info/2020/11/01/double-agency-on-the-role-of-ltte-and-farc-female-fighters-in-war-and-peace/>. For more on motivations for entry and exit, see William Rosenau, Ralph Espach, Roman D. Ortiz, and Natalia Herrera, "Why They Join, Why They Fight, and Why They Leave: Learning from Colombia's Database of Demobilized Militants," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26, no. 2 (2014).

¹⁶⁰ Herrera and Porch, "Like Going to a Fiesta," 613. For a more recent example of the group's stated commitment to gender egalitarianism, see the FARC-EP communiqué, "8 de Marzo, Día Internacional de la Mujer," CEDEMA, March 8, 2014, www.Cedema.or/ver.php?id=6105.

¹⁶¹ Francisco Gutiérrez Sanín and Francy Carranza Franco, "Organizing Women for Combat: The Experience of the FARC in the Colombian War," *Journal of Agrarian Change* 17 (2017), 774.

- Gathering and analyzing intelligence
- Messaging and propaganda activities
- Performing educational tasks
- Providing medical care to fighters and hostages.¹⁶²

Researchers generally agree that women and men performed the same roles, and that there was little gender discrimination inside the FARC-EP. As one female fighter told a researcher, “men and women contributed shoulder to shoulder, that if the man had to carry 50 pounds, we would too, that if the man went to combat, the woman also went. Like this, women within FARC earned respect and earned the position to be equal to men.”¹⁶³

But that is not to say discrimination was entirely absent. Girls had a greater responsibility for tasks like cooking and cleaning.¹⁶⁴ The FARC-EP, according to some sources, deliberately recruited attractive women and girls as part of what one commander called “our marketing strategy”: “Everyone expects to see ugly *guerrilleros* in the road blocks. However, they are received by the prettiest *guerrilleras*. This is an attraction so that they will enroll in our [ranks].”¹⁶⁵ And while the FARC-EP claimed women had the same opportunities for command as men, in reality women never rose above mid-level positions of command; and as mentioned above, they certainly never played senior leadership roles in structures like the Secretariat.¹⁶⁶ Finally, there is significant evidence that women and girls routinely provided sexual services to higher-level FARC-EP commanders. Recounting her own experiences, one female fighter explained that sexual relationships with commanders were consensual: “I don’t deny this: I

¹⁶² Kunz and Sjöberg, “Empowered or Oppressed?”

¹⁶³ Quoted in Laura Camila Barrios Sabogal and Solveig Richter, “Las Farianas: Reintegration of Former Female FARC Fighters as a Driver for Peace in Colombia,” *Cuadernos de Economía* 38 (Dec. 20, 2019), http://www.scielo.org.co/scielo.php?pid=S0121-47722019000300753&script=sci_arttext&tlng=en.

¹⁶⁴ Jeremy McDermott, “Colombia’s Female Fighting Force,” BBC News, Jan. 4, 2002, news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/1742217.stm.

¹⁶⁵ Kunz and Sjöberg, “Empowered or Oppressed?”

¹⁶⁶ Alexandra Welsh, “Women of the Jungle: Guerrilleras on the Front Lines of the FARC-EP,” *Gideon Journal of International Studies*, 2015, <https://gjis.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/gjis/article/view/39078>. One woman who achieved a relatively high level in the FARC-EP was Elda Neyis Mosquera García (aka “Karina”), who commanded the group’s 47th Front. Jeremy McDermott, “Nelly Avila Moreno, FARC’s ‘Karina,’ captured by Colombian forces in war on drugs,” *Daily Telegraph* (London), May 19, 2008, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/1989610/Nelly-Avila-Moreno-FARCs-Karina-captured-by-Colombian-forces-in-war-on-drugs.html>.

was with the commander for a better life, to win points, but voluntarily. . . . A woman's life with a commander is super, . . . it is the best life."¹⁶⁷

Figure 2. FARC-EP combatants and FARC-EP *guerrillera* standing guard



Source: Flickr/Silvia Andrea Moreno, "FARC's Insurgent Feminism Moves from the Battlefield to Society," Upside Down World, 2017, <https://upside-downworld.org/archives/colombia/farcs-insurgent-feminism-moves-battlefield-society/>; Anastasia Moloney, "Colombia's FARC female fighters," Reuters, 2014, <https://news.trust.org/slideshow/?id=ed79b68a-bfda-44e6-b139-40125173ae9f>.

Rules governing behavior

According to one legal scholar, The FARC-EP, like many other guerrilla groups, "imposed rules not only on its own members to maintain discipline but also on civilians to direct their behaviors, regulating issues such as free speech, mobility, sexual conduct, personal appearance, labor standards, commercial trade, etc."¹⁶⁸ The FARC-EP stressed that discipline within its ranks was enforced on an equal basis, with no discrimination between women and

¹⁶⁷ Quoted in Rachel Schmidt, "Framing a Revolution: Identity, Gender, and Rebel Group Cohesion in Colombia," undated, <https://files.elfsight.com/storage/037d5ad1-bc8f-429a-a878-aa211518497d/84721129-9af3-4435-aa28-87e99b32b0d2.pdf>.

¹⁶⁸ René Provost, "FARC Justice: Rebel Rule of Law," Social Science Research Network, Feb. 24, 2017, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2925278>.

men.¹⁶⁹ Women had the right to choose their partners, in contrast to the rules in much of rural Colombian society. However, some commanders believed that stable couples had the tendency to desert and separated them by sending them to different fronts.¹⁷⁰ In addition, the FARC-EP had a gendered approach to reproduction: contraception (such as Norplant injections) was both mandatory and the sole responsibility of women.¹⁷¹ When women did get pregnant, they were typically compelled to undergo abortions (or in some cases, turn their children over to family members to rear), which led many to leave the ranks.¹⁷²

Violence against women

The extent of in-group sexual violence in the FARC-EP is the subject of considerable debate.¹⁷³ In its official pronouncements, the FARC-EP insisted that sexual violence within its ranks was a very serious offence, and dismissed as antirevolutionary propaganda claims that rape was widespread.¹⁷⁴ The fact that the women of the FARC-EP were armed and that strict sanctions against sexual abuse were in place may have limited potential sexual violence.¹⁷⁵ Yet the Colombian government and nongovernmental organizations have argued that such violence was not rare or unsystematic. In 2016, for example, Colombia's attorney general declared that 232 cases of rape of girls and boys had been uncovered and that these were not isolated incidents.¹⁷⁶ Other sources conclude that FARC-EP commanders, who meted out harsh punishments for indiscipline, fecklessness, and disobedience, chose to ignore instances of

¹⁶⁹ Keith Stanski, "Terrorism, Gender, and Ideology: A Case Study of Women who Join the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia," in James J.F. Forest, ed., *The Making of a Terrorist: Recruitment, Training, and Root Causes* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2006), 145.

¹⁷⁰ For more on this point see Andrea Méndez, "Militarized Gender Performativity: Women and Demobilization in Colombia's FARC and AUC," Ph.D. diss., Queen's University (Canada), Aug. 2012, http://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/ddr-militarized_gender_performativity-women_and_demobilization_in_colombias_farc_and_auc_0.pdf.

¹⁷¹ In the words of one female fighter, "It is understood that we are professional revolutionaries . . . It is very difficult to be a revolutionary and a mother." Quoted in McDermott, "Colombia's Female Fighting Force."

¹⁷² Kazman, *Women of the FARC*.

¹⁷³ Sanín and Franco, "Organizing Women for Combat," 776.

¹⁷⁴ See for example the FARC-EP communiqué, "Las Guerrilleras son Mujeres Revolucionarias Consientes y Libres," January 2, 2016, www.cedema.org/ver.php?id=7036.

¹⁷⁵ According to one female FARC-EP fighter, "If you touch me, I can shoot you. That is why there is less violence against women in the FARC than in civilian life. In civilian life, there is more violence and more impunity and those who carry out violent crimes don't get punished. In the FARC, they do. If you mess up, you pay for it." Quoted in Méndez, "Militarized Gender Performativity."

¹⁷⁶ José Miguel Vivanco, "Colombia: Sexual Violence by FARC Guerrillas Exposed," Human Rights Watch, Aug. 11, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/08/11/colombia-sexual-violence-farc-guerrillas-exposed>.

sexual violence against female combatants.¹⁷⁷ Moreover, the FARC-EP policy of mandatory birth control and forced abortions has been widely considered a form of sexual violence.¹⁷⁸

Sexual violence against noncombatants did not appear to be widespread. However, that is not to say that the FARC-EP, right-wing paramilitary forces, and the Colombian state did not commit systematic violence against civilians (both male and female) on a massive scale. According the Colombia's National Center for Historic Memory, 82 percent of the deaths during the conflict were civilian, while fewer than 18 percent were soldiers, guerrillas, or paramilitaries.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ Sanín and Franco, "Organizing Women for Combat," 776.

¹⁷⁸ Isabel Babosa, "No Room for Reproductive Choice: Forced Contraception Within the FARC in Colombia," O'Neill Institute for National and Global Health Law, Georgetown University, Jan. 17, 2020, <https://oneill.law.georgetown.edu/no-room-for-reproductive-choices-forced-contraception-within-the-farc-in-colombia/>.

¹⁷⁹ "Civilian Casualties of Colombia's Armed Conflict," *Columbia Reports*, July 20, 2019, <https://colombiareports.com/civilians-killed-armed-conflict/>.

Appendix C: Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam

Overview

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was founded in 1972 by Velupillai Prabhakaran. Originally known as the “Tamil New Tigers,” by 1976 Prabhakaran renamed the group the LTTE.¹⁸⁰ Prabhakaran was Tamil, an ethnic minority group in Sri Lanka. Historically the Tamil population was concentrated in the northern part of the country, around Jaffna, and maintained ties to Tamils across the Palk Strait in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. During British colonial rule in Sri Lanka (called Ceylon at the time), the minority Tamils were favored over the majority ethnic Sinhalese in accordance with the British policy known as “divide and rule.”¹⁸¹ However, following Sri Lanka’s independence in 1948, the Sinhalese rose to power, persecuted the Tamils, and excluded them from political, social, and economic positions of power.

In response, Tamils formed groups to resist Sinhalese oppression. One of these groups was the LTTE. Over the course of the mid- to late 1970s, Prabhakaran consolidated power over the other Tamil resistance groups. By the 1980s, the LTTE had established itself as the preeminent Tamil militant formation in Sri Lanka.¹⁸²

The LTTE under Prabhakaran was a highly hierarchical organization. Some have described it as a cult of personality, with Prabhakaran as the LTTE’s all-powerful “supremo.”¹⁸³ Indeed, he ruled over the group from its inception until its (and his) demise at the hands of Sri Lankan

¹⁸⁰ Mapping Militant Organizations, “Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam,” Stanford University, last modified June 2018, <https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/liberation-tigers-tamil-elam>.

¹⁸¹ “Sri Lanka: The ethnic divide,” BBC News, May 16, 2000, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/514577.stm.

¹⁸² Mapping Militant Organizations, “Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam.”

¹⁸³ Jyotti Thottam, “Prabhakaran: The Life and Death of a Tiger,” *Time*, May 19, 2009; and N. Ram, “The Idealist I once Knew Became Tamils’ Pol Pot,” *The Guardian* (London), June 1, 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2009/jun/01/sri-lanka-prabhakaran-tamil-tigers>.

government forces.¹⁸⁴ The goals of the LTTE were to establish autonomy for Tamils in Sri Lanka to allow for self-governance.¹⁸⁵

Aside from the support of Tamils in Sri Lanka, the LTTE was able to effectively garner material support from external sources, most notably the Tamil diaspora.¹⁸⁶ The LTTE maintained a robust communications network and used messaging to win support among sympathetic populations outside Sri Lanka. In addition, many suspect that the group received covert training and support from Indian forces early in its history.¹⁸⁷

The LTTE pioneered terrorist tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP) which would later be adopted by other organizations. They used suicide bombings to conduct targeted assassinations of politicians and military leaders. In the maritime domain, the LTTE used explosive-armed boats to launch suicide boat attacks and conducted sabotage operations employing rudimentary mines targeting Sri Lankan government vessels.¹⁸⁸ In 1991, an LTTE female suicide bomber assassinated Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi. Two years later, another suicide bomber assassinated Sri Lankan president Ranasinghe Premadasa.

The LTTE proved to be a formidable opponent for the Sri Lankan government, which struggled to counter the group. In 1987, Sri Lanka and India signed an accord that secured the deployment of an Indian peacekeeping force to help broker peace.¹⁸⁹ However, the LTTE rejected the Indian calls for peace and began to fight them as well. Indian forces were also accused of human rights violations against Tamils.¹⁹⁰ Indian forces withdrew in 1990. In 2002, a ceasefire was brokered between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government. However, the

¹⁸⁴ Prabhakaran was killed in May 2009 during a battle with Sri Lankan armed forces in the northern part of the country.

¹⁸⁵ Mapping Militant Organizations, "Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam." In this way, the LTTE was more in line with the national liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s than with the emerging Islamic fundamentalist movement in the 1980s and 1990s. Religion played a minimal role in the motivation and identity of the LTTE.

¹⁸⁶ International Crisis Group, *The Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora after the LTTE*, Asia Report 186, Feb. 23, 2010, <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/186-the-sri-lankan-tamil-diaspora-after-the-ltte.pdf>.

¹⁸⁷ "FACTBOX: India's role in Sri Lanka's civil war," Reuters, Oct. 17, 2008, <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUKCOL223047>.

¹⁸⁸ For more on LTTE suicide tactics, see: R Ramasubramanian, *Suicide Terrorism in Sri Lanka*, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies Research Paper 5, August 2004, https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/29174/5_Suicide_Terrorism_in_Sri_Lanka.pdf.

¹⁸⁹ "TIMELINE: Collapse of Sri Lanka's troubled ceasefire," Reuters, Jan. 8, 2008, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-srilanka-ceasefire/timeline-collapse-of-sri-lankas-troubled-ceasefire-idUKCOL11910920080108>.

¹⁹⁰ Barbara Crossette, "Studies Find Torture by Indian Troops in Sri Lanka," *New York Times*, May 17, 1989, <https://www.nytimes.com/1989/05/17/world/studies-find-torture-by-indian-troops-in-sri-lanka.html>.

ceasefire broke down and fighting continued. Eventually, the Sri Lankan government launched a series of offensives targeting the LTTE. The final offensive in 2009, focused on northern Sri Lanka, devastated the group, killing its top leadership, including Prabhakaran. However, the offensive remains controversial for the tactics employed by Sri Lankan forces and the accusations of a substantial number of civilian casualties.¹⁹¹

Role of women and gender

Below Prabhakaran, the LTTE operated through a Central Committee consisting of about ten people. At first, the Central Committee was staffed only by men. Yet with time, some women were allowed to join the committee. By 2003, it was reported that three of the ten members were women.¹⁹² Furthermore, below the Central Committee, the LTTE established a Women's Front (discussed in more detail below) to handle female membership and operations in the group. The Women's Front, apparently established by 1983, had its own leadership structure as well.¹⁹³

Recruitment

There are many theories about why women join terrorist and insurgent organizations. Research into the LTTE specifically reveals several understandings of the motivations that drove women into the movement. Alison argues that women joined the movement due to both "pull" and "push" factors. At a certain point in the evolution of the group, the LTTE expected every Tamil family to designate one member to join the group, as the loss of so many men necessitated more fighters. This coercive recruitment represents a "pull" factor. Yet women had specific motivations for joining the LTTE, among them: sexual violence experienced by them or by family members at the hands of Sri Lankan and Indian security forces, perceived social progression through membership, nationalist sentiment, communal perceptions of

¹⁹¹ See: Jon Lee Anderson, "Death of the Tiger: Sri Lanka's brutal victory over its Tamil insurgents," *The New Yorker*, Jan. 10, 2011, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/01/17/death-of-the-tiger>.

¹⁹² Alisa Stack-O'Connor, "Lions, Tigers, and Freedom Birds: How and Why the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam Employs Women," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 19 (2007): 49.

¹⁹³ Kim Jordan and Myriam Denov, "Birds of Freedom? Perspectives on Female Emancipation and Sri Lanka's Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 9, no. 1 (Nov. 2007): 46; Sara Dissanayake, "Women in the Tamil Tigers: Path to Liberation or Pawn in a Game?" *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 9, no. 8 (2017): 2.

suffering, and educational displacement.¹⁹⁴ Shoker underscores the importance of perceptions of gender equality, arguing that many of the women who joined the LTTE honestly believed in the group's proclamations of equality, which spurred female recruitment.¹⁹⁵ Anecdotal evidence suggests that some women joined the LTTE as a result of being labeled social outcasts based on the sexual violence perpetrated against them.¹⁹⁶ Other factors that contributed to entry into the LTTE included Tamil nationalism, the possibility for social mobility, and the opportunity to escape the deadening confines of Tamil society. This would seem to confirm the notion that membership in the LTTE offered women a fresh start, social mobility, and an escape from the deadening confines of Tamil society.¹⁹⁷

We were not able to find specific information on how and why women left the LTTE. This may be because the group was defeated more than a decade ago. However, some research suggests that women did not experience widespread physical or sexual oppression in the LTTE. Aside from that, we cannot speculate as to why women left the group.

Roles within the organization

Women in the LTTE participated in group's activities at every level, though it is unclear if they occupied leadership positions in every category of activity. In the LTTE's early years, females were often relegated to traditional "women's work" like nursing and social work, although this changed over time.¹⁹⁸ As mentioned above, the LTTE formed a Women's Front in 1983, which had its own leadership structure (presumably consisting of women only). And by the early 2000s, women made up a small but notable percentage of the Central Committee membership. However, the majority of women seemed to have been in either combat or support roles. These roles are briefly described below.

Many women in the LTTE served as fighters. Given these female fighters' high-profile activities over the years, the group became famous for its inclusion of women in operational roles.

¹⁹⁴ Miranda Alison, "Cogs in the wheel? Women in the liberation tigers of Tamil Eelam," *Civil Wars* 6 no. 4 (2007): 37-54.

¹⁹⁵ Sarah Shoker, "Males and Females in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam: Why They Joined," master's thesis, University of Saskatchewan, Aug. 2012, p. iii, <http://hdl.handle.net/10388/ETD-2012-08-687>.

¹⁹⁶ Nimmi Gowrinathan, "The committed female fighter: the political identities of Tamil women in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 19, no. 3 (2017): 332-333.

¹⁹⁷ Even among those who were forcibly recruited, some rose through the ranks and turned into committed LTTE fighters, highlighting the adaptation and evolution of some women over the course of their membership in the group. Gowrinathan, "The committed female fighter," 327.

¹⁹⁸ Stack-O'Connor, "Lions, Tigers, and Freedom Birds," 52.

Women reportedly made up between 15 and 20 percent of the LTTE's overall fighting force.¹⁹⁹ According to LTTE figures, from 1982 through the ceasefire in October 2002, a total of 3,768 female combatants were killed out of 17,651 total LTTE combatants. Assuming these numbers are roughly correct, females killed in action (KIA) accounted for around 18 percent of all KIA from 1982 through 2002, a number proportional to their overall representation in the LTTE fighting force.²⁰⁰ Fighters reportedly had specialized training in "mining, explosives, weapons technology, electronics, [and] intelligence work."²⁰¹

Figure 3. LTTE women on patrol



Source: Photograph by Salix Oculus, "Women of the LTTE 1, northern Sri Lanka, 2002," distributed under a CC-BY-SA-4.0 license, Creative Commons, accessed Dec. 2020.

¹⁹⁹ Stack-O'Connor, "Lions, Tigers, and Freedom Birds," 53.

²⁰⁰ Tamara Herath, "Women Combatants and Gender Identity in Contemporary Conflicts: The Case of the LTTE," PhD thesis, London School of Economics and Political Science, 2007, 284–285, <http://etheses.lse.ac.uk/id/eprint/2314>.

²⁰¹ Jordan and Denov, "Birds of Freedom?" 46.

Furthermore, women made up approximately 33 percent of the Black Tigers, the LTTE's infamous suicide bomber cell.²⁰² In this role, women participated in some of the highest-profile operations carried out by the LTTE. As mentioned, a female Black Tiger assassinated Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1991. Furthermore, women were reportedly involved in every aspect of that operation, from planning to support to cover.²⁰³ Decisions surrounding when to utilize males as opposed to females appears to have come down to tactical calculations. Stack-O'Connor notes that one of the reasons for employing women was that they could move around the country more easily than Tamil men.²⁰⁴ This ability to get close to potential targets without arousing suspicion could account for the higher proportion of female Black Tigers to overall female fighting forces. According to LTTE figures, female Black Tigers accounted for 65 of 241 total Black Tiger deaths from 1982 through 2002.²⁰⁵

Early on in their operational history, female fighters fell under the command and control (C2) of male superiors. However, after lobbying for independence, LTTE women successfully gained C2 over female fighters. In this way, they were able to be independent and also enforce separation of the sexes, a trait that characterized the LTTE's gender dynamics (described in more detail below).²⁰⁶

In addition to their roles as fighters, some LTTE women also served in support roles for the organization. Women appear to have played an important role in LTTE propaganda. However, it is unclear the extent to which women actively participated in propaganda operations, as opposed to being "utilized" by the broader LTTE for the purpose of propaganda. For instance, the inclusion of women in the LTTE allowed the group to present itself as more inclusive. The LTTE could also point to the actions of the Sri Lankan government as driving women to join the LTTE.²⁰⁷ The group would allow or encourage its female members to give interviews to the media to propagate this narrative. However, the agency of female fighters in this area is questionable, as the LTTE may have simply used these women to strengthen its public image.

In addition to propaganda, women supported the LTTE in other ways. Prior to the establishment of the Women's Front in 1983, Dissanayake notes that women were involved

²⁰² Stack-O'Connor, "Lions, Tigers, and Freedom Birds," 53.

²⁰³ Stack-O'Connor, "Lions, Tigers, and Freedom Birds," 54.

²⁰⁴ Stack-O'Connor, "Lions, Tigers, and Freedom Birds," 47.

²⁰⁵ Herath, "Women Combatants and Gender Identity in Contemporary Conflicts," 287–288.

²⁰⁶ Stack-O'Connor, "Lions, Tigers, and Freedom Birds," 50.

²⁰⁷ Stack-O'Connor, "Lions, Tigers, and Freedom Birds," 47.

mostly in support roles, including fundraising, recruitment, and information collection.²⁰⁸ It is unclear the extent to which women continued this work after the establishment of the Women's Front. However, the Women's Front (which had political and military wings) created other opportunities for women to serve. The political wing, for example, taught classes on feminist ideologies and supported welfare projects and employment opportunities.²⁰⁹

Rules governing behavior

Stack-O'Connor notes that the LTTE had to walk a fine line between integrating women and not alienating their Tamil support base, many of whom were concerned with women acting outside of traditional roles. To address this dynamic, the group enforced separation of the sexes, policies on sexual conduct (discussed below), and dress policies; it also emphasized chastity. Besides these measures to accommodate traditional Tamil norms, the LTTE also attempted to shift the role of women in Tamil culture more broadly.²¹⁰ We are unsure as to how successful the LTTE was in this regard.

Violence against women

Some women in the LTTE were apparently executed for having sexual relations with non-LTTE members, thereby breaking the rules governing sexual contact. Males also apparently faced consequences for violating these rules, though it is unclear if they suffered the same punishment.²¹¹ However, other than this, we found no evidence of systemic sexual violence within the LTTE. If anything, women seemed to join the group precisely because of sexual violence perpetrated by Sri Lankan and Indian forces. This is not to say that internal physical/sexual violence did not take place. However, it does not appear to have been a widespread problem.

²⁰⁸ Dissanayake, "Women in the Tamil Tigers," 2.

²⁰⁹ Dissanayake, "Women in the Tamil Tigers," 3.

²¹⁰ Stack-O'Connor, "Lions, Tigers, and Freedom Birds," 50.

²¹¹ Stack-O'Connor, "Lions, Tigers, and Freedom Birds," 50–51.

Appendix D: Kurdistan Workers' Party

Overview

The Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK—an acronym for *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê*—was established in 1978 and, with the exception of ceasefires during 1999–2004 and 2013–2015, has been active for more than 40 years. Unlike other movements in the region (e.g., the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or ISIS), this organization is not universally recognized as a terrorist group. In fact, the movement's international status is somewhat mixed.

A number of countries and organizations, including the US, EU, and NATO, have designated the PKK as a terrorist group. The US, for example, first did so in 1997 and reaffirmed this designation in 2019, concluding that “in addition to its continued status as an FTO [foreign terrorist organization], the PKK has also been designated as a specially designated global terrorist (SDGT) under Executive Order 13224 since 2001.”²¹² This designation has not, however, precluded coordination that would be inconceivable in other circumstances (e.g., with ISIS). In fact, “Kurdish female guerillas have been trained by the United States, along with their male comrades, and they are now fighting in Syria to expel ISIS terrorists.”²¹³ Other countries and organizations, including China, Russia, and the United Nations, have chosen not to designate the group as a terrorist organization.²¹⁴ Thus while the PKK is recognized by the US government as both an FTO and an SDGT, its status is in fact more nuanced and complex than other, similar groups active today.

The PKK's founder, Abdullah Öcalan, was for the first twenty years of the group's existence the movement's de facto leader, serving as head of a central committee overseeing PKK activities, policies, and operations. However, since his 1999 conviction and imprisonment, he has functioned primarily as the symbolic leader of the PKK.

²¹² US Embassy and Consulates in Turkey, Office of the Spokesperson, “State Department Maintains Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) Designation of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK),” media note (Mar. 1, 2019), <https://tr.usembassy.gov/state-department-maintains-foreign-terrorist-organization-fto-designation-of-the-kurdistan-workers-party-pkk/>.

²¹³ Murat Haner, Francis T. Cullen, and Michael L. Benson, “Women and the PKK: Ideology, Gender, and Terrorism,” *International Criminal Justice Review* 30, no. 3 (Sept. 2020): 279–301, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1057567719826632>.

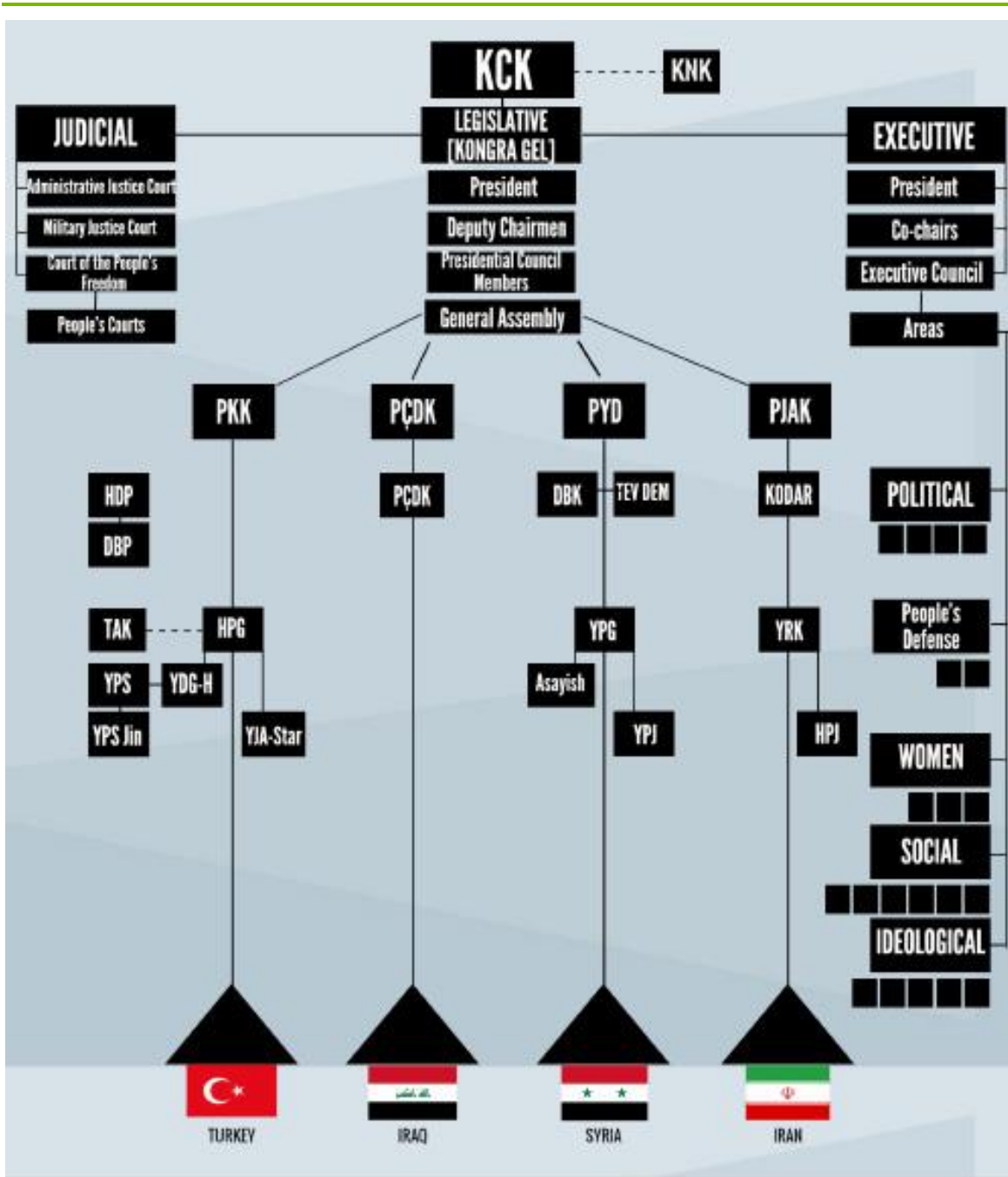
²¹⁴ Haner, Cullen, and Benson, “Women and the PKK.”

What is called the PKK is in fact a small part of a much larger and more complex organization spanning four countries. The parent organization, the Kurdistan Committees Union (KCK), is the PKK's executive council and highest governing body; it was established to fill the void created following Öcalan's arrest.²¹⁵ The KCK is administered by the Kurdistan People's Congress (Kongra-Gel), which elects a 31-person Executive Council and is led by two chairpersons. At the moment, these co-chairpersons—who must be a man and a woman per a 2013 ruling—are Cemil Bayik and Bese Howat (the first woman to hold this role). Beneath the KCK are four subsidiary organizations located in the four countries home to the approximately 30 million members of the Kurdish ethnic group: the PKK in Turkey, the PYD in Syria, the PJAK in Iran, and the PDCK in Iraq. Each of these, in turn, has a variety of its own subsidiary branches and movements. The PKK, for example, has subsidiaries that include an armed wing (People's Defense Force, or HGP), an urban terrorism wing (Kurdistan Freedom Hawks, or TAK), and an all-women guerilla unit (Free Women's Units, or YJA-STAR).²¹⁶

²¹⁵ Sherzad Shekhani, "PKK elects new leadership as Iran steps up border presence," *Asharq Al-Awsat*, July 11, 2013, <https://eng-archive.aawsat.com/sherzadshekhani/news-middle-east/pkk-elects-new-leadership-as-iran-steps-up-border-presence>

²¹⁶ US National Counterterrorism Center, *Counterterrorism Calendar 2015*, http://www.nctc.gov/site/pdfs/ct_calendar_2015.pdf.

Figure 4. PKK's political position within "The Kurds" organizational chart



Source: Alev Erhan and Aaron Stein, "Mapping 'The Kurds': An Interactive Chart," The Atlantic Council, March 15, 2016, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/mapping-the-kurds-an-interactive-chart/>.

The PKK—as might be expected from any organization in existence for more than 40 years—has evolved in the past few decades. The organization’s original objective was an independent Kurdish state within the borders of Turkey. Yet over time, the PKK evolved and the movement’s objective changed to a demand for greater autonomy and freedom within the Turkish state. Concurrent with this shift in objective, the PKK changed the types of tactics that it deployed and the ways in which it fought; specifically, “rural insurgency tactics gave way to urban-based terrorism in the 1990s” as the group came to rely on guerrilla warfare.²¹⁷ The group was, in fact, linked to “coordinated attacks involving firebombs and vandalism on Turkish diplomatic and commercial offices in six West European countries...[the use of] bombs and grenades at tourist sites in Istanbul and at Turkish seaside resorts...[the kidnapping of] Western tourists (who were subsequently released) to attract publicity...[and the killing of] civilians and village guards loyal to the Turkish government.”²¹⁸ This is not to suggest, however, that the PKK is indiscriminate in its use of violence. Targeting is purposive, as one analyst noted:

Since [1984], the primary targets of the PKK have been the police, gendarmerie, military, and village guards (teachers have been occasionally targeted, as well). With a few exceptions, the group has continued to follow a policy of limited war—targeting only members of Turkish security forces as a means of retaliation.²¹⁹

Ideology

The ideology of the PKK has, like the movement’s objective and tactics, evolved considerably over the decades. In its early years, its ideology was similar to many nationalist and separatist movements, and there was “little in its early history to suggest that it would come to either advocate or actually implement a policy of radical gender egalitarianism.”²²⁰ However, in the early 2000s, Öcalan became interested in—and actually initiated a correspondence with—an aged, wheelchair-bound radical American philosopher and social theorist, Murray Bookchin, a

²¹⁷ “Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK),” Project on Violent Conflict, START National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, January 2015, <https://www.start.umd.edu/baad/narratives/kurdistan-workers-party-pkk>; Greg Bruno, “Inside the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK),” Council on Foreign Relations, October 19, 2017, <https://www.cfr.org/background/inside-kurdistan-workers-party-pkk>.

²¹⁸ Bruno, “Inside the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).”

²¹⁹ Haner, Cullen, and Benson, “Women and the PKK.”

²²⁰ Ora Szekeley, “Exceptional Inclusion: Understanding the PKK’s Gender Policy,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2020): 1–18, doi: 10.1080/1057610X.2020.1759265.

“Marxist-inspired writer who advocated a radical form of grassroots democracy.”²²¹ In the wake of Öcalan’s engagement with Bookchin, the movement began to advocate for “democratic confederalism,” a form of local and participatory democracy. As Öcalan noted, “Democratic confederalism is based on grassroots participation. Its decision-making processes lie with the communities. Higher levels only serve the coordination and implementation of the will of the communities that send their delegates to the general assemblies.”²²²

Importantly, Öcalan’s articulation of democratic confederalism was decidedly feminist in its agenda. This approach to government was “a social movement with self-administration at the local level, an alternative type of economy, ecology, and feminism as central pillars” and was “open toward other political groups and factions...flexible, multicultural, anti-monopolistic and consensus-oriented.”²²³

Opinions about Öcalan vary considerably, and the PKK’s ideology is derived almost exclusively from his writings, but as one scholar noted:

Regardless of whether one views him as a visionary or a tyrant, women’s liberation is a concern in many of Öcalan’s writings, which form the core of the PKK’s ideology and the substance of much of the ideological training given to recruits. This includes an explicit call to reject male domination of society and to end the exploitation of women under capitalism. Öcalan argues that all oppression in society stems from what he terms the “housewifization” of women.²²⁴

The liberation of women is so central to the organization that it is articulated both internally and externally in a manner that is “unusually explicit.” This “double commitment—both in its outward-facing ideology and its internal policy—to gender equality distinguishes the PKK not

²²¹ Sirwan Kajjo, “Writings of Obscure American Leftist Drive Kurdish Forces in Syria,” *VOA News*, January 16, 2017, <https://www.voanews.com/extremism-watch/writings-obscure-american-leftist-drive-kurdish-forces-syria>. Bookchin’s belief system is difficult to categorize—he has also been described as an “eco-anarchist” and a proponent of “environmentalist anticapitalism.” Wes Enzina, “Bizarre and Wonderful: Murray Bookchin, Eco-Anarchist,” *London Review of Books*, July 19, 2017, <https://pulitzercenter.org/reporting/bizarre-and-wonderful-murray-bookchin-eco-anarchist>.

²²² Öcalan, Abdullah, *Democratic Confederalism* (International Initiative, 2017), https://ia803105.us.archive.org/27/items/DemocraticConfederalism4thEd/Democratic_Confederalism_4th_ed.pdf.

²²³ Öcalan, Abdullah, *Democratic Confederalism*; Yesim Yaprak Yildiz, “Turkey and the PKK: The Kurdish women who take up arms,” *BBC News*, Jan. 15, 2013, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-21026273>.

²²⁴ Szekely, “Exceptional Inclusion,” 10.

only from other Kurdish political organizations, but from other leftist groups in the Middle East.”²²⁵ As Howat notes:

This doesn't mean that the PKK was formed and led by women. What this means is the PKK's stance by freedom, equality and democracy. The women's participation in the PKK with their own will and their being the leading power in the freedom struggle has always held the PKK on a democratic, libertarian and socialist line. This is why and how the PKK has become a women's party today.²²⁶

Within the PKK, this commitment to gender equality is often linked with the term “jineology” which was coined by Öcalan and is typically interpreted as “women’s science.”²²⁷ This doctrine—or science of women—is part of the ideological training that PKK recruits undergo, and is essentially a critique of the male monopoly of power.²²⁸ It is “a theoretical paradigm but it is based in the actual experiences of the Kurdish women who have both faced patriarchal and colonial oppression...[and it] aims to offer an alternative methodology for the social sciences that already exist.”²²⁹ It is, moreover, explicitly normative in that the concept “is built on the principle that without the freedom of women within society and without a real consciousness surrounding women no society can call itself free.”²³⁰

Role of women and gender

As suggested above, gender equity—both as an ideological and as a practical matter—permeates the entire structure of the PKK from its highest levels on down. Meral Düzgün describes the place of women in senior leadership structures this way:

The PKK has a certain number of guaranteed seat allocations for the women in all executive positions: in the Union of Kurdish Communities (KCK), the Headquarters Command Management, the Guerilla Parliament, and the Defense Committee....The regulations of the PKK require the application of the co-chair model for the KCK, the highest administrative structure after President

²²⁵ Szekely, “Exceptional Inclusion,” 2.

²²⁶ ANF News, “Bese Hozat: PKK is a women’s party,” November 27, 2013, <https://anfenglish.com/features/bese-hozat-pkk-is-a-women-s-party-8745>.

²²⁷ Szekely, “Exceptional Inclusion.”

²²⁸ Szekely, “Exceptional Inclusion.”

²²⁹ Tajzan Sharif, *YPJ is Breaking the Religious Shackles in Middle East* (Books on Demand, 2018), <https://www.amazon.com/Breaking-Religious-Shackles-Middle-East-ebook/dp/B0798WKW5S>.

²³⁰ Meral Düzgün, “Jineology: The Kurdish Women’s Movement,” *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies* 12, no. 2 (July 2016), 12, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1215/15525864-3507749>.

[Öcalan]. According to this model, the KCK needs to appoint two leaders, a man and a woman, who are jointly in charge of the PKK and share equal leadership responsibilities on the governance and oversight of the organization. The PKK also requires women to serve as co-chairs in committees, including appointment, nomination, investigation, discipline, promotion, and several others that are essential to proper functioning of the organization....Women in the PKK have their own headquarters, administrative units, political branches, and even separate congressional meetings—all independent from the men’s. Within this system, women are in charge of decisions and have their own decision-making processes regarding their own lives without the worry of male intervention.²³¹

The gender breakdown in the PKK is surprisingly balanced. In fact, estimates suggest that approximately 40 percent of PKK fighters (a force estimated to consist of approximately 25,000) are women, meaning that the organization “contains one of the largest contingents of armed women militants in the world.”²³² At the same time, women hold a “significant proportion” of leadership roles in the PKK: “the organization’s charter requires that each leadership position be held jointly by a man and a woman, and sets a 40 percent minimum quota for women.”²³³ While it may come as no surprise that these women are sometimes less dominant than their male counterparts, “there are a number of prominent female leaders in the organization.”²³⁴

The PKK’s evolution

Although the PKK has always embraced its female members, and has even empowered women from the beginning, the reality is that the organization has evolved over the years. The early PKK did include women, and a female founder of the group has been “credited by several...with having helped advocate for women’s rights in the organization and for encouraging an ideological focus on women’s liberation for the movement as a whole.” The reality, though, is that there were fewer women in the PKK (as a percentage of the entire force) in its early days and the focus on an anti-patriarchal/pro-feminist agenda was not as explicit. In fact, women who participated in the early PKK noted that their male compatriots were reluctant to take the

²³¹ Haner, Cullen, and Benson, “Women and the PKK.”

²³² Yildiz, “Turkey and the PKK: The Kurdish women who take up arms.”

²³³ “Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK),” Project on Violent Conflict, START National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, Jan. 2015, <https://www.start.umd.edu/baad/narratives/kurdistan-workers-party-pkk>.

²³⁴ Szekely, “Exceptional Inclusion.”

issue of women's rights seriously and that interest in the issue grew only as more women joined the movement.²³⁵

In this early period, as Haner, Cullen, and Benson describe it, men sometimes "resisted taking orders from female leaders,...challenged the authority of female commanders by refusing to perform the duties asked by them,...argued with female commanders, or covertly circumvented the orders given by women by going around them to male officials."²³⁶ They also "argued that women could not fight like them, could not endure the hardships of the mountain life, or have the same stamina as men," resulting in a pattern in which women were "often being assigned into support and auxiliary duties such as the transport of supplies and caring for the wounded." As one former member noted:

All of the easiest tasks would be given to women. For example, there were items like pans, glasses, spoons, teapots, forks, knives, pots, etc. in each squad. In the beginning of the organization, only the female guerillas were responsible for the transport of those things.²³⁷

Yet this same member also noted that this pattern "changed as the years went on." The early PKK's leadership refused to abandon its commitment to gender equality and made a series of intentional decisions to ensure its longevity: Men in the movement participated in "an intensive ideological training" in which they were "introduced to the new role, status, and rights given to their female Kurdish comrades and alerted to the importance of women to the Kurdish cause." Men were also required to serve in "support/auxiliary roles at special training facilities that were solely dedicated to the advancement of the ideological and military training of the women."

Conversely, women were intentionally assigned to "positions of authority and leadership," women-only military units were established, and women were "recruited into positions that were traditionally assumed by males." In fact, "positive discrimination was applied to further increase the status of women—special rules were brought into action regarding the appointment of women into important leadership positions, new codes of behaviors were developed on the treatment of women, and auxiliary roles/duties once filled only by women were eventually assigned to men so that women could focus on professional development activities." Rounding out this effort, the PKK forbade domestic violence, sexual assault, and forced marriage. Ultimately, "the male guerillas eventually relented and agreed to work under

²³⁵ Szekely, "Exceptional Inclusion."

²³⁶ Haner, Cullen, and Benson, "Women and the PKK."

²³⁷ Haner, Cullen, and Benson, "Women and the PKK."

the command of their female leaders as their resistance earned harsh criticism and heavy penalties from the PKK administration.”

Haner, Cullen, and Benson go on to explain that men were not the only ones who had to adopt a new set of norms. Women sometimes felt pressure to “try harder in order to prove themselves to the men.”²³⁸ In some cases this was a relatively low stakes endeavor as women would attempt to “carry heavier loads when traveling from one point to another to break the stereotype that they were weak, fragile, and useless.” In other instances, though, the stakes were higher with one former member noted that he had “witnessed females throwing themselves into deadly situations before the men did just to prove how courageous they were.”

In fact, the PKK in some ways served as a space from which Kurdish women were able to “challenge the cultural and traditional prescriptions ascribed to them in the society (e.g., childbirth, caregiving, and other domestic duties).”²³⁹ This is not to suggest that the changes were easy or quick. As one scholar who conducted field work among PKK women noted: “Women have struggled hard to get their voices heard and to develop their own organizational structures....In many ways, the organization of women in the PKK became a movement within the movement”²⁴⁰ The PKK thus provided women with opportunities—education, training, leadership—that simply weren’t available outside the organization.²⁴¹ Some have argued, in fact, that female-only units such as the YJAK functioned as “‘safe [spaces]’ from which self-organized and armed women actively influenced the PKK’s ideology and practice” and “pushed the party towards a more radical feminist agenda.”²⁴²

Over time, as women took on increasingly active roles within the organization, respect for their contributions increased. Current female members enjoy far more equality than their predecessors as the PKK’s ideology no longer advocates for mere gender equity but “actively promotes a subversion of traditional gender structures.”²⁴³ In fact, International Women’s Day (March 8) “became an important celebration for the PKK,... [as] the leadership cadre required the observance of this day in each region to recognize the achievements of women guerillas.”²⁴⁴

²³⁸ Haner, Cullen, and Benson, “Women and the PKK.”

²³⁹ Haner, Cullen, and Benson, “Women and the PKK.”

²⁴⁰ Yildiz, “Turkey and the PKK: The Kurdish women who take up arms.”

²⁴¹ Haner, Cullen, and Benson, “Women and the PKK.”

²⁴² Andrea Novellis, “The Rise of Feminism in the PKK: Ideology or Strategy?” *Zanj: The Journal of Critical Global South Studies* 2, no. 1 (2018): 115–133; <https://doi.org/10.13169/zanjglobalsouthstud.2.1.0115>.

²⁴³ Novellis, “The Rise of Feminism in the PKK.”

²⁴⁴ Haner, Cullen, and Benson, “Women and the PKK.”

Recruitment

One noteworthy observation that can be made about women who join the PKK is that there is no single profile of these individuals. Many of these women are driven by the same constellation of motivations that have been observed in almost all extremist movements. As one analyst has noted:

Factors such as a desire for national independence, depression, displacement, humiliation, peer pressure, coercion, personal tragedies, fear of retaliation, commitment to an ideological cause, the need for protection, desire to improve social status, familial connections, desire to avenge personal suffering or loss of a significant other, and opposition to perceived oppression may have all served as important considerations affecting Kurdish women's participation [in the] PKK.²⁴⁵

Although the population of women who join is markedly diverse, the literature thoughtfully explores both ends of the spectrum. As one analyst noted:

Women join the PKK to escape poverty. They flee a conservative society where domestic violence is common and there is little opportunity for women. Other female guerillas are university graduates. They study Kurdish history and Öcalan, as well as the Marxist theories at the root of the PKK, and consider fighting as much an intellectual exercise as a physical one. Many join because of relatives in prison, and others join to avoid prison.²⁴⁶

Similarly, some women join in an effort to flee oppressive familial environments in which options are limited, marriages are arranged, and freedoms are constrained. These women see the PKK as an organization that offers freedom and liberation. In other instances, women are actually encouraged to join by families hoping that their daughters will avenge the deaths of other family members or benefit from the social status that comes from an affiliation with the movement.²⁴⁷

All of the above is not to suggest that there are no efforts to identify dominant recruitment trends in the organization. Some have speculated that “a majority of the recruits had joined the

²⁴⁵ Haner, Cullen, and Benson, “Women and the PKK.”

²⁴⁶ Jenna Krajeski, “Kurdistan’s Female Fighters,” *The Atlantic*, Jan. 30, 2013, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/01/kurdistans-female-fighters/272677/>.

²⁴⁷ “PKK Recruitment of Female Operatives,” The Jamestown Foundation, Sept. 11, 2007, <https://jamestown.org/program/pkk-recruitment-of-female-operatives/>.

PKK out of a desire for revenge and bloodlust.”²⁴⁸ Others have noted that it is, in fact, the PKK’s progressive position on women that is responsible for the large number of female recruits:

It is the liberation lifestyle and progressive ideology of the PKK that have been most responsible for the flow of women into the PKK....A majority of the PKK recruits...voluntarily joined the PKK to attain equality with males, to resist patriarchal oppression, and to gain improved life opportunities. Life in the PKK not only provided these women with emancipation but also offered them a degree of status that is unavailable to females in traditional Kurdish society.²⁴⁹

This is a recurrent theme in the literature. As one scholar noted, the literal and ideological roles played by women in the movement actually increase the appeal to potential female recruits: “The increased focus on women’s rights generated by the presence of women in the movement attracted those who were specifically interested in the organization because of its record on women’s rights.”²⁵⁰ This framework of liberation, moreover, functions at many levels as women join the movement in an effort to liberate themselves as Kurds (from Turkish oppression) and as women (from male oppression). As one article observed: “Many of the fighters are waging war on the patriarchy—as well as enemy combatants.”²⁵¹ And as Öcalan himself observed: “Women were attracted to the movement precisely because it promised ‘to end the internal feudalism and to demand freedom.’”²⁵²

To be sure, women in the PKK have been explicit about the appeal of these overlapping liberation movements. One woman asserted that, “if we [women] get our freedom with our own hands in this war...no one can take it away.”²⁵³ Another claimed, “Women grow up enslaved by society. The minute you are born as a girl, society inhibits you....We’ve gone to war with that. If I am a woman, I need to be known by the strength of my womanhood, to get respect.”²⁵⁴ And a third noted pointedly, “Those like us, as a majority, came to the mountain for the liberation of their people and for their own freedom. So we, as women, should not fight only

²⁴⁸ Haner, Cullen, and Benson, “Women and the PKK.”

²⁴⁹ Haner, Cullen, and Benson, “Women and the PKK.”

²⁵⁰ Szekely, “Exceptional Inclusion.”

²⁵¹ Lazarus, Sarah, “Women. Life. Freedom. Female fighters of Kurdistan,” *CNN*, January 27, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/01/27/homepage2/kurdish-female-fighters/index.html>.

²⁵² Haner, Cullen, and Benson, “Women and the PKK.”

²⁵³ Szekely, “Exceptional Inclusion.”

²⁵⁴ Szekely, “Exceptional Inclusion.”

against the occupation of Turks but also against the domination of men. Being a guerilla, being a woman in the PKK is not that easy. This cannot be explained but only experienced.”²⁵⁵

Critically, these overlapping motivations are the product of overlapping layers of oppression. Kurdish women are “born into a traditionally male-dominated society, which has also been subjected to the oppressive military and cultural measures of the Turkish government”; the result has been a sort of “dual oppression” for Kurdish women.²⁵⁶ In some ways, this has followed a predictable and expected pattern consisting of social norms that circumscribe the appearance and behavior of women in public spaces, the educational opportunities available to women, and the practice of marriage. Yet in other ways, this paradigm has been unique. As one analyst noted:

The decades of degradation, mistreatment, violence, arbitrary arrest, torture, and other humiliating measures applied by the Turkish security forces have created widespread trauma in the Kurdish community, especially among males....The Kurdish men who went through these distressing events have suffered emotional and mental instability. They have often coped with this pain by abusing their own family members, at times manifesting aggressive behavior and emotional outbursts directed toward their wives and children. The absence of effective means to cope with the impact of these traumatic events and their continuous occurrence have damaged the well-being of Kurdish women. After each of these traumatic events, the men would withdraw from day-to-day activities and often beat their wives when they tried to help them.²⁵⁷

In offering a mechanism that fights both the Turkish oppression and Kurdish patriarchy at the root of this dynamic, the PKK thus functions as a powerful outlet for women hoping to “achieve social liberation by breaking the patriarchal structures of their male-dominated society.”²⁵⁸

These levels of motivation are not mutually exclusive. A female commander of a guerilla unit noted that in joining the PKK she left behind a violent home. She was motivated to fight for those still caught in violent environments, but her actions weren’t merely those of someone seeking an escape from violence: “We live in a patriarchal society....Women are not respected. Here I enjoy my life. I have more rights.”²⁵⁹ The “micro” and the “macro” motivations coalesced and brought her to the PKK.

²⁵⁵ Szekely, “Exceptional Inclusion.”

²⁵⁶ Haner, Cullen, and Benson, “Women and the PKK.”

²⁵⁷ Haner, Cullen, and Bension, “Women and the PKK.”

²⁵⁸ Haner, Cullen, and Benson, “Women and the PKK.”

²⁵⁹ Krajewski, “Kurdistan’s Female Fighters.”

Roles within the organization

The rigidly egalitarian nature of the PKK's ideology—"a socialist view of equality in every aspect of life, including religion, economics, division of labor, and most importantly the gender relations"—has resulted in a contemporary movement in which women make up a significant portion of the movement and can occupy all positions.²⁶⁰ As mentioned above, women make up a considerable percentage of PKK combatants and serve in leadership roles at the squad, platoon, company, battalion, and regional levels.²⁶¹ Moreover, in the 1990s women also made up a significant portion or even a majority of the PKK's suicide bombers.²⁶² While the precise reason for this trend is unknown, women in this role have been driven by the same motivations—including revenge and the pursuit of a tactical advantage—that motivate male suicide bombers.²⁶³ Yet a former PKK member has also argued that these women "have been willing to die, including as suicide bombers, mostly for their commitment to an ideological cause—for the freedom and gender equality that they swore to protect and defend."²⁶⁴

Even women who do not ultimately serve in leadership roles or participate in direct combat, however, receive the same military training as those who do:

Military training is required for everyone and is composed of two parts: (1) weapons training and (2) guerilla war tactics. During the weapons training, along with their male counterparts, women are required to learn how to use weapons (e.g., properly hold, aim, fire, reload) and how to maintain them (e.g., cleaning and servicing). Guerillas who successfully complete the arms training are then transferred to a higher-level class that offers practical training on guerilla war tactics, including assault, ambush, raid, infiltration, siege, forestallment, and deployment of explosive mines. Under the guidance of experienced members, women in the PKK learn how to stage an assassination, destroy an enemy encampment, and penetrate enemy facilities. Basic guerilla war tactics training usually lasts 3–4 months, after which guerillas are assigned to their duty stations. Based on their performance during the training period, they are placed into one of the two main groups—saboteur or operation. Women play direct and active roles in both groups. However, they are often assigned to carry out assassination missions within the saboteur groups, as they have proved themselves effective in these kinds of missions.²⁶⁵

²⁶⁰ Haner, Cullen, and Benson, "Women and the PKK."

²⁶¹ Haner, Cullen, and Benson, "Women and the PKK."

²⁶² Szekely, "Exceptional Inclusion."

²⁶³ Haner, Cullen, and Benson, "Women and the PKK."

²⁶⁴ Haner, Cullen, and Benson, "Women and the PKK."

²⁶⁵ Haner, Cullen, and Benson, "Women and the PKK."

Thus not only are all roles open to women, but women are from the outset prepared to assume all roles, even if they go on to serve in more traditionally female positions within the organization.

Figure 5. Kurdish female fighters of the Women’s Protection Unit (YPJ) participating in military training



Source: Kajjo, “Writings of Obscure American Leftist Drive Kurdish Forces in Syria.”

Rules governing behavior

Notably, rules concerning the behavior of women—much like roles available to women in the movement—overwhelmingly parallel those that govern the behavior of men. Both sexes are required to follow the same rules, and both sexes suffer the same consequences for infractions. Moreover, the same is true of the punishments such that “male and female recruits who violate the codes of the organization are subjected to the same consequences.”²⁶⁶

This is the case even for rules and norms governing sexual behavior, though there is a gendered element to these restrictions that bears noting: Men and women are both “forbidden from

²⁶⁶ Haner, Cullen, and Benson, “Women and the PKK.”

having sex, getting married, or having children.”²⁶⁷ In fact, sexual relationships between PKK members were prohibited to such a degree in the past that “apart from killing a comrade, the death penalty within the PKK was reserved for those who violated the policies on sexual relations.”²⁶⁸ Times have obviously changed, though, and today’s punishment for such a transgression is more likely to consist of “reprimand, incarceration, reassignment to different regions, demotion, denial of promotion, and even dismissal.”²⁶⁹

Despite this equity, the sociocultural implications of—and motivations for—these restrictions are highly gendered. As multiple analysts have noted, the guarantee that women in the PKK will not engage in sexual activity “comforts those at home who...attach a woman’s purity to family honor.”²⁷⁰ As a result of this policy, “women who joined the PKK were able to assure their families that their virginity would remain intact.”²⁷¹ Thus even an equitably articulated and enforced restriction can have differential impacts on populations of different sexes.

It is also undeniable that the PKK benefits from propaganda about these female guerillas, though the PKK’s enemies benefit as well. In Turkey, the female guerilla “is portrayed as a gun-toting baby-killer, a threat to national security and the Turkish family.... She is scowling and masculine.”²⁷² In Kurdish areas, by contrast, “she is a hero, sacrificing her life for a better Kurdish future....She is proud and strong.”²⁷³

²⁶⁷ Krajewski, “Kurdistan’s Female Fighters.”

²⁶⁸ Haner, Cullen, and Benson, “Women and the PKK.”

²⁶⁹ Haner, Cullen, and Benson, “Women and the PKK.”

²⁷⁰ Krajewski, “Kurdistan’s Female Fighters.”

²⁷¹ Szekely, “Exceptional Inclusion.”

²⁷² Krajewski, “Kurdistan’s Female Fighters.”

²⁷³ Krajewski, “Kurdistan’s Female Fighters.”

Appendix E: Al-Shabaab

Overview

Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen (The Movement of Mujahidin Youth), or al-Shabaab, is an Al Qaeda (AQ)-affiliated violent jihadist group based in southern and central Somalia. With an estimated 6,000–12,000 fighters, al-Shabaab is among the largest armed Islamist groups in East Africa. Key al-Shabaab military targets inside Somalia include the Somali National Army (SNA) and the forces of the United Nations–mandated African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). Al-Shabaab has demonstrated some ability to mount deadly cross-border operations, such as the September 21, 2013 attack on the upscale Westgate Mall in Nairobi, Kenya, where al-Shabaab gunmen murdered at least 67 people and wounded more than 200 others. Although al-Shabaab has adherents among Somali diaspora communities in the United States and elsewhere in the West, the group’s ability to conduct sophisticated terrorist attacks outside East Africa is limited. With support from the United States, Somali and UN forces have made considerable progress against al-Shabaab in recent years. But any predictions of the group’s demise are probably premature. Given the group’s considerable resilience, it is likely that al-Shabaab will remain a long-term security threat in the region.²⁷⁴

Since 2014, al-Shabaab has been led by Ahmed Omar, also known as Abu Ubaydah. Omar succeeded Ahmed Abdi Godane, who was killed by a US airstrike on September 1, 2014. As emir, Omar heads both an executive council and a shura council, the latter a consultative body that determines strategy and assigns regional governors and military commanders who operate with relative autonomy. Each region is administered by a local council, comprising a governor and deputies responsible for finance, administration, and security. Coordination among regional groups is common. The deputy leader of al-Shabaab, Mukhtar Robow (also known as Abu Mansur), was a deputy leader of Somalia’s Union of Islamic Courts (UIC), from which al-Shabaab emerged in the mid-2000s.

Junior leaders run al-Shabaab’s media branch, law enforcement, and military operations. Al-Shabaab’s media branch, al-Kataib (the Brigades), disseminates recruitment videos for international audiences. Al-Shabaab also operates a radio station, Radio Andalus, and periodically operates Facebook and Twitter accounts.²⁷⁵

²⁷⁴ Pamela G. Faber, *Al-Shebab: An Al-Qaeda Affiliate Case Study*, CNA, DIM-2017-U-016115-2Rev, Oct. 2017.

²⁷⁵ Faber, *Al-Shebab*.

Al-Shabaab has two military branches: Jaysh al-Ushr (“army of hardship”), the external military branch, and Jaysh al-Hisbah (“army of morality”), the internal religious police force. The Maktabatu Amniyat (Ministry of Justice and Internal Security) is al-Shabaab’s capable and feared intelligence organization, responsible for recruiting spies, assassinating perceived adversaries, and helping to promote and maintain the centralization of power inside the group.²⁷⁶

Internal discord led a splinter group of more than 200 al-Shabaab fighters to ally itself with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in late 2015. It has been reported that the two groups have carved out operating areas, with the ISIS affiliates operating in Kenya’s northeast and the al-Qaeda affiliates operating out of Kenya’s southern forest region. Al-Shabaab’s connection to al-Qaeda has reportedly weakened over time, as many of the directly al-Qaeda-affiliated al-Shabaab leaders who were trained in Afghanistan and Pakistan have been eliminated by US special operations forces (SOF). Furthermore, according to a US State Department report in 2017, defection rates amongst al-Shabaab members was on the rise due to US activities to counter the group as well as al-Shabaab’s failure to pay low-level fighters.²⁷⁷ However, we could not identify information on specific rates of defection over time.

Like other al-Qaeda affiliates, al-Shabaab has both local and international goals. Al-Shabaab’s national objectives include overthrowing the Somali government, expelling foreign forces from Somalia, and establishing an Islamic state according to its version of sharia law. Al-Shabaab’s internationalist goals include spreading global jihad and supporting AQ and its affiliates. Labels such as Salafism, Wahabism, and Takfirism are often used to describe al-Shabaab’s politico-religious belief system these ideological categories are typically hazy and ill defined.

But these international and ideological goals are limited. More central are its national objectives and a vision of “Greater Somalia.” In this respect, al-Shabaab has more in common with colonial and postcolonial nationalist rebellions that took place across the global South. Hussein Solomon argues that Somali nationalism traditionally has been driven by a perceived external threat, and al-Shabaab requires a connection to a greater narrative of existential menace to build consensus among fractious clans.²⁷⁸ Evidence of this divergence from a global radical Islamist movement can be found in the opportunistic and shifting pledges of allegiance

²⁷⁶ Faber, *Al-Shebab*.

²⁷⁷ Claire Felter, Jonathan Masters, and Mohammed Aly Sergie, *Background: Al-Shabab 2004-2020 (timeline)*, Council on Foreign Relations, Undated, Accessed Jan. 10, 2020.

²⁷⁸ Katharine Petrich and Phoebe Donnelly, “Worth many sins: Al-Shabaab’s shifting relationship with Kenyan women,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 30, nos. 6–7 (2019): 1169–1192, doi: 10.1080/09592318.2019.1649814.

to al-Qaeda (in 2012) and ISIS (in 2015), decisions reported to be based solely on which “parent” group would provide greater resources.²⁷⁹

At the tactical and operational level, al-Shabaab targets hotels, malls, and restaurants in Somalia and other countries in Africa (particularly Kenya), focusing on locations where foreign tourists, politicians, and diplomats are known to frequent. Al-Shabaab has also targeted local African populations. For example, al-Shabaab carried out the Garissa University massacre in Kenya on April 2, 2015, killing 148 people, mostly young students.

Over the course of its history, al-Shabaab has governed areas under its control, operating courts, resolving disputes, and collecting taxes. This is key to its popular support.

Role of women and gender

Al-Shabaab’s approach to women has some inherent tensions insofar as it is simultaneously restricting and empowering. While the organization “imposes severe limits on women’s comportment and access to the public sphere,” it also behaves in ways that at times clearly benefit women and that grants them limited rights.²⁸⁰ It affords women an increased (though not full) degree of physical safety and security; its Islamic courts interpret law (particularly in the area of divorce and inheritance) in ways that are favorable to women and that offer a form of justice often absent in areas controlled by legitimate authorities; it at times punishes gender-based violence including rape and domestic assault; and for some women marrying into the organization, it offers a degree of financial stability that might not otherwise be attainable.²⁸¹ Importantly, al-Shabaab is a patriarchal organization that by no means affords women equal rights; it is, however, an organization that offers limited rights in an environment that sometimes guarantees no rights.

Al-Shabaab “does not include women in its military command structure, decision-making bodies (with limited exceptions, as discussed below), or fighting units.”²⁸² The location of where men and women serve al-Shabaab differs: while men live and fight with a cadre of men, women serve al-Shabaab from their homes in both al-Shabaab-occupied and non-occupied

²⁷⁹ Petrich and Donnelly, “Worth many sins.”

²⁸⁰ International Crisis Group, *Women and Al-Shabaab’s Insurgency*, Crisis Group Africa Briefing 145, June 27, 2019, 15.

²⁸¹ International Crisis Group, *Women and Al-Shabaab’s Insurgency*, Crisis Group Africa Briefing 145, June 27, 2019, 15.

²⁸² International Crisis Group, *Women and Al-Shabaab’s Insurgency*, Crisis Group Africa Briefing 145, June 27, 2019, 15.

towns, cities, and villages.²⁸³ Whether or not women are considered full members of al-Shabaab is a matter of disagreement within and outside the group. Although women affiliated with the group often consider themselves full members of al-Shabaab, male militants and the Somali and Kenyan governments countering these militants often do not.

Recruitment

Women join al-Shabaab both voluntarily and involuntarily, and for complex and layered reasons. The Kenyan coastal counties of Mombasa, Tana River and Taita Taveta are among its major target areas, as they are plagued by socio-economic disenfranchisement, development failures, and security sector violence against the population.²⁸⁴ Women often join due to a mix of coercion, desire for revenge, survival, and, sometimes, to support the movement's goals.²⁸⁵ This renders the voluntary-involuntary recruitment schema problematic but nevertheless useful in understanding women's intentions.

Marriage—a potential source of economic and physical security—is the most common way for a women to become affiliated with, or join, al-Shabaab.²⁸⁶ Most marriages appear voluntary. Women may choose to marry into al-Shabaab because military wives have more security than non-military wives. Al-Shabaab wives also have a degree of financial security, as widows whose al-Shabaab husbands die in battle often quickly remarry.

Marriage is also used by al-Shabaab as a tool for male recruitment. It has largely abolished the custom that prevents Somali men from minor clans from marrying women from larger clans. Not only does this provide men from minor clans more of a chance to marry, it also develops a network of cross-clan loyalties. Al-Shabaab has also attempted to entice foreign fighters by providing a wife upon entrance into the group. However, this recruitment device was resisted by Somali families. While some Somali women and girls married foreign fighters in the 2007–2012 period, this trend appears to have waned. Al-Shabaab has also altered traditional inheritance practices regarding the marriage of a widow. Rather than an al-Shabaab widow

²⁸³ Orly Maya Stern, *The Invisible Women of Al-Shabaab*. Adam Smith International, Sept. 2019. <http://www.orlystern.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/The-Invisible-Women-of-al-Shabaab-.pdf>.

²⁸⁴ Fathima A. Badurdeen, "Women and Recruitment in the Al-Shabaab Network: Stories of Women being recruited by Women Recruiters in the Coastal Region of Kenya," *The African Review* 45, no. 1 (2018): 19–48.

²⁸⁵ Badurdeen, "Women and Recruitment in the Al-Shabaab Network."

²⁸⁶ International Crisis Group, *Women and Al-Shabaab's Insurgency*, Crisis Group Africa Briefing 145, June 27, 2019, <https://www.africaportal.org/publications/women-and-al-shabaabs-insurgency/>.

being remarried to a male relative of the deceased, any al-Shabaab member can remarry the widow.²⁸⁷

In some cases, deception is an important part of the recruitment process. This typically involves a covert al-Shabaab recruiter, who is often a woman who hides her connection to al-Shabaab. Over time, these female recruiters developed trusting relationships with the abductees.²⁸⁸ For instance, unwitting women and girls are lured by the promise of employment opportunities, education, and friendship and are then trafficked across the border from Kenya to Somalia.²⁸⁹ These (primarily Kenyan²⁹⁰) women and girls end up playing various roles in al-Shabaab-controlled territories, including sexual slavery²⁹¹ (a contested term) and gang rape.²⁹²

Women joining al-Shabaab from Kenya travel to Somalia under conditions of severe poverty. Many women join or assist al-Shabaab as a means of survival. Yet there is evidence that many Kenyan women who radicalized and joined al-Shabaab were generally young, middle class, and fairly well educated; as such, economic marginalization is an insufficient explanatory factor.²⁹³ Another motive for joining al-Shabaab is grievances against Kenyan authorities who are accused of extrajudicial violence and killing. For these women, joining al-Shabaab in Somalia is a means of revenge and a form of empowerment.²⁹⁴ There are also those women who live in al-Shabaab-occupied territory and may or may not have exhibited acceptance or support of the group.²⁹⁵

When compared with their male counterparts, less is known about the pathway women take out of al-Shabaab. Male members who wish to leave the group can enter into a formal exit process that includes access to rehabilitation facilities—an option that is not open to women

²⁸⁷ Stern, *The Invisible Women of Al-Shabaab*.

²⁸⁸ Badurdeen, “Women and Recruitment in the Al-Shabaab Network.”

²⁸⁹ Badurdeen, “Women and Recruitment in the Al-Shabaab Network.”

²⁹⁰ Petrich and Donnelly, “Worth many sins.”

²⁹¹ “Women’s Roles in Al-Shabaab: Deeper Understanding and Research Is Needed,” Rise to Peace, 2019, <https://www.risetopeace.org/2019/07/27/womens-roles-in-al-shabaab-deeper-understanding-and-research-is-needed/risetopeace/>.

²⁹² “Women’s Roles in Al-Shabaab.”

²⁹³ “Countering Female Violent Extremism in Kenya: Government and Media Approaches.” Wilson Center, 2016, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/countering-female-violent-extremism-kenya-government-and-media-approaches>.

²⁹⁴ “Women’s Roles in Al-Shabaab.”

²⁹⁵ Stern, *The Invisible Women of Al-Shabaab*.

or girls.²⁹⁶ Some female defectors are interrogated by Somalia's National Intelligence and Security Agency, which typically characterizes them as victims rather than as terrorists or criminals. However, the vast majority reenter Somali life with no official scrutiny. Integrating back into society without notice is particularly the case for women who supported al-Shabaab from their homes, without any major disruption to their daily lives.²⁹⁷ Women who left al-Shabaab cited a number of reasons for doing so, including the tough conditions of living in the camps and disillusionment with the group over time. Women have been identified as playing a crucial role in encouraging male defection (usually their sons and husbands) from al-Shabaab.²⁹⁸

Roles within the organization

At the most basic level of engagement, women play a supporting role in al-Shabaab. For example, women are involved in psychologically preparing their husbands to carry out a suicide attack. They are also urged to conceive a child before their husband carries out such an operation. Women participate in recruitment by recruiting other women and, at times, men within their own families.²⁹⁹ The recruitment takes many forms, including in-person and online. For example, the Kenyan case referred to as the "Jihadi brides of Kenya" (Halima Ali, Khadija Abdul Kadir, Mariam Aboud, and Ummul Khayr) occurred through an internet chat room.³⁰⁰ Women in al-Shabaab also participate in committees established by the shadow governor (*wali*) of the regional subnational administrative unit (*waliyat*). The shadow governor is responsible for recruits, and certain committees comprise the wives of high-ranking officers who go door-to-door to proselytize and develop a network of female supporters.

Women with specific skills are at times asked or manipulated to join al-Shabaab training camps. One female *hidaya* (tailor) sewed and repaired clothes at a training camp.³⁰¹ Kenyan women reported that they were tasked with cooking and cleaning. The majority of women in

²⁹⁶ Christian Taylor, Tanner Semmelrock, and Alexandra McDermott, "The Cost of Defection: The Consequences of Quitting Al-Shabaab," *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, vol. 13/2019, 6.

²⁹⁷ Stern, *The Invisible Women of Al-Shabaab*.

²⁹⁸ Stern, *The Invisible Women of Al-Shabaab*.

²⁹⁹ Phoebe Donnelly, "Women in Al-Shabaab through a New War's Lens," *Women in International Security*, July 25, 2018, <https://www.wiisglobal.org/women-in-al-shabaab-through-a-new-wars-lens/>.

³⁰⁰ Badurdeen, "Women and Recruitment in the Al-Shabaab Network."

³⁰¹ Badurdeen, "Women and Recruitment in the Al-Shabaab Network."

the camps were Kenyan. There is evidence that women's experiences in al-Shabaab camps differed based on their nationality. Kenyan women report repeated sexual assault, including gang rape. Kenyan women alluded to the few Somali women in the camps as "legitimate" wives and implied that they were protected from sexual violence outside of their (possibly forced) marriages.

Women are active in the formal and informal economies that support al-Shabaab, including areas that typically would be prohibited to women according to Salafi norms, such as the local markets, where many Somali women are permitted as *suuqley* (market women). This is because women are often the primary earners in Somalia, especially if their husbands or sons are already al-Shabaab soldiers. Women who own businesses are important figures in al-Shabaab's money-laundering activities.³⁰² In addition, women contribute to al-Shabaab fundraising by developing social networks for the collection of alms (*zakat*) by male al-Shabaab officers.

Women also contribute to the armed struggle in more-direct ways, such as gathering intelligence, smuggling arms, and conducting attacks. Women are involved in al-Shabaab's intelligence wing, Amniyat, which maintains a network of informants and operatives that gather intelligence and carry out attacks, including suicide bombings. Women gather information and intelligence on government facilities, Somali and foreign forces, and individuals of interest. Women also participate in the planning and execution of assassinations.³⁰³ Women are tasked with collecting information and intelligence since their access to various locations does not arouse suspicion.³⁰⁴ Notably, there is evidence that al-Shabaab has instrumentalized sex workers in Nairobi (the women were referred to as both Kenyan and Tanzanian, but not Somali) to serve as an intelligence network by paying them to disclose information they gather from their clients, who are primarily Kenyan police officers. In addition, there is evidence that al-Shabaab became directly involved in the sex trafficking of Kenyan and Tanzanian women to al-Shabaab fighters.³⁰⁵ Yet these women do not get recruited

³⁰² Women also participate in fundraising for al-Shabaab outside of Somalia and Kenya. For example, Amina Farah Ali and Hawo Mohamed Hassan were convicted of fundraising for al-Shabaab in the US. During their criminal trials, evidence was presented that Ali led conference calls with other women in the US (one call had up to 143 women) urging them to send money and supplies to Somalia, specifically linking these efforts to *jihād*. Ali claimed insider knowledge about al-Shabaab's operations and claimed to have a direct link to Mukhtar Robow, al-Shabaab's then-spokesperson. See Donnelly, "Women in Al-Shabaab through a New War's Lens."

³⁰³ Stern, *The Invisible Women of Al-Shabaab*.

³⁰⁴ "Women's Roles in Al-Shabaab"; Donnelly, "Women in Al-Shabaab through a New War's Lens."

³⁰⁵ Petrich and Donnelly, "Worth many sins."

into al-Shabaab, nor do they pledge any loyalty to the group; rather, they develop a transactional relationship and provide what is viewed as a service to the group.³⁰⁶

Al-Shabaab also relies on women to provide hiding places to organize operations and hide weapons. In addition, women have proven invaluable as arms smugglers—in Somali society, women typically are not considered a security threat and thus generally escape military or police scrutiny. In socially conservative Somalia, women can be searched only by other women, and female police officers are few in number.³⁰⁷

As mentioned above, women in al-Shabaab generally are excluded from direct involvement in military operations, but there are notable exceptions. For example, al-Shabaab member Samantha Lewthwaite, a white British woman known as the “White Widow,” allegedly was involved in terrorist operations (including the Westgate Mall attack) that killed a total of 400 people.³⁰⁸

Since 2006, ten women and girls have carried out suicide attacks on behalf of al-Shabaab.³⁰⁹ According to one estimate, women make up less than 5 percent of suicide bombers.³¹⁰ Women have carried out assassinations. Some former combatants have indicated that women who participate in violent operations are from the Somali diaspora.

³⁰⁶ Al-Shabaab fighters’ extensive use of Nairobi’s sex-worker industry also points to the dichotomy that while the group claims to value the purity of women, it is usually reserved for Somali women, which reflects a wider distinction that al-Shabaab is actually an ethnonationalist group focused on controlling, improving, and expanding Somalia, as opposed to a group focused on global Islamic principles.

³⁰⁷ “Women’s Roles in Al-Shabaab.”

³⁰⁸ “White Widow has Killed 400 People as Key Figure in al-Shabaab,” *Daily Telegraph* (London), May 18, 2015, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/somalia/11611954/White-Widow-has-killed-400-people-as-key-figure-in-al-Shabaab.html>.

³⁰⁹ Jason Warner and Ellen Chapin, “Targeted Terror: The Suicide Bombers of al-Shabaab,” *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point*, United States Military Academy, February 2018.

³¹⁰ Stern, *The Invisible Women of Al-Shabaab*.

Figure 6. The “daughters” of al-Shabaab, armed with assault rifles



Source: “Women’s Roles in Al-Shabaab: Deeper Understanding and Research Is Needed.” Rise to Peace. 2019. <https://www.risetopeace.org/2019/07/27/womens-roles-in-al-shabaab-deeper-understanding-and-research-is-needed/risetopeace/>. Credit for image and caption: Al Jazeera.

Rules governing behavior

There are strict regulations on female behavior within al-Shabaab. These regulations both provide benefits and lead to harm. Al-Shabaab enforces strict adherence to sharia law in areas under its control, which generally means removing women from the public sphere and attempting to control women’s behavior, including an effort to exhibit more modesty at work and in travel.³¹¹ Women are generally banned from leaving the house without a male guardian (such as a close male relative). In al-Shabaab–controlled territory, women were forced to wear *niqabs*, including a full-face veil, socks, and gloves.³¹² In addition, women were told to attend compulsory Islamic lectures. Women are generally prohibited from conducting business, but,

³¹¹ Stern, *The Invisible Women of Al-Shabaab*.

³¹² Stern, *The Invisible Women of Al-Shabaab*.

as described above, these restrictions were not fully applied. Men and women were generally prevented from mingling in public.³¹³

Al-Shabaab can provide a degree of physical safety for the women and girls under its control. Women in Somalia are vulnerable to kidnapping and sexual assault. Al-Shabaab has been cited as punishing rapists and intervening on women's behalf when it comes to sexual and domestic violence. Al-Shabaab maintains an Islamic court system that upholds tenets of sharia law, including Islamic family law that protects women's rights in matters of divorce and inheritance. Women can initiate divorce according to Islamic law, and this is facilitated by al-Shabaab. Al-Shabaab also supports women in remarrying within the group. Divorce rates are high in al-Shabaab, and this support is often more than the official Somali courts can provide.³¹⁴ If women violate the rules of al-Shabaab's moral code, for instance by committing (or being accused of committing) adultery, women can be stoned to death.³¹⁵

Violence against women

Despite its purported commitment to the defense of women, there is substantial evidence of physical abuse by male al-Shabaab members. Non-Somali women are victims of sexual violence in al-Shabaab camps and at least some Somali women are coerced into entering marriages with al-Shabaab fighters. Moreover, recent UN reporting has indicated that sexual violence is used by al-Shabaab as a strategy for social control in areas they control, including abducting women and girls for the purpose of forced marriages.³¹⁶

³¹³ International Crisis Group, *Women and Al-Shabaab's Insurgency*.

³¹⁴ International Crisis Group, *Women and Al-Shabaab's Insurgency*.

³¹⁵ Women play a part in community policing for al-Shabaab, including a women-led group that polices the behavior of other women. Women's role in this space appears to have expanded since 2014.

³¹⁶ Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, "Somalia," United Nations, 2020, <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/countries/somalia/>.

Appendix F: White Supremacists in Europe

Overview

Right-wing extremism (RWE) presents a significant and growing challenge across Europe.³¹⁷ When compared with the violent extremism associated with jihadism, the frequency and severity of attacks by RWE groups and individuals remains relatively small.³¹⁸ However, the right-wing threat appears to be growing. European Union Security Commissioner Julian King warned in 2017: “I think we also need to keep in mind the growing menace of right-wing violent extremism. . . . I’m not aware of a single EU member state that is not affected in some way by right-wing violent extremism.”³¹⁹ According to the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), RWE attacks in Europe have increased significantly: from zero in 2012 to 9 in 2013, 21 in 2016, and 30 in 2017.³²⁰

A comprehensive, continent-wide survey of gender and RWE is beyond the scope of this case study. Instead, the focus here will be on two formations: National Action in the UK, and the

³¹⁷ The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) describes right-wing extremism as a “shifting, complex, and overlapping milieu of individuals, groups, and movements (online and offline) espousing different but related ideologies, often linked by hatred and racism toward minorities, xenophobia, islamophobia, or anti-Semitism.” UNSC Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Secretariat (CTED), *Trends Alert: Member States Concerned by the Growing and Increasingly Transnational Threat of Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism*, April 2020, https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/CTED_Trends_Alert_Extreme_Right-Wing_Terrorism.pdf.

³¹⁸ For example, in the United Kingdom as of 2020, the vast majority (77 percent) of those held under terrorist offences were jihadists, but a substantial minority (13 percent) were right-wing extremists. United Kingdom, Home Office, *Operation of police powers under the Terrorism Act 2000 and subsequent legislation: Arrests, outcomes, and stop and search: Great Britain, financial year ending March 2020*, Bulletin Number 15/20, June 11, 2020, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/891341/p-olice-powers-terrorism-mar2020-hosb1520.pdf; Daniel Koehler, Violence and Terrorism from the Far-Right: Policy Options to Counter and Elusive Threat, Policy Brief, International Centre for Counter Terrorism (ICCT), Feb. 2019, <https://icct.nl/app/uploads/2019/02/Koehler-Violence-and-Terrorism-from-the-Far-Right-February-2019.pdf>.

³¹⁹ Quoted in Matthew Tempest, “Commissioner warns of ‘growing menace’ of right-wing terrorism in EU,” EURACTIV, Mar. 23, 2017, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/commissioner-warns-of-growing-menace-of-right-wing-terrorism-in-eu/>.

³²⁰ Seth G. Jones, “The Rise of Far-Right Extremism in the United States,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, Nov. 7, 2018, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/rise-far-right-extremism-united-states>.

National Socialist Underground (NSU) in Germany. The reason for this selection is twofold: RWE is a significant part of the political landscape in both countries, and there are reasonably good (albeit limited) primary and secondary sources that explore the experiences of women in these RWE groups. Yet two caveats are in order. As many scholars have observed, women and RWE remains underdocumented and underanalyzed when compared to the attention devoted to the engagement of men with RWE groups.³²¹ Moreover, gender and RWE remains underresearched relative to the phenomenon of female engagement in jihadist, ethnonationalist, and left-wing violent extremism.

All of this is to say that this case study does not offer a comprehensive picture of these groups, a task that will require additional research.³²² It should be noted here that the structure of this case study differs from the others in this report. All of the other cases explore women and gender in significant insurgencies—that is, political-military movements intended to “seize, nullify, or challenge political control of a region.”³²³ The tiny, sect-like terrorist formations discussed below differ substantially—in scale, operations, leadership, and other factors—from movements like ISIS, al-Shabaab, and the FARC-EP. While sharing some characteristics with insurgencies (e.g., the use of violence), National Action and the NSU are different enough to merit a somewhat different case-study approach.

³²¹ See, for example, Catherine Stinton, “Combining the Aberrant with the Ordinary: The Role of White Supremacy in the Far-Right Radicalisation of Women,” *Journal of Applied Psychology and Social Science* 5, no. 1 (2019), <http://insight.cumbria.ac.uk/id/eprint/5323/>; and Andrea S. Dauber, “The Increasing Visibility of Right-Wing Extremist Women in Contemporary Europe: Is Great Britain an Exception?” in *Gender and Far Right Politics in Europe*, ed. Michaela Köttig, Renate Bitzan, and Andrea Petö (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017), 49.

³²² Nonetheless, it does appear that female participation in right-wing extremism is substantial and growing. In recent years, according to one policy-oriented German study, “There has been a marked increase both in the number of active extreme right-wing women as well as a growth in the number of women’s groups in the extreme right-wing scene. The possible roles and positions which can be assumed by women have also expanded: from activists, street fighters and gang leaders to local government politicians, and from demonstration coordinators to internet activists.” Fachstelle Gender und Rechtsextremismus [Expert Center on Gender and Right-Wing Extremism], *Overlooked and Underrated: Women in Right-Wing Extremist Groups in Germany*, Amadeu Antonio Foundation, Mar. 2014, https://www.amadeu-antonio-stiftung.de/w/files/pdfs/pressemitteilungen/overlooked-and-underrated.-german-women-in-right-wing-extremist-groups_longer-executive-summary.pdf.

³²³ US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, Apr. 4, 2020, accessed Dec. 2020, https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp3_24pa.pdf.

National Action: “A true friend in the spectre of National Socialism”

Founded in 2013, National Action has been described by one scholar as a small, secretive neo-Nazi “groupuscule” that promoted rabid anti-Semitism, hatred of non-whites, the deification of Adolph Hitler, transnational ties with like-minded groups, Holocaust denial, and imminent race war.³²⁴ National Action was ideologically opposed to democratic institutions, the rule of law, and all other features of liberal democracy.

National Action rejected electoral politics on ideological grounds (unlike other extremist groups like the British National Party). In the view of the National Action leadership, the far-right milieu in Britain had been ideologically diluted by attempting to build a mass-based fascist movement. Never numbering more than 100 members, the group regarded its modest size as a source of strength—it viewed itself as an ideologically pure vanguard of virulent neo-Nazi extremism.³²⁵ National Action was a youthful, street-based network of regional clandestine cells whose senior leaders worked together at the national level. In strategic and operational terms, National Action believed that small-scale revolutionary action, violence against minorities and other perceived enemies, online agitation—and in all likelihood, terrorism—would somehow bring about the overthrow of the liberal democratic order and the salvation of the white race. As its website declared in 2014, “the youth have finally found a true friend in the spectre of National Socialism.... Only a storm of flowing passion will save our people.”³²⁶

The possibility of National Action could transmogrify into a terrorist formation was never far from the minds of UK security officials. According to a senior police counterterrorism officer, “this group was amassing weapons and recipes for bomb-making. They communicated through

³²⁴ Paul Jackson, “#hitlerwasright: National Action and National Socialism for the 21st Century,” *Journal for Deradicalization*, no. 1 (Winter 2014/2015), <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/42492009.pdf>. Roger Griffin characterizes RWE “groupuscules” as small political entities (but never primarily “party-political”) pursuing an ultimate goal of “overcoming the decadence of the existing liberal democratic system.” In addition, these formations are “fully formed and autonomous,” but with “numerically negligible active memberships and minimal if any public visibility or support.” Roger Griffin, “From Slime Mold to Rhizome: An Introduction to Groupuscular Right,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 37, no. 1 (2003): 30, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322022000054321>.

³²⁵ Daniel De Simone, “National Action: The new parents and the neo-Nazi terror threat,” BBC News, Nov. 12, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/stories-45919730>.

³²⁶ Quoted in Jackson, “#hitlerwasright.”

secret channels to recruit others to their cause. Left unchecked, they presented a real threat to the public.”³²⁷

Women in some RWE movements in Britain have participated in related violent demonstrations and assaults. Jackie Oakley, the editor of the White Nationalist Party’s *Valkyrie* magazine and leader of the group’s women’s division, told a reporter in 2004 that “I headbutt, punch and kick just like a man....None of your poncey girly scratching for me; I’m up there with the men and so are all the other women in the group.”³²⁸ In the case of Nation Action, female roles were significant but sharply limited. National Action’s positions on gender flowed from “traditional” National Socialism, with its emphasis on the reproductive role of women, childrearing, and the transmission of ideological, social, and cultural values to the young.³²⁹

National Action sought to bring women into the movement, albeit on highly traditionalist and sometimes bizarre terms.³³⁰ In 2016, the group staged a “Miss Hitler” beauty contest, reportedly in an effort to recruit women. According to a National Action website, the pageant would build morale and acknowledgement among women, who “rarely get much spotlight or recognition.”³³¹ Would-be neo-Nazi beauty queens entered under grotesque stage names, including “Eva Bin Gassin,” “Lady of the Lolocaust,” and “Gallopig Gestapo.” In their contest applications, women expressed a variety of Hitlerian views on female responsibilities, such as “the survival of our race depends on women like me,” and that women needed to have “lots of children.”³³²

³²⁷ Quoted in “‘Miss Hitler’ and Three Others Guilty of National Action Membership,” BBC News, Mar. 19, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-leeds-51966050>.

³²⁸ Quoted in Amelia Hill, “Far Right Woos Women with Vows on Feminism and Family,” *The Guardian* (London), Apr. 11, 2004, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2003/sep/21/uk.thefarright>.

³²⁹ Chris Allen, “Proscribing National Action: Considering the Impact of Banning the British Far-Right Group,” *The Political Quarterly* 88, no. 4 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-923X.12368>.

³³⁰ Allen, “Proscribing National Action.”

³³¹ Quoted in Julia Ebner and Jacob Davey, “How Women Advance the Internationalization of the Far Right,” in *Perspectives on the Future of Women, Gender & Violent Extremism*, ed. Audrey Alexander, George Washington University Program on Extremism, Feb. 2019, <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Perspectives%20on%20the%20Future%20of%20Women%20Gender%20and%20Violent%20Extremism.pdf>.

³³² Quoted in Allen, “Proscribing National Action.”

Figure 7. "Miss Hitler" contestants



Source: Twitter via Rachael Pells, "Scottish woman named 'Miss Hitler 2016' in neo-Nazi beauty pageant," *Independent*, June 30, 2016, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/scottish-woman-named-miss-hitler-2016-neo-nazi-beauty-pageant-a7112216.html>.

Joan Cutter, the apparent winner of the contest (who entered under the name "Buchenwald Princess," in reference to the Nazi concentration camp), was later prosecuted for her National Action connections after the Home Office made membership in the group a criminal offence. During her trial in 2019, the court heard an interview with Cutter, who explained the importance of female participation in National Action:

IT IS IMPORTANT TO ME THAT THERE'S A BALANCE OF FEMININE TO MASCULINE IN THE MOVEMENT—WITHOUT FEMININE INVOLVEMENT, WHAT WOULD A MOVEMENT BE? A SAD SAUSAGE FEST WITH NO APPEAL? WOMEN ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT FIGURES WHEN IT COMES TO TEACHING AND RAISING THE NEXT GENERATION TO BE STRONG AND PROUD. WE NEED TO STEP UP, BE THE LIONESSES WE OUGHT TO BE, AND RIP APART THE HYENAS

LAUGHING AT US AS WE GET RAPED, BEATEN, BRAINWASHED, AND DE-FEMINISED EN MASSE. HYENAS HAVE NO PART IN OUR PRIDE AND NEVER WILL."³³³

A glimpse inside a traditionalist National Action household was provided in a court case involving two members, Claudia Patatas, and her partner, Adam Thomas. In text messages, Patatas reportedly expressed extremist views such as "all Jews must be put to death" and "bring back those concentration camps."³³⁴ In the couple's Oxfordshire house, police found a bedroom littered with weapons, including a crossbow, machetes, and a Nazi-style dagger. Large swastikas draped the walls, and the premises were festooned with Ku Klux Klan regalia, as well as runes and occult paraphernalia associated with the Nazi *Schutzstaffel* (SS). Bomb-making instructions were found on a computer hard drive. A National Action poster in the kitchen declared "Britain is Ours—the Rest Must Go." The police also discovered a set of photos depicting Thomas in a Klan hood and robe cradling the couple's newborn child.³³⁵ In another photo, Thomas holds up a Nazi flag while Patatas holds the baby in her arms—a baby to whom they had given the middle name Adolph, in honor of the Nazi leader.³³⁶

³³³ Quoted in Josh Halliday, "Woman Entered 'Miss Hitler' Contest in Neo-Nazi Recruitment Bid, Court Told," *The Guardian* (London), Mar. 20, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/20/woman-entered-miss-hitler-contest-to-gain-female-recruits>.

³³⁴ Quoted in De Simone, "National Action."

³³⁵ De Simone, "National Action."

³³⁶ Andy Robinson, "Six Members of Neo-Nazi Group National Action Were Trying to Start a Race War," *Birmingham Mail*, Dec. 18, 2018, <https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/six-members-neo-nazi-group-15568550>.

Figure 8. Claudia Patatas, Adam Thomas, and their newborn child



Source: West Midlands Police via Andy Robinson, “Six Members of Neo-Nazi Group National Action Were Trying to Start a Race War,” *Birmingham Mail*, Dec.18, 2018, <https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/six-members-neo-nazi-group-15568550>.

In December 2016, then Home Secretary Amber Heard announced that National Action had been proscribed under the Terrorism Act 2000—the first RWE group to be banned in the UK since the British Union of Fascists was proscribed in 1939 in the immediate outbreak of World War II. According to Heard, “It has been proscribed following an assessment that it is ‘concerned in terrorism.’ The group’s online propaganda material, disseminated via social media, frequently features extremely violent imagery and language.”³³⁷ Moreover, according to the home secretary, National Action promoted and encouraged acts of terrorism after the June 2016 murder by a right-wing extremist of Jo Cox, a Labour Party member of Parliament.

³³⁷ UK Home Office and the Rt Hon Amber Rudd, “National Action becomes first extreme right-wing group to be banned in UK,” press release, Dec. 16, 2016, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/national-action-becomes-first-extreme-right-wing-group-to-be-banned-in-uk>.

Membership in National Action, or encouraging support for it, became a criminal offence, carrying a sentence of up to 10 years' imprisonment. In 2018, Patatas and Thomas were convicted for their National Action membership.³³⁸

National Socialist Underground: “Actions, not words”

Like the National Front, the National Socialist Underground (NSU) was an RWE “groupuscule” that emerged following a meeting of three neo-Nazi activists—two men, Uwe Böhnhardt and Uwe Mundlos, and a woman, Beate Zschäpe—in the eastern German town of Jena. They fought street battles with local anti-fascists, attended “white pride” events, and became involved with a subsection of the Thüringer Heimatschutz (Thuringian Homeland Protection), a loose alliance of neo-Nazi groups.³³⁹ The trio went underground in the late 1990s after police found explosives in a garage Zschäpe had rented.

³³⁸ “National Action trial: Three guilty of neo-Nazi group membership.” BBC News, Nov. 12, 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-oxfordshire-46151838>; Following the ban, National Action continued to operate under a variety of aliases, including Scottish Dawn and NS131. In 2017, the UK Home Secretary proscribed these formations. UK Home Office and Rt Hon Amber Rudd, “Further Extreme Right-Wing Groups Banned in the UK,” press release, Sept. 28, 2017, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/further-extreme-right-wing-groups-banned-in-the-uk>.

³³⁹ “Anti-Antifa,” FOIA Research, Sept. 1, 2020, <https://www.foiaresearch.net/organization/anti-antifa>.

Figure 9. Uwe Mundlos, Beate Zschäpe, and Uwe Böhnhardt (c. 2004)



Source: Bundeskriminalamt (Federal Criminal Police Office) via Rene Blixer, “State racism and the National Socialist Underground murders,” *Exberliner*, Nov. 21, 2012, <https://www.exberliner.com/features/zeitgeist/state-racism-and-the-nsu/>.

Committed to a “homicidal race war vision” of purging Germany of immigrants and inspiring other extremists with its actions, what is now known as the NSU began establishing a violent presence and eventually sustaining itself with bank robberies.³⁴⁰ Between 2000 and 2006, the NSU went on a killing spree that left nine Turkish and Greek migrants dead.³⁴¹ In its last known terrorist act, the NSU murdered a female police officer in 2007 with the same silencer-equipped Česká CZ 83 pistol used to kill the other victims, all of whom were shot in the face at

³⁴⁰ “Beate Zschäpe: Surviving member of German neo-Nazi murder cell NSU gets life in prison,” *The Telegraph* (London), July 11, 2018, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/07/11/beate-zschape-surviving-member-german-neo-nazi-murder-cell-nsu/>.

³⁴¹ AFP/The Local, “NSU Verdict approaches; who is woman at center of neo-Nazi terror trial?” *TheLocal.de*, July 10, 2018, <https://www.thelocal.de/20180710/beate-zschape-accomplice-to-murder-or-complicit-bystander>.

close range.³⁴² In addition, the NSU carried out a series of nail bombings that targeted immigrant communities, including an attack in 2004 that wounded 22 people.³⁴³

According to one estimate, more than 100 people—20 percent of who were women—directly supported the NSU.³⁴⁴ This support network, which included individuals from like-minded extremist organizations—the “close periphery” that was part of a vibrant neo-Nazi milieu³⁴⁵—reportedly supplied the trio with weapons, false identity documents, safe houses, and other essentials.³⁴⁶ The NSU, ostensibly a clandestine, underground organization, hid in plain sight during its active years. Indeed, it was only after a November 2011 bank robbery that German authorities, after first concluding that the “professional-quality” shootings were the work of Turkish criminal gangs, began connecting the crimes and identifying violent right-wing extremism as a motive.

On November 4, Böhnhardt and Mundlos, having robbed a bank in the eastern city of Eisenach, hid out in a trailer and waited for police searches to stop. But after the two were discovered by police, they set the trailer on fire and rather than face arrest, entered into a successful murder-

³⁴² Thomas Meaney and Saskia Schäfer, “The Neo-Nazi Murder Trial Revealing Germany’s Darkest Secrets,” *Guardian* (London), Dec. 15, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/15/neo-nazi-murders-revealing-germanys-darkest-secrets>.

³⁴³ “Beate Zschäpe: Surviving member of German neo-Nazi murder cell NSU gets life in prison.”

³⁴⁴ Andrea S. Dauber, “Not All Nazis are Men: Women’s Underestimated Potential for Violence in German Neo-Fascism,” in *Gendered Perspectives on Conflict and Violence: Part B* (Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing Limited, 2014), <https://doi.org/10.1108/S1529-21262014000018B011>.

³⁴⁵ Daniel Köehler, “The German ‘National Socialist Underground (NSU)’ and Anglo-American Networks: The Internationalisation of Far-Right Terror,” in *The Post-War Anglo-American Far Right: A Special Relationship of Hate*, ed. Paul Jack and Anton Shekhovtsov (London: Palgrave Pivot, 2014), 129.

³⁴⁶ Nikki Sterkenburg, “Far-Right Extremism: A Practical Introduction,” Radical Awareness Network (RAN) Centre of Excellence, 2019, https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/ran_fre_factbook_20191205_en.pdf. Mandy Struck, an NSU supporter who bore a close resemblance to Zschäpe, allegedly gave the latter her identity cards and other documents and allowed Zschäpe to assume her identity. Julia Jüttner, “In Mandys Namen,” *Der Spiegel*, Mar. 13, 2012, <https://www.spiegel.de/panorama/justiz/nsu-terroristin-zschaepe-tarnte-sich-als-mandy-s-a-820123.html>. Another supporter, Susan Eminger, also allowed Zschäpe to “borrow” her identity several times and provided her with health insurance and rail-travel cards. Claudia Gerdes, “Political Comic: Three Women in the NSU Drama,” *Page Online*, Sept. 3, 2019, <https://page-online.de/bild/politischer-comic-drei-frauen-im-nsu-drama/>.

suicide pact.³⁴⁷ Zschäpe went to the apartment she shared with the two men in the eastern town of Zwickau, destroyed incriminating evidence, and set the flat on fire.

But police later recovered DVDs, one of which showed NSU members confessing to the 2007 murder of the policewoman and other killings, and another in which Böhnhardt and Mundlos described the NSU as a “network of comrades adhering to the basic principle of actions, not words.”³⁴⁸ Four days after torching the apartment, Zschäpe turned herself in. “I’m the one you’re looking for,” she said as she entered an East German police station.³⁴⁹ Although Zschäpe insisted during her five-year trial that she was not involved in the NSU killings, she was convicted of nine murders and a nail bomb attack and received a life sentence.

The trial and subsequent research revealed much—but not everything—about Zschäpe’s involvement in the NSU and its terrorist crimes. Some headlines hinted that she was a passive participant or somehow disengaged from the NSU’s actions: *Newsweek* called her a “neo-Nazi queen”;³⁵⁰ Germany’s NTV dubbed her “the mother of the terror family”³⁵¹; and France 24 labeled her the “Nazi fiancée.”³⁵² The best available evidence suggests that Zschäpe was in fact a highly willing participant and who was instrumental in the survival and “success” of the NSU. The evidence includes the following: the successful management of NSU finances;³⁵³ procuring weapons and forged documents;³⁵⁴ surveillance of possible targets and intelligence

³⁴⁷ Graham Macklin, “Neo-Nazi terrorist trial concludes after five long years,” *RightNow!* (blog), University of Oslo Center for Research on Extremism (C-REX), July 12, 2018, <https://www.sv.uio.no/c-rex/english/news-and-events/right-now/2018/neo-nazi-terrorist-trial.html>.

³⁴⁸ Quoted in Derek Scally, “Far-right network may have killed 10,” *Irish Times*, Nov. 14, 2011, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/far-right-network-may-have-killed-10-1.11378>.

³⁴⁹ Quoted in Stephanie Trouillard, “Trial of ‘Nazi fiancée’ Beate Zschäpe opens in Germany,” *France 24*, June 5, 2016, <https://www.france24.com/en/20130506-trial-nazi-fiancée-beate-zschäpe-opens-germany>.

³⁵⁰ “The Making of a Neo-Nazi Queen,” *Newsweek*, Nov. 7, 2013, <https://www.newsweek.com/2013/11/08/making-neo-nazi-queen-243924.html>.

³⁵¹ Solveig Bach, “Die Mutter der ‘Terror-Familie’: Wer ist Beate Zschäpe? [The mother of the ‘Terror family’: Where is Beate Zschäpe?]” *ntv Nachrichten*, Nov. 12, 2012, <https://www.n-tv.de/politik/Wer-ist-Beate-Zschaepe-article7710471.html>.

³⁵² Trouillard, “Trial of ‘Nazi fiancée’ Beate Zschäpe opens in Germany.”

³⁵³ Bach, “Die Mutter der ‘Terror-Familie.’”

³⁵⁴ Bach, “Die Mutter der ‘Terror-Familie.’”

collection;³⁵⁵ and making travel arrangements and renting apartments.³⁵⁶ In addition, Zschäpe played a key role in helping the NSU hide in plain sight. In the words of her prosecutor, she carried out “the indispensable task of giving the terrorist organization the appearance of normality and legality; she created the “inconspicuous façade” that permitted the group to exist underground.³⁵⁷

³⁵⁵ Helene Bubrowski and Marlene Grunert, “Mit verteilten Rollen [With distributed roles],” *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, Apr. 29, 2020, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/inland/nsu-urteil-ohne-zschaepe-ging-es-nicht-16747952.html>.

³⁵⁶ Dauber, “Not All Nazis are Men.”

³⁵⁷ Quoted in Bach, “Die Mutter der “Terror-Familie.””

Appendix G: Boko Haram

Overview

Boko Haram emerged as a violent extremist group in Nigeria around 2009 with the aim of ridding the country of Western influence and establishing an Islamic state.³⁵⁸ The group's name roughly translates to "Western education is forbidden," though many members prefer its Arabic name, Jama'a Ahl as-Sunna Li-da'wa wa-al Jihad. Boko Haram began and remains most active in the northeastern areas of Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin (LCB), where the population is largely poor and Muslim and lacks effective civilian institutions and governance. Since its beginnings, Boko Haram has exploited volatile conditions in Nigeria and the LCB to its advantage, such as sectarian tensions between Christians in the south and Muslims in the north. These divisions are also economic, with the northern populations comparatively poorer, and educational, since southern influences have instituted a Western approach to education throughout the country. Many Nigerian Muslims deeply resent this Western influence, which has allowed Boko Haram to gain an ideological foothold by exploiting existing grievances. Still, the extremist group's willingness to target Muslims in its attacks severely limits support for its actions.³⁵⁹

In 2009, the Nigerian government initiated a crackdown on Boko Haram, which had existed and operated in a relatively peaceful manner since 2001 or 2002. Muhammad Yusuf, who led the group in those early years, died in police custody in 2009.³⁶⁰ Since those events, the group has perpetuated extraordinary violence against civilians and government representatives in northeastern Nigeria and the bordering regions of Chad and Niger. It is difficult to determine precisely what Boko Haram's impact has been, but estimates from 2018 claim that the group

³⁵⁸ Patricio Asfura-Heim and Julia McQuaid, *Diagnosing the Boko Haram Conflict: Grievances, Motivations, and Institutional Resilience in Northeast Nigeria*, CNA, DOP-2014-U-009272-Final, Jan. 2015.

³⁵⁹ Madiha Afzal, "The fundamental connection between education and Boko Haram in Nigeria," Brookings Institution, May 7, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/05/07/the-fundamental-connection-between-education-and-boko-haram-in-nigeria/>.

³⁶⁰ Jidefor Adibe, "Explaining the Emergence of Boko Haram," Brookings Institution, May 6, 2014, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2014/05/06/explaining-the-emergence-of-boko-haram/>.

is responsible for more than 15,000 deaths and the displacement of almost 2.5 million people.³⁶¹

Abubakar Shekau took over leadership of Boko Haram following Muhammad Yusuf's death. With the rise of the Islamic State in the mid-2010s, Boko Haram originally pledged support for the umbrella group in 2015. Subsequently, however, disagreements among the leadership caused a splintering of the group into two factions: one retained the name Boko Haram (and is the faction we cover here), and the other maintained the name Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). Both remain active in northeastern Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin region.³⁶² However, distinctions between the groups in terms of goals, types of operations, and so forth are difficult to make, and "Boko Haram" often refers to elements from both factions. Abubakar Shekau leads the Boko Haram faction and Muhammad Yusuf's son, Abu Musab al Barnawi, heads up ISWAP.

Boko Haram represents one of the greatest security threats in Nigeria. The Nigerian government made significant headway in its efforts to counter the group in the years since 2015. However, past government efforts to counter the group have tended to problematically over-rely on military operations.³⁶³ Furthermore, recent reports show a weary, undersupplied military having less effect against the group, highlighting the limits of such an approach.³⁶⁴ One of the reasons for Boko Haram's rise was its ability to exploit local grievances and insert itself into local conflicts.³⁶⁵ The ability of the Nigerian government to address fundamental issues in local communities will be critical to the long-term success of any strategy. Yet the government's actions in the conflict to date, including the long-term detention of persons suspected of having ties to Boko Haram,³⁶⁶ may hinder its relations with local communities and make long-term conflict resolution more difficult to achieve.

³⁶¹ Lauren Ploch Blanchard and Katia T. Cavigelli, "Boko Haram and the Islamic State's West Africa Province," Congressional Research Service, June 28, 2019.

³⁶² Lauren Ploch Blanchard and Katia T. Cavigelli, "Boko Haram and the Islamic State's West Africa Province."

³⁶³ Pamela Faber, *CNA Event: Insecurity and Militancy in the Sahel and West Africa*, CNA DCP-2017-U-015425-Final, Apr. 11, 2017.

³⁶⁴ Dionne Searcey, "Boko Haram is Back. With Better Drones," *New York Times*, September 13, 2019.

³⁶⁵ Faber, *CNA Event: Insecurity and Militancy in the Sahel and West Africa*.

³⁶⁶ Saskia Brechenmacher, *Stabilizing Northeast Nigeria After Boko Haram*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, May 3, 2019.

Role of women and gender

It is important to view the role of gender and women in Boko Haram against the backdrop of gender roles in Nigeria and West Africa generally. Well-established patriarchal societal norms relegate women to traditional roles in the home and gender inequalities pre-existed the emergence of Boko Haram in northeastern Nigeria.³⁶⁷ The practice of *purdah*, where women are secluded from society, reinforces these norms. Very few women participate in government, even in roles as wives of politicians.³⁶⁸ Female illiteracy is high in the region, and women have long been subject to institutional and cultural disadvantages, including lack of legal recourse for acts such as assault and rape within marriage, along with less common practices like genital mutilation.³⁶⁹ Despite these hindrances, violence in the region has compelled many women to serve as sole providers for their families if their husbands are killed or captured as members of these extremist groups.

Recruitment

Boko Haram cites government repression, failures, and neglect during its efforts to recruit members. It also is known to use financial incentives, coercion, and social pressure to draw people into the organization.³⁷⁰ The group also uses women as incentives in the recruitment of male fighters, offering captured women as wives to encourage enlistment.³⁷¹ Although men are the main targets for Boko Haram's recruitment efforts, the group makes gender-specific appeals to women, including offers of physical protection and opportunities to avenge husbands killed in the region's endemic conflicts.³⁷²

In Boko Haram, women can receive a gender-segregated Islamic education, which often has greater appeal than the Western/Christian education provided by the government (if state-sponsored education is available to them at all). Boko Haram initially encouraged smaller

³⁶⁷ United Nations Populations Fund, *Case Study: Nigeria Funding for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls in Humanitarian Programming*, June 2020, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/GEEWG_UN_Women_Nigeria_new.pdf

³⁶⁸ "Nigeria: Women and the Boko Haram Insurgency," International Crisis Group, December 5, 2016.

³⁶⁹ Jacob Zenn and Elizabeth Pearson, "Women, gender, and the evolving tactics of Boko Haram," *Journal of Terrorism Research* 5, no. 1 (2014).

³⁷⁰ Lauren Ploch Blanchard and Katia T. Cavigelli, "Boko Haram and the Islamic State's West Africa Province."

³⁷¹ "Nigeria: Women and the Boko Haram Insurgency."

³⁷² Azadeh Moaveni, "What Would Make a Woman Go Back to Boko Haram? Despair," International Crisis Group, Jan. 14, 2019, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/what-would-make-woman-go-back-boko-haram-despair>.

dowries, which allowed women more choices in whom they could marry.³⁷³ In some cases, the bride herself receives the bride price (rather than her parents or other male guardians), which can be highly empowering to women who are otherwise financially dependent on men.³⁷⁴ Marriage inside the organization has evolved, however, into an arrangement more akin to sexual slavery in many instances.³⁷⁵

Given these conditions, it can be difficult to discern between voluntary actions and coping mechanisms for women in Boko Haram. Joining the group might be a way to improve their status quo, even if the agency it affords exists somewhere between subjugation and resistance.³⁷⁶ The result is a blurred line between women as victims and participants. Some literature refers to women who willingly join or cooperate with Boko Haram as “impossible women” due to the perceived dissonance between the group’s violent acts against women and the potential of important roles for women inside the organization.³⁷⁷

The role of the widow and single mother has become a prominent one as Boko Haram’s fighters and their victims have died, leaving families behind. Women struggle to provide for themselves and their children and often live under threat of rape and violence.³⁷⁸ There are substantial disincentives for defection. Once a woman decides to leave the group, her options for doing so may be limited to escaping or being rescued/captured.³⁷⁹ It does not appear that women are freely allowed or encouraged to leave. This is logical given the frequency with which women are coerced into joining the group. However, we lack detailed information on how women exit Boko Haram. Furthermore, the challenges do not end with a successful exit from the group. Once they have left, women who have been associated with Boko Haram (as wives of fighters, slaves, or fighters themselves) have a difficult time reentering Nigerian society because of the stigmatization of individuals linked to Boko Haram.³⁸⁰ In addition to being viewed with general

³⁷³ Moaveni, “What Would Make a Woman Go Back to Boko Haram? Despair.”

³⁷⁴ Eugenia Zena, “(Impossible) Women and Boko Haram: The Paradox of Female Support to Sharia Law,” E-International Relations, Feb. 2019.

³⁷⁵ Mia Bloom and Hilary Matfess, “Women as Symbols and Swords in Boko Haram’s Terror,” PRISM, Vol. 6 No. 1, March 1, 2016.

³⁷⁶ Eugenia Zena, “(Impossible) Women and Boko Haram.”

³⁷⁷ Eugenia Zena, “(Impossible) Women and Boko Haram.”

³⁷⁸ Moaveni, “What Would Make A Woman Go Back To Boko Haram? Despair.”

³⁷⁹ International Crisis Group, *Returning from the Land of Jihad: The Fate of Women Associated with Boko Haram*, report 275, May 21, 2019.

³⁸⁰ International Crisis Group, *Nigeria: Women and the Boko Haram Insurgency*, Report No. 242/AFRICA, Dec. 5, 2016, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/nigeria-women-and-boko-haram-insurgency>.

suspicion for their association with the group (which in many cases was not their choice), these women find it difficult to marry/re-marry and can be shunned by their own families.³⁸¹

Roles within the organization

One of the most important roles women play in Boko Haram is to bear children to perpetuate the group and expand its numbers. The group is also well known for kidnapping large numbers of girls and young women for this purpose, a topic we cover in the next section.

There have been especially deadly periods since Boko Haram began using violence to achieve its objectives, and the role of women has played a key part in some of the most notorious periods in the group's short history.

Boko Haram has made significant use of female suicide bombers compared to other terrorist organizations and the topic has been well studied. Just in 2015, for example, there were more female suicide bombers acting on behalf of Boko Haram than any other terrorist organization in history up to that point.³⁸² Unlike other extremist groups who have found willing women to carry out suicide attacks, Boko Haram has relied heavily on coercion as the primary method to employ women in this manner. The targets of female suicide attacks are "soft" (i.e., markets, mosques, and other gathering places in urban settings).³⁸³ One key difference with other terrorist groups, however, is that Boko Haram does not use its female suicide bombers as propaganda tools to promote the group's tolerance of women.³⁸⁴ This may be indicative of either its rejection of even the notion of gender equality (and therefore the desire to hide instances of women in operational roles); or a tacit acknowledgement of the fact that most female suicide bombers did not decide to participate of their own free will.

In addition to serving as suicide bombers, there are examples of women being trained to take up arms in support of Boko Haram as fighters. It appears that this occurred less frequently than instances of female suicide bombers, and there are similar questions as to women's willingness to participate in operations. There is evidence that Boko Haram teaches some of its female recruits how to carry out attacks, but we lack a full understanding of the process.³⁸⁵ In some

³⁸¹ International Crisis Group, *Returning from the Land of Jihad*.

³⁸² "An unprecedented use of female suicide bombers," STRATFOR, Oct. 23, 2015.

³⁸³ Mia Bloom and Hilary Matfess, "Women as Symbols and Swords."

³⁸⁴ Elizabeth Pearson, "Boko Haram Beyond the Headlines: Analyses of Africa's Enduring Insurgency," West Point Combatting Terrorism Center, May 2018, 42-43.

³⁸⁵ Amnesty International, "Nigeria: Abducted women and girls forced to join Boko Haram attacks," Apr. 14, 2015.

cases this training has been put to use. In August 2013, two women were arrested after hiding rifles in their clothing.³⁸⁶ Female operatives in Boko Haram have a gendered advantage: they are less likely than men to draw the attention of the security forces. This may allow them to access heavily fortified areas, enabling the group to more efficiently strike targets. As further evidence of the clear advantage women have in this regard, there have been instances of male Boko Haram fighters dressing as women in attempts evade detection and access targets.³⁸⁷ One source estimates that by 2018, Boko Haram had sent out 454 women and girls to conduct operations on the group's behalf. Some succeeded and others were arrested, and the 232 incidents killed more than 1,200 people.³⁸⁸ However, as noted above, it is difficult to understand how frequently women are coerced into participation.

Women are not limited to operational roles. They have reportedly served as spies, couriers, and recruiters, alongside more violent roles such as suicide bombers.³⁸⁹ However, our understanding of the relative balance in women's responsibilities in the group is limited by a lack of data. We therefore cannot discern how often women serve these enabling functions as compared to serving as suicide bombers.

Violence against women

Boko Haram is notorious for its deliberate and brutal acts against women. The group repeatedly targets women in its violent attempts to delegitimize and overthrow Western-style governing institutions in northeastern Nigeria. The version of Islam that Boko Haram's leaders and members espouse advocates narrow gender roles.³⁹⁰ Still, Boko Haram does not maintain a ubiquitous policy on violence toward women. In some cases, it is thought to be conducted by more criminally driven (rather than ideologically driven) members, reflecting the fractious and heterogeneous nature of the group.³⁹¹ Violence against women is used as a tool to achieve a variety of objectives, including the destruction of families and community to enable population

³⁸⁶ Zenn and Pearson, "Women, gender, and the evolving tactics of Boko Haram."

³⁸⁷ Ibid.

³⁸⁸ Sherrie Russell-Brown, "Boko Haram's violence against women and girls demands justice," Council on Foreign Relations, Africa in Transition, May 11, 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/boko-harams-violence-against-women-and-girls-demands-justice>. Although we know that there are some female combatants, there are no known organized units of female fighters like those seen in other African insurgencies; International Crisis Group, Nigeria: Women and the Boko Haram Insurgency.

³⁸⁹ International Crisis Group, *Nigeria: Women and the Boko Haram Insurgency*.

³⁹⁰ Zenn and Pearson, "Women, gender, and the evolving tactics of Boko Haram."

³⁹¹ Zenn and Pearson, "Women, gender, and the evolving tactics of Boko Haram."

control.³⁹² Such violence is not exclusively physical: Boko Haram also employs psychological violence, especially against young, impressionable women and girls, to encourage loyalty.³⁹³

Perhaps the most widely known instance of Boko Haram's targeting of females occurred in April 2014, when the group kidnapped 276 female students from the village of Chibok in Borno state. Prior to the attack, many schools had closed due to Boko Haram's constant targeting of educational institutions that do not conform to its Islamic interpretations. The school in Chibok had opened briefly to allow students to take final exams. Militants pushed into the town and eventually overwhelmed the small number of guards at the school. The extremist group carried off hundreds of young female students at gunpoint, driving them deep into the forest, where Boko Haram can operate more freely.

During their captivity, the young women have been forced to study the Quran, have been victims of sexual violence, and have been forced into marriages with insurgents.³⁹⁴ Captured women are often forced to care for Boko Haram members, cooking and cleaning.³⁹⁵ Few women escape captivity with Boko Haram. In 2016, militant leader Shekau released 21 girls, but the vast majority remain with Boko Haram.³⁹⁶

³⁹² Mia Bloom and Hilary Matfess, "Women as Symbols and Swords."

³⁹³ Mia Bloom and Hilary Matfess, "Women as Symbols and Swords."

³⁹⁴ Hilary Matfess, "Boko Haram's Campaign Against Women and Girls," *Futures without Violence*, May 2017.

³⁹⁵ Zenn and Pearson, "Women, gender, and the evolving tactics of Boko Haram."

³⁹⁶ International Crisis Group, *Nigeria: Women and the Boko Haram Insurgency*.

Figure 10. Betty Abah poses after an event to mark the first anniversary of the kidnapping of more than 200 schoolgirls in northeastern Nigeria



Source: CEE-HOPE NIGERIA, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:CEE-HOPE_NIGERIA_FOR_WIKI_LOVES_WOMEN%22S_PROJECT_IN_NIGERIA_21.jpg, [14 April 2015]

The mass kidnapping prompted worldwide backlash against the group, including a social media campaign under the banner “Bring Back Our Girls” that gained attention and support from prominent leaders around the world. With support from partners, Nigerian forces launched a large-scale effort in February 2015 to counter Boko Haram, successfully displacing many enclaves and rescuing hundreds of hostages.³⁹⁷

As discussed earlier, Boko Haram opposes Western education generally, and especially the education of women and girls. The group also retaliated against the Nigerian government’s practice starting in 2011–2012 of detaining the family members of militants to put pressure

³⁹⁷ National Counterterrorism Center, “Boko Haram,” Counterterrorism Guide, https://dni.gov/nctc/groups/boko_haram.html.

on them to surrender or negotiate. Victims often included women and girls.³⁹⁸ In response, Boko Haram began capturing government officials and their families, especially in Borno state. In exchange for their release and return, Boko Haram made demands of the Nigerian government, including the release of family members the government was holding.³⁹⁹ Women on both sides in these activities are thought to be largely nonparticipants in operations. In fact, many on the side of Boko Haram usually do not know that their family members are involved with the group.⁴⁰⁰

Gender-based violence against Christian women living in Nigeria's northern areas is common. Some research even suggests that Christian women and children account for almost half (45 percent) of Boko Haram attacks.⁴⁰¹ Muslim women may be spared, even when Boko Haram attacks Muslims. In 2013, an attack on college students ended in the death of all male students but the sparing of female students. Likewise, kidnapping victims are often treated differently according to their religious affiliation. Boko Haram has also been known to force conversion of Christian women and integrate them into the group's culture.

³⁹⁸ Elizabeth Pearson and Jacob Zenn, "How Nigerian police also detained women and children as weapon of war," *The Guardian*, May 6, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/06/how-nigerian-police-also-detained-women-and-children-as-weapon-of-war>.

³⁹⁹ Zenn and Pearson, "Women, gender, and the evolving tactics of Boko Haram."

⁴⁰⁰ Zenn and Pearson, "Women, gender, and the evolving tactics of Boko Haram."

⁴⁰¹ Zenn and Pearson, "Women, gender, and the evolving tactics of Boko Haram."

Appendix H: Islamic State of Iraq and Syria

Overview

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS, also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham) is an international Salafist jihadi terrorist movement with a complex organizational history. As one scholar noted, the movement has passed through four distinct phases: it originated with Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's Al Qaeda in Iraq (2002–2006), survived a period of relative decline as the Islamic State of Iraq (2006–2013); began a rebirth as ISIS under the leadership of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (2013–2014), and reached its most powerful incarnation as the Islamic State (2014–present).⁴⁰²

The most recent information available suggests that the leadership structure of the organization is relatively straightforward. Following the 2019 death of al-Baghdadi, a new caliph—Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurashi—assumed control of the organization. Underneath the caliph, “there are two high-level committees: a five-member Shura (Consultative) Council...and a five-member Delegated Committee (the highest executive body).”⁴⁰³ Every member of the Delegated Committee is also “in charge of a portfolio (security, safe houses, religious affairs, media, and funding).”⁴⁰⁴ ISIS-controlled areas (while greatly diminished, as discussed below) are organized into 14 *wilayat* (states), five ministries, and a department that handles “immigration and administration of the remote *wilayat*.”⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰² Cole Bunzel, *From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State*. Center for Middle East Policy at Brookings. June 2016, 19, <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/the-ideology-of-the-islamic-state.pdf>. The organization is also sometimes referred to as ISIL (translated as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) or Daesh (its Arabic-language acronym). Moreover, though it is now officially called the Islamic State (IS), this case study will follow the convention of the US government in referring to the group as ISIS.

⁴⁰³ Husham Al-Hashimi, “ISIS 2020: New Structures and Leaders in Iraq Revealed,” Center for Global Policy, May 19, 2020, <https://cgpolicy.org/articles/isis-2020-new-structures-and-leaders-in-iraq-revealed/>.

⁴⁰⁴ Al-Hashimi, “ISIS 2020.”

⁴⁰⁵ Al-Hashimi, “ISIS 2020.”

The goals of the movement have remained relatively consistent over the course of its existence, with its primary focus being the establishment of an Islamic state, or caliphate.⁴⁰⁶ When ISIS began to lose territory in Syria and Iraq—declining from a 2014 peak of more than 100,000 square kilometers, home to almost 12 million individuals—it evolved into a more conventional international terrorist movement and began to focus on recruiting and training individuals who could execute attacks outside the Middle East (with a particular focus on Europe and the United States).⁴⁰⁷ Beyond Iraq and Syria, ISIS (or those who considered themselves inspired by the movement) mounted major lethal operations in Egypt, Yemen, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Turkey, France, and the United States.⁴⁰⁸

Role of women and gender

Although ISIS' political, ideological, and theological commitments are extensive, those that are critical for understanding its engagement with women and gender are rooted in its "extremist and minoritarian reading of Islamic scripture that is also textually rigorous, deeply rooted in a premodern theological tradition, and extensively elaborated by a recognized cadre of religious authorities."⁴⁰⁹ In this sense, it is markedly distinct from al-Qaeda. As one scholar argued, "If jihadism were to be placed on a political spectrum, al-Qaeda would be its left and the Islamic State its right."⁴¹⁰ In other words, ISIS adheres to an exceptionally conservative interpretation

⁴⁰⁶ For more on ISIS' state-building agenda, see Shadi Hamid, "What America Never Understood About ISIS," Brookings Institution, Nov. 1, 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/11/01/what-america-never-understood-about-isis/>.

⁴⁰⁷ Seth G. Jones, James Dobbins, Daniel Byman, Christopher S. Chivvis, Ben Connable, et al., *Rolling Back the Islamic State*, RAND Research Report RR1912, 2017, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1900/RR1912/RAND_RR1912.pdf. At the height of its power and reach, ISIS "held about a third of Syria and 40 percent of Iraq. By December 2017, it had lost 95 percent of its territory," including prizes such as Mosul, Iraq's second largest city; "Timeline: The Rise, Spread and Fall of the Islamic State," Wilson International Center for Scholars, Oct. 28, 2019, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/timeline-the-rise-spread-and-fall-the-islamic-state>.

⁴⁰⁸ For a list of key ISIS attacks, see "The Islamic State," Center for International Security and Cooperation, Stanford University, last updated 2019, https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/islamic-state#text_block_12420.

⁴⁰⁹ Bunzel, *From Paper State to Caliphate*.

⁴¹⁰ Bunzel, *From Paper State to Caliphate*.

of Islam that tightly constrains the roles women might play within the organization *and* that demands “‘true’ Muslims...dissociate from anyone not fitting this narrow definition.”⁴¹¹

Given these ideological commitments, it is perhaps not surprising that the gender composition among the movement’s known leadership is entirely male. Demographics among the broader membership are more complicated. In early 2020, it was estimated that ISIS had “between 3,500 and 4,000 active fighters and 8,000 inactive ones spread across 11 regional sectors in Iraq.”⁴¹² This number represented a considerable decline from 2019 estimates suggesting that approximately 52,000 “international citizens” had joined the movement, but it also didn’t include civilians, women, or minors.⁴¹³ The 2019 study, by contrast, suggested that nearly 7,000 of the 52,000 “international citizens” (i.e., 13 percent) were women.⁴¹⁴ Other studies suggest a similar pattern:

At least 10 percent of all FTFs [foreign terrorist fighters] who traveled from outside of Iraq and Syria to Syria are estimated to have been women, and from some countries these numbers rose to between 30 to 40 percent females. For instance, 36 percent of FTFs from France and up to 40 percent of FTFs from the Netherlands were women. Outside of Europe, about 12 percent of Tunisian FTFs, 15 percent of Australian FTFs, and 17 percent of Moroccan FTFs were women.⁴¹⁵

Recruitment

Many of the studies on ISIS’ recruitment of women focus on Western women and not on the starkly different experiences and choices that face women living in areas that ISIS controls and/or has access to on a regular basis. Yet these analyses of Western recruits—whether having made the decision to join ISIS involved travel to its physical instantiation or committing an attack in a Western nation—suggest that the factors compelling women to join are similar to those that compel men to join. There are important differences that one study explored by

⁴¹¹ Bunzel, *From Paper State to Caliphate*.

⁴¹² Al-Hashimi, “ISIS 2020.”

⁴¹³ Jack McGinn. “*Female Radicalisation: Why do Women join ISIS?*” LSE Blog, London School of Economics and Political Science, Aug. 15, 2019. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mec/2019/08/15/female-radicalisation-why-do-women-join-isis/>.

⁴¹⁴ McGinn, “*Female Radicalisation*.”

⁴¹⁵ Anne Speckhard and Molly Ellenberg. “How Men and Women Were Drawn to the Hyper-Gendered ISIS Caliphate.” *Homeland Security Today*. August 31, 2020. <https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/counterterrorism/perspective-how-men-and-women-were-drawn-to-the-hyper-gendered-isis-caliphate/>.

splitting “push” factors (i.e., driving women from their preexisting environments) from “pull” factors (i.e., compelling women to join ISIS as opposed to another group):

The major *push factors* we have tracked that prime Western females to migrate to ISIS-controlled territory are often similar, if not the same, as their male counterparts...[and] include: feeling isolated socially and/or culturally...feeling that the international Muslim community as a whole is being violently persecuted...[and feeling] an anger, sadness, and/or frustration over a perceived lack of international action in response to this persecution.⁴¹⁶

By contrast, while the pull factors had “some major similarities” to those for men, the “narratives and propaganda defining these pull factors tend to differ greatly due to the drastic differences in roles men and women play once inside ISIS-controlled territory.”⁴¹⁷ Thus while men might be pulled by the allure of fighting, women were pulled by factors including “idealistic goals of religious duty and building a utopian ‘Caliphate state’...belonging and sisterhood...[and] romanticisation of the experience.”⁴¹⁸ Another analysis argued that ISIS’ “official propaganda and unofficial proselytizers” emphasized four themes in pulling women to the organization: empowerment, deliverance, participation, and piety.⁴¹⁹ Importantly, although religion has most frequently been identified by women recruits as the most important factor driving their decision-making, research suggests that “by itself it is not sufficient to explain the willingness of Western-educated Muslim women to move to the ‘Caliphate’ and to join ISIS.”⁴²⁰

Much of the analysis on the recruitment of women into ISIS has focused on the phenomenon of the so-called jihadi brides. Recruitment materials targeting potential jihadi brides has been described as presenting “highly glorified” images of romance and marriage that offer the promise of “meaningful romance.”⁴²¹ In these narratives, which often emphasize the domestic lives of already-recruited jihadi brides, potential recruits are regaled with the important and critical roles they will serve as “wives of ISIS’ fighters and mothers of a new generation of

⁴¹⁶ Erin Marie Saltman and Melanie Smith. *‘Till Martyrdom Do Us Part’ Gender and the ISIS Phenomenon*. Institute for Strategic Dialogue 2015.

⁴¹⁷ Saltman and Smith. *‘Till Martyrdom Do Us Part’*

⁴¹⁸ Saltman and Smith. *‘Till Martyrdom Do Us Part’*

⁴¹⁹ Haras Rafiq and Nikita Malik, “Caliphettes: Women and the Appeal of Islamic State,” Quilliam Foundation (2015).

⁴²⁰ Anita Perešin, “Fatal Attraction: Western Muslimas and ISIS,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9, no. 3 (June 2015): 21–38.

⁴²¹ Saltman and Smith. *‘Till Martyrdom Do Us Part’*

jihadists.”⁴²² This narrative highlights the goal of “finding a brave and strong husband, but also propagandizes the notion that supporting a jihadist husband and taking on the ISIS ideology is [an] empowering role for females.”⁴²³ In such a framework, it is the “*purpose of marriage*” that functions as a major recruiting tool.⁴²⁴

But while marriage motivations are important, focusing too narrowly on them poses analytical risks, such as overlooking the nuanced multiplicity of motivations that drive women to join ISIS. As one study asserted, “the assumption that females join ISIS primarily to become ‘jihadi brides’ is reductionist and, above all, incorrect.”⁴²⁵ In fact, the landscape of motivation is much more complex and includes a multitude of complementary concerns, such as escaping sexual abuse, cultural alienation, rejection of Western gender roles, and the desire for a “safe space” in which to practice their form of Islam. These concerns are discussed in turn below.

Escape from sexual abuse

Some women have been drawn to ISIS because it “offered a vision of protection for females by enforcing strict gender separation and claiming to protect women’s honor.”⁴²⁶ This framework was especially appealing to women who had experienced sexual assault or abuse, with one Canadian recruit claiming that she was “desperate to regain her honor and feel protected by a faithful Islamic husband whom she expected to treat her with respect versus abuse.”⁴²⁷ An ISIS recruiter played to this vulnerability, promising her that the group would eventually find her former abuser and restore both her and her children’s honor. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the promise was an empty one: her ISIS husband was also abusive.⁴²⁸

Cultural alienation

Some recruits have perceived ISIS as a solution to a conflict they feel in navigating the traditional values articulated by their families and the liberal values articulated by their friends. ISIS, for these women, represents “a third path, which offers them a sense of belonging

⁴²² Perešin, “Fatal Attraction: Western Muslimas and ISIS.”

⁴²³ Saltman and Smith. *‘Till Martyrdom Do Us Part’*

⁴²⁴ Saltman and Smith. *‘Till Martyrdom Do Us Part’*

⁴²⁵ Saltman and Smith. *‘Till Martyrdom Do Us Part’*

⁴²⁶ Speckhard and Ellenberg. “How Men and Women Were Drawn to the Hyper-Gendered ISIS Caliphate.”

⁴²⁷ Speckhard and Ellenberg. “How Men and Women Were Drawn to the Hyper-Gendered ISIS Caliphate.”

⁴²⁸ Speckhard and Ellenberg. “How Men and Women Were Drawn to the Hyper-Gendered ISIS Caliphate.”

to a global cause, as well as stability and acceptance within a group, which they previously lacked.”⁴²⁹ A rejection of Western gender roles explains the following:

A subset of women are likely attracted to ISIS because they desire to “challenge modern Western-imposed gender norms, and furthermore emphasize their rejection of ‘Western feminism.’”⁴³⁰ For these women, ISIS represents an opportunity to “live Islamic lives without the restrictions of Western laws” and norms.⁴³¹ In fact, ISIS has “used gender stereotypes and conservative Islamic ideals about modesty and familial roles to attract both men and women into the group.”⁴³² It has, in this sense, “presented itself as a bastion of traditional gender roles, a stark contrast to the liberal democracies of the West.”⁴³³

Search for a religious “safe haven”

Related to but somewhat distinct from a rejection of Western gender roles is the desire of some women to find a place that they perceive to be a “safe haven for those who wish to fully embrace and protect Islam.”⁴³⁴ These women experience the West to be a place “where conservative Muslim men and women may feel alienated if not outright harassed for overt displays of religiosity, such as dressing in conservative Islamic clothing and for men growing Islamic-conforming beards.”⁴³⁵ Recruiters targeting this vulnerability “talk about the failings of Western societies, speak negatively about restrictions on how they can practice Islam (for example, the ban on wearing the *burqa* in France), and criticize the political system.”⁴³⁶

Analysts have identified a number of other motivating factors—many of which are shared by recruits in other nonstate armed groups (including violent non-jihadist formations). These include but are not limited to the following: escaping boredom; the desire to be part of a world-shaping movement; the allure of doing something meaningful with their lives; the hope of finding a “real man, a fighter” or “a heroic figure willing to sacrifice himself for a cause”; the promise of housing and a stipend; the desire to defend Islam and/or to participate in a humanitarian effort to help Muslims under attack; and the need to experience feelings such as

⁴²⁹ Perešin, “Fatal Attraction: Western Muslimas and ISIS.”

⁴³⁰ McGinn, “*Female Radicalisation*.”

⁴³¹ McGinn, “*Female Radicalisation*.”

⁴³² Speckhard and Ellenberg. “How Men and Women Were Drawn to the Hyper-Gendered ISIS Caliphate.”

⁴³³ Speckhard and Ellenberg. “How Men and Women Were Drawn to the Hyper-Gendered ISIS Caliphate.”

⁴³⁴ Saltman and Smith. *‘Till Martyrdom Do Us Part’*

⁴³⁵ Speckhard and Ellenberg. “How Men and Women Were Drawn to the Hyper-Gendered ISIS Caliphate.”

⁴³⁶ Perešin, “Fatal Attraction: Western Muslimas and ISIS.”

“adventure, alienation, dissatisfaction with their lives, searching for alternatives, romantic disappointments, adolescent rebellion, or other forms of discontent.”⁴³⁷

Notably, some of these motivations also appear to be linked to the radicalization of non-Western women. A 2015 manifesto for non-Western women began “with a lengthy rebuttal of the ills of Western civilization and Westernization, how they have resulted in the injustices felt by Muslims across the world today” before moving “almost seamlessly, into an angry response to feminism, the ‘Western program for women’” and then into the “central argument that the manifesto is seeking to convey, that the role of women is inherently ‘sedentary,’ and that her responsibilities lie first and foremost in the house, except in a handful of narrowly defined circumstances.”⁴³⁸ In short, there is no single narrative driving ISIS’ radicalization of women; by contrast, women have cited an almost unbelievably broad array of reasons for their recruitment and radicalization.

As a final note, the number of deradicalized women is far smaller; consequently, there have been fewer studies on the topic. Yet research suggests that a primary mover in this area is disillusionment concerning the treatment of women.⁴³⁹ Women interviewed by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue also cited “concerns over the role of females, specifically frustrations over being banned from military combat and emotional strains of becoming a widow at a young age, to physical descriptions of failing infrastructure and harsh environments,” though it wasn’t clear if these frustrations were linked to the decision to leave the group.⁴⁴⁰

Roles within the organization

Perhaps unsurprisingly, there is no single profile that captures the standard role that a woman might play within ISIS.⁴⁴¹ The image that ISIS sells in its propaganda—of the content housewife

⁴³⁷ Perešin, “Fatal Attraction: Western Muslimas and ISIS.”

⁴³⁸ “Synopsis,” in “Women of the Islamic State: A Manifesto on Women by the Al-Khanssaa Brigade,” translated by Charlie Winter, Quilliam Foundation, Feb. 2015.

⁴³⁹ Speckhard and Ellenberg. “How Men and Women Were Drawn to the Hyper-Gendered ISIS Caliphate.”

⁴⁴⁰ Perešin, “Fatal Attraction: Western Muslimas and ISIS.”

⁴⁴¹ Throughout this report, we distinguish between what a group does rhetorically and what a group does on the ground. This distinction is particularly important for our analysis of ISIS because of the abundance of speculative literature about the roles women play in the group. Although this literature is valuable for understanding possible future trends, it often draws heavily on speculation or assumptions that have limited verifiable data. For example, we did not include ISIS’s call for women to defend the caliphate as evidence of female fighters because this request was rhetorical and was not reflected in a verifiable change of women’s

and jihadi bride—is rhetorically dominant but demographically rare. In fact, the roles that women play within ISIS are far more diverse than a cursory review of the research suggests. These include slaves; wives and mothers; recruiters; morality police; and to a limited degree, fighters. These roles are discussed in turn below.

Slaves

Not all of the roles that women filled within ISIS were voluntary, and the sexual enslavement of Yazidi women fits firmly into the involuntary category. As analysis shows, though, “gender was the strongest factor that determined the slavery circumstances” of captured Yazidi individuals.⁴⁴² Men were overwhelmingly executed (in some cases even if they had accepted the “offer” of converting), and young boys were sent to training camps for indoctrination. Women, by contrast, “endured conditions of slavery that were so systematically brutal some committed suicide rather than continue to be held captive.”⁴⁴³ While some older women were executed, most were “divided in anticipation of three uses: being sold in markets, given as ‘gifts’ to Islamic State fighters, and held in ‘rest houses’ for fighters,...where they were faced with the threat of execution for refusing sex...[and] their bodies were regulated with forced abortions and birth control.”⁴⁴⁴

Wives and mothers

As with recruitment, the narrative surrounding marriage is the dominant one in discourses on the roles that women play in ISIS. ISIS media organizations have shared information on the path to being “good wives of jihad,” which has included information on “how to sew and cook ‘fast and easy recipes’ from the ISIS recipe book—food that can be served to fighters at any time but especially during breaks in battles and with the necessary nutrients and calories to enhance the power and strength of fighters.”⁴⁴⁵ As one woman in ISIS notes, “The main role of the *muhajirah* here is to support her husband and his jihad and [God willing] to increase the

activities. We recognize, therefore, the possibility that not all facets of women’s *assumed* roles are included in this chapter, but rather only those roles that we could verify and triangulate using unclassified data collection.

⁴⁴² Nadia Al-Dayel and Andrew Mumford. “ISIS and Their Use of Slavery.” International Centre for Counter-Terrorism - The Hague, Jan. 27, 2020. <https://icct.nl/publication/isis-and-their-use-of-slavery/>.

⁴⁴³ Al-Dayel and Mumford. “ISIS and Their Use of Slavery.”

⁴⁴⁴ Al-Dayel and Mumford. “ISIS and Their Use of Slavery.”

⁴⁴⁵ Perešin, “Fatal Attraction: Western Muslimas and ISIS”

ummah.”⁴⁴⁶ A 2015 manifesto affiliated with al Khansa Brigade (an all-female ISIS unit) also suggested: “Women have this Heavenly secret in sedentariness, stillness, and stability, and men its opposite, movement and flux, that which is the nature of man, created in him. If roles are mixed and positions overlap, humanity is thrown into a state of flux and instability.”⁴⁴⁷ It went on to argue that women struggled to find fulfillment in domestic spaces because they were not being “presented with a true picture of man” and because there had been a “rise in the number of emasculated men who do not shoulder the responsibility allocated to them toward their *ummah*, religion or people, and not even toward their houses or their sons, who are being supported by their wives.”⁴⁴⁸ In other words, ISIS narratives about women’s roles were explicitly linked to ISIS narratives about gender roles for *both men and women*.

Recruiters

Women have long been active recruiters for ISIS; the UN reports that the benefits of such work include “receiving between \$2,000 and \$10,000 for each person they recruit” as well as “a reprieve from the reality of life under ISIS” as a result of special privileges such as access to the internet.⁴⁴⁹ Moreover, not all of the women recruiting for ISIS are focused on finding new jihadi brides. Rachid Kassim, as one example, was accused of “coach[ing] and recruit[ing]” a group of women hoping to bomb Notre Dame Cathedral in 2016.⁴⁵⁰

Morality police

ISIS has two all-female and armed brigades—al Al-Khansaa and Umm al-Rayan—that are responsible for the enforcement of the movement’s morality laws. Members of these groups “accompany male fighters at checkpoints and on home raids to search women, look for male fighters who might have concealed their identities under a veil or *niqab*, and enforce ISIS’ strict rules of dress and morality for other women.”⁴⁵¹ Analysts have suggested that the primary role of these all-female brigades is to ensure ISIS’ control by creating an environment of endemic

⁴⁴⁶ Perešin, “Fatal Attraction: Western Muslimas and ISIS.”

⁴⁴⁷ “Women in the Islamic State: A manifesto on women by the Al-Khansaa Brigade,” translated by Charlie Winter, Quilliam Foundation (2015).

⁴⁴⁸ “Women in the Islamic State: A manifesto on women by the Al-Khansaa Brigade,” translated by Charlie Winter, Quilliam Foundation (2015).

⁴⁴⁹ *ISIS’s Persecution of Women*. Counter Extremism Project. July 2017.

https://www.counterextremism.com/sites/default/files/ISIS%20Persecution%20of%20Women_071117.pdf

⁴⁵⁰ *ISIS’s Persecution of Women*.

⁴⁵¹ Perešin, “Fatal Attraction: Western Muslimas and ISIS.”

fear that produces nearly blind obedience. As one study noted: “ISIS needs support from the population and sees women as an important ‘means of ruling and controlling civilians.’ ISIS wanted women to fill these roles instead of men, because women could help ISIS control civilian populations in ways that men could not.”⁴⁵²

Fighters

Women have not taken on significant roles as fighters within ISIS, but there is evidence that some have served in “limited fighting roles, including snipers and suicide bombers.”⁴⁵³ Women suicide bombers are, as one analysis notes, a particularly interesting case for ISIS, as “the use of women in suicide missions...avoids the unwanted women's empowerment that would result from their militant acts, as in the same moment they engage in fighting they also die and disappear from the scene.”⁴⁵⁴ Beyond this one example, there is evidence that the movement's position on female fighters has evolved.⁴⁵⁵ A 2015 manifesto affiliated with al Khansa Brigade (an all-female ISIS unit) conceded that in rare instances women might take up arms; specifically, this could occur “if the enemy is attacking her country, the men are not enough to protect it, and the *ulama* have given a *fatwa* for it.”⁴⁵⁶ The manifesto thus created space for the eventual arming of women, but argued that the conditions outlined had not yet been fulfilled.

Similarly, a 2016 issue of ISIS's Arabic-language newspaper claimed that “jihad is not, as a rule, an obligation for women, but let the female Muslim know as well that if the enemy enters her abode, jihad is just as necessary for her as it is for the man, and [that] she should repel him by whatever means possible.”⁴⁵⁷ By 2017, though, the rhetoric was changing: An article in one of ISIS's Arabic-language newspapers was titled “The Obligation on Women to Engage in Jihad Against the Enemies,” and in 2018 ISIS released an English-language video titled “Inside the Caliphate,” “purportedly showing women, covered from head to toe, shooting guns and

⁴⁵² Perešin, “Fatal Attraction: Western Muslimas and ISIS.”

⁴⁵³ Speckhard and Ellenberg. “How Men and Women Were Drawn to the Hyper-Gendered ISIS Caliphate.”

⁴⁵⁴ Anita Peresin and Alberto Cervone. “The Western Muhajirat of ISIS.” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 38, no. 7 (2015): 495-509.

⁴⁵⁵ Speckhard and Ellenberg. “How Men and Women Were Drawn to the Hyper-Gendered ISIS Caliphate.”

⁴⁵⁶ Audrey Alexander, *Perspectives on the Future of Women, Gender, & Violent Extremism*, George Washington University Program on Extremism, Feb. 2019, <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Perspectives%20on%20the%20Future%20of%20Women%2C%20Gender%20and%20Violent%20Extremism.pdf>.

⁴⁵⁷ Alexander, *Perspectives on the Future of Women*.

preparing for battle.” Critically, analysts have noted that the shift in rhetoric has not been matched by a similar shift in behaviors.⁴⁵⁸

Women who have participated in Western attacks on behalf of ISIS may appear to be an exception to this trend, but the relationship between these women and the organization more broadly is unclear. Such fighters—including Tashfeen Malik (who perpetrated the attack in San Bernadino, California with her husband)—have overwhelmingly and notably not been described as soldiers by the group after the attacks. This rhetorical lacuna, however, “has not stopped women attempting terror plots, including Hasna Ait Boulahcen, a member of the Paris cell who died in a raid targeting ringleader Abdelhamid Abaaoud...[or a] group of women [who] have been charged with mounting what is thought to be Britain’s first all-female terror plot.”⁴⁵⁹

In addition to the roles discussed above, there are a number of other positions held by ISIS women, although the degree of female involvement appears to be relatively low. Women have been engaged as couriers and fundraisers (this is true even today, as European women appear to be leading the effort to raise funds to smuggle women from prison camps in Syria⁴⁶⁰); they have worked as teachers and in medicine; women have maintained ISIS safe houses;⁴⁶¹ they have enforced ISIS’s religious morality laws; and (more passively) appearing in propaganda as victims of violence in an effort to galvanize ISIS’s men to action.⁴⁶² There has also been speculation that, “with the losses that ISIS is experiencing, women will soon be given some new

⁴⁵⁸ Some work suggests that women in ISIS have assumed more active roles in Syria. One report, for instance, suggests that ISIS has five all-female battalions of operatives, three of which are operational and engaged in activities including surveillance, intelligence collection, and assassinations. (Notably, none of the five are thought to be actively engaged in combat.) If this is accurate, it represents an important evolution in the roles that women play in ISIS. We were unable to find an independent source to confirm this data source, and therefore do not include it in this report’s analysis. For more information, see: Assad H. Almohammad and Anne Speckhard, “The Operational Ranks and Roles of Female ISIS Operatives: From Assassins and Morality Police to Spies and Suicide Bombers,” *International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism* 23 (2017).

⁴⁵⁹ Lizzie Dearden, “Isis calls on women to fight and launch terror attacks for first time,” *Independent*, Oct. 6, 2017. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/isis-war-syria-iraq-women-call-arms-islamic-state-terror-attacks-propaganda-change-ban-frontline-a7986986.html>.

⁴⁶⁰ Anne Speckhard, Mona Thakkar and Molly Ellenberg, “Social Media Tracking of ISIS Women and Real-Life Actions of ISIS Men on Their Behalf,” *Homeland Security Today*, Sept. 7, 2020. <https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/counterterrorism/social-media-tracking-of-isis-women-and-real-life-actions-of-isis-men-on-their-behalf/>.

⁴⁶¹ Combined Joint Task Force, Operation Inherent Resolve, “Defeating Daesh Highlights of the Week,” News release, Dec. 27, 2019, <https://www.inherentresolve.mil/Portals/14/Documents/Security%20Highlights/2019/12%20December/CJTF-OIR%20Press%20Release-20191227-01-Defeating%20Daesh%20Highlights.pdf?ver=2019-1228-031038-953>.

⁴⁶² Speckhard and Ellenberg, “How Men and Women Were Drawn to the Hyper-Gendered ISIS Caliphate.”

roles, such as gathering intelligence or even participating in military operations” outside the narrow parameters cited above.⁴⁶³

A final category of “roles” that women in ISIS have assumed is worth mentioning, but is less discrete than those explored above. It is perhaps the least expected and most contemporary: Recent analysis suggests that women have taken on critical leadership and enforcement roles in camps across Syria. In fact, in a series of September 2019 interviews with Women’s Protection Unit (YPJ) members, a research team learned that there were female ISIS enforcers in three Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) camps in Syria.⁴⁶⁴ According to the interviews, these women would “cruelly require former ISIS women to cover themselves and refrain from criticizing the group...[and] met out punishments in a series of escalations.”⁴⁶⁵ One individual noted: “They punish them first by delivering a written warning, then a knife, then kerosene in their tents, and then it varies what they do—burn their tents.” The women were apparently “afraid of no one and they believe that their ISIS male fighters, still on the loose, will be coming to their rescue and to reinstate the Caliphate.” As a result, they “instill fear in all, attacking guards and inmates alike, beating, biting, stabbing and setting fire to tents and killing.”

Their actions, critically, have neither been strictly violent nor strictly limited to former ISIS members. Those loyal to ISIS have apparently

worked to impose religious classes on all residents, set up a secret sharia court, and assert their dominance through a brutal regime of fanaticism and violence. Women who refused to comply have faced severe punishments. One Azerbaijani girl was murdered, allegedly for refusing to wear her *niqab*. A pregnant Indonesian woman was killed after she reached out to a Western media organization.⁴⁶⁶

According to reports, this has been made possible in part by “a group of trained women who have set up Islamic courts that can sentence camp members to death and who teach the Quran to girls and Islamic jurisdiction to the women. The only book they use is the Quran and their only philosophy is a radically distorted version of Islam.”⁴⁶⁷ According to various news

⁴⁶³ Perešin, “Fatal Attraction: Western Muslimas and ISIS.”

⁴⁶⁴ Anne Speckhard and Ardian Shajkovci, “SDF Needs Our Help Now as Another Woman in Camp Hol Killed by ISIS Enforcers,” International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism, Oct. 1, 2019. <https://www.icsve.org/sdf-needs-our-help-now-as-another-woman-in-camp-hol-killed-by-isis-enforcers/>.

⁴⁶⁵ Speckhard and Shajkovci. “SDF Needs Our Help”

⁴⁶⁶ Elena Pokalova, “Pay More Attention to the Women of ISIS,” *Defense One*, Oct. 31, 2019. <https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2019/10/pay-more-attention-women-isis/161012/>.

⁴⁶⁷ Natalia Sancha, “ISIS women impose their own caliphate in Syria’s Al Hol camp,” *El Pais*, Oct. 25, 2019, https://english.elpais.com/elpais/2019/10/25/inenglish/1571990542_345221.html.

agencies, in one case a riot “broke out when a group of female ISIS supporters ordered that several other women in the foreigners’ section of Al Hol Camp be given lashes for refusing to attend an informal Koranic studies class.”⁴⁶⁸ Prison guards have also allegedly been attacked with hammers, knives, and biting.

As one analyst noted, the women had “set up a mini Islamic State...in the Al Hol Camp...The group is headed by a woman, an emir, who sets down the rules on living arrangements and the dress code in the camp, receives information on the movements of guards, and decides what punishments to mete out.”⁴⁶⁹ The emir has apparently organized the women into four brigades, “which are divided according to nationality and assigned specific roles,” including those of controlling the camp, enforcing religious laws, collecting intelligence, and meting out punishments.⁴⁷⁰ Similarly, YPJ guards in Ain Issa Camp told ICSVE researchers “about a charismatic ISIS female enforcer who goes around preaching ISIS propaganda to the other women, telling them that the men are soon going to reinstate the Caliphate and return for them.”⁴⁷¹

According to reports, this “de-facto radical matriarchy...is radicalizing all the women held captive in the camp...[including] the nearly 40,000 minors who have never known a world outside the caliphate.”⁴⁷² Though it is not possible at present to identify the long-term implications of this shift, an empowered generation of ISIS women—raising their children in detention camps, and on occasion breaking out of those camps—has the potential to radically reshape the future of the movement. As one scholar noted, such a shift

would be consistent with the nascent “jihadi girl power subculture” that has been observed on the posts on social media of Western women sympathizing with ISIS and more compatible with the character of girls and women that make the courageous decision to move from a safe environment to a conflict area, but it could backfire for ISIS. The “sexual revolution” that would result from women's empowerment and military involvement, in fact, could undermine the jihadist ideology, founded on a patriarchal model of society and, as assumed by professor Nelly Lahoud, could “supplant jihad altogether.”⁴⁷³

⁴⁶⁸ Speckhard and Shajkovci. “SDF Needs Our Help”

⁴⁶⁹ Sancha. “ISIS women impose their own caliphate in Syria’s Al Hol camp.”

⁴⁷⁰ Sancha. “ISIS women impose their own caliphate in Syria’s Al Hol camp.”

⁴⁷¹ Speckhard and Shajkovci. “SDF Needs Our Help”

⁴⁷² Sancha. “ISIS women impose their own caliphate in Syria’s Al Hol camp.”

⁴⁷³ Peresin Cervone. “The Western Muhajirat of ISIS.”

Violence against women

ISIS's treatment of women—in terms of the rules that it requires women to follow and the punishments that it delivers for violations of these rules—is widely understood to be both harsh and in direct conflict with Western notions about women's agency and free will. According to one report, women in ISIS are "always entirely dressed in black,...are heavily controlled once they arrive, and their movement outside the home is restricted, especially for unmarried women....[They] are either given a home, if they are married, or settled in an all-female hostel, with a guaranteed monthly allowance, if they are single."⁴⁷⁴

These all-female hostels were by no means pleasant places. They were "small, dirty, and infested with vermin"; there was limited food; and because women could go outside only with a male family member, most time was spent indoors."⁴⁷⁵ The degree of control that ISIS showed to women outside of these "hostels" was similarly extensive; according to official administrative documents, "the limitations imposed upon the Islamic State's female members are myriad: for example, clothing must be 'baggy' and made of 'dense' material; it 'should not be decorated'; nor may it 'draw attention to' the wearer. The wearing of perfume is tantamount to behaving like a 'whore.' Traveling unaccompanied or being in the company of the opposite sex is strictly forbidden (this includes a nurse being in the presence of a doctor)."⁴⁷⁶

Transgressions of these rules can be extraordinarily harsh. ISIS' morality police "punished women who failed to comply with ISIS' strict dress code or rules regarding chaperones by flogging them and using metal teeth to bite them until they bled, sometimes even to death. Women accused of adultery were often stoned, even when evidence was lacking. The morality police also punished ISIS women's husbands for allowing any nonconforming behaviors by beating these husbands or leaving them to die while caged in frequently bombed areas."⁴⁷⁷ In other instances, they have been associated with "cruel punitive methods, such as the disfigurement of 15 women's faces with acid for not wearing a *niqab*, or the torture of a mother with a spiked clamp device for breastfeeding in public."⁴⁷⁸ Al Khansaa has been accused of beating a teen to death "for lifting her veil while going clothes shopping in Mosul" and for

⁴⁷⁴ Perešin, "Fatal Attraction: Western Muslimas and ISIS."

⁴⁷⁵ "Jihadist women, a threat not to be underestimated," Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service, Dec. 2017, <https://english.aivd.nl/publications/publications/2017/12/14/publication-jihadist-women-a-threat-not-to-be-underestimated>.

⁴⁷⁶ Rafiq and Malik, "Caliphettes: Women and the Appeal of Islamic State."

⁴⁷⁷ Speckhard and Ellenberg, "How Men and Women Were Drawn to the Hyper-Gendered ISIS Caliphate."

⁴⁷⁸ Perešin, "Fatal Attraction: Western Muslimas and ISIS."

arresting and torturing a woman who appeared in public “wearing a veil that al-Khansaa members deemed too transparent.”⁴⁷⁹

Importantly, not all of ISIS’s violence against women has been linked to these putatively legalistic and religious transgressions. In addition to the discussion of slavery above, ISIS has been accused of executing “hundreds of Muslim women and their relatives for refusing to marry ISIS fighters”; critically, according to ISIS, eligibility for marriage to an ISIS militant begins at the age of nine.⁴⁸⁰ Moreover, the group has supported these acts with scriptural interpretations that justify them. As one example, a 2014 ISIS publication “ruled that a man can rape a female slave even if she ‘hasn’t reached puberty,’ so long as she is ‘fit for intercourse.’”⁴⁸¹

Finally, while ISIS does articulate distinct rules for Muslim women and non-Muslim women in those vastly diminished areas under ISIS domination, it is important to be clear that all women are treated poorly.⁴⁸² Thus while non-Muslim women are subjected to practices like sexual slavery, it is Muslim women who are targeted and tortured by the morality police. This is just as much the case in ISIS populations currently found in detention camps as it was during the height of ISIS’ territorial conquest.

⁴⁷⁹ “ISIS’s Persecution of Women,” Counter Extremism Project, July 2017, https://www.counterextremism.com/sites/default/files/ISIS%20Persecution%20of%20Women_071117.pdf.

⁴⁸⁰ “ISIS’s Persecution of Women,” Counter Extremism Project.

⁴⁸¹ “ISIS’s Persecution of Women,” Counter Extremism Project.

⁴⁸² “ISIS’s Persecution of Women,” Counter Extremism Project.

Figure 11. San Bernardino killers Syed Farook and Tashfeen Malik in a security camera photo at Chicago's O'Hare Airport on July 27, 2014



Source: "DHS OFFICER BLOWS LID ON US 'SUBMISSION TO JIHAD'," *San Bernadino County Sun*, May 16, 2016. http://www.sbcounty.gov/Uploads/CAO/_NewsClips/Content/NewsClips_5-17-17.pdf.

Appendix I: Lord's Resistance Army

Overview

Several interrelated factors contributed to the emergence of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), including inequitable colonial and postcolonial treatment of people in northern and southern Uganda, significant disenfranchisement of specific ethnic groups, civil war, and uneven development and prosperity across the country.⁴⁸³ In the late 1980s, a lack of development in the north and the historical marginalization of the Acholi ethnic group led to the rise of many insurgent groups that sought to overthrow President Yoweri Museveni. The Lord's Resistance Army, formed by charismatic leader Joseph Kony in 1987, was one such insurgent group; it has carried out the longest and most violent Acholi insurgency in Uganda.

An Acholi from northern Uganda, Kony is a self-styled prophet, messiah, and spiritual medium whose involvement in a huge number of verifiable atrocities has generated a concerted international effort to capture or kill him. Born in the early 1960s in Odek, Kony was heavily influenced by Alice Auma (aka "Lakwena"), a mystic (referred to as a former prostitute and/or Kony's cousin in some reports) who formed the Holy Spirit Movement in the 1980s. The movement combined Acholi nationalism with mysticism, as Lakwena championed the Acholi people while promising immortality in the face of Ugandan bullets.⁴⁸⁴ Kony established the LRA ostensibly to reclaim the honor of the Acholi people and to establish a government based on a mixture of Acholi mysticism and the Ten Commandments.

Despite the alleged goal of championing the disenfranchised Acholi, Kony has taken very few concrete or practical steps to further this political agenda; on numerous occasions, he has failed to use negotiations advantageously to gain concessions from the Ugandan government. Rather, Kony has weaponized legitimate historical grievances of northern Ugandans as a pretext for carrying out civilian violence on a massive scale. By the early 2000s, Kony controlled an estimated 3,000 combatants, with tens of thousands of children and young people passing into LRA control via abductions.

The LRA gained international attention mainly because of the brutality of its tactics. In addition to massacring hundreds of people during each attack in the pre-2006 era, the LRA routinely maimed survivors by cutting off ears, lips, noses, and hands. The LRA uses abductions, often of

⁴⁸³ Pamela G. Faber, *Sources of Resilience in the Lord's Resistance Army*, CNA, DOP-2017-U-015265-Final, Apr. 2017.

⁴⁸⁴ Faber, *Sources of Resilience in the Lord's Resistance Army*.

children, to fill its ranks of soldiers, sex and conjugal slaves, and porters. The LRA abducted an estimated 54,000–75,000 people, including 25,000–38,000 children, between 1986 and 2006.⁴⁸⁵ Females were abducted at roughly half the rate as males.⁴⁸⁶ Military pressure led Kony to order the LRA to withdraw from Uganda in 2006. Since then, the LRA has been largely itinerant, operating in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the Central African Republic (CAR), Sudan, and South Sudan.⁴⁸⁷

Kony has routinely demonstrated suspicion of LRA commanders and has purged his own leadership, including commanders who had lived and fought with him for decades after being abducted as young boys. Dwindling battlefield successes in the past decade have led to numerous waves of high-level defections, causing LRA ranks to dwindle to an estimated 800 core combatants in 2008.

The LRA has been effectively degraded from a group that was once able to kill more than 100,000 people, abduct tens of thousands, and displace more than two million people in Uganda from 1987 to 2006, to one that currently comprises fewer than 150 core combatants operating in “survival mode” on the borders of the DRC, CAR, Sudan, and South Sudan. Although the ranks of LRA fighters are thin, many thousands of abductees are still forced to work in bush camps in various capacities. Even in its weakened state, however, it has proved resilient. Militants continue to abduct and kill civilians and are increasingly involved in cross-border smuggling and criminal networks. Despite persistent rumors of his ill health, Kony is assumed still to be alive and continues to evade capture.

⁴⁸⁵ Phuong N. Pham, Patrick Vinck, and Eric Stover, “The Lord’s Resistance Army and Forced Conscription in Northern Uganda,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (May 2008): 404–411; Roberta Russo, “UNHCR takes on new role protecting Ugandans displaced by civil war,” UNHCR, May 2006, <https://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2006/5/4471d1fa4/unhcr-takes-new-role-protecting-ugandans-displaced-civil-war.html>; Marc Ellison, “Female child soldiers with the Lord’s Resistance Army struggle to return to normal,” *Toronto Star*, May 2012, https://www.thestar.com/news/world/2012/05/19/female_child_soldiers_with_the_lords_resistance_army_struggle_to_return_to_normal.html.

⁴⁸⁶ Jeannie Annan, Christopher Blattman, Dyan Mazurana, and Khristopher Carlson, “Women and Girls at War: ‘Wives,’ Mothers, and Fighters in the Lord’s Resistance Army,” HiCN Working Papers 63, Households in Conflict Network, 2009, <https://ideas.repec.org/p/hic/wpaper/63.html>.

⁴⁸⁷ United Nations. “Lord’s Resistance Army” United Nations Security Council, Mar. 7, 2016. <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/2127/materials/summaries/entity/lord%E2%80%99s-resistance-army>.

Role of women and gender

All senior LRA leaders are men and are subordinate to Joseph Kony.⁴⁸⁸ Kony is estimated to be 58–59 years old. Some LRA commanders were abducted as young children and have lived the majority of their lives within the group. Information gathered at reception centers for LRA returnees offers the most comprehensive picture of the demographic composition of the LRA's rank and file. Most LRA returnees were 13–18 years old (37 percent) and 19–30 years old (24 percent). Twenty-four percent of the former abductees were female and 76 percent were male. The mean age of females was 16 years old (SD=7.0), with a median age of 15.⁴⁸⁹

Recruitment

Women and girls enter the LRA exclusively through abduction. There are several methods in how the LRA abducted women and girls. Women and girls have been abducted while walking to and from school,⁴⁹⁰ while at school,⁴⁹¹ walking to and from their homes for various errands, and in raids on their towns and villages.⁴⁹² The greatest number of abducted people (male and female) came from districts in northern Uganda.⁴⁹³ Most abducted women and girls were from the Acholi, Lango, and Iteso peoples.⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁸⁸ Tom Mailiti, "Witness Names Senior LRA Commanders Who Planned and Organized Pajule Attack," *International Justice Monitor*, Nov. 8, 2017. <https://www.ijmonitor.org/2017/11/witness-names-senior-lra-commanders-who-planned-and-organized-pajule-attack/>.

⁴⁸⁹ Pham, Vinck, and Stover, "The Lord's Resistance Army and Forced Conscription in Northern Uganda."

⁴⁹⁰ John Okot, "She was forced to marry a warlord. Now, she's helping survivors heal," *The Christian Science Monitor*, Apr. 15, 2020, <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Africa/2020/0415/She-was-forced-to-marry-a-warlord.-Now-she-s-helping-survivors-heal>.

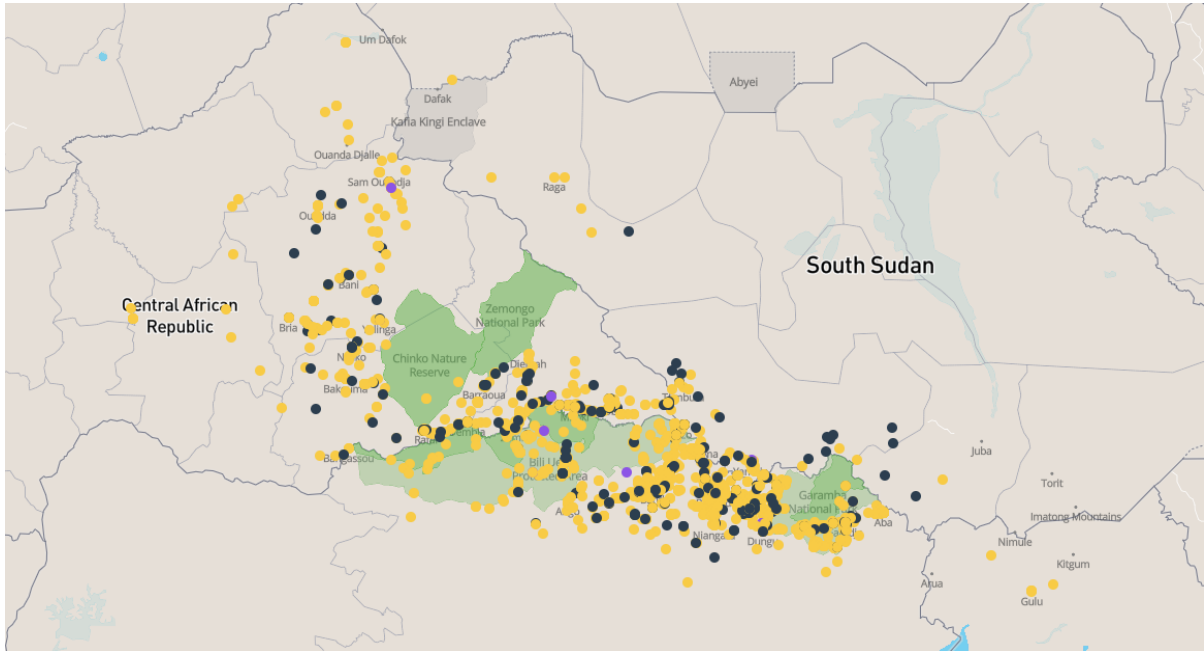
⁴⁹¹ Isabelle Masson, "Voices of women and girls in war," Canadian Museum for Human Rights, accessed Jan. 2020, <https://humanrights.ca/story/voices-of-women-and-girls-in-war>.

⁴⁹² "Lord's Resistance Army kidnaps dozens in Central African Republic," *Reuters*, Jan. 12, 2016. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-centralafrica-rebels-lra/lords-resistance-army-kidnaps-dozens-in-central-african-republic-idUSKCN0UQ29G20160112>.

⁴⁹³ Pham, Vinck, and Stover, "The Lord's Resistance Army and Forced Conscription in Northern Uganda."

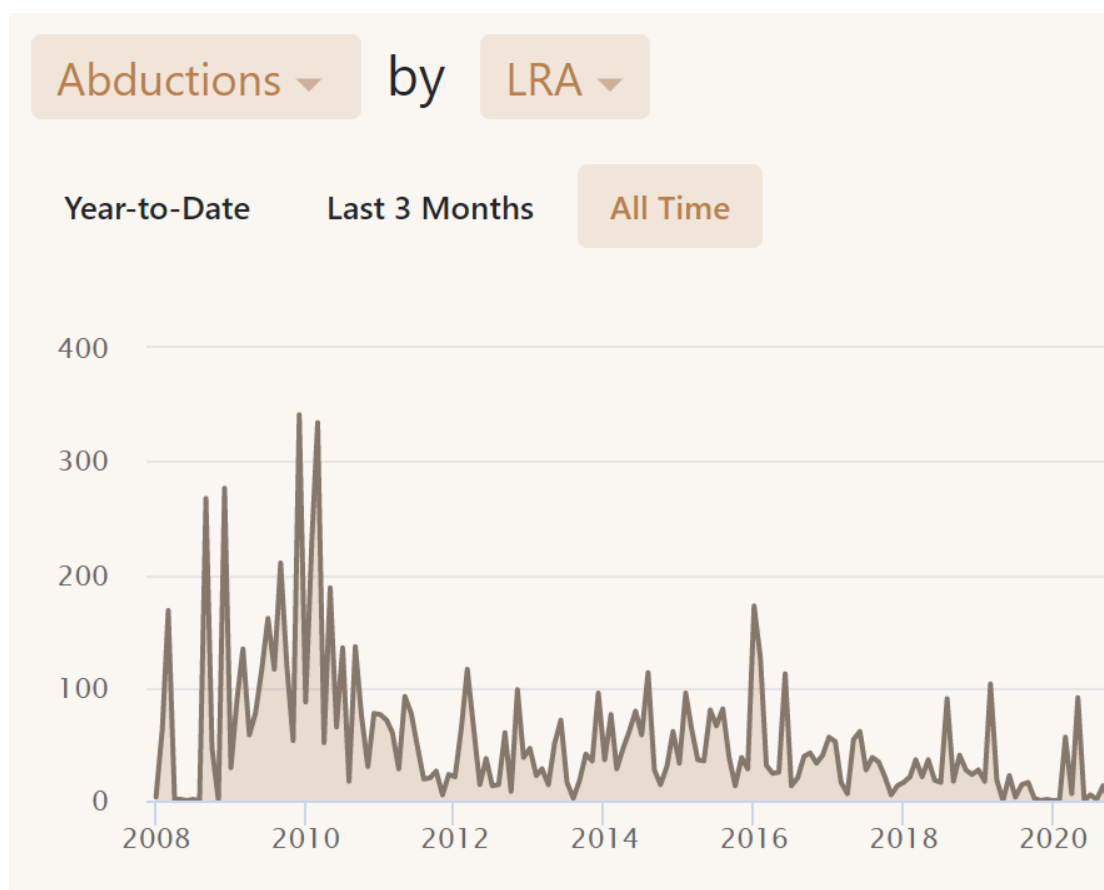
⁴⁹⁴ Christopher Carlson and Dyan Mazurana. *Forced Marriage within the Lord's Resistance Army, Uganda*, Tufts University and Feinstein International Center, May 2008, <https://fic.tufts.edu/assets/Forced+Marriage+within+the+LRA-2008.pdf>.

Figure 12. Map of LRA abductions, 2008–early 2021



Source: LRA Crisis Tracker, <https://crisistracker.org/>.

Figure 13. LRA abductions, 2008–early 2021



Source: LRA Crisis Tracker, <https://crisistracker.org/>.

The LRA units received criteria for female abductions: they were told to select beautiful girls and were more likely to target women and girls who were educated. A final selection occurred after abduction, with undesirable females often released. These selections were methodically organized.⁴⁹⁵ According to an analysis of data collected from 857 women and girls from 2005-2007, females interviewed were released in 19 percent of cases, versus 13 percent of males. Abduction age is the most accurate determinant of release for females; an additional year of age is associated with a 1 percentage point higher probability of release.⁴⁹⁶ Educated females

⁴⁹⁵ Carlson and Mazurana. *Forced Marriage within the LRA*.

⁴⁹⁶ Annan et al., "Women and Girls at War."

were the least likely to be released. Once abducted, commanders reportedly kept careful records on female abductees, detailing the number of abductees, escapees, deaths, and children born within LRA units.⁴⁹⁷

After being abducted, the girls and women the LRA units abducted were often taken long distances, at times crossing borders, to LRA encampments. Upon arrival, the women and girls were often isolated from others in the camp (up to three months) and evaluated and treated for medical conditions. During this time, the women and girls were under guard and largely protected from sexual assault. After a time, the women and girls were formally initiated into the group by being ritually covered with oils and earth. At this point, they assumed various roles within the camp, as discussed in greater detail below.

Although some abductions were opportunistic, many were the result of careful planning. When the number of females in the LRA camps was determined to be below quota, or when a certain number of female abductees escaped or died, LRA leadership (often Kony himself) communicated orders to LRA units to abduct specific numbers of women and girls.⁴⁹⁸ While the demand for young men was constant and made up the majority of abductions, the number and rate of female abductees changed over time.⁴⁹⁹

The average length of abduction was 342 days, which varied significantly between genders. Women and girls on average were abducted for nearly two years, more than twice average length for males.⁵⁰⁰ Women and girls have left the LRA by escaping (or defecting, depending on one's definition of group membership) and by being captured by or surrendering to regional military units, such as the Ugandan People's Defense Forces (UPDF). Due to harsh conditions and an ever-present threat of violence, it is assumed that a significant percentage of women die in LRA captivity. Despite the relative decrease in the LRA's influence since the 2000s, many abducted women and girls have not returned.

Successfully fleeing the LRA required a combination of planning and opportunism. Although many women and girls planned their escape for years, the opportunity to do so occurred only

⁴⁹⁷ M. Gustavsson, J. Oruut, and B. Rubenson, "Girl soldiers with Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda fighting for survival: experiences of young women abducted by LRA," *Children's Geographies* 15, no. 6(2017): 690–702, doi: 10.1080/14733285.2017.1300233.

⁴⁹⁸ Gustavsson, Oruut, and Rubenson, "Girl soldiers with Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda fighting for survival."

⁴⁹⁹ The LRA is an itinerant group and has operations across many countries in central Africa. LRA commanders have preferences for the type of women and girls to capture. Abductions targeted primarily Ugandan, not Sudanese women, perhaps to avoid retaliation by the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA). Whether or not abductees were from the Acholi ethnic group also influenced their roles in the LRA.

⁵⁰⁰ Pham, Vinck, and Stover, "The Lord's Resistance Army and Forced Conscriptation in Northern Uganda."

periodically—for instance, when searching for food or water alone.⁵⁰¹ The length of abduction between capture and escape varied significantly; in one study, the range was from two months to 10 years.⁵⁰² For some women, the prospect of escape became more difficult over time, specifically as they became LRA wives and conceived children. In addition, women had less opportunity to flee than men abductees, as women were more likely to be living in encampments and villages as opposed to mobile military units. Female abductees also leave the LRA by being captured by or surrendering to regional military units, which often transfer them to LRA returnee reception centers or other resettlement organizations.

Escapees often face problems with reintegration. They may be rejected by their families, though some research shows that the majority of women are able to return to their homes and that relations improve over time. Returnees also report being unable to receive assistance from the Ugandan government.⁵⁰³ Returnees report difficulty in receiving education and employment, but recent research indicated that women and girls returning from the LRA face similar difficulties as their non-abducted peers and that the “absence of general educational and economic impacts of abduction is probably a reflection of the poverty of all women’s and girls’ rights and opportunities in northern Uganda—abducted or not.”⁵⁰⁴ Some returnees miss their lives with the LRA, which (unlike the Ugandan government) fed, clothed, and housed them and their children.⁵⁰⁵ Most female returnees eventually socially reintegrate and postconflict hostility is low. Because females have fewer economic opportunities, the adverse economic impact of their abduction is low.⁵⁰⁶

Roles within the organization

Women and girls played several roles within the LRA. These roles are hierarchical in that LRA commanders viewed some as more important than others. It is not uncommon for women and

⁵⁰¹ Gustavsson, Oruut, and Rubenson, “Girl soldiers with Lord’s Resistance Army in Uganda fighting for survival.”

⁵⁰² Gustavsson, Oruut, and Rubenson, “Girl soldiers with Lord’s Resistance Army in Uganda fighting for survival.”

⁵⁰³ Samuel Okiror. “Abducted at nine to be a girl soldier for Kony: ‘Now people call me a killer’,” *The Guardian*, Jan. 8, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/jan/08/abducted-girl-soldier-joseph-kony-lra-lords-resistance-army-uganda>.

⁵⁰⁴ Annan et al., “Women and Girls at War.”

⁵⁰⁵ Marc Ellison, “Female child soldiers with the Lord’s Resistance Army struggle to return to normal,” *Toronto Star*, Dec. 15, 2015, https://www.thestar.com/news/world/2012/05/19/female_child_soldiers_with_the_lords_resistance_army_struggle_to_return_to_normal.html.

⁵⁰⁶ Jeannie Annan, Christopher Blattman, Dyan Mazurana and Khristopher Carlson, “Civil War, Reintegration, and Gender in Northern Uganda,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 55, no. 6 (Dec. 2011): 877–908.

girls to have various roles (primary and secondary) or transition between roles. For instance, one study on former female captives found that the top three roles women and girls reported undertaking were porters (41 percent), food producers (22 percent), and fighters (12 percent). Just over half (51 percent) reported being forced to serve as wives as either a primary or secondary role during their time in captivity. Additionally, 49 percent reported serving as fighters as a secondary role.⁵⁰⁷

The three main types of roles for women and girls were wives/conjugal slaves, workers (including babysitters, maids, and porters), and fighters. There is also some evidence that women played operational roles other than fighting, including nursing, midwifery, radio communications, recordkeeping, and logistical support.⁵⁰⁸ It is unclear how commonly women were assigned or fell into these roles. Length of time in captivity also corresponded to roles. The longer the women remained in an LRA encampment, the more likely they would eventually be assigned to a man as a conjugal slave.

Fulfilling the role of a conjugal slave/wife was the primary reason why women and girls were abducted into the LRA. If a woman was deemed unsuitable for this role (due to age, illness, or other reasons), she was often assigned to another role either temporarily (for instance, until she reached puberty) or permanently. If a woman's husband died, she would often be assigned a new husband. However, there were instances when this could also lead to a shift in roles. According to some sources, women whose captor husbands were killed in battle were exempt from being forced into another marriage. Other testimonies, however, reveal women being forced into second marriages if their first husbands were killed.⁵⁰⁹

Conjugal slavery differs from sex slavery in several respects. Conjugal slavery usually begins with a forced marriage. Forced marriages are coercive relationships that lack consent, but they have many of the traditional characteristics of non-forced marriages, including bearing children, domestic responsibilities, exclusivity, and sex.⁵¹⁰ The relationships are familial, as children are raised by the abducted females and their captors. According to one estimate, half of those forced into marriage bore children.⁵¹¹

⁵⁰⁷ Carlson and Mazurana, *Forced Marriage within the LRA*.

⁵⁰⁸ Carlson and Mazurana, *Forced Marriage within the LRA*; Khristopher Carlson, Dyan Mazurana, Elizabeth Stites, and Godfrey Orach Otobi, "Young Mothers, Forced Marriage and Children Born in Captivity within the Lord's Resistance Army in Northern Uganda," 2006.

⁵⁰⁹ Okiror, "Abducted at nine to be a girl soldier for Kony."

⁵¹⁰ Carlson and Mazurana, *Forced Marriage within the LRA*.

⁵¹¹ Carlson and Mazurana, *Forced Marriage within the LRA*.

Adult males often had multiple wives. Senior commanders and Kony himself selected women they wanted as wives—Kony himself was reputed to have more than 100.⁵¹² Lower ranking commanders were given wives on decisions from senior commanders. Senior commanders had on average five wives at a time, whereas lower-level fighters had one or two wives. Providing wives to male fighters was seen as a way to raise morale.

Competition among women in the LRA was common and to some degree formalized. This was largely dependent on which role a woman was given and where she was relative to other women within and between roles. In order to assert familial control, commanders appointed their first wife as a “senior wife” and all others in a junior role. Certain wives were treated better than others. Often the most senior, older wives treated younger, newer wives with suspicion and abuse. Competition between wives was also linked to how many times they were chosen for sex over the other wives. This linked sex and physical closeness with captor husbands to survival.⁵¹³

⁵¹² James Ocitti, Melissa Parker, and Tim Allen, “Lord’s Resistance Army hierarchies survive in peace time,” Africa at LSE: Displacement and Return (blog), June 25, 2019, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2019/06/25/lords-resistance-army-hierarchies-peace-time-women/>.

⁵¹³ Ocitti, Parker, and Allen, “Lord’s Resistance Army hierarchies survive in peace time.”

Figure 14. An LRA fighter with his wives and child



Source: Kristof Titeca, "Photographs reveal the personal lives of the Lord's Resistance Army," *The Conversation*, Dec. 12, 2019, <https://theconversation.com/photographs-reveal-the-personal-lives-of-the-lords-resistance-army-127843>.

This was often exacerbated by scarcity of resources, as LRA soldiers were responsible for providing food, clothing, and other goods for their many wives and children through looting. According to one testimony, clothes looted by the men were not equally distributed among the women. The higher the rank of the LRA fighter, the better the access to nicer clothes for their wives.⁵¹⁴ There are numerous testimonies of senior wives making false accusations against junior wives to maintain their relatively privileged positions.

Non-Acholi women were rarely allowed to be taken or given as co-wives to the same man for fear that they would conspire against their husband. In general, Acholi women and girls were favored by the LRA and received relatively less abusive treatment. According to some sources,

⁵¹⁴ Kristof Titeca, "Photographs reveal the personal lives of the Lord's Resistance Army," *The Conversation*, Dec. 12, 2019, <https://theconversation.com/photographs-reveal-the-personal-lives-of-the-lords-resistance-army-127843>.

Iteso and Langi girls were forced to conduct more manual labor than Acholi girls. However, Acholi girls dispute that their treatment was better than other forced wives. Sex within forced marriages was encouraged for the explicit purpose of producing children.

Females abducted for longer than two weeks reported that their main role was either as a porter (27 percent) or cook/water collector (37 percent). Together, 69 percent reported a supportive role, including farming, childcare, water collection, cook, or porter. A combat role, whether a fighter, fighter's aid, or spy, was reported by 16 percent.⁵¹⁵

Prepubescent girls who were distributed among households as domestic servants were commonly referred to as "tink tinks" or "ting tings." They would work as domestic servants until reaching puberty, at which time they would be forced to marry. In most documented cases, tink-tinks stay with the family they were assigned as domestic laborers, transitioning from a "child" to a "wife."⁵¹⁶ Transitioning young girls once they went through puberty is consistent with the norms of sexual control in the LRA with regard to attempting to protect commanders against HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.⁵¹⁷ Although the majority of workers indicated that they were forced to engage in sex only after they were forcibly married, there were several examples of workers being raped by commanders before they were married.⁵¹⁸

Females who were assigned to be fighters were given firearms and training, but they were much less likely to be called into a fight than their male counterparts. These women often had other duties, described above. Women and girls who were determined to have untreatable illnesses were expected to fight. Some female fighters were forced to use violence against their own communities.⁵¹⁹ Educated women were sometimes used by the LRA for nursing, midwifery, radio communications, recordkeeping, and logistical support.⁵²⁰

Many former abductees reported that they carried guns for defensive purposes and that once a female fighter became pregnant (presumably through her "primary" role as a conjugal slave),

⁵¹⁵ Annan et al., "Women and Girls at War."

⁵¹⁶ M. Gustavsson, J. Oruut, and B. Rubenson, "Girl soldiers with Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda fighting for survival," *Children's Geographies*, 15:6, 690-702, 2017, DOI: 10.1080/14733285.2017.1300233, <https://www.tandfonline.com/action/showCitFormats?doi=10.1080%2F14733285.2017.1300233>.

⁵¹⁷ The LRA lost several commanders to AIDS, including Kony's original second-in-command, Komakec Omona (Baines 2009).

⁵¹⁸ Ellison, "Female child soldiers with the Lord's Resistance Army."

⁵¹⁹ Carlson and Mazurana, *Forced Marriage within the LRA*.

⁵²⁰ Carlson and Mazurana, *Forced Marriage within the LRA*; Carlson, et al., "Young Mothers, Forced Marriages."

she was no longer called into battle.⁵²¹ Conversely, former forced wives and former LRA commanders stated that forced wives who did not have children were expected to fight.

Rules governing behavior

There was an attempt to control all sexual contact within the LRA. There also appears to have been an attempt to control sexual contact outside the group; this is less clear, however. Kony imposed strict rules governing how abductees interact with one another and the other members of the LRA.⁵²² Monogamy of LRA wives and sex within forced marriage was strictly enforced. If wives were suspected of showing interest in or sought help from other male fighters, they would be killed. If LRA husbands were reluctant to have sex with their forced wives, they would be punished.⁵²³ Sex outside forced marriage was prohibited for both men and women.

Violence against women

Theoretically, sexual violence against women within the LRA was a grave offense, punishable by death. However, there is considerable evidence that the LRA engaged in gender-based violence, including rapes of women and young girls, although much of this appears to have taken place largely within the confines of forced marriage.⁵²⁴ Abducted women were sometimes forced to kill other abducted women for alleged misbehavior, such as attempted escape. Another way the LRA enforced control over its captives, including female captives, was by forcing them to commit violence against their family or neighbors. Some analysts have argued that the LRA established norms prohibiting the sexual abuse of non-LRA civilian women.⁵²⁵ And while it seems true that mass rapes were not attributable to the LRA, male combatants did on occasion rape civilians.

⁵²¹ Carlson and Mazurana, *Forced Marriage within the LRA*.

⁵²² Carlson and Mazurana, *Forced Marriage within the LRA*.

⁵²³ Carlson and Mazurana, *Forced Marriage within the LRA*.

⁵²⁴ United Nations, "Lord's Resistance Army"; The Crisis Tracker, Invisible Children and USAID, <https://crisistracker.org/map> (search by "gender based violence").

⁵²⁵ Annan et al., "Women and Girls at War."

Appendix J: Abu Sayyaf Group

Overview

Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) is a violent extremist organization operating in the southern Philippines. It was established in 1991 by Abdurajak Janjalani, a Filipino native who was radicalized after visiting Saudi Arabia and other majority Muslim countries, including Pakistan, where he reportedly met al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden.⁵²⁶ The name of the group is derived from that of an Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, an Afghan mujahedeen leader known for his actions during the Soviet war in Afghanistan. Sayyaf, who went on to be a politician following the fall of the Taliban regime, trained Filipino fighters during the 1990s.⁵²⁷ ASG is among a number of other Islamist organizations in the region, including the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), and, more recently, the Islamic State (IS). While all these groups have overlapping ideology and goals, ASG stands out for its emphasis on establishing an independent Islamic state in western Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago.

Scholarly work often describes ASG in terms of a network of violent actors, loosely acting under a broad umbrella of violent extremism to establish Islamic rule.⁵²⁸ Some refer to its hybrid nature, reflecting elements of both criminal and terrorist organizations.⁵²⁹ ASG carries out kidnapping for ransom and extortion, as well politically motivated violence such as bombings and assassinations. Among the groups active in the southern Philippines, Abu Sayyaf is notoriously brutal. When MILF and MNLF entered into peace negotiations in the 1990s, ASG

⁵²⁶ Mapping Militant Organizations, “Abu Sayyaf Group,” Stanford University, last modified Aug. 2018, <https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/abu-sayyaf-group>.

⁵²⁷ Luke Hunt, “Former Warlord Primed For Afghan Presidency,” *The Diplomat*, Sept. 24, 2013.

⁵²⁸ Eduardo F. Ugarte and Mark Macdonald Turner, “What is the ‘Abu Sayyaf’? How labels shape reality,” *The Pacific Review* 21, no. 4 (2011): 397–420.

⁵²⁹ Allan Jones A. Salem, “Nexus of crime and terrorism: the case of the Abu Sayyaf Group,” Naval Postgraduate School, December 2016, <https://www.hsdl.org/?abstract&did=810996>.

rejected the idea and continued to pursue violent attacks.⁵³⁰ To date, ASG is responsible for the deadliest terror attack in the Philippines—the 2004 Superferry bombing that killed 116.⁵³¹

In examining the group's operations and tactics, it is possible to break up its history into phases coinciding with specific strategies.⁵³² In the beginning under Janjalani, ASG had limited operational capabilities, but carried out bombings, ambushes of Philippine military personnel, and kidnappings for ransom. After Janjalani's death in 1998, the group fell into disarray and infighting occurred. During this period, ASG devolved into more of a criminal group, focused on theft and kidnappings for ransom in order to stay afloat. After Janjalani's brother consolidated power over the group in 2002, he refocused it as an Islamic terrorist group, and pressed for high profile terrorist attacks. It was during this period that ASG carried out the bombing of Superferry 14. Following an intense offensive operation launched by the Philippine government in 2006 that killed Janjalani's brother, ASG once again fell into disarray. It resorted to criminal activities as before. During this time the group separated into two main factions: one based on the island of Basilan, and one based on Jolo. The Basilan-based faction was led by Isnilon Hapilon. In 2014, Hapilon pledged allegiance to the Islamic State and began carrying out terrorist attacks while the Jolo faction continued to operate as a criminal group. However, the full extent and nature of the relationship between Hapilon's faction and the Islamic State itself is unknown. In 2017, forces under Hapilon mounted a five-month siege of the city of Marawi, and Hapilon was killed in a gun battle with Philippine troops.⁵³³ Ties with ISIS likely weakened after his death.

Role of women and gender

The roles and positions of women in ASG reflect the relatively high status of women in the Philippines, with the country scoring high on the UN gender equality index.⁵³⁴ Filipino women have a history of activism and enjoy far more opportunity compared to women in other

⁵³⁰ Michael Hart, "Abu Sayyaf Is Bringing More of ISIS' Brutal Tactics to the Philippines," *World Politics Review*, July 22, 2019, <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/28054/abu-sayyaf-is-bringing-more-of-isis-brutal-tactics-to-the-philippines>.

⁵³¹ The Asia Foundation, *The State of Conflict and Violence in Asia*, 2017, https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/The_State_of_Conflict_and_Violence_in_Asia-12.29.17.pdf.

⁵³² P. Kathleen Hammerberg, Pamela G. Faber, and Alexander Powell, *Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG): An Al-Qaeda Associate Case Study*, CNA DIM-2017-U-016122-2Rev, Oct. 2017.

⁵³³ Hart, "Abu Sayyaf Is Bringing More of ISIS' Brutal Tactics to the Philippines."

⁵³⁴ United Nations Development Programme, *Legal Gender Recognition in the Philippines: A Legal and Policy Review*, Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines, 2018.

countries where violent extremism is present (e.g., West Africa). Women in the Philippines have a high literacy rate and regularly enter professional fields after earning advanced degrees.⁵³⁵ However, reported cases of violence against women have increased in recent years, though this may be due to improved laws and increasing awareness of problems associated with such violence.⁵³⁶ Women and children often make up the majority of internally displaced persons (IDPs), where they are vulnerable to violence, abuse, economic strain, and physical and mental illness. Uncertainty creates vulnerability in IDP camps, and women can be especially vulnerable to the ill effects.⁵³⁷

Women appear to play important roles in ASG, though we note that there is generally little information available on gender dynamics in the group. Women benefit from increased mobility (compared to men, whose mobility is often severely curtailed by conflict) and can carry out tasks that would otherwise be performed by men. Women have also had the opportunity to take on new socioeconomic roles in the absence of men, though the accompanying burden of providing for their families often detracts from the benefits of these new roles.⁵³⁸

Recruitment

As is the case with most Islamist extremist organizations, the majority of ASG members are male.⁵³⁹ Motivations vary in their decision to join the organization, although it seems clear that participating in the armed struggle offers opportunities to escape the indignities brought on by conflict and poor socioeconomic status and the chance to regain their diminished masculinity.⁵⁴⁰

The participation of women seems largely self-initiated, brought on at least in part by ties of kinship and affection with individuals already engaged in terrorism. Familial ties appear to represent an important dynamic amongst female members of ASG. Female relations of deceased ASG members sometimes assume a more active role following a male family member's death (sometimes having already cooperated while the member was alive).

⁵³⁵ Irene M. Santiago, "Participation of Women in the Mindanao Peace Process," UN Women, Oct. 2015.

⁵³⁶ "The State of Conflict and Violence in Asia," The Asia Foundation, Oct. 2017.

⁵³⁷ Maria Isabel T. Buenaobra, "Gender and Conflict in Mindanao," The Asia Foundation, Oct. 19, 2011, <https://asiafoundation.org/2011/10/19/gender-and-conflict-in-mindanao/>.

⁵³⁸ Buenaobra, "Gender and Conflict in Mindanao."

⁵³⁹ There is little information available on why or how women leave ASG.

⁵⁴⁰ Buenaobra, "Gender and Conflict in Mindanao."

However, it is difficult to understand whether this transition of responsibilities is a formalized process or occurs as needed on an ad-hoc basis.

Although female engagement with ASG is largely self-initiated, there are efforts by the group to recruit women and women play an active role in recruiting new members. One report details their efforts to use social media to bring in new members, even going so far as to offer themselves as brides to jihadist fighters.⁵⁴¹ We can also look to similar organizations in the region to further our understanding of how women are involved in recruitment efforts. For example, evidence shows that women have been involved in recruitment activities for the MNLF.⁵⁴²

Roles within the organization

Traditionally, key roles in ASG—from leaders to fighters on the ground—have been filled by men. In recent years, however, women have begun taking on more visible roles such as providing logistical support, including the movement of money, materiel, and militants.⁵⁴³ We were not able to discern the reason for this shift in roles. We can speculate that it may have been due to men in the group being killed or captured by security forces (and the resulting transition of responsibilities process outlined above, or due to a shifting understanding of the roles of women in the group. Regardless of the reasons for this shift, it has led to a more active role for some women, along with attendant consequences. In April 2019, four women were arrested for supporting Abu Sayyaf by conducting financial transactions, procuring weapons, and arranging recruitment and travel for foreign fighters into the Philippines. The women were all wives of ASG commanders working under Hajan Sawadjaan, who assumed leadership of the

⁵⁴¹ The Asia Foundation, *Understanding Violent Extremism: Messaging and Recruitment Strategies on Social Media in the Philippines*, 2018, <https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Understanding-Violent-Extremism-Messaging-and-Recruitment-on-Social-Media-in-the-Philippines.pdf>.

⁵⁴² Vivienne Angeles, “Women in Revolution: Philippine Muslim women’s participation in the Moro National Liberation Front,” *The Muslim World* 86, no. 2 (1996): 130–147.

⁵⁴³ A similar dynamic is at work in other Islamist extremist groups. For example, women in MNLF have supported (materially and ideologically) male fighters since its beginnings in the late 1960s. Their roles have evolved with changes to women’s social roles generally, giving them more of a voice in decision-making while maintaining previous responsibilities.⁵⁴³ During peace negotiations between the Philippine government and the MILF in 2011, the MILF hired a female lawyer to serve as a consultant in the talks.⁵⁴³ Just five years earlier, MILF leaders had maintained that women have no role to play in public decision-making. (It should be noted that women also served on the side of the Philippine government during the same negotiations.) See “The participation of Women in the Mindanao Peace Process,” UN Women.

group after the death of Hapilon.⁵⁴⁴ The ties of these women to ASG fighters demonstrates the centrality of familial relationships in female participation in the group.

The biographies of ASG women provide insights into recruitment, motivations, roles, and other central aspects of female involvement in the group. Myrna Mabanza was a former public school teacher and the wife of a Malaysian bomb maker who facilitated communications and movement of militants in Indonesia and Malaysia to ASG and IS in the Philippines. She also helped move an estimated \$107,000 on behalf of Hapilon. Her reach extended as far as Syria, where IS leaders used her (via Hapilon) to move money to fellow fighters in the Philippines. She used the *hawala* system common in Islamic societies in which transactions are extremely difficult to trace.⁵⁴⁵ Indications also show that Mabanza may have helped identify targets for kidnapping who were likely to command a high ransom.

As Mabanza came from a radicalized family, her indoctrination into the group's ideology was not as deliberate as that of a new recruit without any previous association with ASG. Nevertheless, her actions as a member resulted in the US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control listing her as a "specially designated global terrorist." She was arrested in 2018, and officials confiscated her laptop, which contained information on terrorist operations. She was released from custody the following day due to insufficient evidence, but her exposure made her useless to ASG and she returned to teaching. Another woman moved into position to help fill the void: Al Maida Marani Salvin, who is Mabanza's cousin and is married to Abu Talha, a close advisor to Sawadjaan. She was subsequently arrested in April 2019.⁵⁴⁶

Another woman, Karen Aizha Hamidon, caught the attention of authorities in 2016 due to her active role in the recruitment and radicalization of individuals from India, Bangladesh, and Western countries such as Australia and the UK. She used social media primarily to reach out to and recruit interested parties. Hamidon, like Mabanza, is educated and had a profession apart from her terrorist activities; she is or has been married to militants. Yet she did not come

⁵⁴⁴ "Philippine police: 4 wives of Abu Sayyaf commanders arrested," AP News, Apr. 16, 2019, <https://apnews.com/article/874ee1ecd5ca4888ab2ba61345af8690>.

⁵⁴⁵ Ana P. Santos and Nikko Dizon, "Women of the Eastern Caliphate, Part 1: Hiding in Plain Sight," Pulitzer Center, Dec. 17, 2019. <https://pulitzercenter.org/reporting/women-eastern-caliphate-part-1-hiding-plain-sight>.

⁵⁴⁶ Sofia Tomacruz, "US puts Abu Sayyaf sub-leader Sawadjaan on global terror list," *Rappler*, Sept. 12, 2019, <https://www.rappler.com/nation/united-states-puts-abu-sayyaf-sawadjaan-global-terror-list-september-2019>.

from a radical family. There are some indications that her motives were based on potential financial gain. She was arrested in October 2017.⁵⁴⁷

In addition to the enabling roles outlined above, in recent years women have also played increasing operational roles in ASG. Women have become more involved in suicide attacks, for example. Twin suicide bombings in Jolo, capital of Sulu Province in the southern Philippines, targeted a Catholic cathedral in January 2019. Ulfah Handayani Saleh, the wife of the couple carrying out the attack, is believed to be the first woman to take part in a suicide bombing in the Philippines.⁵⁴⁸ A woman believed to be her daughter was also photographed holding a rifle and participating in gun battle in the southern Philippines.⁵⁴⁹ Eighteen months later, in August 2020, two women detonated suicide vests, again in Jolo, killing 14 people. Just two months later, an Indonesian woman, the widow of a male suicide bomber, was arrested on suspicion of planning additional bombings in the southern Philippines.⁵⁵⁰ Furthermore, there is some evidence suggesting that ASG is using women as fighters, though we do not know how widespread this practice is or why ASG has increased its use of females in operational roles.⁵⁵¹

Violence against women

There is very little evidence of ASG directly targeting of women in violent attacks—certainly nothing like the systemic violence against women seen in other regions and extremist groups. There have been a few instances in 2015 and 2016 in which women have been victims of kidnappings for ransom. Also in 2016, the body of a German woman was found on a yacht in an apparent extortion operation.⁵⁵²

⁵⁴⁷ Ana P. Santos and Nikko Dizon, “Women of the Eastern Caliphate, Part 1: Hiding in Plain Sight,” Pulitzer Center, Dec. 17, 2019, <https://pulitzercenter.org/reporting/women-eastern-caliphate-part-1-hiding-plain-sight>.

⁵⁴⁸ Santos and Dizon, “Women of the Eastern Caliphate, Part 1: Hiding in Plain Sight.”

⁵⁴⁹ Santos and Dizon, “Women of the Eastern Caliphate, Part 1: Hiding in Plain Sight.”

⁵⁵⁰ “Army says two women carried out the Jolo bombings in the Philippines,” Al Jazeera, Aug. 25, 2020; “Philippines arrests woman suspected of planning suicide attack,” Al Jazeera, Oct. 10, 2020.

⁵⁵¹ Santos and Dizon, “Women of the Eastern Caliphate, Part 1: Hiding in Plain Sight.”

⁵⁵² Counter Extremism Project, “Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG),” <https://www.counterextremism.com/threat/abu-sayyaf-group-asg>.

Appendix K: Determining Which Women's Roles to Counter

In this section, we propose a three-step process for determining which women's roles US CT/CVE operations should counter. This section should not be taken to imply that countering women's roles is the only way to factor gender into CT/CVE. In fact, countering women's roles is just one of many ways of incorporating gender into CT/CVE, such as developing DOD and non-DOD programs tailored to address the roles women play in a non-operational capacity. As this section highlights, there are certain roles women play in VEOs that DOD is poised to counter through CT/CVE operations. Other roles, however, cannot be effectively countered by DOD, nor should they be countered at all in some instances. This framework will aid in that distinction.

- **Step one:** Identify what roles DOD CT/CVE activities should and should not counter based on CT/CVE objectives and DOD capabilities.⁵⁵³ Although some women's roles (such as female combatants) may correspond to CT/CVE activities carried out by the DOD, other roles (such as women in sexual slavery) clearly do not. Table 33 provides one example of how to differentiate between high and low potential suitability of DOD to counter women's roles using the roles previously identified.

⁵⁵³ It is outside the scope of this paper to identify whether US activities are currently countering each specific role, nor is the US CT/CVE gender-specific data robust enough to carry out such an analysis. However, this framework provides a starting point for future efforts to determine whether women's roles are being sufficiently addressed.

Table 33. Potential suitability of DOD CT/CVE to counter women’s roles

High potential suitability	Low potential suitability
<p>Most enabling roles, including: build social networks, recruit, proselytize/propagandize, fundraising, administrative (to include finances), collect intelligence, smuggling or transporting, weapons/materials, camp management/maintenance, procuring weapons, logistical support, operational planning, communications specialists, community policing, monitoring other women</p> <p>All operational roles, including: specialized training in weapons, fighters/combatants/attackers, senior leadership, leaders/commanders, suicide bombers, guards, assassins</p>	<p>Most supporting roles, including: psychological/emotional support to husband and/or male companion, procreation/childrearing: household management/maintenance: sexual services/within “marriages” or “relationships” (e.g., conjugal slavery), sexual services/outside marriage (e.g., sexual slavery)</p> <p>Some enabling roles, including: teaching, medical specialists</p>

Source: CNA.

- Step two:** After making this designation, the next step would be to identify which roles are already being directly or indirectly targeted by DOD CT/CVE efforts, and in what way. For example, DOD CT/CVE efforts may currently be countering some women’s roles, especially those for which detailed intelligence, analysis, and reporting exists (e.g., female suicide bombers). There may be women’s roles that DOD CT/CVE efforts are de facto, or unintentionally, countering because CT/CVE efforts counter these roles in general (likely assuming a male actor). Examples in this category include DOD CT/CVE efforts to disrupt a VEO’s logistical planning that would affect both male and female planners. The third and most significant category is DOD CT/CVE efforts that may not be effectively countering some women’s roles either because women carry out these roles in different ways than men, rendering existing efforts insufficient, or because these roles are not recognized at all in CT/CVE activities. For example, recruiting and fundraising networks that are managed by women to target other women and are outside male-dominated channels may not be captured in current CT/CVE activities.
- Step three:** After determining existing efforts to counter each role, the final step would be to adjust specific CT/CVE operations to account for the above-mentioned gaps. The recommendations earlier in this report focus on how to adjust these and other efforts at the strategic and operational level.

Appendix L: List of Organizations

As part of this analysis, we received replies from and conversed with individuals at the following organizations and institutions:

- Secretary Office of Global Women's Issues, US State Department
- Office of Programs, Bureau of Counterterrorism, US State Department
- United States Special Operations Command
- United States Africa Command
- United States Indo-Pacific Command
- United States Central Command
- United States European Command
- United States Southern Command
- United States Marine Forces Special Operations Command
- Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations / Low Intensity Conflict
- Joint Staff J5, Global Policy & Partnerships
- United States Naval Special Warfare Development Group
- Defense Intelligence Agency
- Defense Security Cooperation Agency
- Africa Center for Strategic Studies, National Defense University
- West Point Counter Terrorism Center
- Venture Strategy & Initiatives at the Department of the Air Force
- United States Institute of Peace
- International Peace Institute
- NATO Special Operations Headquarters
- William J. Perry Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies
- Hedayah Center

- Leiden University
- George Mason University
- Swansea University
- Georgia State University
- Texas A&M University
- Yale University
- Clark University

We contacted several additional organizations during our data collection outreach but did not receive replies.

Appendix M: Data Collection Request Letter

Dear _____,

We are writing to request your collaboration on a study titled “Understanding Gender and Violent Extremism.” This work is part of a congressionally mandated requirement (as outlined in section 1047 of the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA)) that the Department of Defense (DOD) provide for a study “to conduct research and analysis on the relationship between gender and violent extremism.”

In response to this requirement, and in accordance with the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Act of 2017, the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations / Low Intensity Conflict – Stability and Humanitarian Affairs (OASD (SO/LIC-SHA)) asked CNA to **study the role of women and gender in counter terrorism (CT)/ counter violent extremism (CVE) operations.**

The **first phase of this project involves collecting relevant materials from US government (USG) agencies, with a focus on the DOD and State Department. We are reaching out in the hope that you might aid us in that effort.** We are looking for classified (up to SECRET//NF) and unclassified materials on any topic that connects women, gender, and CT/CVE operations. We are defining this very broadly, so please do not hesitate to share items, even if you are not sure.

In an effort to help clarify what we are looking for, below is a non-inclusive list of items we would be interested in seeing:

- Campaign plans, other planning documents
- Rules of engagement (ROEs), and/or materials on the development of ROEs, that address women or gender
- After-action reports (AARs) that highlight instances in which the presence of women, or assumptions about gender roles, shaped the course of action taken (for better or worse)
- Studies on women active in VEOs
- Briefings, presentations
- Reports on, or proposals for, CT/CVE operations that involve women (or discuss gender roles) in a significant way
- Descriptions of formal efforts/programs (for example, the cultural support teams)
- Doctrine or policy on the role of women in CT/CVE operations
- Studies on women, gender, and CT/CVE operations
- Details on training programs

Finally, we would also be interested in any materials that your office or command has found useful when thinking about this issue. In other words, we are looking not only for official documents from your office, but also for any government or non-government articles that you have found helpful in navigating the space between gender, women, and CT/CVE operations.

Materials can be shared, or emails scheduled, by contacting us at one of the below email addresses.

- Classified materials can be sent via SIPRNET to: _____
- Unclassified materials can be sent to: _____ or _____

The second phase of the project involves conducting interviews with individuals who have actively engaged in either (1) the WPS mission as it pertains to CT/CVE operations or (2) CT/CVE work that involves women or gender in a non-negligible capacity (e.g., efforts to collaborate with women-led organizations, work that connects with women in a vulnerable community, work that helps operators to understand the gender roles in the region where they operate). These are not-for-attribution.

We are interested in your willingness to participate in such a discussion with us and whether you know of other people who we should contact for additional interviews.

Please let us know if you have any questions as we’re happy to clarify the parameters of our search. And if you—or a colleague—is available for an interview, please let us know the best date, time, and manner to get in touch.

Thank you so much for the assistance.

Best,

Julia McQuaid

Principal Research Scientist, SP3

Appendix N: Interview Protocols

Interview protocol for USG personnel

Gender and CT/CVE Interview Guide

Study Background and Informed Consent

Thanks for speaking with us. [Introduce ourselves and CNA] CNA is currently engaged in a study on behalf of the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations / Low Intensity Conflict – Stability and Humanitarian Affairs (OASD (SO/LIC-SHA)) about understanding gender and violent extremism. This work is part of a congressionally mandated requirement that the DOD “conduct research and analysis on the relationship between gender and violent extremism.”

Specifically, the study aims to do three things: 1. Analyze the role of women and gender in terrorist and violent extremist organizations (VEOs), 2. Analyze how gender affects US military and partner nation efforts to combat terrorism and counter violent extremism, and 3. Provide recommendations on how the US can effectively factor the role of gender into its counter terrorism (CT)/ counter violent extremism (CVE) approaches, including operations, training, and professional military education.

To collect data for this project, we are carrying out a series of interviews with those who have actively engaged in CT/CVE work that involves women, gender, or the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) mission. We are also interested in any documents or sources you may be able to direct us to (official planning documents, after-action reports, briefings, studies, descriptions of programs) that would help us understand how gender is factored into CT/CVE programs.

Once we complete our research, we will submit a report to OASD (SO/LIC-SHA) that will provide them with our findings. Although we may draw upon the information you provide today to inform our report, we will not quote you or directly attribute anything to you without your permission.

Do you have any questions or concerns about this before we begin? And do we have your permission to use the information from this conversation to help inform our report?

Interview questions

Background information

- Ask them to introduce themselves
 - What office do you work in and what is your role?

- What led you to this position?
- Do you / does your office work on CT/CVE issues?
 - If yes: CT? CVE? Where? What type? How often?
- Is the topic of gender integrated into these CT/CVE initiatives either formally or informally?
 - If yes, in what way? What elements of gender issues?
- Has your office authorized, or have you overseen or been involved in, any specific studies on gender, women, and CT/CVE?
 - If yes, can we have a copy?

Substantive content-based questions

For policymakers / practitioners

- What role, if any, **do** gender-specific considerations play in US CT/CVE policy (as reflected in programming, funding, training, etc.)?
 - [If a specific program is mentioned] Has this been effective?
- In your view, what role **should** gender-specific considerations play in CT/CVE operations, training, and education?
- Are there any risks for failing to incorporate gender issues into CT/CVE?

For regional / terrorist / VEO SMEs:

- What roles (organizational, operational, etc.) do women play in the terrorist groups / VEOs you are familiar with?
- What gender roles are evident in these groups?
- Has this changed over time? Do you see any trends that indicate changes in the near future?
- In your view, **do** US CT/CVE efforts factor in [or does the US adequately factor in] the role of gender?
 - If yes, how?
- In your view, how **should** US CT/CVE efforts factor in the role of gender?

Environment in general

- Are those you work with on CT/CVE issues conversant (or do they understand) gender issues in terrorist groups and VEOs and / or CT/CVE?
 - Are there certain groups (researchers, practitioners, operators, implementers) that are more familiar with these issues than others?
 - Do you find that the issue of “women” is raised with some regularity?
 - How about “gender roles”?
- Has your office received, to the best of your knowledge, any training on women, gender, or gender and CT/CVE?
- Is there anything that we did not bring up that is important for us to know?

Interview protocol for subject matter experts

Gender and CT/CVE Interview Guide

Study Background and Informed Consent

Thanks for speaking with us. [Introduce ourselves and CNA] CNA is currently engaged in a study on behalf of the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations / Low Intensity Conflict – Stability and Humanitarian Affairs (OASD (SO/LIC-SHA)) about understanding gender and violent extremism. This work is part of a congressionally mandated requirement that the DOD “conduct research and analysis on the relationship between gender and violent extremism.”

Specifically the study aims to do three things: 1. Analyze the role of women and gender in terrorist and violent extremist organizations (VEOs), 2. Analyze how gender affects US military and partner nation efforts to combat terrorism and counter violent extremism, and 3. Provide recommendations on how the US can effectively factor the role of gender into its CT/CVE approaches, including operations, training, and professional military education.

To collect data for this project, we are carrying out a series of interviews with those who have actively engaged in CT/CVE work that involves women, gender, or the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) mission. We are also interested in any documents or sources you may be able to direct us to (official planning documents, after-actions reports, briefings, studies, descriptions of programs) that would help us understand how gender is factored into CT/CVE programs.

Once we complete our research, we will submit a report to OASD (SO/LIC-SHA) that will provide them with our findings. Although we may draw upon the information you provide today to inform our report, we will not quote you or directly attribute anything to you without your permission.

Do you have any questions or concerns about this before we begin? And do we have your permission to use the information from this conversation to help inform our report?

Interview questions

Substantive content-based questions

For generalist experts on women and VEOs

- How are the processes of recruitment, radicalization, participation, and deradicalization different for men and women? Universally? Case-specific?
- Are there issues that are still problematically understudied?
- Have any broad patterns about women and VEOs become clear to you over the course of your research/analysis?

For regional or organizationally specific SMEs:

- How do women join (voluntary, abduction, coercion, all of the above)?
- What roles do women typically play in the group?
 - Organizationally?
 - Operationally?
- What are the typical gender roles of the group?
 - What stereotyping of men and women does the group use?
- Does the group have any rules or regulations for women who are members of the group? If yes, who enforces these?
- Does the group have any rules or regulations about gender roles inside the group? If yes, who enforces these?
- Does the group have any rules or regulations regarding women outside of the group? If yes, who enforces these?
- Is there violence against women *within* the group?
 - What form does it take?
 - If applicable, what alleged transgressions precipitate this violence?
 - Who perpetuates the violence? (e.g., men, other women)
- Does the group perpetrate violence against women *outside* the group?
 - Does this occur incidentally (e.g., as collateral damage in an effort to damage strategically significant targets) or intentionally (e.g., the decision to target a women's prayer group or women's hospital)?
 - If applicable, what alleged transgressions precipitate this violence?
 - Who perpetrates the violence? (e.g., men, other women)
- Have there been any notable changes over time? Do you see any trends that indicate changes in the near future?

Theoretical content-based questions

- In your view, **do** US CT/CVE efforts factor in [or does the US adequately factor in] the role of gender?
 - If yes, how?
- In your view, how **should** US CT/CVE efforts factor in the role of gender?
- In your view, what is the most significant risk in not doing so?
- Is there anything that we did not bring up that is important for us to know?

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Abbreviations

ACP	USAFRICOM Campaign Plan
AM&E	assessment, monitoring, & evaluation
AMISOM	African Union Mission in Somalia
AOR	area of responsibility
AQ	Al Qaeda
ASG	Abu Sayyaf Group
BPC	building partner capacity
CAR	Central African Republic
CCMD	Combatant Command
CCP	CCMD Campaign Plan
CHOD	Chiefs of Defense
CJCS	Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
CJTF	Combined Joint Task Force
COCOM	combatant command
CP	Campaign Plan
CST	Cultural Support Team
CT	Counterterrorism
CVE	counter violent extremism
DOD	Department of Defense
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
EU	European Union
EXORD	Execute Order
FARC-EP	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia–Ejército del Pueblo
FET	Female Engagement Team
FHET	Female Human Exploitation Teams
FST	Female Search Team
FTFs	foreign terrorist fighters
FTO	foreign terrorist organization
GCC	Geographic Combatant Command
GENAD	gender advisor
GPOI	Global Peace Operations Initiative
GSO	Global Special Operations
HGP	People’s Defense Force
IS	Islamic State

ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
ISWAP	Islamic State West Africa Province
IW	Irregular Warfare
JP	Joint Publication
JPME	Joint Professional Military Education
JS	Joint Staff
JSCP	Joint Strategic Campaign Plan
KCK	Kurdistan Committees Union
KIA	killed in action
LCB	Lake Chad Basin
LOE	Line of Effort
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MILF	Moro Islamic Liberation Front
MISO	military information support operations
MNLF	Moro National Liberation Front
NA	National Action
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDAA	National Defense Authorization Act
NDS	National Defense Strategy
NDU	National Defense University
NIC	National Intelligence Council
NLF	National Liberation Front of South Vietnam
NMS	National Military Strategy
NSCT	National Strategy for Counterterrorism
NSS	National Security Strategy
NSU	National Socialist Underground
OAI	Operations, Activities, and Investments
OASD (SO/LIC-SHA)	The Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations / Low Intensity Conflict – Stability and Humanitarian Affairs
OSD	Office of the Secretary of Defense
PCC	Partido Comunista Colombiana
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party
PME	professional military education
PN	partner nation
PPD	Presidential Policy Directive
PVE	preventing violent extremism
RAF	Red Army Faction

RWE	right-wing extremism/extremist
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
SDGT	specially designated global terrorist
SECDEF	Secretary of Defense
SME	subject matter expert
SNA	Somali National Army
SOCAF	Special Operations Command Africa
SOCENT	Special Operations Command Central
SOPAC	Special Operations Command Pacific
SOF	Special Operations Forces
TAK	Kurdistan Freedom Hawks
TCP	Theater Campaign Plan
TSOC	Theater Special Operations Command
UIC	Union of Islamic Courts
UN	United Nations
UNSCR	UN Security Council Resolution
UPDF	Ugandan People's Defense Forces
USAFRICOM	US Africa Command
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USCENTCOM	US Central Command
USEUCOM	United States European Command
USG	US government
USINDOPACOM	United States Indo-Pacific Command
USSOCOM	US Special Operations Command
VEO	Violent Extremist Organization
WPS	Women, Peace, and Security
WUO	Weather Underground Organization
YJA-STAR	Free Women's Units
YPJ	Women's Protection Unit

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