

## ABSTRACT

**TITLE OF THESIS:** Gender and Terrorism: Motivations of Female Terrorists

**STUDENT:** (b)(6)

**CLASS NO.** PGIP 2005                      **DATE:** June 2005

**THESIS COMMITTEE CHAIR:** (b) (3), (b) (6)

**SECOND COMMITTEE MEMBER:** (b) (3), (b) (6)

This thesis addresses the following question: To what extent are women motivated to participate in terrorist activities for the same reasons as men? This research identifies unintentional gender bias that severely inhibits the Intelligence Community (IC) from making accurate assessments about the motivations of female terrorists.

This study challenges the dominant view that female terrorists are motivated for different reasons than male terrorists. The IC predominantly focuses on profiling male terrorists. Gender bias leads analysts to discount the threat when women conduct terrorist attacks for the same reasons as men. This has left the U.S. vulnerable to terrorist acts conducted by women.

Research presented in this study supports the hypothesis that women are motivated to engage in terrorist activities for the same reasons as men. Focusing mainly on differences between men and women, reporting tends to limit analysis of women to gender and does not fully address the role of women in the context of the group. This study demonstrates that media reporting has a more persuasive influence on perceptions

than facts, information, scholarly work, or academic journals, leaving analysts at risk for unintentionally adopting speculations and applying them to intelligence assessments.

This thesis supports the hypothesis in four phases. First, biased reporting is evaluated through various examples of claims that are derived from media speculations about how women are treated and expected to behave in repressive societies. This study identifies academic findings that challenge those speculations.

Second, this thesis identifies historical evidence of women's participation in violent organizations. It depicts how women have been active participants in violence for centuries regardless of social constraints and expectations. Women in terrorist groups found in Europe, South America, Central America, Asia, Russia, and the Middle East are described.

Third, using criminological data on gender and violence, this thesis compares criminology findings on gender and violence to the effect of perceptions on female terrorists. Assumptions about women terrorists are mirrored in theories about female criminality. The long-standing focus on male violence has left a significant gap in understanding the motivations of violent women.

Fourth, using a case study, this paper evaluates women of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in a multi-causal framework. It illustrates how existing gender analysis at the individual level is insufficient to fully understand causal factors for female terrorists. The case study conducts analysis at the individual, organizational, and societal levels to demonstrate that motivations of female terrorists are best identified when evaluated in the context of organization and society.

**GENDER AND TERRORISM:  
MOTIVATIONS OF FEMALE TERRORISTS**

by

(b)(6)

MSSI Class 2005

Unclassified thesis submitted to the Faculty  
of the Joint Military Intelligence College  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Science of Strategic Intelligence

June 2005

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and  
do not reflect the official policy or position of the  
Department of Defense or the U.S. Government