

## **Brussels Attack: Lessons Learned**

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## Executive Summary

# Violent Extremism– Threat and Response

**W**e are pleased to release Volume 8, Issue 3 (March 2016) of the Counter Terrorist Trends and Analysis (CTTA) at [www.rsis.edu.sg/research/icpvtr/ctta](http://www.rsis.edu.sg/research/icpvtr/ctta) (ISSN 2382-6444) by the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore.

THE terror attacks to the Brussels airport and a city metro station in Belgium on March 22, 2016 underscored a perplexing security challenge from transnational jihadist networks in both Asia and in the West. In particular, the threat from violent jihadism, accompanied by the rise of religious extremism, presents an enduring challenge for governments in many parts of the world. This is particularly so in European countries and in parts of North America, which has of late, witnessed an uptick in the radicalisation of a significant portion of their Muslim population.

In this issue, **Shahzeb Ali Rathore** discusses the factors for the growth in jihadist networks across Europe and reflects on some of the lessons learned for European nations.

**Rohan Gunaratna** argues that, in the wake of the Paris and Brussels attack, Europe must take stock of how it has been fighting the Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS). To displace the group's centre of gravity, airstrikes alone are insufficient. He observes that European nations must seek to understand the ideology underpinning the group's struggle and work with Muslim religious, educational, media and other community organisations to reach out to the Muslim diaspora and migrant communities to counter the spread of ISIS' vicious ideology.

**Kathleen Turner** explores the tactical and strategic motivations for terrorist groups to deploy female suicide bombers. She observes that a proactive approach which includes prevention, engagement, training and research is needed, in order to deter women from joining extremist and terrorist organisations.

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<b>Editor</b>	Stefanie Kam
<b>Associate Editor</b>	Shahzeb Ali Rathore
<b>Design and Layout</b>	Okkie Tanupradja

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# Brussels Attack: Lessons Learned

Shahzeb Ali Rathore

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*The March 2016 terrorist attacks in Brussels, Belgium highlights a growing shift towards operational interest in militant jihad among the Muslim community in Europe. There is a need for European nations to strengthen its security and intelligence infrastructure and to relook at its integration policies in order to address the underlying causes of the threat of violent extremism.*

## **Introduction**

On 22 March 2016, Belgium came under attack from the Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS), when its European jihadist network carried out suicide bombing attacks at Zaventem Airport and Maalbeek Metro Station in Brussel; killing at least 31 people and injuring 300. The cell is linked to perpetrators of the August Thalys train attack and the Paris attacks in November 2015 which killed 130 people and injured hundreds more (BBC News 2015).

The attacks in Brussels and Paris reflect a shifting interest from support and recruitment to operational activity among militant jihadists in European Muslim communities. This article discusses the reasons for the rise of violent extremism across Europe; intelligence and security weaknesses which enabled ISIS and its networks to exploit these loopholes; and finally, puts forward some recommendations to addressing the underlying causes of terrorism in Europe.

## **Why is Europe Susceptible to Violent Extremism?**

The main driver for some European Muslims to join radical groups is Europe's significant problem of integration. In Brussels and Paris, a sizeable Muslim

population live in ghettos, with corresponding high unemployment and high crime rates, potent incubators of violent extremism (Schram and Fredericks 2016). The aforementioned deepens the perception of isolation from the broader community base, making the community—especially young males, more vulnerable to extremist messages. The alienation is wider spread; no one in Molenbeek contacted Belgium authorities to alert them that the attackers in Paris, the Charlie Hebdo shooting and other terrorist strikes were hiding in the community.

The sense of alienation is not surprising. For example while only 9.6% of French population is Muslim (Europe Muslim Population 2014), they constitute 70% of the prison population (Alexander 2015). In Belgium, 4,000 of the 11,300 a prison population is Muslims. Even taking into account that 1,500 to 2,000 of them are illegal immigrants, this is still a very high number (De Morgan 2015).

#### Why Belgium?

Europe's problems are substantial. A total of 6,000 Europeans -1700 from France alone, have made their *hijrah* (migration) to Iraq and Syria (Kirk 2016). Belgium and its city of Molenbeek have become a microcosm for Europe's wider problem. Against this backdrop, almost 500 fighters have left Belgium for Iraq and Syria, which makes it the highest number of per capita foreigners among all European countries (Sanchez 2016). At least 150 of these have returned, posing a substantial security challenge in the future.

The perpetrators of the November attack on Paris came from Molenbeek, a slum neighbourhood in Brussels with a history of radical Islam, drugs and lawlessness. The Kouachi brothers who carried out the Charlie Hebdo massacre lived in a run-down, poor neighbourhood of Paris (Schram and Fredericks 2016). Additionally, the mastermind of the November 2015 attacks on Paris, Salah

Abdeslam, who was arrested from Molenbeek on 19 March 2016, was living in a ghetto with his family and friends, who helped him evade the police (Times of Oman 2016). Abdeslam had been arrested for drug peddling in the past, and was believed to have been recruited in prison.

Reportedly, Abdeslam had met Abdelhamid Abaaoud, the suspected ringleader of the Paris attacks, while in prison. French police had killed Abaaoud days after the attacks.

**“ In Brussels and Paris, a sizeable Muslim population live in ghettos, with corresponding high unemployment and high crime rates, potent incubators of violent extremism. ”**

#### ISIS' Strategy?

Before the November 2015 Paris attacks unfolded, the Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS) leaders gathered at the Syrian town of Tabqah to discuss prospects of exporting terror to Europe. According to *The Guardian*, up to 200 militants spread across the European continent were awaiting orders from ISIS-central (Chulov 2016). These ISIS members managed to blend in with the migrants, who were making their way to Europe to escape the conflict zone. However, most of the migrants were guileless refugees, and some foreign fighters exploited this opportunity to make their way back into European territories.

ISIS' Tabqah meeting is also of significance. Previously, ISIS had concentrated most of its efforts in holding territory in Iraq and Syria, mostly through conventional forces. Now ISIS is taking the fight to the 'enemy land'. In all likelihood, this change in strategy represents ISIS' long-term vision to mobilise more recruits, based on the resulting polarisation that the attacks caused in Europe.

Moreover, this change could be attributed to the immense pressure that the group faces due to the on-going airstrikes by 16 nations, including U.S. and Russia, on ISIS' strongholds (Chulov 2016). With the loss of territory in Syria and Iraq, it is not difficult to understand ISIS' thinking.

Europe has demonstrated a difficulty in securing its external borders, particularly in Greece and Italy, and once inside Europe the Schengen agreement allows for free movement between the member countries making tracking nearly impossible. Salah Abdeslam exploited this weakness and crossed over into Belgium, with the help of his friends, after the Paris attacks (Lichfield 2015). Europe has started to try and address this issue; Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Norway and Sweden have already erected their borders to keep out refugees and potential terrorists (WSJ 2016). Others will likely follow suit; however it is likely that enough fighters are already present to cause major harm. Similarly, ISIS is capable of spreading its ideology regardless of strengthened or closed borders.

The above said, initial findings and arrests of suspects linked to both attacks suggest that thus far there is only a single active terrorist network receiving orders from ISIS in Syria (Schweitzer and Eran 2016). This is unlikely to remain so.

It is not only the borders and relative openness of Europe that makes it vulnerable. Intelligence and security services fell short on two accounts. Firstly, months before the attack, Belgian authorities affirmed that there were signs pointing towards a potential terrorist plot, but did not appear to disseminate it to appropriate police. Secondly, despite the threat intelligence, there was no intelligence that placed the key link in all the recent attacks, Abdeslam, had been hiding in his own neighbourhood, and only a few blocks away from his family's apartment in Molenbeek (Walt 2016).

### Lessons Learned

Prior to the Paris attacks and the attacks in Brussels, the problems leading to domestic crisis and terrorist attacks were not well understood by the European security establishment. The threat from ISIS was seen to be concentrated in Iraq and Syria. This presumption led to the European countries to neglect the importance of taking pre-emptive measures in averting terrorist attacks. In light of the attacks, what are some lessons to be learned?

European countries need to understand that averting terrorism involves investing in preventive security measures, focusing on gathering and disseminating intelligence (Crumley 2015).

**“ Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Norway and Sweden have already erected their borders to keep out refugees and potential terrorists. ”**

Currently, many European countries lack the resources, assets and legal provisions to take preventive action. The intelligence and CT reaction forces in France have skills; however they are overly centralised and constrained by antiquated laws and tactics. Sadly, Belgium lacks the resources in terms of law enforcement capabilities to match the growing threat of ISIS sympathisers and supporters in the country (Sanchez 2016). There is a need for European countries to expand the amount of resources invested in their security and law enforcement agencies.

Priority ought to be given to organisational and inter-organisational preparedness. This will result in more collaboration between different security departments. At the same time, more intelligence and police officers should be employed and trained to keep up with the evolving threat. This should also be complemented by a legal framework that allows law enforcement agencies to take steps that they previously could not, including conducting night raids.

Presently, Europe is caught in a dilemma. It has to choose between individual freedom and rights that define the European life or decision to eliminate terrorism from their respective countries (Schweitzer and Eran 2016). The latter will require scrutinising religious institutions and restricting freedom of speech in order to curb the spread of hate speech.

Conversely, in order to prevent a breakdown of relations between Muslims and the rest of the European population, the European leadership must also make it clear that their war against terrorism is not a war against Islam.

This is essential to prevent the Muslim population from joining the extremists. Finally, Europe has to consider ways to better integrate the Muslim population in the larger European society. At a political level, there is a need to tone down the rhetoric on Muslims as a group, particularly on terrorists, to facilitate integration and assimilation of the Muslim community. Meanwhile, some European countries have introduced religious training for *Imams* (Islamic leaders) to promote assimilation. In the road ahead, winning the hearts and minds of the European Muslim community will remain a challenge. There is a need for European governments to constantly seek out greater avenues to engage with the Muslim communities so as to eliminate the experiences of alienation and discrimination felt by these minority communities from becoming radicalised into violence.

**Shahzeb Ali Rathore** is a Research Analyst at the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR) of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Singapore.

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# The “Brussels Invasion” Through ISIS’ Eyes

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Rohan Gunaratna

*The Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS) stepped up its propaganda after the attacks in Paris and Brussels. ISIS’ steady messaging stream and videos aims to project an image of invincibility. Increasing airstrikes on ISIS alone will not displace the threat, as the group has threatened to carry out more attacks. To defeat and avert future attacks, ISIS’ ideology must be understood and targeted.*

## Introduction

The attacks on Belgium on 22 March 2016 were referred to by the Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS) as an invasion of the “Crusader Belgium” by the “soldiers of the caliphate.” ISIS justified the attacks on grounds that Belgium was a founding ally of NATO, a member of the European Union (EU) and a host of its permanent headquarters. As such, ISIS referred to Belgium as complicit in the “Crusader coalition against the Islamic State”, and concluded that, “in the name of terrorism, Belgium participates in the war on Islam” (Most important results, SITE Intelligence Group 2016). The motivation for the attack was revenge.

The human casualties and economic losses incurred from the attacks were great. European countries, the United States and Russia raised their security levels. ISIS also publicised the panic that engulfed Belgium, which declared a maximum state of emergency in the country. The main airport for Brussels was shut down for an entire week, with hundreds of flights departing from and arriving at the airport on the day of the operation cancelled, border controls at the French-Belgian were closed, and Belgium tightened its border controls with other countries.

## The Context

Until France was attacked by terrorists on 13 November 2015, the world believed that ISIS’ primary area of focus was Syria and Iraq. After ISIS killed 130 and injured 368, the West in particular realised the magnitude, scale and severity of the threat to their own countries (AP 2015). Nonetheless, most governments were reluctant to respond decisively.

Directed from ISIS Syria-Iraq, Belgium was the launching pad for attacks in Paris (BBC 2016). Despite the range of measures taken to confront the extant and emerging threat, two attacks within five months exemplified Europe’s challenges of cooperation and collaboration to fight a common threat.

The threat from ISIS is on two fronts – battlefield and off the battlefield. The formation and function of the ISIS external operations wing was neglected by Western and other governments fighting the terror group (Gutiérrez 2015). However, ISIS considers its operations overseas so far in a formative phase (An Exact Recompense, SITE Intelligence Group 2016).

Today, the threat is both in Syria and Iraq and Europe and other recruiting grounds where the foreign fighter recruits come from. Away from Iraq and Syria, the threat is both from ISIS directed and from ISIS inspired attacks. The recruitment of fighters and attacks are influenced by propaganda by ISIS official and supporters. Almost all the attackers of Paris and Brussels were Europeans, born and raised on the continent.

An ISIS sub-culture is emerging among European Muslims. In the margins of Muslim communities in Europe, ISIS’ ideology is steadily replacing European Islam. Although they live in France, Belgium, Germany, the UK and elsewhere in Europe, their loyalties have begun to shift and they identify more with ISIS’ message. With Europe stepping up the fight against IS, the politicised, radicalised and militarised Muslims of Europe will want to join IS.

## ISIS’ Ideology – Main Driver

ISIS attacks and propaganda reflected ISIS’ growing capacity to mobilise European Muslims and strike Europe from within. This highlights the traction of ISIS ideology to recruit and drive attacks. With a growing support base in Western

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Europe, ISIS recruited and motivated them to strike their own countries of birth. In a video released immediately after the attacks at Brussels, an ISIS narrator mocked Brussels and the European Union for failing to avert the attack even with security preparations. The narrator further added that the “Islamic Ummah has men who do not sleep amidst grievance and do not accept disgrace, and have hearts full of eagerness to take revenge for your barbaric crimes. Know that ahead of you is a long bill, and you must pay it off with your blood.”

Abu Abdullah al-Beljiki and Abu Mujahid al-Beljiki, Belgian fighters serving in Ninawa Province, Iraq, lauded the attacks in the same video. Abu Abdullah celebrated the attacks in Brussels and remarked: “After New York and Paris, today we declare to you the new 9/11.”

Additionally, he threatened that the group has “other targets.” The second fighter, Abu Mujahid, urged Westerners to demand their governments withdraw their aircraft and soldiers from the fight with the ISIS, and claimed that the era of war is upon them (An Exact Recompense, SITE Intelligence Group 2016). ISIS support groups also influenced the ideological and operational landscape in Europe and beyond.

Messages posted by Wafa’ Media Foundation, an ISIS media support group, threatened that after the ISIS attacks in Paris and Brussels, the United States and UK will be the next. Abu Wahba alias Al-Gharib Al-Kinani referenced the San Bernardino mass shooting in December 2015 and threatened with ominous prospects of sending more of their supporters like they did in Paris and Brussels (America, You’re Next, SITE Intelligence Group). With every attack, both ISIS and its supporters produced frightening threats.

When ISIS publicised the coalition attack on Mosul University, ISIS supporters called on the group to target European hospitals and universities and inflict upon them the “largest possible extent of destruction and affliction.” An ISIS supporter explained that such strikes will be “in response to the repeated targeting of hospitals in the land of Islam by the Crusader coalition, and also the hospitals of the Muslim public in the areas of the apostate opposition.”

The ISIS supporter further stated that “... universities must be targeted the same as they target our universities. From a military perspective, targeting universities is easier than targeting the airports, for there is no protection or high degree of search procedures” (The Islamic State Must Target European Hospitals, SITE Intelligence Group).

### **The Response**

In response to the terrorist attacks in Paris, France stepped up its airstrikes campaign against ISIS and enhanced cooperation within Europe and beyond. Belgium followed suit.

However, the fundamental driver of the threat is the spread of extremist ideology by ISIS, which remains unaddressed. Ideology, the centre of gravity of ISIS, is the glue that keeps the group’s network intact and fuels support and the attacks. Hence, in addition to strengthening and broadening the existing counter-terrorism framework, Europe should create new partnerships to win the hearts and minds of the Muslims of their respective countries.

To cripple the current and emerging ideological and organisational threat landscape of ISIS in Europe, the governments should fight back using a range of tools. To prevent recruitment and radicalisation of foreign fighter recruits and rehabilitate those supporting and conducting attacks, Europe should complement its

**“ When ISIS publicised the coalition attack on Mosul University, ISIS supporters called on the group to target European hospitals and universities and inflict upon them the “largest possible extent of destruction and affliction.” ”**

operational response with a strategic counter-terrorism response.

At the heart of fighting back is to understand ISIS mind-set and messaging. ISIS’ attacks are designed to influence public opinion, governments and coalitions fighting them. To magnify the impact, ISIS and its supporters issue frightening threats before, during and after the attack.

The ISIS messaging after the Brussels attack targeted the Belgian people, government, Europe, the world at large, and to “the Crusader alliance against the Islamic State.” The messages were calibrated to invoke fear among the public and to deter governments and encourage those radicalised and militarised to fight their host countries.

### **Post-Brussels – ISIS Threat and Message**

Justifying the Brussels attacks in a video and executing a spy for the “Crusader coalition”, Abu Hanifa al-Beljiki, a Belgian fighter in Raqqah Province in Syria said: “This is a message I direct to the failed government of Belgium, the humiliated slaves of Obama. I say to you:

Did we not warn you before? You learned nothing from the lessons of Paris, because you continued fighting Islam and the Muslims. For this I want to tell you that the attack in Brussels is reaping what you had sown with your own hands. Just as you bomb the Muslims with your F16s, we will fight your people. Just as you make our women widows, we will make your women widows. And just as you kill our children; we will kill your children” (And Cast Terror into Their Hearts, SITE Intelligence Group).

In addition to ISIS official media, ISIS supporters issued threats. The Al-Thabaat Foundation for Media Productions video stated: “And you Crusaders, know that this campaign is your last campaign and it shall be broken, by Allah’s permission, and then after that we will break your Cross and invade your homes... We will govern with the Shariah of Allah” (A Message to the Western Kafir [Disbeliever] from the Supporters of the Caliphate, SITE Intelligence Group 2016).

In the video with a clip of the Eiffel Tower being destroyed, the ISIS supporter threatens: “So we will invade London, Brussels, and Berlin like we did in Paris before... We will come to you and terrify you everywhere. We will come after you from where you never expect. We will make your filthy blood fill the streets, and your torn flesh fills the cities” (A Message to the Western Kafir [Disbeliever] from the Supporters of the Caliphate, SITE Intelligence Group 2016).

### Countering the ISIS Influence

ISIS promotes the message that despite the coalition strikes, ISIS prevails. A pro-ISIS media Al-Thabaat Media Foundation released a video which stated: “The Muslims live in happiness. Business continues. The children laugh and play in the parks, and the Mujahideen are breaking through in the fronts. And despite your bombing, the immigrants are still coming to the Islamic State” (And Cast Terror into Their Hearts, SITE Intelligence Group).

To counter the ISIS message, European governments should work with Muslim religious, educational, media and other community organisations to reach out to Muslim diaspora and migrant communities. As the communities are increasingly influenced and driven by the developments in Syria, Iraq and other Muslim conflict zones, investments should be made to counter the ideology and to promote moderation,

**“ Until European governments and their partners engage the Muslim communities on the ground and in the virtual space, Muslims will continue to be influenced by ISIS messaging. ”**

tolerance and coexistence. Until European governments and their partners engage the Muslim communities on the ground and in the virtual space, Muslims will continue to be influenced by ISIS messaging.

### Conclusion

The heart of Europe has been attacked. However, the law enforcement-centric European response is inadequate to manage the threat.

The European response is neither robust nor far reaching. The most effective government response is to dismantle the terrorist infrastructure. For decades, terrorist and extremist groups misused and abused the freedoms enshrined in Europe’s constitutions to build terrorist support infrastructure. Furthermore, Belgium hosted two dozen extremist groups – the most notorious was Sharia4Belgium.

Like the UK, France and Canada, Belgium was the host of a dozen terrorist groups that influenced mainstream Muslims to embrace the ideologies of Al Qaeda, ISIS and other threat groups.

There is no better time than now for Europe to act. The response should be multipronged, multidimensional, multiagency and multijurisdictional.

To start with, Europe should upgrade the laws to criminalise support for ISIS and other threat groups, dismantle the terrorist and extremist support infrastructure, and create efficient platforms for European and global cooperation and collaboration to unilaterally and multilaterally fight the threat.

**Professor Rohan Gunaratna** is head of the *International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR)* at the *S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS)*, NTU.

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# The Rise of Female Suicide Bombers

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Kathleen Turner

*The increasing visibility of females in suicide bombing attacks highlights the growing trend of females being used by terrorist organisations as agents of war. This article explores the various reasons behind this phenomenon and puts forth a number of broad policy recommendations for tackling the issue of female suicide bombing.*

In recent years, the number of women involved in suicide bombings is increasing. Groups like Boko Haram, Al Shabaab, and the Taliban have successfully used females in attacks (Bloom 2007). Palestinian and Chechen groups that have used the tactic of suicide bombing have tended to be more socially conservative than the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) that also have used the tactic. The former groups have breached social prohibitions against using women in combat where in the past they had not done so.

The utilisation of female combatants by groups to commit attacks against security forces and the local population is becoming a growing trend. In a study conducted by Yoram Schweitzer, between 1985 and 2006, female bombers committed more than 220 suicide attacks. This number represents nearly fifteen percent of the overall number of actual suicide bombers (Anne 2008). Schweitzer's study identified the predominant locations where female suicide bombing attacks have occurred: Sri Lanka; Israel and Palestinian territories; Russia and Chechnya; and Turkey (Schweitzer 2006).

These locations correlate to the operating areas of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka; the Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party

(SSNP); and the Chechen rebels and Black Widows in Russia. While these findings are useful in understanding the tactics by groups, however, they do not adequately explain the growing trend of groups using female suicide bombers in carrying out attacks.

### **Why are More Groups Using Women as Attackers?**

What motivates a terrorist group to use female suicide attackers? Scholars generally attribute their usage to two primary factors: tactical and strategic.

Tactical reasons include: tactical advantages and to enable an organisation to increase the number of operatives. Strategic reasons include, increased media attention and psychological effect (Zedalis 2004). A study of these reasons may help better explain the strategic appeal of using female suicide bombers.

On the first factor, Zedalis writes that women provide a tactical advantage to terrorist groups for they are “stealthier in attacking”, they have an element of surprise, and male security personnel are hesitant to search women (especially in conservative societies like Chechnya). On 21 May 1991, a female Sri Lankan separatist killed herself and former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in a suicide bombing attack, killing fourteen others (Bloom 2011). A member of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Thenmuli Rajaratnam was able to get close enough to Gandhi for him to speak to her so she could kill him.

Deploying female suicide bombers can be tactically advantageous for reasons that females are likely to arouse suspicion. Security forces look less to women and children because they picture them as non-combatants. Women are also able to conceal explosives in clothing or fake pregnancy. In a similar vein, Bloom states that “the use of the least likely suspect is the most likely tactical adaptation for a terrorist ground under scrutiny”.

At one level, this demonstrates the tactical superiority of suicide attacks over guerrilla warfare and, crucially, as Bloom suggests, can highlight the “strength of the organisation.” On a practical level, the use of females allows

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some organisations to increase their number of operatives. For instance, LTTE used women to add to their ranks out of necessity, as the Sri Lankan government had decimated the predominantly male LTTE members (Eager 2008). LTTE created its own division of women bombers called the Freedom Birds (Bloom 2011).

At a strategic level, female suicide attacks tend to have a “greater psychological impact on [the] target audience,” and can therefore generate more publicity and attention. An outcome from a suicide bomb attack is the psychological impact generated on the adversary or the population. This type of attack relies on the element of surprise and can ignite fear across villages, towns, cities and countries because of the death and destruction it creates.

A widely known attack by female suicide bombers was carried out by the Chechen Black Widows, an ominous nickname given to these women to highlight the loss of male relatives – usually husbands or brothers – that push these women to commit the suicide bombings and mass hostage-takings. The campaign of suicide bombings and mass hostage-takings was a hallmark of Chechnya's earlier separatist campaigns. Separatist Chechen rebels recruited a legion of women to partake in the terrorist campaigns and formed the Black Widows.

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Forty-one Chechen terrorists, including 19 female suicide bombers, held some 800 people hostage for three days, until Russian forces stormed the building and killed the terrorists (Sjoberg and Gentry 2011). This incident propelled the Black Widows into the media spotlight (Sjoberg and Gentry 2011).

Organisations have used female suicide bombers to generate media attention, to promote their cause, and bolster recruitment numbers. In a 2002 interview with *Agence France-Presse*, sociologist Liza Taraki concluded, "Suicide attacks are done for effect, the more dramatic the effect, the stronger the message" (Bloom 2007). In 2002, a Palestinian woman named Wafa Idris became the first widely known suicide bomber in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The suicide attack transformed her into a "cult heroine" throughout the Arab region (Bloom 2007).

### **Why is it a Concern?**

There are numerous examples of women's participation in violent extremists groups. Boko Haram, also known as Islamic State's West Africa Province, recently increased its use of female suicide bombers, and has even targeted military camps. In Nigeria, attacks by female suicide bombers have grown sharply. In 2014, 85 percent of total suicide attacks involving females occurred in Nigeria (Suleiman 2015). According to an article by the *Long War Journal*, as of 4

**“ Given the strategic desirability of using female attackers by terrorist organisations and the persistence of attacks done by female suicide bombers, the number of female suicide attacks is likely to increase. ”**

December 2015 at least 75 women and girls have carried out suicide attacks on behalf of Boko Haram. Similarly, numerous factions of Pakistani Taliban have claimed the use of women as suicide bombers. Omar Khalid al Khorasani, a senior Taliban leader admitted that the use of female suicide bombers is a part of the group's strategy. Qari Zia Rahman, on behalf of Taliban and Al Qaeda, operates training camps for women in remote areas of north-western Pakistan and north-eastern Afghanistan (Roggio and Weiss 2015). In the case of LTTE, women comprised thirty percent of the group (Alexander 2014); Peru's Shining Path had forty percent (Sjoberg and Gentry 2011); and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) had an estimated thirty to forty percent female combatants (O' Neill 2015).

Given the strategic desirability of using female attackers by terrorist organisations and the persistence of attacks done by female suicide bombers, the number of female suicide attacks is likely to increase.

### **Policy Recommendations**

A proactive approach is needed in order to reverse the trend of female suicide attacks would include the following:

prevention, engagement, training and further research on the issue of female suicide bombings.

In order to counter the radicalisation of women there is a need to better understand the motivations associated with women who fight for terrorist organisations, and deter them from joining these groups (Gowrinathan 2014). Young women and girls in war zones, failed states or areas with poor economies are more susceptible to becoming radicalised by terrorist organisations.

The use of women in suicide bombing attacks has proven to be tactically advantageous for many terrorist organisations and it should therefore come as no surprise that terrorist organisations will continue to recruit and deploy female suicide bombers. Since women play a significant role in many of these groups, there is a need for women to play a more active role in the peace process within failed states or form part of the discussions at the strategic level.

The peacekeeping process should be inclusive, providing diverse perspectives that will ultimately lead to a more stable global environment (Gowrinathan 2014).

The military and security forces need to be trained, experienced and equipped to deal with threats from all individuals. Terrorist groups will use every tactical advantage they can to have the upper hand. Both male and female security personnel should be well-equipped to perform security checks on all individuals prior to allowing individuals to gain entrance into restricted areas.

There is a need to continue to research on the issue of female suicide bombers, through data collection and analysis of trends. The University of Chicago's Project on Security and Terrorism recently released a suicide attack database to the public, cataloguing incidents from 1982 to 2015. The institution is among several others in the U.S. studying the root causes of suicide bombing attacks (University of Chicago). To mitigate the growing trend of female suicide bombers and deterring groups like ISIS and Boko Haram from going down this path requires an understanding of the underlying causes driving the use of women in suicide bombing attacks.

**“ At a strategic level, female suicide attacks tend to have a “greater psychological impact on [the] target audience,” and can therefore generate more publicity and attention. ”**

*Kathleen Turner is a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army currently serving as an Army War College Fellow at the U.S. Institute of Peace in Washington D.C. The views expressed in the article are her own and do not reflect a policy or position of the U.S. Army or Department of Defense.*

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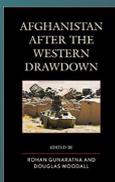
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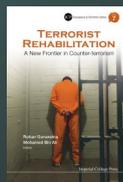


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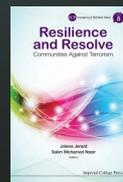
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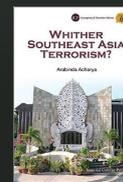
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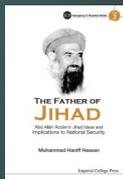
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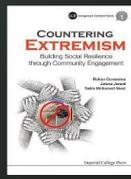
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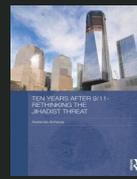
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Nanyang Technological University

Block S4, Level B4, 50 Nanyang Avenue, Singapore 639798

Tel: + 65 6790 6982 | Fax: +65 6794 0617 | [www.rsis.edu.sg](http://www.rsis.edu.sg)