COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS ON TERRORISM

(CODEXTER)

DISCUSSION PAPER ON POSSIBLE GENDER-RELATED PRIORITIES

27th Plenary Meeting

Strasbourg (France), 13-14 November 2014

_____

1.   Introduction

At its 26th Plenary Meeting CODEXTER instructed its Gender Equality Rapporteur, Ms Tanja KIKEREKOVA ("the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia"), to prepare a discussion paper with proposals for gender-related priorities in the field of counter-terrorism.

This draft proposal paper will more specifically discuss the aspect of whether the various standards of the Council of Europe in the field of counter-terrorism are gender-biased.

The present discussion paper is the outcome of the work of the Gender Equality Rapporteur, Ms. Tanja KIKEREKOVA ("the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia") and the Secretariat and is intended to form the basis for the discussions of CODEXTER at the occasion of the 27th Plenary Meeting of the Committee.

2.   The pathways to terrorism

Women have increasingly become key strategic assets within the realm of suicide terrorism. The number of female suicide attackers has risen from eight during the 1980s to well over one hundred since 2000; women have struck in Afghanistan, India, Iraq, Israel, Lebanon, Pakistan, Russia, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Turkey, and Uzbekistan. Moreover, suicide attacks conducted by females are substantially more lethal than those conducted by men. Beyond mere numbers, however, female suicide attacks are considered especially shocking since such actions violate the gender norms of the societies from which the attackers emerge.[1] Female terrorists have functioned in a variety of roles including collaborators, informers, human shields, recruiters, sexual baits in person or over the Internet, and as perpetrators of acts of destruction and death. As women are less likely to arouse suspicion, their value as perpetrators has long been recognized.[2]

2.1. Motivations

Scholarly works on or including female terrorism identifies five main forms of motivation, namely: social; personal; idealistic; key event and revenge.[3]

2.2. Recruitment

Women's participation in deadly attacks varies greatly, and it is hard to generalize for this phenomenon is recent and the attacks have been few. Although the data is limited, female suicide bombers, just like male suicide bombers, have one characteristic in common – they are young. The average age varies from 21.5 (Turkey) to 23 (Lebanon), a small non-explanatory differential. Other characteristics are not specific. Some are widows and others have never been married; some are unemployed and others are professionals; some are poor and others are

_____

[1] *What's special about female suicide terrorism?*, Lindsey A. O' Rourke, 2009, ORourke.pdf

[2] *Gender, Palestinian Women and Terrorism: Women's liberation or oppression?,* Anat Berko and Edna Erez, May 2007

[3] Social motivations are discussed significantly more than others. Social motivations are frequently noted in publications examining conflicts in Latin America where better living conditions are one of the main motivations for violence. In these areas, according to the literature, the perception of being humiliated and repressed, the inequalities between men and women, and needs in education and career are prime in motivating female to engage in terrorism, cf. *What's special about female suicide terrorism?*, Lindsey A. O' Rourke, 2009, ORourke.pdf

_____

middle class. Most analysts can easily compare the Black Widows in Russia with the Palestinian suicide bombers as these both appear to be "struggles of national identity" with religious overtones. Additionally, as is true of the male counterparts, several female suicide bombers have experienced the loss of a close friend or family member. The selection of women for suicide operations and the methods used to persuade them are generally similar to those employed for men. The recruiters take advantage of the candidates' innocence, enthusiasm, personal distress and thirst for revenge.[4]

2.3. Effectiveness

The average number of victims resulting from individual attacks conducted by women is 8.4, versus 5.3 killed per male attack. Although the effectiveness of female suicide terrorism (FST) varies across conflicts, the evidence suggests that women inflict more casualties in individual attacks.[5]

The superior effectiveness of FST derives from the specific norms regulating women's behavior in the society where the attacks take place. Social prejudices about the role of women impact the effectiveness of female attackers in three ways: women generate less suspicion; they are better able to conceal explosives; and they are subjected to more relaxed security measures.

Furthermore, FST benefits from societies where wearing loose, full-body coverings is common among women, maximizing their potential for carrying explosives attached to their bodies. A woman in traditional clothing could conceal over twelve pounds of explosives on her body. In addition, female suicide terrorists frequently disguise themselves as pregnant in order to smuggle a larger explosive device. There are several documented cases (including Chechen, Palestinian, Kurdish, and Tamil attackers) of female bombers pretending to be pregnant.[6] Finally, the societies in which FST attacks take place tend to regard invasive physical searches as threatening a woman's honor, making females less likely to be thoroughly searched than males.

Terrorist groups seem to acknowledge the advantage female attackers present in terms of circumventing counterterrorism measures while carrying more explosives. This perception is evident when considering the bomber's gender for an attack upon a specific individual. Again focusing upon the groups that employ women, female attackers have committed an impressive 60 percent[7] of assassination ST attacks for which the gender of the perpetrator has been identified. In fact, one in every four women who conducted a suicide attack did so with the purpose of assassinating a particular individual.

FST is also likely to be particularly effective in terms of its psychological impact on the target state. It is a well-established fact within the social sciences that women are generally less violent than men, less likely to commit homicide, and less likely to commit suicide. Social beliefs tend to mirror these perceptions. This is particularly likely to happen when the target state has gender-specific norms in which women are typically allocated non-violent roles. As a violent act

_____

[4] *Female suicide Bomber*s, Debra D. Zedalis, [Female Suicide Bombers](#)
[5] The percentage of ineffective suicide attacks (no casualities) within the groups that employ women is 16.9 percent whereas male ineffective suicide attacks are 33.3 percent. In sum, female suicide attacks are more likely to inflict casualties and are more lethal at both the individual and team levels.
[6] Pretending to be pregnant may also decrease the likelihood of being subjected to a thorough physical search.
[7] At the time of writing in 2009.

_____

of homicide-suicide, FST shatters all these beliefs, provoking a sense of outrage and bewilderment in the target state and generating greater journalistic coverage. This increases the target society's expectations about the future costs of the conflict and may well hinder the target government's ability to keep fighting.

In conclusion, female suicide terrorists offer numerous tactical advantages compared with male attackers, as illustrated by the greater lethality of their attacks, the greater frequency of FST assassination attacks, and the increased public outrage and media coverage they generate.[8]

3. Some considerations concerning gender-related issues in the field of counter-terrorism

There is growing evidence that understanding gender relations, identities and inequalities can help improve standard setting. The fact that men are usually presented as being the norm or as the "standard" human being means that the risk of policies accidentally reinforcing gender inequalities is a real one and a detriment to fighting terrorism effectively. Careful attention must be paid to the ways policies are designed and whether they are gender sensitive. It must include questioning any possible biases built into institutions and structures.

Often assumptions are based on stereotypical perceptions of women's and men's roles in terrorism and counter-terrorism. Men are often seen as perpetrators of terrorism and women primarily as passive victims. Women's patterns of involvement in terrorism, particularly the manner in which they are recruited, their motives, rewards and roles, may differ from that of men, which raises questions about specific gender motivation and terrorism.[9]

As regards counter-terrorism efforts, women and men often highlight different concerns and bring different perspectives, experiences and solutions to policy-making. Understanding these differences can help ensuring a more comprehensive approach to counter-terrorism

1. Integrating gender perspective into policy-making

Understanding e.g. the radicalization and recruitment of male and female terrorists can assist in the development of counter measures regarding prevention or reducing radicalization. If policies are in the main based on stereotypical assumptions, such as the misconception that violent extremism and terrorism only concerns men, counter measures will not address the realities on the ground.

When drafting new policies the Committee should take the different gender dimensions into account in order to enhance the effectiveness of the Council of Europe's prevention policy. Furthermore, the Group of Parties could examine the implementation of gender-mainstreaming within the Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism.

2. Integrating gender in developing new legal instruments

Women clearly play multiple roles in the terrorism realm which is why women must also have an enhanced role in the design and implementation of counter-terrorism measures, as well to be recognized for their contributions in combating terrorism. Women can provide crucial feedback

_____

[8] *What's special about female suicide terrorism?*, Lindsey A. O' Rourke, 2009, ORourke.pdf
[9] *Gender, Palestinian Women and Terrorism: Women's liberation or oppression?,* Anat Berko and Edna Erez, May 2007

_____

on the counter-terrorism efforts of the international community, pointing out when preventive policies and practices are having counterproductive impacts on their communities. Moreover they can be effective undertakers of initiatives and shapers of narratives to counter violent extremist and terrorist propaganda and may carry special weight with women audiences. It is therefore necessary to ensure that women are able to participate and be represented in policy development discussions and that gender expertise is included at the very outset of the policy development.[10]

3. Monitoring and evaluation

There must be regular monitoring and evaluations, including on the basis of specific gender benchmarks, the effectiveness, positive and negative impacts of counter-terrorism and counter-radicalization policies and practices. This should also include further research into terrorist radicalization of women, especially factors conducive to it and women's logistical and ideological roles in terrorist groups. In this connection, the Gender Equality Rapporteur could provide, in cooperation with the Group of Parties to the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism (CETS No. 196), a targeted analysis of possible gender bias in the aforementioned Convention.

CODEXTER could in addition consider examining the role of women in radicalization, including on the internet[11], with a view to developing best practices/guidelines on these issues as necessary.

_____

[10] *The Roles of Women in Terrorism, Conflict, and Violent Extremism,* Lessons for the United Nations and International Actors, Naureen Chowdhury Fink, Rafia Barakat and Liat Shetret, April 2013
[11] Recruitment for women and men can differ, but the internet and marriages often play a key role in the recruitment for women.