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14. ABSTRACT Studying, analyzing, and understanding the tactical, strategic, and psychological use and effectiveness of women in past and current insurgencies will help the U.S. in predicting and countering how women could be utilized in future insurgencies. A review of various conflict zones over the past few decades in places such as Algeria, Colombia, Nicaragua, Sri Lanka, Sierra Leone, Russia, Afghanistan, and Iraq, reveals that women play a robust and strategically significant role in modern insurgencies. Additionally, the roles that women have held in insurgencies since the end of the Cold War have expanded, and morphed, presenting new challenges to security operations. Still, there is little more than cursory information regarding the impact of women in insurgencies in most Western military literature, and, to this day, proves to be a topic rarely addressed by Western security experts. A thorough study of the capabilities, trends, and uses of women in modern day insurgencies will help in understanding the grievances and root causes for an insurgency, will better prepare our troops to deal with the complex reality of today's battlefield, and will allow policy makers and military planners to more effectively influence future COIN strategies.					
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Marine Corps University
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Women in Modern Day Insurgencies

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AUTHOR:

Major Tara L. Opielowski, USAF

AY 14-15

Mentor and Oral Defense Committee Member: Craig A. Swanson, Ph.D.

Approved: 

Date: 13 April 2015

Oral Defense Committee Member: Charles D. McKenna, Ph.D.

Approved: 

Date: 13 APRIL 2015

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Executive Summary

Title: Float Like a Butterfly, Sting Like a Bee: Women in Modern Day Insurgencies

Author: Major Tara L. Opielowski, United States Air Force

Thesis: Studying, analyzing, and understanding the tactical, strategic, and psychological use and effectiveness of women in past and current insurgencies will help the U.S. in predicting and countering how women could be utilized in future insurgencies.

Discussion: A review of various conflict zones over the past few decades in places such as Algeria, Colombia, Nicaragua, Sri Lanka, Sierra Leone, Russia, Afghanistan, and Iraq, reveals that women play a robust and strategically significant role in modern insurgencies. Additionally, the roles that women have held in insurgencies since the end of the Cold War have expanded, and morphed, presenting new challenges to security operations. Still, there is little more than cursory information regarding the impact of women in insurgencies in most Western military literature, and, to this day, proves to be a topic rarely addressed by Western security experts.

The U.S. needs to understand why women join and how they are used in insurgent groups. A greater understanding of women in insurgencies can lend the U.S. to understanding and leveraging the societal framework with which it is involved, aiding policy makers and military planners in devising effective counterinsurgency strategies. With the rise of insurgencies across the globe, from Boko Haram in Africa to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, one thing is certain: the importance of women in combat will continue to grow. America cannot afford to ignore this critical dynamic of modern warfare as our enemies may certainly employ it with increasing effectiveness

Conclusion: A thorough study of the capabilities, trends, and uses of women in modern day insurgencies will help in understanding the grievances and root causes for an insurgency, will better prepare our troops to deal with the complex reality of today's battlefield, and will allow policy makers and military planners to more effectively influence future COIN strategies.

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PREFACE

The subject of this paper is women in insurgencies. More specifically, women's motivations for joining and their employment within an insurgency. The paper focuses on four insurgencies that occurred after the end of the Cold War, and compares how women were used and why the women joined the insurgency in the first place. The purpose of this research paper is to review the use of women in these four modern day insurgencies, find any key similarities, and suggest that the study and analysis of their motivations in joining and their employment within the insurgency will aid in understanding the insurgency itself and in constructing effective counterinsurgency strategies.

I found this topic to be extremely exciting and very relevant in today's security environment. In an era of limitless battlefields and undesignated combatants, I believe that the use of women in any capacity during armed conflict can be a powerful tactic. In my opinion, people are only now fully realizing how effective women are as tactical and strategic weapons of war, and I predict that the use of women in armed conflict will continue to evolve and increase once more people realize this fact.

I was a bit disappointed when conducting my research to discover how little U.S. military counterinsurgency doctrine mentions women in insurgencies. Whether this is by design, or by accident, I feel it is an oversight and I feel it would benefit U.S. counterinsurgency experts to explore and better understand this subject.

I would like to thank Dr. Craig A. Swanson, Professor of History at the USMC CSC, for his advice and input throughout this research project. I would also like to thank Professor Michael Lewis, USMC CSC, for his contributions and expert insights. Additionally, I would like to thank USAF Major Matthew Garvelink for reviewing the paper and providing

inputs. I am also indebted to Mr. Donovan Campbell, former Marine infantry captain and dear friend of mine from our 2008 Afghanistan tour, for his time, energy, and advice on my paper. His extensive recommendations helped me to properly focus the paper, and his motivation and kind words kept me on track.

Lastly, and most importantly, I want to thank my daughter Reagan. She is the reason I work hard and try my absolute best. It is my life's goal to make her proud and to show her that she can accomplish absolutely anything in this world that she sets out to do.

One life is all we have and we live it as we believe in living it. But to sacrifice what you are and to live without belief, that is a fate more terrible than dying.

~ Joan of Arc, French female military leader during Hundred Years War in 1428

Young love! If you do not fall in the battle of Maiwand, by God, someone is saving you as a symbol of shame!

~ Malalai, Afghan female warrior during Battle of Maiwand in 1880

I no longer think it's necessary to prove ourselves as women by imitating men. I have learned that a woman can be a fighter, a freedom fighter, a political activist, and that she can fall in love, and be loved, and she can be married, have children, be a mother.

~Leila Khaled, fighter for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine in 2000

I. INTRODUCTION

On November 1, 2014, *USA Today* published an article entitled “Jihadist Jane: Islamic State Seeking out Women.” The article highlighted the growing number of women from all parts of the world leaving the comforts of their homes and traveling to Iraq and Syria in order to join the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), further noting the establishment of an all-female militia within the Islamic State, The Al Khansaa Brigade.¹ The article states that the women of Al Khansaa Brigade aid the ISIS insurgency by patrolling the streets of Iraq and Syria in order to ensure other local women are dressed according to Islamic standards and are acting in accordance with Islamic law, using brutal tactics to enforce both.² The article also acknowledges that women serve to recruit potential Islamic State men and women fighters, mostly through social media, and that the women have proven to be very successful in this endeavor.³

Four months earlier, *BBC News* published a strikingly similar article entitled “Boko Haram Crisis: Nigeria’s Female Suicide Bombers Strike.” Much like the *USA Today* article, this story noted the increased role of women in Boko Haram’s terror campaign throughout Nigeria, highlighting that “to use female suicide bombers is the most dramatic strategy that an

organization can use. It becomes easier to penetrate targets because we are less suspicious about women."⁴ The article notes that Boko Haram also has an all-female wing, primarily used to recruit other females, as well as to serve as intelligence collectors for the group.⁵ Lastly, the article predicts that it is likely that females will continue to move from support roles within Boko Haram to suicide bombers and other combat-oriented roles traditionally held by men.⁶

While some might find this news a bit disconcerting, the fact is that women have participated in various forms of asymmetric warfare, such as terrorism, revolutions, guerrilla movements, and insurgencies for centuries. Additionally, some regions, such as Latin America, have seen a contemporary increase in women's participation in the aforementioned armed conflicts, beginning in the 1970s.⁷ For example, today women contribute to almost "one-third of the combatants and half of the support base" in the Zapatista Army of National Liberation in the Mexican state of Chiapas.⁸ Similar statistics are found in insurgent groups such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (FARC-EP) in Colombia, and in various insurgent groups throughout African countries.

A review of various conflict zones over the past few decades in places such as Algeria, Colombia, Nicaragua, Sri Lanka, Sierra Leone, Russia, Afghanistan, and Iraq, reveals that women play a robust and strategically significant role in modern insurgencies. Additionally, the roles that women have held in insurgencies since the end of the Cold War have expanded, and morphed, presenting new challenges to security operations. Still, there is little more than cursory information regarding the impact of women in insurgencies in most Western military literature, and, to this day, proves to be a topic rarely addressed by Western security experts.⁹ Even with initiatives such as the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, implemented in 2000,

and similar subsequent resolutions designed to internationally address the roles of women in armed conflict, there remains a knowledge gap for policymakers and military planners.¹⁰

There is also a considerable lack of literature addressing women in insurgencies within U.S. counterinsurgency (COIN) doctrine and manuals. In fact, the pillar of the U.S. Army's COIN guidance, the 2006 *Field Manual (FM) 3-24, Counterinsurgency*, only mentioned women once, in reference to cultural guidance to soldiers when engaging with women, and advised soldiers to be cautious around children.¹¹ The most recently published *FM 3-24*, published in May 2014, no longer even has that reference.

Overlooking half the world's population is no doubt detrimental to overall U.S. COIN strategy. However, studying, analyzing, and understanding the tactical, strategic, and psychological use and effectiveness of women in past and current insurgencies will help the U.S. in predicting and countering how women could be utilized in future insurgencies. A thorough study of the capabilities, trends, and uses of women in modern-day insurgencies will also better prepare our troops to deal with the complex reality of today's battlefield, while allowing policy makers and military planners to more effectively influence future COIN strategies.

Thus this paper will address the following:

- 1) Representative case studies of women participating in insurgencies in various regions throughout the world since the end of the Cold War. Specifically, this paper will address women supporting the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone, women supporting the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (FARC-EP) in Colombia, women supporting the Liberation Tigers of Tamil *Eelam* (LTTE) in Sri Lanka, and lastly women supporting the Islamic State (IS) in Iraq and Syria. The paper will address why women join these insurgent groups, and how they are employed.
- 2) Issues and factors relating to women and pertinent to each respective insurgent group for policy makers and military planners to take into consideration for future COIN strategy.

- 3) Trends and commonalities between how women are employed within the various insurgent groups in regions around the world. A majority of the lessons appear to be universal, whereas a minority seem constrained to specific places.

This paper will address the above by providing a concise overview of each particular insurgency in order to frame each situation. These particular insurgencies reviewed within the paper were chosen because they all fall into different geographic locations. Additionally, each insurgent group also has a different religious background or ideology, thus varying reasons for the insurgency. Choosing such vastly different insurgencies will allow one to observe if there are similarities in the motivations and employment of insurgent women despite different areas of operation and different causes for the insurgency.

Following each overview, the paper will discuss how women were employed in each insurgency and explore reasons for the women's motivations to join the insurgency. Each case study will highlight factors regarding women within each respective group that policy makers and military planners might consider for the future. The last portion of this paper will analyze similarities in how various insurgent groups around the world use females within their groups, concluding with a few possible recommendations to aid in the future development of U.S. COIN strategy.

II. BACKGROUND

It is important to discuss the term "insurgency," as it applies to the research conducted and the content of this paper. Much modern literature discusses "women in terrorism," yet many of the terrorist acts discussed in various readings were carried out by women in "recognized" insurgent groups. Since there is no universally-agreed upon definition for terrorism, and since

many insurgent groups rely on acts of terror to garner control of territory or populations in the place of manpower or advanced weaponry, the lines tend to become a bit blurred when distinguishing between terrorist and insurgent groups.¹² Especially within specific conflict zones since the end of the Cold War, terrorist acts and violence against civilians are no longer just a by-product of war; rather they are a distinct strategy used to effectively wage insurgencies.¹³

For the purpose of this paper, however, the writer will use the definition of insurgency found in *Joint Publication 1-02, Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, which states that insurgency is “the organized use of subversion and violence to seize, nullify, or challenge political control of a region. Insurgency can also refer to the group itself.”¹⁴ In addition, as *FM 3-24, Counterinsurgency*, states, insurgency is also included “within a broad category of conflict known as irregular warfare.”¹⁵ Thus, insurgency within this paper will refer to the tactics and methods used by the insurgent group in order to garner political power, gain territory, and delegitimize and replace an existing government.

The most recent version of the U.S. Army’s *FM 3-24, Counterinsurgency*, was published in May 2014, and acknowledges the unique strategic and operational environment of COIN operations. While there are proven and previously successful tenets of COIN, the fluid nature of COIN and the importance of understanding the strategic effects of tactical actions in COIN remain undisputable. Additionally, as the security situation of the world continues to evolve, so must the strategy and tactics of the U.S. military in COIN operations. The enemies of the U.S. will look to cause great harm to the U.S. and its allies by striking at its vulnerabilities, and will do so with limited manpower, limited funds, and limited weaponry.¹⁶ The U.S. must acknowledge that insurgents do not play by the same rules as the U.S., nor do insurgents always

play “fair.” Failure of the U.S. to recognize and adapt to this fact will leave the U.S. at a disadvantage.

One of the most striking gaps in our modern COIN doctrine is a near complete failure to address the use of women by insurgents and America’s potential response options to this tactic. Women seem to be continuously viewed solely as victims of war; rarely are women viewed as perpetrators or enablers of violence. This is a dangerous assumption that has proven to be incorrect on numerous occasions. For example, on 27 January 2002, Yasser Arafat stated to a crowd of women that “women and men are equal....you are my army of roses that will crush Israeli tanks ... you are the hope of Palestine.”¹⁷ That very day, a young Palestinian Red Crescent woman detonated a bomb in a department store, killing one and injuring 100 Israelis.¹⁸ The attack, estimated to cost no more than \$150, was effective because the security guards ignored women as a potential threat.¹⁹ Perhaps it was a culturally-biased predisposition that convinced Arafat to shift the role of suicide bomber from a male-dominated to a female-dominated one.

Perhaps one reason for the particular effectiveness of women in such a role is that it partially conflicts with what many assume are the “natural” roles for a woman. As Chris Coulter, Mariam Persson, and Mats Utas state in their essay “Young Female Fighters in African Wars Conflict and Its Consequences,” people oftentimes think of women as the life-givers, and men as the life-takers, thereby seeing war and violence generally as a masculine duty.²⁰ Viewing war and violence using this perspective can be problematic, and can lead to an underestimation of how war affects women and how women can effectively participate in war.²¹ In a new era of heightened threats, this perspective is not one the U.S. can afford to have.

Thus, the U.S. needs to understand why women join and how they are used in insurgent groups. A greater understanding of women in insurgencies can lend the U.S. to understanding and leveraging the societal framework with which it is involved. Additionally, as acknowledged by David Galula, a distinguished COIN theorist, women are often a key element in insurgents' tactics and strategies.²² According to the World Population by age and sex in the International Program of the US Census, women make up half of the world's population.²³ Insurgencies are hallmarked by their intelligent use of all available assets, and women are no exception. Finally, by studying how insurgents maximize the use of women in conflicts, the U.S. can learn valuable lessons on how to better employ its own women in COIN operations.

Throughout the paper, it will become evident that a majority of the issues discussed can be interpreted to mean that there is not a vast difference in the motivations for women joining an insurgency or their employment within, as compared to the motivations and employment of men in an insurgent group. However, there are a few key distinctions among female insurgents' motivations and employment, to include the psychological effect of women as weapons, the willingness of women to join the group, and if women had any other choice to ensure their security and protection in life. Additionally, understanding how women are generally viewed within a particular society and insurgency, can say a great deal about the society in which one is trying to conduct a counterinsurgency. Therefore, while the application of most COIN doctrine could still be effective without specifically addressing women, understanding and exploiting these key distinctions could aid in even more effective, longer lasting COIN operations. The bottom line is that with the rise of insurgencies across the globe, from Boko Haram in Africa to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, and the rising use of women within them, one thing is certain: the importance of women in combat will continue to grow. America cannot afford to ignore this

critical dynamic of modern warfare as our enemies will certainly employ it with increasing effectiveness.

III. CASE STUDY ONE: WOMEN SUPPORTING THE REVOLUTIONARY UNITED FRONT IN SIERRA LEONE

Overview of the Revolutionary United Front Insurgency:

During the early 1990's, the *Basic Document of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) of Sierra Leone: The Second Liberation of Africa*, as quoted in the RUF propaganda booklet *Footpaths to Democracy: Towards a New Sierra Leone*, provided a critique of the neo-colonial regime that governed Sierra Leone at that time.²⁴ The literature advocated for a return to a multi-democratic party system, a redistribution of resources, educational reforms, and laid the groundwork for a revolutionary movement to be conducted within Sierra Leone.²⁵ The propaganda appealed to many youths, both male and female, of an African nation that had gained its independence from Great Britain in 1961 after over 150 years of colonization.²⁶

At the beginning of the RUF, however, there was little formal leadership and it was just a loose organization receiving military training in Libya; the group merely consisted of men determined to lead an armed struggle for revolution within Sierra Leone.²⁷ Despite this paucity of resources, on March 23, 1991, the armed revolutionary group, staged out of Liberia and led by Foday Sankoh, entered Bomaru and started a revolution.²⁸ Unfortunately, by 1991, the government of Sierra Leone was so corrupt and broken it could neither stop the insurgency nor provide basic services, such as an effective police force, to secure both men and women from the RUF and other perpetrators of violence.²⁹ Government corruption, political instability, poverty, lack of education, and violence were the norm in Sierra Leone at this time, creating a

disenfranchised and rebellious male and female youth ready to revolt.³⁰ The civil war consisted of various fighting groups vying for control, to include the RUF, the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), the Civilian Defense Forces (CDF), and the Sierra Leone Army (SLA).³¹

These groups fought an 11-year civil war, leading to three government coups in 1992, 1996, and 1997.³² Both the RUF and the SLA carried out heinous acts of violence, sometimes fighting each other, and other times collaborating.³³ The illicit mining and smuggling of diamonds helped ignite and perpetrate the war, providing a source of funds for both the military and the insurgents.³⁴

With the help of the United Kingdom and other United Nations peacekeeping forces, the Sierra Leone civil war officially ended with a peace treaty in January 2002, but not before the death of over 50,000 to 75,000 men, women, and children, and with the displacement of hundreds of thousands more.³⁵

The Use of Women by the Revolutionary United Front Insurgency:

It is estimated that over the years from 1991 to 2002, ten to thirty percent of the insurgent fighters in the Sierra Leone civil war were female.³⁶ While women participated in all of the various groups during the civil war, women were most prevalent in the RUF and composed 24 percent of the insurgent group.³⁷ Unfortunately, there are substantial gaps in the information found on these women insurgents, perhaps because many women did not participate in documented disarming or demobilization after the civil war's end in 2002; rather they simply just returned home to their communities.³⁸ Only about 5,200 female fighters were registered in Sierra Leone's Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) program.³⁹ What is

known about the women fighters, however, is that they were largely regarded as ‘barbarians’ and ‘monsters’ by the general population, and in many cases were seen as more brutal and violent than their male counterparts.⁴⁰ In fact, one ex-combatant stated “The women fighters were much more hot tempered than the men. The ladies would kill a lot of people—they were filled with anger.”⁴¹

Upon being admitted to the group, all women were trained as fighters and taught how to use a weapon.⁴² After receiving this initial training, women were used within the group as spies, laborers, sex slaves, and armed combatants.⁴³ The women fighters were just as capable and brutal as any male fighter, and stories emerged regarding these violent female insurgents throughout Sierra Leone.⁴⁴

Rape was also a prevalent wartime atrocity during the Sierra Leone war, and was often conducted by groups of rebels.⁴⁵ Women were not exempt from participating as perpetrators in this activity either, and gang rape with women perpetrators composed one of every four gang rape incidents in Sierra Leone.⁴⁶ Women were involved in gang rapes and often participated by inserting weapons or other objects into the victim, or by just holding the victim down while other members committed the act.⁴⁷ As this may come as a surprising fact to many readers, it is important to note that women participation in wartime rape is not restricted to the conflict in Sierra Leone; reports of similar incidents have also surfaced in the Congo, Liberia, Haiti, and even Abu Ghraib.⁴⁸

Possible Motivations for Women to Join the Revolutionary United Front Insurgency:

A majority of the women insurgents had been abducted from their villages and forcibly taken to the “bush” to participate in the violent actions of the RUF; a small minority willingly

joined the group.⁴⁹ Some women fled, some tried to flee and were killed, and others chose to remain with the insurgent group and fight.⁵⁰ Many, if not all, were subjected to violence, rape, forced labor, and in some cases, forced marriages or pregnancies.⁵¹ Dana Cohen, author of “Female Combatants and the Perpetration of Violence: Wartime Rape in the Sierra Leone Civil War,” believes that women joined or stayed in the group for many of the same reasons that the men did. She stated “women fighters face similar social pressures within armed groups that men do and, given a similar set of circumstances, are likely to commit similar forms of violence.”⁵² Cohen acknowledges that many of the women may not have had any other choice, and that the females’ participation in violent acts was better than estrangement or death.⁵³ Cohen also argues, however, that it is a person’s own assumptions of gendered roles that lead to surprise and the misunderstanding of a woman’s role and motivations in carrying out violence.⁵⁴

Chris Coulter, author of “Female Fighters in the Sierra Leone War: Challenging the Assumptions,” does not deviate far from Dana Cohen’s theories, and claims that women fighters joined and stayed in the group for survival, control, empowerment, prestige, the need to belong to something, resources, or an opportunity to loot (or as Dana Cohen put it, for many of the same reasons the men did).⁵⁵ Coulter also acknowledges that participation in the violence was a better choice for women fighters than staying a victim of war and possible death.⁵⁶ An interesting note that Coulter highlights is the motivation to stay changing throughout the women’s time in the group. He stated that while many women originally joined and participated for reasons of survival and resources, some women’s motivations to stay evolved to ones of empowerment and control, even if those reasons were illusionary.⁵⁷ Coulter also notes that some women stayed and carried out violent acts for revenge, directing their own inner fear and anger to the victims and perpetrating the cycle of violence in this society.⁵⁸

Key COIN Considerations for Women in the Revolutionary United Front Insurgency:

Chris Coulter, author of “Female Fighters in the Sierra Leone War: Challenging the Assumptions,” points out that assumptions and biases regarding gendered roles and female fighters could be a hindrance to policymakers, and to others simply trying to understand war.⁵⁹ Mr. Coulter notes that “in rural Sierra Leonean traditional culture, women are not believed to be inherently peaceful. On the contrary, the traditional discourse on femininity implies that women are by nature wild and dangerous, they are metaphorically 'from the bush', and therefore they need to be controlled and domesticated.”⁶⁰ Therefore, women fighting in the “bush” are only unleashing their natural tendencies and true nature.⁶¹ This key distinction says a great deal about the particular culture of Sierra Leone, and understanding this distinction could be beneficial in conducting future COIN operations in similar societies.

This key distinction is perhaps the most important consideration when studying the use of women in past insurgencies. U.S. policy makers and military planners must overcome their own culturally-based preconceived notions. Women need to be regarded as more than just victims of war. Most planners recognize this fact for women in westernized state-sanctioned armies; the fact must now be recognized for female guerrilla fighters. Additionally, as seen in the case of women RUF insurgents, females can be just as violent as men and can be effective instruments of war, causing great physical and physiological harm.

One other key distinction from the RUF case to consider, a distinction that will be seen again in the following case studies, is that oftentimes women joined or stayed with the RUF because they had no alternative choice. Simply stated, it was safer for women to join the insurgency and

participate in violence than risk the chance of being a victim. In *FM 3-24, Counterinsurgency*, there is a chapter dedicated to indirect methods for countering insurgencies. This chapter speaks to “Generational Engagement,” and to providing education, empowerment, and participation opportunities to the youth in order to provide the next generation with a better choice.⁶² It would be beneficial to address “Gender Engagement” as well, in order to provide other options to females and potentially reduce the number of women joining an insurgency because it is the only viable life choice.

IV. CASE STUDY TWO: WOMEN SUPPORTING THE REVOLUTIONARY ARMED FORCES OF COLOMBIA-PEOPLE’S ARMY IN COLOMBIA

Overview of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People’s Army Insurgency:

The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People’s Army (FARC-EP or simply FARC) has been, and remains today, the dominant insurgent group within Colombia.⁶³ During the 1930s and 1940s, as a time known in Colombia as “*La Violencia*,” peasants and elites fought in a civil war over land and democratic reforms, leaving over 200,000 Colombians dead.⁶⁴ Despite the agreement reached by the Liberals and Conservatives known as the National Front, during their continued struggles for land reform and in order to resist capitalism in the 1960s, several hundred male and female rural peasants organized themselves into self-defense groups, eventually evolving to create the FARC.⁶⁵ Initially, the self-defense groups’ goals included the creation of a stable, autonomous, uncorrupted society, based on Marxism, local control, and free of capitalistic intentions.⁶⁶

The Colombian government's concern over these groups' expanding influence, and the government's overt attacks (with the aid of the U.S.) carried out against the groups, led to the formal creation of the FARC in May 1964.⁶⁷ From 1970 and into the 1990s, the FARC expanded their influence into both rural and urban areas of Colombia, and by 1999, the FARC had increased their power and had guerrilla fighters in over 60 percent of the nation.⁶⁸

The FARC has funded itself through both licit and illicit means over the years, but is most known for their illicit funding methods, such as kidnapping for ransom, extortion, and profits from drugs sales and trade. Violence conducted by the FARC, and conducted by the government in response to the FARC, has fluctuated over the years with violent acts culminating in 2000 when the FARC was fighting various para-military groups, as well as the Colombian government.⁶⁹ According to the February 2014 Victims United report, 50 years of violence between the FARC, para-military groups, and the Colombian government has caused over 220,000 deaths and over six million men, women, and children to be displaced.⁷⁰ Peace negotiations between the FARC and the Colombian government have been on-going since November 2012, with occasional spikes in violence occurring during cease fires throughout the past two years.⁷¹ Although the numerical strength of the FARC has fluctuated over the years, the group currently remains fairly strong and viable within the country. It is believed, however, that the FARC moved to negotiations again in 2012 due to a reduction in members, dwindling political influence, and the murder of some of their key leaders.⁷²

The Use of Women by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army Insurgency:

Political violence has been a part of Colombia since the country received its independence from Spain in 1810, and women have been both victims and perpetrators of the

numerous violent struggles since that time.⁷³ The roles and functions women have performed in these various politically-charged violent groups have morphed over time, but today it is estimated that thirty to forty percent of the FARC's members are women, with an increase in FARC women participation beginning in the 1980s.⁷⁴ Interestingly, the FARC claims to be a feminist organization, with a female FARC commander stating that gender discrimination is prohibited and women in the FARC have all the same rights and responsibilities as the men.⁷⁵ In fact, the FARC claims to punish those who discriminate by gender.⁷⁶ Whether this is true in practice, or only in theory, remains questionable.

Due to this purported equality, women in the FARC hold many, if not all, of the positions that men hold. Women are employed as recruiters, political spokesmen, medical caretakers, cooks, spies, messengers, and combatants.⁷⁷ FARC women have excelled in gathering intelligence, population outreach, propaganda, and recruiting duties.⁷⁸ FARC women also dig trenches, patrol, pull security, and participate in fire fights because oftentimes the physical and emotional expectations of the women are the same as the men.⁷⁹ There are instances when women have not been able to “keep up with the men,” and have become a liability. In those instances, women are punished; many times by death.⁸⁰ The only role that some FARC women must perform, that is not expected of the men, is the role of sexual provider.⁸¹

One female FARC member, named Elda Neyis Mosquera Garcia, joined the FARC as a teenager, served 24 years in the group, and eventually rose to the role of a unit leader with 300 fighters under her.⁸² Her duties included killing members of Colombian security forces, or others, who opposed the FARC's agenda. In one incident, in 2000, Ms. Garcia was responsible for castrating male hostages.⁸³ This is one incident that highlights that Ms. Garcia, among many

other female FARC fighters, appears to have been just as cruel and capable of carrying out violent duties as the male counterparts.

Possible Motivations for Women to Join the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia- People's Army Insurgency:

Unlike the Revolutionary United Front insurgency group in Sierra Leone, very few women are abducted and forced into the FARC; most join voluntarily.⁸⁴ This point remains a key distinction, however, and again aids in fully understanding the society the FARC manipulates. It is also pertinent to note that due to the militarization and strict rules that govern the lives of FARC members, once a member joins the FARC (male or female), they are not permitted to leave and they must cut all ties with their families, friends, and previous lives in order to devote themselves entirely to the insurgent group.⁸⁵

Women in Colombia join the FARC for numerous reasons. Alexis Henshaw developed a theory in her doctoral dissertation titled "Why Women Rebel: Understanding Female Participation in Intrastate Conflict," that claims a woman's circumstances combined with personal issues and a threat to her existence will compel a woman to join a group.⁸⁶ This could largely explain why women join the FARC. Conversely, Keith Stanski and Douglas Porch claim in their book, *Like Going to a Fiesta*, that some women join the FARC because of the uniforms, weapons, status, and empowerment.⁸⁷ Other studies show that women join the FARC to escape from their present, dreary life conditions, perhaps optimistic that the FARC will offer a better life.⁸⁸ Additionally, women join the FARC to bring political change; although it appears that only a small minority of women join for this reason.⁸⁹ Finally, women also join the FARC for a

sense of adventure, a sense of gender equality, family ties, revenge, custom, and to improve their lives.⁹⁰

The motivations for women joining the FARC vary based on each particular woman and her circumstances. Analyzing the above motivations, and similar to the RUF, women appear to join for some of the same reasons that a man would join the FARC. In addition, the FARC does a very good job of propagating that it is an “equal opportunity” insurgent group, which may cause females involved in domestic violence or with few options to enhance their lives to join the FARC. Similar to women who willingly or unwillingly join and stay with the RUF, joining the FARC may be a woman’s best option for security, protection, and empowerment in a society that offers few other options in life. This is another key distinction that can be exploited during COIN operations.

Key COIN Considerations for Women in the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia- People’s Army Insurgency:

In his book, *The Accidental Guerrilla*, David Kilcullen recognizes that U.S. strategy towards global terrorism and insurgency tends to be defensive rather than decisive.⁹¹ What Kilcullen means by this is that the focus tends to be on keeping terrorists and insurgents at bay, as opposed to addressing the underlying conditions that terrorists and insurgents exploit.⁹² An understanding that permanently defeating an insurgency cannot be accomplished through military means alone will ensure that policy makers and military planners accurately identify the social grievances that give power to insurgents. For example, the World Health Organization discovered that twenty percent of women in Colombia were victims of domestic violence.⁹³ This grievance of women is a key distinction and could be one factor that motivated women to escape that violence and join an insurgent group for protection. Understanding this distinction and

providing other options for women to escape this violence could be an indirect method for countering insurgents.

Another factor to consider is the FARC's claim that it is a gender-neutral, non-discriminatory group that promotes the empowerment of women. Half of Colombia's population is comprised of women, and the FARC has been effective in engaging this portion of the population and inspiring women to join in order to make a better life for themselves.⁹⁴ This is another key distinction that COIN experts could exploit. Women want to be politically involved and want positions that empower them, as evidenced by some of their motivations for joining the FARC. Targeting this audience and providing options besides violence may enhance a COIN operation's success.

Additionally, Colombia has 4.7 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), with women estimated to make up 56 percent of that IDP population.⁹⁵ These two factors combined lead to an environment full of disenfranchised women. This population needs to be engaged in a positive manner, again providing political and economic options that will empower them, allow them to be involved in political processes, and swayed from resorting to violence for change.

V. CASE STUDY THREE: WOMEN SUPPORTING THE LIBERATION TIGERS OF TAMIL *EELAM* IN SRI LANKA

Overview of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil *Eelam* Insurgency:

The beginning of Tamil nationalism can be traced back to the end of the British colonization of Sri Lanka in 1948.⁹⁶ Prior to its independence, Sri Lanka was a nation comprised of many ethnic groups that had a mutual understanding and loose tolerance of one another.⁹⁷

After becoming an independent state, however, the Sinhalese majority began to impose state-sanctioned restrictions on education, language, and employment; restrictions which ostracized and repressed the minority group of the Tamils.⁹⁸ Additionally, and to alleviate the issues caused by a rapidly expanding Sri Lankan population, the majority-Sinhalese government implemented a program called the *Peasants Colonization Scheme* in 1953.⁹⁹ This program was designed to evenly spread the population throughout Sri Lanka to avoid heavily congested urban areas, and moved Sinhalese civilians into North and Eastern areas of Sri Lanka that were already inhabited by Tamils.¹⁰⁰ This motion continued to promote discontent between the two nationalities, in both men and women, as the Tamils viewed this as a threat to their “homeland.”¹⁰¹

The poor condition of the Sri Lankan economy in the 1970s only heightened the tensions, and Tamil revolutionary groups comprised of disenchanted male and female youth began to emerge.¹⁰² These groups believed that the only solution to the Sinhalese colonization of their homeland was the creation of a Tamil, autonomous, self-governing region in Northern Sri Lanka, and that the traditional, peaceful attempts at negotiations with the Sinhalese members of government were futile.¹⁰³ Thus, the first violent tactics of the “Tamil Tigers” were seen in 1972, with the group evolving to the politically armed movement of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil *Eelam* (*LTTE*) in 1976 and being led by Vellupillai Prabuakaran.¹⁰⁴

Initially, the LTTE targeted Sri Lankan armed forces as well as conducted political assassinations, but over time the insurgent groups’ tactics led to violent attacks against any Sinhalese civilian.¹⁰⁵ The violence on both sides intensified in the 1980s as both the Sinhalese and the LTTE took part in revenge killings, assassinations, and killing in the name of self-defense.¹⁰⁶ But it was the LTTE’s killing of the Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, in 1991 by

a female suicide bomber that propelled the group further onto the international limelight, and caused many countries to view the LTTE as a dangerous terrorist group.¹⁰⁷

In May 2009, after over 30 years of violent civil strife, the LTTE was finally defeated through an intense Sri Lankan military operation.¹⁰⁸ Over the course of those 30 years, it is estimated that each side lost 70,000 to 80,000 people and hundreds of thousands were displaced in and out of Sri Lanka.¹⁰⁹

The Use of Women by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil *Eelam* Insurgency:

Although officially stood up in 1976, the LTTE initially began recruiting and arming women in 1983 in order to provide Tamil women a means of self-defense against Sinhalese or Indian enemies and to provide propaganda for the group.¹¹⁰ This all-female wing was called the Suthanthirap Paravaikal, or Birds of Freedom.¹¹¹ The Birds of Freedom eventually evolved from a woman's self-defense and support group to a military guerilla unit; a group that exposed women to combat and had women performing duties such as checkpoint security, defensive bunker guards, and guerilla fighters.¹¹²

By 2006, the LTTE had 4,000 women in the 14,000-member group, comprising twenty-nine percent of the LTTE's rank and file.¹¹³ Due to the group's frequent and effective use of suicide bombing, the LTTE formed a wing called the Black Tigers. By July 2006, the Black Tigers had 199 male and 74 female suicide bombers.¹¹⁴ The most notorious LTTE suicide bombing was the one carried out by a Tamil female named Thenmuli Rajaratnam. In May 1991, she placed a garland around Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's neck and kneeled down to touch his feet in respect, detonating a deadly bomb as she did.¹¹⁵ This incident displayed the LTTE's resolve to use any means necessary to achieve their desired objectives. It also displayed

an evolving security threat to the world; the use of women as highly effective instruments of violence. Both of these highlight key distinctions in the use of women within an insurgent group and display the psychological effect that women have when inciting violence.

In her book *Women in Terrorism, the Case of the LTTE*, Tamara Herath notes “an essentialist understanding of women as nurturers allow women suicide bombers a certain freedom to be a successful phenomenon in terrorist groups, in particular the LTTE.”¹¹⁶ In April 2006, another LTTE female gained access to a military hospital. She hid her suicide bomb by disguising herself as a pregnant woman, and was able to detonate the bomb near her target, killing many civilian bystanders.¹¹⁷ This is just another example among many of the LTTE using their women effectively as suicide bombers, and of the distinction of using women as weapons to garner a psychological response. Because of cultural norms in Sri Lanka, the traditional ways in which women were viewed, and the lack of female Sri Lankan armed forces, the LTTE were able to capitalize on this tactic in their fight. While female Tigers still participated in recruitment, propaganda, medical care, and other support roles, thirty to forty percent of all LTTE suicide bombing attacks were carried out by women.¹¹⁸

Possible Motivations for Women to Join the Liberation Tigers of Tamil *Eelam* Insurgency:

When the LTTE was initially formed in 1976 to achieve an autonomous Tamil region in the North and East of Sri Lanka, women were primarily used for recruitment, propaganda, fund raising, information collection, and medical care.¹¹⁹ By the early 1980s, however, the LTTE was experiencing a shortage of male members and called out to the Tamil women to become combatants for the group.¹²⁰ Tamil females willingly answered the call; perhaps due to their own internal motivations and grievances, and perhaps due to the strong propaganda that encouraged females to join their combatant male counterparts as “women warriors.”¹²¹ This propaganda

highlighted the LTTE's "enlightened" view of women's freedoms and equality in a Tamil society.¹²²

Additionally, and similar to most Tamil men, another large motivation among female Tigers was the desire to promote Tamil nationalism.¹²³ This was the core of the LTTE struggle, and in her book, *Women in Terrorism, the Case of the LTTE*, Tamara Herath captures these feelings of a female Tiger. Herath's interviewee stated "Women cannot be separate from the society. They are very important part of the society. So it was inevitable that women also took part in the fight for freedom. When the enemy came to war against us he didn't differentiate between man and women. So we also look at it the same way"¹²⁴

Other motivations for women to join and take up arms in the LTTE included a sense of empowerment, liberation for women, kinship, revenge for the loss of deceased family members, and security.¹²⁵ As seen within the other insurgent groups previously mentioned, and a key distinction in the use of female insurgents, many Tamil women did not have any other viable options to effectively protect themselves against rape and death, or to provide a better life for themselves and their families, other than to join and fight for the LTTE.¹²⁶ Lastly, as chaste and a woman's sexual conduct are highly valued in a Tamil society, Tamil women who had been previously raped in the past would choose to fight with the LTTE rather than take their own lives.¹²⁷

Key COIN Considerations for Women in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam Insurgency:

As seen in the previous case studies, a key distinction that is identified in this case study is that many women joined this insurgent group when there appeared to be no other viable options for security and economic prosperity. Additionally, and similar to the men, Tamil

women felt a strong sense of nationalism and sensed that violence was the only way to achieve their political goals.

The most distinct take away from this case study, however, is that it reveals how an insurgent group adapts to heighten its effectiveness, especially once the insurgent group realizes the psychological effect women have as weapons of war. As *FM 3-24, Counterinsurgency*, states, “as the operational environment changes, it can affect an insurgency’s resourcing, the ways an insurgency attempts to achieve its ends, and its calculation of what its ends should be.”¹²⁸ The LTTE’s manipulation of and increasing role of women as suicide bombers is an example of this adaptability. This same tactic is also highlighted by Boko Haram’s increased use of women due to the sheer effectiveness of women as suicide bombers. The continued increase of women suicide bombers, coupled with cultural and religious norms that soldiers are trained to respect, present a challenging security environment. U.S. military planners must take this key distinction into consideration in order to stay ahead of an ever-adapting enemy.

VI. CASE STUDY FOUR: WOMEN SUPPORTING THE ISLAMIC STATE OF IRAQ AND AL-SHAM IN THE LEVANT

Overview of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham Insurgency:

The Islamic State’s leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, formally declared the emergence of the Islamic State of Syria and al-Sham (ISIS) caliphate in regions covering Iraq and Syria in July 2014.¹²⁹ Almost immediately after al-Baghdadi’s declaration of the Islamic caliphate from Mosul, the phenomenon spread like wildfire and gained enormous popularity from Muslims in the Middle East, Europe, and other Muslim countries.¹³⁰ By the end of summer 2014, ISIS had

20,000 to 31,500 men and women as members, with an expected increase in membership due to the group's successful information campaign, their influential ideology, and their territorial gains.¹³¹

ISIS' true motivation is the resurrection of the Muslim nation, or *ummah*, and the reestablishment of an Islamic caliphate, reclaiming territory of the past centuries.¹³² The group seeks to return Islam to its purest and most original form and recreate the Islamic caliphate experienced in 632 B.C., the caliphate that Mohammed the Prophet left behind shortly after his death.¹³³ ISIS members do not recognize nationalism, race, social and economic status, or the "imaginary" nation-state borders drawn on the map by the victors of World War I.¹³⁴ Rather, the group recognizes true Sunni Muslim faith and piety and complete compliance with Islamic Law, or *Sharia*.¹³⁵

Because a caliphate demands territory, ISIS took advantage of the failed governments of both Iraq and Syria and capitalized on the opportunity to fill the vacuum with their extreme governance.¹³⁶ Using a provocative propaganda campaign coupled with speed, surprise, and tenacity, ISIS fighters quickly took areas of Syria and Iraq and defeated numerous Syrian and Iraqi Security Forces.¹³⁷ As ISIS tore through the countries, the members also killed thousands of men, women, and children; crucifying Christians, shooting apostate Muslims, and beheading both Muslim and Christian Westerners. The scale of violence used by ISIS, especially in acts carried out towards other Muslims, is unprecedented by other jihadist groups.

Currently, the U.S. leads a coalition of partner nations to defeat ISIS. There will likely be increasing and ongoing efforts by the coalition to defeat ISIS for the foreseeable future.

The Use of Women by the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham Insurgency:

An alarming event began to occur shortly after the emergence of ISIS in summer 2014; women starting leaving the comforts of their home to travel to Syria and join the spreading insurgent group. To date, about ten percent of foreign fighters in ISIS are women and come from North America, Australia, Europe, and numerous Muslim nations.¹³⁸ Many outside the sphere of Islamic fundamentalism question the reason a women would want to join a group that seeks to subjugate women, and many speculate how the women are employed and what their roles are within the group.

One of the most notable ways that women are being used within ISIS includes the formation of an all-female brigade called the Al Khansaa Brigade.¹³⁹ The brigade, established in Raqqa, Syria, is a militant police force of sorts, using women to patrol the streets in order to ensure other women are in full compliance with Islamic law and the strict morality standards.¹⁴⁰ Adhering to other prohibitions within Islamic Law, men and women do not comingle and every position within the Al Khansaa Brigade is filled by women.¹⁴¹ Expressing support for the brigade's methods of dispensing discipline, Abu Ahmed, an ISIS official in Raqqa, declared that "Jihad is not a man-only duty. Women must do their part as well."¹⁴²

Women are also doing their part in other areas. A *BBC News* article titled "IS Needs Women and is Using Love as a Recruitment Tool," highlights that some women have joined ISIS in order to marry a man and aid to legitimize the formation of the Islamic State.¹⁴³ Yet being a wife and mother is not the only role these women fill. Rather, ISIS benefits immensely from using these young women as recruiting agents, and uses women in this role on multiple social media sites to attract male and female members.¹⁴⁴

The current combatant role of the women in ISIS appears to be somewhat limited, but as seen with Boko Haram and the Tamil Tigers, this role will likely evolve over time. ISIS's Al

Zawra school for female recruits aims to motivate girls who are “interested in explosive belt and suicide bombing more than in a white dress or a castle.”¹⁴⁵ While ISIS has not yet used women as suicide bombers or as fighters on the front line, one must assume that ISIS is capable of this adaptation, as witnessed in other insurgent groups.

Possible Motivations for Women to Join the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham Insurgency:

It may appear paradoxical for a women to join a group that seemingly oppresses women. Discarding any biases, however, and reviewing the previous three case studies, the fact that women are joining ISIS should come as no surprise to COIN planners. Additionally, to believe that women are only joining ISIS in order to become a jihadist bride might be a bit naïve. Nimmi Gowranithan, a leading expert in women and violence, states in her *Foreign Affairs* article titled “The Women of ISIS: Understanding and Combating Female Extremism,” that women who live in deeply conservative social spaces and have their political identity threatened will rise and fight for the same basic reasons as the men.¹⁴⁶ This statement is seen in the previous case studies, and is repeated again by Gowrinathan. One of the appealing features of ISIS, for both men and women, is that the group caters to marginalized Sunni Muslims, encouraging *all* genders, ethnicities, and classes of Sunnis to participate in the armed struggle to establish the caliphate. This call gives Sunni Muslims an opportunity to relocate to and fight for territory in which the legitimacy of their laws and traditions will be recognized.

One example of this is found in France, where women are not permitted to wear their head scarves or burqas in many areas, thus creating a feeling of marginalization and the space for isolationism.¹⁴⁷ Perhaps not surprisingly, the largest number of ISIS’ foreign female fighters comes from France.¹⁴⁸ Women, as well as men, may resort to joining political groups such as

ISIS if they feel their own political identity in their current homeland is being oppressed, especially if they feel that the group will align more with their beliefs. The Al Khansaa Brigade relies on the dissatisfaction of political identity in order to help its recruiting efforts and messaging.¹⁴⁹

Finally, whether real or imagined, actively participating in the establishment of an Islamic caliphate, particularly in the role of a police force, could feel like empowerment to a woman. Additionally, participating in a cause to create the caliphate, whether as a bride or as a fighter, could be a meaningful adventure that appeals to some women, especially if one feels that the promised after-death reward is worth the price.

Key COIN Considerations for Women in the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham Insurgency:

Looking past biases and truly understanding the above mentioned motivations could be one factor in helping to defeat the ISIS insurgency. In her book, *Bombshell*, Mia Bloom states “it is now clear that women are the future of even the most conservative terrorist organizations.”¹⁵⁰ Understanding the underlying reason why women are drawn to participate in such groups, as opposed to assuming that those women are an anomaly, is an important key distinction that can be exploited, and is the first step in countering women insurgents’ participation and in helping to dismantle the insurgency. As Nimmi Gowrinathan states in her article, “The Women of ISIS, Understanding and Combatting Female Extremism,” “if policymakers overlook such motivations, treating female fighters as nothing more than instruments of male leadership, they will find it difficult to prevent female extremism.”¹⁵¹ This is a risk that could be too dangerous for the U.S. to take.

While women are more than likely not the center of gravity within the ISIS insurgency, it is unlikely that the establishment of an Islamic caliphate can be successful without the support and participation of women. This makes women a sensible portion of the population to engage as an indirect method of countering an insurgency. As females are engaged, however, counterinsurgents must be mindful as to not push their own ideology and biases on individual freedoms. Rather an understanding of the political, cultural, and religious grievances and goals that these Muslim women have can aid in exploiting and undermining ISIS' intended objectives and its progress.

VII. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS OF WOMEN IN INSURGENCIES

As seen from the case studies, women are active and highly effective members of any insurgency, participating in a full range of roles within an insurgent group. This paper highlights that a majority of the reasons women join and how they are employed within an insurgency are similar to male insurgents, yet there remain a few key distinctions that could be exploited in a COIN environment to include the psychological effect of women as weapons, the willingness of women to join the group, and if women had any other choice to ensure their security and protection in life. Additionally, while the use of women in each of these insurgencies and the motivations for women joining may slightly differ from case to case, there are definitely a few trends across the groups. Some of these similarities highlight the fact that:

- 1) While not always the case, many women join insurgencies for the same reasons as men. These reasons include money, boredom, adventure, political motives, religious reasons, safety, and power. Additionally, women typically join for a multitude of these reasons. Some women may be forced or aggressively persuaded to join an insurgent group, but many other women make the calculated decision themselves.

Identifying key distinctions found within each society and insurgency will aid in understanding the society as a whole and in addressing grievances within the insurgency.

- 2) Oftentimes women join insurgent groups because it is the only or the best option for their (and their family's) security, safety, and livelihood. Women choose to become perpetrators of war rather than victims of it. This is a salient fact, a key distinction in why women join insurgent groups, and a fact that lends credence that engagement of females in COIN operations is imperative for COIN success.
- 3) Women are just as capable of violence and destruction as men. As seen in some of the case studies, women can be more violent than the men. Women can also incite higher levels of violence from their male peers. Additionally, women have a deeper psychological effect when carrying out violent attacks, which is oftentimes used as an advantage for an insurgent group.
- 4) The use of women in insurgent groups will likely continue to increase. Insurgents seemingly realize the effectiveness of using women in various roles and will likely continue to adapt and evolve the ways and means of using women.

These trends highlight the importance women play in any insurgency. In fact, it is probably unlikely that an insurgency could succeed without the aid, acceptance, and participation of women. Yet *Joint Publication 3-24, Counterinsurgency*, and *FM 3-24, Counterinsurgency*, do not even acknowledge the role women play, the importance of women, or that women themselves can be insurgents. This is a critical flaw in COIN doctrine and a missed opportunity to target or exploit a specific portion of a population.

While there have been initiatives within U.S. COIN policy and doctrine, such as the Female Engagement Teams (FETs) and the Lioness Program in Iraq, these programs appear ad hoc, poorly trained, and under-utilized.¹⁵² These teams were utilized to gain intelligence, engage the female population, train female soldiers and police officers, and provide additional security measures against women insurgents that are difficult for male soldiers to do because of cultural restrictions. It is beyond the scope of this paper to go into greater detail about the specifics of these programs, but seeing as COIN operations are “population-centric,” and intended to lessen

legitimacy of the insurgent groups, the FET concept appears to be a method with great potential if given the proper funding, training, and attention.

Yet it appears that U.S. policy makers largely ignore the effective engagement of female insurgents, perhaps due to cultural biases. Many enemies of the U.S., however, do not share this same bias. Thus, the largest impediment to successfully engaging women in insurgents and swaying female insurgents may very well be U.S. cultural biases played out in U.S. policy and military doctrine.

VIII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper sought to bring an awareness to the importance of studying, analyzing, and understanding the tactical, strategic, and psychological use and effectiveness of women in past and current insurgencies in order to help the U.S. in predicting and countering how women could be utilized in future insurgencies. The three key points to take away from this paper are the following:

- 1) First, it is imperative for U.S. policy makers and military planners to acknowledge and understand women in insurgencies. Not only the roles women hold within insurgencies, but the reasons and grievances that compel women to join an insurgency or resort to violence, especially when they deviate from the reasons men join and how men are employed. Identifying these key distinctions can aid in effectively targeting women during COIN operations.
- 2) *FM 3-24, Counterinsurgency*, states that “successful conduct of counterinsurgency operations depends on thoroughly understanding the society and culture within which they are being conducted.”¹⁵³ Understanding how women are viewed in a society and the grievances of the women will aid in effectively addressing and countering an insurgency. As nearly half of the population in most societies, women are an important, yet oftentimes overlooked, part of the human terrain that must be studied, analyzed, and coerced to believing an ongoing insurgency is not beneficial.
- 3) The use of women in insurgencies and why women join the groups must be addressed in COIN strategy development. Policy and military doctrine concerning women in insurgencies cannot be marginalized, downplayed, or given minimal attention. The

proper targeting and exploitation of this portion of a population could potentially wield great success, and this needs to be addressed in updated COIN manuals and doctrine.

Therefore, while it is again beyond the scope of this paper to provide detailed recommendations, the following are a few generic recommendations that policy makers and military planners could consider for future COIN operations:

- 1) Continue and expand the use of U.S. military Female Engagement Teams. Ensure the teams are properly trained and effectively utilized during all stages of COIN operations. The potential lift of the U.S. Combat Exclusion Laws and policies could aid in this endeavor.
- 2) Ensure commanders conducting COIN operations are trained for and aware of gender-specific grievances and that they have the means and methods to address them. This element of the human terrain is imperative for successful COIN operations.
- 3) Encourage political and economic opportunities for women. For example, when advising and training Host Nation defense forces, ensure females are incorporated into both military and police forces. Additionally, partner with Department of State officials to ensure women have the opportunity and capability to peacefully express their political dissent and grievances. Finally, address the issues needed to ensure women are afforded protection and security, thus giving women one less motivation to side with an insurgency.
- 4) Update and address gender engagement in *JP 3-24, Counterinsurgency*, and *FM 3-24, Counterinsurgency*. In addition to updating U.S. military COIN doctrine, ensure gender-specific training is conducted for all COIN operations. Additionally, and preemptively, engage more female foreign military and police officers in combined exercises and military exchanges.
- 5) Ensure a viable plan for addressing the reintegration of women into society after an insurgency fails is addressed in all Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) plans. Failure to address this issue or provide viable options for women could lead to further issues in the future.

These recommendations are by no means all encompassing, rather they are simply baseline recommendations for consideration. The purpose of this paper is to provide case studies in order to show the use of women by various insurgent groups. By understanding and analyzing this information and the key distinctions between how women are used and why women join

insurgent groups as compared to male insurgents, policy makers and military planners may be more informed when devising future COIN policy directed to engaging and countering women insurgents, as well as when devising effective future COIN strategies in general.

Endnotes

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- ⁴ Farouk Chothia, "Boko Haram Crisis: Nigeria's Suicide Bombers Strike," *BBC News* (August 2014), accessed on January 11, 2015 at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-28657085>.
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ Naval Postgraduate School, *Women in Insurgent Groups in Latin America*, 2014, 1.
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