



# Female Terrorists... A New Generation of Feminism



Prepared by: Mustafa Emad



# Female Terrorists... A New Generation of Feminism

Dialogue Forum for Development and Human Rights

Non-partisan civil institution - known as 6337 for 2005

Its statutes are subject to Law 84 of 2002 for NGOs and private institutions.

Website: [https://www.fdhrd.org/ /](https://www.fdhrd.org/)



ALL RIGHTS RESERVED- 2021 ©

FDHRD





## **Introduction:**

Waves of extremism and violence have spread around the world in many forms. One of them is feminist terrorism where women join terrorist groups. Researchers in the field of terrorism call this a qualitative shift in the terrorist strategy. The feminist movement has passed through three generations. Even if the goal differs for each of them, they unanimously agree on the importance of liberating women from patriarchal authority (not men) and obtaining empowerment and independence as they consider women a qualitative minority within any society, i.e., they lack equal political, economic and social rights.

Feminist movements have always been denouncing injustice, family and societal oppression, and being victims of terrorist organizations in armed conflicts. They base their data on the theory of motherhood, as feminists explain that the ethics of motherhood and the mother's thinking are naturalized from motherhood and the non-violent behavior of women. But is it possible for a woman to criticize women who are active in terrorist groups in leading the battlefronts or suicide operations?

This report discusses feminist terrorism and its definition, the distinction between it and feminist radicalism, what are the motives and causes behind it, as well as the clarification of the features of women's involvement in terrorist groups, and the possible impact of this phenomenon on human rights and humansecurity.

## **First: Introducing feminist terrorism**

Due to their close proximity, people confuse the terms “terrorism” and “extremism”, as they are related to each other and are similar to other terms, as well as having a causal relationship where extremism can result in terrorism. According to the Arabic lexicon, extremism is intellectual, political, religious or doctrinal exaggeration, which goes beyond the limit of moderation and lack of mediation. This limit of moderation is relative and cannot be measured because extremism depends on the prevailing values at a time and in every society, and therefore an action may be considered extremism in one society (negative extremism) but the same action is not considered extreme in another society (positive extremism).



The concept of intellectual extremism is used to express a departure from the rules, ideas and values common in society which overlaps with some other terms such as: dogmatism, fanaticism, violence, and terrorism. Dogmatism is “the tendency to lay down principles as undeniably true, without consideration of evidence or the opinions of others”. As for fanaticism, it is a “belief or behavior involving uncritical zeal or an obsessive enthusiasm”, and if the extremist thought extends to an apparent behavioral act as a means to achieve the ideas in which it believes, then it is violence that may be considered physical or psychological terrorism if it affects other people against those who stand in the way of an obstacle in the way of realizing those ideas.

### **The difference between feminist extremism and feminist terrorism**

Addressing the phenomenon of women terrorists necessitates a distinction between the terms "feminist terrorism" and "feminist extremism". First of all, it is necessary to mention that feminist movements arose in order to defend women's rights to obtain equal civil, political, economic and cultural rights, reform patriarchal authority, and create a new society in which women have rights and responsibilities (i.e., citizenship) guaranteed by the various rules of the constitution.

On the other hand, feminist extremism is defined as the intellectual hardening of the feminist movements, the departure from the norm from the values of society, and the exaggeration of demands that exceed the limit of intellectual moderation known to society. This behavior is accompanied by the use of loud voice, heated discussion, and obscene words in addition to the threat of violence, civil disobedience, and the disruption of ways of life until their demands are fulfilled. The most widespread image in conservative Arab societies is that women's groups urging women to remove the veil.

Feminist extremism emerged with the second generation of feminism in the 1960s in the United States of America, specifically with the emergence of feminist schools that adopt revolutionary tools. They believe in dismantling the patriarchal system completely, not reforming it from within. Radical feminism at the time was characterized by loud demonstrations and demands regarding the women's sexuality, abortion, and others. Today, the term radical feminism has a negative connotation that is understood as an extremist movement. Radical feminism has also been keen to



obscure the gender norms that divide social characteristics and roles in society between femininity and masculinity without regard to people's choices, and give a stereotypical role for each of the sexes that should not be deviated from, or else they would face societal punishment.

The following generations of the radical school inherited the same methods in defending women's rights and highlighting their demands, and we find that the pioneering women of the movement started defending the social perception of the social injustice directed against women over the entire system.

As for what is meant by feminist terrorism, it is women actually joining jihadist and terrorist groups to carry out sabotage or takfiri acts that would destabilize the stability, or even to carry out auxiliary work for the men of terrorist organizations, i.e., voluntarily recruiting them. The core of this term is the complete abolition of patriarchy that is based on male domination and not equality. Feminist terrorist believe that the main cause of women's oppression arises from the social roles and institutional structures that are built with male superiority and patriarchal authority. Accordingly, this generation depends on assigning women unconventional roles, such as entering jihadist organizations and participating in the work they do.

### **The Motives and Reasons**

Although the radical feminist movement has been effective in generating widespread support for campaigns on issues such as rape, domestic violence, sexual harassment. It also successfully assigned terrorism to men because of his power and authority, and his enslavement and torture of women. Terrorist feminism has transcended this stage by radicalizing the movement with its demands.

This phenomenon is due to several reasons. There are personal motives such as rebellion, the desire for violent action and attraction to the policy of enforcing de-facto situation, or commitment to a cause, ideology or a certain understanding of religion. To add to that, it could be due to attempting to force societal change because of grievances about social and political conditions, grief after the death of a family member, the intention to reap economic benefits or the desire to create an extremist



figure with social reputation. 85% of the reasons for women's participation in extremist groups are socio-intellectual rather than economic.

Gender studies have shown that women who are victims of domestic violence tend to turn to terrorist groups. They believe it enables them to prove themselves and restore their dignity through carrying out major terrorist missions. Another reason is related to the polarization dimensions of the opposites, where the presence of a female element in an organization increases youth affiliation. This turns women into a reward that the fighter seeks to reach.

## **Second: Women's involvement in terrorist organizations**

Unlike feminist movements that want to free women from the patriarchal authoritarian system and reject physical violence and terrorism, this new generation of women voluntarily goes to terrorist groups to become an instrument in the hands of the men of these organizations. They serve their agenda, depending on their abilities and psychological, family and also professional circumstances, and their contribution is to recruit them, and to attract and promote the ideology of the organization in their social circles such as relatives, parents, neighbors and friends. They are also tasked with using social media to spread propaganda, incite against the state, or carry out dangerous terrorist missions such as leading battalions and carrying out suicide attacks.

The term "women's jihadism" was not recently coined. It appeared in the early 1990s, and its ideological roots in Salafism and the Brotherhood are found in Sayyid Qutb's writings, which formed the intellectual ground of many extremists Salafist religious movements, with the principle of atonement of Arab and Islamic governments. He also demanded in his book "Landmarks on the Road" the "re-Islamizing the state and society through violent armed action to reach the Islamic caliphate, as well as addressing the talk of female (mujahidat)". This caused the emergence of female "jihadists" whom was described as "the most close adherence to the Islamic religious system imagined according to the ideology of Salafism "jihadism" ".

The emergence of women's roles in armed terrorist groups increased after 9/11. It redefined the role of women in al-Qaeda's Islamic Jihad, and dissolved their traditional





roles at home to become active members carrying out takfiri suicide operations to achieve the interests and objectives of their organization. The development and intensification of the female presence in terrorist groups came with the emergence of ISIS in Iraqi and Syrian territory from 2014. It began with the polarization of women from all over the world- not just from the Arab world- they were called by the media ""Brides of Jihad" and "Wives of Al-Baghdadi". Later, they were integrated into the "Al-Khansa Brigades" which is an ISIS military battalion that works on attracting, mobilizing and training women in combat. This is similarly the case in the formations of Iran's Basij sisters and the Houthi terrorist group's "Zainabiat" militia, which is their feminist arm against their opponents.

In the same vein, intelligence and security services in some Arab countries, such as Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Yemen, Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt, have stopped many women who attempted to carry out suicide bombings wearing niqab and hiding bombs and explosive belts under their cloaks. For counter-terrorism officials in 2017, interior ministries in member states agreed to coordinate education, family and social affairs to monitor the phenomenon of feminist extremism in universities, schools and slums.

ISIS used women fighters in what was called (battles of exhaustion) according to its tactics after it was defeated in Iraq and Syria. Moreover, ISIS issued a statement at the time stating that it is possible that female jihadists are allowed to fight without the niqab or any face veils. The Egyptian Fatwa House issued a strong response to this statement in a study of the Observatory of Takfiri Fatwas and Extremist Opinions stating that the presence and involvement of women in combat shows the reality of the organization and the extent to which it is contradicting its own fatwas that it was trying to impose previously. This is shown in the previous statement on the organizations' al-Bayan radio concerning the participation of women in invasions. It stated that women are not meant for jihad, and sharia law does not obligate them to fight. They had even stopped taking women to battlefields in fear they fall into captivity.

In Egypt, the "Muslim sisters" played a hidden role in attracting university girls and recruiting many women to the Muslim Brotherhood. This feminist group began its cultural activity in 1933 and then added a social role in social welfare such as the care of orphan girls who were the main target of the political upbringing project of the Muslim Brotherhood. Thus, they expanded the circle of mothers and wives who carry the same





extremist ideology until at some point it reached the House of Representatives and the presidency. The Muslim sisters also played a role in the political violence that resulted in the ouster of President Morsi and the Rabaa events in 2013, as they served as the electronic army of the Muslim Brotherhood on social media platforms. They spread rumors and lies against the Egyptian state, called on foreign militias to fight against the Egyptian security services, and called on the major countries to intervene militarily or impose sanctions. Among these women are Azza Al-Jarf or "Um Ayman", a former member of the parliament for the dissolved Justice and Development Party. She used her social media page to launch an attack on the army and police. She wrote via her personal Twitter account: "When NATO planes come and enter Egypt, the Egyptian army will kneel to the Brotherhood and then we will not show them mercy."

Throughout their volunteering and religious career, these women have emerged as defenders of women's rights from an Islamic perspective, but then their brutal facts revealed their participation in terrorist acts, such as in the event in "Kerdasa massacre" that took place on the day of the break-up of the Rabaa sit-in, resulting in the death of 13 security personnel. Investigations by the Egyptian prosecution showed that a woman called Samia Shenen participated in the desecration of the bodies of the officers of the Police Station Kerdasa and their weapons, encouraging the gunmen to vandalize police armory and set fire to the station, as well as the testimony of an eyewitness who stated that she poured acid on the body of the district commissioner Amer Abdel Maksoud, and also desecrated the body of his deputy Mohammed Jabr.

Moreover, on the same night at al-Fatah Mosque, three women from the Brotherhood were arrested in possession of a number of weapons and machine guns. The accused Ola Hussein was the woman who was accused in the case of the bombing of the Church of Al-Batrassia in Abbasia in late 2016 with her husband.

It should be noted that most of the women who participated in violence against the Egyptian state are not high cadres in the dissolved organization, but they are mostly sympathizers of the Muslim Brotherhood. This is due to their use of religious language to justify their actions.

It is worth noting that female terrorists in terrorist organizations are generally divided into three categories. The first are the wives of fighters/members of the organization. They are forced to follow their husbands, whether they hold high positions within these



organizations, or those who embrace violence more. This makes the choice of a woman's refusal to follow in her husband's path a death sentence. The second are women who are ideologically affiliated with the jihadist ideology. As for the third, they are sympathizers with those ideas and organizations.

One study in political science divided the levels of violent women's terrorism into three levels (individual- family-organizational). the first level is individual action which is often formed by "suicide bombers" outside regulatory frameworks. It has one or more women that exist within large organizations but are not structured in battalions or teams, a pattern found in al-Qaeda. The second level is formed using the families or any persons they associate with. For example, Al-Qaeda has sent spouses Sajida al-Rashwi and Hussein al-Shammari in the 2005 Amman bombings, and ISIS is considered the organization that most uses this pattern, as the two brothers Al-Anzi committed murders in the name of the organization in Saudi Arabia. As for the third level, which is the most permanent and continuous, it is the organization and structuring of violent women's activity, whether within independent organizations or a part of its structure in battalions, teams and cells within organizations. They derive their ideas and reference from the temporal and spatial contexts in which they arise

### **Third: The new generation of feminism and human rights**

Security Council Resolution 2242 of October 2015 explicitly highlighted the role of women in combating violent extremism, as well as the participation of women's organizations and feminist organizations in developing strategies to combat terrorism and violent extremism that could lead to terrorism. This includes combating incitement to terrorist acts, creating counter-narratives and other interventions. This seems necessary given that the continuing global concern for the gender dimensions of poverty, the need for gender development, widespread state and non-state violence against women, and the diminishing gains of equality for women are widespread realities at risk of being obscured. However, through the continued expansion of counter-terrorism dialogues, the long-term priorities of the global women's movement are formed and guided through new security frameworks.

Therefore, human rights organizations as one of the branches of civil society are supposed to address this issue (feminist terrorism), and try to stop this phenomenon



within Arab societies or participate in the publication of reports or policy papers with recommendations to overcome this phenomenon. However, instead there is a collective blackout and marginalization from all international and regional human rights organizations. They are ignoring this sensitive issue even though it negatively affects the right to life and human dignity, and the right to human security.

What human rights organizations focus on instead is to the stereotypical image of women in armed conflicts as the exploited victim of armed jihadist groups, and highlighting terrorist violence against them, through kidnapping, forced marriage, rape, slavery and sale. This, even though it is all true, reinforces gender stereotypes of women vulnerability, thus, they are often not considered potential terrorists and are not seen as individuals who pose a threat like their male counterparts if they are involved in terrorism.

These biases and lack of recognition of feminist terrorism created a state of panic and fear in European societies precisely after ISIS strongholds were eliminated, and jihadists from European and foreign countries wanted to return to their homes, as the doors were closed in their face. However, recent studies indicate that about 550 Western women have traveled to the territories occupied by ISIS and that 17% of European foreign fighters are women. Moreover, according to Europol, one in four people arrested in the European Union for terrorist activities in 2016 was a woman.

Furthermore, most of the women who traveled to Syria and Iraq are not supporters of the extremist ideology of terrorist organizations, but have migrated because of their husbands. Several press reports have observed that in the event of the death of the (jihadist) husband, his wife tries to escape immediately from the terrorist camps. Tunisia's experience in treating returnees from ISIS strongholds is commendable, as the Interior Ministry has setup mechanisms in how to deal with the returnees and their children and those in detention centers and shelter camps abroad to prepare them psychologically and reintegrate them into society. According to statistics, their number reached more than 40 women and 100 children.

Feminist terrorism is a problem that already exists and requires global efforts from official and unofficial institutions without politicization or bias. It has gone through the same stages as bloody or black terrorism. It also networks spread all over the world,



and its representative in each branch of this network undertakes lamenting, wailing, and raising anything under the pretext of defending women's rights.

## **Conclusion**

The phenomenon of feminist extremism differs from the new generation of feminists that is referred to in this report. Terrorist feminism is a generation under development and is spread around the world. Some of its characteristics are similar to feminist radicalism that characterized the second generation of feminism. Despite calls for women's liberation from patriarchal authorities, what is happening in the Middle East in increasing waves of terrorism foreshadows many of the voluntary and compulsory roles of women in terrorist groups. In theory, women went through three stages in terrorist groups, starting with what they call “domestic jihad” to the stage of female suicide bombers, until they established women’s military units.

Feminist terrorism is part of violent extremism and terrorism, and it is one of the real threats to human rights and human security. That is why the world needs a collective stand in order to eliminate this phenomenon.