

# The Real Revolution in Military Affairs (it's not what you think)

By Fabius Maximus; November 14, 2005

*Muslim women are increasingly joining the global jihad, some motivated by religious conviction to change the plight of Muslims under occupation, and recruited by al-Qaeda and local terrorist groups strained by increased arrests and deaths of male operatives. Attacks by female fighters, also known as the mujahidaat, are arguably more deadly than those conducted by male jihadists, attributed in part to the perception that women are unlikely to commit such acts of horror, and when they do, the shock or “CNN factor” of their attacks draws far greater media attention than male bombers. Increasing awareness with instant media attention can motivate other women to commit similar attacks.*

“Muslim Female Fighters: An Emerging Trend”

Terrorism Monitor, November 3, 2005, Farhana Ali (Rand

<http://jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2369824>

Women combatants appear in many of today’s conflicts around the world. Recent examples include Middle East suicide bombers, soldiers and officers in western armies, fighters in the Eritrean War for independence from Ethiopia

With few historical precedents, except in near-mythological tales, the appearance of women in combat represents a real revolution in military affairs.

Why now? For example, why the appearance of suicide bombers in conservative Arab societies? After all, the 1400 years since Mohammad have seen almost continuous combat in many forms. And in the Middle East we have the first recorded suicide attack, in the second century B.C.

*Now Eleazar, called Avaran, saw that one of the {elephants} was equipped with royal armor. It was taller than all the others, and he supposed that the king was on it. So he gave his life to save his people and to win for himself an everlasting name. He courageously ran into the midst of the phalanx to reach it; he killed men right and left, and they parted before him on both sides. He got under the elephant, stabbed it from beneath, and killed it; but it fell to the ground upon him and he died.*

The First Book of the Maccabees 1.6.43

Farhana Ali, a Policy Analyst at RAND, gives a conventional answer in the excellent survey article quoted above.

*Suicide becomes the preferred tactic when Muslim women perceive they have no other alternative to affect change to their local environment; coupled with a heightened sense of anger, disillusionment, and despair, some women choose suicide as a way to communicate and channel their frustration. This is particularly true for those who believe there are no other social, economic, or political opportunities available to them.*

However widely accepted, this shows an awesome misreading of history. History consists of countless times and places in which women experienced anger, disillusionment, despair, and frustration in every conceivable magnitude and combination. Often in situations by comparison of which today's societies are a cakewalk.

As an alternative, perhaps feminism has penetrated these societies. Is war just another example of woman moving into another male dominated occupation?

For clues as to the real cause we can look to another trend in modern warfare: increasing use of children as soldiers.

*For military commanders in some of the poorest countries of the world, no strategy would be complete without children. They are more agile, impressionable and expendable than adult soldiers. They can stand watch at dangerous checkpoints, scout for mines and infiltrate enemy lines. Their natural empathy can be beaten out of them.*

*We would like to think that such attitudes are rare, isolated. The reality is different. Every day, all around the world, children are abducted and recruited into armed forces. An estimated 300,000 children are actively participating in 36 ongoing (or recently ended) conflicts in Asia, Europe, Africa, the Americas and the former Soviet Union. In Sierra Leone some 80 percent of all rebel soldiers are aged seven to 14. During the Liberian civil war from 1989 to 1997, seven-year-olds took part in combat. In the hostilities in Cambodia that nominally ended in the early 1980s, a fifth of wounded soldiers were between the ages of 10 and 14.*

"Children of the Gun," *Scientific American*, June 2000

Again we see the Middle East as a leader in this trend, with reports of widespread use of children as shields and combatants by the Palestinians, and by both sides in the Iraq-Iran War. (See the end of this article for more information about children-soldiers.)

What drives this democratization of warfare, providing women and children the opportunity to die for their tribe, religion, or nation?

Technology is the obvious candidate. Many powerful weapons require little strength, such as pulling the trigger on an AK-47 or detonating 10 kg of SEMTEX wrapped around your waist.

Today even the physically weak can fight. And they do fight, proving that bravery is a universal aspect of the human spirit. Many kinds of societies send women and children to fight and die, another example of the soulless, Darwinian nature of warfare. What works gets used. Even the most fundamental social rules bow to the necessities of war.

Consider this trend from another perspective.

Many armies have traditionally relied on "stand-off" weapons, such as cavalry armed with the composite bow, to combat heavy infantry. Now armies can in some circumstances rely almost entirely on mines, mortars, and missiles – with no need to even face their enemy.

We see this in Iraq, where about 2/3 of our deaths result from insurgents' IEDs. We see the same trend in our own forces, as the day nears when remotely piloted vehicles sweep manned aircraft from the sky.

What need for the traditional warrior virtues in this form of combat? Bravery, discipline, and loyalty have no role. Armies themselves become unnecessary in any conventional sense. Perhaps armies become strange in form, mixing fighters who face their foe and those who do not – a more radical divide than anything in today's military.

These trends affect all soldiers in another way. Warfare is an intimate relationship between enemies. What glory for our elaborately equipped soldiers when they kill "armies" containing women and children? Or for a "pilot" sitting in a comfortable chair, commanding a RPV to drop 500-pound bombs on a densely populated neighborhood hundreds of miles distant?

This puts a new spin on Thomas Barnett's sunny tales about a future in which American Expeditionary forces sail off to civilize dark corners of the world. To do so means wars of a kind alien to our culture and experience. Are we willing to kill women and children soldiers who are defending their cultures, however misguided we believe them to be?

This is our times' *Revolution in Military Affairs*, perhaps the most significant in many millennia.

What might this mean for warfare as a social phenomenon?

Often the entrance of significant numbers of women into a profession both lowers its social standing and sparks an exodus of men. Examples are teaching in the United States and medicine in the Soviet Union.

The increased role of women in both conventional and unconventional armies might do this for warfare. The increased role of children in guerilla warfare might do so even more powerfully, especially in tribal societies where the role of Warrior has deep connections with concepts of manhood and glory.

Perhaps men will no longer see war as a high status occupation, but just another nasty but occasionally necessary task. Like fixing sewers.

We will have moved from the Clausewitz's ordered theater of war to a new world where war becomes a more primal thing – still terrible, but with little room for glory or honor.

Perhaps then it will become less common.

Perhaps that is an acceptable trade-off, if one wants to live in societies that send women and children to fight and die – or sends soldiers to kill armies of women and children -- for politically convenient goals.

For myself, it seems better to stay at home, waging defensive warfare.

**For more information about children as soldiers:**

References from: <http://pawss.hampshire.edu/topics/childsoldiers/bibliography.html>

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Reports on the practice of individual countries with respect to the recruitment and use of children as soldiers are available for Africa, the Americas, Asia, and Europe at the website of the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, <http://www.child-soldiers.org/>