Terrorism Victimization of Women and Children:

Costs, Lessons, and Future Outlook

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"Terrorism Victimization of Women and Children: Costs, Lessons, and Future Outlook"

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Thank you, I am very pleased to attend this event and to listen to the panelists' comments and to engage with all of you on these issues. Kathleen did a marvelous job of setting the context and the tone. The title of my talk is "The Utility of the Vulnerable: Women, Children and Politically Motivated Violence." In terms of defining terrorism, I base my thinking on the State Department framework, will most often refer to politically motivated violence rather than terrorism, and will explore my reasons for this during my remarks.

Women and children have been victims of war throughout history as we heard previously. More recently, the end of the Cold War and the end of the proxy wars post-Cold War have caused a great deal of upheaval. I will primarily look at Africa, having spent a good deal of time in West Africa, Sierra Leone and Liberia in particular. And if you remember any of those wars, you know that they were extremely brutal. It was not necessarily called terrorism, but that is exactly what it was if we use the State Department definition. There were amputations, there were mass rapes, kids were involved in militia groups, women and girls were involved in militia groups, and so on. Hundreds of thousands of people died as wars were fought in communities, villages, and rural areas with no standard battles lines drawn. As war fighting became all-inclusive in terms of territory and population, the old military practices disappeared into the chaotic, disordered, and non-demarcated fighting of the civil and cross border wars of today.

In Colombia, there was a similar disorder; a purposeful destruction of normal life by the actions of the FARC in the rural areas and the ELN in the urban areas. The FARC are notorious for using the bodies of rural residents (whether as pressed into militia service or as objects to be removed) to gain territory and gain access to resources. Similar patterns occurred throughout West Africa and are currently used by armed factions in all parts of the world. As, for example, the FARC gained power over access to resources and land, they were able, through forced labor, to grow coca over huge hectares of land, making it very profitable and allowing the fighting to continue. In West Africa, the profitably came from diamonds, bauxite, iron ore, human trafficking, and slavery. We can also think of similar patterns in current ongoing conflicts. Imagining the experiences of women and of children in these situations, the things they endured, the things they had to do to survive, the difficulties faced as they struggled to return to their communities, and the dilemmas and heartbreak endured once they returned is in reality, for us, impossible. These dynamics do, however, point out the scope of the human effects of vulnerability and utility in the frame of war fighting today.

Gathering data to allow a greater understanding of the experiences outlined above can be difficult and ethnically questionable. My field experience demonstrated that women do not want to talk about this in public and certainly not to me as an outsider. Some of the reasons for their reticence involve the relationship between speech and remembering. For example, the more a person talks about it, they remember, and the more people remember the more the victimization could start all over again, and the higher the potential for negative consequences both personal and social. It is not only that these things happen, it is also that the effects of their happening can bounce back on the victims. These individuals can be perceived by their families or communities as unwelcome or considered dangerous depending upon their experiences while they were away. If the women happen to have children by any of their captors, it is even harder to integrate back

into normal life because those children are not seen as a full part of the community; the father could be anybody and possibly an enemy. The child, in consequence, could also be seen as an enemy and a danger to the group. These strains on the community, the families, the women, and the children can further breakdown traditional patterns of life and create new situations of vulnerability for the already highly vulnerable; in essence, the effects of the political violence on women and children can affect generations.

Using children in war has a long history. In the Middle Ages, young boys came up through apprenticeships to become fighters, aligning with knights and in consequence gaining access to resources that were held by the knights. In the Revolutionary and Civil Wars in this country boys also participated in various ways, not generally, however, on the frontline with a weapon. In more recent wars across the globe, AK47s were given to boys (and some girls) as a matter of strategy as well as tactic, destabilizing in many ways the traditional patterns of war fighting. From an adult perspective, giving an AK to a young girl or a young boy is a terrorizing thing in and of itself. This begs the question of why is it more terrorizing for a young person than for an adult to have such a weapon. For one thing, it goes against all the socially constructed notions of what we think is right. The adult is socially held to be experienced and responsible; the child inexperienced and hence irresponsible. The perception of a child in charge of widespread death seems to turn socio-cultural norms and generational power relations on their head, creating a sense of uncertainty and fear or in other words terrorism. In addition, if communities and societies are fractured by this dynamic and more and more young people get involved the old system could potentially collapse leaving more chaos and anarchy. These patterns are rippling across the world to great effect for those who desire chaos and anarchy for their own ends. It is, of course, not very effective in the sense of a Westphalian state organization which is the internationally recognized norm but it does gain groups and individuals territory and power and status. For people who have been marginalized or suppressed or who do not have a set path put forward to adulthood as Kathleen was discussing, there are violent transitions to adulthood that are an option. This has happened over the past twenty to fifty years and perhaps even longer.

What I mean by "the utility of the vulnerable" in this discussion refers to the dimensions of age and gender but also to the contextual constraints within which individuals live. For example, access to education is often limited if even possible. If individuals do manage to get an education (and for girls that is a big 'if'), jobs are almost nonexistent, which in many cases leaves farming as a backup strategy. In West Africa, for example, farming is manual meaning a hoe, a spot of hard ground, and a difficult life. Most young people no longer want to live that way. They want to have a job that reflects their wider capabilities and that is a generational shift. Imagine for a moment yourself as a militia commander in these areas throughout the world. You have a large population of young people, approximately 50% of the population under the age of 18, and most of them do not have anything to do and are waiting to somehow find a path to adulthood, to build their house, to get married, to live a "normal" kind of life. Yet they are blocked from that by factors they cannot control and that can be seen as reflective of changing processes internationally. These processes trickle down to the large numbers of young people who are rocked by the economic and political waves of change that leave them outside of any benefit structure and that create feelings of anger and despair. As such, this vulnerability could

lead them to make choices otherwise unthinkable and choices that increase the vulnerability of others.

Returning to the previous comments regarding recent patterns of warfare, using violence against women and children in an asymmetric strategy to gain whatever power and territory you can through attacking civilians rather than combatants can seem a sound approach to righting the balance or gaining the ends of a particular group. A larger aspect of this strategy is to fracture the existing society and inflicting trauma and destroying families are important components to this plan. To maintain power, from this mindset, creating continuous disorder, uncertainty, and fear are essential. Throughout this process, women become more vulnerable to damage of all types because of socio-cultural constructions as Kathleen articulated. If a woman is damaged her value, already less than man in most cases, decreases substantially and in consequence her children's value also decreases. It is difficult to face the fact that some humans have more value than others but we see this actualized in repressive laws and socio-cultural norms, values, and practices that place individual value on a sliding scale. This happens everywhere. In areas of ongoing political violence however, the people who have a lesser ascribed value are increasingly vulnerable and therefore at higher risk of being victimized and also of then victimizing others.

In terms of the hyper-masculinity (a form of claiming and holding the highest socio-cultural value) in some military groups, the raping of women is a *rite de passage*. If a militia member is unwilling to rape a woman it serves as an indicator of his unworthiness to be in the circle of the elect and will result in his death. Brutality against women, and often children, becomes an experiential marker of the brotherhood of the militia warrior; it also, emotionally, links the members through the brotherhood of guilt. Upholding the value of the practice keeps any potential socio-cultural tugs of ethical or spiritual guilt at bay. Recently, militia members have covered all of their face but their eyes as they engage in activities of violence. This can of course be to increase the aspect of terror – a faceless individual who commits unspeakable acts with impunity. On the other hand in some previous civil wars fighters (while not covering their faces) chose 'fighting names' or wore 'fighting costumes.' The fighting name could be dropped once the individual left the militia and the costume was used specifically for military operations and could also be removed. The effects, however, of fighters' militia activities are not easily abandoned but will linger. It may be years before the full scope of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and social responses will be known.

Basically, the point I am trying to make is that vulnerability and political violence are complex dynamics playing out on a global stage across the bodies of noncombatants via all forms of media. There are complexities upon complexities related to any deep understanding of such blatant and extreme violence. In terms of what to do about that, Kathleen had some wonderful ideas about programmatic approaches. There are, however, but aspects on other levels of engagement that need to be at least considered. For example, acknowledging and addressing the effects of land seizures, plantation agriculture, and other liberal peace activities that are happening in post-war areas as part of economic development and peacebuilding and that are, in essence, repeating the negative legacy of the past. Allowing the international community and transnational economic practices to give the country's economic power and wealth back into the elite hands when often wars were fought to change that pattern, does not build peace despite increasing a country's GDP. When individuals have their land seized, have their livelihoods

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(manual farming or animal husbandry) removed, that person can feel deep humiliation and loss of dignity. The loss or lack of recognition of a persons' dignity no matter the reason but particularly as it results from an agenda for sustainable peace requires critical analysis and change. Alternatively, in situations of political violence and war if you are dehumanizing through violating the person directly that person experiences negative effects as long as they live, perhaps reshaping a person, a family, and a community. The current peacebuilding dilemma arises from stopping the direct violence and then, in the name of peace, often introduces programs and policies that benefit the elite segment of the population with no trickle down benefits for the vast majority of the population. By their effects these types of programs and policies can be considered structural violence that continues the legacy of the past and prepares the ground for the violent cycle to begin again. As mentioned previously, however, there are ways to intervene in that process but it will take some brave and thoughtful people willing to challenge current assumptions about peacebuilding, individual recovery, and economic equity.

Primarily my comments to this point have described fighters as men. Women also engage as war fighters (statistically a lower number however), committing atrocities, condoning or facilitating rape, recruiting children, and killing civilians and combatants. This view of women goes against most socio-cultural norms of the nurturing female. In the general context under discussion here, the intervention of violence alters or changes absolutely traditional norms, values, and practices at all levels for all demographic groups in all situations. Neither men, women, nor children escape and each will have to live with what was done to them, what they did, and all of the attendant effects on society for the rest of their lives. As local, state, and international actors ponder appropriate responses to these realities, the possibility for peace building processes that are more attentive to some of the dynamics explored in this presentation as well as by other members of the panel comes closer to being actualized.

To conclude, in terms of causal dynamics the discussion explored gendered norms, values and practices, the difference in value of a man and a women in society, lack of a broad vision for post-conflict programming, across sectors, demographic influences, the value of violence and the difficulty of peace, and non-elite and the elite evaluation. I am merely pointing out the obvious I suppose, but disorder is a political instrument, and it is very, very effective. Its effect on societies can be devastating to some and enriching to others. The parts that the vulnerable play in this disorder, whether as victim and/or perpetrator or defender and/or aggressor, depends upon contextual variables and individual or group identities. To say, however, that women and children are solely victims takes away their agency and devalues them even further. Their vulnerability does not define them.

Long War Journal.
1/25/15

Long War Journal.
1/25/15

Our conference focus today is on women and children, but my brief presentation is going to be about children, only.

And, although the conference properly focuses on women and children as victims, I want to talk today about children as actors, as terrorists.

The Oxford dictionary defines a victim as "the unwilling recipient of cruel or oppressive treatment." The Monday, January 12th issue of *The Guardian* newspaper reported from Lagos, Nigeria a bomb attack in Potiskum, Yobe State which killed three people and wounded 26, and an attack a day earlier in Borno State which killed at least 16 people. The Potiskum bombing was attributed to two suicide bombers described as, "little girls." In her talk Ms. Shea referred to the Borno suicide bomber who was a ten-year-old, stopped in the main market for a security check. Would you agree with me that these two young bombers were as much victims as the people they killed?

My thesis is that child bombers pose a particularly challenging threat for security forces because they are too young to be in security records, assuming that the state maintains security records. And if, somehow, a child were identified as a potential threat, there are many legal and cultural barriers to rehabilitation.

How can a government legally protect its citizens from child suicide bombers?

We in the U.S. cannot look at our own experience, nor that of our fellow democracies, which share our legal traditions. Those traditions emphasize ex-post-facto punishment for criminal acts—not available if the child is a suicide bomber. Our liberal democratic tradition calls for legally mandated special treatment - counseling, possibly institutionalization - if the child is considered to be a prospective physical threat to the community. Our legal and medical institutions are sufficiently robust to cope with a prospective ten-year-old terrorist, but we have never had one.

What of the children in, for example, Nigeria? Nigeria is the richest country in Africa. If it were to divert some of its oil revenues to its juvenile justice system, hoping that the threat of child bombers could be diminished, what obstacles would it meet?

First, religion. The child bombers we have read about were apparently motivated by their Muslim religious beliefs. I know that Christian religious beliefs have motivated killers, as has Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and I suspect Zoroastrianism. But the Judeo-Christian faiths do not sanction suicide. Their approval of martyrdom is derived from the concept of witness: The young child or adult permits herself to be killed rather than deny their faith. Religiously-motivated behavior may challenge government institutions who seek to regulate it.

When the U.S. was established, suicide was a crime, and I believe it still is. Unsuccessful suicides are not prosecuted for two reasons: Either the authorities conclude that the perpetrator

was mentally unstable, or, if they conclude that he was rational, none of the punishments in their civic repertoire are particularly intended to discourage suicide. I submit that our legal system, legislative, executive, judicial, cannot protect us or the bombers from suicidal attacks.

Community attitudes can encourage, or discourage, juvenile suicide bombing. In the U.S. we can sympathize with some rational suicides—those suffering from a terminal, perhaps painful, disease. But suicide is not a culturally acceptable solution in the U.S. Other cultures may accept of it. Some of you will recall the Hindu self-immolations during the Vietnam War. But, none of the suicide-accepting cultural would approve of a ten-year-old suicide, as do apparently, some segments of Muslim society.

So in response to Dr. Alexander's implicit question, "What can be done about the victimization, by encouraging politically-motivated suicide of children?" I cannot offer any law-based solutions. Political authorities can attempt to regulate words and behavior intended to encourage child martyrdom. Religious authorities can challenge those who claim that the deity approves of child bombers. That is as far as I can go.

Thank you for your attention. I look forward to your comments.

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