COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CHECHEN AND KURIDSH FEMALE TERRORISTS IN THE MASS MEDIA

by

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Comparative Study of Chechen and Kurdish Female Terrorists in the Mass Media

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COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CHCHEN AND KURIDSH FEMALE FIGHTERS IN MASS MEDIA

Kathryn Card, M.S.

George Mason University, 2016

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Since the 1990s the PKK and the Chechen separatists have been branded as terrorist organizations by the international community. As a result, these groups have challenged the conception of terrorist organizations. This is especially the case when the conversation turns towards who is directly and indirectly involved in such attacks. When debate arises about terrorist organizations, the topic usually revolves around the actions carried out by men in those groups, with little to no acknowledgement of the actions of women carrying out similar attacks. In the event that the discussion does turn to these women, there are a number of assumptions and stereotypes projected on them while their male counterparts receive no further label. This phenomenon of shock, confusion and stereotyping, of female involvement in terrorist organizations or attacks is due in part to the image of female fighters. This is representative of females not usually being linked with terrorist groups or war in general. When presence of a female fighter causes society to question the role of women, and what it tells us that woman should represent. Through my research I will
analyze why the activities of women in the conflicts which have raged in Chechnya and Turkey in the 1990s and 2000s, respectively have been ignored or over exaggerated. This has been done to the point that their actions do not seem to have the same effects as their male counterparts to further their respective movements towards the end goal of independence. By examining the phenomena of invisibility and misrepresentation of female fighters in these movements, I aim to understand how the lack of acknowledgement of these actions reduces attention to the movements themselves. This will particularly examined due in part to the media’s focus on their gender rather than their goals and motivations as part of their organizations. I will examine both conflicts in the shadow of the collapse of the Soviet and Ottoman Empires as well as the "Global War on Terror." I will therefore analyze how these events have also played a role in the invisibility and misrepresentation of female involvement in both conflicts. Although I may only be examining two conflicts that involve women in terrorism and in combat roles, it is observable that the role of women and girls in terrorist activities worldwide has been relegated to insignificance and ambiguity in the male dominated sphere of war. My research will therefore revolve around the question of what are the roots of female involvement in armed conflict in Chechnya and Turkey and how is it represented in media?
Introduction

The issue of statehood for minority groups or “nations” of individuals has proved a challenge to existing states at various points within the last century. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the 1990s and early 2000s saw a pointed rise in violence over the proposal of independence for minority groups. The Paratiya Karkaren Kurdistan (Kurdish Workers Party, PKK) in Turkey and the Chechen separatist movement in the Russian Federation in particular brought worldwide attention to the issue of sovereignty for ethnic groups during this period. As both of these groups experienced brutal conflicts with their long term overlords, with no resolution in sight, there has also been witnessed within these groups the significant involvement of women.

Since the 1990s the PKK and the Chechen separatist organizations have been labeled as terrorist organizations by the international community. Through association with this label, both have challenged the perception of the nature of terrorist organizations. When discussion arises about terrorist organizations, the topic usually revolves around the actions carried out by the men in those groups with little acknowledgement of the actions of women fighting alongside them. The introduction of these groups during this period, to a broader international community in particular, saw frequent mischaracterization and misclassification of female terrorists and fighters in
general. This in turn allowed for the general coverage of these movements to grow into a reality where the contributions of women in these terrorist groups were ignored or relegated to relative invisibility. The media coverage of this period of the 1990s and early 2000s had a lasting effect on subsequent characterization and coverage of female fighters; however, this ignorance of the impact of female fighters has slowly been diminished.

In the event that the discussion did turn to these women during this period, there seemed to be an endless number of assumptions and stereotypes projected on them while none of this is projected on their male counterparts. This phenomenon of shock, confusion and stereotyping, when it came to female involvement in a terrorist organization or attack, was in part a results of the fact that the image of female fighters “runs counter to inherited perceptions of women as maternal, emotional, and peace-loving…. (who) are not supposed to be violent” (Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007, pp. 1-2).

When presented with the image of a female fighter and what society tells us that woman should be, this situation has caused society to question the role of women and the nature of established gender roles that may threaten the society itself.

Sjoberg and Gentry (2007) argue that when women are violent, there are three stereotypical narratives that are placed on them including; mother, monster or whore. The narrative of mother is explained as “women [who] are characterized as acting either in a support role (the nurturing mother) or out of revenge (a vengeful mother)” (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007, p. 33). The narrative of monster “explains their [women] violence as a biological flaw that disrupts their femininity…a monstrous woman’s violence is
characterized as quite different from male violence. A violent women is more deadly; she is more of a threat” (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007, pp. 36-37). Finally, the narrative of whore “characterize[s] women’s proscribed violence, or women’s support for proscribed violence, as sexually deviant” (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007, p. 46). It can be argued that a predominant majority of women who have committed a violent act could be placed into one of these narratives, which in turn has fed into the stereotypes that a majority of all female fighters face.

The concept of female fighters brings into question what society sees as the stereotypical woman and its related narratives. It is critical to understand, however, that the use of women as fighters is nothing new in a historical context. Sjoberg (2014) argues “women’s presence as fighters has been consistent throughout history, and is increasing, yet remains invisible” (p. 40). It can be further argued that “women have not only been combatants on behalf of state militaries in state-sanctioned wars, they have also been terrorists, insurgents, and rebels, fighting against governments, for national self-determination, or for some other cause…women have been a part of non-state armed forces for as long as histories of such groups can be traced” (Sjoberg 2014, p. 40).

Through an examination of this historical precedent and knowledge that women have played an active role in furthering military causes, it is difficult to understand the reasoning behind the failure to recognize their involvement in both the PKK and the Chechen separatist movements during such a technologically and socially advanced period in western society.
As part of the historical aspect of female fighters provided, women have been present from the very beginning within both the PKK and Chechen movements. Their active presence, however, has remained largely unnoticed and practically invisible in the eyes of the international community in the past. However, as these terrorist organizations began to grow and expand across their respective countries’ borders, there has been a growth of discussion concerning female involvement that had not taken place previously. Within the Chechen-Russian conflict it is known that “Chechen female terrorists have participated in a majority of suicide attacks in Chechnya – taking part in 79 percent of the attacks attributed to terror groups…a total of 42 percent of all Chechen suicide bombers have been women…forty-six woman bombers out of a total of 110 Chechen suicide bombers” (Speckhard & Akhmedova, 2008, p. 100). This has allowed the Chechen separatists to make their mark in the international community through their heavily recruitment and use of women in their fight for sovereignty. Similarly in the Kurdish-Turkish conflict, “women carried out 14 of 21 suicide attacks (66 percent) conducted by the PKK in Turkey” (Skaine, 2006, p. 81). This number has continued to grow in the last few years with the emergence of the Islamic State (ISIS) and a renewal of open violence against the Turkish government.

While these numbers from both conflicts are discussed among the academic community, and those most familiar with these conflicts, they remain mostly invisible in the mass media’s perspective. This is largely due to the persistent continuation of past analyses seeping into current coverage of the conflicts, along with the media’s frequent reprocessing those narratives concerning women put forth by those same parties that are
active within the conflicts. Recognition of female fighters in the media has been slow, although recognition of Kurdish female suicide bombers has been on the rise in the last few years. These themes have been representative of the invisibility of the PKK and Chechen female fighters within the global context of terrorist organizational knowledge and member demographic studies, since there is still no clear understanding of the profile of a female suicide bomber that can be applied to all terrorist organizations. This lack of public knowledge or comprehension of female fighters, and their active roles within their movements, has been staggering within the mass media specifically during the critical period of the 1990s and 2000s. While the mass media has evolved in recent years to begin a systematic effort to understand of the roles of women in terrorist organizations, the attacks committed by women have continued to contribute to the shock and awe that their mere existence provides in the aftermath of a terrorist attack.

While the media and the international community have tended to focus mainly on suicide attacks, it is known that not all Chechen women who participate in these attacks are committing suicide warfare. There is a rich and detailed history of female heroines fighting against the Russians. The earliest heroines in the fight for Chechen independence include Dadi Aibika and Amaran Zaza, along with many other fearless women who fought against the Tsarist armies in the early 1800’s (Murphy, 2010). Chechnya’s long history of female fighters has extended into the modern context. Murphy (2010) details that the “White Stockings’ snipers…classic trademark was said to be a bullet to the crotch …[their] principle virtue was patience, willingness to wait for hours, sometimes days, for a Russian officer to come along” (p. 104). Murphy (2010) also explains that
“female fighters served in most every of the Chechen units, led by major field commanders like Shamil Basayev, Salamn Raduyev, and Ruslan Gelayev” (p. 102). This aspect of female involvement in the conflict against the Russians remains practically invisible, with little coverage of cultural and historical background provided within the media coverage of the conflict. This has been determined by the fact that it is not a widely known history, or understood within the larger framework of female involvement in the Chechen struggle.

Although it has slowly changed in the recent years, Kurdish women combatants also possess a largely missing history of contributing to the struggle against the Turks. Acuk (2014) argues that from a historical standpoint “women were defined as the bearer of the nation and therefore responsible for its liberation, as well as initiating peace” (p. 117). Within the framework of the PKK, Kurdish women took to writing propaganda that promoted the mobilization of women in the name of ‘Kurdistan’. Acuk (2014) explains that there were three female journals, “Roza and Jujin were very outspoken about their feminist positions, arguing for separate mobilization of Kurdish women and opposing collaboration with men in principle” and “YOK focused primarily on mobilizing women for the national struggle and addressed issues resulting from this, such as suicide bombings, self-immolations, and the role of patriotic mothers and peace mothers” (p. 116). The Kurdish women are known for both taking the peaceful activist route and the route of mobilizing the military since the 1980s. Both aspects, however, have remained invisible to the world beyond Turkey until recent years. Some progress in reporting on the nature of the conflict has been a result of the fact that the current fight against ISIS in
the Levant has also involved the PKK and their culturally linked Kurdish groups in Syria. This, along with minimal legal improvements in Turkish press freedoms in the late 2000’s, provided some room for broader interest and availability of information concerning the general conflict and the impact of female fighters. While in the past these women’s actions were mostly shielded from the media, within the current conflict female participation in fighting in the PKK has been heavily reflect in mass media coverage. Specifically, this has been the case of female suicide bombers and female involvement in guerilla warfare within and outside of Turkey.

As more female Kurds and Chechens have become active members in the PKK and Chechen nationalist movements, it is important to assess how their past and present contributions to the movements remain largely imperceptible to the international community. As a result of this invisibility that occurred in the 1990s and early 2000s, female fighters have lacked the impact that their male counterparts have exerted. This can be seen in the disparity of attention they have gained as recognized actors within both conflicts; where they should be known outside of sexual stereotypes. This failure to recognize female contributions to the Chechen and PKK separatists’ movements has hindered the advancement of those movements’ goals of security and sovereignty through the mere fact a great number of their members’ attempts to assist the movement remain unnoticed. With a clear understanding of this reality of how the international community views each conflict I will be able to better examine why female involvement in these groups have had such minimal effects in progressing each of these conflicts to the desired conclusion in the 1990s and early 2000s.
Throughout this paper there will be an ongoing assessment of the conflicts in Turkey and Russia as well as the continued roles that women have played in each struggle. The next chapter will provide a historical overview of the Chechen and Kurdish conflicts, with highlights concerning the First Chechen War and the initial formation of the PKK. Within chapter two there will be an examination of the active role women have played in both conflicts as well as the broader theoretical underpinnings and evolution of the role of women in these two groups. In chapter three I will discussed the methodology that was used to conduct my research of sixteen articles, eight of which concern the Chechen conflict and eight articles concerning the Kurdish conflict. These will then be discussed in chapter four. Finally, chapter five will be a discussion concerning the analysis of my research in attempting to better understand female terrorist fighters and their broader impacts on the conflicts in which they have been active.
Chapter 1: Historical Overview

Introduction

In order to understand the presence of female fighters in both the Chechen-Russian and Kurdish-Turkish conflicts, it will be important to appreciate the historical background of each. This chapter will provide a historical background of both conflicts with an emphasis on the First Chechen War (1994-1996) and the formation of the PKK in Turkey in the late 1970s. This background is critical in establishing the context and track record for increased female involvement.

History of the Chechen-Russian Conflict

*Figure 1: Map of Chechnya (BBC News, 2015)*
The conflict between Russia and Chechnya has continued for almost 200 years. Chechnya is a small region located north of the Caucasus Mountains and helps form the land bridge between Asia and the Middle East. Chechnya's geographic location has made it a strategic asset for the Russian government. Not only does Chechnya provide a strategic military location for the Russians, it also has "important oil deposits, as well as natural gas, limestone, gypsum, sulfur, and other minerals...major production includes oil, petrochemicals, oil-field equipment, foods, wines, and fruits" (Skaine, 2006, p. 97).

Chechnya has historically been an ethnically dominant Muslim country with Chechen being its national language. This has been in spite of the fact that during the Soviet years Russian language was the only language officially allowed to be spoken and taught in schools, while Chechen being outlawed. While the population of Chechnya is only around a million people (BBC News, 2015), it remains a strongly fortified part of the Russian Federation, which has sparked regular violent conflict between the Chechen people and the Russian government. This violence has been maintained in order to advance Chechen goals for independence.

Following the formal collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1991, conflict that had lain dormant for decades between the Chechen people and the Russian government violently erupted. The resulting trigger for the beginning of these violent conflicts was a direct consequence of many other former Soviet republics being established as independent sovereign nations. This had occurred while Chechnya was formally incorporated into the newly established Russian Federation. In the article “Chechnya: The Causes of a Protected Post-Soviet Conflict” by James Hughes (2001), he
argues that there were five primary reasons for the renewal of violent conflict that erupted between the Chechens and the Russians. Hughes’ (2001) first point addresses the rapid and largely unforeseen collapse of the Soviet Empire in a space of only two years. A chaotic transitional period ensued after the formal ending of the USSR that witnessed many former Soviet holdings energetically rejecting Russian influence that could no longer control them. As the rapid decline of Russian influence in former Soviet republics became more evident, it became practically impossible for the new Russian Federation to politically or militarily maintain the many territories previously held by the Soviet Union. This resulted in many former republics gaining independence and launching hostilities in those that were absorbed into the newly created Russian Federation.

The nature of Russia’s initial expansion across the Eurasian continent (Hughes, 2001) made the detangling of Russian identity from imperialistic rule over now independent neighboring states extremely difficult. This was especially challenging as the Russians still aspired to maintain their status of superiority over former colonies. The Russian Federation would argue that former colonies of the Russian imperialistic area were culturally different than those countries later incorporated into the USSR after the World Wars. The very nature of the Soviet Union’s ethnically driven internal state system as well as that of its successor, the Russian Federation, provided the seeds of its own disintegration. This ultimately occurred as ethnically established states with no historical record of statehood now sought independence (Hughes, 2001). Existing international norms considering internally semi-autonomous states could have justified that Chechnya be recognized as an independent state. It could have easily existing outside of Russia once the
international borders of the Soviet Union were no longer enforced (Hughes, 2001). These arguments ultimately set the stage for a violent clash between Chechnya and Russia as their ideological motivations made peaceful coexistence impossible in the international political atmosphere following the collapse of the USSR.

**Historical Background**

The Chechen-Russian conflict initially arose when the Russians began to expand into the Caucasus Region in 1783 (Atrokhov, 1999). This began during the rule of Tsar Nicolas II, under the auspices of protecting Russian Christians from the Muslims of the region (Atrokhov, 1999). The battle that ensued between the Russian military and the Chechens took longer than anyone in the Russian government had estimated. During this period of expansion “the Russian scholar Pluton Zubov observed…the Chechens were ‘remarkable for [their] love of plunder, robbery and murder, for [their] spirts of deceit, courage, recklessness, resolution, cruelty, fearlessness, [their] uncontrollable insolence and unlimited arrogance…. [the] only way to deal with this ill-intentioned people to destroy it to the last” (Atrokhov, 1999, p. 370). This uneven and damaging stereotype (McGarty, 2002) would haunt the Chechen people and their interactions with Russia for centuries to come, and would help fuel conflict to the present day. It wasn’t until 1858 that the Russian military defeated Imam Shamil’s forces in Chechnya and the region became considered an officially conquered territory (BBC News).

Chechnya continued to exist under direct Russian, and then Soviet, rule until 1934 when the Chechen-Ingush Soviet Socialist Republic was formally established. This was
due in part to continued uprisings by the Chechen people against Soviet rule. These took place in 1922, 1924 and 1925 with a few stretching into the early 1930s but promptly ended once their own autonomous region was granted to them by Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin. Although Chechnya had finally received the semi-independence she had long hoped for, it was very short lived within the continued consolidation of power by Joseph Stalin.

The Chechen-Ingush Soviet Socialist Republic was officially dissolved by Joseph Stalin during the Second World War. The dissolution of Chechen-Ingush Soviet Socialist Republic was the direct result of Stalin’s growing suspicions of his own people collaborating with Nazi Germany. The Chechens were one of the many ethnic groups that Stalin suspected of collaboration and ordered the deportation of around half a million Chechens to Serbia and Central Asia to work in labor camps as a result. Among those deported, it is generally accepted that around a third of those forced to relocate died while in exile. It has been argued that Stalin was not merely accusing the Chechens of collaboration with the Nazis, but that he was “resolved to finish the task begun by the Tsar a century earlier: the obliteration of Chechnya and the Chechens” (Atrokhov, 1999, p. 371). This massive deportation of Chechens by Stalin has been considered by many to be genocide, with many Chechens viewing this massacre as a chosen trauma (Volkan, 1997). This was not a strictly sectarian, but universal, perspective among the Chechens. They see what occurred during this time period as a heinous act committed against them and their culture.
The exile of the Chechens from Chechnya officially lasted until 1957, when Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev restored the Chechen-Ingush Soviet Socialist Republic and allowed the Chechens to return to their ancestral homeland. After the return of the Chechens to the Caucasus region some Russians began to see the mistake that had been made by deporting the Chechens. The “Russian Constitutional Court Justice Ernest Ametisov recalled the arrival of the exiled Chechens to his hometown in Northern Kazakhstan and observed ‘I think such horrors become embedded, genetically, in the consciousness of people’” (Atrokhov, 1999, p. 371). Although the horrors of the deportations greatly affected the Chechens, it did not break their will in the manner that Stalin had intended. Lapidus (1998) explains that “both historical experiences and the impact of the Soviet policy had served to consolidate and reinforce group identity and solidarity among Chechens” (p. 9). This chosen trauma (Volkan, 1997) has become “a defining event for the reinforcement of Chechen identity constructed around resistance to Russia” (Hughes, 2001, p. 20). Khrushchev broadly “denounced the deportation in 1957 as one of the crimes of Stalin era, and allowed the ‘punished peoples’ to return to their homeland” (Lapidus, 1998, p. 9). Khrushchev little realized that these reintegrated Chechens would bring with them a bitterness against the entirety of the Soviet Russian state that would manifest itself in fierce resistance to a repeated threat of victimization or further cultural trauma (Volkan, 1997).

The Chechens “reestablished themselves rapidly on their home ground, and made up their population losses with one of the highest birthrates” (Henze, 1996, p. 397) in Europe in the period. Although Khrushchev ultimately allowed the return of the Chechen
exiles, he never-the-less sought to undermine the legitimacy Chechen people by encouraging ethnic Russian settlers to relocate to Chechnya. This was intended to outweigh the increased population of the ethnic Chechens and continue to secure Russian influence in the territory. This strategy to undermine the Chechen ethnic identity by the Soviet Union was an utter failure due to the fact that 1989 census of the region clearly showed that “Chechnya was one of only four Soviet republics with an absolute majority of the titular ethnic group” (Hughes, 2001, p. 17). The Chechen population, totaling nearly one million people at this time, was composed of roughly 25% ethnic Russians (Hughes, 2001, p. 17). This is indicative of the strong sense of nationalism within Chechnya that would express itself later as the Chechens engaged in direct confrontation with the Russian Federation.

One of Chechnya’s most influential leaders, Dzhokar Dudayev, was one of the many who returned to Chechnya at the age of 14 from exile in Kazakhstan, ultimately surviving the intended genocide of the Chechens and suffering the chosen trauma (Volkan, 1997) that was inflicted in his youth. Dudayev would go on to attend the Soviet Air Force academy, eventually achieving the rank of general (Henze, 1996) and would ultimately become one of the most influential of all Chechen leaders that bolstered the independence movement in Chechnya following the collapse of the USSR. It wasn’t until after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 that conflict between Chechnya and Russia would be renewed in the form of violent confrontation.

*The Establishment of the Chechen Republic*
With the rapid collapse of the Soviet Union and the formation of the new Russian Federation, Chechnya saw its opportunity to officially declare its own independence outside of the Russian control. In 1990 the Chechen-Ingushetia Supreme Soviet declared itself independent of Russia. It was one of the last republics to do so in hopes of achieving the same outcome as many other former Soviet republics who were allowed independence. Although the Chechen people had declared themselves independent, the Russian government did not agree and still held power in the Chechen government in the capital of Grozny. In the aftermath of the Chechens declaring independence, Moscow appointed a Communist Party member named Doku Zavgaev to govern Chechnya in 1990 in order to retain Russian control in the country. Many Chechens considered Zavgaev to be a puppet of the Russian government. This in turn spawned more radical views for independence in reaction to this perceived ploy. The Chechen people overwhelmingly viewed themselves as being independent and separate from Russia; however, Zavgaev was seen by many as trying to preserve and maintain Russian influence in the region. This effort by Zavgaev to act as a proxy for Russian power disillusioned many Chechens and acted as a catalyst for radicalization that in turn spurred more conflicts.

During this period of Russian influence through Zavgaev as the appointed administrator for the Chechen government, the National Congress of the Chechen People (NNCP) was formed by Zelimkhan Yandarbiev in November of 1990. This was meant to counter the power and control the Russian government was hoping to retain. Yandarbiev was a private citizen and intellectual thinker in Chechnya; however, his greatest accomplishment may have been his recruitment of Major General Dzhokhar Dudayev to
join the fight for independence. A decorated Soviet Air Force general, Dudayev, after retirement following his military withdrawal from Estonia in 1990, returned home to Chechnya, he subsequently became involved in nationalist activities (Erlanger, 1994). Dudayev’s role as leader of the executive committee of the NCCP put him in direct opposition with the Zavgaev government, which in turn placed him as political target as the face of opposition to Russian interests in Chechnya.

While in Moscow in August of 1991, the appointed Chechen leader Zavgaev became embroiled in the internal political struggle that was the chaos of post-Soviet Russian politics. Zavgaev, although initially hesitant to support one party or the other during the 1991, supported the attempted coup against Gorbachev and lost the confidence of Russian President Boris Yeltsin as a result (Henez, 1996). The coup was an attempt by hard-liner opponents of Gorbachev’s reforms for the Russian government and economic system (Lapidus, 1998). Yeltsin supported Gorbachev in this political battle, as he favored even deeper reforms to the Soviet system.

While Zavgaev was preoccupied in Moscow with the fallout from the failed coup against Gorbachev, Dudayev saw an opportunity to overthrow the Zavgaev administration and win over the support of the Chechen people. Due to Zavgaev’s participation in the failed coup, Moscow initially supported Dudayev in his overthrow of the Chechen-Ingush Republic in order to punish Zavgaev for his political misstep. Moscow quickly became troubled by the growing nationalist sentiments of the new Chechen state however, and soon began making ultimatums to Dudayev concerning his actions as leader of the NCCP. In
initial response to Dudayev’s actions within Chechnya, a state of emergency was announced in the Caucuses by the Russian government in hopes that it would suppress the nationalistic motivations of the Chechen people. Russian President Yeltsin even went as far as to support military intervention in the Caucasus region; however, this proved a failure within a Russian government who rejected taking any military action. Although there was no direct military interaction between the Russians and Chechens during these early stages of the independence movement, this threat of violent repression in turn resulted in increased and strengthened Chechen support of Dudayev and the militarization of Chechnya. This rash reaction from Moscow to declare a state of emergency ultimately did nothing but fan the flames of Chechen nationalists. On November 1, 1991 they voted Dudayev as President of the Chechen Republic, a sovereign state completely separate from the USSR.

Upon Dudayev’s victory in the national elections, an officially independent Chechen Republic was declared. A new constitution was written and on March 12, 1992 Dudayev’s government adopted the Constitution of Chechen Republic. In this document it unambiguously proclaimed itself a “sovereign democratic legal state created as a result of self-determination of Chechen people” (Article 1, The Constitution of Chechen Republic). In this document a parliamentary system, complete with presidential and judicial functions was established. With this official formation of an independent state, the Russian government was left with no option but deal directly with the Chechen separatist movement.
Russian Reaction and Attempt to Extinguish Chechen Nationalism

The results of Chechnya declaring itself independent had major economic and strategic repercussions for the Russian government and economy. Not only is Chechnya situated at the southern border of Russia, it is also located on a stretch of land critical to Russian pipelines that ships billions of tons of oil from the Caspian Basin to Russia for refinement. The loss of control over this pipeline would have detrimental effects for the Russian economy. Russian officials dreaded even the possibility of Chechen leadership falling to anyone unwilling to act in Russia’s direct interests. A leader such as Dudayev who became a powerful proponent for Chechen nationalism and anti-Russian rhetoric could not be tolerated. For a time, lasting from 1992-94, these economic interests dictated a limited level of interaction between the governments of Russia and Chechnya. Russian neglect of Chechnya’s declared independence resulted in economic benefits as resources were allowed to flow without serious interruption.

Although there were many economic benefits for the Russians to have an alliance with the Chechens, a history of ethnic hatred ultimately acted as a driving factor for Yeltsin’s policies towards Chechnya’s punishment and reintegration. Within the Russian government, two groups emerged as a result of Chechnya declaring independence with the interventionists and the non-interventionists blocs. The interventionists argued that Chechen independence threatened the integrity of the Russian Federation and spread fears that a domino effect among other Russian republics would follow if Chechnya was officially recognized as a sovereign nation. Non-interventionists argued that it was
“morally wrong to use coercion against Chechnya’s exercise of its right to self-determination” (Hughes, 2001, p. 26). Ultimately, Yeltsin sided with the interventionists and began to put into place policies that would eliminate the chance for Chechen independence.

Due to the failure of implementing military action against Chechnya, shortly after the Presidential election of Dudayev Yeltsin enacted a blockade of Chechnya. The purpose of the blockade was to suffocate the Chechen economy to the point that the Chechen people would sequentially turn against Dudayev and reach out to Russia for assistance, fundamentally defeating any notions of nationalism in the Chechnya. Much to Yeltin's surprise, the results of the blockade failed to meet his expectations. As a response to Yeltsin’s attempted blockade a black market flourished to meet the needs of the limited Chechen economy. Activity of criminal groups within Chechnya resulted in “trafficking in weapons, oil, and drugs and to engage in money laundering, facilitated by a large number of unregulated international flights from Grozny’s airport” (Lapidus, 1998, p. 17). The ultimate result of the blockade was to introduce the Chechen system to a level of existence that necessitated illegal and unregulated economic activity that further sowed the seeds of Chechen resistance to Russian influence.

As a response to this aggressive Russian economic policy of blockade and isolationism, a mass of the Chechen people were radicalized in their deep ethnic mistrust and hatred of Russian. In 1991-1992 “some 90,000 Russians and Slavs…..were physically expelled or otherwise forced to leave” Chechnya (Hughes, 2001, p. 30). These ethnic
disturbances were “allowed to spill out into uncontrollable public disorder, with routine humiliations and robbery of armed gangs” (Hughes, 2001, p. 30). This ethnically oriented outbreak of violence can be seen as a period of escalation that saw both Russians and Chechens further radicalized along traditionally hostile lines. This escalating hostility, felt by both sides, would demonstrate a tit-for-tat system of action and reaction as neither side in this confrontation could allow themselves to become a victim of the other’s aggression.

Although not yet willing to engage in direct military intervention, Russian President Boris Yeltsin turned to the nomenklatura, as proxy agents within the communist system. In the region of Nadtrechny in Chechnya, they were used to aid in an overthrow of Dudayev’s government. These proxies were armed and given support by the Russian military, however they would not directly recognize or claim them as their agents. Russia’s continued refusal to recognize Dudayev’s government resulted in a promotion of increasing the authority of these proxies within Chechnya as a substitute, and to enable them to become legitimate partners in negotiations. This attempt to legitimize proxies within Chechnya failed to gain support of the Chechen people, beginning with the peace mission led by the Russian parliament’s leader Khasulatov, an ethnic Chechen, in August of 1992 and the creation of the Provisional Council led by Umar Avturkhanov in August 1994 (Hughes, 2001). Russian proxies attempted a military overthrow of Dudayev’s government in March 1992, August 1994 and November 1994; however, each of these attempts failed to achieve the demise of Dudayev's governmental legitimacy that Russia was hoping for.
On March 27, 1994 there was an assassination attempt on Dudayev’s life. A remote car bomb would have killed Dudayev if he had been in his ceremonial place within the automobile procession. To Russia’s disappointment he had taken another place that day and survived the attack. This continued hostility towards the legitimate government established by Dudayev in Chechnya exhibited Russia’s institutional enmity towards Chechen home-rule, and demonstrated the fact that Russia could not co-exist peacefully with an independent Chechen Republic to its immediate southern border. At this point, many among both the Chechen and Russian camps saw that direct military clashes were unavoidable. This interaction between the Chechen and Russian governments provides a clear example of escalation between the two countries and made war all the more likely.

Dudayev’s Attempt to Negotiate

At any time before and during the outbreak of hostilities between the Russian and Chechen forces, a politically negotiated settlement might have been reached. Dudayev “was willing, indeed eager, to meet with Yeltsin….however the successful efforts of hard-line advisors around President Yeltsin convinced him that Dudayev was neither a serious nor a legitimate political actor” (Lapidus, 1998, p. 25). Furthermore, Dudayev repeatedly supported the establishment of third party intervention and negotiation which never materialized. A proposed mediation or negotiation between Yeltsin and Dudayev might have been able to end the conflict at the early stages of violence and prevent the vast destruction that would follow.
Dudayev had a very open position when it came to the possibility of negotiating with Russia. He was willing to continue the economic relationship that had existed between Chechnya and Russia, and his proposed plan for this continued economic relationship would have continued the use of the ruble. He would also generally maintain normalized economic activity as opposed to those examples of Moldova and Georgia. This economic position offered a willingness for Dudayev to compromise and give in to several of Russia’s chief concerns. This attempt to establish a negotiated peace was ultimately made impossible by hard-liner advisors to President Yeltsin. With no reciprocal willingness to find a common ground on the Russian side of the conflict this attempt was doomed to failure.

First Chechen War 1994-1996

In December of 1994, after several failed attempts to oust Dudayev’s government, military action was approved by the Russian Security Council to enter Chechnya to counter the entrenched separatist movement. At the outset of the war, Russia exuded overconfidence in its military superiority over the Chechen military forces and people. In efforts to cement Russian superiority in the conflict, Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev even went as far to make the assumption that the military campaign would be an almost “bloodless blitzkrieg” and would be over within a week (Lapidus, 1998, p. 20). This gross oversimplification of the situation that Russian forces would meet on the ground in Chechnya, was destined to be an overly optimistic assumption. This overconfidence on the part of the Russian military led to a hardening of Chechen resistance as Russia saw no need
to allow for any quarter or ambiguity in purpose for their incursion into Chechnya. The Russian military boasted that it would roll into the Caucasus nation and destroy all forms of resistance with minimal effort, therefore their ethnic and ideological enemies in the Chechen people prepared themselves for a bitter struggle. The well-organized Chechen forces were gifted and experienced guerrilla fighters and were prepared to do battle and die on their ancestral and familiar home ground in light of the confidence of the Russian military to destroy them. Overconfident, corrupt, and incompetent, the Russian military leadership would find it difficult to back up their boasted ability to take the capital “within a couple of hours” (Hughes, 2001, p. 31) and began to face a much harder fight than expected.

The Russian need for a small but victorious war, according to Yeltsin, went deeper than a need to recover the land area encompassing Chechnya. The Russian military was described by Hughes as suffering from “Afghan syndrome” (2001, p. 31). This syndrome was carried over from the Soviet era and acted to demoralize and undermine the Russian military in their purpose as well as to disillusion the Russian people, who became disenchanted with military grandeur as a result. The lack of discipline and training, paired with rampant alcoholism and drug abuse among a massively conscripted military were a few of the many symptoms of this Afghan syndrome. A quick military victory was seen by Yeltsin and his military counselors as a sort of cure for both the military and the Russian people who they looked to for support. Another key motivation for Yeltsin in supporting a military solution to the Chechen menace to the south, was that a quick and glorious military action would bring with it the political advantage of securing the continuity of the Russian
Federation. This would also no doubt secure an electoral victory for himself in the upcoming national elections by demonstrating his great leadership.

The initial response to the Russian military intervention saw many Chechen civilians, which included women and children, meeting Russian troops at the border seeking to block their movements further into the country. This show of defiance by the ordinary Chechen people created a development in the conflict that surprised Yeltsin, and persuaded many Russian officers to turn their troops around and thereafter refuse to take part in the invasion. This instance proved the extent of Chechen solidarity against the Russian military and governmental control that would be continued throughout the war. The invasion was not prevented however, and as a result of the Russian military action many Chechen civilians became victims of rape, murder and plunder by the Russian armed forces. These hardships and general tragedy inflicted upon the Chechen people, surprised many Russian military administrators by bolstering the grass-roots support among Chechens for Dudayev. Dudayev’s administration had been suffering from abandonment by the general public of Chechnya and was nearing a danger point, however this renewed support from the nation proved critical for the resistance effort. The conflict for many Chechens was framed in the form of a nationalistic campaign of resistance and survival with Dudayev as their fearless and charismatic leader. The very symptoms of the ‘Afghan syndrome’ which Russian leaders sought to cure, were among the prime factors for the solidification of a nationalistic identity of resistance among Chechens. The swelling of Chechen nationalistic furor would not only motivate Chechen guerrilla fighters, but would act as a catalyst for Russian military leaders, and even President Yeltsin himself, to see the
enemy not merely as Chechen President Dudayev, but as the entirety of the Chechen people.

The Chechens held a clear advantage over the imposing Russian military in a strategic manner. Chechens’ knowledge of the terrain, local support and unlimited supply of willing volunteers to fight for the cause made them superiorly motivated compared to the Russian forces. Russia’s military training and extensive source of weaponry were not compatible with the style of guerrilla tactics the Chechen people implemented. The lack of a formal Chechen military meant that the civilian population was forced to band together to fight a long awaited battle with Russia to uphold their right to self-determination as a country.

On December 27, 1994 Yeltsin announce the impending assault on the Chechen capital of Grozny that would take place within the next four days. In his address to the troops he stated:

“Remember, our common goal is to help the Chechen people escape from the misfortune into which they have fallen, to help restore a normal, peaceful and calm life… Your specific task is to disarm bandits and get them to give in or destroy their heavy weaponry. You are under the protection of the state and the Russian constitution, under the personal protection of the president” (Smith, 2001, p. 146)

Although Yeltsin made an attempt to bolster Russian morale in order to ensure a quick victory, this was not to emerge. The New Year’s Eve attack on Grozny, beginning in the early hours with a heavy bombing campaign and extremely poor Russian military readiness, resulted in a slow but crushing defeat for the Chechen people that lasted two months until March 1995 when Russia officially took control of the capital. Although
Russian military leaders had stated that the military campaign was to be a quick exercise and that many civilians would be able to return to Grozny, after a few short days following the intimal attack “violence continued for almost two more years and resulted in some 100,000 causalities and nearly 400,000 refugees, one third of the republics population” (Lapidus, 1998, p. 21). Many have argued that the initial bombing of Grozny was the most devastating bombing of a European city and would ultimately end in the greatest military defeat for Russia since the end of the Second World War.

In an attempt to regain control of Chechnya through pseudo-political means, Yeltsin called upon former Chechen President Zavgaev to return to Grozny to set up an amicable government that could be manipulated by Russia. In fall of 1995, Zavgaev arrived back in Chechnya and soon attempted to legitimize himself as the elected leader through a heavily manipulated election in December of that year. This did nothing to disrupt the popular support of Dudayev and his fight for Chechen independence. It is widely accepted that Zavgaev never gained significant support from the Chechen population after this point. This political failure coupled with military humiliation of Yeltsin during the taking of Grozny was devastating to his popularity amongst the Russian people and embarrassing within the international community. Yeltsin’s humiliation originated from the fact that the military campaign to Grozny had been promised as a swift and bloodless victory which was obviously made untrue due to the high level of resistance and relative success of the Chechen fighters. By early 1995 Russian “public opinion polls indicated that over 60% of the population opposed the use of force and about 25% were prepared to recognize Chechen independence” (Lapidus, 1998, p. 21). Along with opinions within the Russian Federation
many other nations also looked down on the invasion and its effects on the Chechen people. Ultimately this military campaign and political maneuvering cost Yeltsin much of his political support as well as military integrity. Yeltsin’s hopefulness to end the stalemate between the Russian military and the Chechen resistance was a flawed concept that did not take hold.

In a true attempt to create an end of the stalemate between Russia and Chechnya, Yeltsin, in hopes of improving his popularity among the Russian people before the 1996 presidential elections, attempted to find a way to end the conflict. On March 31, 1996 Yeltsin proposed a cease-fire and a meeting with Dudayev, against the advice of his advisers. Speculation that the Russian military would not stay true to a cease-fire was confirmed when on April 22, 1996 Dudayev was assassinated as his car was struck with a Russian missile. The Russian government’s hopes that disposing of Dudayev would end Chechen resistance and that his replacement Aslan Maskhadov, also a former Soviet commander and known moderate, would be receptive to negotiations on Russian terms. Maskhadov and his fellow Chechen commanders, however, vowed to continue Dudayev’s fight.

A surprise visit by Yeltsin to Grozny before the July 1996 election initiated new talks between Russia and Chechnya. These talks resulted in a cease-fire that would lead to Russian withdrawal and prisoner exchanges. What ultimately secured Yeltsin’s reelection in Russia was the appointment of General Aleksandr Lebed to become the secretary of the Security Council and placing him in charge of negotiations between Russia and Chechnya.
Peace was in sight until Yeltsin made the claim that the Russians had effectively won the war. On the eve of Yeltsin’s inauguration on August 6, 1996, the Chechens, insulted by Russia’s assertion that they had achieved victory, launched an aggressive assault on Grozny. Around 1500 Chechen rebels were able to penetrate Russian positions in Grozny. This assault resulted in the deaths of many Russian soldiers in the process of recapturing the city (Atrokhov, 1999). This attack on Grozny by the Chechens ultimately led to the subsequent expulsion of the Russians from the country. Many Chechens therefore necessarily see the recapturing of Grozny as a chosen glory (Volkan, 1997). The Chechen victory over the superior Russian military in the First Chechen War became known as a glorious victory for the small nation and solidified their need for independence as a cultural necessity. This surprise attack was a chance to assert to the Russians that the war was not over and that negotiations needed to continue. The humiliating defeat of the Russians at Grozny left the Russian military no choice but to propose the utter destruction of the city. The Russian government recognized that this option was not a realistic strategic move towards winning the war and was therefore persuaded to send General Lebed to Grozny to reopen negotiations towards a peace agreement.

*Negotiating Towards Peace: the Khasavyurt Agreement*

The Khasavyurt Agreement signed on August 31, 1996 was made possible by three major events that had to occur in order for this agreement to be realized. The first event was the humiliation of the Russian military after the surprise attack by Chechen forces on August 6, 1996 which ultimately left them no choice but leave the capital or risk completely
destroying it. The second event occurred during Yeltsin’s reelection campaign where more liberal advisers began to gain influence over the policy for Chechnya. The final event was the appointment of General Aleksandr Lebed who was able to view the conflict outside of a biased Russian perspective in order to draw constructive conclusions that led to the signing of the agreement by both parties.

The Khasavyut Agreement in the end brought international attention to the Chechnya military conflict. The agreement was created and signed by Aslan Mashadov and General Lebed. The agreement outlined the demilitarization of Grozny, withdrawal of Russian troops from Chechnya and the prevention of civil disturbances through the creation of a joint headquarters in Grozny. The Khasavyut Agreement also established that “their mutual relations were to be regulated by ‘standard of international law’, and where both sides renounced ‘forever’ the ‘use of the threat of force in the resolution of any disputes between them’” (Hughes, 2001, p. 33). The status of Chechnya as an independent nation, however, would be delayed for a period of five years until 2001 when negotiations would reopen.

The Khasavyut Agreement resulted in many improvements in relations between Chechnya and Russia. As proof of the initial success of the Khasavyut Agreement, the election of Aslan Maskhadov was conducted under the supervision of the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and other international observers in January 1997. The election was declared free and fair with Maskhadov receiving 65% of the vote (Hughes, 2001). Also in May 1997 an agreement titled “On Peace and the Principles of
Mutual Relations between the Russian Federation and the Chechen Republic of Icherkia” was signed. The Khasavyut Agreement resulted in two years of relative peace until the election of Vladimir Putin in 1999 occurred and the modified Russian policy towards Chechnya resulted in another clash between Russia and Chechnya.

Second Chechen War

The Second Chechen War began in September 1999 shortly after Vladimir Putin was elected to office of Prime Minister of the Russian Federation. This is considered by both sides to be a continuing struggle in the region. The Russian military ultimately was able to recapture Grozny quickly in February 2000 through “aerial bombardment, and the Chechen forces were pushed back into the less accessible highland areas and over the border with Georgia” (Hughes, 2001, p 37). In response to these new attacks, Faurby (2002) explains that “during both wars, there have been numerous instances of disproportionate and indiscriminate bombing of the civilian population” (pp. 106-107) by Russia against the Chechens. This is in direct connection to the counteraction plan created by Putin to destroy and dominate the Chechen state and continue Russian influence and control of the Caucasus region.

Not only has Putin enforced his counteraction (Korostelina, 2007) plans within Chechnya, he has also authorized several unwarranted raids on Chechen villages which were used to search for and neutralize any who oppose Russian rule. He also created a permanent Russian military force within Chechnya. Putin also began to further expand the Russian threat narrative (Korostelina, 2007) concerning the Chechens that has been
continued since the first invasion of the region over 200 years ago. This was done by labeling them as terrorists, and seeking to legitimize military actions taken in Chechnya under the aspect of the new War on Terror that began after the September 11th attacks on the United States. Putin argued that the war “aim was to destroy Chechnya as a ‘terrorist state’, ‘an outpost of international terrorism’, and a ‘bandit enclave’ for foreign-funded ‘Islamic fundamentalist’” (Hughes, 2001, p. 36). Not only was Putin reinforcing the old stereotype (McGarty, 2002) that the Chechens were bandits, he began to label them as terrorists that ultimately spawned the newest stereotype (McGarty, 2002) placed on the Chechen people and has marked them as unwanted in the broader international community. In response to this increased military presence in Chechnya and the new terrorist stereotype (Korostelina, 2007) placed on them by Putin, many Chechens have resorted to hostage taking as a form of protest and resistance against the Russians. This is generally seen to the world as a terrorist act meant to press the Russian government for independence and military withdrawal. These guerilla measures are ultimately considered the only viable military strategy since Chechen military groups are unable to compete with Russian military might directly.

**Terrorism in Chechnya**

This detailed and uneven conflict left in many the spirit of resistance to oppose an overwhelming military power in Russia. there is little ability however to actively resist such an advanced military power through ‘legitimate’ armed forces. This desire to resist would become pushed more and more towards the periphery of internationally recognized
norms of conflict and strayed into terrorist activities. Such a transition allowed for the radicalization of many individuals and groups within Chechnya, as well as allowing a secure base among the population for some external groups to impart certain forms and organizational structures supporting terrorism. Many internationally recognized terrorist groups espousing these violent extremist tendencies, Al Qaeda being among them, have been observed recruiting and spreading their ideologies in the region. It is known that “local Chechen Islamists like Shamil Basayev (who travelled to Afghanistan to train in Al Qaeda camps) and foreign Arab mujahidin, such as Amir Khattab, rapidly transformed the previously localized conflict in the Caucasus into a ‘front’ in the wider global jihad” (Johns, 2013, p. 1). Terrorism, as a result of these various sources and origins, has become a core ideological trait within the current resistance to Russia in the region. It must necessarily be considered when forming a strategy to undermine and eradicate terrorist and other extremist groups from the region without perpetrating excessive violence and doing irreparable damage to the civilian population.

Due to the fact that Chechnya does not have a formal military, they must rely on guerrilla fighters to carry out their aims of securing sovereignty form the Russian Federation and has necessarily translated into the extremist community now present within the Caucasus region. This failure to field a formal military results in the Chechens being splintered into several different groups that have different aims and ideologies of what the country should become. The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) explains that there are eight major groups working within Chechnya including; Caucasus Emirate, Armed Forces of the Chechen Republic of
Ichkeria, Riyadsu-Salikhin Reconnaissance and Sabotage Battalion of Chechen Martyrs, Dagestani Shari'ah Jamaat, Islambouli Brigades of Al Qaeda, NVF, Chechen Lone Wolf Group, Special Purpose Islamic Regiment (SPIR) and others (Johns, 2013). START also reports that between January 1, 1992 and December 31, 2011 there have been a total of 1,415 terrorist attacks with only 80 of these being attributed to one of the groups listed above, with the Caucasus Emirates claiming the majority (Johns, 2013). It must be noted here that the lack of attribution of attacks to certain groups are a direct result of the lack of organization in Chechnya among the different ideologies. This situation is aggravated and further confused due to the various extremist groups that have taken up the Chechen cause for independence and influenced many of those involved by enforcing their own individualistic extremist ideology on the conflict as a whole. Terrorism provides one of the roots of the continuation of the conflict since the perpetuation of extremist violence is the ultimate goal of many of these groups, instead of bringing about a resolution and productive conclusion to the violence. Combating and attempting to eradicate this violent extremism must therefore be central to efforts in the region if a resolution to the conflict is to be possible in the future.

Although the perpetrators of violence may be splintered among many groups, it must be acknowledged that the targets of these acts do not vary much between groups. START outlines that the top two targets of violent extremism in Chechnya include the Police and the Government (Johns, 2013). In the timeframe of January 1, 1992 and December 31, 2011 1,356 of the 1,435 attacks committed have been attributed to the many groups working within the Caucasus region with 60.5 percent of those attacks targeting the
police (371), the government (271) and the Russian military (179) (Johns, 2013). It must also be noted that there is a unified method of carrying out these attacks with bombing and explosives being the most prevalent, and armed assault and assassination also being widespread (Johns, 2013). These statistics show a clearly shared enemy and method of engagement among the groups that allows for a blurred but unified front against the Russians. In this way violent extremism has allowed these groups a share of common ground and allowed them to flourish separately instead of directly competing and weakening their ability to carry out their goals in the region at large.

Although many have argued that a method of countering terrorism entails the prevention of travel for foreign fighters that is not the case in Chechnya. The number of foreign fighters is extremely minimal and usually consists of military trainers from other extremists groups outside of the region. The majority of Chechen groups consists of indigenous fighters from Chechnya or the Northern Caucasus area. It must also be noted that only 67 out of the 1,415 terrorist attacks committed between January 1, 1992 and December 31, 2011 were committed in Russia or Moscow while the rest were concentrated within the Caucasus region with the most occurring in Chechnya itself (Johns, 2013). This point further outlines and highlights the need to combat terrorism within the Chechnya conflict due to the growth in such tactics within the indigenous population. This is a separate problem from foreign fighters possibly entering the conflict in massive numbers and changing the form of conflict externally due to outside influences. Due to the successes of radicalization, to the extent that violent extremism is being largely carried out by native Chechens, terrorism has become a clear root of the ongoing conflict and must be dealt with
in order to bring about the scenario in which a peaceful solution can be enacted. Without first combatting terrorism, this conflict will result in further loss of life and lead to an ever more radicalized local population.

Two of the most infamous attacks on Russians by the Chechens were the Moscow Theatre Siege in 2002 and the Beslan School Siege of 2004. The Moscow Theatre Siege took place from October 23 – 26, 2002 and involved 800 hostages, 40 total Chechens (19 female, 21 male) and an outcome that no one anticipated (Speckhard & Akhmedova, 2008). The Beslan School Siege lasted from September 1-3, 2004 and involved 1,120 hostages, 32 Chechens (2 female, 30 male) and the death of many children (Speckhard & Akhmedova, 2008). In both attacks the Chechens demanded full withdrawal of Russian troops from Chechnya. In both attacks the Russians refused to negotiate. In an attempt to end the Moscow Theatre Siege the Russians pumped gas into the theatre hoping that it would cause everyone to fall asleep. Unfortunately the gas did not affect everyone which led the Russians to storm the theatre, killing all the Chechens as well as 129 Russians due to the fact that they did not plan to have enough medical personnel present to revive all of the Russian civilians. In the Beslan School Siege the Russian Special Forces stormed the school which resulted in a gun fight and the death of 300 Russians, including many children.

The Chechen- Russian Conflict is a prime example of an “us vs. them” narrative (Korostelina, 2007). The conflict continues to smolder due to the mobilized identity (Korostelina, 2007) of the Chechens as well as Russian claims to authority over the region.
Anything short of recognition by the Russian state of Chechen independence will continue to fail to resolve this conflict. As a result of Russian intransigence, the hopes of recognition for a Chechen state seems to fade with every year that Vladimir Putin holds office.

**Brief History of Turkey and the Kurds**

![Map of Kurdish Inhabited Region of the Middle East](https://example.com/map-kurdish-inhabited-region-middle-east)

*Figure 2: Map of Kurdish Inhabited Region of the Middle East (BBC, 2014)*

The history of the modern state of Turkey and its Kurdish citizens stretches back to before the fall of the Byzantine Empire. The Turkish Ottoman Empire under Sultan Mehmed II the Magnificent, in 1453, “captured Constantinople, ending the Byzantine Empire and consolidating Ottoman Empire in Asia Minor and Balkans” (BBC, 2015). After the formal conquering of the Byzantine Empire the Ottoman Empire began its campaign for expansion in the 15th and 16th centuries into the directions of Asia, Africa and Europe. The Ottoman Empire become a powerful empire until their “advance into Europe (was) halted at Battle of Vienna” (BBC, 2015) in 1683, beginning the decline of the empire that would last through the First World War. In an effort to keep the empire alive there was an
attempt in the 19th century to modernize the political and economic aspects of the empire that ultimately failed (BBC, 2015). Generally referred to as the “sick man of Europe”, the Ottoman Empire became synonymous with economic and social decline through its political and technological eclipsing by Western Europe. Present throughout this period, the ethnic group known as the Kurds is historically disputed as to their emersion as a distinct group or ‘nation’, with Kurdish nationalists claiming the formation of their ancestry going as far back as ancient Mesopotamia, and the Ottoman Turks claiming the Kurds as a tribe among their Turkic confederacy going back to their emersion from the Eurasian steppe.

The 20th century would ultimately spell the end of the Ottoman Empire. In 1908 the “Young Turk Revolution established constitutional rule, but degenerated into military dictatorship during the First World War, where the Ottoman Empire fought in alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary” (BBC, 2015). Following the end of the First World War the Ottoman Empire was partitioned and in 1918-1922 “triumph of the Turkish National Movement in a war of independence against foreign occupation and rule of the Sultan” (BBC, 2015). This led to the creation of modern Turkey. This period of transition saw one of the first instances of Kurdish recognition on a national scale in modern history. It was within the rejected treaty of Sevres that the Kurds were determined to have their own state. Although rejected by both the Turks and the Kurds in 1918, this would prove an important point of reference for future developments within the Kurdish national identity later in the 20th century.
In 1923 the “Grand National Assembly declares Turkey a republic and Kemal Ataturk president” (BBC, 2015) and in 1928 Turkey was established as a secular state. It was declared that Islam would remain the state religion but that it would be removed from an institutional role in the constitution (BBC, 2015). Ataturk remained in power as president until his death in 1938 and was succeed by Ismet Inonu (BBC, 2015). During the Second World War Turkey remained neutral until 1945 when it declared war on Germany and Japan, while never actually participating in combat. Turkey later joined the United Nations upon its founding later that year (BBC, 2015). This general tracing of Turkish national history is to be taken in the context of normalization with its Western European neighbors and implementation of a nationalist state from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire. During such a transition from a multi-ethnic empire to a localized ethno-centric nation-state, a crisis of identity may naturally arise in time among a citizenry now encompassed within that specific national system, and such was the case of the Kurds in Turkey.

Following the Second World War, Turkey began to face opposition from within its own country. In 1950 Turkey held its first free election and the opposition Democratic Party was announced the winner (BBC, 2015). In 1952 the Turkish government “abandon[ed] Ataturk’s neutralist policy and join[ed] the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)”, thus further joining itself to the western powers and opposing the Warsaw Pact and the communist Soviet Union (BBC, 2015). This post-war period for Turkey is identified with further militarization within its structural leadership. This would in turn destabilize the balance of power and relationships among the ethnic groups inside
of turkey, such as the Kurds, as well as its immediate neighbors, such as Cyprus in the following decades.

The social struggle within Turkey continued into the 1980’s, and it was in 1980 that martial law was enacted following political deadlock and unrest (BBC, 2015). As a result of this political unrest a new constitution was created establishing a presidency with a term of seven years and restructuring the parliament to one chamber (BBC, 2015). From the late 1980’s into the 1990’s, Turkey made several moves in an attempt to move closer towards the west. This was seen in 1987 with its application for full membership in the EEC and allowing the US-led coalition to launch air strikes against Iraq from Turkish air bases in 1990 during the First Gulf War (BBC, 2015). This move; however, was not accompanied with a liberalization of internal political or social reforms. This period would be marked as a time of violent clashing with the militant Kurdish PKK.

**Kurdish History within Turkey**

The ethnic group known as the Kurds currently exist as “the world’s largest stateless people and nearly half live in Turkey, making the battle there a critical part of the larger Kurdish problem throughout the region” (Marcus, 2007 p. 3). Although a critical factor in the history and analysis of the Kurdish resistance to the Turkish state, the origins of the ethnic group are disputed. “The reason the issue is so obscure is that there is no way to trace the claim that the Kurds established an independent states as one separate group in history” (Cakar, Cengiz, & Tombul, 2011, p. 4). It is argued that the Kurds were first mentioned in the writings of Xenophon’s *Anabasis*, a Greek mercenary writing during an
“expedition from Mesopotamia to the Black Sea around the year 400 B.C.”. Here Xenophon “tells us about people known [as] the Carduchi, who are mountain tribes that may relate to origins of the Kurds” (Cakar, Cengiz, & Tombul, 2011, p. 4).

Another theory “argues that Kurds are a wing of Turanians like the Turks who originally came from Central Asia. This possibly was advanced examining the similarities between the language of the Ural Altai region of Central Asia and Kurdish” (Cakar, Cengiz, & Tombul, 2011, p. 4). The word Kurd was first “seen in 732 BC at the Yenisey Stones in which Khan (a Turkish leader) says ‘I am Kurt-el-khan’” (Cakar, Cengiz, & Tombul, 2011, p. 5). Another issue revolves around the concept that the Kurds may be made up of several different groups and from different tribes. This duality in historical and ethnic tradition exists as the foundation of each sides’ resistance to a state of affairs that either ignores Kurdish autonomy or partitions the Turkish state.

In the aftermath of World War I in 1920, the Treaty of Sevres, which was imposed by the victorious Entente powers, dissolved the Ottoman Empire. Ultimately, the foundation for the imposing of the Treaty of Sevres was to “divide the empire along ethnic lines” and would ultimately have resulted to “provide for an autonomous Kurdistan on the Kurdish-populated territory” (Cakar, Cengiz, & Tombul, 2011, p. 6). Although the treaty officially created an independent Kurdistan it was never implemented. Cultural resistance to this treaty brought the Kurds and Turks into a united front against the treaty as the invading force supported by Greek soldiers in Asia Minor was seen as a damaging and
dangerous influence that sought to divide and diminish the cultural and historical relevance of the Ottoman Empire and of their shared Islamic culture.

The goals of the Entente powers is seen in the fact that “Dahlman (2002) says that ‘Sevres mostly served to create buffer states among rivals rather than acknowledge any expression of Kurdish nationalism or minority self-determination, although the treaty has remained a significant touchstone for Kurdish political movements ever since” (Cakar, Cengiz, & Tombul, 2011, p. 6). Unified by this shared purpose, the Treaty of Sevres was ultimately abandoned and was replaced by the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 (Cakar, Cengiz, & Tombul, 2011, p. 6). This would reject the further partition of the Ottoman Empire and establish the boundaries of the state of Turkey. As a result, the Kurdish areas of the former empire beyond Turkey were in turn partitioned. In their support of the Turks, the Kurds effectively subverted their own ethnic identity to that of the Turks, much to the level it had been during the Ottoman Empire. This however would become an issue later in the 20th century as the Kurds resisted further cultural assimilation.

The new Turkish Republic was supremely focused on seeing its citizens exclusively as Turkish. “With the declaration of the Republic of Turkey, national identity was redefined and the 1924 constitution identified the national language as Turkish and defined the citizenship in one group, ‘Turk’” (Cakar, Cengiz, & Tombul, 2011, p. 6). Under this new constitution a “‘Turk’ is anyone living within the boundaries of Turkey and attached to Turkey by bonds of citizenship” (Cakar, Cengiz, & Tombul, 2011, p. 6). Turkish officials relied on this point and “stubbornly insisted that Kurds were actually Turks and that their
language was a corrupted form of Turkish” (Marcus, 2007, p. 9). This not only serves as a demeaning point towards Kurdish identity but an effort to subjugate that identity for purposes serving the Turkish state. Over the coming decades “nonviolent pressure … wrested little if anything from the central authorities in terms of Kurdish cultural or political rights. Those who tried to promote their ethnic identity ended up in prison on trumped up charges of trying to overthrow the state” (Marcus, 2007, p. 9). This non-violent resistance and assertion of a Kurdish identity existed as an opening salvo against Turkish cultural domination and would be the beginning of a process that would later turn violent as Turkish government structures and institutions became more radically nationalistic and adversarial to ethnic minorities within Turkey.

There exists within the history of Turkey a string of “Kurdish rebellions… in 1924, 1926, and 1936-1938” that are in turn “colored with religious sentiment against a secular state” (Criss, 1995, p. 22). This reaction from the Kurdish ethnicity exists as a sample of religious resistance to a basic change in social structure; however, this also stands as an example of an ethnically unified resistance to a given policy imposed by the Turkish state. During the rebellion in 1925 instigated by Skeikh Said, “the main reason for the outbreak of the revolt was the fundamental changes during the new sate-construction process, especially the reforms based on creating a secular nation-state. Religious sentiments among Kurdish society played an important role in the formation of the rebellion” (Cakar, Cengiz, & Tombul, 2011, p. 7). The “Turkification” of Turkey can be explained as “a host of laws were enacted to wipe out Kurdish history and identity. Kurdish village names were changed to Turkish one, the word Kurdistan- until then used to denote a geographical region – was
expunged from books and the language itself was essentially banned” (Marcus, 2007, p. 18). In response to this national policy, various revolts took place where Kurdish groups rejected and replaced the authority of the Turkish government in ways as pertaining to their own cultural heritage. This legacy of resistance provides a perspective of Kurdish identity in a chaotic and important period of transition for Turkey and those ethnicities living within its new borders. In the coming years, the Kurds as well as other varying groups would both see the Turkish state and its laws as unjust, even as Turkey sought to expand its role in the international community. It was only in as recent a time as June and July 2003, in hopes of becoming members of the EU, that Turkish parliament passed “laws easing restrictions on freedom of speech, Kurdish language rights and on reducing political role of the military” (BBC, 2015). This step has been one of few moves by the government accepting of such measures as inviting a delusion of Turkish identity. Much of the 20th century is identified by repression and resistance to political and ethnic minority groups within Turkey that spawned a series of violent clashes.

Organized Terrorism in Turkey

The landscape of armed resistance and terrorist organization within Turkey is dominated in the media by the Kurdish struggle for statehood. It is important, however, to understand that the Kurdish people are not the only group that has committed terrorist activities to further a political goal. Ulkumen Rodoplu, Jeffery Arnold and Gurkan Ersoy (2004) explain that since the 1990s there were fourteen active terrorist organizations, out of those fourteen only seven were directly related to the Kurdish people while the other
seven where Turkish based. Most of the Kurdish groups had the goal of establishing a Kurdish state either in Southeast Turkey or expanding that into parts of Syria, Iraq and Iran along with Southeast Turkey and most of them have Marxist ideologies. (Rodoplu, Arnold, & Ersoy, 2004). Kurdish groups include Kurdistan Worker’s Party (PKK), Kurdistan Democratic Congress (KADEK), People's Liberation Army of Kurdistan (ARAK), Kurdistan Liberation Party, Northern Kurdistan Democratic Party (PDK/BAKUR), Union of Kurd Laborers, and Islamic Kurdistan Party (PIK) (Rodoplu, Arnold, Ersoy, 2004). Although most of these groups have shared similar beliefs in Marxism and separatism, there is no evidence that they have worked together on this common goal.

The forming of the PKK; however, does show a marked rise in terrorist attack and general insurgent activity. At the time of the establishment of the PKK, "between 1978 and 1982 the Turkish National Security Council recorded an estimated 43,000 terrorist incidents in Turkey, with an average of 28 deaths per day due to terrorists attacks" (Rodoplu, Arnold & Ersoy, 2004, p. 155). This is a clear marking of the influence of the PKK since the time of its emersion, and also is indicative of its impact on the landscape of Kurdish ethnic community. As a possible response to this shocking and sudden impact of the PKK, "the 1983 ban on expressing oneself in Kurdish was lifted" by the Turkish government, but this would ultimately exist only as a half-measure and “hollow gesture in the face of increasing terrorism… this suggests that granting cultural rights does not necessarily mean that terrorism will automatically cease, though it may be an aspect of containment” (Criss, 1995, p. 20). The violent rise of the PKK was to prove a daunting and
long-term conflict that would not be so easily diminished or destroyed, lasting even to the current day.

_The Rise of the PKK_

It has been well documented that the PKK “first appeared in the 1970s ‘as a primary leftist, radical, student group’; however, over the course of the following years it would extend “its base of support into many other countries besides Turkey” (Cakar, Cengiz, & Tombul, 2011, p. 9). Abdullah Ocalan, the founder of the PKK as well as its supreme leader, came from a poor Kurdish family who moved to Ankara in 1970 to pursue education at the university level. It was at this point in his life that he was exposed to Marxist-Leninist ideology (Cakar, Cengiz, & Tombul, 2011). His early political machinations can be seen due to the fact that he “was sentenced to seven months in prison for attending an illegal demonstration in 1971” (Cakar, Cengiz, & Tombul, 2011, p. 9). In 1973 Ocalan and his friend decided to form the National Liberation Army (Cakar, Cengiz, & Tombul, 2011). “At this point, Button (1995) points out that the aim of this student movement was to liberate the Kurds and to build an independent Kurdistan in the Turkish state of Anatolia” (Cakar, Cengiz, & Tombul, 2011, p. 9). This mission would take on further development as the organization grew beyond the bounds of a radical student organization, ultimately taking on the ambitions of a great swath of the Kurdish population of Turkey.

The terrorist organization of the PKK, or ‘Partiya Karkaren Kurdistan’ was “formally established in November 1973 in the village of Fis (Diyarbair) by Abdullah Ocalan and with twenty-three of his friends, including some Turks, based on the ideology
of Marxism” (Cakar, Cengiz, & Tombul, 2011, p. 9). The purpose of the PKK was not based on religion, but ultimately “in the cause and devotion to its leader” (Skaine, 2006, p. 81). From the outset of the formation of the PKK, it ultimately had the goal of establishing an independent Kurdistan. This ethnically oriented organization committed to terrorist activity is not an anomaly for the period, as many Marxist organizations had been established within Turkey as well as other nations in the region.

The details of the internal nature of the PKK was initially undetermined through the fact that “in the first congress, there was no indication of how the PKK would recruit members and how the PKK would find enough political support” (Cakar, Cengiz, & Tombul, 2011, p. 9). The second congress of the PKK, held in Damascus, Syria in 1982, was a critical meeting for the development of the group. “The group decided to begin violent armed movements against the Turkish state in order to build an independent Kurdish state… in the following years, the PKK began to send its members inside Turkey to initiate its guerilla war … against the Turkish government in 1984.” (Cakar, Cengiz, & Tombul, 2011, p. 9). From the outset of their armed struggle within Turkey “the attack strategies used by the PKK were kidnapping, bombing cars, suicide bombing, and attacking people who represent Turkish authority” this would grow to include even those individuals who supported the state through jobs such as teachers (Cakar, Cengiz, & Tombul, 2011, p. 9). These tactics however, defended by the internal ideology of the organization, can be clearly demarcated as terroristic in nature and in targeting. Ultimately, “the PKK legitimated the use of violence by arguing that the eastern and southeastern regions of Turkey were deliberately rendered under-developed and the Kurdish identity as not
acknowledged by the Turkish government” (Alkan, 2011, p. 93). As a result of this mismanagement and forced submission, prevalent throughout modern Turkish history, the PKK had declared the rule of Turkey among its Kurdish citizens as illegitimate, providing their own authority as a substitute.

Organizational Structure

The PKK was structured into three branches of: leadership, political, and military. “The central committee, under administrative of Abdullah Ochala constitutes the organizations top structure” (Cakar, Cengiz, & Tombul, 2011, p. 10). The political wing included “the National Liberation Front of Kurdistan (ERNK) that was created in 1985…its main objective of provide intelligence, collect money, and organize small scale attacks” (Cakar, Cengiz, & Tombul, 2011, p. 10). Finally the third branch involved the military and was named “the People’s Liberation Army of Kurdistan (ARGK)…(this was) created in 1986 and refers to the Armed Propaganda Wing of the organization, which aimed at carrying out the armed struggle and terrorist activities” (Cakar, Cengiz, & Tombul, 2011, p. 10). Through this diffusion of roles and responsibilities, the PKK was ultimately focused on providing an armed resistance to the Turkish authority within Kurdish populated areas of east and southeast Anatolia. This system of institutionalized armed resistance and terrorism was ultimately supported by an institutional and bureaucratic structure seeking to maximize the reach and efficiency of the terrorist organization.

The PKK continues to evolve and has gone through many name changes. It has operated under such names as “the organization changed the name of ERNK to the
Kurdistan Democratic People’s Force (YDG) in 2000…the ARGK was replaced with the People’s Defense Force (HPG) so as not be referred to as bloody activities anymore” (Cakar, Cengiz, & Tombul, 2011, p.10). The PKK itself changed its name to KADEK (Kurdistan Freedom and Democracy) in 2002 to try and rebrand their organization and mission, in turn again changing their name in 2003 to KONGRA-GEL (Kurdistan People’s Congress). This was ultimately an attempt to separate the overt terrorist actions of the group’s past from a current organizational structure seeking political change and political autonomy within Turkey. This was eventually abandoned after the organization redirected its organization once again towards armed resistance to the Turkish government following the 2003 American invasion of Iraq which provided a nearby base of militaristic operations in the Kurdistan region of that country. As a result of these and other political and social forces, the group officially changed its name back to the PKK (Cakar, Cengiz, & Tombul, 2011).

Regional Organizational Activity

Realizing that the Turkish government inherently existed as a dominating military presence within Turkey, Ocalan had as his long-term plan, a system in mind “to arrange for PKK fighters to get training from the Palestinian militant groups in Syria and Lebanon” (Marcus, 2007, p. 54). The organizational connections that existed among the leadership of various groups from the area of Palestine and the PKK provided for training and support activities to exist in tandem, while maintaining a distinct Kurdish purpose and ideology. “Palestinians and Kurds usually did their military training together but separated for
political classes” (Marcus, 2007, p. 56). The military classes “were only training in explosives, which needs only 10 days or two weeks to learn. Some courses took two months, for example, for staff officers, they took courses in military, topography, explosives, artillery and guerrilla fighting” (Marcus, 2007, p. 56). Through relatively quick training in explosives, the PKK was able to establish itself through bombing terrorist attacks on Turkish soldiers and civilians and give them a greater presence throughout Turkey beyond what their paramilitary presence could directly secure in Kurdish dominated population areas.

Through these regional connections among other terrorist organizations, the PKK was able to support broader areas of direct activity. In 1984 the Kurdistan Workers Party launched a separatist guerrilla war in Turkey, although mostly contained in the southeast corner of the country (BBC, 2015). This growth in ability and reach for the PKK was also met with increased resistance and scope of Turkish response. In 1992 “20,000 Turkish troops enter Kurdish safe havens in Iraq in anti-PKK operations. Also, in 1995 “major military offensive is launched against the Kurds in northern Iraq, involving 35,000 Turkish troops” (BBC, 2015). This is clearly a recognition on the part of the Turkish government of the extended use of the Kurdish ethnic areas even beyond Turkey, and a need for their reach to go beyond the border.

*Organizational Strategy*

The strategy and tactics of the PKK have varied through the years, but what has not changed is its focus on maintaining a direct line of influence and authority among the
Kurdish population centers in southeast Turkey. “The terrorist organization PKK maintained its strategy based on targeting civilians, security personnel, and famous people in the southeast region in order to be known among the public and achieve its goal” (Cakar, Cengiz, & Tombul, 2011, p. 11). The characteristic of the military strategy for targets include “a) attacking the public to illustrate its power to provide wide public support for the organization and to show the weakness of the government; b) attacking the business community to create the dispute about government policy, to provide money for the organization, and to increase the business expenses stemming from investing large amounts of money to security; c) attacking government workers in southeast Turkey to increase an ethnic and nationalist awareness in the Kurdish community” (Cakar, Cengiz, & Tombul, 2011, p. 11). Through these tactics and general strategy, the PKK has sought to establish itself as the sole source of political legitimacy and security among Kurdish areas.

In many ways, the influence of the PKK has been spread by violence even within Kurdish areas and against Kurdish civilians. “The PKK employed revolutionary violence to increase the unrest among the public in the region in order to gain public support” (Cakar, Cengiz, & Tombul, 2011, p. 12). This legitimacy among the Kurdish population was seen by the PKK as a source of legitimacy but also as a resource that had to be defended through its implementation in the national struggle for autonomy and independence from Turkey. A vital issue for the PKK “was to recruit new members to the organization. To achieve that issue, the PKK developed a new strategy that was called ‘military service law’ to force people into sending their children to the mountains to be members of the PKK or confront the PKK’s punishment” (Cakar, Cengiz, & Tombul, 2011, p. 12). Through this policy, the
PKK was able to support its terroristic and guerrilla activities while also practically gaining hostages from among their own supporters in order to create a spiraling system that created a continuation of support for the organization and its activities.

Organizational Adaptations

Existing originally as a Marxist-Leninist organization espousing the goals and ideology of a communist state, the PKK has had at several points in its history been forced to either adapt itself to a changing political reality or be met with dissolution or possible irrelevance. After the fall of the Soviet Union it was seen as opportunistic for the PKK to give up “the idea of establishing an independent Marxist-Leninist Kurdish state. This major shift can be easily understood within Ocalan’s statement that ‘My people need Turkey; we can’t secede for at least forty years….Unity will bring strength’ (Cakar, Cengiz, & Tombul, 2011, p. 12). This was a critical adaptation for the organization in the early and mid-1990’s as the goal of the PKK began to be seen to focus on existence within the Turkish state, but as an autonomous entity. “The PKK declared a unilateral ceasefire in 1993 to prove its motivation towards solving the problem within legal political activity” (Cakar, Cengiz, & Tombul, 2011, p. 13). It is important to state that the general aim of that political dimension was to deceive the public into believing that the organization was giving up its previous goals.

At this point “the PKK was pretending to change its rotation to the political activities to achieve its goals; those which were not achieved illegally. Despite the unilateral ceasefire, the PKK continued its violent attacks, which caused numerous deaths
and wounded many in Turkey” (Cakar, Cengiz, & Tombul, 2011, p. 13). The terrorist activities of the organization would only expand during this period as the PKK “decided to insert suicide bombing in its strategy of violence after the sixth congress in 1996…to increase the morale of the PKK’s fighters in terms of their military activity which was in recession between 1994 and 1996” (Cakar, Cengiz, & Tombul, 2011, p. 13). In order to survive the dissolution of their ideological foundation, the PKK sought to orient its activities through a more centrist political perspective, but ultimately chose to reinvigorate its military presence with an increase in scope and extremism of its chosen terrorist activities.

This reorganization ultimately originated from the ultimate leader in Abdullah Ocalan, as did every major policy. While the change in politically stated goals of the organization was taking place, Ocalan “ordered the PKK to maintain the ceasefire and pull out the majority of the armed facilities from Turkey”, this was concurrent to the PKK increasing its suicide bombing activities in Turkey (Cakar, Cengiz, & Tombul, 2011, p. 13). Ultimately, “with its new strategy, the PKK was trying to carry its political and peaceful solutions into the international arena” (Cakar, Cengiz, & Tombul, 2011, p. 13). Simultaneously the PKK/KONGRA-GEL broke its “unilateral ceasefire in August 2004, and resumed its violent attacks against civilians, security forces and governmental targets in Turkey” (Cakar, Cengiz, & Tombul, 2011, p.13). This in itself represents a central strategy of the leadership headed by Ocalan, and the PKK in general as they were focused on surviving as an entity no matter what the cost to the Kurdish population, let alone the Turkish state.
Another adaptation that took place at this time was for the PKK to gain a more secure grasp not only on the Kurdish population’s support but their relative indoctrination into organizational principles and goals. “The organization employed different tactics such as forcing locals not to open their stores in some private days to illustrate the power of the organization. In addition, children and women were used by the terrorist organization as the first actor in funerals and celebrations such as Nevruz” (Cakar, Cengiz, & Tombul, 2011, p. 13). Ultimately, in order for the PKK to successfully indoctrinate its followers, the relations of the Turkish and Kurdish ethnicities was seen as needing to maintain an open hostility. “The first objective was to increase the hate between Turkish and Kurdish citizens. The second objective was to illustrate that the Turkish state was the oppressor against the Kurds in order to provide international support and to put some pressure on Turkish state. The third objective was to demonstrate to the local people that the Turkish security forces were merciless in terms of using violence against children and women” (Cakar, Cengiz, & Tombul, 2011, p. 13). In this manner the PKK and Ocalan sought to solidify their own hold on the Kurdish population, but also within that population to maintain and spread their version of Kurdish identity and purpose that would be a lasting bastion of support, unable to be shaken by outside actors in the international community. They desired to further establish themselves as a secure organization totally in control of their own existence and destiny within the Kurdish ethnic identity.

To further illustrate this theme, the PKK tended to target specific locations or people during their peak of activity. Many of the terrorist attacks performed by the PKK took place in Southeast Turkey in Kurdish regions because the "PKK sought to compel the
population to cooperate with its aims” (Rodoplu, Arnold, & Ersoy, 2004, p. 157). The PKK's objectives in killing members of its own ethnic group “has been threefold. First, it demonstrates to the people that the PKK is a strong force with whom they should side and rise up in rebellion against the Turkish state. Second, it sends people the message that as long as they remain passive, PKK will consider them to be on the enemy's side and therefore punish them. Third, PKK's wrath is mainly directed against village guards whom the state arms and employs against PKK attacks” (Criss, 1995, p. 19). However brutal and cruel a gambit to be played among their own ethnic population groups, this strategy ultimately succeeded in its goals. It has been estimated that circa 1992 “the number of PKK militants and supporters was reputed to be about 10,000” (Criss, 1995, p. 20). The tactics of the PKK in meeting this goal of expanded growth of their military strength was maintained by fear and cruelty among the Kurdish population. “Among the methods used by PKK militants to recruit manpower were kidnapping young men and women or threatening to kill boys approaching the age of military service unless they joined the organization” (Criss, 1995, p. 20). This all or nothing, join or die mentality was maintained by the organizational leadership and established for a purpose of espousing the ultimate leadership and loyalty to the PKK and its leader Abdullah Ocalan.

A distinct adaptation of the organization during its growth to a regional terrorist power was its targeting of public figures. Residential areas were also targets of the PKK and they "conducted 23 attacks against mayors of cities and villages in the region from 1984-2000, killing eight mayors and wounding another three. This massive targeting or political figures is significant and can be seen as a calculated attempt to secure a hold on
the population as the sole Kurdish authority to the point of paranoia. Ultimately, in roughly “105 attacks against village elders, 60 were killed, another eight were wounded, and 30 were kidnapped, of whom 23 disappeared. Even imams were attacked. In 40 incidents, 27 imams were killed, 89 others were wounded, and five were kidnapped” (Rodoplu, Arnold, & Ersoy, 2004, p. 157).

Another major target of the PKK was the societal infrastructure of the educational system since they believed that it was instilling Turkish culture on Kurdish children. "In 128 attacks against schools or teachers between 1984 and 2000, 116 teachers were killed, 48 others were wounded, and 30 kidnapped, nine of whom disappeared" (Rodoplu, Arnold, & Ersoy, 2004, p. 157). As is seen in many targets by the PKK, self-serving policies are ultimately adopted under the guise of supporting the Kurdish people and their collective interests. In this way they further solidify their hold on the population through a complex system of providing ‘security’ while advancing their ability to practically indoctrinate the population in every facet of the social structure. "By the end of October 1993, 700 schools in Diyarbakir were closed down, either because PKK murdered the teachers or because the school building were burned down. Overall, 3,600 schools have been closed in the region. These schools accommodated nearly 100,000 children" (Criss, 1995, p. 30). The educational sector, although central to the premise of the PKK, could not contain the societal ambitions for organizational control.

Another target and societal institution that the PKK saw as intrinsically necessary for organizational domination was the press. The press represents another popular target,
resulting in "35 attacks against members of the press during (1984-2000), 21 were killed and another six were wounded" (Rodoplu, Arnold, & Ersoy, 2004, p. 157). Finally, the PKK also targets public and commercial infrastructure "in order to deter investment in the region, including bridges, dispensaries electricity plants, oil facilities, and pipelines" (Rodoplu, Arnold, & Ersoy, 2004, p. 157). These targets of the PKK prove their intent not only of ridding Turkish influence from Kurdish areas, but show a ferocious intent of destroying any individual or institution that has the ability to take away or challenge the PKK in its influence over the Kurdish people, including the Kurdish people themselves.

The reach of the PKK has long been established outside of Turkey. Although their attacks may be designed to encompass generally Turkish interests and institutions, the location of those attacks is broadly applied on an international stage. "On November 4, 1993, PKK militants attacked Turkish Airline offices and Turkish banks, embassies, cafes, and businesses with Molotov cocktails in England, Switzerland, Denmark, Austria, Norway, France, and Germany" (Criss, 1995, p. 33). As a result of this willingness to reach out beyond the border of the Turkish state, the PKK has been established as a terrorist organization in other nations. "By 1994, the PKK had been declared illegal both in France and Germany, but not in other European countries" (Criss, 1995, p. 33). The United States designated the PKK to their Foreign Terrorist Organization watch list on October 8, 1997 (United States Department of State). These separate labels of the PKK as a terrorist group were generally established through that nation’s relationship with the Turkish government. Those nations with closer ties to Turkey naturally joined them in banning of PKK supported activities and labeled the organization as a terrorist group.
In February 1999 PKK leader Abdallah Ocalan was captured in Kenya and jailed for treason (BBC, 2015). After the arrest of its leader “the PKK introduced a five-year unilateral ceasefire and took a number of steps to try to change its image and widen its appeal, changing its name several times before deciding it again wanted to be known as the PKK” (BBC, 2015). Centered so closely on the personality of Ocalan, his subsequent capture brought about an immediate mellowing and retreat of many PKK policies. In exchange for sparing Ocalan’s life, much of the terrorist activities of the PKK ceased by the year 2000.

The series of public proclamations of the PKK following the capture of Ocalan have been varying rapidly over time. In May 2004 the PKK stated that it planned to end the ceasefire that was signed “because it calls for annihilation operations against its forces” (BBC, 2015) and resumed its violent campaign. Two years later; however, on September 30, 2006 the PKK declared a “unilateral ceasefire in operations against the military” (BBC, 2015). Between 2009 and 2011, “high-level secret talks took place between the PKK and the Turkish government in Oslo, Norway, but they collapsed after a clash between Turkish soldiers and the PKK in June 2011, in which 14 Turkish soldiers were killed” (BBC, 2015). Although separated from their founder and leader, the PKK still looks to Abdullah Ocalan for leadership. In October 2012 “hundreds of Kurdish political prisoners went on hunger strike…demanding better conditions for Ocalan and the right to use the Kurdish language in the justice and education system. The hunger strike which lasted 68 days ended after Ocalan urged them to stop, which showed he remained the most influential actor in the Kurdish movement” (BBC, 2015). Generally Ocalan has sought to bring about a peaceful
resolution following his capture by the Turkish authorities. In March 2013 Ocalan “called a ceasefire and urged PKK forces to withdraw from Turkey, in an announcement he said was ‘historic’” (BBC, 2015). Ultimately, violence has not completely ceased at any one point even following the capture of its leader. The breakdown in peace talks in 2015 between the PKK and Turkey have introduced a renewed sense of uncertainty and violence as the two sides have again adopted adversarial positions, even as ISIS looms beyond the Syrian border.

This historical background establishes the broader framework within which female fighters will have a place in the Chechen-Russian and Kurdish-Turkish conflicts. Further analysis of female roles in these conflicts will be presented through the theoretical and historical growth of the involvement of female fighters within each of these conflicts. Context is critical in understand the mass media perfection of women which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.
Chapter 2: Stereotyping Female Terrorists in Mass Media

While understanding the historical background of each conflict is important to comprehending the larger frame of female involvement, it is also key to understand how the world has stereotyped and labeled these women throughout history. A detailed analysis of the timeline through which female fighters became more involved in these conflicts is examined in the following chapter. Also the social and cultural forces at work within these societies critical to understanding the broader perspective of how these women have been depicted in the mass media is thoroughly examined.

Historical Examples of Female Fighters

The recognition of females in the modern military and terrorist framework is a relatively new concept. The presence of women in war, however, has been established since the beginning of recorded history and stretches back into cultural obscurity. History has presented a plethora of influential women who have participated in warfare actively, in leadership roles and in support of the broader military efforts. The historical record provides examples such as the mythical Amazonians, specific figures including Joan of Arc, groups like Soviet female fighter pilots during World War II. These models as well as various other tribal and nomadic cultures over thousands of year of human history stand as
witness to the ability and aptitude for women to participate and excel in the ‘traditionally’ male realm of warfare.

Although history has provided many examples of female heroines, there still remains to a certain extent an inability to recognize and discussion active female participation in warfare. In order to gain an understanding of the current atmosphere and stereotypes that are projected on the Chechen and PKK female fighters and units, there must be a discussion around the evolution of females participating in war as well as their support of other indirect aspects of warfare.

When considering women serving in the military in combat, there has been an evolution to accept the presence of women on the battlefield that has occurred gradually. This acceptance has ebbed and flow over time but as McLaughlin (1990) argues, throughout human history “warfare was seen as a masculine activity. Indeed it was generally viewed as the quintessential masculine activity, through which ‘manhood’ was demonstrated” (p. 194). Although this may be the dominant case in cultural evolution, there have been countless examples of women who have taken on the role of men in order to fight or were generally accepted by their society to carry out this role of warrior. The place in society that is responsible for waging war has not been evolutionarily assigned, but culturally appropriated. Women have provided multiple examples for their physical and psychological aptitude for warfare within human nature, and must be recognized as capable of fulfilling this cultural role when available or socially appropriate.
One of the earliest recorded human societies, Chinese culture is one that also saw war as characterized as masculine. This fact did not detract from the many renowned female fighters in ancient China and other areas of the world, however. Li (1994) explains “only occasionally have Chinese women been reported as participants [in war]. However, women actually appear in Chinese history as early as Sun Tzu’s time (496-453 B.C.), when King Wu’s palace concubines were turned soldiers as a demonstration of the effects of discipline” (p. 67). Li (1994) continues to explain that in Chinese history there are four female generals, five leaders of uprisings, and ten heroines that span many dynasties and dating as far back as 16 B.C.E. and as early as 1777 C.E. Li (1994) continued to explain that these nineteen women and countless fictional female warriors are discussed in serval literary and artistic artworks have praised these women over time. Here is further proof, that even within a culture of warfare dominated by men, cultural norms could still accept and celebrate the female warrior.

China was not the only ancient society to claim having females in combatant roles. Ancient Greece and the classical period in general, as well as leading up through the middle ages showed trends of famous heroines. Willard (1988) argues that there were three famous heroines that must recognized in ancient Greece that included, “Minerva, to whom was attributed the invention of metal armor, Penthesilea, the Queen of the Amazons who went to Troy in hopes of rescuing Hector, and the flesh and blood warrior Joan of Arch, who rescued the city of Orleans and led the French dauphin to be crowned at Rheims” (para. 5). The sustained presence of female cultural icons through mythology and mythologized
history continue this human trend towards an established female ability to wage war on par or to even exceed their male counterparts.

The Middle Ages also shows “evidence for women’s involvement in military actions is…more common in the middle ages than in the classical world or in early modern Europe” (McLaughlin, 1990, p. 196). Although it may have been common to have female fighters during the Middle Ages it is key to understand that “Joan of Arc aside, the female fighters of medieval Europe have largely been overlooked- or dismissed. And yet the evidence of their activities is there for those who want to see it” (McLaughlin, 1990, p. 196). This is established even among the varied societies of Europe through female Vikings, it is was written that “among these was Lathgertha, a skilled female fighter, who bored a man’s temper in a girl’s body; with locks flowing loose over here shoulders she would do battle in the forefront of the most valiant warriors” (McLaughlin, 1990, p. 197). It was during this time period that “the noblewomen of southern France and Catalonia not only joined in their husband’s campaigns, but also possessed their own castles and made use of their own retainers for both offensive and defensive warfare” (McLaughlin, 1990, p. 198).

At this point in history the concept of warrior widows were also prevalent, similar to that of Chechnya today. It was known that “noble widows were disproportionately represented among women who pursued warlike careers. Such anomalous behavior may have been considered less inappropriate for them than other women, even in the later middle ages, for the absence of suitable male protectors they might be obliged to fight to
protect their children’s interests….on the other hand, some widows engaged in warfare on their own behalf, without references to their children’s needs” (McLaughlin, 1990, p. 198).

What has been highlighted during the extended period of the Middle Ages then, is that there was a place in the military for all types of women. This was established regardless of their individual rank or marital status. This cultural aspect of many western societies was determined to change however as societies expand and change certain characteristics over time through a series of cultural and political pressures.

Women enjoyed the freedom to partake in organized combat for an extended period of history until the middle ages. It was beginning at this point that there appeared certain gendered norms that implemented across societies, from agriculture to warfare. McLaughlin (1990) explains that “from the late eleventh century on, confrontation with behavior considered unusual for women began to elicit strong reactions, in which assumptions about gender were fully expressed” (p. 195). This shifting perspective of gender norms maybe be due to the changing economic world of the Middle Ages. In many ways, “the effort to clarify social roles threw into sharp relief all behavior that did not coincide with the norm – including that of Jews, heretics, and gay men, as well as women warriors” (McLaughlin, 1990, p. 195). With this evolution of gender in this period, there was an established “contrast between ‘normal’ feminine behavior and military activity [that] was more fully expressed, warfare came to be seen not as unusual, but as somehow unnatural for females” (McLaughlin, 1990, p. 195).
The presence of chronicled data concerning female fighters peaked in the period before the tenth century and slowly began to decline. This may be in part due to the shift in ideology regarding cultural gender norms (McLaughlin, 1990, p. 200). It has also been noted that “the past behaviors of women warriors was sometimes reinterpreted in very negative terms in later medieval writings” (McLaughlin, 1990, p. 200). To further imply that women should not be involved in warfare, “from the late eleventh century on, a variety of sanctions were directed at women who participated in warfare…ranging from restrictive legislation to ridicule to charges of sexual misconduct or even witchcraft” (McLaughlin, 1990, p. 200). These new implications put on women who wished to fight resulted in a decline of female fighters.

The discussion of warfare in general typically revolves around military activity. Although it is important to discuss this key aspect of warfare, modern warfare encompasses many societal aspects and forms. Sjoberg (2014) argues that women have played active roles in within many of these aspects of warfare that include, but are not limited to, war preparation, war economics, war-fighting (either in formal militaries or terrorist groups), peace-making, and post-conflict reconstruction. These aspects of war have in turn become critically important for the development and maintaining of societies structure for well over a century.

Not only have women been active participants in combat and military roles, they have also played a passive support role in wartime. Women have been used as propaganda to encourage men to fight. A prime example of this occurred during World War II when
posters centered on women not only encouraged men to join one of the several branches of the service but also urged them to buy bonds in order to support the war financially. Women have also been regularly used as religious symbols within polytheistic religions where there would be a god and goddess of war that supported or maintained the act and ability to maintain martial standards and motivations. Interestingly, the Greek goddess Athena is always depicted as a strong female warrior who represents wisdom to the people of Ancient Greece. This occurred throughout the mythological lexicon but also during and after the specific setting of the Trojan War with the guidance and support of the mythical figure of Odysseus. It was Athena who inspired the epic classical deceptive strategy to build the Trojan horse to bring about the conclusion of the conflict.

While phasing into the modern era of warfare, the advancement of technology has bolstered the ability and cultural capital of women in warfare. With this considered, however, women are still only slowly being accepted further into the more traditional realm of how western culture examines and processes legitimate state combat as well as the functioning of terrorist strategies. This has especially been the case in the eyes of mass media and in the views of the Western world’s established cultural hierarchy. Female participation in modern terrorism began in the 1980s in Israel and Palestine and has spread to other groups such as the PKK and Chechnya. The presence of women committing terrorist attacks continues to grow worldwide within many different groups. This type of warfare is in turn evolving and learning to accept the presence of female fighters as legitimate actors. The wider culture must itself expand its perspective to recognize the utility of women in modern warfare, as well as the many benefits that this expanded and
historically established perspective will have for the broader society for strategic analysis moving forward.

Modern Continuation of the Invisibility of Women in the Military

The continued invisibility of women in the realm of warfare throughout much of modern history can be directly related to the cultural framing of war itself. Many within the military institutions and society in general have upheld the need of military discourse and its ideology to be exclusively masculine. Kimberly Hutchings explains, “A key reason for the ongoing invisibility of women and gender in the theoretical frames through which the post-Cold War international politics is grasped is the legitimizing function of masculinity discourses within these theories” (Sjoberg, 2013, p. 13). A core shift that has occurred since the end of the Cold War to support this the reestablishment of regional cultural systems that look to their own mythology and cultural definitions of society, including the nature of war. The interplay of the relatively reduced scope concerning these social structures in turn supports a renewed spirit of competition among culturally centered nationalist-based identities. Thus, in many situations the overtly male realm of war is forced to push women to the periphery, while still relying on their support and presence within that system.

The modern military has perpetuated itself as a masculine occupation that establishes manhood in a society. As the technology and style of war continues to shift, more women have been accepted into military positions. This has in turn generated considerable pushback against this female presence. Vojdik (2002) explains that “the
integration of women into the military fundamentally challenges the identity of the warrior as male” furthermore, the “decision to exclude women from combat explicitly has rested, inter alia, on the military’s claim that women, like homosexuals, would undermine male bonding and the cohesion of troops” (p. 267). The need to continue to only allow men into combat roles has been further argued by the US Army when they stated “bonding and unit cohesion are best developed in a single gender all male environment” preserved from women” (Vojdik, 2002, p. 267). Vojdik continues this theme of single gender bonding in the masculine nature of the military when he states that “as many theorists have observed, masculinity is constructed ‘in front of and for other men and against femininity.’ Rituals and practices such as gang rape or group harassment function are ‘veritable tests of manliness’” (p. 266) This concept of maintaining a strong military is through ‘single gender bonding’ and the establishment of the masculinity has continued to be used to justify the exclusion and invisibility of women to currently serving persist in the military.

Aside from establishing warfare and the military as innately masculine, extensive cultural efforts have been made to disqualify women from active military service. The female sex has been characterized as “potentially uncontrollable . . . overpersonalized and vindictive”(Blanchard, 2003, p. 1300). The argument for military discipline is used in this way in an attempt to reserve warfare as a male-dominated institution by delegitimizing and marginalizing female contributions to war currently and in the past as “an anomaly to be read out of the history of war” (Blanchard, 2003, p. 1300). This is a transparent ploy to frame the alternative “male violence [to] be moralized as a structured activity…and thus be depersonalized and idealized”(Blanchard, 2003, p. 1300). This argument has been used
repeatedly to denying women access to combat roles and leads to a lack of recognition for their contributions to military efforts around the world.

In the ever changing nature of warfare, the question of perpetuating masculine rhetoric may be shifting. Blanchard (2003) argues “for sure, beliefs in the masculinity of war and the inherent aggressiveness of men are undermined by contemporary warfare, which ‘seems to require, as much as physical aggression, a tolerance of boredom or the ability to operate a computer under stress, characteristics that are neither distinctly ‘masculine’ nor heroic’” (p. 1299). As warfare becomes more focused on advanced technology (i.e. explosives or even drones) and away from the physically dominating foot soldier, women will continue to question the argument that they are not physically fit to fight in combat. They may continue to push and support a counter argument that their intelligence and strategic aptitude enable even a female superiority to run the technology needed to wage war.

Although the military and terrorists organizations have continued the rhetoric of continuing an all-male fighting force there have been instances in the course history when women were needed to take up arms in defense of their countries. In times of war when the male population has become sparse, governments such as the Soviet Union, relied heavily on their female population to fill the void left within their fighting forces. Terrorist groups, when pressed by powerful state opponents, have also begun to understand this need to include women. Bloom (2014) states that “most Islamist groups (besides the Chechen) were slow to adopt the strategy of female suicide bombers either because they assumed
they had more than enough men for the job or because the social limitations of women traveling without a chaperon would require additional considerations and planning”. Once the need was established, however, society became more open to women fighting to support that cultural system. This was still commonly done in connection with the cultural need to limit the influence of female fighters. In this setting, women in the military were grudgingly accepted out of necessity rather than cultural enlightenment.

This cultural system that developed the need to relegate women to strictly supporting roles within the military have been forced in several scenarios to adjust their reasoning out of self-preservation. In a setting of modern and terrorist forms of warfare, culturally identifying groups such as the Kurds and Chechens have been pushed to make use of their female population to support their military capabilities. This necessity however, has not led to a growing sense of equality among the genders in many cases. It is no coincidence that the inclusion of women in military and terrorist activities have been concentrated in many scenarios to suicide missions. The logical reduction of suicide attacks are founded on the sacrifice of the individual in order to achieve a successful attack. The suicide attacker is automatically relegated in many situations to the role of a pawn since it is the leadership that provides the context for this sacrifice rather than the individual who succeeds in committing the suicide attack.

One of the few secure ways to express motivations and perspectives for broader political and social change for suicide bombers is through the release of suicide tapes recorded prior to the attack. Proof of this selfish manipulation of female suicide attackers
by their leadership is seen in that “in contrast to male suicide bombers, few female bombers leave ‘last will and testament’ videos that” could be used to establish their legacy on their own terms (Bloom, 2014). For this reason, women are widely used to attack ‘soft targets’ that are accessible to civilians and provide the establishment with a maximum amount of political capital (Bloom). This can be specifically seen in Kurdish PKK tactics against Turkey. It is clear that these organizations have tended traditionally to use men in terrorist activities; however, the ability of women to be used as pawns, many of which being taken advantage of through their zeal and dedication to the cause, allow for a maximum level of utility to be derived from their death. This is provided with little danger of their involvement becoming a source of social commentary that would threaten the male-dominated realm of warfare. Women are available to be used in this way while broadly being rendered invisible both to the groups’ constituents as well as the media that they rely on to publicize their terrorist actions.

The media is one lens through which the minimization and invisibility of women is supported throughout society and broadcast throughout the international community through tacit acceptance. Due to its position as a watchdog and as a central origin of societal introspection, the media is justly held to a lofty standard. The lack of specific analysis of female motivations and natures in warfare develop the pillar of society in the media that allows for further mischaracterization and exploitation of female fighters in traditional military settings as well as in terrorist campaigns. This is done through inactivity on the part of the media. The media and the journalists of which it is comprised are not the origin of this campaign for the invisibility of women in warfare and its connected issues. They
do, however, project themselves as uninterested and uninvolved in the examination of this issue that has the ability to correct this injustice. As a result, the media is just one, however prominent and influential, institution within the global culture that is complicit in the invisibility of women in modern militaries through its inability to function within its accepted social role.

**Terrorism in the World Today**

Terrorism in the world is not a new phenomenon; however, there has been a growing concern regarding the implementation and tactics of female fighters becoming involved in groups that are categorized as terrorist organizations by international intelligence agencies and international governments. This growing trend within international terrorist activities began in the 1980s and has ebbed and flowed over the last three decades. The international community has witnessed an increased amount of reporting of terrorist attacks since the implementation of the global ‘War on Terror’ strategy launched under United States President George W. Bush in 2002 (The White House Archives, January 29, 2002). The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in the United States defines “international terrorism” as activities that “involve violent acts or acts dangerous to human life that violate federal or state law; Appear to be intended (i) to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; (ii) to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or (iii) to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping” (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2015). This definition of terrorism aids in the categorization of attacks made against governments or individuals that
may have varying perspectives other than that of the victimized standing government. Terrorism has established a legacy as well as certain expectations through the acts committed by al-Qaeda. Especially highlighted have been the infamous attacks on September 11, 2001 against the United States, and other groups such as al-Shabab and the threat posed to the international community by the Islamic State (ISIS).

Regardless of the legacy that terrorism may possess in the political sphere, it is important to understand the general reaction following terrorist attacks. The international community continues to remain shocked by the subsequent wave of destruction or by the audacity of the choice of the intended targets. The increased coverage of terrorist groups and attacks by the international media and many national governments has not changed the fact that there remain many questions about the organizational works of many of these categorized ‘terrorist’ groups. These questions continue to go unanswered and baffle the international community. This is especially the case in the instance of female participation in such terrorist groups and their function within the organizational infrastructure of those groups. With the rise of mass media and the rising publicity of terrorist activities, the issue surrounding female involvement nevertheless leaves the media and international governments unsure of how to approach this subject of gender within the framework of the War on Terror.

One of the most common uses of female combatants within terrorist organizations is suicide terrorism. This simple fact seems to strike fear into the international community for various reasons. This fear stems from gender stereotyping as well as the uncertainty
and unpredictable of many of these suicide missions. Not only is it a shock to learn that women are carrying out this form of terrorism but Eliatamby and Romanova (2011) explain that “suicide terrorism presents one of the deadliest and ‘unconventional’ forms of warfare, with its destructive potential, profound fear, insecurity, and apprehension of imminent threat that continuously looms over the public” (p. 53). Speckhard et al. (2010) also explain that “contemporary suicidal terrorism is conducted with the desire of appearing in the lens of the worldwide media with the promise of an immediate social impact” (p. 316). It has been hypothesized that the use of female fighters to carry out these suicide missions ensures that there will be an element of surprise and astonishment. This is a key component in successful acts of terrorism here, as is the case in general. This use of females in terrorist organizations, and the purpose of using females for suicide missions, ultimately alarms the international community mainly in respect to the issue that these women are going against established female stereotypes. These are the stereotypes that many cultures around the globe have come to know and propagate to the point of general consensus regarding the nature of women. Terrorist organizations have discovered a fundamentally way to turn these stereotypical views of females, as caring and nurturing individuals, to present enemies with surprising and devastating attacks that prove difficult to predict. In the end, the use of females has presented a unique challenge to the international counterintelligence community, forcing them to determine how to set aside centuries of gender based stereotypes and assumptions in order to recognize the threat that women present in this new era of terrorism.

Stereotypes about Female Terrorists in Mass Media

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When terrorism is discussed within the international community, most assume that most terrorists are male due to gender stereotypes that are held around the world regarding aggression and violent warfare. Stereotypes can generally be understood as “the set of relations between knowledge, labels and perceived equivalents” (McGarty, 2002, p. 18). Stereotypes can be constructed differently based on many factors which include cultural norms, historical contexts and social pressures that are projected on any given group in a national perspective. Stereotypes can also be reinforced through continued use in mass media that preserves and breathes new life into these stereotypes for future generations. Many terrorist groups recruit and use women in their terrorist activities in order to capitalize on these gender stereotypes and function within this cyclical system of stereotypes to game that system and in due course are able to present a systemic threat to their enemies.

The assumption that terrorist groups consist exclusively of men stems from many variables. These range from gender stereotypes to roles assigned to men and women according to cultural standards. When it comes to females being recognized for committing terrorist acts, many people around the globe, including the media, are unsure how to react appropriately. Sjoberg and Gentry (2007) explains the reasoning behind the global community and media’s shock and confusion over females committing terrorist acts, when they explain that “this image of women runs counter to inherited perceptions of women as maternal, emotional, and peace–loving” (p. 1) and “women are not supposed to be violent” (p. 2). Zedalis (2008) explains this concept further when he states that “analyzing female suicide bombers is fraught with problems… having a small sample size and being unable
to obtain direct information from successful bombers, problems with stereotypes, projections of intention, political use of the information, and media hype cloud the issue” (pp. 49-50). What must be understood concerning these discussions of women in the media is that there is a drastic disconnect between how these women see themselves and what the media sees of them. This is especially the case when considering western culture and civilization. The media, generally reflects the audience to which it caters, ultimately being treated here as that societal institution reporting on and analyzing those terrorist attacks within an international scope.

Due to the already established gender stereotypes concerning women, Sjoberg and Gentry (2007) explain that when women do commit terrorist acts, the media reacts with disbelief and usually make comments assuming the general opinion of: a woman did what? Many argue that “the mere idea of women participating in such acts seems even more repugnant to some, and others deny even the existence of female suicide bombers” (Eliatamby & Romanova, 2011, p. 52). Although female fighters have become more involved in terrorist groups in excess of a dozen countries, in the past several decades the media has seemed to misunderstand the importance of their presence, not only for the group but for the female stereotype that the world and media cannot seem to release from their mental grasp (Eliatamby & Romanova, 2011). By committing these acts of terrorism, female fighters are seen as destroying and degrading the cultural foundations of gender roles that were considered established practice and have stood as being descriptive of a certain duality in human nature. Many parties to the analysis of such actions cannot accept
this possibility of female actors in suicide terrorist attacks and must therefore reject this concept.

An important factor to understand when discussing females playing active roles in combat is that this is not at all an entirely new phenomenon without historical reference. Women have participated in warfare for an extended period of time. It is only the case that the media has just recently begun to acknowledge female involvement in combat at all. Sjoberg (2014) argues that “women’s presence as fighters has been consistent throughout history, and is increasing, yet remain invisible” (p. 40). Eliatamby and Romanova (2011) further justify the presence of women who play a role in combat in the form of suicide warfare when they explain that “the first official record of a female suicide bomber is that of Sana’s Mehaaidli who drove a vehicle laden with explosives into an Israeli Defense Force installation in Lebanon in 1985” (p. 52). The fact that the first female to commit a suicide mission occurred in 1985, and that dozens of other women from varying cultural backgrounds have also committed suicide missions in the time since then have not been recognized draws back to this concept of invisibility that Sjoberg (2014) addresses. This concept is one that many female fighters actively attempt to correct. The concept of invisibility also plays into the functioning of the media. It may refuse to report about the female suicide attackers out of disbelief or might report such actions yet provide incorrect or incomplete information about the event in order to continue to project the gender stereotype that follows the conception and discussion of the nature of women.
Many traditionalists argue that war and violence is not inherently among the characteristics of women. When women do commit these acts then, the world is not sure how to react since it had claimed that such an act is out of character for women and must not have been possible. An important point to understand is that women have been participants in war for centuries without demanding recognition and have remained invisible by choice. Sjoberg (2014) explains that “women have not only been combatants on behalf of state militaries in state-sanctioned wars, they have also been terrorists, insurgents, and rebels, fighting against governments, for national self-determination, or for some other cause…women have been a part of non-state armed forces for as long as histories of such groups can be traced” (p. 40). In both Chechen and Kurdish history there is a presence of women fighting in a variety of roles from combatants to defenders of their homelands which has assisted in the recruitment of these women to the fight against their oppressors.

Although women have been members of military forces, be it state authorized or terrorist, they lacked proper recognition that is common among their male counterparts. This issue directly relates to the concept of female invisibility during warfare, a justification that Sjoberg (2014) argues is the concept of overarching gender stereotypes that women are expected to live up to. It is unrealistic to relegate an entire gender to the periphery of such a central human issue of warfare in this way. Recent developments in terrorism and female suicide attacks have therefore forced this issue of females as fighters and actors in warfare to an extent that can no longer be ignored or dismissed by the international community or mainstream cultural stereotypes. The belief in women playing
a redeeming factor in human nature must be examined not only for the obvious reasons that such a claim is generally unsupported by the historical record, but also for the fact that such a dubious approach should have been relegated to the absurdities of utopian philosophical musings of past eras long ago.

Currently there is an accepted argument revolving around the history of female participation in warfare and the invisibility of women who do participate during times of conflict through involvement in warfare. There is a dispute however, concerning the labeling of these women. Sjoberg and Gentry (2007) call attention to this gender stereotypical distinction that is made between male and female fighters when they explain that “women who commit acts of violence in defiance of national or international law are not seen as criminals, warriors, or terrorists, but as women criminals, women warriors, or women terrorists” (p. 9). Not only can it be argued that creating a gendered distinction between female and male acts of violence continues this gender stereotype that is focused on women, but it upholds it. This is prevalent in the Chechen case where female fighters are given stereotypical labels, such as Black Widows, which helps distinguish them from their male counterparts. This need to perpetuate these gender stereotypes in regards to violent acts may in the end hinder women from participating in warfare or even discredit their actions. It is ultimately predictable but also dangerous to dismiss these terrorist actions on the basis of gender. To dismiss these violent acts of terrorism performed by women is to ignore their motivations as well as the possibility to predict or react effectively to this developing and growing threat around the world. To allow for such a blatant
misunderstanding of the nature of this evolving and emerging threat is to turn a blind eye to the prevention and adaptation necessary to counter such a threat.

*Chechen Black Widows: how they obtained that label*

It is of central importance to truly understand the ways in which women participate in terrorist organizations. However, it is also important to understand that not all terrorist organizations are the same and do not always use their female members in the same manner. Chechnya is one of the most infamous examples of female participation due in part to the fact that Chechen women have their own subgroup in the Chechen nationalist movement that only targets the Russian government. This female subset of the Chechen nationalist movement are labeled as terrorists by the Russian government and have been given the name Black Widows by the international community. Eliatamby and Romanova (2011) explain one of the projected meanings behind the name ‘Black Widows’ when they state that Chechen female combatants usually wear “their black dresses and the dark attire that covers their bodies from head to toe becoming a trademark, symbolizing their personal loss/es resulting from the Chechen wars” (p. 54). It is important to note here that “the practice of veiling and wearing the long, head-to-toe, black, Arab-style robe is not traditional in Chechnya” (Murphy, 2010, p. 10) which implies that this way of dressing may have evolved from former fighter influence, such as from al-Qaeda. Sjoberg and Gentry (2007) argue that “the ‘black widow’ epithet automatically sends the signal that the Chechen women are poisonous and violent towards a certain population – here, the Russians” (p. 100). This idea of being poisonous in nature relates to another known
explanation about these women that they resemble the black widow spider that is known for killing its mate once they are finished with them. The issue with these competing images of Chechen female fighters is according to whichever reasoning is behind the moniker being used. This is in turn how they are portrayed in the media because of the stereotypes attached to both definitions.

Another important point concerning the Black Widows is that the name that is attached to these Chechen fighters has been assigned to them exclusively by the media. The Chechen female fighters themselves do not call themselves any certain title and their male counterparts do not have a name for them that is separate or distinguished as any separate entity. It can be argued that the media may have assigned this group of female fighters a name in order to understand and justify their actions when they associate the name with grief and trauma. This reasoning is yet another avenue that may be used by mainstream culture to attempt to explain and rationalize such an alien and uncomfortable reality to their traditional cultural sensibilities regarding female involvement in terrorist activities.

The Black Widows have become one of the most well-known female fighting groups in the world, committing terrorist acts mainly in Russia with some occurring in their homeland of Chechnya. Alongside the Black Widows, Chechen women have played an active role in fighting against Russia from the beginning of this 200 year conflict. In Chechnya “the third Sunday of September [is] an official annual holiday – Chechen Women’s Day – in honor of Dadi-Yurt’s forty-six women and today’s Chechen women”
(Murphy, 2010, p. 103). The legend of the Dadi-Yurt’s girls details the efforts women in the village of Dadi-Yurt who during the tsarist Russian expansion “girls cut off their cherished long braids, slicing them into bullet-sized bits to stuff into empty gun barrels when ammunition ran out…these women fought furiously when [Russian] soldiers entered their home” and “[Russian] force was crossing the bridge over the Terek River 15 September [1819] forty-six of them [women] pounced on Russian soldiers and threw themselves and their conquerors into the abyss below” (Murphy, 2010, p. 103). Women also had a strong resistance presence in 1839 during the siege of Akhulgo, where women were known for hiding in caves waiting for Russian soldiers to walk by in order to attack them (Murphy, 2010).

Finally, the most famous female fighter in Chechen lore was Nadehda Durova, “also known as ‘Taimaskha Moldova from Gekhi’ [who] became a legend of the Caucasus wars in her own time” (Murphy, 2010). She fought in the wars from the Black Sea to Derbent for a timespan of ten years. She even fought alongside famous Chechen leader Imam Shamil (Murphy, 2010). She was finally captured but Tsar Nikolas requested that he meet the famous female fighter and she was brought to Petersburg (Murphy, 2010). “It is unknown how long she remained there, but Moldova so captivated the tsar and tsarina that they presented here with gifts of a gold necklace with pearls, a hundred rubles, and her freedom” (Murphy, 2010, p. 104). Upon her return to the Caucasus region she was said to have never fought again.
Not only are Chechens known for spirited resistance fighting and suicide missions, they are also renowned for their sniper skills. It is important to note that “female fighters served in most of the Chechen united led by major field commanders like Shamil Basyev, Salman Raduyev, and Ruslan Gelayev” (Murphy, 2010, p. 102). They were also members an elite all-female sniper unit called the White Stockings. Murphy (2010) explains that the “‘White Stockings’ snipers, whose trademark was said to be a bullet to the crotch and whose principle virtue was patience, willingness to wait for hours, and sometimes days, for a Russian officer to come along” (p. 104). The name was not derived from “wearing sexy belye kolgotki (white pantyhose) but from the white sport pants worn by highly killed Soviet biathlon sharpshooters from the Baltics” (Murphy, 2010, p. 104). The White Stockings were very skilled snipers and feared among the Russian troops, but if captured such a status of skill generally preordained certain death. The White Stockings were just one of many ways that Chechen women contributed to the resistance efforts against the Russian government.

Since the fall of the Soviet Union Chechen women have mainly been used in suicide missions as opposed to being active in combat roles. Speckhard and Akhmedova (2008) explain how the Black Widows have played a different role in the Chechen fight for independence than other groups as they state that “unlike many other Muslim areas of the world where the tactic of suicide terrorism has been used – Palestine, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Iraq – Chechen women have carried out acts of suicide terrorism from the beginning of this struggle for independence” (p. 100). Speckhard and Akhmedova (2008) further explain that “the types of suicide terrorism that Chechen women have been involved
in have varied – wearing explosive bomb belts, carrying bomb-filled bags, driving cars or trucks filled with explosives, exploding themselves on airplanes, in subways, and on trains” (p. 100). It is important here to highlight the different functions of these women in suicide missions. The varied roles that women have played in the current conflict, from the outset of hostilities clarifies their role as fighters that are central to the cause for independence from Russia in a general sense.

Women have been present in the fight for independence through varying types of suicide tactics that they have been implemented. It is important to point out that these female combatants have played an indispensable role in the conflict. “Chechen female terrorists have participated in a majority of suicide attacks in Chechnya – taking part in 79 percent of the attributed to terror groups…a total of 42 percent of all Chechen suicide bombers have been women…forty-six woman bombers out of a total of 110 Chechen suicide bombers” (Speckhard & Akhmedova, 2008, p. 100). These numbers are significant to understanding these Chechen women’s participation in the independence movement and the value that Chechens have placed on their females to join the fight for independence.

Although women play an active role it is important to understand that they do not always receive the recognition that many argue they deserve. Sjboerg and Gentry (2007) explain that "the Chechen women’s proscribed violence is rarely seen as heroic; instead it is perceived as frighteningly monstrous” (p. 100). Although terrorism, with a specific focus on suicide bombings, are rarely seen as heroic, this variation from men is even more pronounced in this scenario of female terrorists due to the gender roles and the expectations
that are their natural products. With the amount of Chechen women willing to commit
terrorist acts to secure independence from Russia, it ultimately begs the question of what
motivates these women while they continue to be given labels by the media.

*What motivates these Chechen women?*

The level of activity of women in the Chechen fight for independence is a revelation
to most. Following the completion of their suicide missions, many wonder what motivates
these women to such actions. There are several motivations that have been presented by
the media in order to understand these women in respects to gender stereotypes. The
justification for these acts can range from manipulation to a traumatized past, to being a
result of their socioeconomic status. With each justifying explanation of proposed
motivations for women to join these groups, the image of these female fighters begins to
become more complicated and clouded through so many cultural lenses. With a plethora
of so many competing narratives, it becomes harder to understand who these women really
are and what compels them to justify such actions.

One of the most popular explanations for women joining terrorist groups is the
concept that they are not joining these groups due to their own free will, but are
manipulated in some way into joining. Elimatamby and Romanova (2011) explain that “the
current popular descriptions of female terrorists reinforce gender stereotypes of women
being weak, vulnerable, emotionally unstable, or drugged, and as such easy to manipulate”
(p. 62). Stacks (2009) explains that many believe that Chechen a female fighter is
sometimes called a “zombie’, a women drugged, raped, or tricked into terrorism by
Chechen men” (p. 83). Stacks (2009) even speaks about an interview with a former militant who explained that the “women don’t want to be involved in these attacks. They are drugged, raped, forced to do it. I understand they are not to blame” (p. 87). Murphy (2010) explains that “rape victims have been persuaded by the religious gurus of those fighting the Russia that Allah will absolve them of their ‘sin’ if they become suicide bombers” (p. 17) which may explain the rape as a causality for motivate. This view of female terrorists has been widespread due to its ability to fulfill cultural norms that are seen as acceptable. It seems a simple and easily discovered conclusion that also follows out of assumptions about Islamic culture as well as those individual nations that are seen to be less developed on a societal and cultural. Not only are women seen as not being capable of such actions as suicide terrorism in order to fulfill their partial role in human nature, but they may also be pointed to as fulfilling the ‘just actions’ of their adversaries.

There is the further proposed issue of kidnapping and forced suicide missions. Murphy (2010) states that “girls are also kidnapped against their will for suicide missions. The first publicized case of this appeared in early 2002. Zarema’s policeman boyfriend kidnapped her – she thought for marriage –to blow up a Grozny police station” (p. 77). Luckily her bomb failed to detonate and she was allowed to tell her story and witnessed the arrest of her boyfriend (Murphy, 2010). Another case of kidnapping and rape occurred “on 23 June 2003 twenty-two year old Luiza Osmayeva, after being wounded by OMON policemen in a shootout wither tow ‘curators’ (handlers), confessed on her deathbed that she had been kidnapped five months earlier, raped, and trained to become a suicide bomber to absolve herself of her shame” (p. 77). Although these cases are few in number it is
important to understand that this does occur and must be acknowledged as a source of motivation. To assume that such cases form the norm by which other such cases should be anticipated to be similar is a logical leap that must be revealed as a fallacy.

The concept of trauma has repeatedly been argued when discussing manipulation. It has been said that “regardless of the recruitment techniques, women are selected based on the assumption that they have experienced personal ‘life drama’ and, consequently, can be easily manipulated” (Eliatamby & Romanova, 2011, p. 56). It has been argued then that “if they are not drugged or blackmailed, Chechen women are often characterized as slaves who engage in suicide bombings to obtain money for their family” (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007, p. 106). This concept of manipulation by male fighters is one of the many competing narratives concerning female motives. Interestingly enough “the All-Russian Center for the Study of Public Opinion found that 84 percent of Russians surveyed believed female suicide bombers were controlled by someone else (zombies); only 3 percent believe the women acted independently” (Stacks, 2011, p. 87). In this perspective, much like many of those to which it is similar, women are the weak victims as opposed to individuals who have made a conscious choice to carry out acts of terrorism.

Along these lines of manipulation is this idea that women are being used purely for propaganda purposes. Stacks (2011) points to the fact the Chechens did not give the name Black Widows to their women but began to play off that name given to them by the international community in order to gain more attention for their cause and also instill sympathy for them. It has been proven that the Chechens “occasionally play up the black
widow image, emphasizing the victimization of women...if women are involved, there is an unspoken message that the conflict must be serious and cause may be just” (Stacks, 2011, p. 87). O’Connor (2007) argues that “terrorism is known as the propaganda of the attack. If the attacker is a women, the subject of the propaganda becomes the women rather than the attack” (Alkan, 2011, p. 96). Another argument is that Chechen men are using these women to guilt other Chechen men to join the cause as “there is some evidence that Chechen groups view the use of women in attacks as something of a failure and rely on it to attract men to the fight through shame” (Stacks, 2011, p. 89). This strategy of using women fighters as leverage to increase the number of men in the end down plays the importance of these women fighting in their independence movement and undercuts the purpose of examining this phenomenon.

Many disagree with the narrative centered on this concept of women being drugged or forced to commit these terrorist attacks and try to look for other explanations for these women's actions. Sjoberg and Gentry (2007) argues against this idea when stating that “the narrative link between drugs, brainwashing, blackmail and zombriovaniye is incredibly disturbing, and makes the women who are involved in suicide bombings appear to be involuntarily enslaved” (p. 105). It has been argued that “the zombie story ignores the possibility that Chechen women are freely volunteering for terrorist operations” (Stacks, 2009, p. 89). Skaine (2006) argues that “since 1999, Chechen women attackers hope to help Chechnya establish an independent Muslim state in the Russian-occupied region” (p. 41). Although many have discredited this narrative of being forced to commit these attacks, there are many other competing narratives that seek to explain the phenomenon of female
terrorism and suicide bombings through means that do not depend on recreating or reworking gender stereotypes. In some cases they refute this statement of female weakness and instead submit a perspective that is based on traumatization that is felt on an individual and nationally identified level, the motivations then being centered on universal human attributes such as a need to seek revenge.

One significant explanation for women joining this terrorist organization is the concept of a traumatized past. Many have argued that the Chechen female fighters get their name of Black Widows because they are grieving the loss of loved ones killed during the long drawn out conflict with Russia. Speckhard and Akhmedova (2008) explains that “the Chechen sample is that deep personal trauma and the desire for revenge within the context of a national battle were the strongest motivating forces behind suicide terrorism” (p. 110). Speckhard and Akhmedova (2008) therefore argue that one of the top motivating factors for females joining the Chechen independent movement involves “a serious personal trauma that in nearly every case involved the death, torture, and/or disappearance of a close family member, and often witnessing violence to family members at the hands of Russian forces” (p. 110). This concept of trauma ultimately harkens back to the long history of violent conflict between Russians and Chechens and the continuous revisiting of “chosen traumas” (Volkan, 1997). Having endured such an extended period of relentless violent conflict with these women who have survived such violence on themselves, their loved ones, and their countrymen being supremely motivated by a need to strike back at their torturers in any way that they see as possible or that may do the most to support their cause of independence.
This concept of trauma is an important notion of motivation for Chechen women to join in the independence movement. It is argued that “opportunity for traumatized individuals to self-recruit, psychological vulnerabilities and needs become fatally matched with opportunity” (Speckhard & Akhmedova, 2008, p. 111). By taking this opportunity to join the Chechen national struggle, female fighters are carrying out their own personal vengeance that has resulted from their individual and cultural trauma. This is a critical realization in the attempt to rationalize the general motivations of Chechen women who join militant and terrorist groups.

Although this concept of an extensive history of trauma could be viewed as a valid explanation for the reasons for females to join terrorist organization, it still does not explain every facet or every issue in play in this situation. It is important to also look at the cultural aspect of trauma and revenge that is present within Chechen society. Sjoberg and Gentry (2007) explore this category of motivations of female Chechens when they explain that “their actions are motivated by the fight for independence and, more and more, by the desire for revenge, which runs deep in the (Chechen) tradition” (p. 101). Speckhard and Akhmedova (2008) explain that “trauma and the duty of revenge to be the most important motivating variables on the level of the individual” (p. 113). This concept of vengeance has even been linked to their name, “the name ‘black widow’, and many other narratives about the shakhidki, imply that violence is borne directly of a desire for vengeance for the deaths of their husbands and sons either in combat with the Russians or in unprovoked attacks by the Russians” (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007, p. 100). Finally, it is stated that “over time, the effect of personal traumas (e.g., torture and death of family members), combined
with the fact of already being married into a group that provided an ideology and a means for revenge, made it simpler for them to volunteer as suicide bombers” (Speckhard & Akhmedova, 2008, p. 112). This argument revolving around trauma and revenge is the most discussed motivation of them all; however, it has also been argued that “while psychological trauma was a serious motivation variable, it was not in itself sufficient as a cause for suicide bombing” (Speckhard & Akhmedova, 2008, p. 117). Like many possible causes for such motivations, trauma forms a significant but limited reasoning for the present extent of terrorist activities. Likewise, this is similar to many other semi-explanatory causes regarding this complex issue of violent extremist motivation and attacks.

A further explanation of motivation revolves around the social conditions of those women who join terrorist groups. Alan Krueger and Jitka Maleckova (2003) cite such socioeconomic reasons as “extreme poverty, lack of education, and the denial of basic human needs as circumstances and preconditions leading to suicide terrorism” (Eliatamby & Romanova, 2011, p. 54). Speckhard and Akhmedova (2008) argue that “the socioeconomic status of the [female] bombers was difficult to assess as nearly all Chechens have been severely impacted by the country’s two recent wars” (p. 108). During their research of this issue of socio-economic status, Speckhard and Akhmedova (2008) state that six women they surveyed ran their own businesses. This ultimately allowed them a cover to travel to Russia, supposedly done in order to get more production for their businesses, but resulting in suicide missions without being suspected by family or friends. It is a well-
known fact that the Chechen people live in extreme poverty and although this is important to understanding the Chechen fight it is rarely connected to the Black Widows.

With all of these competing narratives, gender stereotypes and miscommunicated information revolving around the motivations of women joining terrorist organizations, many do not consider one central motivation that is key to understanding this issue; that of free will. The idea that women would willingly desire to join terrorist groups is usually never discussed fully within the mass media, however this is slowly changing. Eliatamby and Romanova (2011) argue that “no longer are women perceived as unwilling participants” (p. 57) which goes directly against the stereotypes discussed previously. Sjoberg and Gentry (2007) explain that “one author writes ‘little research has been done on [women’s] motivations’ but what has been done ‘shows a high degree of support [among] women for taking up arms’” (p. 99). It is clear that to understand the true motivations of female terrorists, the gender stereotypes must first be removed with these women being examined without cultural or other form of bias.

The examples of manipulation, either through kidnaping or exploitation of trauma, trauma, either historical or family related, and socioeconomic status are what people assume are the motivations for women to commit suicide missions. These have been widely used and applied to many of the individuals who have been labeled as ‘Black Widows’. Although many of these explanations may apply to some women it may not apply to all. The issue that faces examination of the motivations of the Chechen Black Widows are
these extremely varied and competing narratives surrounding their inspirations which clearly require further clarification and analysis.

*Presentation of Chechen Black Widows in Mass Media*

In examining these concepts of motivations, it is important to understand how the media’s projection of gender stereotypes and the use of propaganda plays into how the world sees the ‘Black Widows’. Stacks (2011) argues that “in the Chechen case assumptions about women’s motivations are central to the effectiveness of the propaganda, but they do not necessarily reflect true group or individual motives” (p. 91). It has been argued that if the motivations of trauma, manipulation and socio-economic status were always true, then there would be many more women willing to commit suicide missions than there are currently. “The salience of the black widow and zombie narratives, however, derives from gendered assumptions about women’s intent, capacities, and essential characteristics. That women are neither that simple nor that similar rarely comes into play” (Stacks, 2011, p. 92). These instances of propaganda being implemented to explain female suicide bombers is clearly supported through traditional means of stereotyping females and are therefore overwhelmingly narrow and fail to see through previously established cultural norms.

In the case of Chechnya, the recognition of women as active members of the independence movement is rare in the West. Most of the concepts concerning motivations come from the West; however, it has been argued that “Chechen women have been active from the first as suicide bombers. They do not appear coerced, drugged, or otherwise
enticed into these acts. On the contrary, they are self-recruited on the basis of seeking a means of enacting social justice, revenge, and warfare against the perceived as their enemy” (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007, p. 110). Although these women are willing to join the fight, the West paints a different and conflicting image of them that is reflected in seemingly contradicting motivations.

Although it is a growing perspective that women are capable of voluntary terrorist affiliation, it is simpler for the media to paint these women as victims than as rational actors. Sjoberg and Gentry (2007) argue that “the current political culture of storytelling about women’s violence excludes the possibility that a violent woman rationally chose her violent actions” (p. 17) and that “a woman’s involvement in political or criminal violence is not necessarily men’s fault; nor does it make her less of a human being or less of a woman” (p. 19). These competing narratives concerning the stereotypical woman and real world dynamics, contradict each other causing misrepresentations of motivations in the projected image of these women.

The world may slowly be coming to terms with the concept that women are capable of joining terrorist groups. This possibility is still opposed however, by the gender stereotype of what women should be and how they should act as defined by cultural contexts. “Though some women’s bodies are a source of life, nurture, care, and love, some also cause death and destruction. In the growing body of literature on female suicide terrorism…there is a slow, yet observable shift from treating women terrorists as victims to understanding that they are willing perpetrators” (Eliatamby & Romanova, 2011, p. 62).
While this shift may be occurring in the international community there remains a continued disconnect in the mass media perception of these women’s willingness to join. Also, Yoram Schweitzer believes that “it is possible that ‘the growth in the number of Chechen female suicide bombers signals the beginning of change in the position of fundamentalist Islamic organizations with respect to the involvement of women in suicide attacks’” (Skaine, 2006, p. 52). In the end, regardless of the overall motivations of a group of women, they must be examined on a case to case basis of what motivations as individual actors. The need to categorize and label the motivations of an entire group based upon their gender must be removed from the analytical process of this case. Only then can honest analysis be accomplished, with a focus on the individual and group motivating factors in play in a given situation. Rather than merely existing as a theoretical concept, the effect of female terrorists’ actions have already been examined and stand as an example of their increased presence within terrorists organizations. Examples within the Chechen conflict highlights their involvement as autonomous actors where they are fully capable of terrorist activities outside their identity as women. Two famous cases that highlight Chechen female terrorists are the Moscow Theater Siege of 2002 and the Beslan School Siege of 2004.

**The Moscow Theater Siege**

The events that occurred on October 23-26, 2002 at Dubrovka Theater in Russia’s capital city of Moscow, would catapult the Chechen cause and the image of the ‘Black Widows’ into the consciousness of the international community. “This marked the first time in history of female suicide terrorism that such a team was established, signaling a
shift from an individual action to a group structure. Although large-scale operations occurred in the past, only a small number of women had assumed the role of warriors” (Skaine, 2006, p. 42). This event would become one of the most famous terrorist attacks committed by the Chechens, and one of the most embarrassing rescue missions attempted by the Russians.

During a performance of the musical titled Nord Ost, shortly after intermission 40 Chechens (19 female, 21 male) took control of the theatre. There was a lot of confusion surrounding the Chechen's presence explained by one survivor of the situation said "it happened in the second act, 10 minutes after the starting of it. People in Army uniforms appeared on the stage. It was musical about World War II so that was expected....They shot into the air and shouted 'You are hostages'' (Speckhard, Tarabrina, Krasnov & Akmedova, 2010, p. 307). Once there was an understanding what was happening the Chechens took full control of the theater and ultimately took 800 hostages (Speckhard & Akmedova, 2008). “The suicidal intentions of the terrorists were laid out for the hostages from the first moment of the siege, “Barayev announced, ‘Our goal is to remove all military forces out of Chechnya. All the hostages will be kept in the theater until all military forces withdraw from Chechnya’” (Speckhard, et al., 2010, p. 319). The Chechens women "wore officer's army belts and put explosives there. They were in black. Every woman had a pistol revolver and a grenade" (Speckhard et al., 2010, p. 308). From the outset “the hostages also noted gender differences, ‘The women terrorists had bombs with battery-operated button mechanisms to blow themselves up. For us it was clear – these women will be the first to die” (Speckhard, et al., 2010, p. 319).
The hostage situation lasted almost three days. On the final day of the crisis, 57 hours after the crisis began, the Russian Special Forces took action. They decided to pump a sedative gas into the theatre, with the hopes of incapacitating everyone inside, so that their teams would be able to storm the theater safely. While the gas was flooding the theatre, the Chechen men attempted to make an escape while the Chechen women stayed with the hostages, ultimately becoming affected by the gas. While the Chechen men made a desperate attempt to shoot their way out of the theatre they too succumbed to the gas.

The Russian Special Forces waited 40 minutes after the start of the gas attack to ensure that the Chechen terrorists were incapacitated. This was reportedly done to ensure that they would not set off any bombs that could kill Russian soldiers. After this period the Russians stormed the theater killing all Chechen terrorists in the process. In the end all 41 Chechens were killed during the storming of the theatre and the bombs strapped to the Chechen women were safely disarmed. As a result of poor planning on the Russian government side, a total of 125 Russian hostages were killed due to the lack of medical attention to resuscitate them from the effects of the gas.

There has been much speculation as to why the Chechen women did not detonate their bombs. One of the speculated reasons behind the failure of the women to detonate their suicide belts may stem from the hierarchy of the mission itself and that there was no formal order given to detonate the bombs. Speckhard et al. (2010) explains that “the women were largely given passive roles and lacked authority” (p. 317). Unfortunately there will never be a definite answer to why the women did not set off their bombs at the beginning
of the gas attack. Ultimately is totally speculative, but we can venture that the orders from the men were not given in time. No doubt the chaos or possibly impaired reasoning may have played a role in this unexplained outcome.

After the attack the presence of Stockholm syndrome began to emerge. After the raid “one hostage recalls, ‘At first I was happy about the storm (i.e. when the Russian special forces overtook the theater)…But (afterwards) there is a different face of the terrorists and the face of those (Russian) soldiers. I like the face of the terrorist better” (Speckhard et al., 2010, p. 312). Another hostage was reported saying “when I came to (from the gas) I felt very sorry that they were all killed. The young one, she never took a baby in her hands, ever” (Speckhard et al., 2010, p. 312). The result of these feelings are a direct result of Stockholm syndrome which “is believed to occur when hostage takers refrain from overly abusive behaviors and have had ongoing personal contact with their hostages” (Speckhard et al., 2010, p. 312) can be argued was present in the theater. Stacks (2011) argues that “In the Russian and Western press, Chechen women involved in the theater seizure emerged as vicious, sympathetic, strong, fanatical, foolish, and weak – sometimes all in the same portrayal” (p. 83). The duality of perspectives revolving around this terrorist attack are still debated in an attempt to rationalize the actions of the women as well as that of the Russian special forces.

**Beslan School Siege 2004**

The Beslan School siege began on September 1, 2004 around 9am local time on the first day of school and lasted until September 3, 2004 when Russian forces stormed the
school (CNN, 2004). Beslan is located in North Ossetia, in the Northern Caucasus region, in Russia. Chechen rebels took approximately 1,200 children and adults hostage (CNN, 2015). Hostages included children of primary and secondary school age, some of their parents there to celebrate the first day of school, and many teachers (Britannica, 2015). “The Beslan Middle School No. 1 attack was a sophisticated strike…Thirty-two attackers with (at least) one known female succeeded in killing over 350 people” (Skaine, 2006, p. 52) although many have reported there were actually two female suicide bombers in the school. The number of children dead numbered 186 and over 700 people were wounded during the ordeal (CNN, 2015). Reportedly, the two females involved were rumored to be wearing suicide belts and there had “bombs strapped to the basketball goals in the gymnasium” (CNN, 2015) where the hostages were kept, similar to what had occurred during the Moscow Theater Siege. Throughout the siege “hostages were refused water or food; after two days passed, some resorted to drinking urine” (Britannica, 2015). In the initial hours of the attack “militants bark out orders: no cell phones, no talking without permission” (McEvers, 2006) which helped establish the hierarchical order that would continue throughout the siege.

On the first day of the siege contact with the hostage taker was not made until 7:30pm, almost 12 hours after the situation began, and demands were made when “a hostage [brought] a note outside with militants’ demands – chief among them that Russian troops leave Chechnya” (McEvers, 2006). Also on the first day there were disputes between the Chechen terrorists concerning the taking of children as hostages and “what is known for sure is that the two shakhidas (suicide bombers) died on the first day of the siege and
only two bodies were found in the school’s rubble after the federal storming on 3 September” (Murphy, 2010, p. 194). Murphy (2010) states that “the two women blew themselves up in the school corridor, along with some male hostages, because they could not stomach killing children” (p. 194). The dispute between the terrorists is critical to understanding the hostage crisis and how it differed from Moscow. Perhaps indicative of conflicting reasoning and loyalty to the Chechen separatist cause, that of a rational militant and a disagreement with their superiors, this action has been highlighted for examination of those female terrorists’ actions.

On the afternoon of the second day of the crisis, former president of neighboring Ingushetia, Russlan Aushev, entered the school to speak with the Chechen hostage takers in order to understand their demands and act as a mediator (McEvers, 2006). After some time Aushev “exits with a list of demands and a letter from Chechen rebel leader Shamil Basayev, addressed to Russian President Vladimir Putin….Aushev takes 11 mothers and 15 babies out of the school” (McEvers, 2006). At 4:40pm “approximately 26 hostages are released” (CNN, 2015) and at 9pm “local authorities say approximately 20 male hostages are executed” (CNN, 2015).

On the final day at 1pm “local authorities receive permission from hostage takers to remove bodies lying in front of the school since the siege began. A few minutes later, loud explosions are heard. Hostages begin fleeing building and are shot at. Militants also begin fleeing the building. The roof in gymnasium, where hundreds of hostages are held, collapses, killing many.” (CNN, 2015). “Others were slain by the attackers or perished in
the ensuing chaos of shelling and gunfire” (Britannica, 2015) after the Russian forces entered. After the initial explosion, Russian tanks and troops got into position to storm the school. “About 20 to 30 hostages who survived the first blasts remained in the school are herded into the school cafeteria, where militants are waging a full-scale battle with soldiers outside. Soldiers fire tanks, militants fire rocket-propelled grenades. Militants order adult hostages to put children in the windows” (McEvers, 2006). At 2:30pm “Russian commandos take over the school and free many hostages” (CNN, 2015). At 3:17pm the siege is officially over and most hostages are evacuated.

It was reported that “Russian forces ultimately killed all but one of the known militants. The survivor, Nur-Pashi Kulayev, escaped the school and was nearly lynched before authorities captured him. He was convicted in 2006 of terrorism, hostage taking, and murder and sentenced to life in person” (Britannica, 2015). This terrorist attack by both male and female Chechen terrorists provides yet another example of the complex motivations, tactics and desired outcomes involved with the separatist Chechen cause. This also acts as another instance where Russian tactics may be analyzed within the nature of the overall conflict, and serves to further amplify Russian motivations in countering such terrorist actions.

This extended history of female involvement in the Chechen cause, in both military and terrorist activities, is important to understanding the larger frame of the conflict. As the mass media has covered several large suicide missions, it is important to also notice that they have not fully addressed all the roles these women have played in the larger
conflict. It will now be discussed how the Kurdish women have also dealt with a similar lack of mass media acknowledgement in the last forty years. This mirror that of Chechen women and serves to highlight the misgivings and shortcomings of analysis presented through the cultural lens of western media outlets.

**History of Women in the PKK**

Female involvement in the PKK can be categorized into three eras in its generalized organizational history. “The first era includes the establishment of the organization in 1978 and the establishment of the first women division in 1986. The second era includes the period between the establishment of the women division and the capture of the organization leader in 1999. The third era started with the capture of Ocalan in 1999 and still continues on” (Alkan, 2011, p. 93). These three eras demonstrate the evolution of women in the PKK from being completely excluded initially, to then becoming members of the guerilla warfare tactics with the Turkish and then systematically the starting of female suicide bombings, to eventually the need to branch off into their own group. Within the organizational structure of the PKK, it should be noted that women have existed from its inception and founding to the most recent era within the recruitment and fundraising activities for separatist activities and goals.

In the first era of the PKK beginning with the founding of the organization, women were not especially welcome within the organizational structure or in its general membership. It was known that the “PKK was a male-dominated organization at the outset and the only woman who had participated in the first convention of the PKK in 1978 was
Kesire Yildirim- Abdullah Ocalan’s wife” (Alkan, 2011, p. 93). The reasoning behind the lack of female representation in the founding of the PKK, besides the wife of its leader, revolves around Marxist-Leninist ideology that PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan valued in initially structuring the organization. In this sense “Ocalan considered family, religion, law, education and feudal system as elements of the upper class system. Within this frame, he considered women to be ‘degeneraters of men’ through the family institution” (Alkan, 2011, p. 94). By continuing this Marxist-Leninist mindset Ocalan was concerned that “women would enervate the fighting skills of men and damage the intra-organizational atmosphere” (Alkan, 2011, p. 94). Another factor in the failure to allow women to participate in the first years of the PKK revolves around the personal issues that Ocalan has with his wife and “considered woman to ‘degrade men’ and did not want women to join the organization” (Alkan, 2011, p. 94). Ocalan was said to have stayed with Kesire for ten years and “gave her away in the 3rd convention of the organization. As a matter of fact, PKK decided to separate women’s activities under the name of Kurdistan Patriotic Women’s Union in its 3rd convention held in Lebanon in 26-30 October, 1986” (Alkan, 2011, p. 95). It was at this point that women began a more direct involvement in the PKK and its activities.

The second era of the PKK was ushered in with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the loss of internal influence of the Marxist-Leninist ideology in the world and within the PKK organization. This shift in global ideology was acknowledged by the PKK and “although Ocalan considered family, religion, and tribe infiltrator institutions and women to be degrader of men until the 1990s, he starts mentioning the importance of gaining the
support of women, family, and tribes; and manipulation of religion as a tool in the struggle after then” (Alkan, 2011, p. 95). Ocalan began to see how the Palestinians were using women and religion effectively in their struggles against Israel and began to see the value of what women could do to a movement against an oppressor. This was the true turning point for the inclusion of women in the PKK.

Ocalan also began to notice how Turkish women were being given more freedoms and saw the opportunities to empower Kurdish women as well to gain their support in the PKK struggle for sovereignty. “Ocalan used the ‘emancipation’ rhetoric to attract women in the organization. He states that ‘our party’ s approach on women is based of freedom and it has already revealed how important this is” (Alkan, 2011, p. 96). At this time the PKK was also beginning to see how important women were to nation building and they soon adopted the motto “emancipated women is emancipated Kurdistan” (Alkan, 2011, p. 96). This shift in ideology surrounding the role and place of women was a pivotal turning point and a change that was well received. Such women as Sakine Cansiz are seen to be more active members within PKK organizational structure at this point in the organizational evolution of the group. This is a hallmark not only of the PKK’s ability to adapt to changing social norms, but serves as an example in its ultimate goal of supporting autonomy naturally depending on the support of women internally and in its broader activities.

The period between 1992 and 1994 saw the largest recruitment of women in PKK history. The result of this change of policy concerning participation of women resulted in the fact that “women formed one third of the entire armed PKK combatants by 1993”
(Alkan, 2011, p. 93). As female participation continued to grow, the PKK saw the opportunity to capitalize on this and began to use women as propaganda by “using the stories of women militants such as Berivan and Beritan who were killed while fighting against the army as a propaganda tool” (Alkan, 2011, p. 96) in order to recruit more their cause. It can be argued that the use of the propaganda helped recruit many women, along with many men, to the PKK struggle and “after the 1990s armed combats became more violent and first female martyrdoms started in those years” (Alkan, 2011, p. 97). This is seen as helping to give women a purpose for joining the movement of Kurdish separatism.

The third era of the PKK was ushered in with the capture of its beloved leader Ocalan in Kenya in 1999 by Turkish forces. At the time of Ocalan’s capture Kurdish women saw Ocalan as a “‘god’ because of his aggrandizing women” (Alkan, 2011, p. 98). In light of Ocalan’s arrest “female participation in the organization and the number of women who wanted to set themselves on fire and commit suicide attacks have boosted” (Alkan, 2011, p. 98). There was a massive ripple effect on the women involved in the PKK, explained by an interviewee named Zelal who states that the “capture of Ocalan created a huge shocking effect on women. We felt just like children who feel lonely and orphan when their father passes away” (Alkan, 2011, p. 98). The strong sense of loss after Ocalan’s arrest on women was in direct result of the fact that most women received direct orders from Ocalan himself and he “placed women he trained in high level positions in the organization after 1997” (Alkan, 2011, p. 98). With the capture of Ocalan many women were worried of backlash from men in the organization due in part of Ocalan’s favoritism. In direct result of the fear of backlash during this time there was an attempt to create a totally separate
organization for Kurdish women, known as the PJKK. Due to the criticism among the male party members it caused however, the party ultimately remaining as one group. It is important to understand that “although women participation in the organization peaked in 1999 when Ocalan was arrested, the amount dwindles since then” (Alkan, 2011, p. 99). The fact that many women lost faith in the PKK after Ocalan’s arrest was a pivotal moment for female involvement with reverberations within the organization being observable to this day.

*Kurdish Women in the PKK armed struggle*

Before Kurdish women became fully active in suicide missions they were heavily involved in the guerilla war being fought against the Turkish army. In the 1990s the “first ‘female teams’ were established; and after 1993 these teams were transformed into ‘female brigades’” (Alkan, 2011, p. 106). In this time period women were considered comrades to their male counterparts in the PKK and not viewed any differently because of their sex. Starting in 1993 until 2004 these women units were part of the People’s Defense Force (HPG) and were fully active in the fighting. “In the 5th congress of the PJA [Party of Free Life of Kurdistan] women’s army was given an autonomous status within the organization and called PJA Star” (Alkan, 2011, p. 106) which was an important move for the PKK in recognizing the value women held in combat. Although the PJA was autonomous, they were still connected to the HPG which then required that all decisions be approved by them. “In theory women are able to make their decisions regarding armed conflict. Yet they have to get those decisions confirmed by men before putting into practice. This
situation demonstrates that men’s thoughts about women regarding their inability to fight and adapt in mountain conditions were never changed” (Alkan, 2011, p. 106). This lack of understanding of the importance of women within the Kurdish movement was what lead to a shift in how women were empowered to fight the enemy.

*Shift from guerilla warfare to suicide missions*

The failure of Tukey to recognize the importance of female involvement in the struggle directly led to the first Kurdish female suicide attacker. This occurred on June 30, 1996, with Zeynep Kinaci, who pretended to be pregnant while wearing a suicide belt. Zeynep Kinaci’s actions became a “source of motivation and confidence to the women’s movement in the party, (a) symbol of the line and ideology of the women’s struggle” (Alkan, 2011, p. 107). As a result of this first suicide attack it became known that “the Partya Karkeren Kurdistan (PKK) has a substantial number of women in its suicide brigade” (Skaine, 2006, p. 51). "It also is noteworthy that the PKK began deploying suicide bombers (often women) during the late 1990s" (Rodoplu, Arnold, & Ersoy, 2004, p. 158) which ultimately gave women a clear and firm role in the struggle against Turkey. "Ocalan had urged his troops to imitate Hamas by becoming human bombs" (Skaine, 2006, p. 81). In this way the PKK is seen as both imitating the supposedly successful tactics of fellow terrorist and separatist movements, as well as carving out a clear role and involvement of women within the national struggle.

The Kurdish feminist movement began to see this first suicide attack as something to celebrate and ultimately began to inspire more women to sacrifice themselves for this
cause. Kurdish women’s magazine Yaşamada Özgür Kadin (YÖK), which “focused primarily on mobilizing women for the national struggle and addressed issues resulting from this, such as suicide bombings, self-immolations, and the role of patriotic mothers and peace mothers” (Açık, 2014, p. 116), was one of the leading magazines along with Union for the Liberation of Kuridsh Women (YAJK). These were two sources and supporting social institutions that helped spread a belief in the act of suicide missions. “In YÖK and YAJK, the suicide bombings of young female guerrillas are represented as resembling the struggle of goddesses apparently engaged in to defend the golden age of matriarchal Mesopotamia” (Açık, 2014, p. 121). A historically cultural foundation for female involvement is clearly used in this way to provide further historical support for the ideological and cultural struggle for the Kurds. This was also used to provide a clear representation for female fighters being able to play an active role in supporting the Kurdish state to come.

The PKK viewed women as “‘mothers’ in the early years, ‘comrades’ after the 1990s; and ‘goddess’ after the attacks of Zeynep Kinaci” (Alkan, 2011, p. 107). It was said “to be Zilan means to become a goddess to all women; to bring about an explosion in their materials lives and thereby leave their own traces behind them in the epoch, and consequently to ascend into heaven [Parti Merkez Okulu Yayınları 1998: 13, emphasis in original]” (Açık, 2014, p. 121). Here “death is mythologized: the female combatants have a holy assignment and will become martyrs if they fulfill it” (Açık, 2014, p. 121). Furthermore, “the women who sacrifice themselves are considered to be immortal, like the goddess of ancient Mesopotamia… Female ‘freedom fighters’ such as Zilan are compared
to these imagined courageous goddess of the golden age and serve as a role models for the women of today” (Aҫik, 2014, p. 121). Use of historical and cultural references such as these provided a core rationale behind female terrorist activities within the PKK; however, there was a multitude of more current and modern motivations for those female fighters to take up arms to fight for their cultural and ethnic heritage.

Even Ocalan began to consider what Zilan did as goddess-like, which in turn promoted more women to commit suicide attacks (Alkan, 2011). This blessing from Ocalan “has been an indicator of the new mission given to women in the armed conflict” (Alkan, 2011, p. 107). "Women carried out 14 of 21 suicide attacks (66 percent) conducted by the PKK in Turkey. This number includes both successful and unsuccessful missions” (Skaine, 2006, p. 81). PKK female suicide bombers have been known for wearing the bomb around their waist that appears to look as if the woman is pregnant (Skaine, 2006). The range of reasoning for such actions include the:

“PKK’s encouraging women to suicide attacks can be enumerated as follows: a) because the male dominant structure of the organization does not consider women a power, they wanted to proof their proficiency; b) women are more emotional than men and the organization take advantage of this; c) women are more loyal to Abdullah Ocalan than men; d) blessing of women as goddess in the organization; e) organization realized that the security forces tolerated women due to traditions during the body searches; f) it is easy to conceal bombs in women’s body when they pretend to be pregnant” (Alkan, 2011, p. 107).

These enumerations of motivations must be examined closely for what they contribute to the understanding of this conflict and those actors within their defined conflict. Ultimately, many of these motivations are due to an over-emphasis on traditional stereotypes and roles
of women that must be examined further before they are able to be proved or discarded as illegitimate.

**Stereotypes of Kurdish Women**

Within Turkey and in Kurdish society, women carried the stereotype of being weak and subordinate to men. Due to this cultural apparatus “as a result, they are thought to lack self-respect and more importantly, they are perceived as being easy to manipulate by Kurdish men as well as by the ‘enemy’” (Açık, 2014, p. 122). In spite of this stereotype “female PKK activists feel expected to prove that, as women, they are no longer weak and have divested themselves of their ‘slave mentality’, terminology that is commonly used in these publications. Moreover, through radical forms of actions, such as suicide bombings and self-immolations, they attempt to demonstrate their ‘strength’ and prove that they have ‘strong will’” (Açık, 2014, p. 122). This duality is somewhat problematic since “there is clearly a contradiction here: on the one hand, women symbolize justice, freedom, and the determination to sacrifice themselves for their ideals. On the other hand, they are ascribed a ‘slave mentality’, which means that they have no will of their own and are likely to bow to anyone else’s will” (Açık, 2014, p. 123). Clearly, the formulation of the motivations of Kurdish women fighting for the PKK do not provide us with a simple or straightforward analysis.

Ultimately, the stereotypes surrounding female PKK fighters are incomplete and therefore at least partially misleading. It has been established that “there is no evidence to indicate that women are ordered to carry out these actions by the party…yet the period in
which these activities become prominent has also been the period with the highest human-rights violations in Turkey, which ranged from the systematic evacuation of Kurdish villages, to torture and the extrajudicial killings of thousands of politicians, activists, journalists, and intellectuals” (Aҫik, 2014, p. 123). The possibilities of trauma affecting the female combatants within the PKK is unavoidable and must be examined further. Although quite dissimilar in many facets, the conflict between the PKK and the Chechen separatist movement may be similar in this sense of projected false stereotypes on these female actors in the attempt to support traditional gender roles and cultural assumptions. The role of women in either of these conflicts necessitate further analysis for such stereotypes and assumptions to be examined and disproved.

With this general understanding of how female fighters in Chechnya and Turkey have been perceived through history and media, the shortcomings of the current international perspective of these conflicts and female roles within them is clear. By establishing this foundation in a historical background of both conflicts and female involvement my research will further present themes that have evolved in the mass media that depict these women in a manner that is incapable of recognizing their importance and utility.
Chapter 3: Methodology

In order to examine the roles of females in the PKK and Chechen separatist movements I conducted a comparative analysis. This was done to further explore how the international media presents the roles and involvement of women among these groups within the larger framework of their organizations and conflicts in general through the lens of professional and widely disseminated journalism. This focus was to examine the international media’s role of reporting events that concern female suicide bombers and revolved around the issue that most people learn about these conflicts through media reporting. In this comparative analysis I cataloged and analyzed the media’s portrayal of the presence and involvement of women in terrorist activities in Turkey and Russia through an impartial identity lens. I thereby sought to identify the root issues at play in and surrounding their association as suicide bombers. I especially drew from international media reports of what occurred in the aftermath of the Moscow Theater Siege and Beslan School Siege in Russia as well as the first few female suicide bombers in Turkey in the 1990s.

In order to examine the presence and portrayal of female fighters in Chechnya and the Kurdish community in Turkey I turned to mass media outlets mainly located in Europe and the United States in order to present media outlets that are commonly known to an
international audience. Sources such as CNN in the United States, BBC in the United Kingdom, and Hürriyet Daily News in Turkey were used prominently to present the different styles of reports on similar events. Articles were chosen for their focus of known and widely reported on terrorist attacks committed by women. These included the Moscow Theater Siege in Russia and the suicide attack on a military parade in Turkey in 1996.

Within both cases there were eight articles chosen to examine each case, with sixteen articles being analyzed overall. For the Chechen case there were eight articles and one documentary examined and for the Turkish case there were also eight articles examined. Articles were mostly discovered through a common search on the George Mason University library website by using key words such as ‘female suicide terrorism in Turkey’ and ‘Chechnya’. Newspaper specific websites (e.g. BBC.com, CNN.com, etc) were used for searching specific dates of terrorist attacks. Searches on Google Scholar were also used to find articles that may have been archived or moved to larger databases. Articles were chosen based on their subject matter in relation to female suicide bombers in both conflicts with a focus on highlighting terrorist acts that were widely reported on and disseminated.

This study was done foremost through an analysis of common themes that appeared consistently throughout the mass media representation of both the Chechen and Kurdish female fighters. The themes that emerged were ones that remained constant in all articles regardless of the source of the article. These themes included; the desire to understand motivations and culture in the frame of committing terrorist attacks, as well as the need to
humanize these women. This was in order to better understand why these attacks occurred and to continue the invisibility, be they in favor of the fight or against it, of both groups’ female actors. Nearly all the themes that were identified were evident in practically every article. It is interesting to note that the frequency of articles discussing Chechen Black Widows is much greater than that of the Kurdish female fighters.

I chose to perform a comparative study on Chechnya and Turkey due in part to the similar origins of both of their respective conflicts, each groups’ goals of sovereignty, and the similar methods of their terrorist activities. These specifically focused on their similarities in the use of women to carry out those activities. I compared and contrasted the visibility of women in both movements, including actions that were attempted to further the movements in both countries, as well as the perception/stereotypes placed on these women by both internal and external actors in the conflict. Also considered were the observational/news related to international organizations in multiple countries. These case studies mainly focused, and Chiefly dealt with sources concentrated on the actions committed during the 1990s and early 2000s, when the conflicts were at their peaks as both groups began to gain international recognition following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the outset of the ‘Global War on Terror.’ I analyzed these sources in order to establish the impacts and forces involved in the practical invisibility of the roles of women in the PKK and Chechen separatist movements. This was done particularly to highlight its analysis in the media and in retrospect the general public’s understanding of each conflict.
Chapter 4: Results

While conducting this research on the portrayal of female involvement in the Chechen and PKK separatist movements, there were some surprising outcomes in regards to the prevalence of media reports on each case. When researching the Chechen Black Widows there was an overwhelming number of sources that perpetuated stereotypes that have been continuously associated to Chechen women following their suicide missions. This resulted in those female fighters remaining invisible due to the fact that the media continues to fail to attribute actions taken by these women as reflecting the Chechen cause for independence. Instead they are reduced and compartmentalized into a separate issue. In contrast, in the case of the PKK, women were invisible according to their sex being stereotyped to the point that they were much more visible in bringing media attention to the larger issue of the PKK struggle for independence within the country of Turkey, but not recognized for their respective impact on the whole of the movement. The common core of either of these cases highlights a continued misunderstanding regarding female involvement in their respective armed conflicts and in viewing how their actions are seen in light of each group’s struggle for independence.

Media Perpetuation of Stereotyping Chechen Women
Within the Chechen case there are five major themes that presented themselves when discussing terrorist actions taken by Chechen women, especially during suicide missions. These themes include (1) employment of stereotypes, (2) a desire to understand motivations, (3) attempting to relate these attacks to essences of Chechen culture, (4) the need to humanize the women in order to understand their actions, and (5) finally the idea of invisibility of these women in the larger Chechen fight. While these themes are not exhaustive, they are ones that endure in mass media coverage of terrorist attacks committed by Chechens.

In the Chechen case there seems to be an extremely large presence of continued stereotypes that are perpetuated through the media that continue to vilify and devalue the importance of female involvement in the conflict. This projection of continued stereotypes was most prevalent in five of the eight articles. The way in which the media continues to report on attacks committed by Chechen women, through the use of stereotypes, can be seen by reading headlines that detail such attacks as state “‘Chechen Girls’ were happy to die” (Goodspeed, 2012), “Slaughter in the School: Terror of the Black Widows; Chechen women in vanguard of attacks” (McGiven, 2004), and “Deadly secret of the Black Widows” (Vinogradova, 2003). There are many more similar headlines that appear with a simple search concerning Chechen female suicide bombers, which spreads the media-originated name of “Black Widows” and continues a narrative that does not always reflect the true nature of these women’s actions. This issue, revolving around the name Black Widow, was previously discussed concerning the fact that this name, associated with Chechen women, is one that Chechens use to refer to themselves, but which perpetuates
the image of a trauma/grief stricken woman out for revenge. Although the media harks to the underlying issue of the loss of life in Chechnya with the word “widow”, it fails to address the larger issue of the Chechen-Russian conflict and the thousands of people who have died during the over 200 years of conflict. Furthermore, the obvious emotional appeal is clearly seen by such labels as the “Black Widows”. Through this subtlety the name is maintaining an entertainment value rather than that of investigative or traditional journalism. This tactic evades the issue and instead is used to make ethical and moral assumptions.

The theme most often used in nearly all of the articles in examining the Chechen case is a continued desire to understand what would cause a women to commit a suicide attack. There continues to be little discussion or detailed analysis of the nature of the overarching conflict that spawn these attacks. This deep desire to understand possible motivating factors to explain why these women would commit such crimes has produced several, now mainstream, stereotypes that have become attached to Chechen female suicide bombers. Many of these stereotypes were seen in the article by Goodspeed (2002), featured in the National Post in Canada titled “‘Chechen girls’ were happy to die” when he explains the Chechen women present during the Moscow Theater Siege were “vengeance-seeking widows of Chechen field commanders killed by Russian troops”, “eager to die”, and “vowing their lust for death”. All of these stereotypes and their variations, have been seen in many other articles which propagate these stereotypes. This is established without offering any knowledge of the reasoning behind these women taking up arms or their willingness to die for their cause. These concepts seem to go unmentioned other than the
fact that many of these women have suffered losses in their families. Such journalistic works undercut any effort to provide truly constructive insights into the subject of female suicide attacks. Instead they rely on the safe and culturally normalized view of the evil vengeful woman seeking revenge that acts as a support for established stereotypes.

The third theme that appeared in the media presentations was an attempt to understand why Chechen women would commit these attacks through harkening back to an attempt to understand Chechen culture, still with no regard to the actual conflict at hand. In the same Goodspeed (2002) article he says that “the ‘Black Widows’ break all the rules governing women’s traditional roles in the Caucasus and marks a dangerous new escalation in the Chechen conflict”. Although Goodspeed (2002) may be writing from the misunderstanding of what the media perceives to be the culture of Chechnya, this point fails to acknowledge the combatant culture intrinsic among the female population of the Caucasus region that has been clearly evident starting at least by the 1990s within the First Chechen War. Other articles continue this stereotyping and assumptions concerning traditional culture in the Caucasus region. This is seen in such articles as by Vinogradova (2003) who writes also about the theater siege for the Times in London. He states that “many of the women who lash explosives to their young bodies are little more than slaves to a cause, sold into certain death by their own kin” (Vinogradova, 2003). Following the events of the Moscow Theater Siege, Time magazine reported that Putin was linking the attack to “foreign terrorist center, its roots more likely lie in a long-established tradition among Chechen insurgents of mounting dramatic terror strikes aimed at titling the balance of power back in their favor” (Karon, October 25, 2002). These two articles are prime
examples of the lack of understanding and cultural sensitivity regarding the Chechen case. These articles blatantly disregarded Chechen history, which regularly addresses female fighters, as explained earlier, as well as the roles that women have played in perpetuating the Chechen cause for independence.

The fourth theme represented in some forms of media was an attempt to humanize these women and gain a deeper understanding of their actions. This topic was present in all eight articles in one sense or another. This need for the mass media to truly understand the motivations for these attacks has resulted in the need to see the Chechen enemy as human. The movie *Terror in Moscow* (2003), which details the events occurring during the Moscow Theater Siege, makes it clear that within the first few minutes of the movie, a theme of focusing on the actions of the females, while disregarding the men, is prevalent. This theme was first noticed when, during the siege, a camera crew was allowed to enter the theater in order to film the demands given by the Chechens. Interestingly, during this interview with the Chechen leader, one of the Chechen women involved in the hostage taking was also interviewed and explained the demands being declared. While the movie shows clips of the interview, the commentator for *Terror in Moscow* (2003) highlights the fact that she was a 24 year old university student who was from a Westernized Chechen family. It also went on to explain that when her husband, brother and cousin were killed by the Russians forces in Chechnya, this resulted in her joining an Islamic sect.

The commentator in this sense attempts to humanize one of the female suicide bombers in order to establish a justification for this attack. During the interview, regarding
demands of the full evacuation of Chechnya by Russian forces, she says “our women, children and old folk are dying. No-one pities us, even if we all die here, this will not end. Many more will take our place” (Terror in Moscow, 2003). After this interview the commentator explains that there were other educated women carrying out this suicide mission and that the deaths of loved ones drove them to carry out this mission. It is very interesting that the commentator, and the creator of this documentary, focused on the occupation of a few of the women in this way to show that they had lives before this attack and perpetuate the stereotype of grief and trauma. While the documentary focused on the women, there seemed to be no justification in regards to the 21 men involved. This in turn seems to also continue to highlight the issue with women committing such attacks and not men. This trend of ignoring the impacts of the genders on each other allows certain journalists to codify or ignore larger themes within their own constructed context that may be formed in order to control the narrative when women are present, as in this case.

The fifth theme was the highlighting of the importance of women to the Chechen cause through their perceived invisibility. In an article by Steven Eke (7, July, 2003) published by BBC News titled “Chechnya’s female bombers”, Eke highlights the role women play in this conflict. Eke (2003) says “women as potential fighters have been largely left out of Moscow’s strategic thinking” which ultimately shows a side of the media that has acknowledged the presence and relative invisibility of women in the Chechen conflict which was present in three of the eight articles, these articles are mainly from western outlets. This article by Eke (2003) also harks to the issue of trauma, but in a manner that addresses the reality of the conflict when he states that “specialists say nearly all
Chechen women in the conflict areas are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorders. Three-quarters have lost relatives, 60% have had their homes destroyed and at least half are unemployed”. A CNN report (from 24, October 2002) on the Moscow Theater Siege touched on the history of the conflict, but only briefly mentioned the presence of women, when it stated “there were women of ‘non-Slavic’ nationalities among the armed contingent, some with explosives on their bodies”. It is also important for the media to present the international public with the key facts from both sides of the conflict to generate each ones’ public understanding.

Although McGivern (2002) explains that Chechen women “have no fear of death” he also provides the public with facts such as that “the modern conflict has claimed more than 100,000 lives, and left towns and cities in ruins. More than 350,000 people have fled Chechnya”. These articles represent the West and their style of reporting by such a crisis being focused on facts without bringing in biases that can easily be either worked into the narrative or subconsciously included in the framing of the article, such as in the sensitive case of Chechnya. This direct and truthful reporting on the crisis in Chechnya in regards to women is few and far between, it yet presents a reality that nevertheless supports the call to arms of these women to continue the fight against the Russian government.

Even though there continues to be wide media attention focused on Chechen female bombers, there is an extreme lack of follow up regarding the aftermath of the attacks from both the Russian and Chechen perspectives. This lack of follow up has left a void of knowledge in understanding the exact effects of the actions made by these female suicides
bombers, and act to minimize the effects that these attacks have on the advancement, or even negative affects they may produce, on the Chechen separatist movement. There was one media follow up on the ten-year anniversary of the Moscow Theater Siege which was covered by the Huffington Post by Laura Mills (26, October 2012) with the article titled “Moscow Theater Siege 2002: Russian Mark Chechen Hostage Taking”. The article explained that while the event itself was perpetrated by the Chechens on the ten year anniversary, the media reported more on the ill feelings that survivors and victims’ families have towards the Russian government for not responding to the situation correctly, resulting in more deaths than were necessary. As a result of these feelings, it may be generally considered that Chechens were also seen as victims of the Russian government, similar to the Russian citizens that perished during the raid. This allowed for a somewhat positive outcome for this attack for the Chechen cause. Although this is just one instance where it may be viewed as a success for the Chechen separatist movement, it is still a step in the direction of humanizing the Chechen enemy in the eyes of the Russian and international community.

Presentation of Women in the Kurdish Case

In the case of the Turkish and Kurdish conflict there is a stark contrast. Most media tends to focus on the larger conflict at hand, while only mentioning the fact that a woman has committed such suicide attacks as a side note. Although it is a fact that such attacks were committed by a woman for the most part within this conflict, the media tends to focus only on the attack itself without placing stereotypes or detail recognition on these women.
This stands in stark contrast with the Chechen case, where such details are highlighted. This is exemplified in the article titled “Kurdish problem Haunts Erbakan” which was published on the Hürriyet Daily News (HDN) website on July 5, 1996. This was merely four days after the first known female suicide attack committed by a PKK member. The article details the larger issue of the Kurdish problem in the region with only two sentences attributing the attack to a woman suicide bomber. This article states that “however, things seemed to change when a Kurdish female suicide bomber killed nine Turkish soldiers last weekend during a parade in the eastern provincial center of Tunceli” and that “Zeynep Kinali, 24, disguised as a pregnant woman, rushed into the military parade in Tunceli on Sunday and let off a bomb hidden under her clothes” (HDN, 5, July, 1995). This type of reporting, of examining the larger “Kurdish Problem” in connection to female suicide terrorism, is a repeated pattern in this case. The presence of a relatively blatant disregard for the fact that the bomber was a woman may harken to the Turkish and Kurdish cultures that view the sexes as being relatively equal, especially in such instances of belligerency.

Similarly in the frame of more western news sources, such as BBC and the New York Times, the issue of the suicide attacker is glanced over in the framing of the larger conflict between the Kurds and the Turks. Rainsford (2006) details a suicide attack committed in the city of Ordu which states “police in Turkey say a suicide bomber has blown herself up in a northern city, killing herself and injuring at least one other person…police say one female suicide bomber was killed another woman seriously injured” It is interesting to note that the article only mentions the attack in three sentences while the rest of the article, 11 more sentences, speaks about the larger conflict with the
PKK. This highlights that the bombing is viewed in the larger picture of the conflict and not just through one event. Similarly, an article published in The New York Times in 2011 detailed an attack in a Kurdish town called Bingol as the article says “A suicide bomber who was a woman detonated a bomb on herself” (Arsu, 30, October 2011). It is important to note that title of this article is called “Suicide bomber kills 2 Amid Turkish Crackdown on Kurds” (Arsu, 2011) which frames in the attack in the sense of the larger conflict from the beginning.

Although stereotyping Kurdish female suicide bombers is not a prevalent trend in the framing of the Kurdish fight, such does not mean that it does not occur. This theme is reflected in only three of the eight articles examined. This in turn highlighted this lack of acknowledgement of the issue of females committing these attacks. Another article on HDN, published on October 30, 1996 and titled “Suicide Attack mars Republic day”, mentions “Sivas city officials said special anti-terrorist squads detained a fat woman, later identified as Zeynep Kara, together with male friend on suspicion that they might be terrorists…the woman, taken into a police car…detonated the explosives apparently strapped to her body”. It is well known that many Kurdish women who carry out suicide attacks for the PKK do so disguised as being pregnant women to avoid search and hindrance of their attacks by security personnel. Another example of stereotyping was exhibited in 2008 when BBC Monitoring Europe reported on two people being detained by Turkish authorities who had connections to “a woman captured with a bag full of explosives”. The stereotyping in this case stems from the lack of knowledge surrounding how Turkish authorities knew the woman had explosives in her bag in the first place. This
is one way the PKK fighters generally use the gender stereotypes of the innocence of women to their own advantage in order to carry out attacks relatively unsuspected by the Turkish government.

While the issue of stereotyping women as being innocence and women remain unsuspected by the Turkish government may be seen in some articles, one particular article published in Turkey tells a different story. In an article in the Hürriyet Daily News titled “Police heighten security against suicide bomb threat” (8, July, 2005) it is discussed that the issue of an attempted male suicide bomber is stated at the end that “state forces have taken action to capture a potential female suicide bomber belonging to the outlawed Kurdistan Works Party (PKK) after receiving a tip that a woman from the southeastern province of Van was sent to a big city to carry out a suicide attack”. This article in due course pointed to the fact that the Turkish government is aware of female suicide bombers and actively try to prevent them. It is interesting that this article also highlights that both male and female suicide bombers are present in Turkey, ultimately making the attacks more unpredictable.

It is interesting to note that female involvement in the PKK is rarely reported on, even considering the many suicide attacks that have been carried out by women. An explanation for this may be attributed to the larger military conflict with the PKK and that suicide terrorism is just another factor of that fight that isn’t necessarily felt as needed to be highlighted. Through the fact that women have been integrated into this struggle between the Turks and Kurds for some time now, this may be a reason why the media does
not necessary highlight the actions committed by women during suicide missions. However, this may ultimately also hark back to a larger governmental issue concerning freedom of the press and the failure to report certain attacks due to humiliating factors for the Turkish government. The positioning of the Turkish government when considering the long-standing Kurdish insurgency and resistance is a sensitive topic in Turkish internal politics. This is also the case in Turkish relations with its neighboring countries, who are also forced to function with substantial Kurdish minorities.

Similar to the Chechen case, there is no evidence of follow up concerning attacks committed by Kurdish female suicide bombers. Without media involvement in this discussion and its ability for probing analysis, there will be little to no understanding of the impact these actions have on the Kurdish struggle, or on actions taken by the Turkish government in response to such attacks. Without formal follow up, these attacks are just another attack against the Turks committed by the Kurds that holds no real significant or further meaning to the overall struggle for Kurdish independence.
Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

Table 1: Theme Prevalence
This table represents the themes and percentage of occurrence in 8 articles about Chechnya and 8 articles about the PKK.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Chechen Case</th>
<th>Kurdish Case</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employment of Stereotypes</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire to Understand Motivations</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempting to relate attacks to culture</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The need to humanize the women in order to understand their actions</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The idea of invisibility in the larger frame of the conflict</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion
When conducting this research it was fascinating to realize just how imbalanced the media coverage of female involvement and the root causes of female involvement are between the Chechen and PKK cases. There are many factors that play into the reasoning for this disparity between media coverage concerning female suicide bombers and what
this phenomenon means to each group’s advancement of their causes for sovereignty. Some of the factors that may be involved in this disparity of media coverage include perspectives on religion, the longevity and intensity of the conflict, types of attacks, clashing of different cultures, threat narratives (Korostelina, 2007), chosen traumas and glories (Volkan, 1997), general media perceptions of each conflict and most importantly gender stereotypes of women (McGarity, 2002). While this list is not exhausted these factors may help draw some understanding on media perception of female suicide bombers in both cases and the lack of consistent understanding of the roles these women play in their respective conflicts.

Examining the female fighters presentation in the Chechen-Russian Conflict

Within the Chechen-Russian conflict there are many factors that play a role in the media representation of women in the Chechen fight for independence. These factors may include a religious aspect, continued threat narratives (Korostelina, 2007), the presence of chosen traumas and glories (Volkan, 1997), mobilized identities (Korostelina, 2007), ethnic terrorism (Volkan, 1997) and relative deprivation (Gurr, 1969). All of these theories help to further the discussion concerning the invisibility of the Chechen women in the continued struggle with the Russians over the issue of sovereignty. I will discuss the impacts below.

In the Chechen-Russian conflict case, one of the factors involved in the increased media presence may have to do with religious differences that have haunted this conflict from its beginning. The religious contrast of Russia existing as mostly Orthodox Christian or atheist, while the Chechens are Muslim, plays a role in understanding the Jihadist aspect
of the Chechen fight and the understanding of how Chechen women play a role in this religious fight against their perceived oppressors. This conflict began with the idea of expanding the Russian Tsarist Christian ideology into the Caucasus region. This fear of an Islamic influence has increased especially after the attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001 when the world opinion became hyper sensitive to the issue of the Islamic world committing terrorist attacks on non-Muslim countries and the relative threat they were considered to pose.

This hyper-sensitivity over the issues surrounding Islam may contribute to the labeling of the Chechen female suicide bombers as “Black Widows”. This label has been attributed to the fact that these Chechen women were wearing traditional Islamic clothing, including the veil, during suicide missions. It is important to also note that at the same time, the name Black Widow name has been implied as a stereotype (McGarty, 2002) that implied grief and trauma that drove the women to commit the attacks in the first place. This misunderstanding of the Islamic faith may be attributed to the failure of the Russian government to fully understand martyrdom in the sense of Chechen culture, which directly plays a role in the tactics and types of attacks that both Chechens men and women commit in the name of their struggle for independence.

Another possibility for the increase in the public nature of the speculation of why women committed these attacks may have to do with the strong threat narrative (Korostelina, 2007) and continuation of historical stereotype (McGarty, 2002) projection on both parties of the conflict. In regards to the threat narrative (Korostelina, 2007) coming
from the Russians, this includes the continuation of the threat of Islam in Russia and the fear of the further loss of territory for the Russian government. This also deals with the willingness to stand with the international community in order to root out terrorists agents in the Caucasus region. The continuation of the historical stereotypes (McGarty, 2002) on the side of the Russians that has described the Chechens as being bandits, untrustworthy, and ruthless killers throughout this extended conflict.

On the Chechen side of this conflict, the continued threat narrative (Korostelina, 2007) of unpredictable terrorist attacks is continued. This is especially the case with those that are committed by women, against the Russians in the name of their separatist fight, along with the unwillingness to assimilate into Russian society. This is ultimately seen to forgo their independence as well as the continued fear of Russian military superiority in the region resulting in this growing need to fight the enemy by any means possible, including using women in all facets of the conflict. Within the Chechen framework, the continuation of historical stereotypes (McGarity, 2002) of the Russians being untrustworthy also harks back to the feeling of chosen traumas (Volkan, 1997). This includes an unacknowledged genocide committed by the Russians against the Chechens and the deaths and relocations of hundreds of thousands of Chechen.

These factors of continued threat narratives (Korostelina, 2007) and historical stereotypes (McGarty, 2002) have helped continue the narrative of ‘us vs them’ which has created a mobilized identity in both Russia and Chechnya and a desire for ethnic terrorism (Volkan, 1997). The media has continued the concept of mobilized identity (Korostelina,
by continuing the narratives that Chechen female fighters are vilified and describing them as the perpetrators of all the violence. Many media sources also project the idea of ethnic terrorism (Volkan, 1997) in the sense that almost all the articles promote the concept that the Chechens commit these attacks to further their political motivations, especially during Moscow Theater Siege and Beslan School Siege. This is seen when the only demand was the full withdrawal of Russian forces from Chechnya with the threat of killing many Russian citizens in the process if their demands were not met. These ‘successful’ terrorist attacks have been attributed to many chosen glories (Volkan, 1997) that have in turn bolstered the Chechen cause and highlighted the relative deprivation (Gurr, 1969) that is felt by the Chechen people that only helps to continue this cycle of violence.

This concept of relative deprivation (Gurr, 1969) has become embedded in Chechen cultural over an extended period of time. This is seen as the Soviet Union/Russian Federation has grown and shrunk over more than a century with many ethnic groups gaining independence while the Chechnya remained a subservient and dominated society. Over time the evolution of self-determination and democratization following the collapse of the Soviet Union, this sense of victimization and powerlessness is highlighted even further. Chechnya is unable to maintain an independent state due both to their relatively weak position as opposed to Russia. This status has not been developed by one moment or campaign but has evolved gradually due to the stagnant position of the Chechen people surrounded by a modern world that maximizes individual and national rights. Relative deprivation (Gurr, 1969) in this case can be a clear origin for terrorist motivations due to the powerlessness of the Chechen people to work within the international system to achieve
legitimacy and statehood outside the Russian Federation. The military and cultural domination experienced by Chechnya may have left for many the only option of fighting this domination through a means outside, and in opposition to, the norms and structures of the international society of states.

In the case of the Chechens specifically, the type of attacks they commit may directly relate to the amount of mass media coverage they are given internationally, when compared to the PKK. The Chechens have a history of committing high profile hostage taking missions, such as the Moscow Theater Siege and Beslan School Siege, which lasted several days and attracted a significant amount of media attention. This also resulted in many documentaries being made about the event, further highlighting the conflict between the Russians and Chechens. Although these high profile attacks were widely published, the results focused mainly on the few female participants, with speculations being formed concerning their involvement that tended to neglect the larger conflict. While these cases briefly highlighted the objectives of the Chechens for committing such attacks, they did not fully present the full involvement of women in the movement. This may explain the shock and confusion that has occurred upon learning about the roles these women played in the attacks.

The Chechens have also been known to attack locations that target civilians, such as the metro bombing and the downing of a passenger jet, committed by women who are seen as less suspicious. Women are chosen for such attacks since it is believed that they make these attacks more affective. These tactics by the Chechens ultimately draw media
and international attention to them, but not always towards the cause they are fighting for, but draw attention to the group’s use of women and causes people to question gender stereotypes (McGarty, 2002) and the image of innocence that has been projected on the female sex over centuries of social history. Although the longevity of the Chechen fight has ebbed and flowed for 200 years until the 2000s, much of the media attention was not present until these attacks occurred on a high profile level and the recognition of women in one sect of the fight was finally acknowledge worldwide. What these high profile attacks failed to present to the media was the issue discussed earlier of continued female involvement from the beginning of the fight but it has brought general attention to the Chechen struggle as a whole.

Examining the female fighter presentation in the Turkish-Kurdish Conflict

While media presence of the Chechen fight against the Russians is international known, the Turkish and Kurdish conflict is viewed completely differently in the international media. Although the presence of mobilized identity (Korostelina, 2007) and ethnic terrorism (Volkan, 1997) is similar to that of the Chechen-Russian conflict, there is more prevalence of relative deprivation (Gurr, 1969) present in the Turkish-Kurdish conflict than in Chechnya.

Unlike in the Russian-Chechen case, both the Turkish and Kurdish population are solidly Muslim. While this allows for a religious understanding, revolving around the concept of martyrdom and Jihad being culturally recognizable, it does not affect the issue at hand of the Kurdish fight for independent separation from Turkey. Also, due to the long
history of coexistence between the Turks and the Kurds, there is very little cultural difference, except their revolving around language, which has ebbed and flowed over the centuries, and currently, is made legal again to be used in Turkey. The differences between the Turks and Kurds only become exasperated in the second half of the 20th century when ‘Turkification’ began to be inflicted on the Kurdish population, driving the conflict over time to the level it has currently reached. This concept of “Turkification” is what really drove the theory of relative deprivation (Gurr, 1969) in the Kurdish areas of Turkey, driven by the need to be fully recognized by the Turkish government as being independently Kurdish and living the same life as a Turkish citizen.

Also in the case of Kurds, the type of fighting they are waging against the Turks is more centered on guerilla warfare than terrorist attacks, resulting in less media presence due to the longevity of the conflict. In this sense there has been known female participation in this guerilla conflict before the suicide attacks began, making the effect of women committing this acts less shocking and therefore less notable for news outlets. This form of fighting ultimately may contribute to the lack of media coverage, since the drawn out form of military fighting between the Turkish military and PKK trained guerilla forces was not being continuously or widely covered in the media until extremely recently with the inclusion of the role of ISIS. Even after this infusion of international interest in the region and the interwoven relationships of those who make up an American coalition to combat such a force, this media attention has not resulted in exhaustive detail of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict. Due to this drawn out military struggle, when suicide missions began in the 1990s, the Turkish government did not highly publicize the events due to the
continuation of the conflict off the battlefield. They insisted that this was just another aspect of this ongoing fight with the Kurds that they would handle on their own. The political implications of continuing such an observed necessary conflict against the PKK and Kurdish separatism also played a central role in the continuation of this narrative on the part of the Turkish government, who uses it as a source of power and influence on internal and external security affairs.

Conclusion

As evident in both the histories Chechnya and the Kurds in Turkey there has been a long struggle for independence and the desire to be autonomous and included in the international community. Since the fall of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s both conflicts have been catapulted into the international media and conversation. While the media tends to focus on the themes of culture, invisibility, humanization and understanding of why Chechen women join the fight for independence in Chechnya through suicide terrorism, there seems to be a lack of visibility for the Kurdish women purely based on Turkish/Kurdish cultural understanding of relative equality of the sexes.

Although the Chechen and Kurdish cases have much in common, especially their desire and struggle for independence, it is important to also acknowledge the differences in each conflict. While the Chechens have fought two wars against the Russians, their cause has become fractured along religious and nationalistic motivations for independence. This has caused a mixed and ultimately weakened message concerning their cause as it is broadcast internationally. This state of affairs also brings along with it
a misunderstanding of the role of women in Chechen culture and the larger struggle as a whole, to be recognized as active members of the separatist movement against the Russians.

The Kurds have been organized in a semi-unified struggle in Turkey. This has involved guerilla warfare and later suicide missions, mostly committed by women. This lack of acknowledgment of the sex of the suicide bombers seem nonexistent or at least minimized to a point of irrelevance. Ultimately these are mentioned only in passing, but used to hark back to the cultural acceptance of female involvement in this struggle, while also acting to the detriment of their direct impact on the nature of the conflict as it currently exists.

These cases have presented to the world and the media an ever evolving aspect of gender roles among women in the Muslim world and in armed conflict. While the media coverage has not been equal between the two groups, they both have contributed to an ever growing narrative concerning female roles in conflict, and have drawn international attention to both cases. Research still needs to be expanded, in order to fully understand what the lack or presence in the media for these women means in the larger scope of both the Chechen and Kurdish struggle for independence.

Although both of these cases continue to the present day, the involvement of female suicide bombers has become increasingly few and far between, in reference to the levels that they existed in the early 2000s. As the struggle in Chechnya has become marginalized for the international community, it is beginning to experience a resurgence
in the PKK. This is especially the case among factions active in Syria fighting against the growing threat of ISIS. This is also the case in the struggle that Turkey is dealing with in accepting this new role the PKK has taken on within the Global War on Terror. Through this research there is represented the potential for a beginning to understand some of the precise roots of female involvement in both of these conflicts. This can be accomplished through an understanding of both conflicts’ history and by comparing these with what is represented through the physical and metaphorical lens of the media. There may never be a full understanding of the exact roles and involvements of female fighters in both conflicts. This is due to the fact that the media continues to manipulate the motivations and actions committed by these women within their own structural stereotyping and plethora of cultural assumptions. There must be an understanding that these women have made their mark in their respective conflicts’ history. Ultimately must not remain invisible or relegated to insignificance to the larger international community for the role that they play due to the fact that an understanding of these groups may play a central role in future resolution of these conflicts.
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