

Women in Counterterrorism: Best Practices from around the Globe

Recommendations from PTSS Alumni

One of the most striking developments in terrorism in recent years has been the rapid rise in female participation in what is traditionally viewed as a male-dominated activity. To date, far less attention has been paid to the gender imbalance that exists in counterterrorism (CT). It is therefore vital that the CT community addresses this issue and adapt our strategies in order to meet the evolving contemporary threats of terrorism. Indeed, as United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 recognized nearly 20 years ago, women have a vital role to play in addressing the security challenges of the 21st Century, and terrorism is no exception.

In recognition of this, 60 CT professionals from 44 countries gathered at the Marshall Center's recent Program on Terrorism and Security Studies (PTSS) community of interest (COI) event from 9-13 January, 2017. Alumni from Pakistan, Norway, Mongolia, Nigeria, Slovenia, and the Palestinian Authority gave presentations on their experiences of integrating women in CT. Participants then met in a series of working groups exchange ideas and identify best practices. This report is a summary of those discussions.

While it was widely recognized that each nation has its own particular culture –and there is therefore no single pathway to engaging females more effectively in the fight against terrorism– the following conclusions and recommendations are intended to stimulate ideas and to highlight particular roles and abilities that women are especially well-suited to.

Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE)

- **Create, or use existing platforms to engage with women so that they are able to recognize signs of potential radicalization and are able to intervene.** Mothers are uniquely positioned to be able to identify processes of radicalization at an early stage in their families. Police community engagement programs, as well as non-governmental efforts (such as Sisters Against Violent Extremism) are important to building trust with women in society and providing them the tools and education they need to play an active role in countering the spread of violent extremism and terrorism. Female community liaison officers or female-specific hotlines for women concerned about radicalization in their family/community might also be used to provide support and increase reporting to police.
- **Invest in female-specific online counter-radicalization initiatives.** Although off-line interactions also contribute, social media has played an important role in the recent increase in recruitment of women and girls to terrorism. Female-led efforts to understand and counter these activities – to include direct engagement with vulnerable females—are essential.
- **Build CT capacity within women's prisons.** As more females are incarcerated for terrorism offences, the potential for radicalization and related challenges within women's prisons will grow. It is thus important to ensure that female prison staff are appropriately trained and have the resources at their disposal to be able to identify and deal with these challenges.



Women's Roles in Police, Intelligence and the Military.

- **Increase women's participation in 'traditional' areas of CT.** Women often make unique and important contributions in various aspects of CT, including both field work and analysis. A diverse range of successful examples was cited, including all-female Special Forces units, interrogation of female terrorists and supporters, interaction with victims and witnesses, cyber-operations and family liaison roles. Yet it is clear that women are under-represented in CT. In order to increase female participation, each organization should develop its own Action Plan. Specific measures might include:
 - Minimum quotas for female recruits
 - Mentoring programs to encourage female leadership
 - Promotion of female role models in CT (including out-reach in schools and engagement with media)
 - Targeted recruitment of female graduates in security studies
 - Flexible work-schedules for women with children
 - Incorporation of culturally/religiously appropriate clothing (such as hijabs) into uniform

The Need for Further Understanding

- **Fund research in order to identify how women can be empowered to enhance the fight against terrorism.** While workshops such as the COI are an important first step to identifying opportunities for greater female roles in CT and P/CVE, it was widely acknowledged that this is an issue which is still poorly understood. Continued, detailed research is therefore necessary.

Conclusion

- While there is much work still to be done in this area, nations must strive to enhance global CT through the power, influence, and reach of women. As one speaker noted, "**counterterrorism in the absence of women is doomed to fail.**"

About the PTSS and COI

The Program on Terrorism and Security Studies is a four-week resident program for CT practitioners from around the globe, focused on contemporary challenges and solutions in terrorism, counterterrorism and countering violent extremism. The Global CT Alumni COI workshops engage over 1500 alumni of the PTSS, as well as alumni from other U.S. Regional Centers.

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