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The Women of Palestine Fighting for Independence

Abstract

The article is going to present the main reasons for which Palestinian women decide to take part in suicide bombing. The brief characteristic of Palestinian female bombers will allow answering the following questions: What makes women to conduct suicide attacks? Is this a kind of fight for emancipation or gender equality? To what extent participating in a terrorist attack is a sovereign decision of a woman and to what extent are they used as a new type of weapon and treated just like a tool?

Keywords: *female bombers, IDF, suicide attacks, suicide bombers*

Introduction

Why do Palestinian women conduct suicide attacks? Without having a look at the background of Palestine-Israel conflict it is impossible to answer this question. Just imagine living in a cage for more than 50 years, without any hope for brighter future, when any attempt for peaceful solutions, such as the Oslo Accords, have failed (Brown 2003, p. 10). Maybe one can find the answer is here – the women of Palestine are so desperate experiencing the loss of their family members, the loss of security and stability that, they have decided to take part in such a kind of fight against the State of Israel. There is a more essential question needed to be answered: whether it is really a decision a single woman or she is just misused or a terrorist organisation.

Since Nakba we have witnessed the escalation of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. So far, Palestinian people have seemed to use any method and tool to gain their state independence. Any of them failed. There was a need to find a new tool to defeat the enemy. Therefore, leaders of the National Palestinian Movement decided to modify their tactic and use female bombers. It happened during Al-Aqsa Intifada.

Women as Suicide Attackers

Bomb-Women as a Tool

Terrorists claim that a suicide-bomber is more effective than Tomahawk missiles. Human beings can change their minds in the last minute which give make them the most powerful and dreadful weapon (Goldman 2004). It is difficult to say what is the main reason for using women to conduct suicide attacks. One can notice that among them there are lower costs. Women taking an advantage of surprise do not require any long-lasting preparation processes. It is also easier for them, comparison with their male counterparts, to pass the Israeli obstacles or cross the borders. What is more, women are treated as needless and their death is considered to be less painful for family members than a loss of a man. Females do not have any higher position in any terrorist organisation, they are rather subsidiary forces. They do not take part in decision-making procedures; do not have any access to top-secret information, so they cannot disclose any important issues – even if an operation fails. They are more emotional than men so it is easier to indoctrinate them. It is worthy to mention that female suicide bombers gain mass publicity. Media willingly broadcast any news about bomb-women and focus

on the reasons of conducting such an attack. It leads to crime softening (Office of Law Enforcement 2010, p. 8).

Inspiration from Lebanon

Palestinian female suicide attacks were inspired by Sana'a Mahaidli. She was a teenage member of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (Hugbank, Conkey 2011, pp. 158-159). On 9 April 1985, she drove into the IDF checkpoint in Jezzine, South Lebanon. Sana'a killed two IDF soldiers and a few more were injured due to her attack (Narozhna, Knight, 2016, p. 51). What made her to commit such a crime was the hope to go to paradise and willingness to fight for Lebanese independence (Narozhna 2016, p. 156). Her suicide was also a kind of revenge for her fiancé death – he lost his life taking part in operation against Israeli soldiers (Hugbank, Conkey 2011, p. 158). Sana'a named herself as a martyr (Akil 2016, p. 129), later she was called Bride of the South. In her recording we can notice the pride of being – bomber in the name of Homeland (Rajan 2011, p. 225).

Palestinian Female Bombers

II Intifada

The long duration of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict forced the Management of Palestinian National Movement to use another type of weapon–female bombing, in the fight against the national enemy – Israel. In this case we can treat suicide attacks both as a product of strategy and an individual initiative. Suicide bombing were tightly connected with the loss of and discrimination of Palestinian. It was also a kind of response to Palestinian nation expectation. Palestinians demanded firmer action against Israel and they wanted to be more involved, and among these voices there were female ones, too (Yom, Saleh 2004).

Until the time of the Second Intifada, Palestinian women had been treated only as mothers of heroes and martyrs, the turning of the millennium brought them involvement in national fight for freedom. They began to be members of political and terrorist organisations. Finally, female members of Palestinian diaspora became suicide bombers.

This phenomenon seems to be strictly linked with internal political-national development of Palestinian society between the First and Second Intifada (Davies 2017, p. 52). The growth of women consciousness and activation of female movements led to a possibility of taking part in suicide attacks, which were still supervised and controlled by males (Narozhna, Knight 2016, p. 155), and the role of females were underestimated (Gonzalez-Peres 2008, p. 97).

Taking the use of female suicide bombers was in opposition to the ideology of Palestinian fundamentalists. In March 2002, Fatah conducted a female suicide attack, they were criticised by Sheykh Jassin. 2 years later, Hamas changed its point of view; Sheykh gave the arguments for the need of fighting method modification. Women could easier pass through the Israeli obstacles and it was a possibility of using them as a type of the army reserve in emergency. The Palestinian National Movement leaders realised that despite the growth of army, Palestinian women could give them even more – wider publicity. Due to female bombers, Palestinian terrorist organisations had an advantage. Their attacks were more difficult to detect because of some stereotypical attitude considering a woman as incapable of bombing, so no one expected a female to be an attacker (Zedlis 2004, pp. 7-8).

In the Name of Free Palestine

We have noticed eight successful female suicide attacks conducted in the name of Free Palestine. Five of them were connected with Fatah, two with Jihad and one woman was sent by Hamas. The majority of them was well-educated and in their twenties, about a half – was married (Schweitzer 2006, pp. 25-26). Due to insufficient data it is impossible to draw an exact pattern but it seems that these Palestinian female bombers have rather good financial, educational and family background. There was no evidence of mental illness or psychical disorder.

The first female Palestinian bomber was Wafa Idris. She conducted this act of terrorism in a shopping centre in Jerusalem, in January 2002. Wafa Idris detonated a bomb which she was carrying in her rucksack. She killed one person and injured about a hundred more. She was a resident of a refugee camp in Amari near Ramallah, a volunteer of Red Crescent. Her brother was connected with of The Al-Aqā Martyrs Brigades

and convinced the management of this organization to send a woman to commit a bomb attack.

Among of some of the reasons which forced Wafa to conduct this act of terrorism, one can find some personal ones. Firstly, she could not have a baby. Due to this fact she got divorced and her social status got worse. Secondly, she as a victim of several IDF attacks on medical service, so she wanted to take revenge (Cragin, Daly 2009, p.56). Wafa Idris became a symbol of Palestinian despair, of fighting Palestinian women who are willing to fight for Free Palestine such fierce as males (Bennet 2002).

On 22 February 2002, Dareen Abu Aisha conducted a suicide attack at Maccabim checkpoint. Due to her bombing three Israeli soldiers got injured. She was a twenty-one-year-old resident of Beit Wazan in Samaria. Dareen was supervised by the Fatah members, two of them: Hafez Mouqbal and Mousa Hasounaafez were with her on the way to the checkpoint (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2003). Dareen had not been accepted as a suicide – bomber by Hamas or Palestinian Islamic Jihad but she managed to convince Fatah management to send her. Naser Shawish was in charge of preparing her to this attack. At the beginning Naser was against female suicides – for him a woman was just a mother not a fighter. Together with Dareen's fiancé tried to persuade Dareen to change her mind, but she was determined to kill any IDF soldier in any way – even stabbing – just to become a Shahid, a martyr. Finally Nasser decided to support her, because of his friend's – Muhannad Abu Haliw's death. Dareen decided to commit this act of terrorism after witnessing IDF violence. She saw how Israeli soldiers had refused a Palestinian woman with an ill child to cross the border. Dareen wanted to help this woman, but the IDF soldiers were very brutal towards her (Rajan 2011, pp. 29, 159).

One month later, there was another bomb-attack. The next female-suicide was eighteen-year old Ayat Akhras. On 29 March 2002, she killed herself and two Israeli civilians. Her attack took place in a supermarket in Jerusalem. Ayat was a good student from Bethlehem. She was to get married. There were no financial or personal reasons for committing this attack by Ayat – her family had high social statuses. Probably a girl just wanted to be famous and make her family members to be proud of her. Ayat fulfilled her dreams – she became the icon of Bethlehem – a martyr who died for Palestinian people's freedom and Homeland independence (Leung 2003).

On 20th April 2002, Andaleeb Takafka detonated a bomb at a bus stop in Jerusalem. This 20-year-old woman killed six Israeli people and injured a hundred more. She

left a message with explanation of her motivation to conduct such an attack – she was dying for Palestine, for Palestinians dying living (Eager 2013, p. 191). She was connected with The Al-Aqṣā Martyrs Brigades (Cragin, Daly, 2009, p. 61), but on day- to-day basis she worked in a factory and seemed not to be interested in politics (Williams 2002). According to Andaleeb, her body was just a tool, which could be use to fight against the State of Israel (Ryan 2015, p. 146).

On 19th May 2002, Hiba Daraghmeh killed herself and three Israeli people in a shopping centre in Afula. Due to her attack more than ninety civilians were also injured. Hiba was a literature student at Al Quds University on the West Bank. She was a very traditional young woman: she covered her body and met only with girls. Her face was revealed after her death- on posters published by the Islamic Jihad. She probably wanted to make her family famous (Ghazali 2003).

Next woman-bomber was Hanadi Jaradat. After graduating from the Philadelphia University in Amman, she came back home and worked at lawyer office. Hanadi was a strong and independent woman; her suicide attack was an act of revenge on the State of Israel citizens. During her brother funeral she decided to conduct it. She was probably connected with the Islamic Jihad which supported her in a very careful and detailed preparation to a suicide – she visited the checkpoint in Salem for several times. Before the attack, she had changed her clothes into the West ones. On 4th October 3003, Hanadi killed 19 and hurt over fifty people (Kuriansky 2006, pp. 19-20).

The year of 2004 was significant for Palestinian women from the Gaza Strip. One of them, Reem Saleh Rayashi, was chosen by Hamas to conduct a suicide bomb attack. On 14th January, she managed to kill four IDF soldiers and injured four more (Scheipers 2014, p. 242). Reem detonated a 5-kolo-bomb pretending to need a medical aid (Zulczyk 2015, pp. 162-164).

This was a turning point also for Hamas strategy, since then this organisation has begun to recognize suicide attacks conducted by women as the acts of heroism and the superior form of Jihad. Hamas leaders started to emphasize the advantages of female fighters, and among the women-bombers, especially the easiness to pass through obstacles. Reyashi left the videotape with her admission. She was the first Gazan bomb-woman and martyr (Ramadan 2004). Reem Salih al-Rayash was a twenty-one-year-old mother of two children. Her family was wealthy (Ponzanesi 2014, p.85). She was a member of The Al-Aqṣā Martyrs Brigades. She detonated a bomb at the border crossing in

Erez (Naji 2007, p. 49). She left the recording in order to give an explanation her suicide. Reem highlighted that her love to God was greater than love to children (Streete 2009, p. 119). There were rumours that she had been forced to a suicide-attack by her husband and her ex-lover – a Hamas member. This act of terrorism would expiate her guilt (Eager 2013, p. 192).

Another suicide attack was conducted by Zeinab Abu Salem. She was a resident of a refugee camp in Nablus. Her suicide was supported by The Al-Aqṣā Martyrs Brigades (Ponzanesi 2014, p. 85). On 22nd August 2004, she killed two Israeli police officers and hurt seventeen civilians (Eager 2013, p. 192). Her attack was condemned by the Palestinian Prime Minister – Ahmed Qureia, according to him such attack were against the national interest of Palestine and could give the State of Israeli an excuse to continue its occupation (Anderson, Moore 2004). One the Fatah Facebook she is called the heroic female martyr-seeker (PMW 2013).

Statistics

Between 2000 and 2005 there were 147 suicide attacks. The majority of them were conducted by males – 156, and only 8 were carried out by females. More than 500 Israeli people were killed and almost 3,350 wounded. The Israel managed to prevent the number of 450 attacks. Hamas has prepared the largest number of attacks: 58 attacks (40%), The Palestinian Islamic Jihad conducted 39 (27%), Fatah carried out 33 (23%) whilst The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine supported 8 attacks. Eight attacks were joint operations (Intelligence and Terrorism Intelligence Center 2006, pp. 5, 12).

It should be emphasized that Palestinian women stand for only five percentage of all suicide attacks on Israeli people conducted between the years from 2000 to 2015 (Statistic Brain 2017). Between 1985 and 2006 women committed more than 220 attacks all over the world, which was at the level of 15 percentages. There were about 70 successful and failed female suicide attack carried out by females in Israel and Palestinian territories (Turner 2015). Female suicide bombers were older then male ones. They were about 22 years old, well-educated, the vast majority of them was unmarried and connected with the Islamic Jihad (Sela-Shayovitz 2007, pp. 164-166).

Conclusion

All in all, Palestinian women have taken part in acts of terrorism because of their despair. The main factors are not religion, mental disorders or suicide inclination. They have become female suicide bombers because their life standard and the level of safety have still been worsening. They lived in a fear of losing and family members and nothing seemed to change (Standish 2008, p. 1). Instead of the conflict softening there was its escalation – the First and especially the Second Intifada (Filiu 2014, p. 291).

On the other hand it should be mentioned that there is a dissonance in Palestinian patriarchal society whether to admire a woman as a martyr or emphasize her personal causes to commit this crime such as anger, guilt, shame. Until the Second Intifada it had been highlighted that they were so many great male Palestinian fighters that it was no use to involve woman – woman who should stay at home and have babies – especially men ones.

In conclusion, Palestinian women are no decision makers even in the cases of their suicide commitment. They have to be approved by a male leader who can let her to take part in a suicide attack. In Palestinian National Movements the role of female is rather secondary. They are not the members of boards. Therefore, there is the question whether there really dying for equality or maybe just for the desire to be equal?

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