

Mothers, the Missing Link: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Women-Centric Counterterrorism Measures

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Abstract : In counterterrorism, policymakers typically design a confined role for women as family members and nurturers. In recent years, they have embraced the idea of mothers as the missing link to preventing and countering violent extremism. This 'programmed' role of women is derived from the convictions that women's central roles in the family and community afford them the 'unique set of skills' to detect early signs of radicalization and extremism. This paper attempts to focus on the 'mother' narrative that frames women's agency as mothers of 'terrorists' and 'potential' terrorists. The general underlying assumption of the 'mother' narrative is that naturally, every 'terrorist' has or once had a mother, and their radicalization is a maternal 'oversight.' By deconstructing the notion of motherhood as a social construct instead of an inherent female desire and ability, this paper argues that the assumption of 'mothers know best' is invalid. Also, this paper suggests that the 'mother' narrative is a deliberate effort to restrict women's participation in counterterrorism as 'preventers.' Finally, this paper notes a global trend in which mothers are contesting the dominant view of women empowerment that restricts their agency by seeking alternative versions in terrorist organizations. And as such, they create parallel terror cells. Thus, the overemphasis on the role women plays as mothers in counterterrorism limits the scope and potential of counterterrorism programs by marginalizing gender issues and reinforcing gender disparities to the extent that the programs become counterproductive.

Keywords : countering violent extremism, counterterrorism, gender, gender roles, terrorism, women

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