

The Point of No Return: Suicide Bombers, Amphetamines and the YPG/PKK

Suicide bombings have been a strategy used by many terrorist organizations, from leftist's to religion-inspired groups. It's a calculated act whereby one sacrifices himself or herself for the group's cause and ideology in the name of his or her beliefs and ideology. Suicide bombings are not non-rational acts or terrorism, or just done by being 'drugged' or medicated with various amphetamines. The road to suicide bombings and suicide terrorism does not consist of an 'overnight' decision, but is a gradual process of taking up extremism ideology, and psychologically being pushed to take up group causes rather than think of oneself. This process of 'becoming the group' is amplified with drugs used such as Captagon, which in the end as a whole, leads to a point of no return.

Suicide bombings are attacks consisting of a member of a terrorist organization sacrificing himself or herself by blowing oneself up with explosives to bring about damage to the 'other'. The 'other' here can be civilians and governmental personnel, depending on the ideological roots of the terrorist organization. While some terrorist organizations believe everyone outside their ideology is a 'non-believer' and should be killed, others, on the other hand, kill security personnel for state-building and reasons embedded in 'revolution'.

For a suicide bombing attack to come about, three things are needed: 1) A candidate to sacrifice himself or herself 2) An ideology to convince the candidate and 3) Explosives, which are generally explosive belts strapped on to the terrorist, or vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIED) usually used towards moving targets such as buses, cars and trains. The terrorist going to perform the attack will get up close to the target and set off the explosives with either a button hard-wired to the explosives, or a wireless system detonated remotely by a second terrorist.

The YPG, a Syrian off-shoot of the PKK terrorist organization has recently been using suicide bombings more frequently. The PKK's ANF news agency and the YPG Press Office have been posting pictures of suicide bombers performing attacks against the Turkish Armed Forces and the Free Syrian Army who are currently involved in Operation Olive Branch to sweep the region of terrorist entities and secure its borders from attacks against the YPG which had just recently killed some civilians by attacking mosques and civilian grounds with means of rockets fired from the Burseya Mountain in Afrin.

Photos and biographies published by the YPG show mostly women being used for the attacks. Terrorist organizations are generally known to use suicide bombings for two primary reasons. Firstly, the cost-benefit for suicide bombings for terrorist organizations like the YPG is very high if the attack is executed and planned well. A terrorist organization like the YPG will be able to maximize on casualties with a single member towards the intended target, this being the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) and the Free Syrian Army (FSA). Secondly, suicide bombings do not require evacuation plans and routes in contrast to usual attacks executed. This allows for the group to perform attacks quicker, and execute propaganda towards its targeted audience much more effectively.

Currently, the YPG utilizing women in its suicide bombing attacks consist of a symbolic value as the first suicide bomber of the PKK was, in fact, a woman by the name of Zeynep Kinaci (using the code name Zilan). On June 30, 1996, Kinaci performed a suicide bombing in the region of Tunceli against Turkish soldiers at a flag raising ceremony killing eight Turkish soldiers, and injuring many as well. Kinaci was at the age of 24 and was a graduate of psychological counseling, and was also engaged as well. In 1995, Kinaci and four (five according to various sources) of her friends were taken to PKK camps with means of a contact from the organization. Sources state Kinaci was planning on to move on to form a family, but was derogated for such thoughts in the PKK's winter camp of 1995.

According to interviews given by other PKK members possessing close relations with her, Kinaci was always criticized by the PKK for possessing views close to classical norms in regards to family ties and relationships. What could be forecasted from here is Kinaci was isolated by the PKK, and most likely had her ties cut off from other recruits, a similar technique executed by DAESH in their 'Cubs of the Caliphate' battalion consisting mostly of children.

From the suicide bombing executed by Zilan, it could be understood that the PKK/YPG/PYD uses a

four-fold strategy in executing their suicide bombing attacks. Firstly, the YPG divides the potential suicide bomber from his or her friends, separating them from relationship norms and kinship. The recruit here is isolated, and communication with others is prohibited. In the second phase, the potential bomber is first induced with artificial trauma whereby existing values and principles of the bomber are rejected by himself/herself, and psychological gaps are opened by the YPG. Here, the YPG then feeds into the psychological gaps with PKK ideology consisting of 'global revolution', 'fighting against the enemy' and 'saving Kurdish lands from being colonized'. While this is taking place, the potential bomber is then given amphetamines such as Captagon found near the Birsaya mountains by Turkish Armed Forces while executing Operation Olive Branch on Jan 28, 2018.

Captagon also known as Fenethylamine and 'Super Pill II' is a drug known to be used by terrorist organizations in the Middle East and Western Asia. Captagon originally used to treat psychological diseases, primarily ADHD heightens awareness and gives one courage. The drug is currently used by terrorist organizations in suicide bombing missions. Terrorists who have taken the pill state the pill 'would make you go to battle not caring if you live or die'. The drug is banned internationally and was primarily produced by DAESH up until a few years ago whereby YPG had taken control of DAESH territory. Current projections show the production of Captagon to be controlled by the YPG in Syria at this very moment. A second option could also be DAESH supplying YPG with the drugs.

In the third phase of the YPG preparing the suicide bomber, the potential bomber is continuously fed with Captagon and other amphetamines, and is also given greater ideological indoctrination, whereby the potential bomber loses his or her norms, and takes on the norms of the group, and in fact 'becomes the group'. The norms of the bomber here revolve primarily around group dynamics and ideology where one commits an act based on group causes. Here, the bomber's mindset is framed based on YPG principles and ideology.

Finally, to take the bomber over the edge to a point of no return, the YPG will generally have the suicide bomber write a will or letter stating as to why they are performing the attack and what their will from other recruits are. Here the YPG locks the bomber into the intended state of mind and encourages other militants to also perform similar attacks. Zilan in this regard is always shown as an example, and even has a battalion named after her name titled 'Zilan Immortals Battalion'.

Women are exploited by the YPG for suicide bombing missions. Recent quantitative data shows almost all suicide bombers of the YPG being women against Operation Olive Branch forces. Women tend to be used for suicide bombing missions as they are less suspected and allow for 'stealth' in suicide bombing missions, especially towards security forces and personnel. Women are able to disguise suicide belts and vests more effectively than men because of bodily features.

In conclusion, the YPG using women as suicide bombers is not a random act but a calculated strategy and gradual process, intending on taking the militant to a point of no return and aiming for maximum casualties with minimum consequences for the terrorist organization. The YPG is heavily relying on amphetamines such as Captagon for its suicide bombing operations and is purposefully using women in the operations for reasons of stealth and disguise. Finally, the utilization of photos of female YPJ militants from Western media outlets such as those smiling and showing the peace sign may allow for radicalization and encouragement of fresh legs in joining terrorist acts within Syria and the Middle East.