



Office of Intelligence and Analysis

**Homeland  
Security**

**Federal Bureau  
of Investigation**



Joint Homeland Security Assessment

## **(U//FOUO) Female Suicide Bombers Threat**

**11 February 2008**

*(U) Prepared by the DHS/Critical Infrastructure Threat Analysis Division and the FBI/Threat Analysis Unit.*

### **(U) Scope**

(U//FOUO) Most suicide bombers have been men, but some terrorist organizations use women as operatives to circumvent security measures that focus on male terrorists. This joint intelligence bulletin assesses recent female suicide bomber attacks overseas and their implication for the Homeland.

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## (U) Key Findings

*(U//FOUO) The use of female suicide bombers appears to be gaining more widespread media exposure for terrorists.*

*(U//FOUO) Continued use of female suicide bombers—the most recent example being a 3 February 2008 attack at the main railway station in Colombo, Sri Lanka—indicates that terrorists judge this tactic as effective in increasing defenses and thwarting security measures.*

*(U//FOUO) DHS and the FBI have no specific, credible intelligence indicating that terrorist organizations intend to utilize female suicide bombers against targets in the Homeland.*

## (U) Terrorists Use of Female Suicide Operatives

(U//FOUO) The enlistment of women from Chechnya, India, Iraq, Pakistan, the Palestinian territories, Sri Lanka, and Turkey for suicide attacks may well represent a growing phenomenon internationally. Female suicide bombers have been especially effective in Sri Lanka and Iraq.

- (U//FOUO) On 3 February 2008, the eve of Sri Lanka Independence Day celebrations, a suspected Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) female suicide bomber killed at least 14 people and injured 100 others at the Fort Railway Station in the capital city Colombo. The suicide bomber reportedly blew herself up after being stopped by security personnel conducting a random search of the station.
- (U//FOUO) LTTE suicide squads, known as the Black Tigers, have carried out more than 240 attacks since 1983, and many of the suicide bombers were women.
- (U//FOUO) According to press service records, since 2003, terrorists in Iraq have conducted at least 17 female suicide bomber operations that killed more than 100 people and wounded scores.



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(U//FOUO) Exterior view of Iraqi suicide vest found in Baghdad.

(U//FOUO) Even as military and security forces are paying more attention to the use of female operatives, terrorists are adapting their suicide attack tactics to compensate for enhanced security measures. Suicide bombings generally are carried out by motivated, committed men and women who have the mental discipline and physical ability to accomplish the operation. That assumption may be changing.

- (U//FOUO) According to media reports, on 2 February 2008, two mentally-

disabled women strapped with remote-control explosives—possibly unwittingly—killed and injured scores of people in apparently coordinated suicide attacks at two Baghdad pet markets.

- (U//FOUO) A U.S. military spokesman for the Baghdad area indicated that both women looked like they had Down syndrome.\* One female was carrying a backpack that was stuffed with ball bearings and shrapnel, while the other female was wearing an explosives vest.

## (U) Potential Means of Attack

(U//FOUO) DHS and the FBI assess that female suicide bombers may have an advantage over their male counterparts in accessing targets. The means to conduct a suicide attack vary widely, but a key element in maximizing the lethality of a suicide bombing is the bomber's ability to get close to the target. Female suicide bombers may carry explosives devices in a backpack, briefcase, or purse, or hidden in an article of clothing worn close to the body, such as a vest, belt, long socks, or jacket. They also have carried explosives in prosthetic devices that mimic the look of a pregnant woman.



**(U//FOUO) Pregnancy prosthetics—female suicide bombers have used devices that make them appear pregnant to hide explosive devices.**

(U//FOUO) Regardless of delivery by a man or a woman, improvised explosive devices may contain fragmentation or shrapnel, such as nails, bolts, glass fragments, marbles, ball bearings, or other small metal pieces. Dispersed fragmentation is the primary cause of casualties in suicide bombing attacks.

(U//FOUO) Security officials and first responders, especially, should be aware that some worn or carried devices have a backup trigger system, such as an electronic timer, pager, or booby-trap type switch, to initiate the device if the attacker is killed, apprehended, or opts to abort the attack to avoid capture.

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\* (U) Down syndrome is a genetic condition that causes mental retardation and a significantly shorter life expectancy. Some of the physical traits that are common but not always present are flattened face, slanted eyes among other known features.

## **(U) Implications**

(U//FOUO) Suicide bombings continue to be the preferred terrorist tactic because the bomber controls the location, timing, and method of delivery. Many facilities such as public places are inherently vulnerable to suicide bombing attacks and the terrorist's latitude in determining and adjusting the target and timing of an attack up to the point of detonation further complicates countermeasures. These factors indicate the importance of disciplined security measures and alertness by security professionals to potential threats from the full-range of gender and age groups.

(U//FOUO) Despite the lack of a reliable, predictable profile of a suicide terrorist, security and law enforcement officials and first responders should be aware of terrorists' use of female suicide operatives and familiarize themselves with behavioral patterns that such bombers have demonstrated in previous attacks.

## **(U) Resources**

(U//FOUO) DHS and the FBI have published information on suicide bombers and improvised explosive devices that are available to registered users through the TRIPwire website at [TRIPwire-dhs.net](http://TRIPwire-dhs.net). These publications include the following:

- (U//FOUO) Joint Homeland Security Assessment, Suicide Bomber Tradecraft and Suggested Protective Measures, 4 September 2007.
- (U//FOUO) Joint Homeland Security Assessment, Suicide Bomber Planning Behavior and Point-of-Attack Indicators, 27 September 2006.
- (U//FOUO) Joint Homeland Security Assessment, Terrorist Tradecraft Involving Suicide Bombers, 31 August 2006.
- (U//FOUO) Joint Information Bulletin, Update: Tactics and Techniques of Suicide Bombers, 19 October 2005

### **(U) Reporting Notice:**

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