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The history of the Russian-Chechen conflict.

**The role of terrorist methods and
means in the Russian-Chechen conflict**

PhD Dissertation

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Introduction and raising the issue

The Russian-Chechen conflict is the oldest fight after the fall of the bipolar world-order, the bloodiest event in the post-soviet region and the only conflict that is happening within the territory of the Russian Federation. This paper intends to review the progress and the transformation of the conflict, and strives to find the answer for the question: What factors caused that while during the 1990s, standard scientific literature considered the Russian-Chechen conflict a separatist fight instead of a guerrilla war, but nowadays Chechen activity is more evidently and steadily defined as another form of organized political violence: terrorism? What led to the result that in the 1990s the Chechen separatist movement was embraced with significant sympathy, but by today, their activity has been given a definitely negative label? To what extent is it the failure of the Chechen separatist movement and the success of Russian politics? How much is it the result of a different world-order?

At the first look, and from a theoretical point of view, Chechen separatism can seemingly be integrated into the renationalizing progress that caused the split-up of the Eastern and East-Central Europe's federations: the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. It can be integrated, despite the fact, that the international community in the 1990s only recognized the transformation of those federated states into state-nations who had the right of constitutional separation. At the end of 2000, however, this principal - with the recognition of Kosovo, Abkhazia and South Ossetia - was significantly hurt, and it is an important fact even if the international opinion about the Chechen separatism essentially changed. Namely, by recognizing the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Moscow questioned its previous political point of view.

In the same time, we have to see that the Chechen separatist movement never had the kind of social support that we experienced in the case of post-Yugoslav national movements. On the other hand, the separatist movement was divided on the inside from the beginning. As a result of this, the Chechen government, that put separatism on its flag, never had the sufficient amount of violence-monopoly that could create a sustainable and stable balance of power in the country, and therefore, control the operation of the different armed groups. In addition, in order to consolidate power, one needs more than just military force. Social-economic and other social conditions are needed as well. According to several experts, these things were missing from Chechen society from the beginning and the elite had no chance at all to create them when they rose to power. Others, at the same time, emphasized that the the all-time Russian leadership also had be blamed, but mainly the two Chechen wars and the anti-terrorist operations, that had been going on since 1999, was responsible for the dysfunction of the Chechen state. These critics believe that Russian politicians consciously overact the effect of the Islam radicals' activity on Chechen soil, and successfully show

Chechen terrorism as a part of a new kind of global Islam terrorism - especially after September 11, 2001. On the other hand, the leaders of the Kremlin deny and with all means try to hide the fact that in the process during which Chechen separatism deformed into terrorism, the brutality of anti-terrorism and the two wars, played an important role and struck both the resistant fighting groups and the Chechen society. The verification of the latter one in this paper will not be based on Chechen-friendly and biased institutions (For example: The American Committee for Peace in the Caucasus, Chechen Institute in Krakow), but through the well documented studies and reports of the Russian Civil Rights institutions, and through scientific literature, dealing with Chechnya and the Chechen question.

For the terrorism-history part of the paper I have used - besides other different studies - the data of terrorism databases available on the internet (mainly the Global Terrorism Database, the Worldwide Incident Tracking System and the RAND Database of Worldwide Terrorism Incidents), in order to get a complete picture of the Russian, North Caucasian and Chechen terrorism. Although, these sources deal with a different kind of terrorism-concept, they are perfectly capable of demonstrating tendencies and turning points. In connection with Chechen terrorism, in the paper I will have a separate chapter to deal with female suicide terrorists, whose Russian name is "sahidkas" and who became a unique category in terrorism literature. Besides all this, I have studied the military concept of the fight against rebels (COIN), the unique Russian ways of using it, and its effects on Russian military reforms.

Until the recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia the Russian-Chechen politics were - despite all the violence - quite consequent. In Moscow, it was thought that following the fall of the bipolar world-order the Russian leadership would have to face not only the split-up of the Soviet Union, but also the possible break-up of the already seceded Russian state. So for the Kremlin, because of the conservation of integrity and its unquestionable nature, it was unimaginable, and out of question to let the Chechen state gain independency. A haphazard event like that, could create a situation in which other federated states of the Russian Federation could allude to their right and option of secession. At this time it was often stressed that the successful Chechen separatism might set such an international precedent that could be referred to by all those (Albanians in Kosovo, Kurds) who were denied the legal option of sovereignty. The other reason for the adherence to Chechnya was based mainly on security considerations. Even if Moscow had been able to find the international legal formula for Chechnya's step-by-step emancipation, it could have had only a neighbor with no security risk. However Chechnya - as we will see - had not been seen as such from the beginning. It had not been seen as such from neither a political, nor a military, nor a social point of view. In addition, while judging the Chechen situation, Moscow could not disregard its economic interests, namely, that in and around Chechnya there were important routes and oil

pipelines that led to the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea. The latter interest, in a country where the energy sector is the key sector of the economy, easily overwrites political interests.

After all it is important for us to see that during the past two decades the international opinion about the Chechen question has changed significantly. In this respect, the most visible breaking-point was September 11, 2001 and the international war on terror announced by the United States of America. Moscow, from that point, could have their earlier opinion accepted - to be accurate: the leadership of the United States accepted it - according to which, Chechen separatism should be categorized as terrorism. Besides official politics, the Chechen-friendly western public opinion changed as well. The main reasons of this were primarily events with international media coverage that proved to be counterproductive regarding the Chechen case, like the hostage dramas in the Dubrovka theater in 2002 and in Beslan in 2004. In the same time, it is important to note that neither the changes in the international public opinion nor the American politics after September 11, 2001 had a crucial impact on the Russian - Chechen politics and the domestic anti-terrorist policy of Moscow.

The aims and methods of the research

The paper intends to show how the Russian-Chechen opposition went from being a publicly supported fight for Chechen independence to a guerrilla war and later became a North Caucasian terrorist movement of the socially isolated radical armed groups. What were those important Russian and Chechen political processes and events, among the organized political forms of violence presented during the Russian-Chechen conflict, which turned terrorism into an important tool of the Chechens.

The paper covers the five longer periods of the conflict's political history, already known from the scientific literature. It also draws parallel between them and the terrorism history of the Russian-Chechen relationship in order to explain what the reasons and motivations of the separatist movement's figures were that made them use terrorist methods. Doing so, it reviews the political processes in Chechnya between 1991-2011, and it examines more precisely the more significant turning-points and events.

After the review of the Russian-Chechen conflict from the angle of political history, the paper will focus on the forms of political violence within the Russian-Chechen relationship, especially terrorism. In order to do this, it was inevitable to shortly define the different types and forms of political violence and to fully examine war, guerrilla war and terrorism. The paper describes the evolution of terrorism in Russia, Chechnya and the North Caucasus region and its alterations, with the help of online terrorism databases (Worldwide Incident Tracking System -

WITS, RAND Database of Worldwide Terrorism Incidents – RDWTI, Global Terrorism Database – GTD) and the relevant scientific literature. It also analyses precisely the characteristics of Chechen terrorism and its features, and talks about the the, so called, strategic terrorist attacks that happened inside and outside of Chechnya's borders. In case of the latter ones, it mainly tries to find out how the single terrorist attacks affected Russian way of handling the Chechen situation and the development of the Russian security and military thinking.

Since, Russian leadership between 1999 and 2009 explained the military interference in Chechnya as anti-terrorist operations, the paper discusses the security impacts and legal background of the Russian counter-terrorist fights in a separate section, taking into consideration the most important laws that influenced the fate of the Chechen separatist movement and the North Caucasian societies.

Since in the international terrorism literature the Russian name of the Chechen female suicide bombers (sahidkas) became a unique category, the last section of the paper is dedicated to dealing with the problem of terrorist women, primarily female Chechen terrorists. According to the scientific literature, the paper summarizes and exposes the motifs why these women volunteered to take part in suicide missions. Scientific literature also provides the possibility to compare the motifs of the Chechen suicide bombers to those of other suicide missions, done in the name of Islam, and to find their similarities and differences.

The structure of the discourse

The first part of the paper describes those most important historical events and social, political factors that are referred to by the Chechen separatism after the fall of the Soviet Union. Besides, it reviews the ethnic divisions of the Chechens, the traditions of which has survived until today (the value of personal freedom and equality, the collective social sense, revenge, abduction of women, klan council). It was made quite easy, because the Chechens met a centralized power for the first time in the 17th - 18th century, during the era of the Russian conquests. The Sunnite branch of the Islam religion oozed into the North Caucasian territories in the 13th-14th century, but the consolidation was brought in by Sheikh Mansur's holy war between 1785 and 1791. The religious policy of Sheikh Mansur in 1784 was widely supported, not only in his home country, but also in Azerbaijan, and Dagestan, and foresaw the possibility of a united Islam state that could resist outside attacks. Mansur also had to do with the first anti-colonization movement in 1785, during which they intended to fight not only against the Russians' - strategically important - colonization of the south, but also against other outside threats (Russia, Ottoman Empire, Persia). The resistance resurrected in 1834 under the leadership of Imam Shamil who created a theocratic Islam state that

lasted for 27 years, and is still described as a historical prefiguration by the Chechen separatism and the North Caucasian resistance of today (Caucasian Emirates). It reviews those historical wounds that the Chechens had to suffer from during the era of the Soviet Union. These wounds still define the relationship between Russia and the Chechens.

The second part describes and analyses the political history of the Russian-Chechen opposition during the post-Soviet period broken down to five periods (1991-1994 - From the fall of the Soviet Union until the first Chechen war; 1994-1996 - The first Chechen war and the Khasavyurt Accord; 1996-1999 - Chechnya's quasi independence; 1999-2000 - The second Chechen war; 2000-2009 - The period of the anti-terrorist operations), focusing primarily on the turning points. It examines the processes and factors through which the Chechen situation became an urgent problem for Moscow, the motivations and factors that made the leaders of the separatist movement use political violence, and the way Chechnya was pushed into the first and second Chechen wars. It talks in details about the changed Chechen political and sociological situation, and the reason why Grozny could not take advantage of the quasi independence between 1996 and 1999 to reinforce the Chechen political institutions.

The third part reviews the different forms of political violence during the different periods of the Russian-Chechen conflict, emphasizing the categories of war, guerrilla war and terrorism. It precisely deals with the transformation of political violence in Chechnya, namely, the process through which the Chechen separatist movement turned from a war into a guerrilla war before some of their representatives and North Caucasian non-Chechen radicals started to use terrorism. It shows the evolution of Chechen terrorism, its features, the Russian-Chechen relationship and the, so called, strategic attacks that had the biggest impact on the international opinion concerning the Chechen situation. In the meantime, it strives to prove that Chechen terrorism is a response to Russian brutality during the first and the second Chechen wars, and a response to the impossibility of the Chechen separatist intentions which were seriously influenced by the changes of the international approach to terrorism after September 11, 2001. The paper uses the statistic datas of the most important terrorism databases in order to describe the development of Chechen terrorism (WITS, GTD). It also uses the statistics to show how the surroundings of Chechnya radicalizes along with Chechen consolidation, and how Chechen terrorism becomes a radical Islamist North Caucasian (Dagestan, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria) terrorist movement.

The fourth part reviews the changes in the legal background of the Russian operations against terrorism during the conflict. It points out that, although, Russia calls its political and military actions against the Chechens anti-revolution activities and (from 1999) anti-terrorist activities, the legal background always only comes after the real operation. It also shows, how the changes in the legal background influences the activities of the Russian military, Russian domestic

forces and the armed forces of Chechnya and the North Caucasian territory. It comes to the conclusion that the development of the legal background only makes the brutality of the Russian anti-terrorist activity even more intense, and - paradoxically - it brought forth the Chechen terrorism's transformation into North Caucasian terrorism.

The final - fifth - part deals with female terrorist (they are called "sahidkas" in international literature) comparing them to the members of other terrorist groups. It portrays the suicide attack phenomena, that is more and more prevalent nowadays. It provides a historical outlook back to antiquity, and introduces the most significant suicide terrorists and terrorist groups in different eras. It examines the motivation behind suicide terrorism, and the main reasons of the suicide terrorists' service. It comes to the conclusion that suicide terrorism is the most radical version of terrorism and is the way of the politically most desperate terrorist groups. It describes the methods of recruiting and training female suicide terrorists and also the technical preparations before an attack.

About the sources used

For the political history and terrorism-history research in my paper I used sources in Russian, English and Hungarian languages. Since there is an excessive amount of literature about the Russian-Chechen conflict, during the selection process, I focused mainly on the most inspiring authors of my research, who are most often referred to by those who deal with the topic.

From the list of Russian language sources it is absolutely worth to mention the book titled: Time of the South. Russia in Chechnya, Chechnya in Russia. (Время Юга. Россия в Чечне, Чечня в России). The 267 pages long book published in Moscow in 2002 discusses the Russian-Chechen conflict and its effect on Russia in its six longest chapters (1. The story of the never ended conflict, 2. Chechen war and Russian world, 3. The Islam factor, 4. War and military, 5. International consent, 6. Chechnya and the rules of the war). The title of the book clearly shows that the authors of the book believed that the South will be Moscow's biggest challenge in the future, and as they unfolded this topic they wrote about the Chechen conflict as well. The authors examine whether the changes that took place in the Russian political system, foreign policies and military organizations were causes or catalysts of the evolved Chechen conflict. The book - like several other authors - highlights the "Islam factor" and the expansion of Islam radicalism in Chechnya and in the Caucasus region. It was also a big help in my research to use the book: Chechnya. Life during the war (Чечня. Жизнь на войне) published by one of the most significant Russian civil rights organization: the Demos in 2007, containing more than twenty studies dealing with the humanitarian problems of the Chechen situation, the authors of which (some of them: Alekszand Cserkasov, Tatjana Loksina, Alekszandr Mnatszakanyan) also examine the causes and

consequences of the Chechen conflict. The Demos, with the help of the Memorial Russian civil rights organization the Worldwide Human right movement (FIDH) and the Helsinki Committee, wrote its report in 2005: Political Process and Parliamentary Elections in Chechnya that provides very useful information about the era between 2003 and 2005.

In my work I relied on the studies of the Center for Eastern Studies and especially the studies of Maciej Falkowski: Armed conflicts in the post-soviet region (2003); Chechnya and Russia: The significance of the Chechen problem for contemporary Russia (2003); The 'Tribal Areas' of the Caucasus. The North Caucasus – an enclave of 'alien civilisation' within the Russian Federation (2010). CES is an internationally reputed institute of the region, with the most valuable and most extensive set of information exploring the post-soviet zone, where more than 60 researchers examine the social and economic problems of the post-soviet and the Caucasus region. Political scientist Falkowski is the leading researcher of CES whose studies are often referred to by western authors. I also used the works - Chechnya, wahhabism and the invasion of Dagestan (2005), The Pitfalls of the Normalization Process in the Chechen Republic (2006), Islam, Islamism, and Terrorism in the Northern Caucasus and Central Asia: A Critical Assessment. (2006), The Caucasus Emirate: Genealogy of an Islamist Insurgency (2011) – of another, also outstanding expert of the topic, Emil Souleimanov from the Political Science Institute at Charles University in Prague. The Armenian-born Souleimanov is also a North-Caucasian and Chechen expert of NATO and the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs. And finally, I have to mention another expert who helped me with my work: Gordon M. Hahn from the Monterey Institute of International Studies, who had been reporting monthly about the political activities of the Eurasian region, and also about Chechnya and its surroundings from 2009. His writings are not only excellent reports, but the statistics, reported by him, served as an important database for the part of my paper that deals with terrorism.

For the latter one it was a great help that for the past years as an assistant at Strategic Defense Research Center (SVKK) at ZMNE (National University of Public Service) I could follow SVKK's research in connection with terrorism, and I also could be a part of the preparation of the publishing studies. As a editorial secretary for the Nation and Security journal I was among the first ones to learn about the writings connected to the topic of my research.

In the part of my paper that reviews the Chechen wars, for the first Chechen war I used the works of Mark Smith from the Conflict Studies Research Center (Chechnya: the political dimension; A chronology of the Chechen conflict 1-4.), that were published between 1995 and 1997 and for the second Chechen war Olga Olikier's Russia's Chechen Wars 1994–2000: Lessons from Urban Combat, and C. W. Blandy's works from the Conflict Studies Research Center's Caucasian volume (Dagestan: The Storm 1. The 'Invasion' of Avaristan; Dagestan: The Storm 2. The Federal

Assault on the „Kadar Complex”; Dagestan: The Storm 3. The Expulsion of Chechen Bandit Formation from Novolakskiy Rayon; A Search for a Strong Successor; Chechnya: Two Federal Interventions. An Interim Comparison and Assessment), were my main sources of help. Concerning the military theory of the fight against the rebels (COIN), the unique Russian ways to apply it and the Russian military reforms, the greatest help was the book of Christopher Paul – Colin P. Clarke – Beth Grill: Victory Has a Thousand Fathers Sources of Success in Counterinsurgency, published in 2010 at RAND.

Works that were also published in Hungarian like the journalist Anna Politkovskaja's Second Chechen war (2003) and Andrew Meier's Chechnya - To the Heart of a conflict (2005) were also outstanding sources, mainly because of their pictorial nature. Their common feature is that both works devote a lot of space to proving that Russian state-terror exists - based on different stories and interviews -, and furthermore, they excellently describe the mood of the wars in Chechnya and create a picture-like portray of the conflict.

From among the available Hungarian literature I used several - in my opinion very important - studies: László Póti: The war on terror and the changing sphere of interests in the post-Soviet region: Middle-Asia and the South-Caucasus (A terrorizmus elleni harc és az átalakuló érdekszférák a poszt-szovjet térségben: Közép Ázsia és a Dél-Kaukázus) (2006), András Rácz: War on two and a half fronts? Russian in the war on terror (Háború két és fél fronton: Oroszország a terrorizmus elleni küzdelemben) (2010), Gábor Gyóni: The Chechen conflict (A csecsen konfliktus) (2005). I also have to mention the study: Russian opinion on international terror - The Chechen crisis (A csecsen válság) by László Kővári and László Nagy (2003), the university memorandum: The military experiences from the war against terrorism (A terrorizmus elleni katonai küzdelem tapasztalatai) by Tibor Kőszegvári and István Resperger and György Szternák's work: Terrorism as a problem of military science (Terrorizmus, mint hadtudományi probléma). With great caution and circumspection I also took István Zickermann's book: The Chechen war into consideration.

Summarized conclusions

In my paper I intended to find out how the Russian-Chechen opposition went from being a publicly supported fight for Chechen independence, through a guerrilla war to a North Caucasian terrorist movement of the socially isolated radical armed groups. What were those important Russian and Chechen political processes and events, among the organized forms of political violence presented during the Russian-Chechen conflict, which turned terrorism into an important Chechen tool? The result of my research can be summarized in the following:

- Before 1994 it became clear that the Russian leadership - without further risk of losing territory - the Russian Federation could not allow the secession of the both strategically and economically important Chechen territory. The international community did not support it either. This factor restricted the Chechen separatist movement from the beginning.
- During the first Chechen war, between 1994 and 1996, it was proven that the conditions of Chechen sovereignty were not provided. The Russian leadership's response to the Chechen aspiration for independence, during the first Chechen war, proved to be so brutal, that after the war neither Moscow nor the Chechen leadership had the chance of governing with consolidation for even a short period of time.
- The failure of economic reconstruction after the war, The Chechen political elite's mafia-like connections and inner conflicts, and the political elite's differing relationship with the independence of the republic and the Russians, caused such a social-political situation in Chechnya that made it possible for the Russian leadership to interfere again. The Dagestan incursion and the following apartment bombings played a key role in this situation. This time, the operation was legitimized in Chechnya by the Russian public (even if the appartement bombings could not be blamed on the Chechens evidently).
- Through the anti-terrorist operations, the Chechen society was attacked by the Russians for the second time within half a decade, and it forced the most radical wing of the separatist movement to use terrorist methods, and also inspired their use both in Chechnya and in other parts of the Russian Federation. It is important to note that the victims of these operations were mainly Russians and Russian-friendly members of the political elite (that can be regarded as a use of terrorist methods in the separatist fight and the civil war).
- The anti-terrorist operations, however, were not narrowed down to Chechnya only - considering the great number of Chechens who fled to the neighboring countries before the 1994-1996 war and the war period of the anti-terrorist operations of 1999- 2000. The expansion of the operation to Dagestan, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, fueled the discontent of the local societies.
- Its a paradox that while Moscow's Chechenizing politics and the Kadirov Klan, supported by the Russian leadership, managed to reach some kind of consolidation in Chechnya, the armed resistance - mainly with terrorist nature - branched out to the North-Caucasus region too.
- The opinion of the Chechen situation by the public was damaged because the changed relationship after September 11, 2001, and the politically counterproductive terrorist attacks like the hostage dramas in Dubrovka and Beslan. These events isolated the radicals for good,

who were weakened during the second Chechen war, without any other option but to emigrate or join the illegal militant groups.

- The Russian leadership intended to bring forth the North-Caucasian political violence not only with weapons but also by changing the Russian legal system. These changes provided the anti-terrorist authorities and violence organizations with plenty of rights and did not really hold up the brutal abuse of human rights during the fight against terrorism. Those who wanted to speak about these abuses publicly were threatened with punishment and revenge.
- The North-Caucasian Chechen resistance was mainly forced to use terroristic methods by the brutality of the Russian anti-terrorist operations and the region's ungovernability, due to the lack of consolidation. This can be observed in case of the Chechen female suicide bombers ("shakidas") who volunteered for the suicide missions mainly because of family tragedies, hopelessness and sorrow, while in some other cases, their engagement was pushed by local conventions (like the pressure of traditional revenge).
- Nowadays, for Russia, the biggest perspective of challenge is not the Chechen separatism or the North-Caucasian terror organization, but the more and more spectacular civilization differences that are only deepened by the events of the era of our research. And this bears the danger that, as a consequence of ungovernability, the North-Caucasian territory will turn into a kind of political black hole within the Russian Federation.

New scientific results

1. This paper, through statistic data and terrorism-literature, specifies the extent and the character of the phenomena of terrorism - along other forms of violence - in the Chechen conflict, and the role of the female suicide bombers.
2. By drawing a parallel between the region's political history and terrorism history it proves that the Chechen and North-Caucasian terrorism is primarily a response to the violent acts of the Russian side that were not less brutal than terrorism and struck the local societies.
3. Introduces and analyses the stages of that main process, through which, the separatist movement, widely supported by the public, became a more isolated but also more expanded (North-Caucasian) radical terrorist movement. It describes the role of the so called strategic terrorist operations in this process.

The possible use of research results in practice

The discourse: The history of the Russian-Chechen conflict. The role of terrorist methods and means in the Russian-Chechen conflict - because of its summarizing style - may be used as an auxiliary work in Hungarian scientific literature. The entire paper aims to provide information for those who are interested in the topic, giving them the possibility of learning in depth about a certain part - the changes of the political forms of violence in Chechnya - of the Russian-Chechen conflict. The political-history part of the paper can be used effectively in reference to Chechnya for teaching courses that deal with regional security and the Post-Soviet regions's political history and security. Because of its summarizing style, it can be a basic literature for those who would like to deal with the Russian-Chechen conflict in depth. The terrorism history part of the paper contains new information for those who are interested in the political forms of violence, terrorism and the relationship between the two. The part, dealing with the legal background, is useful for those who want to know more about counter-terrorism. Its point of view can bring forth a more differentiated approach of the relationship between terrorism and political violence. Based on all this, I recommend this paper as a support for the work of those who deal with security policy and for teachers and students of higher education.

List of publications from the topic:

Local, Hungarian, verified:

Respons to Terrorism, In. Új Honvédségi Szemle, Vol. LX., 2006/8., 133.p.

Freedom fighters or terrorists?, In. Új Honvédségi Szemle, Vol. LX., 2006/10., 52.p.

The real Lords of Chechnya during the years following the “anti-terrorist” campaign, In. Kard és Toll, 2007

Women as suicide bombers, In. Nemzet és Biztonság, Vol. II., Issue 3., 2009

Russia and democracy, In. Nemzet és Biztonság, Vol. II., Issue 5. szám, 2009

Terrorism, as a organized form of political violence in the Russian-Chechen conflict (I.), In. Nemzet és Biztonság V. évf., Issue 3., 2012

Terrorism, as a organized form of political violence in the Russian-Chechen conflict (II.), In. Nemzet és Biztonság V. évf., Issue 4., 2012

The Caucasus Emirate, In. Nézőpontok 2012/3

Local, foreign language, verified:

Women as suicide bombers, In. Aarms, Vol. 11., Issue 1.