

Insurgent Women

Female Combatants in Civil Wars

Darden JT, Henshaw A, Szekely O. *Insurgent Women: Female Combatants in Civil Wars*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press; 2019. ISBN 978-1-62616-666-0. 112 pages.

Review by COL (Ret) Warner "Rocky" D. Farr, MD, MPH

Do women go to war as members of non-state armed groups? Of course they do. The real questions are why and is it different from what drives men to the same actions and organizations? It is our current reality that female combatants exist all over the world. It is also reality that we know relatively little about who they are, what is their motivation to join, their roles within each non-state armed group, and what happens to them when group demobilization comes.

This book studies female participation in several different non-state actor armed groups. It also defines women's involvement in such wars at three different points in the span of conflict life: recruitment, participation, and resolution. It examines in detail the civil war in Ukraine, the Kurdish rebellion in regions of the Middle East, and the civil war in Colombia. It also touches more briefly on women in ISIS, Boko Haram, and Al-Shabaab.

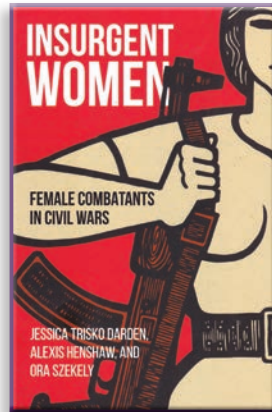
The Ukraine has a long history of female fighters going back to the Ukrainian guerrilla forces, which fought the Nazi and then the Soviets in and after World War II. It also has a countrywide manpower shortage to deal with.

The Kurdish forces have the highest number of female participants, greater than 40%. Kurdish forces in Syria, Iraq, and Turkey vary widely in their number and use of female soldiers, but many are in leadership positions.

In Columbia, FARC female fighters were first sidelined then much more active in the peace settlement than women were in any other revolutionary movement.

Conclusions drawn by the authors include:

1. There is no single profile of a female combatant.
2. Motivations for joining non-state armed groups and participating in violence vary among individual women, just as they do among individual men.
3. Women serve in a broad range of roles within many contemporary non-state armed groups, including as fighters.
4. The degree to which non-state actors appeal explicitly to women, especially in recruitment, is an outgrowth of women's participation in the group itself.
5. Women willingly participate in non-state armed groups even when these groups are hostile to or victimize women.
6. Female combatants face distinct challenges that need to be addressed in peace accords and in disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs.



This book is a quick read on an issue in play today in the Middle East. As the authors say, "Female fighters are a truly global phenomenon."