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Does Motherhood Mean Anything?

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Iran scored a huge publicity coup in the capture and release of 15 British sailors and Royal Marines in recent days. Iran has played this game before, and is likely to play it again. The tactic puts the nation directly into the headlines around the world — and that is the whole point.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad played the media like a musical instrument, greeting the captives just prior to their release. The Muslim world loved it. Tragically, the most damaging element of Ahmadinejad's media triumph was handed to him by the Royal Navy in the person of Leading Seaman Faye Turney, the only woman among the captives and the mother of a 3-year-old daughter. Her presence among the captives taken from the British patrol vessel gave Ahmadinejad the opportunity to make [this observation](#):

"You will know that among the detainees there is one lady who is a mother of a child. Why is it that the most difficult work like patrolling at sea should be given to a woman?"

"Why is there no respect for motherhood? Why does the West not value its women?"

Ahmadinejad's questions still reverberate around the Muslim world. Nothing could more effectively demonstrate the immorality of Western values before Muslim eyes than this — a mother of a little girl sent as a warrior.

As Kathleen Parker remarked in *The Washington Post*:

On any given day, one isn't likely to find common cause with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. He's a dangerous, lying, Holocaust-denying, Jew-hating cutthroat thug — not to put too fine a point on it.

But he was dead-on when he wondered why a once-great power such as Britain sends mothers of toddlers to fight its battles.

Driven by a fanatical ideology of feminism, the West has turned its back on a reality as basic as motherhood. We have adopted a new morality that insists — nature's obstinacy notwithstanding — that there is no difference between men and women. This produces mothers of babies and toddlers in uniform and in the killing zones.

Kathleen Parker sees what so many others miss:

Just because we may not "feel" humiliated doesn't mean we're not. In the eyes of Iran and other Muslim nations, we're wimps. While the West puts mothers in boats with rough men, Muslim men "rescue" women and drape them in floral hijabs.

We can debate whether they're right until all our boys wear aprons, but it won't change the way we're perceived. The propaganda value Iran gained from its lone female hostage, the mother of a 3-year-old, was incalculable.

It is not fashionable these days to suggest that women don't belong in or near combat — or that children need their mothers. Yes, they need their fathers, too, but children in their tender years are dependent on their mothers in unique ways.

There's not enough space here to go into all the ways that this is true, but children (and good parents) know the difference even if some adults are too dim, brainwashed or ideologically driven to see what's obvious.

Why the West has seen it necessary to diminish motherhood so that women can pretend to be men remains a mystery to sane adults. It should be unnecessary to say that the military is not a proper vehicle for social experimentation but is a machine dedicated to fighting and, if necessary, killing.

But the military, like almost all other institutions in this culture, has indeed been turned into the vehicles for social experimentation Kathleen Parker rightly resists.

After her release, Leading Seaman Turney claimed to have embarrassed Ahmadinejad for the fact that she had not seen her daughter during 13 days of captivity. She apparently failed to recognize that it was she who brought embarrassment upon herself through that comment. How can she complain about being separated from her daughter for days when she willingly separated herself from her daughter for much longer tours at sea?

According to *The Shropshire Star* [Britain], Leading Seaman Faye Turney commented about her daughter in an interview conducted just before her capture by Iranian forces:

In an interview, hours before she was captured, Mrs Turney spoke of her feelings for her daughter Molly and her devotion to her job.

She said: "She's getting more of a character each day. It's a shame I'm missing that but she's a top girl and will grow up to be a very reliable, independent, strong young woman, which is exactly what I want for her."

Yes, her absence is a shame. And so is the presence of mothers in combat zones, whether in British or American uniforms. What Iran did in capturing these hostages and playing them as media pawns was evil and reprehensible — and very effective. The moral weakness of the West was made all the more clear to the watching world, and our ideological fanaticism was open for all to see.

Not all see it that way, of course. Dani Garavelli, writing in *The Scotsman*, commented:

It makes no difference to point out that men have been leaving their wives and children to fight wars since the world began, or that women (some of them mothers) have played key roles in myriad conflicts without causing the collapse of civilisation. These commentators cannot see past their own cultural baggage. "How on earth could a mother - with all those centuries of nurturing behind her - leave a defenceless toddler for a battle zone?" they wail. "And doesn't Turney's capture, without resistance, just prove what we have been saying all along: that there can be no place for women in the military?"

In fact, the only thing the saga and the skewed response to it demonstrates is how entrenched paternalistic and sexist attitudes are among male opinion-formers.

So, nothing but "entrenched paternalistic and sexist attitudes" can explain why most people around the world think allowing mothers into combat is crazy?

Such convictions and customs are the very essence of civilization itself. This explains why, to many watching eyes around the world, Western civilization looks increasingly uncivilized.

