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Editor's Preface to the Spring Edition

Here at Elon University, we are extremely grateful to host *The Pi Sigma Alpha Undergraduate Journal of Politics*. We are proud to present the Spring 2022 issue and congratulate all authors published in this issue for their high achievement.

This publication seeks to highlight the intellectual curiosity that leads to innovative scholarship in all subfields of political science, scholarship that addresses timely questions, is carefully crafted, and utilizes diverse methodologies. We are committed to intellectual integrity, a fair and objective review process, and a high standard of scholarship as we showcase the work of undergraduate scholars, some of whom pursue questions that have been traditionally ignored in scholarship but that drive our discipline forward.

Following the lead of the American Political Science Review (APSR) Editorial Board, we are excited to publish research in the areas of “American politics, comparative politics, international relations, political theory, public law and policy, racial and ethnic politics, the politics of gender and sexuality and qualitative and quantitative research methods.” This publication also values the relationships formed through student-faculty collaboration and aims to build a culture of scholarship that expands beyond the college campus. We hope to encourage and empower students to seek out knowledge and pursue their potential, contributing to scholarship in a variety of disciplines.

This year, we thank our advisors Dr. Baris Kesgin and Dr. Aaron Sparks for their support, without which the issue would not have been possible. We would also like to thank the entirety of the Political Science and Policy Studies Department at Elon University, especially Dr. Laura Roselle; our Faculty Advisory Board; and all the students who shared their exceptional work with us this semester.

We are excited to present the Spring 2022 edition of the *Journal*. Thank you for your continued support and readership of our publication; we hope you enjoy the edition.

Sincerely,

The Editorial Board at Elon University

Submission of Manuscripts

The *Journal* accepts manuscripts from undergraduates of any class and major. Members of Pi Sigma Alpha are especially encouraged to submit their work. We strive to publish papers of the highest quality in all areas of political science.

Generally, selected manuscripts have been well-written works with a fully developed thesis and strong argumentation stemming from original analysis. Authors may be asked to revise their work before being accepted for publication.

Submission deadlines are September 15th for the Fall edition and February 15th for the Spring edition. Manuscripts are accepted on a rolling basis; therefore, early submissions are strongly encouraged.

Students may submit their work through Elon University's submission portal, found here: <https://www.elon.edu/u/academics/arts-and-sciences/political-science/psa-journal/>

Alternatively, students may email psajournalelon@gmail.com with an attached Word document of the manuscript. In the body of the email, students are asked to include their name and university, the title of the manuscript, and the closest subfield of political science to which their manuscript pertains (American politics, comparative politics, international relations, political theory, or policy studies). Due to the time committed to the manuscript review process, we ask students to submit only one manuscript per submission cycle.

Submitted manuscripts must include a short abstract (approximately 150 words) and citations/references that follow the *APSA Style Manual for Political Science*. Please do not exceed the maximum page length of 35 double-spaced pages, which includes references, tables, figures, and appendices.

The *Journal* is a student-run enterprise with editors and an Editorial Board that are undergraduate students and Pi Sigma Alpha members at Elon University. The Editorial Board relies heavily on the help of our Faculty Advisory Board, which consists of political science faculty from across the nation, including members of the Pi Sigma Alpha Executive Council.

Please direct any questions about submissions or the Journal's upcoming editions to the editors at Elon University: psajournalelon@gmail.com.

Contents

The Implications of Gender and the Islamic State: The Evolution of Female Roles in Iraq and Syria and Gendered Counterterrorism in the West..... 7
Makenzie DePriest-Kessler, Elon University

The Implications of Gender and the Islamic State: The Evolution of Female Roles in Iraq and Syria and Gendered Counterterrorism in the West

Makenzie DePriest-Kessler, Elon University

In 2014, the Islamic State gained global prominence after years of silently fighting in the Middle East. With images and reports of women being forced into marriage and motherhood, the Islamic State established itself as a global threat against Western security and democracy. A year later, female members of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria were reportedly being used as active fighters on the front-line, straying from the group's long-held conservative beliefs that women are meant only to fulfill subservient, domestic roles in the home. This paper offers how the role of women in the Islamic State has evolved in recent years to allow women to deviate from more submissive, traditional roles, to more operational and active roles within the organization. In addition, it seeks to illuminate the change in roles of women in the Islamic State and how the gender biases of Western counterterrorism have failed to account for female violent actors. Historically, women have held the roles of bride and nurturer, responsibilities of which follow traditional values and hold women to serve the male militants and bring up the next generation of fighters. Allowing roles previously held exclusively for men to be opened up to selected women is enticing for the Islamic States terror strategies while also a proving to be a problem for Western security measures.

INTRODUCTION

Prior to the rise of the Islamic State and the evolution of women in Islamist terrorist organizations, these groups were just men. Islamist terrorist groups were founded by men, operated by men, and made up of men who were committing acts of terror on the basis of religious motivations. Since the turn of the twentieth century, women have been progressively expanding their roles in societies all over the world, gaining opportunities in the workforce and among other societal structures, including terrorist organizations. As one of the most known and prominent terrorist organizations of contemporary times, the Islamic State¹ is on the radar of every Western intelligence agency. Since its rise to global prominence nearly a decade ago, the group has allowed women to take on roles that differed from previous militant Islamic terrorist groups including al-Qaeda and the Taliban. On December 2, 2015, the Inland Regional Center in San Bernardino, California was the site of a terrorist attack consisting of a mass shooting carried out, in part, by a woman who had pledged her allegiance to the Islamic State². This group has separated itself from the traditional mold of previous and other Islamist terrorist groups by allowing and even targeting women to join their fight. Studying the roles women hold in

the structure of the Islamic State tells an important story of the group, its members, and how Western intelligence and security perceives or, more accurately, does not perceive these women as external security threats to their nation.

The Islamic State poses the greatest terrorist threats to the West today, so it is vital to understand all the innerworkings of the group. Within the Islamic State, it has become evident that women are members that make up an increasing demographic. The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation reported in 2018 that of the 41,000 international members affiliated with the Islamic State, 4,761 were women (International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation 2018). However, even with the rising number of female participants in the organization, Western counterterrorism and national security policies have yet to be rebranded and adjusted to account for female attackers. As long as women are seen through gendered lenses as having no part in operational roles, the Islamic State will continue to exploit and wreak havoc on the larger international community through the use of women as frontline fighters (Agara 2015). With governments not viewing women as potential threats in the same way as men, many nations, including Western nations, find themselves at a higher risk of facing attacks. This paper seeks to explore the question of how the roles of women in the Islamic State have changed and

evolved over time. Additionally, this paper looks to understand how the prevalence and rise of women in the Islamic State has had implications on counterterrorism policies in the West.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Women in Terror

Since the mid-twentieth century, women have come to play a much more significant role in terrorism. Over the last few decades scholars have begun to more frequently address the presence of women in terrorist organizations, yet the literature regarding women and terrorism is still limited. The scholars of the existing literature offer two major insights into the dynamic of women and terrorism, with works that advance the roles that women have held in terrorist organizations and the reasons why women join. Tunde Agara has found that women have been involved in terrorist attacks carried out by a number of groups (Agara 2015). The identification of women as being active participants in violent uprisings, performing strategic, supportive, and combative roles, shows the versatility of the roles women have held in a number of organizations including the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Baader-Meinhof group (Agara 2015). Cindy Ness has noted that from modern terrorism's beginnings, women have been more likely to play active roles in ethno-separatist groups in comparison to religious ones. The secular group Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) of Sri Lanka actively used women as insurgents and suicide bombers in their campaigns during the 1980s and 90s, whereas the religious group of Hamas during this same time limited women to occupying supporting roles from a distance as a vocal supporter or family member of an active male participant (Ness 2008). Mia Bloom and Ayse Lokmanoglu have observed that the face of terrorism is changing, even in groups with the most patriarchal ideologies like al-Qaeda. Women in al-Qaeda held particularly traditional and non-violent roles of teacher, translator, fund-raisers, and organizers, yet a handful of women did actively engage in violence (Bloom and Lokmanoglu 2020).

Laura Sjoberg and Caron Gentry have noted in their work that women's involvement in terrorist organizations has grown rapidly in a number of positions including support personnel, logistics, and as attackers. The Shining Path, a Peruvian terrorist organization, was found to have a number of women as part of their central committee and to have played numerous roles as teachers disseminating the group's philosophies and as fighters (Sjoberg and Gentry 2011). Sue Mahan and Pamala Griset have observed that female terrorists have performed many different roles and activities in revolutionary and guerilla groups. Sympathizing roles (cooking, sewing, and other household chores) and "warrior" roles are activities on two ends of the spectrum that scholars have observed women participating in (Mahan and Griset 2008). Griset and Mahan, as part of this "warrior" role, have identified female suicide bombers as having been an important part of

the arsenal of the LTTE and the Black Widows of Chechnya, and even more recently al-Qaeda. Adding to the conversation, Jakana Thomas has found that female attackers and suicide bombers are more deadly in nations where women have limited roles in society (Thomas 2021). Their role in the organization contrasts greatly with the typical role of women in that society. Karla Cunningham has observed that despite the patriarchal roots of the many terrorist groups that originate in the Middle East, the Syrian Socialist National Party (SSNP) and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) utilized women in a number of attacks including as suicide bombers (Cunningham 2007).

Feminism, Gender, and Terror

The intersection of gender and terrorism has become an area of growing interest in the last couple of decades. Women are thought to be innocent and passive beings, which makes it interesting when they act as active members of terrorist organizations, as it goes against everything being a "woman" is. Most of the literature regarding women and terrorism has been analyzed through a patriarchal lens, rather than through a feminist lens. Feminist theory in international relations highlights how gender effects the international community as women are important and visible agents in political, economic, and social processes (Smith 2018). Analyzing women and terrorism via a feminist lens challenges assumptions about feminine and masculine gender roles that determine what men and women should (socially) do. Laura Sjoberg argues that gender analysis is crucial in analyzing conflicts and that literature regarding conflict as "genderless" is not only inaccurate but cripples understandings of war and conflict (Sjoberg 2014). Sofia Patel and Jacqueline Westermann observe that countering violent extremism measures does not adequately integrate feminist or gender perspective into counterterrorism strategies when it comes to developing policies and procedures regarding female terrorists (Patel and Westermann 2018). Many counterterrorism measures fail to recognize women as players in international terrorism as they see women as nurturing wives and mothers, not violent terrorists. Placing a feminist theory lens on terrorism highlights that women have and will deviate from the gender roles that society subscribes to them as women. Laura Sjoberg, Grace Cooke, and Stacey Neal have argued that the standards of what it means to be "a woman" is still subordinate to what it means to be "a man," (Sjoberg, Cooke, and Neal 2011). When *not* placed in a feminist lens, most societal notions of what it means to be a woman places emphasis on peacefulness, rather than violence (Agara 2015). Sjoberg et al have observed that the nature for society to associate women with "traditional" roles has to do with the concept that women are *assumed* to belong in them rather than ones that defy typical notions of what it means to be "a woman," (Sjoberg, Cooke, and Neal 2011). The feminist theory violates conventional notions of gender while also acknowledging women to be independent, autonomous actors.

Motivations to Join the Islamic State

It is vital to understand and acknowledge the motivations for women to join terrorist organizations as a way to grasp how and why they have the roles that they do. Jammie Bigio and Rachel Vogelstein have found that while some women were forcibly enlisted into violent terrorist groups, many voluntarily joined for reasons including ideological commitment and social ties. In the case of women joining Boko Haram in Nigeria, they did so to receive a Koranic education, the only education offered where the group holds power, in a nation where girls rarely have the opportunity to finish their secondary school education (Bigio and Vogelstein 2019).

In regards to women in the Islamic State, a handful of scholars have analyzed the mobilization of women into the organization. There have been a number of reasons uncovered by scholars that answer why a woman would voluntarily join the Islamic State. Erin Saltman and Melanie Smith have identified a number of push and pull factors that lead women through radicalization into the Islamic State. Feeling isolated socially or culturally, including questioning one's identity and uncertainty of belonging within a Western culture may lead an individual to join ISIS. In many Western societies, blatant forms of discrimination unfortunately exist, and many individuals that identify as a member of an ethnic minority group are likely to have experienced some form of verbal, if not physical, abuse on the basis of their ethnic identity. The discrimination that many Muslim women face for donning a niqab or a hijab, fuels anger and even hatred for the West, resulting in women joining the caliphate as a way to wage revenge, but also to be around women that make them feel like they belong. Women are moved to join the Islamic State as a means of sisterhood and to contribute to a new society based on religious duty (Saltman and Smith 2015).

The romanticization of life and adventure in joining ISIS is a major recruitment factor to attract women to the organization. Many of the women mobilized into the organization are young and join as a way to seek adventure in leaving their homes to travel to new places (Saltman and Smith 2015). Women have also been known to join based on the promise of meaningful romance in the form of being a wife to one of the organization's fighters. Marina Shorer has found that women are mobilized into ISIS for a number of reasons including familial ties and the promise of sisterhood. This idea of sisterhood and family is especially effective in recruitment from women in the West. Many Western Muslim women question their own identity as teens and young adults. The propaganda disseminated by ISIS lures the young women in on the belief that they would be given a family by joining the organization (Shorer 2018). Having been socialized in Western societies, most of these women have lived in a constant battle of choosing between living the "modern" Western values they know and retaining traditional Islamic principles that their families' value. Debangana Chatterjee and Alice Martini have found that women join the caliphate to become brides of the

militants. Terrorism analysts at London's International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation estimated that in 2014 there were some 30 European women who had traveled to Iraq and Syria with the intention of marrying members of ISIS and other militant groups (Baker 2014). In 2013, a Scottish woman fled Glasgow to marry an ISIS fighter in Syria and just a year later in 2014, twins Zahra and Salma Halane left Manchester to join the Islamic State (Chatterjee 2016).

Lastly, scholars have identified survival as a motivation for why women join ISIS. When the Islamic State raids towns and villages, they leave them in complete ruins. Oftentimes, male family members are killed, leaving the surviving women to be targeted by ISIS. In order to stay alive, these women join the group for their own protection. In territories controlled by the Caliphate, resources and infrastructure are exploited by the group. The organization's power and control make joining a viable solution for those deprived of public facilities and services including banks and grocery stores. Many women, as a survival mechanism, turn to support the caliphate for access to basic necessities, such as food, water, and shelter (Spencer 2017). In war-torn areas, ISIS provides a safe haven for poor, widowed, and alone women. Joining is a matter of survival and a battle for basic necessities (Gan et al 2019). Yet over time, women who join based on survival become full members and take up active roles in the organization.

METHOD/ARGUMENT

The modern evolution of the female role in Islamist terrorist organizations and the failure of subsequent policy changes by the West is an example of the lack of urgency to solve the problem of gendered counterterrorism strategies. By utilizing a case study and focusing on the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, relevant conclusions can be drawn about the organization that currently poses the greatest national security threat to the West. In order to answer how the roles of women in the Islamic State in the regions of Iraq and Syria have changed, data collection via existing/archival data and published ISIS documents, videos, pictures and other propaganda will be used. The analysis of existing data will include journal articles and books by experts on the Islamic State, and interviews and news articles by journalists. Documents that will be analyzed are original materials released and published by the Islamic State. These include manifestos, photos, and videos. In analysis of this data, inductive analysis will be used to explore and draw theories and make generalized conclusions as why the role of women in ISIS has evolved. Using inductive analysis allows for the specifics of the data to discover patterns and themes, and eventually develop theories around why women have joined ISIS or, if it does not support the theory, why they have not. The Islamic State as a case study is unique when going up against a group like al-Qaeda, as scholars found surprisingly few points of comparison when it comes to the presence of women in the groups. The Islamic State plays an interesting

role in understanding how the roles of women have evolved in Islamist terrorism, specifically groups like ISIS that hold patriarchal values of the highest degree.

Scholars that do not study the Islamic State could be interested in this subject because the feminist and gendered perspective can be viewed as a case study for adjusting counterterrorism measures in response to more violent female operatives in a global climate where terrorism has become a frequent phenomenon. The PLO, terrorist organizations that find a way to operationalize women find a way to threaten and successfully carry out attacks against the West. Although terrorist organizations that do not mobilize women for attacks still carry out dangerous attacks, the organizations that mobilize women are harder to thwart because of the unassuming presence of a woman as an attacker. The recognition and understanding of the evolution of the roles of women in the Islamic State could be significant to scholars of post-9/11 terrorism or scholars of gender-based violence. The Islamic State's use of women in a number of different roles expands their threat of violence globally, while also facilitating the conditions for an increase in female participation and the greater selection of more dangerous roles than previously seen. This paper will analyze the changing role of women and the implications of these changes on Western counterterrorism policies in a case study of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. The changing roles of women in the Islamic State are an important case study in the larger field of international terrorism as it tells a regional story of gendered evolution and the West's failure to respond to changing times.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

As of 2018, the United States Defense Department had estimated there were roughly 15,000 members of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria ("FY2019_LIG_OIRREPORT.Pdf" 2021). The members of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria are not all nationals of the two nations. Of the few thousand members of the organization, many come from abroad (Chechnya, Tunisia, Libya, Saudi Arabia, and Western nations including the U.S. and the European Union) to join the fight (Chaliand 2016). In understanding the role of women in ISIS and even the organization itself, it is necessary to think of it in two different contexts: pre-2014 and post-2014.

The Islamic State was birthed as an extension of the global jihadist movement in the late 90s and the turn of the century. At the same time, its social origins are rooted in a specific Iraqi context, and, to a lesser extent, in the Syrian War (Gerges 2014). Founded by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi³ in late 1999, the group originated as Jamaat al-Tawhid wa-I-Jihad (JTJ) (Zelin 2014). The group was created on a union between an Iraqi-based al-Qaeda offshoot and members of Saddam Hussein's Iraqi Baathist regime (Gerges 2014). Shortly after its creation, al-Zarqawi and the group pledged its allegiance to al-Qaeda and began participation in the Iraqi

insurgency following the United States' invasion of Iraq in 2003. It then underwent a series of name changes from 2004 until its present use of ISIS beginning in 2013. After the initial invasion, the group became insignificant on the global scale, in part, due to the U.S. troop surge in 2007. When U.S. troops pulled out of Iraq in 2011, the Islamic State reemerged from the shadows and began to establish and set forth the foundations for the modern version of itself (Cameron et al 2019). This came at a time of increasing instability in Iraq and Syria as a result of the end of the Iraq War and the start of the Syrian War. In April of 2013, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi⁴, leader of the Islamic State, officially changed the group's name to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in the last event before the group was launched into global prevalence the following year (Cameron et al 2019). Historically, in context with Islamic culture and religion, "a woman's primary role has been as a mother, sister, daughter, and a wife of Muslim men at war," (Sjoberg, Cooke, and Neal 2011). Women, under ISIS, were initially required to play a more submissive role as dictated by ISIS and its publication of the *Women in the Islamic State: Manifesto and Case Study* (Gan et al 2019). In the earliest years of the organization, women were actively discouraged from joining. Prior to 2014, women as part of the Islamic State was unheard of.

The year that most scholars acknowledge as the rise of the Islamic State in regards to international prominence was 2014 when the expansion of its power and ability became apparent on a global scale. This was also the year that women had begun to take active roles in the organization. Al-Baghdadi began an offensive that ended with ISIS taking the city of Mosul, Iraq's second most important city (second to the capital of Baghdad) (Chaliand 2016). By 2015, the Islamic State was increasingly carrying out attacks beyond the borders of Iraq and Syria. It was during this time that an uptick of attacks on the West occurred. Of these attacks was the notable 2015 Paris Attacks (Steafel 2015). By December 2017, ISIS had lost almost 95 percent of the territory it had occupied including its two biggest strongholds in Raqqa and Mosul (Cameron et al 2019). During these years (2014- present), the Islamic State was forced to change some of their practices regarding women in the organization. Because opposition forces were scaling up the number of attacks and the power of these attacks, size in regards to members and area conquered began to dwindle. This time period led to ISIS actively recruiting women for a variety of reasons including growing their population and membership (Spencer 2016). Due to changing counterterrorism measures and a lack of male fighters, ISIS was forced to let women become frontline fighters, which highlighted the evolution of women in ISIS from traditional roles to more operational roles.

Prior to 2014, women were not rendered operational by ISIS leaders. The Islamic State was purely focused on upholding Koranic teachings, winning the fight against Shia militants and establishing a Sunni majority region. However, by the time the group reached its peak in 2014, the U.S. and other

Western forces had begun launching small scale attacks and localized airstrikes to push back against the Islamic State under the campaign “Operation Inherent Resolve” (Cameron et al 2019). This forced the Islamic State to turn to women to begin carrying out daily tasks and functions to keep the organization running. The Islamic State thus began a campaign to recruit women as a means of survival for the group. The fight against the Islamic State by U.S. led forces, forced the hand of senior officials resulting in a change in tactics. This seemingly minor event created an avenue for women to gain positions in the Islamic State and is the reason there has been a shift in the roles of women, highlighting how they have changed from the beginning of the Islamic State to its most recent form.

ANALYSIS

Prior to 2014, women had not been mentioned in any material disseminated by the Islamic State. Based on material released by the group and existing research, classifications of the roles of women can be divided into two categories: domestic and operational. The domestic roles that women hold tend to be more traditional and in line with Koranic teachings. These responsibilities include mother, wife, and caretaker to name a few. Operational functions of women includes using women as active frontline fighters, of which had not been utilized by the Islamic State until 2014 and the groups rise to global notability.

Domestic Roles

Released in 2015 by the Islamic State, “Women in the Islamic State: Manifesto and Case Study” clearly lays out the vision of the roles women are expected to hold in the group. This document outlines the fundamental roles of women and the exceptions to the rules. According to the manifesto, it is a fundamental function of a woman to serve her husband and children. Women are expected to perform traditional functions as wife, mother, and nurturer. According to the manifesto, “The greatness of her position, the purpose of her existence is the Divine duty of motherhood,” (Winter, trans. 2015). Women, according to the manifesto, are mothers first and foremost, as this position is essential to the growth of the Caliphate. Women are expected to raise the next generation of jihad fighters and teach those children about Allah’s ultimate destiny (Spencer 2016). These women are considered the spiritual protector of Islam, shielding their families and homes from the superficiality and falsehood that they believe the West is trying to push onto them (Gan et al 2019). In a data set in which 72 former female members of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria had information collected, roughly 15 percent of the women had reported being a mother and another 48 percent disclosed that they were wives of fighters (Spencer 2016). The emphasis put on women as mothers is evident in the Islamic State’s *Dabiq*, a magazine and media outlet used to disseminate propaganda and messages from 2014 to 2017. In the 11th issue of *Dabiq*, released in

September of 2015, the group states that the women living under the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria should, “have loads of children,” (ISD 2016). This issue is more focused towards women than previous issues, with it urging women to care for their children, as these children are the future of the group.

Part of the decree to women from the Islamic State is that they are forbidden from leaving the home. Women are expected to remain indoors hidden and veiled, while they undertake chores such as providing meals, laundry, and cleaning the house (Spencer 2017). The Manifesto declares that for women, there is no responsibility greater for her than that of being a wife to her husband (Winter, trans. 2015). Women are expected to become wives as soon as possible when entering the group, with girls as young as nine being married to grown fighters (Davis 2017). In the later issues of the *Dabiq*, women are given examples of how to please their husbands. Issue 12 declares that wives should be positive of polygamy and respect the wishes of their husbands in doing so (ISD 2016). Women in this role are vital members of the community, as they are said to keep the spirits of the fighters high during times of conflict (Bloom 2015). Part of being a dedicated wife under the Islamic State means that women are often seen as sexualized objects and are used to satisfy the sexual needs of their husbands. Members of the Islamic State justify the use of women as “sexual slaves” as a way for men to be protected from sin (“ISIS in Their Own Words” 2014). Although these women are highly regarded as fundamental for the survival of the Islamic State, many of the roles they are expected to fill are more for the pleasure and nurturing of others rather than for themselves.

The roles of wife and mother are expected of most, if not all, of the women that join the Caliphate. The sheer number of women that hold these traditional domestic roles highlights the importance of women’s roles as traditional and ideological supporters of the Islamic State (Spencer 2016).

Operational Roles

Even though women are ushered into these domestic, more feminine roles, not all of the women are limited to these roles. In the more recent years of the Islamic State the group has upped their female-focused propaganda by showing women fighting on the frontlines (ISD 2016). Women have recently been allowed to hold positions in more operative and front-line roles. Some of these roles encompass offensive combat operations and defensive military activities. In the manifesto released by the Islamic State, there was a specification that allowed women to leave the house and participate in combative roles. The manifesto states that, “if it has been ruled by fatwa that she must fight, engage in jihad because the situation of the *ummah* has become desperate,” thus giving permission for women to partake in combative front-line roles (Winter, trans. 2015). In waging jihad, women may be appointed by leaders in the group to perform certain combative tasks including laying mines and monitoring the enemy (Bloom and Lokmanoglu 2020).

The Islamic State began to gradually allow women to hold these operative roles beginning in 2014 with the creation of the Al-Khansaa brigade, an all-female police unit that consists predominantly of Iraqi and Syrian women (Spencer 2017). The unit's main purpose is to enforce Sharia Law and to punish women for committing offenses that break the laws. The women in the Al-Khansaa brigade have several different functions along with enforcing Sharia Law in the territory held by ISIS. These functions include overseeing brothels of enslaved Yazidi women, administering punishments, and to search women at ISIS checkpoints (Vonderhaar 2021). The brigade is known for their brutal violence against women who have been identified as committing offenses against Sharia Law, including the case of a twenty-four-year-old woman who had a bear trap torture device placed on her chest after Al-Khansaa members found her to have violated modesty laws for breastfeeding in public (Counter Extremism Project 2021). Photos released by ISIS and obtained by Reuters and the Mirror in 2015 show women clad in burqa's wielding AK-47s in a training exercise held for members of the Al-Khansaa brigade (Leonard 2015). These photos are evidence that women under the Islamic State are beginning to hold more combative roles within the organization. The Islamic State has also been found to have trained some women to be violent killers. In 2016 it was reported that the Islamic State had created an all-female sniper squad affiliated with the Al-Khansaa brigade (Gan et al 2019). Iraqi News and The Sun reported that an Iraqi man had been killed by one of these female snipers in 2017 and the Iraqi Army took to twitter to confirm the use of the female snipers in the attack (Crouch 2017). These attacks were the beginning of the Islamic State gradually introducing the use of women in more violent attacks. Attacks of this kind peaked at the Battle of Mosul in the summer of 2017 when ISIS sent out dozens of female fighters to fight against U.S. forces (Gan et al 2019). Propaganda disseminated by the Islamic State has shown the use of women in combative action with images and videos of women firing weapons on the front-lines of the fighting. Released in February of 2018, a propaganda video shows clips of a woman firing a rifle over a bank of dirt and later in the video a truck of five women bearing rifles was shown to be flying an ISIS flag and driving into battle (Dearden 2018). These propaganda videos acknowledge the use of women outside of the home as combatants, something that the group had never publicly confirmed before. The evolution of women from strictly domestic household roles to being allowed to function as a combatant in recent years highlights a potential change in strategy from the individuals higher up in the group's hierarchical structure.

In addition to operating on the front-lines, operative roles include women disseminating propaganda and recruiting new members into the organization. The Islamic State has become heavily reliant on female members to lead social media recruitment campaigns. With women leading the recruitment mission, the Islamic State has been able to lure in and recruit

over 20,000 foreign militants into joining the organization. In a study of 72 female former members of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, 55 percent of them had held a role in recruiting (Spencer 2016).

The shift to allowing women to hold more operative recruiting roles is seen online and on social media. In 2015, at the height of its power, women in the Islamic State were posting 100,000 pro-ISIS tweets on social media daily (Gardner 2015). These tweets were mainly targeted towards girls and young women, attempting to persuade them to give up their current lives and join the Caliphate. "Women in the Islamic State: Manifesto and Case Study" by the all-female Al-Khansaa brigade is a piece of propaganda that highlights the role women play in the recruitment of others into the Islamic State. Female members of the group have tweeted about practicing shooting guns and have even posted photos of their guns (Davis 2017). With women using these tweets to show themselves participating in action they are able to lure in young women who want to participate in combat.

In addition to showing women in combat, the women who have roles in recruiting and creating propaganda use various social media platforms to glorify their lives and create emotive messages to rally and convince other women to join ISIS (Gan et al 2019). Women who do hold roles as recruiters have created online support groups using social media messaging apps WhatsApp and Kik to aid women in coming to a decision to travel to Syria and Iraq to join the Caliphate (Counter Extremism Project 2021). The role of women in these recruiting roles has become indispensable to the Islamic State, as the recruitment of others is the lifeline for the organization in a time where their power and territory is being fought against by the US and its allies.

IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNTERTERRORISM

With the increasing use of female operatives as both suicide bombers and on the front-lines in combat by secular and religious groups, terrorists organizations have succeeded in using Western gender stereotypes to their advantage (Bloom and Lokmanoglu 2020). Counterterrorism efforts across the globe have failed to give sufficient thought to the idea that women can represent an untapped and unused resource in the spread of extremism and radicalization. Many Western nations, including Australia, have demonstrated that their current approaches to combating violent extremism do not adequately integrate gendered perspectives (Patel and Westermann 2018). Gender stereotypes suggesting that women are peaceful and nonviolent actors are still prevalent in many states today. These gender biases appear to influence the counterterrorism policies in a number of states, including states in the West. These biases deeply affect American security policies. The terrorist profile used by the US Department of Homeland Security has applied only to men, highlighting that even capable counterterrorism programs have blind spots relating

to the presence of women and violence (Thomas 2021). The Islamic State's increasing use of women as militants has created a problem for counterterrorism strategists and policies in the West. Women are not naturally associated with terrorism and violent attacks; therefore they have not been considered serious threats which has allowed them the space, power, and ability to move about facilitating attacks while avoiding detection by authorities. Women make for strategic and unassuming suicide bombers because they are unexpected perpetrators. Despite the potential threat from women participating in combat, they are often overlooked by security agencies as possible perpetrators because violent women interrupt the assuming gender stereotype that women are innocent bystanders (Sjoberg and Gentry 2008). Knowing that women are more frequently joining operational roles that include combative operations and recruitment can place intelligence and counterterrorism agencies ahead of attacks, as they will be more aware that women are potential threats and active militants and not innocent bystanders.

Beyond changing counterterrorism policies, nations need to look inward on their repatriation policies for women associated with ISIS. With the Islamic State on a decline, more women and children are looking return to their native countries, many of those being in Europe and even the U.S. It is imperative that governments implement a policy that investigates the women who are seeking to come back, as with women having a role as perpetrators it is possible, they are looking to attack on their home soil. France, Germany, and Britain have already announced they will deal with ISIS affiliated women coming from abroad on a case-by-case basis (Bryson 2018). If women have had a history of being a violent actor in the organization (i.e. combatants and front-line fighter) it needs to be considered before being allowed to return home. With all we know about women partaking in active combatant roles, it is plausible that they would be willing to carry out attacks once they got back to their native countries. Some western nations have already begun sorting out policies for returning women with ISIS affiliation. An atmosphere of counter-terrorism hypervigilance globally may discourage governments from showing flexibility in dealing with their own nationals (Crisis Group 2019). Nations aware of the threat that the women hold may be less likely to let them back in the country. It's imperative to look at the roles that women held and the circumstances that they came to be part of the organization. While some women choose to join willingly, other women are forced into it for a number of different reasons. For countries to gauge which women are true actors of violence and which ones were there for matters of survival, addressing this on a case-by-case issue is in the interest of both national security and the well-being of women who are innocent and want to come home and start anew. Women who willingly and actively participate in violence should be held accountable, and counterterrorism policies should account for that.

Understanding the multifaceted use of women in the Islamic State is vital in creating effective policies to guarantee the safety of citizens globally. With newfound information regarding these women and their functions, intelligence agencies and policy makers need to treat their active participation in combative and violent operations for what it is: a threat to national security and safety globally (Agara 2015). Until Western governments fully acknowledge the involvement of women in the Islamic State as active participants and actors and adjust their counterterrorism policies to account for women committing acts violence, the Islamic State will continue to use women to exploit the gender biases adopted by society by creating mass hysteria through violent acts of terrorism by using women in these combative violent roles.

CONCLUSION

In the last half decade, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria has had a distinct shift in how women are utilized in the organization. From its creation in late 1999, women were expected to hold strictly conservative and traditional roles in the organization. Beginning in 2015, there was a shift in the dynamic in the Caliphate and women began to be seen and acknowledged holding roles in active operational positions including recruitment and combat. While women still hold subservient roles as mothers and wives, they have been allowed to actively participate in combat roles as dictated by the "Women in the Islamic State: Manifesto and Case Study" written by the Al-Khansaa brigade in 2015. In the manifesto women are permitted to leave the house to wage jihad if a fatwa is issued indicating that the Islamic State has had some evolution in how women are utilized and expected to function. Women are no longer just passive, supporting, background figures, but have become largely portrayed as heroic wives who fight alongside their husbands and as nurturing mothers who are raising the next generation of jihadi warriors (Gan et al 2019). The presence of more women in operational roles means that children born into the Islamic State could have two parents actively fighting on the front-lines, potentially influencing them to fully commit to jihad at younger ages. The use of women in the Islamic State has many implications from counterterrorism to boosting morale in younger generations. Women are crucial in growing the population of jihadi loyalists so that the Islamic State not only survives, but also expands beyond the current generation. Women in the Islamic State that hold roles in recruitment are key because these women not only disseminate propaganda to attract new members but they also have the fundamental task of maintaining the Islamic State's longevity and power. These women are responsible for bringing in thousands of members, local and foreign, to build the organization's ranks and population. The role of these women creates the foundation for the entire Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. Recruitment of other women

by current members of ISIS, creates incentive for more male members to join under the promise that they would receive a wife and marriage. A direct byproduct of more women in the organization is more men, meaning that the Islamic State gains power both militarily and in numbers. The more members the Islamic State has, the more legitimacy it can lay claim to, and the more likely men and women will continue to be willing to join the ranks of the organization.

The evolution of women into operational roles is another vital piece of the Islamic State's growth and existence. The advantages for the Islamic State to use women as combatants is tremendous as it places strain on the counterterrorism policies of the West due to their lack in gendered perspectives and accounting for women as violent operatives. Donned in Burkas, which are required under Sharia Law enforced by the Islamic State, women have the ability to carry weapons and bombs undetected. Due to the gender biases that plague Western security and counterterrorism, women are more likely to not be suspected of being active members of terrorist organizations, catching the world and governments off guard when they commit acts of violence in the name of terrorism. The Islamic State allowing women to join the frontlines in Iraq and Syria has shown to have strengthened the battlefield when women were sent with men into battle. The combination of both male and female fighters puts the Islamic State at a numerical advantage when it comes to regionalized battles, allowing them to successfully keep their territory and acquire more.

The domestic roles that women in the Islamic State hold are equally as important for the survival of the organization as newly held operational roles. The fundamental role of women in the Islamic State is to be a mother. Women raising and nurturing the next generation of ISIS fighters and supporters is imperative for the survival of the group. In this role, mothers preach the Koran and teach jihad to the children as a way to prepare them to sacrifice their lives for the Islamic States purpose. In this domestic role, women are expected to keep their husbands and current fighters satisfied and happy as a way to boost morale and fighting spirits. By pleasuring their husbands, the Islamic State believes that the women are rewarding the male militants for their fight against the enemy. With their spirits high they are more likely to give everything to the organization including, the ultimate sacrifice of death which is considered the most heroic action of these militants.

Under the Islamic State women are used in several different roles, mainly in domestic occupations and a select few in operational roles on the front-line. By utilizing women in roles recognized as traditionally masculine, the Islamic State puts foreign governments and their counterterrorism policies to shame for not accounting for women as violent actors. These women have proven to be paramount for the survival of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. Once a mere speck of importance to the Islamic State, women have proven

to be a key part and an imperative piece to keeping the Caliphate alive. Without them, ISIS would most certainly not exist, nevertheless be one of the most threatening terrorist organization the world faces today. ■

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NOTES

- 1 The Islamic State is also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). For purposes of consistency, this paper will use Islamic State and ISIS to refer to the organization.
- 2 The 2015 San Bernardino attack in California was carried out by a married couple Rizwan Farook and wife Tashfeen Malik, who opened fire at coworkers in a banquet room. In the end, 14 people were killed and 22 were injured. Malik had pledged her allegiance to ISIS the day of the attack.
- 3 Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was a Jordanian Jihadist credited with founding ISIS. He was killed in a targeted killing by a joint U.S. force in 2006
- 4 Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was an Iraqi terrorist and leader of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria from 2013 until his death in 2019. He notably put ISIS on the international map and is credited with its expansion as he was leader of the organization when it reached its peak from 2014–2016.