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THE ISLAMIC STATE OF IRAQ AND THE LEVANT'S STRATEGIC TREATMENT AND USE OF WOMEN

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Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War and the tragic events of September 11, 2001, the field of

security studies has forcibly undergone a paradigm shift in thinking about threats to security not

only emanating from other states, but also from non-state actors. This shift in focus from

conventional state actors to rogue non-state elements has been necessary to address the rapidly

evolving threats posed by terrorist groups (that may or may not receive support from state

sponsors or government officials). Another component of this shift is in the nature of the new

groups, many of whom use an extremist form of Islam to motivate and justify their operations,

recruitment efforts, and use of violence; they are part of the global rise in Islamic terrorism.[1] The

new conceptual frameworks and shifts in the focus of security studies have worked to develop a

deeper understanding of the attraction of highly personalized forms of Islamic practices and help

to inform our responses to this growing phenomenon. These responses, however, continue to

have a significant blind spot when it comes to understanding the nexus of gender and Islamic

terrorism. While there have been a number of studies conducted by Western scholars and

security studies experts on the roles women can play within terrorist organizations, there is little

formal research on how Islamic terrorist groups systematically, strategically, and often

simultaneously, utilize and victimize women to further their goals.

This paper aims to draw increased attention to the changing roles of women within such

terrorist organizations, and ultimately to fill some of the gaps in our understanding of the

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[1] We recognize that religiously motivated terrorism (i.e., the "fourth wave of terrorism") has been a key international issue since 1979, according to David Rapoport, a UCLA political theorist and expert in terrorism studies (Rapoport, 2002). For the purposes of this paper we differentiate between ISIL and secular and state-backed terrorist groups, particularly Palestinian Liberation Organization factions such as the Al-Aqsa Martyr's Brigade and Iranian-backed Shi'a militias, which also heavily utilize Islamic concepts and would fall "within Islam" per the definitions used later in the paper. These groups often have differing influences that do not allow for a simple comparison of their treatment and use of women.

relationships between women and terrorist groups by looking at the role of women within the newly established Islamic caliphate known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (hereafter ISIL).[2] By taking a critical look at the evolving relationship between women and terrorism within this specific group, we hope to draw a more complete and organic picture of the strategic roles women can play within Islamic terrorist organizations and the significant impact they have on terrorist organizational behavior. Our aim is that by providing insight into how ISIL both utilizes and victimizes women, security studies professionals will be in a better position to evaluate, analyze, and respond to new terrorist threats holistically and, more immediately, be better equipped to incorporate women into their strategies to counter-ISIL and other similarly structured terrorist organizations.[3]

Our Research

In researching women's involvement in the current conflict in Iraq, we noticed that beginning in 2005 Al-Qa'ida in Iraq (AQI) began to differ fundamentally from other Al-Qa'ida (AQ) affiliates regarding its treatment and use of women. We also took note of how since 2013

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[2] The authors recognize the ongoing debates within academic, media and policymaking circles regarding the nomenclature associated with this group. To maintain consistency with our other defined terms, we have chosen to identify the group as ISIL following the lead of the United States' government. Other popularly used aliases for this group include: The Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), simply the Islamic State (IS), and Daesh (a term derived from the acronym of the organization's name in Arabic and considered a pejorative by ISIL).

[3] The number of men and women living in ISIL territory is unknown. According to official Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) estimates, the number varies from 20,000–31,500 male fighters; this estimate is up from 10,000 just six months prior. National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) official estimates suggest approximately 22,000 foreign fighters have traveled to Syria. Research suggests that women make up roughly 10 percent of the foreign fighters in the region. Given the uncertainty surrounding the number of male fighters, foreign fighters, domestic recruits, internally displaced people, and refugees in the region, we refrain from estimating the number of women involved. For further information see Nicholas Rasmussen, "Current Terrorist Threat to the United States," Hearing before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, February 12, 2015, Washington, D.C; and AFP, "CIA Says Number of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria Fighters Has Swelled to between 20,000 and 31,500," *The Telegraph*, September 12, 2014.

ISIL has incorporated women into its proto-state functions and how this model appeared to differ from AQ's historical position on women's role in jihad.[4] The contrast in ISIL's very public and systematic treatment and use of women vice AQ's model of gender inclusion presents a puzzling phenomenon because of the historical reticence of AQ-affiliates to incorporate women. Why has ISIL in its evolution since 2005 taken a different approach to female terrorism? Why have ISIL's own policies towards the treatment and use of women strategically shifted since 2013?

In defining our research methodology, we focused on the following sub-questions to elucidate the changing nature of ISIL's treatment and use of women:

- What is the history of the relationship between women and terrorist organizations in Iraq and how does it influence ISIL's current treatment and use of women?

- What is the role of women in ISIL and has this role changed since the organization seized control over large swaths of territory and began establishing the operational and institutional functions of a state circa 2013–4?

- Is ISIL's treatment of women strategic to the organization as a whole and, if so, what impact does it have? What implications are there for counter-ISIL strategies?

These questions, while specific to ISIL by design, are intended to determine what new trends, if any, exist regarding the way Islamic terrorist organizations treat gendered issues. By searching for answers to the above questions, we hope to determine if in its interactions with women ISIL

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[4] We argue that AQI, the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), and ISIL are fundamentally the same organization that transitioned from an insurgent organization to an increasingly bureaucratic governing body beginning in   2002–3. ISIL's largest expansion of its bureaucratic and governance functions took place in 2013–14.

has created a new model or adopted an existing model for terrorist groups' incorporation of women.

Methodology

- We conducted a series of interviews with leading scholars and activists on women's roles within Islamic movements to gain theoretical and practical knowledge on why women join extremist movements, how they are recruited, and what roles women take on in these organizations. Seven interviews were conducted in total, three with terrorism scholars in the United States and four with prominent human and women's rights experts in Iraq. One Iraqi expert provided us with a written report (in Arabic) on women who have joined ISIL and their motivations for doing so. For security concerns, all interviews and correspondence with experts and activists are considered strictly confidential.

- We compiled a database of ISIL material with references to women, utilizing the group's wide social media presence and abundant open source online publications. We focused on official ISIL media when available in order to demonstrate the organization's official views towards women and their role in building the "Islamic State." By conducting content analysis of ISIL's official and unofficial material, we hope to highlight the organization's policies towards women and their role in the quasi-state functions of ISIL from a perspective not yet studied by the many academic and policy institutions looking at ISIL members' social media accounts.

- As background, we include a brief literature review on women in terrorist organizations, with a focus on women in Islamic extremist movements. We utilize the existing literature to establish a framework for studying women as terrorists, highlighting the roles women have traditionally taken on in global terrorist groups. Competing priorities and

ideological differences do not allow for a simple comparison between ISIL and many of these terrorist groups, however. While we reference other groups such as Hamas and Hizbollah in our research, we refrain from making a direct comparison between these groups and ISIL.

Complications

While the topic of women in ISIL has garnered significant international media attention, particularly Western women's involvement with the group, very few people are closely looking at this issue from a strategic security perspective. We reached out to a number of U.S. scholars with expert knowledge of ISIL or women's involvement in terrorism but received positive responses from only three individuals. On the Iraqi side, we faced extreme difficulty in connecting with people knowledgeable on these issues due to the dynamic and complicated nature of their living in a de facto war zone and the lack of subjects to study. Given the circumstances, we were pleased with the responses we received and the information we were able to gain through the interview process.

When taking on this research topic we were confronted with major concerns regarding the safety of our subjects and ourselves as well as the ethical questions surrounding communication with suspected ISIL members or potential recruits. Thus, due to the extremely violent nature of ISIL and the law enforcement and intelligence sensitivities associated with the group, our advisors from George Washington University strongly recommended against interviewing or otherwise directly engaging ISIL members or sympathizers either in third countries or via the internet. Unlike many other researchers focusing on ISIL's ability to recruit within Western populations or the daily activities of life in ISIL-held territories for example, we did not engage directly with ISIL affiliates. For this reason, we were only able to receive

information published in open sources, including from the group itself and its members, ISIL sympathizers, and those opposed to it. For verification purposes, our emphasis remained on official and verifiable material published by ISIL media affiliates and the internationally recognized media covering this issue.

Another concern when gathering material regarding ISIL is that much of the passive collection of data from the thousands of social media users who support ISIL cannot be considered credible without significant corroboration. Yet, this is difficult as highlighted by a Brookings Institute study of 20,000 pro-ISIL Twitter accounts.[5] On top of this, we faced an issue with the relative inability to safely interview non-ISIL affiliated women within ISIL-controlled areas, given the organization's monitoring of internet cafes and generally degraded or unsecure communications systems.[6] We understand these complications present a less than ideal research environment and, for this reason, we do not claim this to be an authoritative study.

Significance

Acknowledging and understanding how and why women support terrorist organizations is a key step towards developing effective strategies to counter them. If, however, counterterrorism campaigns fail to acknowledge female associates and operatives because of poor situational awareness or cultural or personal biases, the chance of successfully contesting a terrorist group such as ISIL is severely degraded. David Kilcullen's previous work on counterinsurgency reinforces this notion by stressing the importance of women's influence.[7] He

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[5] J.M. Berger and Jonathon Morgan, "ISIS Twitter Census: Defining and Describing the Population of ISIS Supporters on Twitter," *The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World Analysis Paper,* No. 20 (2015).
[6] Rami Ali, "ISIS Rules in Raqqa," *Al-Monitor*, February 26, 2014, (Accessed February 28, 2014).
[7] David Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency, (*New York, NY: Oxford University Press Inc., 2010).

points out that in traditional societies, women are hugely influential in forming the social

networks that insurgents rely on for support. He states, "win the women, and you own the family

unit. Own the family, and you take a big step forward in mobilizing the population."[8] This

concept is bidirectional, and both insurgent/terrorist and counterinsurgent/counterterrorist

strategies can use this approach to better understand and more fully exploit the complete

battlespace. As Sahana Dharmapuri highlights, "Women are the key eyes and ears when political

violence swells in their communities. But the failure to recognize and support them as political

actors undermines our ability to counter violent extremism."[9] Therefore, academics,

policymakers, and military strategists struggling to create and implement a coherent strategy to

counter ISIL require a full and comprehensive understanding of its calculated use of women if

they are to develop a strategy that addresses these issues.

Of particular note, most available strategies for countering ISIL since its mid-2014

expansion do not yet incorporate women, or if they do, only briefly address women's issues

within the broad categories of recruitment or tribal relations.[10] An example of this is the February

2015 Washington Institute for Near East Policy special conference on countering ISIL that

included the Director of the NCTC, the Special Presidential Envoy to the Coalition to Counter

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[8] Ibid.

[9] Sahana Dharmapuri, "Take Women Seriously in Fight against ISIS" Women's E-News, November 21, 2014, (Accessed, March 2, 2014).

[10] Jean-Pierre Filiu, James F. Jeffrey, and Michael Eisenstadt "Defeating ISIS: From Strategy to Implementation" Policy Watch 2315, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, September 23, 2015; Jessica D. Lewis, "The Islamic State: A Counter Strategy for A Counter State," Middle East Security Report 21, Institute for the Study of War, July 2014; Max Boot and Jeane Kirkpatrick, "Defeating ISIS," Policy Innovation Memorandum No. 51, Council for Foreign Relations, November 14, 2014; Martin Dempsey and Chuck Hagel, Testimony Before the House Armed Service Committee: U.S. Strategy Against ISIS, November 13, 2014; Marc Lynch, "The Tourniquet: A Strategy for Defeating the Islamic State and Saving Iraq and Syria," Center for New American Security, October 2014; Brian Katulis, Hardin Lang, and Vikram Singh, "Defeating ISIS: An Integrated Strategy To Advance Middle East Stability," Center for American Progress, September 10, 2014; Office of the Press Secretary "FACT SHEET: Strategy to Counter the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), The White House, September 10, 2014.

ISIL, the Director of the Center for Countering Violent Extremism, and various other senior policy officials. Although the panel discussed the multi-faceted and nonmilitary aspects of confronting ISIL, they largely ignored women and their influence on this process, suggesting that there is a strategic blind spot among senior government officials, policymakers and some researchers regarding women in ISIL.[11] Our research seeks to fill this gap by highlighting the strategic role women have in ISIL's governance since 2013.

A Note on Terms

Given this paper seeks to elucidate the changing role of women within terrorist organizations and will conclude with a discussion of policy options within the context of the U.S. efforts against ISIL, we have chosen to define most of our terms following the conventions of the U.S. government so that they are most useful to our audience. As such, we will refer to international terrorism as defined by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in 18 U.S.C. § 2331 as activities with the following three characteristics: (1) involve violent acts or acts dangerous to human life that violate federal or state law; (2) appear to be intended (i) to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; (ii) to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or (iii) to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping; and (3) occur primarily outside the territorial jurisdiction of the U.S., or transcend national boundaries in terms of the means by which they are accomplished, the persons they appear intended to intimidate or coerce, or the locale in which their perpetrators

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[11] Washington Institute for Near East Policy, "Taking the Fight to ISIL: Operationalizing CT Lines of Effort Against the Islamic State Group," February 2, 2015, Washington, D.C.

operate or seek asylum.[12] Additionally, we will refer to ISIL as a terrorist organization vice an insurgent organization, per the State Department's listing of the organization as a Foreign Terrorist Organization since 2004 in accordance with the Immigration and Nationality Act.[13]

We recognize the ongoing public debate within the U.S. policy community about whether ISIL or AQ-affiliated organizations are "violent extremists" or "Islamic terrorists." For the purposes of this paper, we decided to treat ISIL as being within the Islamic tradition, albeit a fringe element within a unique socio-political environment that has had dramatic effects on the organization's support base, ideology, theology, and actions. A key reason for this is that ISIL understands itself as *the* Islamic organization in the world at this time and a literal revival of early Islamic forms of governance following the death of the Prophet Muhammad and the struggle over his successor.[14] To deny its members' understanding of themselves as Muslims or attempt to justify the organization as primarily a nationalist movement that co-opts Islam to justify its actions, we believe, is to fundamentally misunderstand the organization by failing to accept or acknowledge the group's self-created identity. Additionally, per Bassam Tibi's definition of Islamism, we believe it is accurate to consider ISIL an Islamist organization in that it reinvents—or heavily manipulates for its own purposes—Islamic heritage and traditions while attempting to remake the world in its own pre-conceived notions.[15] ISIL's theology relies heavily on the concept of din-wal-dawla in governance, strict Wahhabi interpretations in religious practice, and narrow definitions of Muslims and people of the Book to define military targets, as

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[12] "Material Support to Terrorism Prohibition Enhancement Act of 2004," United States Code of Federal Regulations, 2006 Edition, Supplement 3, Title 18 (Accessed November 14, 2014).
[13] United States Department of State, "Foreign Terrorist Organizations," United States Department of State, August 20, 2014 (Accessed November 14, 2014).
[14] Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, *"Salah al-Jum'a fi al-Jami'a al-Kabir bil-Madina Mosul,"* Mosul, Iraq, *Mu'asisat ul-Furqan*, July 4, 2014.
[15] Bassam Tibi, *Islamism and Islam*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press), 2012, p. 3.

described by Abu Umar al-Baghdadi in 2007.[16] The authors did not want to "adopt the procedure of *takfiri* Islamists themselves who excommunicate from the Islamic community any Muslims who disagree" with our admittedly external perception of what Islam is or should be.[17] This should not be seen as the authors legitimizing ISIL's interpretations of the Quran, *hadith*, and *sunna* above centuries of Islamic jurisprudence to the contrary; that is a theological discussion external to the intended goals of this paper.

To avoid confusion when referring to "security functions" or "security operations" we will use the Department of Defense definition of security as "measures taken by a military unit, activity, or installation to protect itself against all acts designed to, or which may, impair its effectiveness."[18] Given ISIL's highly militarized style of governance, this definition seems to be particularly applicable to both ISIL's security checkpoints and patrols, as well as its internal security operations focused on finding spies and dissidents.[19] By definition, security in this context includes ISIL's use of women to perform searches of other women or to enforce its strict implementations of morality laws regarding female dress and travel restrictions, which are fundamental to the group's attempts to maintain control over all aspects of society.[20] The definition, however, does not include the use of suicide bombers, which are more aptly referred

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[16] Abu Umar al-Baghdadi, *"Qul Inni Ala Biyana Min Rabi" Kitaibat al-Jihad al-Ilami*, March 2007.
The authors note that other forms of Wahhabi Islam are prevalent in Saudi Arabia, the Arab Gulf states, and other Sunni areas where for a variety of reasons, including but not limited to the strength of state security apparatuses and greater economic opportunities, Islamic extremism, and ISIL in particular, has not taken hold to a degree that threatens governance.
[17] Tibi 2012, p. 7.
[18] United States Department of Defense, *Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, Joint Publication 1-02, November 8, 2010 (as amended through January 15, 2015).
[19] "And Wretched Is That Which They Purchased," *Al-Furqan Media,* March 10, 2015 (Accessed March 14, 2015); Hadil Aarja, "Al-Raqqah Wilayat: Al-Iqtiad Ila al-Jinna Bil Silasil: Al-Muhajirin wa Nis'ahum Yuhakimun Bi-Hudd l-Sayf." *Al Hayat,* March 21, 2014 (accessed October 12, 2014).
[20] Kathy Gilsinan, "The ISIS Crackdown on Women By Women," *The Atlantic*, July 25, 2014, (Accessed September 17, 2014).

to as military operations. Under these terms, ISIL has previously used women in military operations and currently uses women for domestic security functions.[21]

Background: Women and Terrorism

Generally, a large portion of the field of security studies and U.S. government policy under-emphasizes the dynamic and complex roles women can play within terrorist organizations. According to Dr. Marc Sageman, a forensic psychiatrist formerly with the CIA, the notion of a woman perpetrating acts of violence "runs counter to Western stereotypes and misconceptions of male terrorists; we assume that women are second-class citizens and rely on the men to run the organization."[22] Rather than challenge our misconceptions of women in terror networks, Western analysts are only beginning to look carefully at women in terms of their support to the insurgents, influence in the community, personal/familial networks, or group or individual identities in the same manner as men.

Most of the existing literature on women and terrorist or insurgent groups leaves out the agency of women in joining and operationally participating in jihad. For example, Kim Cragin and Sara Daly, RAND Corporation analysts and leading scholars on this issue, argue that the main differences pertaining to women as terrorists relate not to differences between women and men, or secular women and religious women, but rather the differences in the minds of the *male*

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[21] Several ISIL leaders are known to have detonated suicide vests as a defensive action to avoid capture; however, according to several studies, none indicate women having attempted to evade capture by detonating their suicide vests, although some detonations may have been premature compared to the intended target.
[22] Quoted by Farhana Ali, "Muslim Female Fighters: An Emerging Trend" *Terrorism Monitor*, Vol. 3 Issue 21, November 2005.

leadership of terrorist groups—i.e., "are men willing to put women on the front lines or not?"[23] How terrorist leaders decide to use female members in pursuit of their strategic objectives is crucial to understanding women's roles within the organization. For example, Hizballah's reticence to use female suicide bombers, but promotion of women as fundraisers and political vanguards is indicative of differing organizational gender norms from what we are seeing with ISIL.[24] Cragin and Daly suggest there are two contexts for terrorist group leaders' decision-making regarding the use of women—strategic thinking and opportunism.[25] Terrorist groups employ strategic decision-making surrounding the use of women to courier messages, to more easily hide suicide vests under conservative clothing, or to provide plausible cover for male operatives seeking entrance to secure areas.[26]

At the organizational level, current knowledge suggests that women predominantly play the role of logistician in worldwide terrorist groups. Twenty-one of twenty-two terrorist groups studied by Cragin and Daly employed women in this capacity.[27] As logisticians, women commonly smuggle weapons and funds, and act as couriers, protectors/handlers of operatives, or decoys. An examination of terrorist leaders' choices in how to deploy women suggests a belief that not only are women less suspected and vulnerable to inspection by security services, but also that these positions are usually exposed to less danger than operatives, and thus are more suitable for women.[28] In organizations that operate more freely and openly, or in fact provide governance, such as Hizballah in southern Lebanon or ISIL in Raqqah, eastern Syria and

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[23] Cragin and Daly, *Women as Terrorists,* Praeger Security International, 2009, p. 12.
[24] For a brief summary on women in Hizballah see Cragin and Daly 2009, p. 4.
[25] Ibid, p. 17.
[26] Ibid., p. 110; Ibid., p. 21.
[27] Ibid., p. 105.
[28] Ibid., p. 21.

northern Iraq, women also have increasing responsibility in governmental functions, particularly in education and women's social issues.[29]

The role of recruiter is also common for women in terrorist groups. Two patterns emerge here: first, family or friendship networks encourage new recruits to join the group and second, terrorist groups seek out specific individuals with skills they need.[30] To date, numbers suggest that the vast majority of terrorists are men and are recruited by men,[31] but women have been engaged in this process as well. Karla Cunningham focuses on women's abilities to recruit other members, particularly other women, via the Internet.[32] In comparison to other terrorist groups, Cragin and Daly suggest that the historical trend of women recruiting women is less common in terrorist groups associated with AQ; this applied even in Iraq up to 2008, according to the U.S. military.[33] This trend, however, does not seem to fit with our current knowledge of ISIL recruitment tactics in which we have found women to be heavily involved (see section on Recruitment Policy).

The literature suggests that women also serve as propagandists to run web sites and social media accounts that disseminate information, official publications, and terrorist group narratives. This is a role we found particularly dominant in our research regarding women within ISIL (see section on Recruitment Policy). Women form their own chat groups, disseminate propaganda on behalf of the organization, and solicit membership over the web.[34] An example is the online AQI-affiliated *Al-Khansaa* magazine for women; it includes articles on how to prepare for jihad

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[29] Tina Wolfe, "Women of Hezbollah: Growing Discontent May Fracture Loyalties," *World Politics Review*, September 6, 2007; Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi, "Archive of Islamic State Admin Documents" January 27, 2015.
[30] Cragin and Daly 2009, p. 53.
[31] Ibid., p. 41.
[32] Karla Cunningham, 2007, "Countering Female Terrorism," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism,* 30:2, pp. 113–29.
[33] Cragin and Daly 2009, p. 41.
[34] Ibid, p. 47.

as well as how to shape the next generation of children for AQI's fight against the West.[35] In the

past two years, ISIL has adopted this practice in numerous platforms such as all-female

Facebook groups, female-run Twitter accounts and ask.fm sites specifically answering women's

questions on jihad and travel to ISIL-controlled territory.[36]

The existing and extensive literature on women in suicide operations suggests that both

secular and Islamist terrorist leaders deploy women as suicide bombers in response to

counterterrorism pressure to either avoid scrutiny from security services or because male recruits

are not available, as Mia Bloom and Anat Berko explain.[37] Current evidence suggests that

secular/nationalist groups, such as the al-Aqsa Martyr's Brigade, are generally more willing to

utilize women as suicide bombers than Islamist terrorist groups.[38] However, once an

organization, secular or religious, uses women it is difficult to retreat from it as a tactic until the

strategic counterterrorism situation allows for an increase in male recruitment or greater freedom

of movement for male operatives. This is demonstrated by AQI's use of female suicide bombers

in the mid-2000s and the group's cessation of the tactic following the withdrawal of U.S.

counterterrorism pressure in 2011.

Studies reveal a variety of profiles for female suicide bombers. According to Anat Berko,

an expert on Palestinian female terrorists, suicide bombers in Palestine are often unmarried or

widowed, young, have an above-average education, with some having deep personal connections

[35] Kilcullen, p. 11.
[36] Aryn Baker, "How ISIS Is Recruiting Women From Around the World," *TIME*, September 4, 2014;
Katie Zavadiski, "Meet the Female Recruiters of ISIS," *New York Magazine*, September 4, 2014 (Accessed
September 5, 2014).
[37] Anat Berko, *The Smarter Bomb: Women and Children as Suicide Bombers*, (Rowman and Littlefield Publishers
Inc.: Plymouth, 2012).
[38] Mia Bloom, *Bombshell: Women and Terrorism* (University of Pennsylvania Press: Philadelphia, 2012) p. 22–23.

to recruiters specializing in suicide operations.[39] This contrasts starkly to the profile of female

suicide bombers in Iraq, whom Mia Bloom describes as often coerced or even physically forced

into the operations.[40] One Iraqi expert on women's activism and human rights pointed out that

most Iraqi female suicide bombers suffered from familial problems, including having family

members killed or kidnapped during the Iraq War, or that they had been imprisoned and

radicalized in American and Iraqi jails during the occupation.[41] The interviewee stated that the

social pressures on widowed women or the shame placed on women who had experienced sexual

violence resulted in their inability to earn an income or provide for themselves. This, she said,

contributed to their willingness to engage in suicide operations—"Society ends her before she is

willing to end herself, this is even better if it is for an honorable cause."[42] Another Iraqi

interviewee stated that joining ISIL offered psychological stability for women who had suffered

from prisons, war, hunger or displacement and that by taking an active role in the war these

women feel their existence has meaning.[43] An American clinical psychologist who focuses on

political violence and militant jihad cited physical and emotional trauma as a leading motivator

for women's involvement in terrorist organizations and suicide operations.[44]

      Within Sunni jurisprudence, some non-ISIL aligned thinkers in the salafi-jihadi

ideological debate have modified their stances on women's active participation in violent jihad in

recent years. No longer are militant activities a domain reserved for men in theory. Hassan Abu

Haniya, an Amman-based analyst of Islamic groups, notes that jihadist ideology has moved

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[39] Berko, 23; Bloom, 128.
[40] Bloom, 216.
[41] Interview E.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Interview G, translations are the author's own.
[44] Interview B

toward the acceptance of women's participation in armed actions.[45] He writes that while "the traditional jihadists limit women's participation in jihad to supporting militant men in activities such as nursing, teaching, and moral support, the new ideologues have begun to mention female participation in armed actions."[46] In fact, the late leader of AQ in Saudi Arabia, Yusuf al-Uyayri, in 2002 was among the first ideologues to encourage women to join jihad, citing multiple women who physically fought alongside or otherwise supported the Prophet Muhammad and his companions during their military engagements.[47] Within the AQ sphere of influence, Umaymah Hassan, the wife of Ayman al-Zawahiri, in response to her husband's 2008 claim that "there are no female members of al-Qaida" asserted that while women did not fight in Afghanistan, they played an integral part in raising children in the ways of jihad.[48]

ISIL's Historical Use of Women as Suicide Bombers

The origin of what is now ISIL and the organization's policies toward women is the product of both an increasingly fundamentalist Sunni Islam within Iraq and the emergent leadership of the late Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, whose real name was Ahmad Fadil Nazih al-Khalaylah, in the early-2000s.[49] As described by Hassan Hassan and Michael Weiss, Zarqawi traveled to Iraq in late 2002 with the general support, but not at the direction, of AQI leadership

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[45] Murtad Batal al-Shishani, "Is the Role of Women Increasing in Al-Qaeda," *BBC*, October 07, 2010, (accessed October 14, 2014).
[46] Ibid.
[47] Yusuf Bin Salah al-Uyayeri, "The Role of Women in Fighting the Enemies," At-Tibyan Publications, 2002; Brenda Opperman, "Hawks, Doves, and Canaries: Women and Conflict," *Small Wars Journal,* August 2014.
[48] Umaymah Hassan, Risala Ila al-Ikhwat al-Muslimat, December 2009.
[49] Hassan Hassan and Michael Weiss, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*, New York: Regan, 2015, Loc. 463 of 4871.

to facilitate the fighting against the impending U.S. invasion.[50] Zarqawi directly shaped the ideological and strategic direction of what was then AQI into a more brutal, sectarian and takfiri-centered organization. He also played an important role in the initial authorization and use of female suicide bombers.[51] This is probable for two reasons. First, the unprecedented nature of the use of females in operations within the AQ-inspired strain of salafi-jihadism and AQI jurisprudence would almost certainly require an approving fatwa from Zarqawi himself or a senior Sharia judge who answered directly to Zarqawi. Second, the use of a female suicide bomber would not fit within the established notion of commander's intent used by local military commanders planning operations because AQ had not previously used women in such a role.[52] Notably, the timing of the first female suicide bombing in Iraq was just six weeks prior to the November 9, 2005 Amman bombings which were directed by Zarqawi and employed a woman, Sajida al-Rishawi. This indicates Zarqawi's explicit approval of the tactic.[53] Additionally, as Mia Bloom argues, Muriel Degaque's suicide operation (the only European female suicide bomber in Iraq) on November 9, 2005 is further evidence of Zarqawi's approval of female suicide bombers.[54]

In its transition from AQI to the Islamic State of Iraq to ISIL, the group had employed up to 80 women for suicide operations before 2012, when the practice began to wane.[55] There are two compounding influences that ended ISIL's use of female suicide bombers: the end of the

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[50] Ibid., Loc. 389 of 4871.
[51] Bloom, 209.
[52] Webb, Murphy, and Nealen, 15.
[53] Ibid; Anthony Cordesman, *Iraq's Insurgency and the Road to Civil Conflict: Volume 2*, (California: Praeger Security International: Westport, 2008), p. 689.
[54] Bloom, 223.
[55] Speckhard, Anne, *Talking to Terrorist,* Advances Press (2012) p. 63; Bloom, 148; "Iraq's Female Suicide Bomb Recruiter" *BBC*, February 4, 2009 (Accessed January 13, 2015).

U.S. occupation and associated decrease in counterterrorism pressure, as well as an incredibly

high turnover in the organization's leadership, which solidified the Iraqi-ness of ISIL's leaders.

Three interviews with Iraqi experts reinforced the point that suicide operations were a result of

foreign influence in Iraq despite the group's use of primarily Iraqi women;[56] evidence suggests

that as foreign leadership decreased, particularly with ascendancy of the first truly independent

Iraqi amir Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in late 2010, so too did its use of female suicide bombers.[57]

Bureaucratizing Women's Affairs

ISIL's rampant bureaucratization is an important paradigm through which to understand

its policies towards women, both its own and those of "other" groups. The evolution of ISIL's

policies towards women was most profound as ISIL transformed itself from AQI to the Islamic

State of Iraq in 2006 when it attempted to set up a shadow government with "ministers" and

"governors" in the various Iraqi and Syrian governorates.[58] The extreme form of this

bureaucratization is the group's establishment of the "Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries,"

which continued in 2014 legislating how fishing can be conducted in ISIL-controlled

territories."[59] This, while comical to some, demonstrates quite usefully that the group's

bureaucratic and militaristic governance dictates most every aspect of the group's operations or

life in ISIL-controlled territory. The most senior leaders are almost certainly not consulted on

minutiae of running local governments or military operations. Large strategic decisions,

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[56] Interviews D, E, F.
[57] Hassan and Weiss, Loc. 1791 of 4871.
[58] "Islamic State of Iraq Announces Establishment of the Cabinet of its First Islamic Administration in Video Issued Through al-Furqan Foundation," SITE Institute, April 19, 2007 (Accessed January 12, 2015).
[59] Ibid; Hassan and Weiss, Loc.3368 of 4871.

however, such as the re-establishment of slavery or permissibility of female law enforcement details, are elevated to the overall sharia and shura councils, particularly considering ISIL's formal endorsements of this in its officially published media.[60]

ISIL's bureaucratized and top-down approach to governance is the framework we seek to unpack when explaining how ISIL interacts with and treats gendered issues. Instead of simply viewing women's affairs within ISIL as opportunistic and tactically effective (as is the common refrain regarding AQI's use of female suicide bombers), our research seeks to elucidate how ISIL systematically incorporates women into its modus operandi.

Recruitment Policies

There has been a concerted change in ISIL's recruitment and use of women since the organization's establishment in 2003. Until 2013, the group actively discouraged women from joining. Instead, women were instructed to show their support by fundraising and encouraging men to fight, very similar to the AQ model of female contribution to jihad. ISIL's need for female recruits increased substantially after the organization took control of a significant portion of territory between December 2013 and its establishment of the caliphate after Mosul fell in June 2014. As the focus of the group shifted from small-scale terrorist attacks to state building, the need for females became increasingly apparent. Most of the women affiliated with ISIL are restricted to performing domestic chores such as cleaning and cooking, with a pamphlet written in early 2015 noting that "the role of women is inherently 'sedentary,' and that her responsibilities lie first and foremost in the house, except in a handful of narrowly defined

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[60] "Modern Day Slavery," in "A Call To Hijrah," *Dabiq Vol. 3*, August 2014.

circumstances."[61] ISIL now also has a need for female doctors, nurses and teachers to help run and expand its state functions. Sasha Havlicek, founder of the London-based Institute of Strategic Dialogue, suggests that recruiting women is a huge component in expanding ISIL's footprint; increasing female recruitment helps build the idea that the group is about more than violence—it is constructing an Islamic state.[62]

In addition to gaining the de facto support of a large portion of Sunni Arab women in the territories it seized, ISIL also employs strategic recruitment practices to increase the number of women joining its organization from areas in Iraq and Syria outside of its current control. According to one of the Iraqis we interviewed, a top-down recruitment strategy involves requiring any young man wishing to join their ranks to bring a number of his female relatives with him to marry jihadi fighters.[63] This policy has the simultaneous effect of reinforcing social or communal relations within ISIL-controlled territories and serving as a preventative measure against desertion in order to reunite with family. It also acts as a recruitment strategy for single, young men who are promised a wife and guaranteed a sexual partner if they join the organization.

ISIL engages women to encourage recruitment via a number of means from official and semi-official publications to unofficial ad-hoc contacts by women already associated with ISIL on social media. In doing so, the organization employs several narratives to appeal to a variety of women, particularly Muslims who have to some degree begun to associate with ISIL's ideology

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[61] "Women of the Islamic State: A Manifesto on Women by the Al-Khansaa Brigade" translated by the Quilliam Foundation, February 2015, p 7.
[62] Carolyn Hoyle, Alexandra Bradford, and Ross Frenett, "Becoming Mulan: Female Western Migrants to ISIS" Institute for Strategic Dialogue, January 2015; Sasha Kaplan, 2014, "'Jihadi Brides': Young British Women are Among Islamic State's Newest Recruits," *The Washington Post*, September 10.
[63] Interview D.

as well as individuals not inherently predisposed to ISIL's narrative. Beginning with Abu Bakr's

predecessor, Abu Umar al-Baghdadi, ISIL has promoted and emphasized the idea of freeing

Muslim women from the lands of the unbelievers in order to protect them.[64] This key message

permeates ISIL's messaging to Muslim men and women and is now intertwined with a new

concept of the mandatory hajj, or pilgrimage, to the new caliphate in ISIL-controlled territory to

be required of all believers to serve the new caliph. Islamic tradition requires all Muslims—male

and female—to make the hajj to Mecca at least once in a believer's lifetime, but ISIL explicitly

links emigration to join the caliphate to the Hajj to Mecca.[65] ISIL laid the groundwork for this

policy in *Dabiq*, its most important foreign messaging platform. Written primarily for Western

Muslims, in its third issue ISIL laid the groundwork for theologically justifying the necessity for

emigration to ISIL-controlled territory in Syria and Iraq. In its eighth issue an ISIL-affiliated

woman using the nom-de-guerre Umm Sumayyah al-Muhajirah specifically wrote to Muslim

women around the world mandating emigration despite the associated challenges.[66] The article

admits women leaving for ISIL-controlled territory will face numerous hardships, such as

"harassment" by law-enforcement, the martyrdom of husbands, and deaths of children; however,

in every case she casts the burdens as minor sufferings necessary to fulfill a religious mandate

and help build the Ummah.[67]

ISIL has two distinct tracks for recruitment of foreign men and women: a formal attempt

at recruitment through official publications and informal networks of individuals in or associated

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[64] Abu Umar al-Baghdadi, *"Qul Inni Ala Biyana Min Rabi"* Kitaibat al-Jihad al-Ilami, March 2007. This speech was republished by ISIL in December 2014 under the title "Hadhi Aqidna," literally, "This Is Our Doctrine."
[65] "Hijrah to Sham is from the Millah of Ibrahim," in "A Call To Hijrah," *Dabiq Vol. 3*, August 2014; Umm Sumayyah al-Muhajirah, "The Twin Halves of the Muhajirin," in "Sharia Alone Will Rule Africa," *Dabiq Vol. 8*, March 2015; "Al-Mar'a fi al-Dawla al-Islamiya: Risala Wa Taqrir," Saraya al-Khansa al-Ilamiya, January 2015.
[66] Umm Sumayyah al-Muhajirah, 35.
[67] Ibid.

with ISIL who are active on social media and maintain or seek out new personal relationships

with possible recruits. These two tracks are marketed towards different groups depending on

one's affiliation with ISIL's ideology. For instance, ISIL official media, such as *Dabiq* or

speeches by Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, calls upon Muslims, particularly those with specialized

skills, to emigrate to ISIL in the Levant or to its various affiliates and appeals to Muslims who

have bought into ISIL's ideology to a greater degree.[68] In contrast, the informal recruitment

mechanisms are more effective with individuals who are less committed to ISIL's ideology and

are instead looking for a meaningful affiliation, which ISIL fighters and associates can then

exploit.

    ISIL and its supporters specifically target women, Muslim and non-Muslim, who they

believe are marginalized within society. The recruiters seek to exploit their social and economic

marginalization as they reach out to disaffected youth seeking purpose in their lives. An

American researcher and expert on female terrorists stated in an interview that ISIL appealed to

vulnerable young women looking for the opportunity to reinvent one's self through the group.[69]

This argument is supported by ISIL propaganda promoting the purity of women and the

opportunity to join a community of like-minded peers within an Islamic utopia. An Iraqi

interviewee reinforced this ideal, stating that "relationships within ISIL's society are

characterized by solidarity and togetherness" and that ISIL provides a sense of belonging to these

women.[70] For some female recruits, the prospect of becoming a jihadi bride is also very

appealing and is a key message in ISIL's recruitment narrative to young women seeking a place

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[68] Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, "Fayqutiluna wa Yuqatiluna" Mu'asisat al-Furan al-Ilami, March 12, 2015; "Hijrah to Sham is from the Millah of Ibrahim," in "A Call To Hijrah," *Dabiq Vol. 3*, August 2014.
[69] Interview B.
[70] Interview G, translations are the authors' own.

within society. Widows of martyrs have a special place of honor within Islamic communities, as have mothers of martyred sons.

The Role of Foreign Women

ISIL's strategy of recruiting women seems to be working effectively as demonstrated by the scores of Western (mostly European) and Arab women seeking a place in the organization. The number of western women who have joined ISIL is unknown, although by late 2014 analysts estimated that the numbers included at least 70 French, 60 British, 70 German, 35 Dutch and 20 Belgian women.[71] The number of Middle Eastern, North African, and South Asian women who have traveled to ISIL-controlled territory is almost certainly higher. The number of American women who have attempted to join ISIL remains much smaller than those from European countries.[72] Either due simply to distance, expense, assimilation practices, or the strength of our counterterrorism apparatus, America is not experiencing a problem on the same scale as that of Europe when it comes to its citizens, male and female, fleeing to ISIL held territory.

The United Nations and the NCTC estimate that less than ten percent of the 20,000–22,000 foreign fighters, including 3,400 Westerners, who have joined ISIL by March 2015 are female.[73] The number of women, while only in the hundreds to possibly low thousands, is significant to the organization's claim it is building a global caliphate.[74] Whereas foreign male

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[71] "Mehr Als 70 Deutsche Frauen in IS-Gebiebt Ausgereist," *Zeit Online*, March 29, 2015 (Accessed April 01, 2015); Steven Erlanger, "In West, ISIS Finds Women Eager to Enlist," *The New York Times*, October 23, 2014 (Accessed November 02, 2014).

[72] Nicholas Rasmussen, "Current Terrorist Threat to the United States," Hearing before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, February 12, 2015, Washington, D.C.; Dina Temple-Raston, "Two Women Arrested In Bomb Plot, American Al-Qaeda Member To Face Charges," National Public Radio, April 2, 2015 (Accessed April 2, 2015); NBC10 Staff, "Philly Woman Accused For Trying to Join ISIS," NBC10 News, April 3, 2015.

[73] Erlanger, 2014.

[74] Rasmussen, 2015; Michelle Nichols, "Syria, Iraq a 'Finishing School' for Foreign Fighters: U.N. Report," *Reuters,* March 31, 2015 (accessed April 1, 2015).

fighters are placed on the front lines and often used for suicide operations, ISIL believes it must work to recruit and protect its women for the sake of nation building. Women are given important functions not only within the family, including procreation, but also within ISIL's bureaucratic wings, outreach programs, and to a much more limited extent security units.

According to Iraqi activists we interviewed, the number of Western women associated with ISIL in Iraq and Syria is not significant to the organization's overall efforts.[75] However, the same Iraqis expressed fear of the Western women and were quick to condemn their influence in Iraq, paradoxically noting that, in the interviewees' opinions, without foreigners ISIL would not exist.[76] The Western women who have joined ISIL, according to these Iraqis, are typically under-educated and have poor Arabic-language skills—this allows ISIL to manipulate them easily.[77] Western governments repeatedly stress there is not a single profile that can be used to screen for ISIL supporters with complete accuracy, but research suggests that foreign women traveling to Iraq and Syria to join ISIL are typically between 18–25 years old, middle-class, and have received full-time education.[78] Approximately a quarter of these women have traveled with male family members.[79]

Women as Human Shields

In addition to online propagandists and recruiters, ISIL also uses women as human shields. While this is not as overt as some accusations leveled at other groups such as Hamas,[80]

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[75] Interviews C and D.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Interview C.
[78] Erlanger, 2014.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Berko, 9; "Captured Hamas Combat Manual Explains Benefits of Human Shields" Israeli Defense Forces Blog, August 4, 2014 (Accessed April 1, 2015).

ISIL has used children to guard compounds, knowing airstrikes will not occur if women or

children are visibly present.[81] This use of women and children as human shields may be a

growing phenomenon that will increase in importance as the Coalition shifts to offensive

operations targeting civilian populated areas in both Syria and Iraq. The most prominent

manifestation of this policy is that ISIL no longer allows women under the age of 45 to leave the

city of Raqqah, according to local activists and a December 2014 fatwa.[82] The policy of not

allowing women to leave the city is clearly intended to maintain the presence of the civilian

population in Raqqah for security purposes. ISIL correctly assumes that the Coalition will not

target locations where there are a large number of civilians, such as in the downtown areas of

major ISIL-controlled cities. This civilian presence allows the organization's fighters freedom of

movement within the city limits. This was particularly notable in ISIL's reaction to the airstrikes

in Kobane/Ain al-Arab in early 2015, which demonstrated the ability of U.S. airpower to push

back ISIL fighters block by block in support of ground forces when civilians were not present.[83]

Al-Khansaa Brigade

ISIL also employs women in its internal security services. In early 2014, the organization

created two armed all-female brigades to act within its territories: the al-Khansaa and the Umm

al-Rayan brigades.[84] The first, al-Khansaa, is a female version of the al-Hisba police that is

[81] "Rule of Terror: Living Under ISIS in Syria," United Nations Human Rights Council, November 14, 2014 (Accessed December 12, 2015).
[82] Kinda Jayoush, "Prisoners in Their Own City: ISIS Bans Women Under 45 From Leaving Raqqah," *Syria Deeply,* January 19, 2015 (Accessed January 24, 2015); Cole Bunzel, "32 Islamic State Fatwas" *Jihadica,* March 2, 2015 (Accessed March 5, 2015).
[83] United States Central Command, "Statement from U.S. Central Command on the Tactical Situation in Kobani, Syria," Release # 201501902, January 26, 2015 (Accessed March 2, 2015)
[84] Bill Rogio and Caleb Weiss, "Islamic State Is Forced From Kobane," *The Long War Journal*, January 27, 2015 (Accessed March 2, 2015).

tasked with enforcing ISIL's strict dress and morality codes.[85] The other, Umm al-Rayan,

comprises a team of women that staff checkpoints and search women with the aim of uncovering

men disguised in female conservative clothing.[86] Both units are staffed with ISIL foreign female

recruits mostly in their late teens and early twenties who are paid a monthly salary of under

US$200.[87] An ISIL official, Abu Ahmad, confirmed that the gender-specific police force was

created to prevent mixing between men and women. "We have established the brigade to raise

awareness of our religion among women, and to punish women who do not abide by the law.

There are only women in this brigade, and we have given them their own facilities to prevent the

mixture of men and women."[88] While women are not yet serving as ISIL soldiers on the

frontlines, Thomas Hegghammer stated in an email interview for *The Atlantic* that the presence

of all-female enforcement brigades suggests a bigger, slow-moving shift toward allowing women

"more operative" roles in the jihadi movement.[89]

The roles of the all-female brigades have expanded to include operating ISIL's brothels

serving fighters returning from battle.[90] ISIL's brothels are reportedly filled with captured Yazidi

or other minority women who are raped multiple times a day. News reports suggest that Western

female jihadists are now in charge of guarding and administering the brothels in which as many

as 3,000 non-Muslim Iraqi women and girls are being held captive as sex slaves, though this

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[85] Kathy Gilsinan, "The ISIS Crackdown on Women By Women," *The Atlantic*, July 25, 2014 (Accessed September 17, 2014).
[86] Ibid.
[87] Terrorism Research and Analysis Consortium, 2014, "Umm Al-Rayan."
[88] Ahmad Al-Bahri, 2014, "In Raqqa, an All-Female ISIS Brigade Cracks Down on Local Women," *Syria Deeply*, July 2015.
[89] Email interview of Thomas Hegghammer in Gilsinan, 2014.
[90] Staff Writer, 2014, "UK Female Jihadists Run ISIS Sex-Slave Brothels," *Al-Arabiya,* September 2012.

information is difficult to verify.[91] In addition to the Western women running the brothels, one Iraqi interviewee described an Egyptian woman who was directly responsible for overseeing a camp of female slaves to service ISIL fighters as concubines.[92] However, the suppression of other women is not universally accepted by ISIL-associated women and in some cases, anecdotally, fighters' wives have helped enslaved women escape under the cover of airstrikes.[93]

Yazidi Slavery and Marriage Bureaus

How ISIL treats women in its territory is indicative of the organization's reliance on total social control to execute its self-mandated governance objectives. The organization's use and abuse of women to dominate society is particularly apparent in the reestablishment of slavery in ISIL-controlled territory. As Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Malinowski argues, "[ISIL] uses rape and sexual abuse as a deliberate military strategy. They target women as tools of war, brutalizing them in order to destabilize and destroy communities—to take away their honor and disrupt their ability to reproduce themselves in the next generation. It's a matter of total possession, total annihilation of a community."[94]

The enslavement of Yazidi women also demonstrates the ISIL's top down approach to policymaking. According to ISIL's own narrative laid out in its official *Dabiq* magazine, the decision to enslave the Yazidis was first made by the organization's senior leadership and then

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[91] Chris Greenwood, *"British Jihadi Brides are 'Running Brothels for ISIS Fighters in Syria'" The Daily Mail*, December 2, 2014.
[92] Interview E.
[93] Interview C.
[94] Tom Malinowski, "ISIL's Abuses Against Women and Girls In Iraq and Syria," March 16, 2015, Swiss Ambassador's Residence, Washington, D.C.

justified post-facto by a panel of students examining Islamic hadith.[95] The original tasking body

on Yazidi slaves arrived at the following legal decisions:

1. Yazidis are not people of the Book and they are not true Muslims. They are considered apostates and can be killed or enslaved.

2. Slavery was not only permissible in the time of the Prophet, it was encouraged as a necessary sign prior to the apocalypse.

3. ISIL should distribute Yazidi women to leaders and fighters as spoils of war and sold; the leaders should receive 1/5 of the women and the rest should be distributed among the lower level fighters.[96]

It was likely up to the local military commanders to execute the actual kidnapping operations in

accordance with commander's intent, as described by former special forces operator Brandon

Webb.[97] The most compelling evidence of this are anecdotes of ISIL fighters approaching Mount

Sinjar with empty trucks with the intention of bringing women back—a premeditated act by all

accounts.[98] The fighters then entered the women into a human trafficking system capable of

detaining and selling hundreds of women across its territory, further confirming preparation in

advance of the military operations.[99]

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[95] *Dabiq Vol. 3*, August 2014.

[96] Ibid.

[97] Brandon Webb, Jack Murphy, and Peter Nealen, *The ISIS Solution: How Unconventional Thinking and Special Operations Can Eliminate Radical Islam*, (St. Martin's Press: New York, 2014), 15.

[98] Interview C; "Matthew Barber on ISIS, Yezidis, and the Enslavement of Thousands of Women," *The Center for Middle East Studies at the University of Oklahoma,* December 10, 2014 (accessed February 22, 2015); "Escape From Hell: Torture and Sexual Slavery in Islamic State Custody" *Amnesty International Ltd*., December 2014.

[99] UN Assistance Mission to Iraq/Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict in Iraq 6 July - 10 September 2014, p. 15.

The *Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict in Iraq* issued in 2014 by the UN Assistance Mission to Iraq and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights reveals that ISIL established an office for the sale of abducted Yazidi women in the al-Quds area of Mosul City during the summer of 2014.[100] In these "markets," ISIL fighters adorned women and girls with price tags, paraded them for buyers to choose from and negotiated a price.[101] The report suggests the buyers are mostly youth from local communities and that ISIL forces use the markets as a recruitment strategy to encourage young men to join their ranks.[102] Other reports suggest that ISIL systematically transferred Yazidi women away from northern Iraq to give the women to senior fighters within the local ranks, in line with ISIL's own "war spoils" claim.[103] As with other aspects of the organization, ISIL's trafficking of women and slavery markets represent a highly bureaucratized and systematic pattern of victimization of women that the organization uses to promote its own strategic aims and instill a sense of fear within the territories it conquers and in neighboring communities. The benefits for the organization are three-fold:

(i) incentivizing recruitment of restless young men who get to claim the spoils of war;

(ii) instilling fear over the territories and peoples they conquer and in neighboring territories; and

(iii) profiting economically from the sale of these women. ISIL defends the slavery of women as, in part, a way to satiate the sexual desire of its fighters by providing licit concubines.[104]

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[100] Ibid.

[101] Ibid; "Escape From Hell": Torture and Sexual Slavery in Islamic State Custody" *Amnesty International Ltd*., December 2014.

[102] UN Assistance Mission to Iraq/Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict in Iraq 6 July - 10 September 2014, p. 15.

[103] Kirk Semple, "Yazidi Girls Seized by ISIS Speak Out After Escape," *New York Times,* November 14, 2014, (Accessed February 10, 2015),

[104] "Su'al wal Jawab Fi Al-Sabi wal Riqab" Translated in "Islamic State (ISIS) Releases Pamphlet on Female Slaves," MEMRI's Jihad and Terrorism Threat Monitor, December 4, 2014 (Accessed January 12, 2015); Cole Bunzel, "32 Islamic State Fatwas" *Jihadica,* March 2, 2015 (Accessed March 5, 2015).

This attempt to focus leaders and fighters on military and governance issues is a core strategic military goal for the organization and appeals to new recruits. It is a key reason that ISIL, unlike many militant organizations in active war zones, still actively promotes the emigration of foreign women to Syria and Iraq.[105] The goal in attracting foreign women is not to use them as fighters but as part of a systematic attempt to recruit younger women with the intention of marrying them or selling them to the fighters upon the young women's arrival in Syria. This is particularly evident in the case of Shannon Conley, an American woman who intended to travel to Syria to join a Tunisian man following his offer to marry her, according to the FBI.[106]

U.S. Policy Options

The problems associated with women and ISIL are neither strictly local nor strictly international. These women often not only cross many physical borders to join ISIL, but their impact over the internet in spreading propaganda and encouraging recruitment and local attacks in the West is truly globalized. As such, we feel that the approaches to address ISIL's simultaneous utilization and victimization of women must reflect and transcend the many lines between local, national, and international jurisdictions. As with our own difficulties in researching this topic, we expect that government bodies, security studies experts, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and activists seeking to address this topic will also experience trouble gathering accurate information about or safely gaining access to women

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[105] Umm Sumayyah al-Muhajirah, "The Twin Halves of the Muhajirin," in "Sharia Alone Will Rule Africa," *Dabiq Vol. 8*, March 2015; Akht Jazaha Allah Khayran, "A Sister's Role In Jihad," (Accessed January 24, 2015).
[106] United States vs. Shannon Maureen Conley, 14-mj-01045-KLM, 1, 12, (Colorado District Court, 2015).

associated with ISIL. Finding solutions to Islamic extremism, especially as it pertains to women, will not be an easy task.

Our discussion below of the options available to U.S. policymakers should not be taken as a concrete approach for addressing ISIL's strategic utilization and victimization of women. Instead, we have chosen to explore the advantages and disadvantages of several potential counterterrorism strategies that will better enable the U.S. to counter ISIL holistically by incorporating women.

● ***Increase Publicity of ISIL Crimes against Women.*** One recommendation to counter ISIL's recruitment of women raised in several interviews was increased publication of crimes against women in order to deter foreign and local women from supporting the group.[107] The proponents of this proposal cited the oft-described "jihadi-cool" phenomenon that has attracted many foreign women to join the organization into order to marry a devout Muslim and war hero.[108] In our interviews, we found anecdotal evidence that not only foreign women were allured by the idea, but in one case an Iraqi Shi'a teenager was attracted to ISIL's propaganda aimed at women.[109] This narrative promoted by ISIL, particularly that of emphasizing "purity" and a reinvention of one's self, is most easily countered by publicly demonstrating the dangerous conditions women in Syria and Iraq face.[110] A concerted campaign by local religious authorities and civil society, in combination with continued governmental support, to highlight the contradictions within ISIL's image and reality should target high-risk audiences, most notably marginalized Muslims outside

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[107] Interviews C, D, and E.
[108] Dina Tempe-Raston, "Jihadi-Cool: Terrorist Recruiters' Latest Weapon," *National Public Radio*, March 26, 2010 (Accessed November 6, 2014).
[109] Interview, Iraqi.
[110] Interview, American Counterterrorism specialist.

ISIL-controlled zones. Such a campaign, however, must be carefully constructed so as not to glorify ISIL's violent actions unintentionally.

This tactic when promoted by the U.S. government, such as the State Department's "ThinkAgain, TurnAway" campaign faces a credibility gap which makes it relatively ineffective. Those who are susceptible to ISIL propaganda are less likely to view U.S. government or State Department promoted media. Official government videos countering ISIL tend to be inadvertently targeted more towards the Western audience creating them, thereby confirming the reasons not to trust the source. A key example of this phenomenon is the Department of State's graphic video "Welcome to the 'Islamic State' land (ISIS/ISIL)" or "مرحبا بكم إلى الدولة الإسلامية داعش", originally in Arabic, but having much higher viewership in English.[111] Rita Katz, the director of SITE, argues that the "ThinkAgain, TurnAway" campaign actually provides ISIL supporters a voice and platform to access moderate audiences targeted by the State Department which ISIL previously would not have been able to access.[112]

A possible answer to this would be the United States government through the State Department or CIA setting up NGOs or other bodies as fronts to disseminate a counter narrative without officially being endorsed by the U.S. government.[113] However, such covert actions are illegal if intended to influence American public opinion, a difficult hurdle when engaging ISIL-supporters publicly on the same social media (including United States-based) platforms ISIL

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[111] ThinkAgain TurnAway, "Welcome to the Islamic State Land (ISIS/ISIL)" (accessed 28 March 2015); Digital Outreach Team, "مرحبا بكم إلى الدولة الإسلامية داعش" (accessed 28 March 2015).
[112] Rita Katz, "The State Department's Twitter War With ISIS is Embarrassing," *TIME,* September 14, 2014, (Accessed 28 March 2015).
[113] Interview F.

uses.[114] If this legal hurdle were overcome, the issue of efficacy would again be a factor, considering the relative ineffectiveness of the State Department's program and how similarly bureaucratic and legally constrained both the CIA and Department of State are.[115] However, even without the ability to message ISIL's target audience effectively with official U.S. government accounts, the U.S. is in a position where it has two viable options that concurrently could prove successful.

● ***Engage Moderate Muslim Countries and Local Civil Society***. Internationally, this includes providing support to the moderate Muslim governments and our Gulf-state partners who are able to provide a more credible non-violent counter narrative to at least a portion of ISIL's target audience. Publicly supporting these countries in countering ISIL's narrative, particularly as it regards to women, would help to demonstrate that the United States is not combating Islam, according to one interviewee.[116] U.S. financial or technical support to already existing groups that are working against ISIL's narrative and propaganda both within ISIL-controlled territory and within the greater Middle East and North Africa is possibly the most effective option the U.S. has for actively countering ISIL's recruitment and its various narratives. These local groups will be able to more effectively understand, interpret, and refute the narratives ISIL uses to promote itself amongst women without the cultural insensitivities and bureaucratic challenges of U.S.-controlled programs.

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[114] Marshall Evan, "Covert Action: Legislative Background and Possible Policy Questions" *Congressional Research Service,* April 10, 2013 (accessed January 05, 2015); Katz, 2014.
[115] Evan, 2013.
[116] Interview F.

● ***Disrupt ISIL's Social Media Platforms.*** Another possible course of action for the U.S. government is to continue its work in an official capacity with social media platforms to suspend, delete, or otherwise disrupt accounts that promote ISIL or disseminate its messages.[117] J.M. Berger, a leading proponent of disrupting extremists on social media, has repeatedly shown that propagation of ISIL-associated media diminishes following large-scale suspension of accounts, particularly on Twitter.[118] These actions are similarly effective on other platforms such as Facebook and Instagram and could be effective with anonymous posting sites such as justpaste.it or archive.org, which ISIL and its associates use to host content. The full level of the U.S. government's current involvement in suspensions of ISIL media accounts is unclear. Any attempt at increased disruption will create an inevitable cat and mouse game between government analysts and ISIL social media users who perpetually create new accounts. However, if successful, a rigorous campaign would lower the number of ISIL-associated users communicating on the Internet by creating a temporarily high barrier to entry and disrupting ISIL media outlets' ability to disseminate propaganda. This, combined with U.S. active engagement with local civil society, could prove particularly effective at limiting ISIL's ability to control its own narrative in Iraq, Syria, and globally while simultaneously providing more moderate groups the space to disseminate counter-ISIL information.

● ***Economic Development.*** One Iraqi we interviewed stressed the importance of using economic development to turn the tide of ISIL recruitment in Iraq and Syria.[119] Providing investment and encouraging development projects in territories surrounding ISIL strongholds, he

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[117] Stern and Berger 2015, 163.
[118] Berger and Morgen, 2015.
[119] Interview F.

argued, would present an alternative source of economic opportunity and income to potential

ISIL recruits thus encouraging them to take part in the licit economy and otherwise keeping

unemployed young men and women from falling prey to terrorist organizations.[120] This approach

is rooted in an understanding that support for ISIL within northern Iraq is not based primarily on

ideology, but on the rational and economic interests of local young men, women, and their

families who have faced economic deprivation from the sectarian policies of the Shi'a dominated

national government. In many cases, young men have joined ISIL because the organization is

able to pay higher wages to fighters, including those with families, than would otherwise be

available in the legal market.

     Whilst economic development policies have a significant potential for success in the

long-term, such action would likely have little impact on stemming ISIL recruitment and growth

in the immediate future, particularly while the U.S. is committed to military action in Iraq and

Syria. Any economic aid sent to the region would risk falling into the wrong hands, and very few

international NGOs have been able to continue working in areas under threat from ISIL.[121]

Additionally, the economic development approach, as opposed to providing aid, does little to

address ISIL's strong international recruitment base or provide a credible alternative governance

option for Sunnis in Iraq and eastern Syria.[122] Observations, such as those by Graeme Wood,

suggest that for the young men and women traveling from overseas to join ISIL, ideological

narratives such as moving to an Islamic utopia or fighting the battles of the apocalypse seem to

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[120] Ibid.

[121] Jamie Dettmer, "U.S. Aid Going to ISIS," *The Daily Beast*, October 19, 2014 (Accessed October 21, 2014); Caleb Weiss, "Islamic State Uses U.S. Made Anti-Tank Missile Near Damascus," *The Long War Journal*, December 29, 2014 (Accessed January 10, 2015).

[122] Interview F.

be stronger motivators than ISIL's provision of salary and public services.[123] Looking to the long-term, however, economic aid to cities and towns neighboring ISIL strongholds could present a strong counter-narrative to ISIL's local supporters. Demonstrating that life outside of ISIL-controlled territories can provide more opportunity, advancement, and security is likely to hold significant sway with the average Iraqi or Syrian citizen looking to protect his/her own family interests.

● ***Military Action Against ISIL-Associated Women.*** The U.S. currently utilizes a rigid counting methodology for estimating casualties in its current counterterrorism operations, which is driven by aforementioned gender biases within counterterrorism.[124] The U.S. tracks the numbers of military-aged males, women, and children at a strike location; however, since 2009 it has universally counted military-aged males as combatants declared hostile, with no requirement to identify the men in order to ensure they are not in fact civilians.[125] The second category of casualties are "civilian casualties," which includes all women and children. The women of ISIL, particularly those who fill roles within al-Khansaa and Umm al-Rayan fit into an interesting gray area. If the members of the brigades were in fact men, they would be legitimate military targets for the U.S. air campaign due to the nature of their role in supporting ISIL security operations and recruiting; because they are women, however, they are not seen or counted as combatants.

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[123] Graeme Wood, "What ISIS Really Wants," *The Atlantic*, March 2015 (Accessed March 28, 2015); Musa Cerantonio, "Which Nation Does Rum in the Ahadith Refer To?" March 2015 (Accessed March 06, 2015).
[124] Given that the United States with only a single extraordinary exception has yet to engage the ISIL with ground troops, for the purpose of this comparison, the campaign against ISIL is more aptly compared to the air campaigns in Yemen and Pakistan than the U.S. occupation of Iraq.
[125] Jo Becker and Scott Shane, "Secret Kill List Proves a Test of Obama's Principles And Will" May 29, 2012, (Accessed March 28, 2014).

The rationale for targeting these groups with military action would be to eliminate these women and/or severely disrupt their freedom of movement and ability to operate openly in ISIL-controlled territory and thus degrade ISIL's governance capabilities. Ultimately however, this would only disrupt a minor portion of ISIL's ability to police its territory and fully enforce its authority on women, by women. The U.S. government must weigh potential tactical successes carefully against long-term strategic interests and the likely media backlash of ISIL propaganda showing dead and inevitably unarmed women due to Coalition airstrikes. Interestingly, such an event targeting female fighters possibly occurred on October 30, 2014 when 30 members of al-Khansaa brigade may have been killed in a Coalition airstrike against the Raqqah Political Security Building, according to an uncorroborated statement by the 'Raqqah is Being Slaughtered Silently' campaign.[126] ISIL does not acknowledge individual airstrikes, however CENTCOM's official summary of operations from October 30 corroborated that the strike against the Raqqah security building had occurred.[127] The U.S. government as of April 2015 is investigating 5 of its 5,500 airstrikes in Iraq and Syria that it assesses may have resulted in civilian casualties, but has not elaborated on the circumstances of those airstrikes.[128]

Conclusion

Overall, our research pointed to several primary conclusions with regard to ISIL's strategic use and treatment of women. First, ISIL's use of women has changed fundamentally

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[126] Raqqah Is Being Slaughtered Silently, October 30, 2014, https://twitter.com/Raqqa_Sl (Accessed February 12, 2015).

[127] United States Central Command, "October 30: Military Strikes Continue Against ISIL In Syria and Iraq," October 30, 2014 (Accessed February 12, 2015); James Cullum, "CENTCOM: No "Confirmed" Civilian Deaths in ISIL Strikes," *Talk Radio News Service*, April 1, 2015 (Accessed April 14, 2015).

[128] United States Department of Defense, "Operation Inherent Resolve: Targeted Operations Against ISIL Terrorists," March 31, 2015 (Accessed April 2, 2015).

since the group's inception in 2003 when it acted primarily as a terrorist organization within Iraq. ISIL has ceased using women as suicide bombers and instead has shifted towards using women in limited bureaucratic and security operations in territory it controls. This is in response to the changing strategic goals of the organization (i.e., state building) while simultaneously attempting to maintain women in traditional roles such as wives, mothers and ancillary support roles. Additionally, evidence suggests that ISIL's utilization and victimization of women is guided strategically from the highest levels of the organization down via ISIL's bureaucratic system, whether the issue is the use of all-female security units or the enslavement of Yazidi women.

While we are not attempting to overstate the role of women in ISIL, our research does suggest that women are critical both within the organization and for its continued existence. More attention should be paid by researchers and security studies experts not only to the phenomenon of Western women traveling to join ISIL, but also to what strategic roles local and foreign women fulfill within ISIL once they become part of the terrorist organization. In this vein, ISIL's policies towards women must be more fully understood in order for the U.S. and our international partners to be able to effectively counter or "degrade and destroy" the organization holistically.

Appendix. List of Interviews

Interview	Description	Gender	Date
A	American researcher, expert on Arab and Islamic Politics and Terrorism	Male	January 27, 2015
B	American researcher and psychologist, extensive experience working with terrorists and militant jihadists and their families	Female	January 30, 2015
C	American scholar, Yazidi advocate	Male	February 19, 2015
D	Iraqi high-ranking expert on human rights	Female	March 7, 2015
E	Iraqi human rights advocate, expert on women's issues	Female	March 22, 2015
F	Iraqi human rights worker	Male	March 22, 2015
G	Iraqi expert on female jihadis	Female	Written, March 28, 2015

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