

**The Death of IS Top Strategist:  
Reflections on Counter-Terrorism Efforts**  
Syed Huzaifah Alkaff and Muhammad Haziq Bin Jani

**Defeating the Islamic State:  
Reconciling Pressure and Precision High Value Targeting**  
Paul Lushenko and Anthony Williams

**Hijrah According to the Islamic State:  
An Analysis of Dabiq**  
Matan Uberman and Dr. Shaul Shay

**Women of the Islamic State:  
The Evolving Role of Women in Jihadism**  
Hamoon Khelghat-Doost



## Counter-Terrorism

Defeating the so-called Islamic State (IS) and its global affiliates and supporters remains an on-going counter-terrorism challenge. So far, kinetic approaches have dominated the modus operandi of anti-IS coalitions and governments, with some success in recapturing lost territories, eliminating top IS leaders and incarcerating IS militants and operatives. More, however, needs to be done. The ideology of the group continues to resonate among numerous supporters and extremist groups in and beyond the Middle East, inspiring terrorist attacks with implications to national security and social cohesion.

Fifteen years after the 9/11 attacks, it remains evident that terrorist groups like IS are persistent in their goals to terrorise societies and create rifts within the communities to disrupt the social fabric. Recent attacks in the US bear testimony to the nature of the extremist and terrorist threat: on 17 September 2016, a pro-IS supporter carried out coordinated bombing attacks in Manhattan and New Jersey, injuring 29. The next day, another extremist carried out a stabbing attack at a Minnesota mall, injuring ten, with IS claiming the attack. A few days later, another terrorist struck at Burlington, Washington State, killing five; it is not known if this incident is IS-linked. These attacks come close in the wake of those in Orlando (June 2016), Istanbul (June 2016), Dhaka (July 2016), Nice (July 2016), Gaziantep, Turkey (August 2016) and elsewhere.

In light of increasing IS-inspired and IS-directed attacks, the international community must intensify efforts to counter terrorist groups like IS. This should entail not only concerted military and police actions and collaborations but also counter-ideological measures as well as serious efforts to address socio-economic and political issues that have allowed IS and its affiliates and other religion-based extremist groups to emerge and thrive.

This is also the thrust of the article by **Syed Huzaifah Bin Othman Alkaff** and **Muhammad Haziq Bin Jani** as they reflect on the assassination of IS spokesperson, Abu Mohamed al-Adnani in another successful high value targeting (HVT) airstrike by the US. Besides reviewing al-Adnani's role in IS, reactions to his death, and his possible successors, they also argue that counter-terrorism strategies such as decapitation and HVT, while crucial, will not be enough to degrade and destroy the group. Instead, there is an urgent need to counter the group's ideology and analyse the underlying root causes that foster violent extremism. Without defeating IS propaganda, and addressing the ground factors that enable IS ideology to grow and spread, IS will continue to find traction and support among radicals in and outside IS heartlands.

The successful HVTs against al-Adnani and others set the stage for a critical examination of HVT. **Paul Lushenko** and **Anthony Williams** examine two military approaches in support of an overall strategy to defeat IS. The authors contend that IS displays characteristics of being both a terrorist and an insurgent group, and therefore recommend a blended HVT approach, fusing HVT in support of counter-terrorism with HVT in counterinsurgency operations. They note that these approaches must be supplemented with initiatives designed to counter extremist narratives.

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## Counter-Terrorism

A part of this narrative concerns IS' adulteration of the concept of *Hijrah* (migration) that has formed part of IS propaganda and recruitment strategy. In a detailed analysis of IS' propaganda magazine, *Dabiq*, **Matan Uberman** and **Dr. Shaul Shay** examine how IS is further manipulating the concept of *Hijrah* to its advantage, even to the extent of sanctioning the use of *Hijrah* to its *wilayats* (governorates). Against the backdrop of IS losing territory in Iraq and Syria, there is a need to control the flow of fighters into the *wilayats* in the Middle East, Caucasus, South Asia and Southeast Asia, before IS manages to strengthen its presence in these regions.

IS' statehood aspirations have contributed to a growing deployment of women in the group's state institutions and security forces, regardless of the strict interpretation of Sharia law that tends to limit women's participation in the same. **Hamoon Khelghat-Doost** examines the expanding roles of women in the ranks of IS and offers us an alternative look at the role of women in IS, given that previous literature on women's participation in jihadi militant organisations have tended to portray them as victims. In light of this, he recommends that approaches to counter-terrorism must also take into account the increasing involvement of women in terrorist groups.



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# THE DEATH OF IS TOP STRATEGIST: REFLECTIONS ON COUNTER-TERRORISM EFFORTS

## SYED HUZAIFAH ALKAFF and MUHAMMAD HAZIQ BIN JANI

source: Page 2 of Rumiayah, IS's new propaganda magazine (September 2016)

*The targeted killing of Abu Muhammad al-Adnani is a major military and propaganda blow to the so-called Islamic State (IS). However, the successful elimination of IS top leaders forms only part of the overall battle against the terrorist entity. Considering IS' succession planning, the assassination of al-Adnani and other senior leaders before and after him may not be enough to destroy the terror group as its strength lies more in its ideology and the circumstances that make it appealing. An effective counter-ideological response, along with efforts to address socio-economic and political issues that have allowed IS to grow and exploit its ideology must accompany any successful high value targeting and military campaigns.*

### Background

Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, 39, was the official spokesperson of the Islamic State (IS), a founding member, and top propagandist and strategist. His involvement with IS began more than a decade ago when he joined Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's jihadist group, Al-Tawhid wa'al Jihad (JTJ) (Bin Ali 2014). Al-Adnani - a nom de guerre of Taha Subhi Falaha - was believed to be one of the instructors at several jihadist camps, and was reportedly among the first foreign fighters in Iraq when the US-led campaign began in 2003 (Anjarini 2014). Al-Adnani was arrested in Iraq in May 2005 and sent to Camp Bucca, a US detention facility in Iraq where he reportedly met the future self-appointed caliph Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, before he was eventually released in 2010.

In 2011, when US forces left Iraq officially, the group expanded its operations, recruiting and crafting strategies to recover from the loss they suffered due to American counter-insurgency operations. Before the declaration of the caliphate in June 2014, al-Adnani was already the spokesperson of the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI), the predecessor of IS (Bin Ali 2014). Being a Syrian, al-Adnani was also the IS emir in Syria following the schism between IS and the pro-Al Qaeda (AQ) group Jabhat al-Nusra (now Jabhat Fateh al-Sham) (Anjarini 2014).

Al-Adnani was also probably the most outspoken critic of Al Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri. As IS spokesman, he had openly challenged and attacked al-Zawahiri and contributed to the worsening relations between the two jihadist movements. He had "harshly criticised" al-Zawahiri for siding with Jabhat al-Nusra chief al-Joulani rather than al-Baghdadi during the power struggle for Syria (Gerges 2016b). He even told al-Zawahiri that he will have to swear *bai'ah* (fealty) to Baghdadi and serve as his foot soldier if he ever comes to IS territories (Gerges 2016b). Besides this insult, al-Adnani had written an angry letter accusing al-Zawahiri of "causing *fitnah* (sedition) among jihadists" and demanding that he "repent for the sins he had committed and apologise for his un-Islamic views" (Gerges 2016b). In an apparent effort to undermine al-Zawahiri's leadership of the global jihadist movement, al-Adnani questioned al-Zawahiri's commitment to Osama bin Laden's mission and accused him of turning Al Qaeda into a "quietist" political organisation.

Al-Zawahiri was not his only target. In an audio statement in June 2015, al-Adnani lambasted prominent Jihadi-Salafi theorists like al-Zawahiri's mentor, Abu Mohammed al-Maqdisi, and other Islamist scholars that support AQ Central; he warned Islamist soldiers against taking "the fatwa of the donkeys of knowledge" seriously (Gerges 2016b). It is interesting to speculate whether al-Adnani's death would diminish the bitter ideological and violent conflict between IS and AQ. It should, however, be noted that there are other radical IS ideologues who share al-Adnani's views, principally al-Baghdadi and his inner circle.

Other than being the IS spokesman, Al-Adnani was reported to have led an intelligence unit of the group (Callimachi 2016) and was responsible for planning attacks across the world, targeting Europe, Asia and the Arab states. He also helped in setting up IS-affiliated groups in Syria, such as the Jaysh Khalid ibn al-Waleed (Army of Khalid ibn al-Waleed) group that dominates the Yarmouk Valley on the border with the Golan Heights (Al-Tamimi 2016).

As a result of his terrorist activities, on 18 August 2014, Al-Adnani was designated as a terrorist with a USD 5 million bounty by the State Department's Rewards for Justice Programme (U.S. Department of State 2014 and 2015). He was killed on 30 September 2016 in airstrikes conducted by the US-led coalition forces in Al-Bab, Aleppo, Syria (Al-Tamimi 2016b).

### **Adnani's Death and Succession**

The targeted killing of Adnani, the second most senior IS leader and a possible successor to Baghdadi, provides an opportunity to revisit the issue of targeted assassinations of key leaders of insurgent groups. According to the Pentagon, the US-led coalition has killed about 120 important IS officials and operators, including about a dozen top leaders (Schmitt, Callimachi and Barnard 2016). However, in a leaked 2009 Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) report on assassinations of High Value Targets (HVTs), the CIA assessed that there is a lack of evidence to prove that HVT benefits counter-insurgency (WikiLeaks 2014). The report acknowledged that HVT assassinations could erode the coherence of a group, weaken its morale or force leaders into isolation to hide. Nevertheless, the same report also noted that the effectiveness of HVT assassinations may be lessened due to structural issues, such as egalitarian command

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structures or succession planning. HVT assassinations could even increase the level of support for insurgent groups, strengthen the relationship between insurgents and civilians, radicalise the remaining leaders, and create a power vacuum in which more radical groups may compete or direct a conflict in favour of the insurgents.

Since the days of Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), the precursor of IS, the IS group has lived through many deaths of senior to mid-level leaders. Some of these leaders include the Emir of Al Qaeda in Iraq Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (in 2006), his successors Abu Ayyub al-Masri and Abu Omar al-Baghdadi (both killed in 2010), 'War Minister' Abu Suleiman al-Naser (2011), military chief Haji Bakr (2014), IS Deputy leader Haji Iman aka Abu Ali al-Anbari (March 2016) and Field Commander Abu Omar al-Shishani (July 2016). However, the pre-2014 deaths of senior commanders did not have a debilitating effect on the group, which managed to expand and capture large swathes of land in Iraq and Syria, and declare a caliphate in 2014. Similarly, their demise has not hindered the formation of several thriving *wilayats* (provinces) outside IS' heartlands, or the launch of an aggressive online propaganda campaign that attracted thousands of recruits and supporters worldwide. There has been no abatement in the number of deadly terrorist attacks in Iraq and Syria and later in Europe and elsewhere.

The limited success of HVT assassinations to degrade and destroy IS signify the resilience of the group. IS has managed to replace top and mid-level leaders, the latest being the replacement of IS' War Minister al-Shishani with a US-trained former head of the special police force in Tajikistan, Colonel Gulmurod Khalimov (Khan 2016). Some may argue that the "Deep Bench" of IS may not be as potent as the key leaders they replace (Schmitt, Callimachi and Barnard 2016) but this is arguable given the lack of intelligence on the long line of potential successors.

Be that as it may, there are three possible pools of members IS could choose from to replace al-Adnani. Firstly, IS may select from a small group of senior leaders who have been in the group and have contributed significantly for as long a period as al-Adnani. This is important as al-Adnani's seniority and long service allowed him to not only hold sway among his fellow comrades, but also navigate through internal conflicts, forge mergers and manage new alliances. Secondly, al-Adnani may be replaced by one of his own protégés or top lieutenants such as Abu Souleymane, a French citizen, or a Syrian Arab named Abu Ahmad (Callimachi 2016). Abu Ahmad is the more likely candidate as IS would prefer a leader, who like al-Baghdadi, can claim to be of Prophetic lineage. In fact, in the IS statement about his death, al-Adnani too was described as having descended from the Prophet's line (Al-Tamimi 2016b). Lastly, IS may select someone from the senior leadership who may not have the same skills or experiences as al-Adnani. Schmitt et al (2016) believe that Turki al-Binali may be one of those possible candidates as he is among the senior clerics of IS, a talented speaker and said to be the group's leading mufti.

Whoever al-Adnani's replacement may be, IS propaganda publications have expressed confidence that IS will weather through his loss. In the first issue of the group's latest online magazine, *Rumiyah*, IS claims that al-Adnani's death, like that of al-Zarqawi, will not harm them. Like the latter, al-Adnani will be replaced by "one of the many soldiers and brothers of Abu Muhammad who will inflict them with a far worse torment" (*Rumiyah* 2016: 3). In its weekly newsletter, *An-Naba'*, IS claims that "a generation has been born in the Islamic State" and "the blood of their leaders will only increase their steadfastness... and increase their resolve to exact revenge and strike out against the

**“ IS has been able to enthuse thousands of alienated and marginalised Sunnis with its ideology of Jihadi-Salafism, which includes the resurrection of the caliphate and implementation of Islamic rule. ”**

enemies” (Dearden 2016).

While praising al-Adnani's contributions since the days of al-Zarqawi, IS publications affirmed that no one is indispensable however valuable their contributions. To IS, 'victory' is ultimately the attainment of God's sacred acceptance of their struggle and not worldly considerations such as the loss of strong leaders (al-Battar Media Foundation; Gharib al-Sururiyyah).

Expectedly, IS has urged its members to avenge al-Adnani's death. The group has recently claimed responsibility for the Minnesota stabbing of nine shoppers while its supporters have reportedly celebrated the Manhattan bombing that injured 29 people. However, it is not yet known whether IS has any direct involvement in these two incidents.

### **Countering IS Ideology**

Al-Adnani's death will be a major setback to IS in the short-term. It will affect IS terrorist operations, propaganda activities, strategic planning and leadership but it will not be a crippling blow. New York Times correspondent Rukmini Callimachi correctly observed that "while Adnani's death is a blow to ISIS, it will not bring about the group's end" because this is a group that "is built on an ideology and what we are fighting is an idea."

Indeed, IS' ideology is its centre of gravity and its

source of strength. IS has been able to enthrone thousands of alienated and marginalised Sunnis with its ideology of Jihadi-Salafism, which includes the resurrection of the caliphate and implementation of Islamic rule. According to Fawas A. Gerges, the idea of the caliphate “has taken hold of the imagination of many Sunni Islamists who see it as redemptive, a means to salvation, and a worthy cause to do jihad for” (Gerges 2016b). IS propaganda publications claim that it is a religious obligation to do *hijrah* (migrate) to IS territories and do jihad to establish *hakimiyyah* (God’s rule on earth). IS propaganda also makes references to the End of Times and epic battles of the apocalypse. According to William McCants, IS “has stoked the apocalyptic fire” and that it is “a big selling point with foreign fighters, who want to travel to the lands where the final battles of the apocalypse will take place. The civil wars raging in those countries today [Iraq and Syria] lend credibility to the prophecies” (McCants 2015). Many have succumbed to IS propaganda about attaining martyrdom in the fight against the ‘Crusaders’ and apostates (non-jihadi Salafi Muslims) and being assured of heavenly abode thereafter.

It is imperative that IS ideas about the caliphate, violent jihad, suicide bombing, *hijrah*, *takfirism* (ex-communication) and others be convincingly demolished. IS misinterpretation and selective reading of religious texts must be exposed to delegitimise and discredit its ideology and the so-called Prophetic methodology. Only then would support for IS and its affiliates and their exploitation of religion for political and military ends be thwarted.

### Addressing Sunni Discontent

Countering IS ideology alone, however, would not be enough. IS has grown and thrived in Iraq and Syria because it was able to exploit the political turmoil and conflict between the Sunnis and Shiites. IS was able to appeal to “many rebellious Sunnis who felt persecuted, marginalised, and excluded by the Shia- and Alawite-dominated regimes in Baghdad and Damascus” (Gerges 2016b). Addressing legitimate political and social grievances of the Sunnis will therefore be necessary (Gerges 2016b). Arab/Muslim states are plagued by poor governance, autocratic rule, tribalism, religious polarisation, unemployment, corruption and human rights abuses. All of these conditions offer non-state actors and subversive

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movements with opportunities to exploit. IS has exploited the same and offered the caliphate as an alternative political system and a means to salvation. A recent article (“Bullets and Bombing Won’t Prevent Violent Extremism. Here’s What Will”) argues that “There are no shortcuts to addressing the root causes of conflict.... Violent extremists move into areas where there is on-going chaos, weak governance and rising violence — places ripe for recruitment. New terrorist groups emerge where there are power vacuums and people have strong grievances” (Keny-Guyer 2016). The article concludes that “Ending violent extremism will not happen through silver bullets or carpet bombing” but through resolving conflicts, promoting reconciliation and building good governance: “Only then will we stem the tide of violent extremism and end the steady stream of terrorist attacks around the world.”

The prognosis, however, is not encouraging. Fifteen years have passed since 9/11 but the terrorism landscape has worsened with IS holding territories in Iraq and Syria and its affiliates controlling almost 20 *wilayats* in several countries. They continue to have the financial resources to sustain their militant struggle, uninterrupted supply of arms, ammunition and heavy weaponry, secure and efficient online communications facility, training camps, ‘safe havens’ and well-fortified bases from which they mount terror attacks, kidnappings and hijackings. IS militants and supporters remain determined and able to exploit weak governance and socio-economic and political grievances to recruit and expand. IS online propaganda continues to preach religious extremism and openly incite terror attacks by whatever means to destabilise

societies and undermine social cohesion. It is imperative that more resolute and determined action be taken to destroy IS and its overseas affiliates. While eliminating HVTs like al-Adnani and recapturing IS-held territories are crucial for counter-insurgency operations, debunking IS Jihadi-Salafist ideology and addressing the root causes of violent extremism must also be among the world's top priorities.

**Syed Huzaifah Alkaff** is a Senior Analyst at the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR) at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore.

**Muhammad Haziq Bin Jani** is a Research Analyst in the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR), a constituent unit of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore.

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# Defeating the Islamic State: Reconciling Pressure and Precision High Value Targeting

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Paul Lushenko and Anthony Williams

*Scholars and practitioners often conflate high value targeting (HVT) in support of counter-terrorism with that of HVT counterinsurgency operations. This article presents a framework to better understand the two. It argues that, with the advent of hybrid threats such as the so-called Islamic State (IS), commanders must adopt a blended HVT approach to meet the challenge of groups which deploy both terrorist and insurgent tactics. A combination of the blended HVT approach, along with initiatives designed to counter extremist narratives, will better enable the coalition to destroy IS over the long term.*

## Introduction

High value targeting, or HVT, is a tactic which involves lethal strikes, raids, and/or offensive cyber operations to capture or kill key enemy combatants and materiel. It is based on the assumption that the removal of critical personnel and assets will eventually lead to the disintegration of the enemy's network (Hardy and Lushenko 2012). Scholars and practitioners often conflate HVT in support of a counter-terrorism (CT) strategy with HVT during counterinsurgency (COIN) operations. This confusion stems from the (mis)belief that terrorists and insurgents are indistinguishable, given "the commonality of techniques in asymmetric or irregular warfare and the growing barbarity of civil wars and insurgencies" (Boyle 2010, 337).

Yet, as evidenced by the conflict in Afghanistan, conflating these threats has caused military leaders to direct HVT efforts equally against insurgents and terrorists, minimising the gains promised by a more tailored application. How should scholars and practitioners distinguish HVT in support of CT from HVT in support of COIN operations?

### HVT in COIN vs. HVT in CT operations

HVT in support of COIN is meant to pressure or disrupt an insurgency. It does so by gradually degrading organisational capacity, controlling tempo, and disrupting formation. Complementarily, a CT strategy supported by HVT emphasises precision targeting of critical assets, to immediately erode the enemy's offensive capability. While the pressure-precision approach capitalises on disruption to facilitate surgical strikes, the precision-pressure approach deploys strikes to create disruption.

Hybrid threats like the self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS) incorporate both terrorist and insurgent tactics. Fighting IS on the ground requires a strategy based on a blended targeting approach with greater attention to the use of “hybrid warfare” – rather than the use of a single approach (Hoffman 2009). This is particularly so, given IS' transition from a state-building to operations-based movement (Gunaratna 2016). Prior to his death in a US drone strike, IS' senior propagandist and strategist Abu Muhammad al-Adnani cautioned that coalition operations had forced IS to adopt insurgent tactics consisting of hit-and-run attacks (Zelin 2016). When applied in conjunction with counter-violent extremism (CVE) programmes within the civilian population, the authors contend that a HVT approach which combines pressure and precision targeting of the intended targets will enable commanders to weaken IS' assets and expansion plans.

#### *HVT in COIN: Pressure Approach*

Applying pressure to a clandestine network involves harassing the organisation and its members to complicate operations, force errors, and delay communication (Hardy and Lushenko 2012, 420). It is characterised by a high volume and frequency of lethal strikes, raids, and/or offensive cyber operations against deliberate and dynamic targets, including safe havens and courier exchange points. As these actions complicate operations, force errors and frustrate communications, they are intended to put pressure on the insurgents (Hardy and Lushenko 2012, 420). Rather than protecting the population as an overriding objective, as is the case with classical population-centric COIN operations, the pressure approach emphasises the use of vital information provided by the population to kill or capture insurgents (Lushenko and Hardy 2015, 110).

**“Applying pressure to a clandestine network involves harassing the organisation and its members to complicate operations, force errors, and delay communication.”**

From a military perspective, there are five benefits to using the pressure targeting method to support COIN operations. First, whereas standard target selection methodologies are based on a ‘ready, aim, fire’ approach, the pressure approach privileges a ‘ready, fire, aim’ logic which expands a commander’s situational awareness of a complex and adaptive insurgency. Instead of focusing on lethal strikes and/or raids against specific insurgents, a ‘ready, fire, aim’ targeting logic encourages a commander to first strike an insurgency’s core functions (consisting of recruitment, fundraising, logistics, and attack wings). These operations are designed to purposely elicit a response from a network, such as heightened communications thereby enabling more tailored targeting against key insurgents and their resources in the future (*Special Operations Intelligence* 2013).

Second, because the pressure method prioritises the value of targets similarly, or casts the widest net against an insurgency, it also increases the probability of killing and capturing consequential insurgents, including facilitators, financiers, and couriers.

Third, pressure targeting is predicated on a heightened operations tempo (frequency of operations and intensity of the enemy’s concomitant demand on resources) that enhances a commander’s ability to confirm or deny enemy activity in suspected operating areas (Hardy and Lushenko 2012, 425).

This enables commanders to balance unremitting collection requirements against limited resources.

Fourth, because pressure targeting encourages an insurgency to reprioritise organisational energy and resources towards self-preservation, it frustrates the enemy's offensive planning. This requires that military commanders understand the enemy's decision-making steps, which encompasses observe, orient, decide, and act (OODA) (Boyd 1976). Finally, the pressure approach to targeting is deliberately intended to alter insurgents' daily routines. This creates an opportunity for military commanders to target the enemy (Hodne 2016).

While commanders can exercise pressure targeting with limited resources and weak intelligence, it is not an unfocused targeting approach, which places the mission and operating force at undue risk. Rather, applying pressure allows commanders flexibility to concentrate, surge, or redirect combat power to disrupt a clandestine network (Hardy and Lushenko 2012, 420). Such disruption often sets the conditions for precision operations.

#### *HVT in CT: Precision Approach*

The precision approach to HVT is designed to destroy the enemy's critical requirements, including high-value targets or high-payoff targets. High-value targets are personnel or assets required by the enemy for success. Commanders are most interested in killing or capturing a high-payoff target, as they are seen as a precondition for the commander to complete his mission – as dictated by higher headquarters (*The Targeting Process* 2010, B-1).

In practice, precision targeting requires commanders to minimise collateral damage to legitimise lethal operations (*Counterterrorism* 2014, II-2). This legitimacy is attained by exercising the principles of *jus in bello* (justice in war). Consequently, precision targeting is more time and resource intensive.

Unlike the pressure approach to HVT, precision targeting demands a mature intelligence architecture. This enables military commanders to apprehend the 'milieus, communication and contacts' shared between extremists (Crone 2016, 598). The 2011 military raid in Pakistan by US Navy SEALs which led to Osama bin Laden's death epitomises precision targeting. The

**“ The precision approach to HVT is designed to destroy the enemy's critical requirements, including high-value targets or high-payoff targets. ”**

successful killing of bin Laden as well as other operations has caused scholars and practitioners to promote precision targeting as a panacea to defeating terrorist groups, including IS. The US' 'Expeditionary Targeting Force' is the latest indication of a policy-strategy whereby authorities intend to destroy the Islamic State via strikes, raids, and cyberattacks conducted by merely 200 special operators (Starr 2016). In reality, precision targeting is a tactic and should be treated as such. In practice, this means that commanders should incorporate precision targeting into a more comprehensive strategy that also accounts for addressing political, economic, and social grievances that result from weak state institutions.

Precision targeting often sets the conditions for pressure operations against hybrid terrorist and insurgent threats. The Taliban and IS constitute two such threats. Based on the authors' combat experiences in Afghanistan, the mutual constitution of the precision and pressure targeting approaches is most evident when a lethal strike or raid against a key enemy combatant creates heightened communication across the network that enables follow-on operations.

#### **Pressure and Precision in Afghanistan**

In 2012, one of the authors led the intelligence directorate for a Combined Task Force's COIN operations in the Panjwai District of southern Afghanistan. The commander privileged 'hard' COIN and implemented the pressure approach to HVT against the Taliban. The unit killed 65 commanders, fighters, and facilitators, and wounded 19 more.

The pace of lethal strikes and raids severely disrupted the Taliban's ability to reconstitute its losses and desynchronised its decision-making process (or OODA-loop). The unit's pressure targeting set the conditions for precision strikes and raids conducted by a Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF). The Combined Task Force's pressure created shifts in the daily routines of the Taliban's district leaders that were recognised by the JSOTF's more robust intelligence collection capabilities. Expanded situational awareness enabled the JSOTF to find, fix, and finish the Taliban Shadow District Governor and his successor in rapid succession of one another in April 2013 (Ardolino 2013).

Coalition forces also pursued the precision approach discretely. The raid by special operations forces to capture the Haqqani Network's senior leader Hajji Mali Khan in October 2011 underscores the deliberate and exacting nature of precision targeting. Khan was seen as a 'lynchpin,' given his supervision of high-profile attacks against Afghan officials in Kabul (Semple 2011). The detention of Khan in Jani Khel District resulted from years of intensive targeting, including counter-intelligence operations conducted in Zhawara, Pakistan, a sanctuary for the Haqqani Network (Rassler and Brown 2011, 9).

Thus, a precision approach to HVT enhances the effectiveness of pressure targeting. In 2009, one of the authors served as the Intelligence Officer for a JSOTF deployed to Khost District in eastern Afghanistan. The JSOTF's commander conceptualised precision targeting as an enabling effort of the coalition's COIN operations. The JSOTF leveraged its myriad collection assets and destroyed multiple foreign fighter encampments that facilitated the training, planning, and staging of high-profile attacks in Kabul directed by the Haqqani Network. The JSOTF's surgical operations created subsequent chatter across the enemy network, enabling local units to cast a wider net and expand the tempo of their pressure operations against fleeing fighters and leaders. This adversely affected the enemy and facilitated conditions for a relatively peaceful Afghan presidential election (Lushenko 2010).

### **Implications: A Military Strategy for Defeating IS?**

As pressure and precision targeting are often

**“ As pressure and precision targeting are often used in a sequence, the coalition should recalibrate its precision operations against IS to facilitate long-term disruption and defeat. ”**

used in a sequence, especially against hybrid threats such as IS, the coalition should recalibrate its precision operations against IS to facilitate long-term disruption and defeat. Operation Inherent Resolve, the name given to the campaign to defeat IS, has resulted in almost 15,000 lethal strikes since its initiation nearly two years ago (Operation Inherent Resolve 2016). Arguably, few are high-value or high-payoff. Rather, they consist of fighting positions, weapons caches, vehicles, refueling sites, and buildings. Beyond al-Adnani's recent death, two exceptions are the airstrikes that killed Abu Omar al-Shishani and Haji Imam in March 2016.

The latter served as IS' 'Minister for Finance' and was the deputy of Omar al-Baghdadi, IS' leader. The former was IS' 'Minister of War' (Pellerin 2016). Although the coalition has purportedly pursued a CT strategy anchored by a precision approach to HVT, it has in fact favoured pressure targeting better suited for COIN operations. The hybridity of threat posed by IS requires a combination of both and the coalition's continued mischaracterisation of the group has presented a problem.

IS has evolved into a hybrid threat deploying both terrorist and insurgent tactics. In addition to heightened hit-and-run attacks, IS has expanded its martyrdom operations at an unprecedented rate. During the first five months of 2016, IS executed nearly 500 suicide attacks across Iraq, Libya, and Syria (Joscelyn 2016).

Also disconcerting for western authorities is IS' decentralised command and control in areas beyond the Middle East. This has seen a growth in terrorist attacks far removed from the conflict in Iraq and Syria (Yourish et. al. 2016). Commanders continue to favour a decidedly pressure or precision approach to HVT. It is unclear, for example, whether the coalition capitalised on intelligence and reflections following the deaths of al-Adnani, al-Shishani, and Imam to focus subsequently on strikes. Similarly, the question of whether the coalition has synchronised raids by special operations forces with lethal strikes to optimise effects against IS is debatable.

Pursuing a more tailored HVT approach that combines both pressure and precision targeting cannot succeed in destroying IS unless it is woven into a broader coalition effort. Such targeting cannot constitute an end itself. It must play a supporting role to disengagement CVE programmes designed to deter participation in, and support for terrorist and extremist groups including IS.

*The views expressed in this article are the authors' own and do not reflect the official policy or position of the United States Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or Government.*

**Major Paul Lushenko** is a U.S. Army Intelligence Officer and serves as an Adjunct Research Associate for the Australian Graduate School of Policing and Security located at Charles Sturt University in Canberra, Australia. He has deployed several times to Iraq and Afghanistan with Stryker and special operations forces.

**Major Anthony Williams** is a U.S. Army Intelligence Officer. He is attending the College of Naval Command and Staff at the U.S. Naval War College in pursuit of a M.A. in Defense and Strategic Studies. He has deployed several times to Iraq and Afghanistan with special operations forces.

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# Hijrah According to the Islamic State: An Analysis of Dabiq

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Matan Uberman and Dr. Shaul Shay

*In the Islamic tradition, Hijrah refers to Prophet Muhammad's migration from Mecca to Medina in 622 CE. However, the Islamic State (IS) has manipulated the same concept to attract Muslim followers to its territories in Syria and Iraq. The article analyses IS' propaganda magazine, Dabiq, to explore how IS has created a false understanding of Hijrah and exploited the concept for its own political and military agenda.*

## Introduction

Since the inception of the self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS) in June 2014, IS started manipulating the concept of *Hijrah* (Islamic migration). While none of the existing prominent Jihadi-Salafi scholars such as Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi and Abu Qatada al-Filistini – who support military means to establish an Islamic State – addressed the concept of *Hijrah* in detail, IS has managed to use its online propaganda magazine, *Dabiq*, to convey its formal viewpoint on the subject to potential recruits.

The concept of *Hijrah*, which represents Prophet Muhammad's migration from Mecca to Medina in 622 CE, is of great importance in Islam. The Prophet migrated to Medina because Muslims faced persecution in Mecca and found it difficult to practice their religion. Consequently, in the mainstream Islamic discourse, *Hijrah* constitutes moving from *Dar al-Harb* to *Dar al-Islam*. *Dar al-Harb*, which literally means “house of war,” refers to lands where Islamic law is not implemented or where Muslims do not enjoy the freedom to practice their religion. Conversely, *Dar al-Islam*, which literally means “house of Islam,” refers to areas under the rule of Islam. The traditional meaning of *Hijrah*, therefore, is that only Muslims who are unable to practise Islam, or face opposition when they do so, are obligated to migrate to the lands of the Muslims (Ebstein 2006).

IS, however, has exploited the concept of *Hijrah* to attract foreign fighters. In a detailed examination of all published issues of *Dabiq*, this article seeks to unravel aspects of *Hijrah* introduced by IS. It argues that while IS advocates the traditional *Hijrah* from *Dar al-Harb* to *Dar al-Islam*, the group has interpreted the application of the concept more broadly in order to widen its support base and areas of conflict.

## From *Dar al-Harb* to *Dar al-Islam*: A Traditional Account

Traditionally, *Hijrah* meant migration from *Dar al-Harb* to *Dar al-Islam*. The concept is considered to have been coined by Abu Hanifa (699 – 767 AD), founder of the Sunni Hanafi School of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence). According to him, there are a number of requirements for a country to be part of *Dar al-Islam*. First, Muslims must be able to enjoy peace and security within the country. Second, the country should be ruled by Muslim rulers. Third, it has common frontiers with some Muslim countries (Islamway.net 2002). Conversely, *Dar al-Harb* refers to territory under the control of non-believers who are belligerent towards the house of Islam and presumably hostile to the Muslims living in its dominion (Zahid 2016).

According to the Shafi'i scholar al-Mawardi, after the conquest of Mecca by Muhammad and his companions, *Hijrah* became an obligation only on those Muslims who are unable to practise their religion. This perception holds that in the time of the Prophet, the execution of religious commandments and duties was the primary objective of *Hijrah*. The believers were asked to migrate to Medina so that they would avoid the persecutions of the people of Mecca, and the temptation to recant Islam as a result of it. They migrated in order to learn the laws of Islam from the Prophet himself (Mawardi 1994). Until today, only when it is not possible for a Muslim to practise Islam will they be obligated to emigrate from *Dar al-Harb*.

### *Hijrah* from "*Dar al-Islam*" to the Islamic State

*Hijrah* to *Dar al-Islam* is an obligation only for those Muslims who reside in *Dar al-Harb*, viz. places where they cannot practise their religion. IS, on the other hand, propagates that there is persecution of "true believers" all over the world, including Muslim countries that constitute the traditional *Dar al-Islam*. IS, thus, calls for *Hijrah* even from the traditional "*Dar al-Islam*" to a new Islamic safe haven in Iraq and Syria – the Islamic State. By creating this delusion, IS has created a new sense of modern *Hijrah*.

It is imperative to understand how IS innovated the concept of *Hijrah* to serve its purpose and justified it through its propaganda magazine *Dabiq*. Firstly, in *Dabiq*, IS asserts what and where the true *Dar al-Islam* is today and does

“ IS innovated the concept of *Hijrah* to serve its purpose and justified it through its propaganda magazine *Dabiq*. ”

not consider any other entity as the true *Dar al-Islam* except the territories it controlled.

In Issue 2, it is written: "Many readers are probably asking about their obligations towards the *Khilafah*... The first priority is to perform *Hijrah* from wherever you are to the Islamic State, from *dārul-kufr* to *dārul-Islām*. Rush to the shade of the Islamic State with your parents, siblings, spouses, and children" (*Dabiq* 2014a, 3).

Secondly, the authors show their contempt towards secular and religious Arab Muslim countries. IS has sanctioned these places and governments as non-*Dar al-Islam*. In Issue 11, it is written: "with the revival of Islam's state, *Hijrah* is to the *wilāyāt* of the *Khilāfah*, not to Nusayrī, Rāfidī, Sahwah, or PKK territory, nor to America, Europe, and their *tāghūt* allies (most Arab and Muslim states especially secular states). Ibnul-Qayyim said that 'if the laws of Islam are not implemented somewhere, it is not *Dārul-Islām*'" (*Dabiq* 2015a, 22). This position is demonstrated through a remark made in an interview with a Tunisian IS fighter in Issue 8: "I decided to perform *Hijrah* to Shām because most of the brothers I used to work with were either killed or imprisoned and all the roads for me to continue *jihād* in Tunisia were cut off. Alhamdulillah, by performing *Hijrah* to Shām, I was blessed with witnessing the revival of the *Khilāfah*" (*Dabiq* 2015b, 61). The aim of this remark is to suggest that Tunisia is not a true *Dar al-Islam* and that "*jihādists*" in Tunisia (and others from traditional *Dar al-Islam*) should migrate to the Islamic State.

Thirdly, *Dabiq's* team hopes to communicate to potential recruits from traditional *Dar al-Islam* to migrate by giving the example of their countrymen already migrating to the Islamic

State and fighting. As such, they want to inspire others who intend to travel to Syria but have not yet done so. In Issue 3, it is written: "if you were to go to the frontlines of ar-Raqqah, al-Barakah, etc., you would find the soldiers and the commanders to be of different lands: the Jordanian, the Tunisian, the Egyptian, the Somali, the Turk, the Albanian, the Chechen, the Indonesian and so on" (*Dabiq* 2014b, 5-6).

Another important innovation is that IS has not mentioned Syria and Iraq as the only places for *Hijrah*. IS considers its *wilayats* (governorates) as extensions of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq and thus calls for *Hijrah* of Muslims to these locations as well. In Issue 8, it affirms: "The Islamic State expanded from Iraq into Shām and thereafter to other lands: West Africa, Algeria, Libya, Khurāsān, Sinai, Yemen, and the Arabian Peninsula" (*Dabiq* 2015c, 5). *Dabiq's* team mentions that these *wilayats* enable potential fighters from traditional *Dar al-Islam* to make *Hijrah* even if they are unable to reach Syria or Iraq. In this sense, *Dabiq* specifically refers to Libya and formally validates it for *Hijrah*. Again, in Issue 8, it says: "Libya has become an ideal land of *Hijrah* for those who find difficulty making their way to Shām, particularly those of our brothers and sisters in Africa" (*Dabiq* 2015d, 26). IS also released a video on 22 June 2016 in an attempt to recruit radical fighters in the Philippines and neighbouring countries; it, however, stated clearly that "If you can't get to Syria, join the *muhajideen* in the Philippines" (The Philippine Star 2016).

IS has, therefore, manipulated the call for *Hijrah* from traditional *Dar al-Islam* to the Islamic State, including all its *wilayats*, which IS perceives as the only true *Dar al-Islam* today.

### ***Hijrah* from *Dar al-Harb* to the Islamic State**

IS has even manipulated the traditional understanding of *Hijrah* and made it relevant to its potential recruits. *Dabiq* uses different tools to justify *Hijrah* and attract Muslims from the countries IS perceives as *Dar al-Harb* (mainly the West) to the Islamic State. It is important to note IS' manipulation of the term *Dar al-Harb* when in reality, most non-Muslim countries (amongst them Western countries) guarantee religious freedom, both in theory and practice.

First, the motif of the "stranger" or "outsider" is used by *Dabiq* to identify with Muslims who see themselves as "strangers" in their home or host

**“ Dabiq uses different tools to justify Hijrah and attract Muslims from the countries IS perceives as Dar al-Harb (but mainly the west) to the Islamic State. ”**

country. In fact, by their clever use of technology and social media, IS plants the same notion even in those who do not see themselves as strangers or outsiders and motivate them to emigrate. According to Issue 3, Ibnul-Qayyim said, "When Islam first began to emerge, it was something strange, and anyone who embraced it and responded to Allah and His Messenger became a stranger in his district, his tribe, his family, and his clan. Thus, those who responded to the da'wah of Islam left their tribes. They were lone individuals who emigrated from their tribes and clans, and entered into Islam. Therefore, they were the strangers, in reality, until Islam had emerged, its da'wah had spread, and the people entered into it in multitudes, such that they were no longer strangers" (*Dabiq* 2014c, 8).

*Dabiq* also attempts to attract European Muslims to carry out *Hijrah* by arousing feelings of resentment and even hatred towards their home country by appealing to their inferior economic status. This is done in tandem with the feelings of disrespect and indignity that some European Muslims feel (*Dabiq* 2014d). In Issue 3, the Islamic State entices such people with this statement: "Do not worry about money or accommodations for yourself and your family. There are plenty of homes and resources to cover you and your family" (*Dabiq* 2014e, 33).

### **Potential Security Threat of “Reverse Migration” and “No Migration”**

Reverse migration, commonly seen as a trend which will bring about 'returning fighters,' refers to fighters who are ordained by IS to migrate from the Islamic State to *Dar al-Islam* and *Dar al-*

*Harb*. In Issue 3 of *Dabiq*, IS calls this as an act of "authorised" jihad: "As for one who travels to a land outside of Shām for jihād on the order of the amīr, his journey is an act of obedience which does not nullify his *Hijrah* to Shām or his residence within it. This is the case even if he is killed outside of Shām" (*Dabiq* 2014f, 11). A recent study found that 30% of foreign fighters have returned to their home countries, presenting potential security threats (Ginkel and Entenmann 2016). This is because many have returned to carry out the instructions of the Islamic State's leadership and spread terror. For example, in the 2016 Brussels bombings, three of the attackers were returned fighters; the November 2015 Paris attacks were also planned by the returnee Abdelhamid Abaaoud. Muslim countries are also targeted, e.g. the 2016 Jakarta attacks planned by Bahrun Naim and the April 2015 Kuala Lumpur terror plot where two of the suspects fought in Syria with IS.

At the same time, IS has obliged those who cannot do *Hijrah* to execute attacks in their home countries. For instance, in Issue 11 of *Dabiq*, IS asserted that: "As for the Muslim who is unable to perform *Hijrah* from dārul-kufr to the Khilāfah, then there is much opportunity for him to strike out against the kāfir enemies of the Islamic State" (*Dabiq* 2015e, 54). Thereafter, many targets are listed, including Michigan, Los Angeles, New York, Jakarta, Riyadh and so on. In his speech on 14 May 2015, the so-called caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi added that "the Muslim who cannot make *Hijrah* should not hesitate nor consult any supposed 'scholar' on this obligation. He should attack after declaring his *bay'ah* (pledge of allegiance) to the Khilāfah, so as not to die a death of Jāhiliyyah" (*Dabiq* 2015f, 54). As such, it is also important to check IS sympathisers and supporters outside of Iraq and Syria since they have already received instructions to conduct attacks.

### The Future of *Hijrah*

The future of *Hijrah* depends on two alternative scenarios. First, if IS stays in power in Iraq and Syria, *Hijrah* will continue its natural course and the number of people joining IS will continue to rise. Second, if the world powers eliminate IS in Syria and Iraq, then Libya, Sinai Peninsula, Nigeria, and other emerging and potential future *wilayats* like the Philippines will likely be potential *Hijrah* destinations albeit on a much smaller scale. Therefore, even if the US-led coalition and Russia defeat IS in Iraq and Syria, the problem

**“ The security problems posed by Hijrah, whether internal migration or external, must be dealt with before it becomes a bigger issue like Iraq or Syria. ”**

will persist. Essentially, the transfer of people from Syria or Iraq to Libya or other *wilayats* will become the new definition of Islamic migration according to IS. This raises the possibility of such *wilayats* providing sanctuaries for plotting and carrying out terrorist attacks to adjacent territories. These *wilayats* are not meant to be static but expanding with the increase in followers or as government control recedes. The security problems posed by *Hijrah*, whether internal migration or external, must be dealt with before it becomes a bigger problem like Iraq and Syria.

*Matan Uberman is an Academic Researcher & an Information Specialist at The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center (ITIC), Tel Aviv and The Lauder School of Government, Diplomacy and Strategy at the IDC Herzliya, Israel.*

*Dr. Col. (Res.) Shaul Shay is the Director of Research of The Institute for Policy and Strategy (IPS) and a Research Fellow at the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT). Dr. Shay is one of the leading experts of Middle Eastern Studies, local and international terrorism and Military History. Dr. Shay is the author and the editor of 17 books, 9 of them were published in the USA and the U.K.*

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# Women of the Islamic State: The Evolving Role of Women in Jihad

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Hamoon Khelghat-Doost

*The present literature on women's involvement with jihadi militarist organisations tends to victimise and portray women as instruments of male leadership. However, the emergence of the so-called Islamic State (IS) has challenged this conventional characterisation. Regardless of the strict interpretation of Sharia law, IS has appointed women to positions within a wide range of state institutions and the security forces. Contrary to previously-held notions, these women remain as ideologically motivated as the men in the organisation, and their participation calls for a renewed look at women's roles in jihadism.*

## Introduction

The emergence of the Islamic State (IS) has challenged the conventional perceptions of security practitioners and scholars regarding the role of women in jihadism. Jihadism in its military form is traditionally regarded as “regulated warfare with divine sanction” (Encyclopaedia Iranica 2012, 154) or “struggle on behalf of the faith” (Scruton 2007, 368). This contrasts fundamentally with the perception of jihad as a “spiritual struggle which is commonly understood by mainstream Muslims today” (Lahoud 2014, 19). In the context of a militarised understanding of jihad, it is widely accepted that classical Islamic sources are not in favour of women in combat roles (Sjoberg & Gentry 2011). Instead, these texts emphasise the importance of women's roles as “mother[s], sister[s], daughter[s], and wives of Muslim men at war” (Sjoberg & Gentry 2011). These roles are considered as secondary or supportive roles in military jihadism, as they tend to exclude armed combat.

However, unlike other organisations such as Al Qaeda which has a vague and even contradictory opinion on establishing a state and women's contribution to it, IS has the clear ambition of establishing a viable caliphate with its own society, economy, military and other state institutions that are inclusive of women. The nature of these goals and ensuring their accomplishment requires women to play a significant organisational role. As such, “IS has big plans for Muslim women who migrate to their territory to play a key role in building the so-called caliphate” (Gardner 2015). Since IS seeks to portray itself as more than just a fighting force and a movement, the role of women in the growth of the state and its sustenance becomes critical (Smith 2015).

For this reason, IS employs women in different state departments and agencies including “the medical department, the educational department and the tax collection department” (Gardner 2015). Overall, the diversity of roles that women are assigned within IS challenges the conventional approaches towards studying women in jihadi organisations. In light of the changing roles, this article argues that women’s roles in jihadi organisations, specifically IS, have evolved from secondary and supportive roles to more primary roles.

### **The Nature of Women’s Participation in Jihadism**

Militant activity is often regarded as a predominantly male preserve. This approach is based upon the broad dichotomy between the public and private spheres, whereby the public sphere includes political and militant activities, traditionally considered suitable for men and unsuitable for women. In comparison, women are relegated to private activities, which include managing the household and peripheral social activities that are largely linked to the household.

However, in light of an increasing number of women participating in violent activities, such as suicide bombings (particularly in the last two decades), the traditional public/private divide is being redefined. This development has also challenged conventional perception regarding militant activity as a masculine characteristic even among highly conservative jihadi organisations. In this regard, it has also been argued that the “growth in women’s participation is especially evident in Islamic terrorism” (Poloni-Staudinger & Ortals 2013, 36).

The evolving roles adopted by women in jihadi organisations can be broadly divided into two categories - supporting and active roles. With respect to supporting roles in jihadi organisations, women are mostly involved in logistical and recruitment activities, such as delivering messages, intelligence gathering and acting as decoys. In terms of active roles, women are involved in executing violent operations (including suicide bombings, shootings and hijackings) and are trained in the use of weapons and the making of explosives. In addition, one of the dominant active roles of women is acting as ideologically-devoted mothers that are ideologising the next generation of jihadists.

**“ The evolving roles adopted by women in jihadi organisations can be broadly divided into two categories - supporting and active roles. ”**

### **Women’s position in Jihadi Organisations: Victims or Agents?**

The dominant traditional studies on the relationship between women and militant jihadism tend to portray women as victims of violence. These approaches regard women as tactical tools within the strictly patriarchal structure of the organisation, where their duties are confined to the decisions of the male-dominated leadership. Concurrently, they also tend to argue that women’s participation in jihadi activities is linked to male-centric factors, such as avenging the death of a male member of the family. This understanding of women’s position denies their agency and ability to make informed decisions regarding joining jihadi organisations. Here, agency is defined as individual actors having the capacity to process social experiences and devise ways of coping with life (Sjoberg & Gentry 2007).

A similar pattern in denying women’s agency may be observed when studying suicide bombings. According to Liz Sage (2013), “while the male suicide bomber is read as making a political or ideological stand for the group to which he is attached, the female suicide bomber is read as engaging in suicide bombing because her personal life has made her suicidal”. Again, viewing women’s involvement in suicide bombing as ‘personal’ denies them agency and rejects the criticality of their roles.

This stereotyping inaccurately tends to generalise women as tactical tools, while consequently marginalising their agency. In comparison, research conducted by the Centre

on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation (2012) argues that women are active as “ideologues and supporters of violent extremism” in several jihadi organisations, including Palestinian and Iraqi groups. Further, a growing body of literature, including Fink’s (2010) study of women’s active involvement in promoting and supporting jihadi organisations in Bangladesh, utilises empirical evidence to suggest that women possess agency in jihadi organisations. Moreover, Farhana Qazi (2011) studies female terrorists and demonstrates that “a complicated combination of history and culture weigh into women’s decisions to be a part of terrorist organisations”. These categories of analysis indicate that women have an active choice in deciding whether to join a jihadi organisation. This also suggests that conventional stereotypes of women’s position in jihadi organisations as victims lacking agency are unable to offer a holistic view of women’s roles. As jihadi organisations such as IS continue to recruit more women in larger roles, their level of agency also rises subsequently.

### The Women of the Islamic State

Unlike its predecessor Al Qaeda, IS has the ambition of establishing a sustainable caliphate, which is essentially a state with a working system of governance. Beyond the male and female membership, a caliphate also comprises economic, military and other state institutions. According to the Middle East Monitor (2014), women comprise approximately 10 per cent of the total number of IS’ foreign fighters and play a significant role in ensuring the normal functioning of the state and its institutions. In light of their indispensability to the group, IS engages women in different state departments and agencies including the medical, educational and tax collection departments (Gardner 2015). The sections below will focus on the prominent roles women are assigned to by IS, that include but are not limited to their traditional roles as mothers.

#### *Schools for Women as Mothers*

Since IS considers itself to be a newly-established state, the entity has a long-term plan for educating the next generation of its citizens or jihadists. Owing to the urgency of preparing the next generation of the caliphate, the women of IS today are regarded as the mothers of tomorrow. For this reason, IS has established its first female finishing school, Al-Zawra, that seeks to

**“Owing to the urgency of preparing the next generation of the caliphate, the women of IS today are regarded as the mothers of tomorrow.”**

create a generation of ideologically-motivated mothers. According to the mission statement of the school, it provides education and training for women “interested in explosive belts and suicide bombings more than a white dress or a castle or clothing or furniture” (Haaretz 2014). In addition, the school also offers a wide range of training courses on domestic work, first aid, Islam and Sharia law, use of weaponry, social media and computer programmes (Kulze 2014).

Even though there were recent reports on the closure of girls’ schools, many remain open in IS territories albeit with severe restrictions imposed. Schools are completely segregated, and women instructors are in charge of girls’ education. Moreover, it is compulsory for the female students and teachers to obey the dress code of *niqab* (veil for the face) and body covering. Certain reports also mention that it is obligatory for female teachers to undergo a ‘legitimacy course’ (focusing on the religious and ideological leanings of IS), with subjects such as science, sports and philosophy banned from the curriculum (Platt 2014). All these harsh measurements ensure the creation of a generation of mothers dedicated to IS ideology, working towards raising and giving birth to the next generation of jihadi citizens and fighters.

#### *Women as Healthcare Providers*

IS also utilises women in the health sector within its controlled territories. As IS advocates intense gender segregation policies, female doctors and nurses are a necessity and located in an isolated section of hospitals to attend to female patients. Multiple reports have also affirmed the

appointment of women in such roles, with general hospitals in main cities of IS territories possessing gender segregated units. As such, IS centrally controls the distribution of female healthcare personnel throughout its territories. Some of these doctors and nurses are reported to be stationed at a medical faculty next to the Raqqa National hospital while others have been dispatched close to Aleppo and Menbij's National Hospital, located 12 miles from the Turkish border (Spencer 2016).

As IS believes in a supra-nationalist approach towards state building, a global call for women to join IS has been made consistently. Following such efforts, a number of female doctors, including Shams from Malaysia and Nada Sami Kader from Britain, migrated to IS territories and joined the healthcare system. Even though IS has made it permissible for women to work as doctors, they are still required to follow the restrictions put forth by IS' Sharia law. This includes the standard dress codes and strict restraint on night shifts at hospitals and treating male patients.

#### *Women as Combatants*

IS also assigns women roles within the security and military apparatus of the so-called caliphate. Shortly after the establishment of IS, the group announced the formation of the Al-Khansaa Brigade, a women-only vigilante force that patrols cities like Raqqa and Mosul while enforcing strict Islamist rule (Gardner 2015). Women from the Al-Khansaa Brigade are very brutal towards those who violate the rules, and use violent tactics to stifle dissent. The members of this brigade, who are selected mainly from citizens of Middle Eastern states, undergo military and police training for several weeks before starting their missions. The women also serve at checkpoints in order to ensure other women are not smuggling arms across the borders (Smith 2015).

Aside from their deployment in moral policing units, recent reports also indicate that IS has made its first recorded attempt to bring women to the frontlines, alongside the men, in Libya. In March 2016, it was reported that several female members of IS were killed, while fighting alongside men in the Libyan city, Sabratha (Webb 2016). There are more than a thousand IS female members currently in Libya and out of this number, it is estimated that more than a hundred are fighting on the frontlines after three

**“ Aside from their deployment in moral policing units, recent reports also indicate that IS has made its first recorded attempt to bring women to the frontlines, alongside the men, in Libya. ”**

weeks training in the use of weapons (Mirror 2016). The involvement of women as fighters in IS ranks predominantly contrasts with the approaches of studying women in jihadi organisations that tend to portray them as tactical tools at the hands of men rather than active members in combat.

#### *Women and the Call to Hijrah*

IS emphasises on the act of hijrah (migration for the cause of God), calling both Muslim men and women to travel to Iraq and Syria and become a part of the caliphate. As such, IS provides women who are alienated and ostracised for their religious beliefs and practices in western countries, an environment that is conducive to Islamist practices. Thus, while placing importance on women making hijrah, IS is enabling them to become active members of the society. For these women, IS' 'Islamic state' could possibly offer an escape from a country where their equality with the 'other' is dependent upon forsaking their religious beliefs or practices (Zakaria 2015).

#### **Conclusion**

Despite the restrictions placed on women and the presence of their traditional roles as mothers, their expansive involvement within IS demonstrates a deviation from roles within other jihadi groups in the past. Thus, the traditional

understanding of women's participation in jihadi organisations as being restricted to mere secondary roles is challenged by IS. Like any other group in charge of a state or territory, IS is using women in larger and more significant functions. In addition, the informed involvement of women with diverse capacities under IS challenges the conventional understanding of women's engagement with jihadi organisations as victims. In light of these developments, it is simplistic and even misleading to consider women who join IS as just victims or jihadi brides. It is imperative to note that these women possess ideological motivations similar to their male counterparts that encapsulate their rationale for participation in IS. Lastly, the criticality of women to IS functioning also necessitates a fresh look at the male-dominated approach in counter-terrorism.

**Hamoan Khelghat-Doost** is a PhD scholar at the Department of Political Science at National University of Singapore (NUS) and a recipient of the NUS Research Scholarship. His research focuses on the role of gender in political violence in the Middle East. The author would like to thank Associate Professor Terence Lee at NUS for his helpful inputs and comments.

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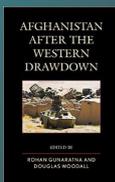
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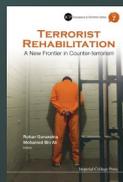


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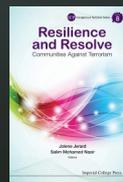
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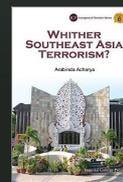
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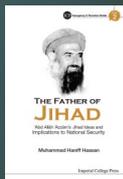
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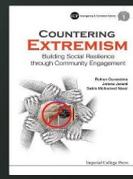
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Nanyang Technological University

Block S4, Level B4, 50 Nanyang Avenue, Singapore 639798

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