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INSTITUTE *for*
STRATEGIC DIALOGUE

Becoming Mulan?

Female Western
Migrants to ISIS

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Cover photo

The cover photo was uploaded to Twitter by one of the women within our dataset; contact the authors for additional information.

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*“I wonder if I can pull a Mulan
and enter the battle field.”*

UMM UBAYDAH, OCTOBER 2014

*“I still remember it was a cold night. I was freezing and exhausted. Tired of walking, I’m not sure how long I have to walk more. I was in a group of strangers, crossing the border. Everyone has their own story, everyone has their own pain to tell – but we all have the same goal that night. Hijrah fee Allāh Ta’ala.
[Migration in the name of almighty God]*

I looked around. I saw an old woman who was about in her 60s. She was with her daughter which I believe was in her third trimester of pregnancy.

And I saw Umm Yusuf, with her two kids. Umm Zayd who was 7 months pregnant and Umm Salah. I’m not sure about the brothers, but I saw an old man, about on his late 70s – crossing the border with us. My tears were rolling on my cheek – not because I’m sad but I felt honoured for Allah has blessed me to be with them.

*After a long walk, few brothers came from the opposite site and approached brothers from our group. As I was looking at them, I saw a car with the slogan of tauheed written on it.
My heart skipped a beat!*

Few minutes later, the brothers from our group chanted Takbeer ["God is the greatest"] and made sujud [prostration during prayers]! They were hugging each other and I can hear everyone began to weep. I wasn't sure what was going on.

Umm Yusuf, came to me and said.

"Shams! Anti fi Shaam al Zan. Mabrouk!"
[Shams! You are in Syria now. Congratulations]

I didn't understand what she said but I believed that I have made my way. All three of them – Umm Yusuf, Umm Zayd and Umm Salah came and hugged me in tears.

"Shams you have made it!" My hear shouted with joy.

I couldn't believe it, I made it. It was an emotional night. We praised Allāh over and over again, congratulated each other.

On that night, three strangers became the most important peoples in my life."

1. Introduction

The current flow of foreigners to Syria and Iraq is remarkable not only for its scale, but also for its inclusion of many women. Much has been written about the male fighters who migrate to engage in the conflict there;¹ these fighters are prolific on social media and share details of their day-to-day experiences with supporters and opponents alike.² Less, however, is known about the women who travel to join ISIS and support its state-building efforts.³ The flow of both men and women is a concern for Western governments, who fear that these individuals could pose a threat on return home. The number of Western migrants overall is estimated at 3,000, with as many as 550 of these being women.⁴ This report aims to provide insight into the female migrants, examining the reasons they migrate, the reality of their lives in ISIS-controlled territory, and the potential risk they pose. While there is a large online ecosystem of female ISIS supporters, this study will focus specifically on Western women who are believed to be currently residing in ISIS-controlled territory.

1.1 Methodology

This report has anchored its findings in the primary material supplied by the Western female migrants themselves, through their social media accounts. In order to create the sample of women, researchers used a simple 'snowball' technique, where female ISIS migrants were identified

among the networks of other known ISIS members. The women have been designated as ISIS migrants if they *self-identify* as migrants in ISIS-controlled territory. Researchers have also used evidence from photographs, online interactions with other ISIS accounts, and media reports to help determine the probability that the person is actually in Syria or Iraq. The core sample of used in the completion of this report includes twelve women.⁵

The women are defined as Western if they indicate that they originate from Europe (excluding Russia and Turkey), United States, Canada, Australia or New Zealand.⁶ The origin of one female migrant in the sample could not be determined.⁷ Her comments have been used in the report, but only when they speak to the comments made by other *muhajirat* (female migrants). Otherwise the women come from a range of different countries; six of the women originate from Britain, two are Dutch, one is French, one is Canadian and one is believed to be Austrian.

The women's social media postings (from Twitter, Tumblr, and Ask.fm) were transcribed and manually coded by sixty-five variables to create a searchable database.⁸ This report has based its research on this database, which continues to be added to by researchers at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue and will form the basis of further studies.

1.2 A note on terms

Although the term foreign fighter is commonly used to describe men who migrate to Syria and Iraq to participate in the conflict there, it is not an accurate description of the women who travel to this region.⁹ As this report will show, the women traveling to ISIS-controlled territory do not currently engage in combat, and indeed are forbidden to do so. For this reason, they will be generally described as female migrants to ISIS-held territory or at other times by the Arabic term *muhajirah* (singular) or *muhajirat* (plural).

The group in question will be referred to as ISIS, as this is the most widely recognised acronym for the group amongst general readers. The term the 'Islamic State' will be broadly avoided, while this region certainly takes on state-like functions, it has not been recognised internationally as a state and applying that label risks granting a degree of legitimacy to the entity created. Terms such as ISIS-controlled territory and ISIS-held region are preferred.

2. Reasons for travel

The first step in seeking to stem the flow of female migrants to ISIS is to understand what is driving these women to leave their home countries and travel to a conflict zone. The women who travel to Syria and Iraq can be divided into two categories, those that travel with male companions or husbands, and those that make the trip alone. Of those that travel alone, three primary reasons have been identified: grievances, solutions and personal motivations.¹⁰ This analysis will focus primarily on the second group as this group appeared more prominent in our dataset and these individuals cannot be said to have been coerced. It is important to note that this analysis has focused solely on the women's *self-identified* reasons for migrating. Without more information about the women's socio-economic status and experiences living in the West, other elements in their radicalisation process are not available to us. More research should be focused on this in the future.

2.1 Travel with male companions and partners

There are documented cases of western fighters bringing entire families with them to ISIS-controlled territory, including young children and wives. Some governments, such as that of Finland, have publically stated that they are aware of numerous children and women that had accompanied male fighters to ISIS-held territory.¹¹ Association with, or marriage to a male ISIS supporters

or fighter remains a strong reason for women to travel to ISIS-held territory, though it must be noted that this was relatively rare within our dataset, perhaps due to a sampling anomaly and the probability of those more vocal on social media to have made the decision to migrate independent of husbands or partners. That said, some of those within our sample travelled with other women who were aiming to join their husbands inside Syria and Iraq.¹²

2.2 Travel independently of husbands or partners

As with all forms of radicalisation, the reason the women give for travelling are as varied as the women themselves, but three distinct reasons for travel can be identified.

The Ummah under attack

Like their male counterparts, the women within our sample who migrate to ISIS territory talk at length about the oppression of Muslims throughout the world. They point to perceived attacks on the Ummah from Bosnia to Syria, from Myanmar to Mali,¹³ and often post gruesome and distressing images of violence against Muslims on their Twitter profiles and blogs. Umm Esa for example re-tweeted a picture of a dead boy and his grieving twin brother, writing: 'Heartbreaking Twin brother of 13 year old child who was murdered yesterday by Israeli army kisses his twin farewell'.¹⁴ Many images show children who have been injured in the violence, many without limbs and severely disfigured. These different conflicts across the world are presented as part of a larger war against Islam by non-believers.¹⁵ One migrant writes that '[t]heir (Kuffar) agenda is to destroy and prevent the awakening of Muslim Ummah [community]'.¹⁶ Binary language is used to describe two opposing entities. Umm Khattab tweets: 'Two camps in the [world] either with the camp of iman [belief] or camp of kufr [unbelief] no in between'.¹⁷ Umm Irhab echoes this sentiment, writing that '[t]his is a war against Islam, so you are either with us or against us'.¹⁸

The empathy these women feel for the Muslim victims of violence and the complicity they feel the Western powers have in perpetuating these conflicts are important factors in their decision to leave the West and seek an alternative society. The binary way in which the world is presented further reinforces this

decision. Umm Khattab explains her thinking: ‘How can you live amongst people who desire to get rid of islam ... Wallahi [I swear to God] these Kuffar and Munafiqeen [hypocrites] will do anything to cause the Muslemeen [Muslims] harm.’¹⁹

Building the Caliphate

Female migrants are not just rejecting the culture and foreign policy of the West; they are also embracing a new vision for society. They hope to contribute to this society, governed by a strict interpretation of *shari’ah law*. In this way, ISIS’s territorial gains and state-building project are crucial in attracting the women, who can see they have an important role to play in the new society. Umm Ubaydah writes: ‘We don’t resort to violence because of the wrong America has done. *We are trying to build an Islamic state that lives and abides by the law of Allah.*’²⁰

“They celebrate every territorial victory of ISIS and will for its expansion across the Middle East and beyond”

Similarly Umm Ibrahim writes that ‘the most important reasons the muhajireen came here was to reestablish the khilafah & be part of bringing back the honor to this ummah.’²¹ For these women, the region controlled by ISIS is seen as a ‘safe-haven for those who wish to follow Islam in its entirety, or those who wish to live by Tawheed.’²² These women perceive themselves as migrating to an area where they can live ‘honourably under the law of Shariah.’²³ The *muhajirat* see hope in the mission of ISIS, hope that this region will develop into their vision of an Islamic utopia. They celebrate every territorial victory of ISIS and will for its expansion across the Middle East and beyond. One woman tweets: ‘SubhanaAllah [Glorious is God] had a dream I saw this khalifah spreading like an empire to the furthest east & west, shortly after the khalifah was announced’.²⁴

Thus the women hope to contribute to the creation of an ideologically pure state. They also hope to practically contribute to ISIS’s state-building,

as mothers, nurses or teachers. ISIS's declaration of a caliphate has given these women an ideologically consistent outlet to do something beyond simply supporting ISIS online, when combat is considered off limits. This goes some way to explaining why women are so prominent in this flow when compared to previous migration patterns during conflicts in Afghanistan, the Balkans, Somalia and Iraq.

Individual duty and identity

Not only do these women believe that the building of a Muslim caliphate is desirable, they believe that it is their *mandatory* religious duty (*fard al-ayn*) to assist this process. Umm Ubaydah writes explicitly that trying to build an Islamic state 'is a Must (*fardh ayn*) upon all Muslims.'²⁵ Another Dutch migrant writes: 'Hijrah [migration] is FARD [a duty]! :)'²⁶ These women have a strong belief in the afterlife. For them, fulfilling their religious duty is crucial to securing their place in heaven. Umm Khattab writes that she has 'no desire to live in this world as [her] aspirations is the hereafter'.²⁷ She even goes so far as to say that '[w]e love death as you love life'.²⁸ Umm Irhab links her migration directly to heaven: 'This [migration] was never meant for ease but a lesson of patience & hardship to understand what jannah [heaven] was always meant for & see if we're worthy of it'.²⁹ Her experience during her migration is somehow a test of endurance to see if she is 'worthy' to enter heaven. Another woman writes about leaving her family in the West, explaining that she 'was sacrificing the dearest people to [her] *fisibillah* [for the sake of God] and to get the best in *akirah* [afterlife]'.³⁰

In addition to the promise of heavenly rewards, there are also rewards in this life which the *muhajirat* seek out. The imagery of a lion and a lioness, of finding a brave and noble husband, is prevalent among female supporters of ISIS; marriage, and as such transition from childhood into adulthood, is considered a core factor in migration. Women who believe they can travel to Syria and Iraq and not get married are actively dissuaded.³¹ Beyond romantic attachment, and in common with their male counterparts, the women within our dataset speak of the sense of camaraderie and sisterhood they experience in ISIS-controlled territory, in contrast to the fake and surface-level relationships they have in the west.³² This search for meaning, sisterhood, and identity is a key driving factor for women to travel.

This analysis has focused solely on the women's self-identified reasons for travel. The women within our sample express their deep grievances at the treatment of Muslims across the world, and deplore the West's foreign policy. In response to these problems, they present their solution – an Islamic society built on their strict interpretation of *shari'ah law*. They share a vision for their ideal society and want to build this society in the territory captured by ISIS. But more than this, these women believe it is their *mandatory* religious duty (*fard al-ayn*) to migrate. They believe that this migration will bring them closer to God and help secure their place in heaven, while giving them a sense of belonging and sisterhood on earth. It is largely these three interlocking factors that are crucial in motivating these women to migrate.

3. Reality of life for female ISIS migrants

The extensive and decentralised use of social media among ISIS supporters has given ISIS an invaluable propaganda apparatus. It has also given researchers and others unprecedented insight into the day-to-day lives of those who travel to ISIS-controlled territory. This section will examine the reality of daily life for the female migrants. In doing so, it provides further insight into the women's motivations for migrating, their reasons for staying or leaving ISIS-controlled territory and what, if anything, can be done to get them home.

3.1 Preparing to leave: The pain of leaving one's family

Before an individual sets out for Syria, they must first reconcile themselves with the fact that they will be leaving their family, perhaps forever. The women within our sample talk at length about the pain they felt when leaving their families in the West. One female ISIS migrant writes about the precious last moments with her family before she left for the Middle East.

So the night before I was leaving I try to spend as much time with my family as I could wallahi [I swear to God] I remember looking at my mums face and it was so hard for me not to cry as I knew I would be leaving her and my dad soon, I played with my younger

*siblings and told them I love them and my heart was breaking knowing I won't see them grow up but kheir [well] I knew it was for the best.*³³

Indeed one of the women writes explicitly that issues around one's family represent the most difficult trial that the women face. "The biggest Fitnah [trial] once you arrive in the land of Jihad is your family."³⁴ She goes on to explain that:

*Wallahi [I swear to God] preparing yourself to leave is difficult because you are leaving the women who kept you in her womb for 9 months, who breastfed you, who stayed up till night taking care of each and every one of your needs and the person who you truly feel at Home with. Even if you know how right this path and decision is and how your love for Allah comes before anything and everything, this is still an ache which only one who has been through and experienced it can understand.*³⁵

“There is evidence to suggest that women’s families have a strong influence in terms of persuading some prospective female migrants at least to delay, if not to reject migration entirely”

Many parents of female migrants disagree with ISIS ideology and goals and are angry and distressed to learn that their daughters have left for Syria or Iraq. The women talk at length about the first telephone call that they make to their families after they have left and how painful they find this conversation. Umm Layth explains that ‘when you hear them sob and beg like crazy on the phone for you to come back it’s so hard. Wallahi [I swear to God] it’s so hard to hear this and I can never do justice to how cold hearted you feel.’³⁶ This same woman, Umm Layth, wrote a poem, entitled ‘Ya Umee’ [O Mother] on her blog to express her sadness at leaving her mother without a proper goodbye.³⁷

The mother, in particular, appears an important figure for these women. Umm Ubaydah writes: ‘I yearn to hug my mother again, kiss her cheek or to even hear her voice, May Allah accept my sacrifice & allow me 2 intercede for her’,³⁸ Umm Khattab, very soon after learning that her husband, an ISIS fighter, has been killed, talks of the longing she feels for her mother. ‘Ya ummi [O Mother] there’s nothing more in this world I long for then the day I embrace you if not in this dunya [world] then in jannah [heaven] insha’Allah [God willing]’.³⁹ The importance of these women’s family, specifically their mothers, should not be underestimated.

There is evidence to suggest that women’s families have a strong influence in terms of persuading some prospective female migrants at least to delay, if not to reject migration entirely. Umm Layth writes that ‘[m]any people are using their parents as an excuse to stay back from making their feet dusty and would rather live in Dishonour amongst the kuffar [non-believers].’⁴⁰ Enquiries from prospective migrants asking about *hijrah* [migration], mention their families. One person writes that she is:

*a last born of a huge family and am planning on soon making Hijra [migration] but I happen to be one the last person who stays with my mom it’s only me and her now all the other siblings are busy with this or that, here or there can I still make Hijra [migration] with the other ukhtis [sisters], I keep asking this question to myself but I keep on saying I’d prolly get married and leave her anyway*⁴¹

These comments reveal the importance of family responsibility in the minds of prospective migrants. Thoughts about leaving their family can dampen these women’s desire to leave the West and migrate to territories under ISIS control.

Families can also provide *practical* obstacles as well as emotional obstacles to women’s migration. This is especially the case for young women. One young woman writes to a *muhajirah* to explain her predicament.

Ukhti [sister] i dont have money, and i dont get money of my family because they are afraid that i leave i’ve sold my iphone my everything yet im broke. Plus my passport my family have it and if i report it lost i have to pay about 500\$ to get it, i dont know what to do. And i cant

take a visa card because im under 21 in my country, and my stepfather is mean and bad has called the cops on me many times. Make dua for me, i dont know what to do for reals :(ya Allahii [Oh my God].⁴²

The mention of dollars and use of the colloquial term ‘cops’ might suggest that this woman is currently based in North America. Whatever her origin, the clear message is that her family is providing real and practical obstacles that prevent her from travelling.

This exploration of the female ISIS migrants’ Twitter and blog posts has highlighted the profound importance of the family in their migration stories. It has suggested that families place significant emotional pressure on women *not* to migrate to territories under ISIS control. More than that, it has provided evidence to suggest that some families are successfully implementing practical measures that prevent their daughters from travelling to Syria and Iraq.

Policy makers should endeavour to support families in their efforts to prevent their daughters from migrating. They should invest in interventions which advise families on the measures, such as withholding passports and large amounts of money, that are effective in preventing their younger daughters from migrating. Furthermore, as has been shown, families have a great deal of emotional influence on their children. For this reason, counter messages coming from family members may have greater effect.

3.2 The journey to ISIS-controlled territory

Once the decision has been made to travel, and the emotional and practical barriers put up by families have been overcome, the women begin their journey to ISIS-controlled territory. When describing their journey, the women in our sample are careful not to give away details which could hamper the efforts of future migrants. Often the women will urge those who want to migrate to contact them using more secure channels, such as surespot or kik.⁴³ Accounts are general and focus more on the women’s emotions than on the practicalities.

Umm Khattab’s journey

One woman, Umm Khattab, tells a detailed and remarkable story of her

journey to ISIS territory.⁴⁴ She talks about arriving in ‘T’, most probably Turkey, and meeting up with ‘two other sisters Umm Laden and Umm Musab [who] both had children under 5.’⁴⁵ The fact that these women are travelling with young children is interesting in itself. Umm Khattab and her group encounter problems however and are detained by the Turkish military. They are travelling in full *nigab*, but are asked to lift this up and show their faces. The Turkish military realise that they are not Syrian and question them about their links with ‘Daesha’ (ISIS). The women are booked tickets back to their countries. Umm Khattab writes:

*So Dawlah [ISIS] found out about our predicament and sent us a lawyer who worked some magic and after a loooooong tiring week in prison they let us go Alhamdulillah [thanks be to God]. So we were allowed to go T but we went crossing the boarder the normal way and me and Umm Musab and Umm Laden were all so happy cause we crossed the boarder’.*⁴⁶

The fact that the women manage to cross after being previously detained is noteworthy, and is consistent with the accounts of others that crossed into ISIS-controlled territory on their second and third attempts.⁴⁷ The claim that ISIS is providing lawyers for their immigrants is also particularly striking and paints a picture of a highly organised well-funded machine attempting to assume state-like functions and interacting informally with Turkish figures. The saga continues however. The women, on crossing the border, find themselves not in ISIS-controlled territory at all.⁴⁸ Umm Khattab explains that ‘[S]omething was a bit strange because there was a big syrian flag and I thought oh no something is not right cause I failed to see the black flag ANYWHERE.’⁴⁹

The women are then detained by another group, which Umm Khattab identifies as the Free Syrian Army. Umm Khattab is open about her fear at this point. She writes: ‘I then knew we were in a real sticky situation ... I thought we were done for’.⁵⁰ Umm Khattab then describes some communication between her travelling companion’s husband from ISIS and the Free Syrian Army official. That the different factions in the Syrian conflict could have this sort of communication is telling and highlights an example of localised cooperation between the armed groups in Syria.

Umm Laden messages her husband saying we were with fsa and he calls us and tells his wife to hand the phone to the fsa guy and then they start exchanging words and then fsa guy looked annoyed and so sends us into a another room.⁵¹

“Despite being interrogated and turned away once, these aspiring migrants are willing to make multiple attempts to enter ISIS-controlled territory”

This interchange eventually ensures their release. They leave the building and find a car outside waiting for them. They are driven three hours to the border controlled by ISIS and enter with ease. Umm Khattab writes that ‘we didn’t even have to run across the boarder wallahi they opened the Boarder gates for us and we entered shaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaam by the will of Allah.’⁵²

Overall, such anecdotes indicate the perseverance of those involved. Despite being interrogated and turned away once, these aspiring migrants are willing to make multiple attempts to enter ISIS-controlled territory. These stories also indicate that it may not be unusual for women to group together and migrate with others. The women may be wearing full *niqab*, although other accounts have indicated that women travelling to the ISIS region also remove their *niqab* so as to avoid suspicion.⁵³ Such accounts also show the treacherous and potentially dangerous nature of these women’s migration, that could lead them to be imprisoned or captured by a competing faction.

3.3 Life under ISIS

Those women who successfully reach Syria or Iraq must then settle into their daily life within the self-proclaimed ‘caliphate’. The women within our sample talk at length about their day-to-day lives in ISIS-controlled territory. The unmarried women stay in a women’s hostel, called a *maqgar*.⁵⁴ They pay

for neither rent nor bills. In addition to free housing, the women are provided monthly food supplies, as well as a monthly allowance.⁵⁵ If the woman is married, she and her husband are given a house. One woman even stipulates that ISIS gives monetary gifts to newlyweds.⁵⁶ The *muhajirat* are also given the spoils of war from ISIS conquest. Umm Layth explains that:

[I]n these lands we are rewarded for our sacrifices involved in our Hijrah for example one is by receiving Ghanimah [war booty]. And know that honestly there is something so pleasurable to know that what you have has been taken off from the Kuffar [non-believers] and handed to you personally by Allah swt as a gift. Some of the many things include kitchen appliances from fridges, cookers, ovens, microwaves, milkshake machines etc, hoovers and cleaning products, fans and most importantly a house with free electricity and water provided to you due to the Khilafah and no rent included.⁵⁷

Despite these spoils of war, not everything is easy for the *muhajirat*. Internet access varies. One *muhajirah* makes a recommendation that prospective migrants buy a 3G sim card while in Turkey in order to keep in touch more easily with their contacts once over the border.⁵⁸ Electricity can also be intermittent. One woman explains:

You can have electricity most of the time or you can rarely have it – it just depends upon your circumstance – but you have to be prepared for not having your mobile charged or their not being light (alhamdulillah [thanks be to God] for battery powered lights and candles) and maybe even learn how to wash your clothes by hand since you really cannot depend on the washing machine here.⁵⁹

In addition to talking about their housing, the women also describe the atmosphere on the streets. We learn that no one conducts business during prayer time. The shops shut up and open again after prayers.⁶⁰ Mujahideen carry their guns at all times. Umm Irhab writes about ‘[t]he amazing feeling when you see the flag of tawheed everywhere, mujaahidiin with theyr [sic] ak47 and shops closing for prayer. Allahu akbar! [God is the greatest]’⁶¹ Another woman writes:

SubhānaAllāh [Glorious is God] it's amazing, they establish the shariah wherever they go, they set up Islamic court houses, and also set up houses for families, the apartment I'm living in is provided by ISIS. They provide electricity alhamdulillah [thanks be to God], and also they give food and clothes (mostly Ghanima [spoils of war]) to families, today for example we received fresh bread. It's almost like a normal town but the shops all close for salah and you see mujahideen everywhere.⁶²

Women's domestic role

As for the life the women lead in ISIS territory, it is a predominantly domestic one. Umm Ubaydah writes explicitly that 'the best thing for a women is to be a righteous wife and to raise righteous children.'⁶³ The women's everyday lives are filled with household tasks. Umm Layth writes that a 'normal day for a Muhajirah revolves around the same duties as a normal housewife'.⁶⁴ Sometimes these tasks can be mundane, but, Umm Layth writes:

[A]s mundane as some of the day to day tasks may get, still you truly value every minute here for the sake of Allah ... Wallahi [I swear to God] I have come across such beautiful sisters who will spend mornings and nights in happiness because they are cooking the Mujahideen food or they'll clean the whole building without anyone even figuring it out who it was.⁶⁵

Cooking, in particular, appears an important element of the women's day. The *muhajirat* tweets pictures of their meals and any desserts they make. One woman writes:

*Dinner.
Simple. Delicious.
Alhamdulillah [thanks be to God]
To top it off, kids asleep + we have electricity!
#SimplePleasures in #IS⁶⁶*

Another celebrates an oreo cheesecake she and a friend made: 'Oreo cheesecake à la @OumMujahid93 and me.'⁶⁷ The scene in this picture,

however, is not a typical household situation, as there is a grenade positioned next to the cake. In addition to such cooking and baking, the women also spend their time reading, studying religion or learning Arabic.⁶⁸ A woman's place, therefore, is predominantly in the home. Their movement outside the home is restricted. This is especially the case if you are an unmarried woman living in one of the women's hostels.

*Different makkar [hostels] has different protocol. In some makkar, you're not allowed to go out – except you have a very strong reason. If you need something from the shop, inform the house owner and she will get it for you.*⁶⁹

At the very least, the women need either a male chaperone, or other women with whom they can travel.⁷⁰ Such regulations on women's movement can be especially difficult for women without husbands. Umm Layth writes that 'The reality is that to stay without a man here is really difficult.' She elaborates:

*I have stressed this before on twitter but I really need sisters to stop dreaming about coming to Shaam and not getting married. Wallahi [I swear to God] life here is very difficult for the Muhajirat and we depend heavily on the brothers for a lot of support. It is not like the west where you can casually walk out and go to Asda/Walmart and drive back home ... even till now we have to stay safe outside and must always be accompanied by a Mahram [chaperone].*⁷¹

Another woman, Umm Ubaydah, echoes this warning to women, explaining that it is hard to live without a husband. 'Sisters wallah being single in sham is extremely difficult, it's best if you're not married when coming, to mentally prepare yourself.'⁷²

Being both at home and foreign in the 'Islamic State'

The *muhajirat* talk at length about the sense of belonging they feel in the territory controlled by ISIS. One women tweets:

*In #IS
U hear many stories.*

*Not just battlefield stories,
But also stories of Love!
Love b/w spouses/brotherhood/sisterhood.
#Beautiful⁷³*

Another woman similarly talks about the sisterhood she experiences: ‘MashaALLAH [Bless the Lord] the sisterhood in Dawla is amazing, the bonding immediate and no fake relationship, based on love fillah only’.⁷⁴ The women leave their friends and families in their country of origin and forge new bonds in the Islamic State.

The family you get in exchange for leaving the ones behind are like the pearl in comparison to the Shell you threw away into the foam of the sea which is the Ummah [Muslim community]. The reason for this is because your love for one another is purely for the sake of Allah.⁷⁵

The friendships the women make appear very strong. Umm Ubaydah writes about her best friends: ‘My companions fid dunyah [in the world]. Umm Layth and umm Haritha. Love you fillah so much I can’t put into words.’⁷⁶

Despite the fact the female migrants talk at length about this sense of belonging, they also clearly foreigners in this region. This is revealed in their anecdotes of their difficulty crossing the road, or their struggles to learn the Arabic language.⁷⁷ While the *muhajirat* talk much about their relationships with other migrants, they write very little about their interactions with the native Syrians and Iraqis in the region. This indicates that they spend the majority of time around other *muhajirat*.⁷⁸ When the women do mention the natives, or *ansar*, as they call them, their comments are broadly positive.⁷⁹ Umm Esa writes: ‘My heart swells with hapiness [sic] when I see the Ansar mujahideen in Dawla, may ALLAH increase the love between Muhajir and Ansar of Dawla.’⁸⁰ Some comments, however, give a less positive picture of the relationship between the natives and immigrants. One woman writes that: ‘To live amongst people that differ from you – e.g language, background, lifestyle and etc. is not always fascinating.’⁸¹ Another woman is more explicit in describing the problems that some *muhajirat* face. Muhajirah Amatullah describes:

An incident which occurred with a Muhajirah at the hospital ...

I head of a situation where a Muhajirah sister was having a miscarriage, She was bleeding so much that you could literally see blood trickling down her leg and dripping onto the floor,

The doctor came and examined 2 women who were just experiencing cramps, leaving the Muhajirah sister in pain and drenched in blood. She wasn't offered a chair or a bed and nobody even returned to check on her to see the progression of her case.

If you want to judge,

Be just in your judgement.

The Muhajireen are also subjected to mistreatment and discrimination from the locals. Many are very welcoming, hospitable and eager to help whilst many others aren't.

The difference is, the stories of mistreatment from Muhajireen towards locals is mostly false, although it does happen.

May Allah (swt) forgive us and guide us all!¹⁸²

Clearly there are natives who do not support ISIS and do not welcome the influx of Westerners to the region. As a result, immigrants may feel very much like foreigners. Even more than this, as the anecdote above indicates, immigrants may even be denied access to goods and services on the basis of their foreign status. Policy makers should be highly alert to these alternative narratives about life under ISIS control. Such stories, especially when emanating from those who support ISIS, could become part of an important counter-narrative to could temper the power of ISIS propaganda messages.

Experiencing a warzone

The region in which these women live is currently a warzone, and indeed the women describe their experiences of bombing raids. At times, the women dismiss the bombing as ineffectual or unimportant. Umm Mu'awiyah tweets: 'Witnessed my first airstrike last night as the disbelievers attacked Raqqa.

Alhamdulillah, zero casualties & more money wasted by the Kuffar [non-believers]'.⁸³ At other times, however, the women talk of the devastation of the bombs. One woman writes:

*Today's air raid in #Raqqa caused severe casualties among civilians
+ ikhwa [brothers].
The sky was filled w/ smoke,
Sirens echoed thru the city!*⁸⁴

The women talk about migrant families having been hit by the bombs.

*Yesterdays #Assad #SAA airstrike
Many civilians wounded
I saw 1 wounded Muhajir [immigrant] family
The hospital was chaotic!
May Allah(s) destroy him*⁸⁵

The female migrants language, when describing such bombing attacks, can be both passionate and threatening. One Dutch woman talks about those 'dirty dogs, throwing bombs'.⁸⁶ Another woman writes about the 'flying pigs above them'.⁸⁷ A third woman tweets:

*Yesterdays blood wasn't enough,
The planes are back!!
May Allah's Curse be upon the oppressors!*⁸⁸

Such language suggests that the women's experience of bombing raids can further intensify their hatred towards their opponents. Policy makers should be alert to the fact that such women may become a greater threat as they experience the violence of a warzone and witness casualties as a result of bombing.

The loss of a husband

Not only do the women witness the casualties from air raids, they also learn about the death of *mujahideen* on the front line of battle. Muhajirah Amatullah explains that '[r]eality hits you when u celebrate a walimah [marriage banquet] and console a widow on the same day. Life in Dar ul-Jihad!⁸⁹ At least two women in our sample have lost their husbands to the

fighting. One of these women, Umm Khattab tweets: ‘Wallahi i would never of thought I would be in shaam yet alone being a widow at 18, we plot and plan but Allah is the best of planners’.⁹⁰ Martyrdom is celebrated amongst the ISIS supporters as a way of ensuring your place in heaven. The death of a *mujahid* is therefore celebrated as a joyous event. Umm Khattab seems philosophical about her husband’s death. She writes in her blog: ‘my heart was content knowing that my husband had left this dunya [world] striving in the way of Allah insha’Allah [God willing].’⁹¹ She acknowledges missing her husband, but indicates that his reaching heaven is more important. ‘My hearts joy, my husband my bestfriend shaheed inshallah [martyred, God willing], some days I miss u more but in jannah [heaven] is everlasting joy’.⁹²

“Martyrdom is celebrated amongst the ISIS supporters as a way of ensuring your place in heaven”

Not all women in ISIS are so philosophical about the death of their husband however. Umm Ibrahim tweets on 19 November: ‘#Nobodycaresaboutthewidow’.⁹³ Such a statement points towards the distress and difficulties that the women can face on the death of their husbands. Even Umm Khattab, who appears remarkably stoic, tweets at the time of her husband’s death that she wants nothing more than the embrace of her mother.⁹⁴ There are indications that, on the death of their husbands, some widows have left ISIS territory in an attempt to return to their countries of origin. One migrant writes: ‘SubhanaAllah [glorious is God] so many sisters I loved,I just got the news they went back to their countries after their husbands got shahadah [martyred] Allahu musta’an’.⁹⁵

Such statements indicate that the death of a husband can be a key turning point in the life of a female migrant. Such an event can further intensify a woman’s commitment to life in ISIS territory. Conversely it can also prompt her to reassess her situation and decide to return to the West. This may be a moment when officials from the women’s country of origin could intervene and suggest her return and eventual reintegration into Western society.

4. Threat currently posed

To analyse the threat that female ISIS migrants currently pose, this section explores the attitude of the women within our sample towards violence, and then goes on to examine the actions they are currently undertaking.

4.1 Attitude of the Muhajirat

Although they occupy primarily domestic roles, in assessing the threat the women of ISIS currently pose to the West it is important to first assess their attitude towards violence, where their anger is directed and their intentions, if any, to engage in combat.

View of violence

The women within our sample celebrate the violence of ISIS, unequivocally. One British woman, Umm Hussain, tweets a threatening quote: ‘Know that we have armies in Iraq and an army in Sham of angry lions whose drink is BLOOD and play is CARNAGE – Sheykh Abu Muhammad Al Adnani.’⁹⁶ After each ISIS beheading video is released, there is a flurry of tweets in support of the brutality. One woman tweets her reaction to the video released of the beheading of Peter Kassig and eighteen Syrian hostages.

*So I finally watched #IS latest video,
OMG!*

I Love Dawlah!
The Nusayri scene,
Gut-wrenchingly awesome..
Shariah = Justice
Alhamdulillah! [Thanks be to God]⁹⁷

Another woman expresses a similar sentiment: ‘So many beheadings at the same time, Allahu Akbar [God is the greatest], this video is beautiful #DawlaMediaTeamDoingItRight’.⁹⁸ A third woman writes about her pleasure in watching the gruesome detail of a previous beheading video. ‘I was happy to see the beheading of that kaafir [non-believer], I just rewinded to the cutting part. Allahu akbar! [God is the greatest!] I wonder what was he thinking b4 the cut’.⁹⁹ She requests for ‘more beheadings please!’¹⁰⁰ There is no doubt, therefore, that the women who migrate to the territory controlled by ISIS revel in the gore and brutality of the organisation. They appear desensitised to the horrific nature of the violent acts being committed.

The women do not just celebrate the violence; they justify it according to their reading of Islamic Law. ‘I have muslim asking me, whether dawla [ISIS] do the barbaric methods of cutting hands & stoning adulterers ... It’s in the Shairah [sic] why r u disgusted’.¹⁰¹ Another woman, Umm Irhab, similarly dismisses Muslims who criticise ISIS, saying they are pathetic: ‘Uff! Some muslims are condemning [sic] the slaughtering of a dirty US kaafir [non-believer]. Saying don’t associate us with them. Pathetic! What pathetic muslims!’¹⁰² A third woman is even more fervent in her response to critics. ‘Beheading is halal [permissible under Islamic law]. Go kill yourself if you say it’s haram. :)’¹⁰³

The targets of the women’s anger

To understand the specific threat to western countries it is important to analyse the targets of the women’s anger. Threats made by female migrants are addressed to different actors at different times. It is common for the women to target Bashar al-Assad or his regime. One woman, in response to an airstrike by the Assad regime, curses Assad and asks ‘May Allah(s) destroy him’.¹⁰⁴ The women also target anyone perceived as loyal to Assad’s regime. One woman writes: ‘Lol there was a Pkk family loyal to bashar across from

us, now their house is a maqar [hostel], I'm pretty sure the men got beheaded, women chucked out'.¹⁰⁵ In addition to threatening Assad and his supporters, the women write about their desire for Shia Muslims to be killed.

Shias are not in the folds of Islam so the term "shia muslim" makes no sense. And Allaah SWT said "And fight them until there is no more fitnah (disbelief and polythesim) and the religion will be for all Allaah alone" {8}.¹⁰⁶

At other times, the women focus on Israel and incite violence against Jewish Israelis for their treatment of Palestinians. Umm Irhab describes her anger at the Jews and her desire for violence against them. 'How filthy jews slaughter [sic] day by day muslims in Gaza and Palestine just makes me so angry. InsAllah [God willing] soon the destruction will come'.¹⁰⁷

Not only do the *muhajirat* address violence to Bashar al-Assad, Shia Muslims, and Israel, they also address violence *directly* to the West. Umm Layth writes explicitly:

Know this Cameron/Obama, you and your countries will be beneath our feet and your Kufr [non-believers] will be destroyed, this is a promise from Allah swt that we have no doubt over. If not you then your grandchildren or their grandchildren. But worry not, somewhere along the line your blood will be spilled by our cubs in Dawlah. We have conquered these lands once Beithnillah [with the permission of God] we will do it again. Read up on your History, and know that it will repeat itself, you will pay Jizyah [tax levied on non-Muslims] to us just like you did in the past. This Islamic Empire shall be known and feared world wide and we will follow none other than the Law of the one and the only ilah [God]!¹⁰⁸

Another woman, Umm Hussain, tweets a quotation from Osama bin Laden, evidently a menacing statement towards the West. 'If killing those who kill our children is called terrorism, then I am proud to be a terrorist – Sheikh Osama Bin Laden'.¹⁰⁹ A third woman, Umm Ubaydah, is more direct in her threat, writing that: 'my best friend is my grenade ... It's an American one too Lool. May Allah allow me to kill their Kanzeer [pig] soldiers with their own weapons'.¹¹⁰ These quotes evidently show a deep antipathy towards the West

and a desire for bloodshed there. The women's glorification of ISIS violence on their social media accounts contributes to ISIS propaganda. It swells the amount of pro-ISIS sentiment online and has the potential to inspire violent action.

“The very women who describe their desire to fight also emphasise the importance of their domestic role”

Willingness to fight

When analysing these women's threat towards the West, it is important to understand to what extent they might be *willing* to be involved in violence. And indeed, not only do the female migrants celebrate violence; they also indicate a desire to inflict violence themselves. In response to a question asking her what she thinks about the killing of Steven Sotloff, Umm Ubaydah responds ‘I wish I did it.’¹¹¹ Another woman acknowledges that she empathises with those who want to fight: ‘I completely understand your desires and craving to participate in the battlefield.’¹¹²

However, it is important to put these comments in context. Only three members of our sample have indicated a desire to fight. The others, while supporting the violence of ISIS, do not express an explicit desire to be directly involved. Furthermore, the very women who describe their desire to fight also emphasise the importance of their domestic role. In a series of tweets, Umm Ubaydah stresses that a woman's domestic role is paramount.

With my love for jihad, and participating, sisters who ask me if women fight here ... Honestly what can you do that the brothers can't?

Allah fashioned men to endure jihad with strength, just like He fashioned women to bare children & He loves those who take care of their duty

The best thing a man can do is jihad, and the best thing for a women is to be a righteous wife and to raise righteous children.

*The four best women in islam were those who did this duty the best, take notes from them & close YouTube vids of those sisters in filasteen [Palestine].*¹¹³

The tweet referring to a woman being a righteous wife and raising righteous children was retweeted sixty one times, indicating that it resonated with its audience.¹¹⁴ Umm Ubaydah's comment 'close YouTube vids of those sisters in filasteen [Palestine]' is also especially interesting. Palestinian women have been particularly active in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, even carrying out suicide attacks.¹¹⁵ Umm Ubaydah urges women not to follow the example of these Palestinian women, but to focus rather on their domestic role in the new state. Other female migrants corroborate Umm Ubaydah's statement that women should focus on their role within the home. Umm Layth explains that women should strive to be good mothers and obedient wives, rather than focusing on martyrdom operations. She writes: 'you may gain more ajr [reward] by spending years of sleepless nights by being a mother and raising your children with the right intentions and for the sake of Allah than by doing a martyrdom operation.'¹¹⁶ Overall therefore, it is clear that women's current role in ISIS is not to fight, but to support their husbands and raise their children to be the next generation of *mujahideen*.

Whether or not the women want to fight for ISIS, it is currently forbidden for women to take part in the fighting. The rules of ISIS stipulate that women cannot take part in *qitaal* (fighting). This is revealed in an intriguing tweet by Umm Ubaydah, who writes: 'I wonder if I can pull a Mulan and enter the battle field.'¹¹⁷ The tweet is notable because of the clear reference to a Disney film; we are reminded that these female migrants are Western in their origin and have grown up around Western films and music. Crucially, however, the tweet reveals that, in order to fulfil her desire to enter the battlefield, Umm Ubaydah would have to pretend to be a man. Women cannot freely take up arms for ISIS and join the men in battle. This is not the women's role.¹¹⁸ Umm Layth explains the situation in more depth in her blog:

I will be straight up and blunt with you all, there is absolutely nothing for sisters to participate in Qitaal [fighting]. Sheikh Omar Shishani has been quite clear on his answer and has emphasized

that there is nothing for sisters as of yet. No amalia istishihadiya (martyrdom operations) or a secret sisters katiba. These are all rumours you may have heard through some sources who themselves are not actually aware of the truth. And the women you may have seen online participating are all part of a propaganda. The women in the video are part of secularist groups who are not calling for the law of Allah. Please sisters do not believe anything you hear or see online where apparently sisters are fighting feesaabeelilah [for the sake of God]. For the time being Qitaal [fighting] is not fardh ayn [a compulsory religious duty] upon the sisters. We have plenty brothers who don't even get selected on going on operations. The brothers get upset and start crying since they want to participate, so what does that make you think? For the sisters its completely impossible for the now. InshaaAllah [God willing] in future.¹¹⁹

Here, Umm Layth is clear that women are prohibited from joining the fighting and that this comes from high up in the ISIS hierarchy. Such statements are corroborated by male ISIS fighters. Abu Farriss explains:

Apparently, head military of Sham said women are not allowed [to fight]. They can do lots of other works. Today I spoke to one of Dawlahs main men in sham. He said even if u wanna start a business [sic] here COME. Like if u wanna be a dr here or anything just come, u can do it all inshallah [God willing]. Lolll¹²⁰

4.2 Muhajirat as Recruiting Sergeants

While we have explored the potential threat of the *muhajirat*, it is important to acknowledge the broader threat that emanates from these women's online presence. Perhaps the most important risk is that the female migrants can inspire others, both men and women, to carry out attacks in Western countries or to travel to Syria and Iraq. The women within our sample actively encourage others to leave their homes and families and travel to ISIS-held territory, often chastising those who use family or other obligations as an excuse not to travel.¹²¹ In addition to encouragement they provide practical advice to those wishing to travel and, as such, are key to ensuring

that ever more women travel to join ISIS. This can include advice on how to overcome the objections and roadblocks raised by family, what clothes to bring, where to attempt a crossing and what to expect on arrival. Although the more general pieces of advice are often contained in blog posts or on public responses on sites such as ask.fm, many of the *muhajirat* encourage those thinking of travelling to get in touch with them directly through closed messaging apps and direct message.

4.3 Encouraging attacks on the West

In addition to encouraging and facilitating travel, some *muhajirat* are directly inciting attacks against the west. There is one notable example of a *muhajirat* directly inciting such violence. Umm Layth writes that young Muslims that ‘cannot make it to the battlefield then bring the battlefield to yourself. Be sincere and be a Mujahid wherever you may be.’¹²²

Another example is a French 15-year-old, who, after failing to reach Syria, was urged by her recruiters to carry out attacks at home.¹²³ As shown by the recent attacks in Sydney and Paris, lone wolf attacks remain a real danger.¹²⁴ Female supporters of ISIS, especially the Western female migrants to ISIS-controlled territory, contribute significantly to spreading ISIS ideology. Their online profiles could therefore contribute to encouraging Western Muslim men or women to perpetrate acts of violence in their home countries.

5. Possible future threat

The *muhajirat* within our dataset work against the interests of the West in many ways; by acting as a support function for ISIS fighters, encouraging others to join them and even encouraging attacks on the West directly. However, as of early 2015, the *muhajirat* appear to pose no direct physical threat to the west. This section will briefly examine how this could change over time, looking in particular at the example of Chechen female suicide bombers during and after the second Russo-Chechen conflict.

5.1 Increased violence as a reaction to setbacks

Although Chechen female suicide bombers, often colloquially known as the ‘Black widows’ are now relatively well known, this was a phenomenon which developed over time. In fact there are no recorded instances of females being involved in fighting during the first Russo-Chechen conflict. Similarly to ISIS, Chechnya during this time was a patriarchal society, with a woman’s role seen as a purely supportive and domestic one. During the first years of the war, women remained in their traditional roles of homemaker and wife. Vast numbers of Chechen men and children were killed during the years that the war raged, and, partly due to this, the traditional patriarchal structure collapsed. With the loss of a large proportion of the male population, the

women had to assume a more central and public role in society, and this included combat. They fought the Russians by becoming suicide bombers, both inside Chechnya and throughout Russia.

The Chechen case study acts as a possible forecast for the future of the *muhajirah*. Like the Chechens, the migrants live in a warzone, They have witnessed the deaths of family members, husbands, and friends. As evidenced above, the women within our dataset have already become desensitised to extreme violence aimed at their opponents. Indeed, like the Chechens, some female migrants in our sample have been significantly affected by the loss of their husbands, which has, in some cases, strengthened their commitment to ISIS.

“Umm Ubaydah, the woman who hoped to become Mulan, herself wonders that ‘maybe the time for us to participate is soon’”

In the medium to long term it is the stated aim of Western policy to wrench the territory ISIS has seized from its control, and to effectively end the state-building efforts of the group. Without Western boots on the ground, an unlikely scenario, this will take time and will likely lead to heavy casualties especially among ISIS fighters, the husbands of the *muhajirah* and possibly even their children. It is possible to suggest that, as the conflict drags on, the death of male fighters and the deaths of the migrant children could be a potential trigger which propels the women into changing roles. They may wish to strike at the ‘near enemy’ or even return home to strike at the West. The women’s social media postings indicate that a sudden shift in roles is possible. Umm Ubaydah, the woman who hoped to become Mulan, herself wonders that ‘maybe the time for us to participate is soon’.¹²⁵

Of particular interest and relevance to any assessment of the threat posed by these women is a set of postings in December 2014. On 8 December 2014, the *muhajirat* living in Raqqah heard suspicious gunshots that made

them afraid that they were about to be overrun. Umm Khattab writes: ‘Whos in raqqah can hear so many gunshots whats happening me and the sisters apprehensive.’¹²⁶ After learning that it was a false alarm, Umm Khattab writes: ‘Laaawl me and the akhawats [sisters] thought maybe murtads [apostates] were in the city lool I put the belt on and everything.’¹²⁷ Umm Khattab is describing an explosive belt.¹²⁸ Such statements indicate that, were ISIS’s territorial control removed and were non-ISIS forces to overrun cities like Raqqah, women affiliated with the ISIS would be willing to engage in combat and carry out suicide operations. It is conceivable that, with a change in circumstance, they could be prepared even to travel back to the West to carry these out.

5.2 Threat posed by “dormant” returnees

As mentioned above, the women within our sample noted that there are women who have returned home following the death of a husband. Even these women, outside the conflict zone, have the capacity to be affected by the escalating violence within ISIS-controlled territory. We know from the testimonies produced by the women in our sample, that the women formed close bonds with other migrants, including children and fighters. As the conflict progresses, it is reasonable to assume that the returnees would be affected were any of their friends who remain with ISIS killed. These deaths could potentially trigger the women to become further radicalised and carry out acts of violence in the West.

The overall number of women who have travelled to ISIS-controlled territory is considerably smaller than the number of men that have done so. The relative openness of the *muhajirat* on social media poses a problem in terms of propaganda. It does however allow Western governments to track these women and potentially intercept them should they hope to return. However, those women who are not active on social media and who are not on the radar of the security services could pose a significantly greater threat.

6. Conclusions

This paper represents a starting point rather than a final analysis of females choosing to join ISIS. That being said, we can draw a number of conclusions based on our sample. Firstly, the muhajirat are not fighters and should not be referred to as such. The threat they currently pose is a different one than that posed by their male counterparts. Females recruit and assist others to join ISIS. They support male fighters in a non-military capacity and encourage attacks on the West by those who cannot travel. They demonstrate support for brutal violence equal in its strength to the men of ISIS. They also demonstrate a capacity and willingness to engage in violence and even suicide attacks should circumstances change.

Many of the reasons women travel to join ISIS are similar to the reasons that male fighters travel; a feeling that the Ummah is under attack, an ideological and religious duty to do something, and a search for comradeship and meaning in their lives. However, the draw of the state-building mission of ISIS is particularly strong among women, and many of the personal journeys and cognitive openings are unique to women.

In attempting to stem the tide of female recruits to ISIS, a number of measures need to be taken. As this study, and many before it, has shown, the internet is a key component in the radicalisation process of aspiring female migrants and needs to be a key battleground in pushing back against this phenomenon. Counter-narratives need to be developed and targeted at a

female audience. The material for this messaging is not hard to come by and can be drawn directly from the women who have migrated. Muhajirah Amatullah's harrowing tale of a *muhajirah* 'covered in blood' and refused medical treatment represents just one example of a story from life under ISIS that could easily be turned into a campaign. Modern targeted advertising could then allow these female-focused counter-narratives to reach high-risk women across different social media platforms.

As the female migrants themselves have told us, families have a great deal of emotional and practical influence on aspiring migrants and are mentioned far more often as barriers to migration than any state-led efforts. Governments need to invest in programmes which advise families on the practical measures that are effective in preventing their daughters from migrating. In addition, programmes building the capacity of families to engage emotionally and intellectually with the arguments in favour of joining ISIS should be supported.

Once women have travelled to ISIS-held territory, efforts to encourage them to turn away from the group and return home should not be abandoned. Much like their male counterparts, it is possible for these women to become disillusioned or simply homesick and seek to return, and a path for the *muhajirat* to do so should be maintained. Women, in particular, have unique cognitive openings, such as the death of a husband or the birth of a child, which can lead some to return to the West. These could and should be exploited by family and state alike as an opportunity for disengagement. Umm Ibrahim's tweet of the hashtag #Nobodycareaboutthewidow after her husband was killed, is just one such example of an intervention opportunity.

The *muhajirat* travel for a variety of reasons, some in the hope of comradeship, some for ideological reasons and some in search for adventure and an opportunity to 'pull a Mulan'. Though these women pose a unique and evolving threat to the West, our response needs to be nuanced and tailored. It is important to learn the lessons of the past decade about the sheer variety of factors which lead people down the path to radicalisation and make full use of the technology at our disposal.

Endnotes

1. See for example: R. Barrett, 'Foreign Fighters in Syria', The Soufan Group, (New York, 2014); J.A. Carter, S. Maher, P.R. Neumann '#Greenbirds: Measuring Importance and Influence in Syrian Foreign Fighter Networks', The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (London, 2014); R. Briggs, T. Silverman, 'Western Foreign Fighters: Innovations in Responding to the Threat', Institute for Strategic Dialogue (London, 2014)
2. For example Twitter accounts of male foreign fighters, see: <https://twitter.com/Abuuthmaan1988>; https://twitter.com/AbuDawud___; <https://twitter.com/AbulbrahimBrit> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
3. Aside from the a small number of high profile cases in the media.
4. R. Barrett, 'Foreign Fighters in Syria', The Soufan Group, (New York, 2014) p.16; For a discussion on numbers, see also: S. Maher, 'Up to 11,000 foreign fighters in Syria: steep rise among Western Europeans'. International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (London, 2013). <http://icsr.info/2013/12/icsr-insight-11000-foreign-fighters-syria-steep-rise-among-western-europeans>; For more recent comments, see: 'CIA says IS numbers underestimated'. Al Jazeera, 14 September 2014 www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/09/cia-triples-number-islamic-state-fighters-201491232912623733.html
5. ISD is willing to share details of these women's accounts with other research institutions. If you wish to get in touch regarding this, please contact Ross Frenett at rfrenett@strategicdialogue.org
6. Some of the women indicate only that they are Western and do not specify their country of origin.
7. Shams, Bird of Jannah: <http://diary-of-a-muhajirah.tumblr.com>; https://twitter.com/_BirdOfJannah [last accessed 28 November 2014]
8. As for Twitter posts, only tweets have been included in the analysis. Retweets have been largely ignored. This is because the report aims to focus on the women's own voices and their own descriptions of events.
9. These men most often fight in opposition to Bashar al-Assad.
10. These three categories mirror the three categories identified by John Wilson in his work *Introduction to Social Movements* (New York, 1973). Wilson deconstructs ideology into three components – diagnosis, prognosis, and motivation. The diagnosis relates to the identification

of the problems in society, the prognosis identified the solution and the motivation provides the extra incentive for each individual to get involved in the movement. See also D.A.Snow and S.C.Byrd, 'Ideology, Framing Processes, and Islamic Terrorist Movements' in *Mobilization* Vol.12 No.2 (2007)

11. Aaron Y. Zelin, *The Clear Banner: Update On The Finnish Foreign Fighter Contingent*, October 18, 2014. Available at <http://jihadology.net/2014/10/18/the-clear-banner-update-on-the-finnish-foreign-fighter-contingent/> [Last accessed 21/01/2015] See also, Daniel H. Heinke & Jan Raudszus , German Foreign Fighters In Syria And Iraq, *Combatting Terrorism Centre*, January 20, 2015. Available at <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/german-foreign-fighters-in-syria-and-iraq>, [Last accessed 21/01/2015]
12. Umm Khattab, <http://ummkhattab.tumblr.com> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
13. Bird of Jannah, <http://diary-of-a-muhajirah.tumblr.com> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
14. Umm Esa @umm_esa73, 17 October 2014, https://twitter.com/umm_esa73 [last accessed 28 November 2014]
15. See also: 'What is 1 James Foley compared to the thousands of innocent muslims being slaughtered daily by filthy US' Umm Irhab @MuslimahMujahi1, 20 August 2014, <https://twitter.com/MuslimahMujahi1> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
16. Bird of Jannah, <http://diary-of-a-muhajirah.tumblr.com> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
17. Umm Khattab @UmmKhhattab_, 15 November 2014, https://twitter.com/UmmKhhattab__ [last accessed 28 November 2014]
18. Umm Irhab @MuslimahMujahi1, 2 October 2014, <https://twitter.com/MuslimahMujahi1> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
19. Umm Khattab @UmmKhhattab_, 17 November 2014, https://twitter.com/UmmKhhattab__ [last accessed 28 November 2014]
20. Umm Ubaydah, 24 September 2014 <http://al-khansa.tumblr.com> [last accessed 28 November 2014] The emphasis in italics in mine. Her statements are in response to this anonymous question: 'Anonymous: I just wanted you to know that the vast majority of Americans don't hate Muslims, & I want to apologize to you & all yoru people for the terrible things we've done, & all the families & husbands we've killed. It's shameful. I'm American, but my best friend is Palestinian. I love her like a sister. Many of us understand you resort to violence because we've done you so wrong & that is the only way you have to fight us. Inshallah-we would embrace you if you sought peace. We are all one people.'
21. Umm Ibrahim @bintlad3n, 6 December 2014, <https://twitter.com/bintlad3n> [last accessed 9 January 2015]
22. Tawheed refers to the concept of oneness, that 'there is no God but God.' Muhajirah Amatullah @BintWater, 21 November 2014, <https://twitter.com/BintWater> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
23. Umm Layth, 3 June 2014, <http://fa-tubalighuraba.tumblr.com> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
24. Umm Ubaydah @FlamessOfwar, 19 November 2014, <https://twitter.com/FlamessOfwar> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
25. Umm Ubaydah, 24 September 2014 <http://al-khansa.tumblr.com> [last accessed 28 November 2014] The emphasis in italics in mine. Her statements are in response to this anonymous question: 'Anonymous: I just wanted you to know that the vast majority of Americans don't hate Muslims, & I want to apologize to you & all yoru people for the terrible things we've done, & all the families & husbands we've killed. It's shameful. I'm American, but my best friend is Palestinian. I love her like a sister. Many of us understand you resort to violence because we've done you so wrong & that is the only way you have to fight us. Inshallah-we would embrace you if you sought peace. We are all one people.'

26. Zawjatu Abou Mujahid @BintMBMA, 24 September, <https://twitter.com/BintMBMA> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
27. Umm Khattab @UmmKhhattab_, 31 October 2014, https://twitter.com/UmmKhhattab_ [last accessed 28 November 2014]
28. Umm Khattab @UmmKhhattab_, 3 November 2014, https://twitter.com/UmmKhhattab_ [last accessed 28 November 2014] See also 'And I have my hearts joy, my husband my bestfriend shaheed inshallah, some days I miss u more but in jannah is everlasting joy' Umm Khattab @UmmKhhattab_, 18 November 2014, https://twitter.com/UmmKhhattab_ [last accessed 28 November 2014]
29. Umm Irhab @MuslimahMujahi1, 21 November 2014, <https://twitter.com/MuslimahMujahi1> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
30. Umm Khattab, <http://ummkhattab.tumblr.com> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
31. Umm Ubaydah @FlamesOfwar, 23 November 2014, <https://twitter.com/FlamesOfwar> [last accessed 28 November 2014] See also: Making hijrah youve left the comfort and protection of your family & being provided for by them..naturally a husband can take over this duty (23 Nov) Sisters ask why its diffiult to be single here, in an Islamic society the husband is the provider,whereas before marriage its the family ... (23 Nov) Umm Ubaydah @FlamesOfwar, 21 October 2014, <https://twitter.com/FlamesOfwar> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
32. Umm Esa @umm_esa73, 13 November 2014, https://twitter.com/umm_esa73 [last accessed 28 November 2014]
33. Umm Khattab, <http://ummkhattab.tumblr.com> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
34. Umm Layth, 3 June 2014, <http://fa-tubalilghuraba.tumblr.com> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
35. Umm Layth, 3 June 2014, <http://fa-tubalilghuraba.tumblr.com> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
36. Umm Layth, 3 June 2014, <http://fa-tubalilghuraba.tumblr.com> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
37. Umm Layth, 3 June 2014, <http://fa-tubalilghuraba.tumblr.com> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
38. Umm Ubaydah @FlamesOfwar, 24 October 2014, <https://twitter.com/FlamesOfwar> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
39. Al Britaniyya @UmmKhhattab_, 15 November 2014, https://twitter.com/UmmKhhattab_ [last accessed 28 November 2014]
40. Umm Layth, 3 June 2014, <http://fa-tubalilghuraba.tumblr.com> [last accessed 28 November 2014]; See also: Umm Ubaydah echoes this exact sentiment: 'Those who stay back because of their family, you can come & your family be a trial in this dunya or stay and them be a regret in the akhirah [afterlife].' Umm Ubaydah @FlamesOfwar, 5 October 2014, <https://twitter.com/FlamesOfwar> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
41. Umm Ubaydah, 19 September 2014 <http://al-khansa.tumblr.com> [last accessed 28 November 2014] See also: 'As'salamu'alkum sister I was wondering how would a sister who is still a teen and wants to make Hijra [migration] do so? And plus her parents are totally against making Hijra [migration]'. Bird of Jannah, <http://diary-of-a-muhajirah.tumblr.com> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
42. 'Ya Ilahii' is used not as a comment of surprise but rather as a form of address. Bird of Jannah, <http://diary-of-a-muhajirah.tumblr.com> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
43. Umm Layth writes for example that 'if any sisters need advice then they can kik me', 12 March 2014, <http://fa-tubalilghuraba.tumblr.com>

44. Evidently her story cannot be independently verified.
45. Umm Khattab, <http://ummkhattab.tumblr.com> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
46. Umm Khattab, <http://ummkhattab.tumblr.com> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
47. See for example *Indonesians And The Syrian Conflict*, 30 January 2014, IPAC Report No.6 (Available at http://file.understandingconflict.org/file/2014/01/IPAC_Indonesians_the_Syrian_Conflict.pdf)
48. Indeed perhaps this explains the women's apparent ease at crossing into Syria from Turkey through that specific checkpoint.
49. 'So me and my dear sisters and the kids were walking and this guy comes to us and makes us go into a building and then I realised I was with fsa and Jabhat, so then I start to get worried like mate they knew we were with Dawlwah due to how we dressed.' Umm Khattab, <http://ummkhattab.tumblr.com> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
50. Umm Khattab, <http://ummkhattab.tumblr.com> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
51. Such communication between rival factions in the Syrian conflict is interesting in itself. Umm Khattab, <http://ummkhattab.tumblr.com> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
52. Umm Khattab, <http://ummkhattab.tumblr.com> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
53. Someone poses an anonymous question on Abu Farriss's (a mujahid) ask.fm account: 'akhi wen makin hijr wt do u recommend sisters to wear to avoid suspicion as in wen u wear jilbab n niqaab it will create suspicion'. Abu Farriss replies 'I met people that say dress like some1 in jahiliya ... no comment lol'. See: <http://ask.fm/abufarriss123>
54. 'At this Makar you are provided with everything alhumdulillah, from food, water, heat, visits to doctors and sometimes even to the market accompanied by the ameer etc'. Umm Layth, <http://fa-tubalilghuraba.tumblr.com> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
55. '1. We don't pay rent here. Houses are given for free. 2. We pay neither electric nor water bills. 3. We are given monthly groceries. Spagetti, pasta, can foods, rice, eggs and etc. 4. Monthly allowance are given not only to husband and wife (wives) but also for each child. 5. Medical check up and medication are free – The Islamic State pays on behalf of you.' Bird of Jannah, <http://diary-of-a-muhajirah.tumblr.com> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
56. Shams writes that 'for every newly married couples are given 700usd as a gift. (I'm not sure if it's still available now)'. Bird of Jannah, <http://diary-of-a-muhajirah.tumblr.com> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
57. Umm Layth, <http://fa-tubalilghuraba.tumblr.com> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
58. Bird of Jannah, <http://diary-of-a-muhajirah.tumblr.com> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
59. Umm Layth, 9 April 2014, <http://fa-tubalilghuraba.tumblr.com> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
60. Ibid.
61. The Flag of Tawheed refers to the black flag with the slogan 'there is no God but God'. Umm Irhab @MuslimahMujahi1, 4 July 2014, <https://twitter.com/MuslimahMujahi1> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
62. Umm Ubaydah, <http://al-khansa.tumblr.com> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
63. Umm Ubaydah @FlamessOfwar, 19 November 2014, <https://twitter.com/FlamessOfwar> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
64. Umm Layth, 9 April 2014, <http://fa-tubalilghuraba.tumblr.com> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
65. Umm Layth, 9 April 2014, <http://fa-tubalilghuraba.tumblr.com> [last accessed 28 November 2014]

66. Muhajirah Amatullah @BintWater, 6 November 2014, <https://twitter.com/BintWater> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
67. Zawjatu Abou Mujahid @BintMBMA, 24 November 2014, <https://twitter.com/BintMBMA> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
68. 'Daily routine depends on how you spend your free time. You can form a halaqat-group among sisters and study together. Or, you can spend by reading and do what-ever you like.' Bird of Jannah, <http://diary-of-a-muhajirah.tumblr.com> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
69. Bird of Jannah, <http://diary-of-a-muhajirah.tumblr.com> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
70. 'You can go out. Either with your mahram or sisters.' Bird of Jannah, <http://diary-of-a-muhajirah.tumblr.com> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
71. Umm Layth, 9 April 2014, <http://fa-tubalilghuraba.tumblr.com> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
72. Umm Ubaydah @FlamessOfwar, 23 November 2014, <https://twitter.com/FlamessOfwar> [last accessed 28 November 2014] See also: Making hijrah youve left the comfort and protection of your family & being provided for by them..naturally a husband can take over this duty (23 Nov) Sisters ask why its diffiult to be single here, in an Islamic society the husband is the provider,whereas before marriage its the family ... (23 Nov) Umm Ubaydah @FlamessOfwar, 21 October 2014, <https://twitter.com/FlamessOfwar> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
73. Muhajirah Amatullah @BintWater, 6 November 2014, <https://twitter.com/BintWater> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
74. Umm Esa @umm_esa73, 13 November 2014, https://twitter.com/umm_esa73 [last accessed 28 November 2014]
75. Umm Layth, 11 September 2014, <http://fa-tubalilghuraba.tumblr.com> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
76. Umm Ubaydah @FlamessOfwar, 21 October 2014, <https://twitter.com/FlamessOfwar> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
77. See for example Muhajirah Amatullah's comment about not understanding the conversations among the locals: 'Many people of Sham Have 2 volumes, Loud & louder. U cant tell whether thy arguing or engaging in a general conversation ... ' Muhajirah Amatullah @BintWater, 9 December 2014, <https://twitter.com/BintWater> [last accessed 9 January 2015]
78. One muhrajirah writes about being surrounded by Europeans, suggesting that perhaps the women spend the majority of their time among other migrants. 'It feels like I never left the West. Im surrounded by so many Brits and Europeans its unbelievable.' Umm Mu'awiyah @ummmuawiyahh, 11 October 2014, <https://twitter.com/ummmuawiyahh> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
79. The word 'ansar' literally means supporters.
80. Umm Esa @umm_esa73, 5 November 2014, https://twitter.com/umm_esa73 [last accessed 28 November 2014]
81. Bird of Jannah, <http://diary-of-a-muhajirah.tumblr.com> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
82. Muhajirah Amatullah @BintWater, 21 November 2014, <https://twitter.com/BintWater> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
83. Umm Mu'awiyah @ummmuawiyahh, 12 October 2014, <https://twitter.com/ummmuawiyahh> [last accessed 28 November 2014] Umm Hussain writes that the bombing is nothing compared to the power of Allah. 'It's thundering hard over the #Islamic State ... the sound of the bombs is a joke compared to the power of Alla Azawajal ... SubhanAllah!' Umm Hussain al-Britani @UmmHussain103, 14 October 2013, <https://twitter.com/UmmHussain103> [Account now deleted by Twitter]

84. Muhajirah Amatullah @BintWater, 25 November 2014, <https://twitter.com/BintWater> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
85. Muhajirah Amatullah @BintWater, 20 November 2014, <https://twitter.com/BintWater> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
86. Zawjatu Abou Mujahid @BintMBMA, 5 November 2014, <https://twitter.com/BintMBMA> [last accessed 28 November 2014] Original Dutch: Dit is de eerste keer dat ik mee maak dat die vuile honden boven mij waren en bommen gooiden. Allahu Akbar.
87. Umm Layth @Muhajirah_, 21 October 2014, https://twitter.com/Muhajirah_ [last accessed 28 November 2014]
88. Muhajirah Amatullah @BintWater, 26 November 2014, <https://twitter.com/BintWater> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
89. Dar ul-Jihad literally means the house of jihad, here referring to the Islamic State. Muhajirah Amatullah @BintWater, 3 November 2014, <https://twitter.com/BintWater> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
90. Umm Khattab's husband died in the fighting in Kobane. Umm Khattab @UmmKhhattab_, 15 November 2014, https://twitter.com/UmmKhhattab_ [last accessed 28 November 2014]
91. Umm Khattab, <http://ummkhattab.tumblr.com> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
92. Umm Khattab @UmmKhhattab_, 15 November 2014, https://twitter.com/UmmKhhattab_ [last accessed 28 November 2014]
93. Umm Ibrahim @bintlad3n, 19 November 2014, <https://twitter.com/bintlad3n> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
94. 'Ya ummi [O Mother] there's nothing more in this world I long for then the day I embrace you if not in this dunya then in jannah insha'Allah' Umm Khattab @UmmKhhattab_, 15 November 2014, https://twitter.com/UmmKhhattab_ [last accessed 28 November 2014]
95. Allahu musta'an literally translates as 'God is the one whose help is sought'. Umm Ubaydah @FlamessOfwar, 21 October 2014, <https://twitter.com/FlamessOfwar> [last accessed 28 November 2014] Another woman writes that: 'Umm A'ishah told me the last message she got from her husband. He requested her not to go back to Morocco if he is martyred and suggested her to re-marry — And even mentioned the name of that brother. That this woman's husband was so adamant that she stay and even suggested a future husband for her, indicates that there is some concern women may leave after their husband's death. Evidently the woman Umm A'ishah is a Moroccan migrant and not a Western migrant, but the comment supports the previous statement by Umm Ubaydah. Bird of Jannah, 7 November 2014, <http://diary-of-a-muhajirah.tumblr.com> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
96. Umm Hussain al-Britani @UmmHussain103, 20 November 2013, <https://twitter.com/UmmHussain103> [Account now deleted by Twitter]
97. Muhajirah Amatullah @BintWater, 21 November 2014, <https://twitter.com/BintWater> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
98. Umm Ubaydah @FlamessOfwar, 20 November 2014, <https://twitter.com/FlamessOfwar> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
99. Umm Irhab @MuslimahMujahi1, 20 August 2014, <https://twitter.com/MuslimahMujahi1> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
100. Ibid.
101. Umm Ubaydah @FlamessOfwar, 26 November 2014, <https://twitter.com/FlamessOfwar> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
102. Umm Irhab @MuslimahMujahi1, 20 August 2014, <https://twitter.com/MuslimahMujahi1> [last accessed 28 November 2014]

103. Zawjatu Abou Mujahid @BintMBMA, 24 September, <https://twitter.com/BintMBMA> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
104. Muhajirah Amatullah @BintWater, 21 November 2014, <https://twitter.com/BintWater> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
105. Umm Ubaydah @FlamessOfwar, 24 October 2014, <https://twitter.com/FlamessOfwar> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
106. Umm Ubaydah, 26 July 2014 <http://al-khansa.tumblr.com> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
107. Umm Irhab @MuslimahMujahi1, 2 July 2014, <https://twitter.com/MuslimahMujahi1> [last accessed 28 November 2014] Umm Irhab also writes that she cannot 'wait for the slaughter of the filthy Zlonist. Woe to you ya ahlu Israel [the people of Israel], the judgement will happen very soon and i make dua to be'. See also Umm Irhab's comment: Damn you "isreal", Dowla will come for you and finish you off! Just wait and see. InshAllah it will be very soon you sons of pigs and monkey (Umm Irhab @MuslimahMujahi1, 2 July 2014, <https://twitter.com/MuslimahMujahi1>) [last accessed 28 November 2014])
108. Umm Layth, 11 September, <http://fa-tubalilghuraba.tumblr.com> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
109. Umm Hussain al-Britani @UmmHussain103, 16 November 2013, <https://twitter.com/UmmHussain103> [Account now deleted by Twitter]
110. Umm Ubaydah @FlamessOfwar, 10 October 2014, <https://twitter.com/FlamessOfwar> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
111. Umm Ubaydah, 4 September 2014 <http://al-khansa.tumblr.com> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
112. Umm Layth, 9 April 2014 , <http://fa-tubalilghuraba.tumblr.com> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
113. Umm Ubaydah @FlamessOfwar, 19 November 2014, <https://twitter.com/FlamessOfwar> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
114. As of 28 November 2014
115. Wafa Idris is the most high profile of these cases, see for example: www.theguardian.com/world/2003/jul/18/gender.uk.
116. Umm Layth, 9 April 2014 , <http://fa-tubalilghuraba.tumblr.com> [last accessed 28 November 2014]. She writes: 'Ok, so lets think about the 4 greatest women in Islam ... It wasn't Nusaybah, or Umm Sulaym or al Khansa (((Ra))) [who are well known for their participation in Qital feesaabeelillah] therefore a womens role as a Mujahidah isn't what makes her great nor is it what they were created for. The 4 greatest women in Islam = Khadeejah, Asia, Fatimah and Maryam ... What made them so unique was that they raised the best of men. They raised true slaves of Allah. Their role as mothers were so important since their upbringing resulted in the future of their child – through which they gained countless ajr. And secondly their role as obedient wives is also an important factor. And that is the reality my dear sisters. We are created to be mothers and wives – as much as the western society has warped your views on this with a hidden feminist mentality. Allahu 3llam, you may gain more ajr by spending years of sleepless nights by being a mother and raising your children with the right intentions and for the sake of Allah than by doing a martyrdom operation.' In her blog, Umm Layth does suggest that there have been many questions about jihad from women hoping to migrate. She writes: 'Jihad. Ok, so this is one of the most common and hyped up questions I have been receiving from sisters who are intending on making hijrah beithnillah.' Whether these women are asking questions about this because they want to take part in jihad or rather because they are merely intrigued about the role of women in IS, we cannot know. Certainly there is curiosity about this issue.
117. Umm Ubaydah @FlamessOfwar, 10 October 2014, <https://twitter.com/FlamessOfwar> [last accessed 28 November 2014]

118. Muhajirah Amatullah further reinforces this point writing: There are NO women engaged in military combat within #IS. Why? Coz unlike other armies, IS isn't void of men! Muhajirah Amatullah @BintWater, 15 October 2014, <https://twitter.com/BintWater> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
119. Umm Layth, 9 April 2014, <http://fa-tubalilghuraba.tumblr.com> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
120. Abu Farriss, 29 June 2014 (approx.), <http://ask.fm/abufarriss123>, [last accessed 28 November 2014]. There is evidence that women can take on certain professional roles, including doctors, nurses and teachers. See quote: 'We have sisters, who used to work as teacher, nurse, tailor and etc. If you have an skills, you can still apply it here. We also have sisters who are conducting home-schooling.' Bird of Jannah, <http://diary-of-a-muhajirah.tumblr.com> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
121. Umm Layth, 3 June 2014, <http://fa-tubalilghuraba.tumblr.com> [last accessed 28 November 2014]; See also: Umm Ubaydah echoes this exact sentiment: "Those who stay back because of their family, you can come & your family be a trial in this dunya or stay and them be a regret in the akhira [afterlife]." Umm Ubaydah @FlamessOfwar, 5 October 2014, <https://twitter.com/FlamessOfwar> [last accessed 28 November 2014]
122. Umm Layth, June 27, 2014. Tweet also quoted here: UK-born private school girl joins Syria militants, *Al Arabiya News*, 2 September 2014, <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2014/09/02/Scottish-private-school-girl-joins-Syria-militants.html> [Last accessed 21/01/2015]
123. www.nytimes.com/2014/12/02/world/europe/a-french-town-reels-after-teenage-girl-vanishes-apparently-to-join-jihadists.html
124. This refers to the attack in a Sydney coffee shop on 15-16 December 2014 and the attacks in Paris in January 2015 on the Charlie Hebdo office and the Jewish supermarket.
125. Umm Ubaydah, 28 April 2014 <http://al-khanssa.tumblr.com> [last accessed 28 November 2014] Italics my emphasis.
126. Umm Khattab @UmmKhattab_, 8 December 2014, https://twitter.com/UmmKhattab_ [last accessed 8 December 2014]
127. Umm Khattab @UmmKhattab_, 8 December 2014, https://twitter.com/UmmKhattab_ [last accessed 8 December 2014]
128. For evidence that it is an explosive belt see tweet 'Then to my shock one side of the room is burning and to make matters worse the explosive belt and 3 grenades are there next to the fire'. Umm Khattab @UmmKhattab_, 10 December 2014, https://twitter.com/UmmKhattab_ [last accessed 10 December 2014]

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