

Women's Jihadi Networks: Ensuring Longevity and Success for the Future of Jihad

Position paper submitted to
Workshop on Mapping Ideas: Discovering and Information Landscapes
San Diego State University, San Diego, CA
June 29-30, 2011

Submitted by
Mia Bloom, Penn State University
323 Pond Lab
University Park, PA 16801 mub27@psu.edu

We will stand, covered by our veils and wrapped in our robes, weapons in hand, our children in our laps, with the Qur'an and the Sunna (sayings) of the Prophet of Allah directing and guiding us. Al Khansa'a Jihadi Website, August 2004

I use my pen and words, my honest emotions ... Jihad is not exclusive to men. Umm Farouq

This position paper is driven by one of the key workshop questions:

Identifying the women's networks of social/radical groups and tracking their changes over time?

Women comprise a diverse group that span supporters, to propagandists, to recruiters, to suicide bombers and reflect the very diversity of the Jihadi organizations. Their agenda is not specifically local, but encompasses a view in which the world of Islam (Dar al Islam) opposes the World of War (Dar al Harb) and the Internet plays a crucial role in their involvement in terrorist activities from support to recruiting front line activists. The virtual world provided women access to Bin Laden and now to other charismatic Jihadi leaders like Omar Hammami, Anwar al Awlaki, Saif and Adl and Abu Yahya al Libi that would inspire many women (and men) to join the global Jihad – not to mention Ayman Al Zawahiri whose wife Umamyma has already used the internet several times to address her fellow sisters in Islam to rally them to the cause.

The paper will examine several notable Internet based terror networks runs by women. One notable group led by Malika el-Aroud is the classic example of women's involvement in the Jihad and their particularly creative ways of using the Internet. On the one hand, Aroud disseminated information about the massacres of her Muslim brothers and sisters in Iraq and Afghanistan. However she did more than report on the events of the war, she urges men to go there and encourages women to support them. Her website Minbar SOS was also a place to express her own convictions and a personal platform calling for Islamic Resistance. "There is a war going on, and it is necessary for each one of us to chase the occupier out of our land. Those countries that have invaded Muslim lands are pigs and dogs and their presence in Afghanistan, Iraq, Chechnya, or in Palestine is only a matter of time." For Aroud, resistance against the occupation is an obligation. Remaining silent is cowardice, if not complicity. Her propaganda efforts have successfully promoted suicide terrorism in Iraq and support domestic terror cells in Europe. For jihadi women, Aroud is a source of inspiration because she is telling women to stop sleeping and open their eyes. It is important that Muslim women participate in the struggle. Like so many other terrorist groups, part of the logic for women's participation

is to shame men and not sit idly by.

The World Wide Web has taken a leading role in women's involvement in political violence for a number of reasons. Marc Sageman argues that on the Internet, women can become radicalized without revealing that they are actually women. In contrast to training camps that served to bolster the movement a decade ago, on the internet it is the individual who chooses whether (or not) to reveal their gender. Women can and are exposed to the very same propaganda as men and contribute postings to chat rooms and other virtual sources at an increasing rate. The virtual world is inherently egalitarian in terms of access and impact. The Internet is used primarily to disseminate propaganda and women are particularly important in this activity. The women emphasize that their sisters in Islam are being attacked and Muslim men need to step up and take responsibility for their protections.

American Colleen Renée LaRose, more commonly known as "Jihad Jane," showed how infectious the use of the Internet has become. Arrested in October 2009, LaRose was indicted in March 2010 for conspiring to commit murder and for providing material support to terrorists. She boasted on the internet of her readiness to help terrorists, recruit men and women for jihad, and raise money for operations in the US, Europe, and Asia. LaRose was arrested specifically for encouraging jihadis in Ireland to kill cartoonist Lars Vilks in Sweden after a series of insulting drawings in 2007 made Vilks public enemy number one in many Islamic circles and al-Qaeda placed a \$100,000 bounty on his head. The arrest and investigation into "Jihad Jane" (and her accomplice "Jihad Jamie" Ramirez) demonstrated that the Internet, combined with women's ability to mobilize new recruits, has become a force to be reckoned within the globalized jihad.

This research analyzes women's growing role in the Jihadi networks and assesses the likely role of women now that Bin Laden is dead and a new generation of leaders (who might be more inclined to use women operationally) are poised to take over.