

# JIHADIST WOMAN: ROLE AND POSITION SHIFT IN ISIS

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## ABSTARCT

*The inclusion and participation of women in jihadist groups was a confusing, disturbing and attractive phenomenon at the same time. The recruitment processes of both sexes have witnessed a major leap in recent years. The issue of jihadist involvement in the ranks of al-Qaeda was limited in influence and had marginal roles. The era of the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (since 2014) has witnessed a remarkable growth and development indicating a change in the traditional roles of jihadist women in the future.*

**Keywords:** Woman, Role, Position

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, it has become clear that the perception about the role of women and the extent of their participation in the activities of jihadist groups has changed, and the stereotype around them has dissipated. There is widespread recognition within jihadi circles that women can play many roles among the current jihadist organizations.

But the development of the "jihadist feminism" ideology did not take place all at once, or as a sudden, as it appears in the media, as it was through a series of historical stages, political conditions and social transformations; The issue of women emerged in the literature of Islamic and jihadist groups, or in the roles that women began to play in Islamic work, in general, and jihad in particular.

From here comes the task of this study in tracking the position of the modern and contemporary jihadist trend, in general, regarding the participation of women in religious and jihadist activity, starting with the modern Wahhabi-Salafi version, passing through the local takfiri and jihadist groups, then we monitor that development during the Afghan jihad era, the Al Qaeda organization, and finally, the "leap" that occurred in the participation and role of women, at the level of ISIS.

The problem of the study centers on a major question, which is: How can we understand - within the conservative vision of jihadists towards women - the recent transformations and developments that have occurred in the role of "jihadist women" and their transfer from secondary ranks and traditional roles in jihadist groups; Including al-Qaeda - as a housewife and nanny of children - to migrant women, and to the phenomenon of "the suicide woman"?

the study will be limited to the topic of "jihadist feminism", women in the Salafi-jihadi movements, which are contemporary groups began to appear in the 1960s in Egypt, and then were formed at a later stage during the era of the so-called Afghan jihad (solidarity jihad) and the founding of Al Qaeda, And later the Islamic State. Its ideology is based on the principle of establishing an Islamic state, refusing to participate in the political process, not accepting democracy, and believing in armed action as the main strategy for change, whether at home against the Arab regimes, or globally through the conflict with the United States of America or the major powers.

There are many studies and media investigations have dealt with the issue of women within ISIS, or have dealt with some case studies. However, there are not many

in-depth studies have approached the transformations of women among the Salafi jihadist circles, especially between Al Qaeda and the "Islamic State".

The added cognitive value of this study is that it will approach the monitoring and analysis of the changes that occurred in the path of jihadist women, and led to quantitative and qualitative changes in the role of women in the Islamic State.

The methodology of the study is based on, firstly, tracking and surveying all that has been written about women in jihadist circles (theorists, writers, books and written, recorded and photographed speeches ...), especially about her role in the "Jihadi group", and secondly on "text analysis" of what we found in that literature, and at the time itself is a historical tracing and analysis of the realistic development of the role of women in jihadist groups from its contemporary beginnings until the rise of the Islamic State in 2014, and its announcement of the establishment of the "Islamic Caliphate".

### **Before al- Qaeda**

The intellectual and historical contexts of Al-Qaeda and ISIS belong to the factions of the so-called Salafi-jihadi trend (within the classification of literature concerned with this research and knowledge field), which is the current that represents the general ideological and dynamic framework of the Salafi groups and the Jihadist groups, and it consists of two main ideological and activist pillars, and even knowledge and jurisprudence. Its ideological, intellectual and jurisprudential roots are in the modern and contemporary Salafi movement, since the Wahhabi preaching in the eighteenth century, which allied with Saudi Arabia and its last embrace. As for the second pillar, it is the jihadist pillar, whose contemporary effectiveness began through local jihadist groups in Egypt and other Arab countries, and is based on a belief in armed action as a method for political change. Then the official marriage between Salafists and jihadists took place in the Afghan experience, and later Osama bin Laden announced the inclusion of groups Jihadism and Salafism under the mantle of the International Islamic Front to Fight Jews, Crusaders and Americans (in 1998), which Ayman al-Zawahiri viewed, and constituted a qualitative leap in the so-called "globalization of jihad" and his shift from local fighting against Arab regimes to global fighting against the United States of America.

On the level of Salafi literature, we find that one of the most prominent founders of "Salafism in modern times", Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1791 CE), did not devote any book specific to women, as is the case in traditional Sunni jurisprudence in general, as issues specific to women come within the chapters of jurisprudence. The writings of Muhammad bin Abd al-Wahhab and the scholars of the Najdi da'wa are the main references in the religious curricula taught within the domain of ISIS, so The status of women within the Islamic State is based largely on the Hanbali Wahhabi jurisprudential heritage and its practical applications in the historical space of the Saudi state, which is based on the separation of the sexes. According to Wahhabi scholars, the natural place of women is the home.

The main task of women - which we will find later with jihadist groups and later al-Qaeda, is to enter into the relationship of lineage and intermarriage, considering these relationships an effective tool for the cohesion of the group and strengthening its internal structure.

After moving back to his home town of `Uyayna, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab married al-Jawhara bint Abd Allah ibn al-Mu`ammar, a woman from an influential family who was

the aunt of the Emir of `Uyayna, Othman ibn Hamad ibn Mu`ammar. Historical sources indicate that al-Jawhara played an important role in strengthening the relationship between her husband and her uncle Emir Othman and other influential figures.

Returning to contemporary literature, with the emergence of the "Islamic anger" organizations during the 1970s era - we will find that the two documents of recognition (al-Eeteraf) and the caliphate, which are the most important references of the group of al-Takfir and al-Hijrah, founded by Shukri Ahmed Mustafa, do not speak separately about women, nor does the book "The Absent Obligation" (Alfareeda Alghaebah), the book The main reference for jihadists, who later became familiar with Mohammad Abd al-Salam Faraj (one of the founders of the Jihad Organization in Egypt), Salih Sariya (founder of al-Faneia al-Askareia organization) "The Message of Faith"(Resalat al-Eman), and the Islamic Group's book "The Charter of Islamic Action"(Mithaq al-Amal al-Eslami), which considers the constitution of the group. Which is repeated in all publications of the group, such as the book "The Categories of Rulers and Their Rulings" by Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman, and a discussion of "Ruling on Fighting against the Sect Refraining from the Laws of Islam," the document "The Inevitability of Confrontation," and the argument of Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman, which was published in a book entitled *Kalimat Haq* (A Word of Truth). Other publications included *Ilahun ma`a Allah: E`lan al-Harb `ala Majlis al-Sha`b* (A Deity with God: Declaring War on Parliament), and the document *Falsafat al-Muwajaha* (The Philosophy of Confrontation). The group's literature, albeit becoming prominent references for Islamist ideology, were devoid of any mention of women's direct role in jihad. The group's literature, albeit becoming prominent references for Islamist ideology, were devoid of any mention of women's direct role in jihad.

We may find different features, on the practical level, in previous experiences in the group of atonement and emigration. In the context of building a society with new ties, Shukry worked to include women in the ranks of the group and forced the women who joined his group to separate their husbands and their families if they were not members of his group, Jamaat al-Muslimeen. The issue of the disappearance of some women and receiving complaints about them raised doubts that led to the discovery of the group. Court's papers, which were examined by the military court, indicate that there are 22 women on the list of those accused of belonging to the group. Shukri Mustafa admitted before the prosecution that it was obligatory for the sons to leave their families if the father and mother did not enter the group (which represent the Islamic society- according to their ideology), and the wife should leave her husband if he did not join the group, and migrate to the areas in which Shukri resided his group.

At a later stage, the position of the "Sheikhs of the Afghan Jihad" in the 1980s did not differ from the previous theorizing about the role of women. Abdullah Azzam limits the role of women to the previous traditional aspect. But the important development in ideological theorizing, which Azzam brought about, and opened the door for those after him to consider and expand the role of women in jihad, is that historical fatwa, in the case of defensive jihad, as it issued a fatwa that a woman should go out to jihad without the permission of her husband or her guardian in the event of assault on the nation, Or the occupation of Muslim lands.

Nevertheless, this "fatwa" remained weak in its realistic outcome during the past decades, because Azzam himself restricted the participation of women and travel with the

presence of a male companion (Muharram), and restricted her role in the field of non-combat logistics.

### **The role of women at Al-Qaeda**

The participation of women in Al-Qaeda has not received the attention of the founder of the organization, Osama bin Laden and his successor, Ayman Al-Zawahiri, as their speeches and messages are devoid of talking about women's issues, and their intellectual contribution is limited to some rare instructions by stressing the non-participation of women in hostilities and preserving their traditional roles in caring for the home and raising a generation Jihadist as a fundamental value in preserving identity.

Ayman al-Zawahiri's view of women is not different from that of bin Laden. Al-Zawahiri had assumed leadership of al-Qaeda after the killing of bin Laden. Al-Zawahiri stresses the traditional roles of women and not including them in the organization in addition to their participation in the fighting. In response to one of the questions of the open meeting conducted by the Al-Sahab Media Foundation in 2008 about "Who are the highest-ranking women in Al-Qaeda?" Do not mention names if you like. What is their job in the organization? Al-Zawahiri categorically replied, "There are no women in the "Al-Qaeda of Jihad "group, but the women of the Mujahideen play a heroic role in caring for their homes and their children in the intensity of migration, mobility and bonding.

And in a rare letter by Umayyah Hassan, al-Zawahiri's wife, entitled "A Message to Muslim Sisters," issued by the Al-Qaeda-affiliated Al-Sahab Foundation (in December 2009), in which she emphasized bin Laden and Al-Zawahiri's vision of women and the traditional roles and the issue of identity, Sharia and anti-Westernization.

Despite bin Laden and Al-Zawahiri's assertion that women's jihad is based on traditional roles in the home, caring for the family, and some logistical roles; However, some women sought to increase their roles and search for a new place in the jihadist space, especially among Arab and Muslim women and recent converts to Islam who had grown up in the European and American space. Malika El Aroud is considered one of the most famous jihadists in Europe, as "Umm Abida" is described as "the black widow" for the killing of her married couple. She is Belgian of Moroccan origin who is described by the security circles in Belgium as the most dangerous woman in Europe. As for Dr. Afia Siddiqui, she is the most famous al-Qaeda woman at all, although the issue of her joining al-Qaeda raises many doubts and suspicions around her and is shrouded in mystery.

### **Harbingers of a new jihadist vision for women**

The decisive effects of the inclusion of women in the frameworks of jihadist groups came from movements formed in conflict zones that witness direct foreign occupation, as was evident during the Russian-Chechen war, the US invasion of Iraq and the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Al-Qaeda has been affected by these transformations, especially its regional branches, despite Bin Laden and Al-Zawahiri's adherence to traditional references on the non-combat roles of women.

The Chechen front formed a new arena for Arab Afghans in general and the Saudis in particular, when the war between the proponents of the separation of the Caucasian Chechen Republic and Russia was fought in late 1995, and which was renewed in 1999, and the Saudi jihadist, Samer Swailem (known as Khattab), was the

leader of the Arab jihadists. Since his arrival in Chechnya, he has worked to build training camps in cooperation with the Chechen leader Shamil Basayev, established logistical supply networks to facilitate the entry of volunteers, and worked to give women logistical and combat roles at a time when the relationship between Khattab and Osama bin Laden was tense. Khattab was not part of the Al Qaeda network.

Yusef Al-Eairy is considered the most important jihadist figure in developing the discourse and practice of Al-Qaeda organization related to women's issues and defining their roles. His biography summarizes the transformations of Al-Qaeda and Saudi jihadism, as he is the actual founder of the Al-Qaeda branch in Saudi Arabia, also he issued a set of books and letters on women focusing on the need to include women in Logistics business.

Al-Ayiri devoted in his writings on women an image that was not common in the male jihadist space, despite his assertion that the primary place of women is the home and the care of the family, so he worked to revive the model of the struggling woman in the different eras of Islam. In his message entitled "The Role of Women in the Jihad of the Enemies," Al-Ayiri strives to recount a group of companions and followers until the present time who participated in the jihad in various combat and non-combat ways. Yusef al-Ayiri also pushed theorizing about women's participation in jihadist combat actions to its utmost goals despite his request that women play a support role, without fighting on the battlefield. He wrote a letter permitting women to carry out suicide attacks entitled "Did Eve commit suicide or martyred?" After Hawa Barayev, Chechen, carried out a suicide bombing attack. Al-Ayiri stated that the reason for writing his book is to respond to those who denied Eve's execution of the operation, who was not a martyr.

The growing role of women was demonstrated by the publication of the first electronic women's jihadist magazine called "Al-Khansa" in September 2004, on the "Women Media Office in the Arabian Peninsula". Her supervisor was "Umm Usama", an Egyptian woman who was arrested by the Saudi authorities for her activities in the women's media arm. Of the organization, and admitted being responsible for editing the magazine.

Perhaps this retreat and crack in the capabilities of al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia is what unleashed the emergence of jihadist women's activity on the part of wives and relatives of jihadists who began to be active in the virtual world to defend the issues of detainees and persecuted, after their conviction, for ideological and psychological motives, of the need to engage more in the movements Jihadism. Some of them began to consider emigrating in search of safer havens, especially in Iraq and Yemen. It also happened with Wafa Al-Yahya, a divorced Saudi jihadist who fought in Afghanistan. She has been active since 2005 on jihadi forums, and was an admirer of al-Qaeda in Iraq leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.

Women's non-combat logistical roles developed in the ranks of al-Qaeda through the Saudi gateway and then the Yemeni (after the announcement of the establishment of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, with its center in Yemen in 2009), so women seemed more insistent on assuming logistical roles and venturing into joining dangerous places, which appeared with Wafa Al-Shehri, accompanied by her three children and children, joined her husband Saeed Al-Shehri in Yemen on March 12, 2009, then started playing media roles through the organization's Al-Malahim Media Production Foundation. The Foundation published the magazine "Sada al-Malahim", and its first issue was published

in January 2008. The magazine included a section on women entitled "Umm Amara's Granddaughters". Wafaa al-Shehri, who used to write under the name "Umm Hajar al-Azdiyya," became one of his main writers, in addition to other women who wrote under kinetic names such as: Umm Abd al-Rahman, Umm al-Hassan al-Muhajira, and the Lover of Shahada .

### **Islamic State and the "Jihadist Woman": The Great Transformation**

The prominent development came through the Zarqawi network, which later became a branch of al-Qaeda in Iraq, then established the Islamic State in Iraq at the end of 2006, before it resumed its rise later, announcing the establishment of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, later declaring the caliphate in 2014.

The organization worked to include women in hostilities, leading to suicide operations. Women's participation in ISIS has witnessed a surge in recruitment operations, since it took control of the Syrian city of Raqqa and the Iraqi city of Mosul in 2014 and announced the establishment of the "Islamic Caliphate", where hundreds of women joined the organization from different parts of the world.

The expansion of the Islamic State imposed the necessity for the inclusion of women in the fields of health, education, al-Hasbah (women's police) and others, also women were active in the fields of propaganda, media, jurisprudence and Sharia issues, some women participated in the hostilities. Especially suicide operations.

The period of the Islamic State has witnessed a transformation represented by the participation of women in establishing a feminist jihadist discourse, and women speak about themselves instead of men. Despite this, the sayings of ISIS women did not deviate from male jurisprudence and male interpretations of Sharia, as they are based on "the law of God," as it is an orthodox, "Islamic" way of life, in which there is no room for feminist or male interpretations. With the admission that all theorists of global jihadism are male.

The inclusion of women in the ranks of Al Qaeda in Iraq came against the background of the escalation of sectarianism and civil war under occupation, so the growing detention of Sunni women with the issuance of the Terrorism Law.

It is clear that al-Qaeda in Iraq, led by al-Zarqawi, began to think about the inclusion of women in combat operations, especially suicide bombings, in mid-2005. Al-Zarqawi's speeches directed at men ranged from using violations against Sunni women to recruit men to directly addressing women. "Where does religion decrease while I am alive?" In July 2005. He held women directly responsible, demanded them to play multiple logistical roles, and paved the way for women to participate in combat and suicide acts.

Al-Zarqawi's previous speech ushered in a new phase of "the inclusion of women" in global jihadist structures. The "martyrdom woman" model became acceptable and legitimate, so the phenomenon of "female suicide bombers" entered a new stage in which it moved from rhetoric and rhetoric to practice and action. The announcement of the birth of the phenomenon of female suicide bombers and its launch in a global jihadist image across borders came with the two simultaneous suicide attacks on the same day, November 9, 2005, for Muriel Deguque and Sajida Rishawi.

As for the increase in the presence of women and the multiplicity of their roles within ISIS, it actually began after the recent growth of the Islamic State, as the third United Nations report indicates that about 30,000 "foreign fighters" are deployed in Iraq and Syria. According to John Paul Labord, Head of the Executive Directorate of the

United Nations Counter-Terrorism Committee, "The first issue that stunned the analysts in my team was that 550 European women traveled to areas controlled by the Islamic State. In some countries women represent between twenty and thirty percent of terrorist fighters." Foreigners, and the number of young girls who have sworn allegiance to ISIS on the Internet has also increased. ”

### **A new phase "in jihadist feminism"**

With the rise of the Islamic State, jihadist women have witnessed new transformations and developments, both qualitative and quantitative, and entered at a different stage in their characteristics than the previous stage, and the most prominent changes and transformations can be observed:

First - The phenomenon of “women's migration” to the lands of the Islamic State, which was a situation that existed previously, through marriage and proximity relations, as we mentioned earlier, in the Afghan case in particular, has become more independent with ISIS, it is linked to the women themselves decision to migrate. Numerous female names among immigrants from different countries of the world, from Sudan (Sudanese female doctors), from Saudi Arabia (Nada Al-Qahtani - nicknamed Sister Jleebb), Iman Al-Bugha (former professor of jurisprudence at Dammam University), Fatiha Al-Majati (Moroccan), teenage girls and school students From Britain, America, and other countries.

Here, woman has moved from describing a "jihadist wife" to a "jihadist woman" with ISIS, as she carries out this task on her own, while trying to find fatwas that sanction her travel, in some cases, without the need for a "mahram" - a husband, by accompanying her children Or her younger siblings, or her going out with a group of women.

Second - This shift in the process of women joining ISIS or other jihadist groups, as is the case in Al-Qaeda in Yemen, was reflected in the roles and tasks of women within the Islamic State. Her job is no longer, as al-Qaeda theorists had previously seen, is limited to the husband, the home and the care of children. It began to play major and pivotal roles, and battalions and roles dedicated to women were formed, such as the Al-Khansa Brigade, for the so-called Hasbah (meaning oversight over the application of Islamic law), nursing roles, active media propaganda, recruitment on Facebook, and many jihadist women names emerged, such as Iman Al-Bagha, who She is considered the foremost jurisprudential reference in the Islamic State, girls like Aqsa Mahmoud and the twin sisters (Salma and Zahra), Doctor Shams, Fatiha al-Majati, Nada al-Qahtani, Rima al-Juraish, Hayla al-Qusayr, and others who have become active online roles in propaganda and recruitment, clearly expressing a personality. The ISIS woman.

Third - There are no confirmed exact figures on the number of women in the Islamic State (ISIS), but most estimates indicate that there are about 550 women from Europe (as mentioned earlier) and dozens of American and Australian women, and there are estimates of the presence of many women from Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Tunisia. And other countries, whether these women came with their husbands, relatives or even as immigrants themselves, in addition to estimating large numbers of Syrian and Iraqi women in the areas controlled by the organization, especially with the establishment of a state and a system of government in the areas it controls, with the presence of thousands The fighters affiliated with it, thousands of families linked to them, and institutions related to the social upbringing of young people in the organization (Cubs of the

Caliphate), meaning that in the end we are talking about a similar “surge” in the size of women's integration, directly or indirectly, with ISIS.

Fourth - The emergence of the "suicide woman", the shift in the role of women did not stop with their transition from secondary roles to major roles in advocacy, media, jurisprudence, and logistical support, but also in the emergence of suicide bombers, a phenomenon that began at an earlier stage in Chechnya (Operation Black Widows, for example), And extended to national Islamic movements, such as Hamas and the Palestinian Jihad Movement, when they were not acceptable and not discussed in the Salafi-jihadi circles, or even among al-Qaeda in the past. but the Islamic State has entered this path since the days of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, when it assigned Sajida al-Rishawi to participate In the 2005 Amman bombings, and the Belgian, Muriel Deguque, in the Iraqi city of Baquba in 2005.

### CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY

The participation of women in jihadist groups has witnessed successive stages of transformation and development, despite the fact that jihadist groups are generally subject to the traditional Islamic jurisprudential vision, which is often Salafi version, based on restricting the roles of women in the home and caring for the family; With the local jihadist groups, the male character was important, and their literature was devoid of any mention of the role of women. Then with the Afghan case, women merged with the jihadist reality, generally as a "Mujahid's wife," as for his sons, her participation was secondary and marginal, and the vision of her role related to the home remained dominant in theoretical thinking. Salafi jihadism and al-Qaeda in general.

The clear turning point came with the formation of the Abu Musab al-Zarqawi group in Iraq, who later joined al-Qaeda in 2004, then his group transformed into what is today called the Islamic State and the declaration of the caliphate. Women, by moving to major and effective roles in media, advocacy and jurisprudential theorizing.

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